

COVER NOTE FOR LIBERIA COVID-19 ACCELERATED FUNDING REQUEST

Country	Liberia
Grant Agent	UNICEF Liberia
Coordination Agency	USAID
Name of GPE Grant	COVID-19 Accelerated Fund
Program Name	Liberia COVID-19 Education Sector Response
COVID-19 Accelerated Funding amount requested	US\$ 10,000,000
Agency fees amount (additional to COVID-19 Accelerated Funding amount requested):¹	US\$ 700,000
Agency fees as % of total COVID-19 Accelerated Funding requested:	7%
Grant Validity	12-18 months
COVID-19 Accelerated Funding application date	5/25/2020
Estimated COVID-19 Accelerated Funding program start date	7/1/2020
Estimated COVID-19 Accelerated Funding program closing date (must be last day of the month, e.g. June 30, 2021):	12/31/2021
Expected submission date of completion report (At the latest 6 months after program closing date):	6/30/2022
Grant modality	Project/Stand Alone
Contact Details	

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¹ General agency fees are additional to the Accelerated Funding amount requested and determined by the grant agent's own internal regulations. They are paid to the agency's headquarters and relate to overhead costs and are typically used to assist in the defrayment of administrative and other costs incurred in connection with the management and administration of grant funds. These fees are pre-determined in the Financial Procedure Agreement (FPA) between the grant agent and the GPE Trustee.

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Introduction

Liberia recorded its first confirmed COVID-19 cases on 16 March 2020 after WHO had declared the virus a global pandemic. The President of Liberia declared COVID-19 a national health emergency. In order to prevent and control the virus from spreading widely, the Ministry of Education (MoE) closed all schools, colleges and universities. This has curtailed the congregation of many people at one time in one place. This has resulted in disruption of learning for more than 2 million children, adolescents and youth. The longer children are out of school, the higher the risks that vulnerable children will not return. Being out of school puts children, especially girls, at increased risk of teenaged pregnancy, sexual abuse, child marriage and other dangers. These negative impacts will be significantly higher for children from poor households. The proposed program interventions to be covered by the GPE funding are guided by the equity approach, and hence will reach poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including girls and children with special needs affected by COVID-19.

To mitigate the impact of the above situation, the MoE and partners have been working to establish practical distance learning and wellbeing options for learners at home. Radio lessons have been developed and are already being aired on several stations. The MoE established the Education in Emergency (EIE) Technical Working Group which comprises of education and humanitarian sector partners. Education sector partners have aligned their programming to contribute to the emergency response, including reprogramming of funds initially earmarked for regular development programs. The Ministry is actively communicating with partners in order to strengthen coordination mechanisms and is seeking technical and financial support from them to respond to this pandemic. The MoE has developed its own sector response plan aligned to the National COVID-19 Response Plan.

The MoE, together with the Grant Agent (UNICEF) and sector partners have developed this proposal in order to access funding through the GPE Accelerated Funding for COVID-19. This proposal is aligned with the MoE COVID-19 Response Plan and is further guided by the GPE eligibility guidelines. The MoE COVID-19 Response Plan that was developed jointly by the Ministry of Education and sector partners was approved virtually and shared with partners. It has now been shared publicly through the MoE website. The draft proposal was shared with members of the LEG and members of the Education in Emergency Technical Working Group for comments. The inputs from the partners was consolidated by the Grant Agent, three MOE staff and a consultant. The final proposal was approved by the LEG through a virtual meeting on 25 May 2020. Through this proposal, UNICEF Liberia, on behalf of the MoE, wishes to apply for the Accelerated funding from GPE with a total required amount of USD 10,000,000 to support mitigation and recovery activities under the MoE COVID-19 Response Plan.

Background and Context

Liberia has an estimated population of 4.94 million people with 54 percent of the population living below the poverty line. The population is growing rapidly with a fertility rate of 4.6 children per woman in 2015. More than two-thirds of the population are under the age of 35 and nearly 50 percent of the population lives in urban areas. There are acute disparities in income, health and education outcomes between rural and urban populations, exacerbated by poor infrastructure and limited domestic investments. Severe malnutrition is also prevalent with almost one-third (32 percent) of children under five years old being stunted.

Inflation and year-on-year exchange rate depreciation peaked at 30 percent in late 2019 and economic growth is subdued. To address and respond to Liberia's precarious fiscal situation, in December 2019, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a four-year arrangement for US\$ 213.6 million under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) for Liberia to help the country restore macroeconomic stability, provide a foundation for sustainable growth, and addressing weaknesses in governance.

Liberia has faced worsening economic conditions, with negative growth (projected at -2.5 percent of Gross Domestic Product for 2020), a high current account deficit and a decline in donor transfers. The

projected consumer price inflation rate is estimated at 20.5 percent for 2020, fuelled by significant depreciation of the Liberian dollar against the US dollar and this has eroded the purchasing power of the poor. Liberia is experiencing socio-economic challenges characterized by rising levels of inflation, unemployment, and financial difficulties for most citizens, including those who are employed. This will likely have a disproportionately negative impact on the delivery of services and the demand for education, as schools struggle to re-open and maintain the basic operational functions to meet the needs of learners.

Liberia's human development outcomes are among the lowest in the world as evidenced by Liberia's ranking on the World Bank's Human Capital Index (HCI)². The HCI estimates that a child born in Liberia today can expect to live to the age of 62, receive only 4.4 years of schooling, and be 32 percent as productive as they would have been had they had access to full, quality health and education services. The country ranks 153 out of 157 countries on the HCI with a score of 0.31.

While the Liberian education system had made some significant gains after 2005, the system has also suffered three major disruptions from which it has not recovered; the civil war which ended in 2003, the Ebola outbreak in 2014 and now the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ebola virus outbreak and the Corona Virus outbreak led to the declaration of two state of emergencies in 2014 and 2020. These outbreaks have had a negative socio-economic impact which have affected learning continuity, school quality improvement, access and participation, and the education system's efficiency. Gains made after the civil war in relation to access to education and learning are now at risk. The 2019 Joint Education Sector Review identified many challenges including lack of access to education for marginalised and out of school children, **overage enrolment, poor school infrastructure, large number of unqualified teachers, weak implementation capacity, and lack of teaching and learning materials.**³

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted learning for at least 1.4 million children of school going age from pre-primary to senior high school due to the nationwide school closure. The number of children globally affected by COVID-19 related school closures is 60 times greater than was the case during the Ebola crisis in West Africa. According to UNICEF, more than two-thirds of countries globally have introduced a national distance learning platform, such as radio programs, but among low-income countries the share is only 30 percent. In Liberia, many learners are digitally excluded.

The poorest and the most marginalized children and youth in Liberia are also at risk due to limited access to essential services such as school feeding programs, information on disease prevention and water and sanitation. Since the economic situation in Liberia is fragile, the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 will be felt hardest by the most vulnerable children. Many vulnerable children already live in poverty, and the COVID-19 pandemic risks plunging them further into hardship. Poor parents will struggle to maintain their livelihoods and income.

The impact of COVID-19 extends far beyond the sphere of physical health. The pandemic is having profound effects on children's mental well-being, their social development, their safety, their privacy, their economic security, and beyond. As was the case during Ebola, the pandemic poses increased risk in children's safety and raises concerns around child protection, particularly family separation, violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse, and increased psychosocial distress among children. These stresses impact negatively on learning as well, especially for girls and children with disabilities.

Globally, it is also known from previous shutdowns that school children, and especially girls, who are out of school for extended periods of time are much less likely to return when classrooms reopen. Girls who drop out of school as a result of this crisis, will face not only a higher risk of child marriage, child labour, and teenage pregnancies, but will see their lifetime earnings potential precipitously fall.

² A composite index based on measures of health, education and nutrition.

³ Ministry of Education. (2019). Joint Education Sector Review Aide-Memoire. Monrovia: MoE.

The closure of schools also eliminates access to school-based nutrition programs, driving malnutrition rates upwards. An entire generation of students could suffer damage to their learning and potential.

Liberia faces many challenges to respond effectively to the pandemic. The GPE's COVID-19 Accelerated Funding is thus urgently needed to comprehensively address the critical needs of the vulnerable schools and learners and to support teachers and other education personnel. The funding is required by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to ensure the provision and continuation of quality and inclusive education and wellbeing services to all children in Liberia.

Ministry of Education COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan

The MoE developed its response and recovery plan soon after schools were closed on 16 March. The plan identifies The Ministry's needs, gaps, priority activities and costs. The plan is guided by the lessons learned from the Ebola response and recovery interventions and highlights the effects of COVID-19 on the education sector. UNICEF worked jointly with MoE and sector partners to refine the draft MoE COVID-19 preparedness and response plan through a series of reviews and consultations. The plan was presented to stakeholders and approved by the MoE and education sector partners.

The MoE's plan prioritizes protection of lives, continuity of learning in the face of school closure, provision of health, nutrition, child protection guidance and messaging as well as community engagement and psycho-social support to learners, parents, caregivers, and school personnel including teachers. The plan is forward looking as it outlines interventions to facilitate school re-opening, recovery and system strengthening to allow access to quality education for all. The plan aims to bridge the gap in student learning and eventually ensure all safety measures are in place for the re-opening of all education institutions across the country.

The plan prioritises fairness and equitable provision of services across location, gender, service provision, and social economic status. Learning continuity for all learners is to be delivered with equal importance for all students, including those with special needs and girls. The plan targets learners at all levels of the education system and takes on a system-wide approach. The plan proposes a targeting approach that ensures that the most vulnerable children and remote schools are included in proposed interventions. The MoE acknowledges the challenges it is facing in implementing distance and alternative learning interventions. Such programmes are not context appropriate in Liberia for a large section of learners and during the Ebola epidemic, they faced logistical and sustainability challenges.

Activities by level of implementation have been identified at the system, school and community levels. These have been categorized based on preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery levels for intervention stages. Three implementation scenarios are being used as guiding principles for the implementation of the plan.

- a) Scenario 1: 0-60 days of emergency preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery
- b) Scenario 2: 61-120 days of emergency preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery
- c) Scenario 3: 120 days + of emergency preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery

Rationale for the GPE Application

The GPE guidelines identify Liberia as one of the countries eligible to receive the Accelerated Funding with maximum allocation of USD 10 million. Liberia was admitted into the Fast Track Initiative (GPE) Partnership in 2007.

The Liberian education system has suffered three major disruptions from which it has never recovered. The major disruptions have been the civil war which ended in 2003, the Ebola crisis in 2014 and the current COVID-19 crisis. The Ministry of Education and education sector partners do not have adequate resources to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 induced learning crisis. Unless the MoE is supported through facilities such as the GPE Accelerated Funding, the system will also struggle to recover when schools reopen again due to lack of funding. Liberia hence needs GPE financial support to ensure system response, recovery and equitable access to learning opportunities to as many children as possible during and after the current pandemic.

The scale of the impact created by the closure of all educational institutions nation-wide is worse than during the Ebola epidemic and the Ministry of Education does not have a budget to respond adequately. Liberia has been experiencing shrinking fiscal space for the last few years. Despite advocacy by MoE and education sector partners, the share of education budget from the national budget is below 16 per cent and the bulk of this allotment is absorbed by salaries, leaving very little for regular programme interventions, let alone an emergency of this magnitude.

The MoE has developed a COVID-19 sector response plan which outlines priority interventions in three phases (immediate response, preparatory phase for school reopening, school reopening and recovery), with a strong focus on continuity of learning for all learners, including the disadvantaged learners. The MoE has established partnerships to facilitate radio lessons and other forms of distance learning in order to ensure continuity of learning for all children in Liberia. The success of implementation of the MoE COVID-19 Response Plan depends to a large extent on GPE funding while the Ministry continues to mobilise resources for activities that have not been prioritized for this application.

As per the GPE guidelines, the budget items for which funding is being sought through this proposal are directed towards supporting public schools only. Funding for other aspects of the plan covering private and faith-based schools is being sourced from donors and other development partners, including reprogramming of funds from existing projects of the Ministry.

Complementary funding to GPE funding and funding gap

The overall estimated cost of the Liberia COVID-19 Response Plan is **USD 32,311,190.22 (Thirty-Two Million Three Hundred Eleven Thousand One Hundred Ninety Dollars and Twenty-two cents)**. Of this amount, the MoE has thus far received funding commitments from various partners totalling approximately **USD 8, 000,000**. Hence, the estimated overall financing deficit is **USD 24,311,190.22**. The Ministry continues to engage more partners and the Government of Liberia to finance the current gap. Several other partners have expressed their commitments to supporting specific activities in the Response plan through provision of technical assistance.

The Ministry has also requested for reprogramming of funds from some of its existing projects including the IDA/World Bank funded Improving Results in Secondary Education (IRISE). Negotiations are ongoing between the MoE and the World Bank for reprogramming of supporting specific activities in the COVID-19 Response Plan through the activation of the contingency emergency response component (CERC) of the IRISE Project. Other partners beside the GPE who have so far provided direct funding and/or technical assistance support to the MoE Response Plan include, among others, UNICEF, UNFPA, USAID, Save the Children, WFP, Mary's Meal, ZOA, Rising Academies Network, UMovement, Luminos Fund, Bridge International Academies and Teach for Liberia. .

Grant Agent Selection Process

Using the guidelines provided by the GPE on how to access the Accelerated Funding, the MoE made the decision that the Grant Agent (GA) should be nominated from the organisations pre-approved by the GPE and then seek the Local Education Group's (LEG) endorsement. In a virtual meeting, the

World Bank nominated UNICEF, and this was backed by the MoE and the sector partners who were present in the meeting. The Coordinating Agency (USAID) then circulated an email on 13 April to the rest of the LEG members who could not attend the meeting seeking the endorsement of UNICEF as GA. There were no objections and hence UNICEF was endorsed by the LEG partners as the GA. The endorsement was based on UNICEF's comparative advantage in responding humanitarian responses globally, its co-lead technical leadership role with Save the Children during education in emergencies, and its history of support to the MoE in both humanitarian and regular education programme settings.

UNICEF-Liberia has contributed significantly to the development of the Liberian education system for over 37 years. UNICEF- Liberia is thus well placed to continue to make valuable contributions to the education sector for the COVID-19 response as the Grant Agent (GA) for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) accelerated funds. UNICEF has experience in managing large grants, working closely with the Ministry of Education (MoE), the latest being the \$18.74 million USAID funded Education Crisis Response Project for Liberia which was used for the education recovery interventions when schools reopened after the Ebola epidemic. UNICEF has the technical expertise locally and internationally to effectively manage the GPE funds and provide support to MoE and sector partners to respond to the COVID-19 emergency effectively and efficiently.

UNICEF will use the following attributes and approaches to manage the grant for MoE:

Low administrative cost for management of the program

UNICEF's low administrative costs facilitates the maximization of the use of the grant for program delivery. As per the agreement between UNICEF HQ and GPE, a 7% administrative fee against the allocated US\$ 10 million will be required. This amount, however, will be contributed separately by the GPE. At the country level, UNICEF will require additional funding against the US\$ 10 million to cover the technical and operational support costs that will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of managing the grant.

Ability to discharge fiduciary and administrative responsibilities

UNICEF has tried and tested internal mechanisms to manage risks and effectively discharge fiduciary and administrative responsibilities. Its internal controls, which are audited annually and reviewed by the regional office and headquarters, will ensure that the grant is safeguarded and used to strengthen delivery of results for children, including systems strengthening. Liberia's reputational risk will be mitigated through UNICEF's anti-fraud systems.

Alignment of the proposed activities for funding to priorities in the MoE COVID-19 Response Plan

The proposed activities under this request for funding are aligned fully with the Liberia MoE COVID-19 Response Plan. The proposed activities respond to the mitigation measures and the recovery phase proposed by the GPE. The immediate response includes raising awareness on prevention and control of COVID-19 using multi-media and community-based platforms and personnel. The MoE is already promoting continuity of learning while schools are closed through distance education initiatives such as radio lessons and use of social media platforms.

The MoE and partners are exploring different options to facilitate continuity of learning and how to deal with grade 9 and 12 students that were due to write regional examinations. Safe school protocols will be developed in preparation for their implementation when schools open. Ensuring the safety of students and teachers when schools open will give confidence to parents to send their children back to school. A key activity in the proposal is school feeding for the first month when schools reopen to promote enrolment and retention. The proposed activities will in the long term contribute to the building of a more resilient education system that can withstand future emergencies. The interventions also cover children with special needs, marginalised children, those at risk of dropping out of school and increasing access to children who were already out of school before the pandemic.

Support to capacity building of the government in COVID-19 response activities and emergency programming

UNICEF supported programmes utilise capacity building as one of the core strategies, including areas such as disaster risk reduction (DRR) and strengthening the education sector resilience. UNICEF will thus provide technical support for MoE and sector partners in these areas and use knowledge management platforms to share innovative ideas that will facilitate implementation of the COVID-19 response plan. The MoE and sector partners can also sharpen their skills through UNICEF' e-learning courses on emergency and humanitarian support programming.

Commitment to global mandate to support humanitarian aid coordination, including on COVID-19

UNICEF is the global co-lead of Education Cluster in humanitarian actions together with Save the Children, appointed through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). In Liberia, MoE is the Education Sector/Cluster lead while UNICEF and Save the Children are co-Leads for emergency planning and response, providing technical assistance for the education sector/cluster coordination. In humanitarian situations, UNICEF supports inter-agency coordination and is also the sector/cluster Lead for WASH and Nutrition and plays substantive roles in Health and Protection Clusters. In Liberia, UNICEF supported the MoE and sector partners to develop the COVID-19 Response Plan and is actively involved in the Education in Emergency (EiE) Technical Working Group.

Agreement within the sector to take on GA role at the highest level

UNICEF was selected globally by the GPE to take on the GA role for the \$70,000 catalytic funding to kick start the COVID-19 emergency response. The Local Education Group in Liberia then selected UNICEF as GA for the \$10 million Accelerated Funding grant.

UNICEF already has an established agreement and understanding to contribute to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)'s work globally and locally. UNICEF is a GPE Board Member in which it is represented by the Associate Director of Education (Headquarters Programme Division) and it is also a member of the GPE Grants and Performance Committee (GPC). At HQ level, UNICEF has dedicated staff that deal with the GPE funds within the Public Partnership Division (PPD) and Education Section of the Programme Division. In several countries globally, UNICEF is playing either the Coordinating Agency (CA) or Grant Agent (GA) roles and plays an active role in the Local Education Groups (LEGs).

Demonstrated ability to deliver activities expeditiously/timely with no procurement delays

UNICEF has solid procurement and distribution systems and can rapidly procure and distribute educational materials at scale. UNICEF's Supply Division in Copenhagen allows it to get competitive prices internationally and hence achieve economies of scale. During the current emergency, the ability to procure and distribute materials will increase value for money which will enable the sector to reach the most marginalized children.

UNICEF does not use its regular program procedures during an emergency in order to facilitate accelerated response. The work processes, including procurement, becomes more flexible to expedite work processes and program implementation. The UNICEF Executive Director declared level 3 emergencies for COVID-19 pandemic which allows UNICEF to use its entire global, or "corporate" human or financial resource base to respond. COVID-19 procurement processes have thus been streamlined. The UNICEF education team is supported by the 70 UNICEF Liberia Team, whose expertise will be harnessed for the COVID-19 response to ensure an integrated response. Technical assistance will be provided by the Health, WASH, Child Protection, Programme Monitoring and Evaluation, Finance and Supply and Logistics teams. The Child Protection team, for example, provides support for psychosocial support and protection of children during and post COVID-19 emergency.

UNICEF Experience in the Education Sector Programming

UNICEF is the UN agency mandated by the General Assembly to protect the rights of the child. Globally, it has been promoting and protecting the rights of children, including rights to education, for more than 73 years. In doing its work, UNICEF works with government and partners to observe, among others, the following international policy frameworks and principles:

- 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The global UNICEF Education Strategy 2019-2030 “Every Child Learns” focuses on three key strategic goal areas:

1. Equitable access to learning opportunities;
2. Improved learning and skills development;
3. Improved learning and protection for children in emergencies and fragile contexts: (1) Prevention (building resilient systems), (2) Response (education in emergencies)

UNICEF’s Education in Emergency Experience and Cluster Coordination

UNICEF has always worked in emergencies, including both natural and man-made since its formation. Hence it was originally called the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund. It was originally created to provide humanitarian assistance to children in response to the negative effects of war and natural disasters on children. UNICEF’s Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) in Humanitarian Actions, which includes the education sector responses, demonstrates the organizational commitments in relation to emergency preparedness and response. UNICEF co-led the Education in Emergency response with Save the Children during the Ivorian refugee crisis, 2010 to 2012 and the Ebola epidemic in Liberia, 2014- 2015.

UNICEF’s Support to Education in Liberia

UNICEF has had a strong presence in Liberia for 37 years. During this period, UNICEF worked closely with the Ministry of Education to support different interventions in the education sector. In 2007, UNICEF worked jointly with the MoE and sector partners to get Liberia admitted into the GPE (then called Fast Track Initiative (FTI)) partnership. Liberia, however, was unable to access funding as the country did not have an Education Sector Plan (ESP). UNICEF was appointed the Chairperson of the Education Partners Forum (EPF) in 2007. The Netherlands government and the Soros Foundation were keen to support Liberia’s education recovery efforts outside the FTI framework and UNICEF was tasked to find a mechanism to facilitate this. UNICEF worked with the MoE and partners to establish the Education Pooled Fund in 2008, which cumulatively received about \$20 million dollars.

From 2007 to 2010, UNICEF worked together with the MoE and sector partners to develop the first ESP (2010-2020) which resulted in Liberia getting \$40 million dollars from the GPE. UNICEF was the Coordinating Agency (CA) for the GPE from 2010 to 2013. UNICEF has been a member of the Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC) since 2008 and the Local Education Group (LEG) since 2016. After Ebola, UNICEF managed the \$18.74 million USAID funded Education Crisis Response for Liberia (ECRL) which include interventions on procurement and distribution of teaching and learning materials for grade 1-12 learners in over 4,500 schools in Liberia. Other interventions included: refresher training of over 10,000 teachers on learner centred pedagogy and psychosocial support; sensitisation

of over 4,700 PTA members on psychosocial support; support to implementation of safe school protocols, including the construction and rehabilitation of WASH facilities in schools.

The Executive Board approved UNICEF's current Country Programme of Cooperation (2020-2024) with the Government of Liberia in September 2019. The Education Programme was designed to support the implementation of the Government of Liberia's Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2017-2021 and government's Pro Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development. (PAPD). Given the large number of children who are out of school in Liberia and the importance of basic quality education to achieving the aims of the PAPD and Sustainable Development Goals, the country programme has prioritized equitable and sustainable access to education at the early learning and basic education level.

The programme will contribute to increasing access of children and adolescents, especially the most disadvantaged, to inclusive, safe, quality learning environments, so that they enrol in school at the appropriate age, complete pre- primary and basic education and transition to secondary education. The programme will, among others, focus on out-of-school children and overage enrolment, particularly at ECE and basic education levels, with special attention to girls, children with disabilities and those living in remote and marginalised communities.

Overall Goal of the GPE Project

To ensure continuity of learning for all learners during and after the COVID-19 induced school closure and prepare and provide all safety measures and support for learners, educational personnel for the re-opening of schools.

The specific goals are:

1. To ensure the prevention and control of COVID-19 during the period of school closure
2. To ensure continuity of learning during the period of school closure with the support of parents and communities
3. To plan for and ensure that when schools eventually re-open, they are safe for students and teachers to return and that systems are strengthened to provide access to quality education for all.

The key interventions proposed are aligned to the MoE Education COVID-19 Response Plan. The interventions are based on the priorities to prevent and control the virus, the continuity of learning with focus on the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, the preparations for the reopening of schools in safe and supportive environments and system strengthening. The interventions are critical for building a resilient and responsive education system, especially in the areas of distance/alternative learning using both digital and non-digital mediums and safe school protocols for disease prevention and control in readiness for any similar emergencies in future.

The interventions proposed interventions are also meant to strengthen the education system's capacity to minimize education disruption and support all school-aged children in emergency situations in future. The response is meant to ensure equitable access to inclusive quality education for all school-aged children, especially the most disadvantaged children and the most disadvantaged schools affected by the pandemic.

Through this funding, UNICEF can provide support to MoE and education sector through the following key interventions:

- Strengthen response coordination;
- Prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 through risk communication messaging and community engagement focusing on learners, youth and communities;

- Support continuity of learning through diverse distance education platforms appropriate for each context to meet the needs of different learners with focus on disadvantaged and marginalized children and adolescents;
- Implement continuity of learning for children with special education needs through development of relevant content, identification of appropriate platforms and provision of teaching and learning materials;
- Empower teachers to provide remote learner support on structured lessons delivered through multiple platforms as well as provide guidance on self-directed learning;
- Design and implement strategies for monitoring coverage and access to continuity learning programme;
- Strengthen real-time monitoring (focusing on the most vulnerable);
- Provision of psychosocial support to teachers, learners and parents;
- Initiate child protection programmes to prevent abuse and exploitation, especially for girls;
- Support back to school campaigns and community outreach to ensure that no child is being dropped out of school due to COVID-19 emergency;
- Safe school operations on resumption, including through the provision of gender-responsive WASH facilities, hygiene supplies and risk communication;
- Cross-sectoral integration to scale-up mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), health, WASH and nutrition services to support children and young people;
- Develop and implement safe school protocols;
- Support remedial/catch up lessons for high stake examination classes and learners who lagged;
- Implementation of accelerated learning based on revised school calendar;
- ‘Opening Up Better Schools’ initiative by ensuring child receive the comprehensive support, accelerated learning and concerted efforts to reach the most vulnerable children to re-engage in formal education, with better system preparedness for continuing learning;
- Improve school supervision and monitoring;

Intervention Strategies

The interventions prioritized above are categorized into output areas. Different strategies that will be employed are listed under each output area.

Output 1.1 Activate the education cluster

While the main response coordination mechanism is currently the Education in Emergency Working Group, the Ministry of Education intends to work with the UN system to activate the education cluster. Interventions under this output will include identifying partners for cluster activation, developing a concept note for the cluster activation, identifying cluster leadership and activating the cluster.

Output 1.2 Ensure cluster operationalization

Once the cluster has been activated, complementary activities will include Identifying the capacity for cluster management, setting up the cluster coordination and reporting systems, identifying and supporting areas of implementation based on the response scenarios, formation of sub-committees to respond to the emergency and providing logistics and equipment for national, county and district levels to facilitate the response plan implementation.

Output 1.3 Ensure development and dissemination of risk prevention and awareness messages

To prevent and control the spread of COVID-19, interventions will include:

- Development of COVID-19 prevention and control awareness messages to facilitate Social Behaviour Change Communication among students and all education actors, with a special focus on poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including girls affected by COVID-19
- Printing of IEC/BCC materials for students and education actors
- Dissemination of prevention and control messages in communities nationally through print and electronic media, including national and community radio stations

Output 1.4 Establish learning continuity platforms

The key intervention under this output is the establishment of relevant platforms and modalities for learning continuity for all levels, paying special attention to the needs of poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including girls affected by COVID-19. The platforms include digital platforms to facilitate online learning and paper-based lessons.

Output 1.5 Support learning continuity for all students including students with special needs

Interventions to support continuity of learning include, among others:

- Identifying learning continuity facilitators using existing teachers at community levels for low risk counties including parents of pre-school children
- Developing and airing radio lessons (Language Arts /Literacy, Numeracy, Life skills/Health and Hygiene/social-civics education and psychosocial lessons)
- Developing age appropriate and gender responsive home study tips, parental support tips and guide for learners, teachers and parents including ECD learners' parents
- Distributing age appropriate and gender sensitive instructional packages (reading materials, lessons assignments, tips and guides)

Output 1.6 Ensure psycho-social support for all

To mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic, including stigma and discrimination of affected learners, teachers and families, as was the case during Ebola, there is need for psychosocial support through:

- Developing a psycho-social support manual and messages for parents, teachers, and students during and after the pandemic, with a special focus on poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including girls affected by COVID-19
- Establishing a psycho-social support help desk with linkages to referral mechanisms in other Ministries and agencies
- Printing and disseminating the psycho-social support manual and psycho-social messages through radio stations, talk shows
- Providing psychosocial support to school communities through the training of PTAs and other personnel in learning institutions in order to create safe learning environments, free of stigma and discrimination

Output 1.7 Support health and well-being and nutrition of students, teachers and parents

The health and well-being of students, teachers and parents will be supported through:

- Developing health and well-being messages including information on safe referral systems, gender and messages against stigmatization, risk and safety communication messages for schools and PTAs
- Printing and dissemination of health and wellbeing, risk and safety materials IEC/BCC material with a focus on poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including girls affected by COVID-19

Output 1.8 Strengthen child protection and care in schools and communities

To protect learners, especially girls, from sexual exploitation and abuse and prevent gender-based violence, the following interventions will be undertaken:

- Develop age and gender appropriate child protection and care packages for students, parents and communities and use existing referral pathways working closely with Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Ministry of Justice (MoGCSP, MoJ)
- Print and disseminate child protection and gender sensitive packages
- Engage communities and parents on child protection including gender sensitive practices through special PTA/community meetings
- Track child abuse incidences through the help desk
- Identify and support abused children through referral to the MoGCSP and MoJ

Output 1.9 Ensure safe re-opening of schools

In order to ensure safe school environments when schools are about to open, the following interventions will be undertaken:

- Conduct rapid assessment on schools, students and community readiness for school re-opening with a focus on poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including girls affected by COVID-19
- Fumigate or decontaminate school environments prior to reopening of schools
- Provide gender sensitive WASH facilities in vulnerable schools with no facilities or, limited facilities for boys and girls
- Produce and air jingles and conduct community awareness campaigns for re-opening of schools, including gender sensitive and inclusive education messages

Output 2.1 Support community mobilization for school re-opening

The support for school re-opening will include:

- Developing community mobilization guidance for schools with focus on back to school campaigns, including enrolment of children who were already out of school, with a focus on poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including girls affected by COVID-19
- Integrating COVID-19 prevention IEC/BCC materials for behaviour change in the community guidance
- Facilitating training of PTAs and school administrators on community mobilization strategies

Output 2.2 Ensure access to health kits for all schools

School health kits, as was the case during school re-opening after Ebola are critical for promoting the safety of learners and teachers. Interventions to promote the health kits will include:

- Developing and approving a standard school health kit list to be used in all schools
- Procuring and distributing school health and well-being kit to include hygienic materials and supplies such as thermal sensor, thermometer, soap, gloves, sanitizers etc)
- Developing school health and well-being protocol and safe operation guidelines on sick learners and staff, absenteeism, regular hand washing, identification, isolation and reporting of suspected cases, and psycho-social materials as well as emergency planning for school administrators
- Disseminating school health and well-being protocols and train teachers, school administrators and PTAs on implementation of the protocol, emergency planning, psycho-social support etc.
- Promoting compliance with Wash in Schools (WinS) protocols across all schools

- Establishment of case management and referral system between education authorities, schools and school communities and health and other social services in the case of coronavirus case identification and tracing

Output 2.3 Guarantee provision of curriculum, textbooks, teaching and learning materials

To strengthen the education system with curricula, teaching and learning materials, it will be necessary to:

- Develop, print and distribute textbooks and teachers guide for Grades 1-9 four core subjects
- Develop workbooks for ECE to grades 6 based on the revised 2019 national curriculum and the ECE curriculum in the core subjects
- Procure teaching learning materials, including specific material for catch up classes and accelerated education programmes
- Print and distribute ECE curriculum and materials

Output 2.4 Enhance capacity strengthening of decentralized staff, school administrators, teachers and caregivers

To strengthen the capacity of school administrators, teachers and caregivers, the following interventions will be undertaken:

- Scale up school leadership training, including orientation on learner-centred pedagogy and subject content
- Conduct Capacity Assessment and Performance Appraisal of District and County Education Officers (DEOs, CEOs)
- Develop training program for DEOs and CEOs based school re-opening planning, assessment results and on education planning, management and supervision at the county level
- Train DEOs and CEOs based on training program
- Develop a comprehensive teacher training framework for all levels
- Develop in-service continuous professional development training packages for ECE -9th grade based on reformed curriculum, WASSEC assessment results for 6th and 9th grade and other assessments
- Conduct teacher training to facilitate school re-opening (Psychosocial support, health, learner-centred and gender responsive pedagogy, approach, content)

Output 2.5 Strengthen systems of school leadership, teacher preparedness, emergency planning, learning continuity in emergency, age-appropriate enrolment, school quality assessment and inclusive education

The following interventions will facilitate systems strengthening:

- Develop guidelines for emergency plans development for schools including planning for a second wave of virus outbreak
- Develop systems and platforms for sustainable learning continuity
- Implement age and gender appropriate enrolment guidance in all schools
- Strengthen school quality assessment systems and EMIS
- Develop, distribute and implement inclusive education guidance and training packages
- Set up and reactivate School Health committees

Output 2.6 Ensure student assessment guidance and school calendar adjustment

In order to make up for the lost time and prepare students for the transition between the 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021 school year, the following interventions will be undertaken:

- Develop and approve guidance on students' assessment in emergencies
- Develop standard operating procedures for future emergencies
- Develop school calendar adjustments scenarios for catch-up classes /remedial programs
- Implement gender sensitive and inclusive catch-up classes and remedial programs
- Develop social distancing guidance to be used by schools in developing their school-specific guidelines

Output 2.7 Monitoring and accountability for COVID-19 Response

To promote monitoring and accountability, the following interventions will be undertaken:

- Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for the COVID-19 emergency response
- Develop relevant data collection and reporting templates for COVID-19 including digitization
- Train staff in the use of data collection and reporting templates for COVID-19 for CEOs, DEOs, M&E Officers
- Procure needed logistics to support monitoring the COVID-19 emergency plan (transportation, laptops, tablets, data (internet), stationeries, etc.)
- Conduct routine and real time monitoring

The proposed interventions under the COVID-19 response plan will have a positive impact on learning in the short and long-term. UNICEF, the MoE and partners will continue work on strengthening the resilience of the education sector through funding the GPE funding to help the sector be better able to withstand future challenges. Interventions to mitigate against COVID-19 impacts will have a forward-looking approach to not only meet the needs of children who were in school pre-COVID-19 but to also target those on the margins including out of school children into the system.

After careful review of the GPE guidelines, UNICEF, the MoE and partners conclude that the proposed interventions are highly aligned with the suggested interventions in the guidelines: 1) Production of learning continuity programs for different platforms; 2) Support safety and wellbeing of children and teachers; 3) Support monitoring, tracking or assessment of learners' progress; 4) Support the most vulnerable and the poorest' 5) Support teachers and educational personnel affected by the crisis; 6) Prepare educational facilities for safe school reopening after the pandemic and 7) Support remedial and catch up learning programs when schools reopen.

Coordination Mechanism

The Education in Emergency (EiE) Technical Working Group, which included the LEG members, will function as the Coordination mechanism for the Ministry of Education Response Plan until the Education Cluster is activated. The Ministry of Education will chair the EiE Technical Working Group with UNICEF and Save the Children providing co-technical leadership for the response.

Implementation and Financial Management

The Ministry of Education as the agency with statutory mandate to manage education in Liberia takes full ownership of this Education in Emergency COVID-19 response plan and will serve as the main implementing agency ensuring that the plan achieves the expected results. The Ministry, however, recognizes and values the enormous technical capacity and resource potential of all its development partners and their willingness to support the sector in responding to the COVID-19 emergency and strengthening the system for improved access, quality, and learning outcomes. In this regard, the Ministry is open to a participatory approach which involves the full participations of its partners in the decision-making processes of the sector as outlined in the roles and responsibilities section of the plan.

The implementation and critical decision making for the planning, implementation, monitoring, adjustments and reporting will be done under the guidance of MoE and the Local Education Group (LEG) and the Education in Emergency (EiE) Technical Working Group. Frequent implementation and

progress indicator monitoring will be led by the Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Committee, a subcommittee of the EiE Technical Working Group. The Committee will raise issues and bottlenecks being encountered during implementation.

The MoE will assume leadership in implementation of the programme. The key units responsible for the programme include, among others 1) The Department of Planning, Research and Development 2) The Department of Instruction 3) The Department of Administration and Finance 4) The ECD Bureau 5) The Bureau of Basic and Secondary Education 6) The Bureau of Teacher Education 7) The Directorate of School Health 8) The Directorate of Special and Inclusive Education 9) The Centres for Curriculum and Excellence.

The Grant Agent, UNICEF, will be responsible for ensuring that implementation is in line with the proposed interventions and will provide technical guidance on monitoring and quality assurance of the implementation. The programme will be managed by UNICEF Liberia Education Programme Section under the responsibility of the Section Chief. The Section Chief will work closely with the UNICEF Senior Management and Education Specialists who will be responsible for the daily management of the emergency programme. Different technical sections within UNICEF Liberia, such as Child Protection, Health, WASH, Social Policy and Research, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation sections will constantly provide technical advice for quality programme approaches and implementation. To ensure effective technical assistance and effective monitoring and quality of programme implementation, when necessary, UNICEF will engage additional experts in the areas requiring such expertise. UNICEF will utilise different implementation strategies depending on the nature of the activities, such as procurement of technical assistance and services, procurement and distribution of supplies, equipment and other items.

The Grant Agent, UNICEF, is responsible for the management of the grant, including financial management. The Education Section will work closely with the Finance and Supply Units within UNICEF to facilitate disbursement of funds and the procurement and distribution of supplies. UNICEF's financial implementation and management is dictated by UN-wide financial management rules and regulations called Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfer (HACT). HACT provides measures to ensure all funds are properly utilized and accounted for, while strengthening national capacities for financial management and accountability, with a view to ensuring sustainability by gradually shifting to utilizing national systems. Currently the HACT assurance review rates MoE as "medium-risk". UNICEF will thus work with MoE in collaboration with other education partners such as the World Bank, to support the strengthening of ministry's financial management capacity, while the implementation, payment transactions and financial management of the GPE programme will be undertaken directly by UNICEF based on the implementation plan, agreement and guidance from MoE and education partners.

UNICEF Liberia is a fully established country office with full operational functions (Programmes, Finance, HR, Supply and Logistics, Monitoring and Evaluation and Quality Assurance). While ensuring due diligence on every process and transactions, UNICEF will use fast-track processes to facilitate implementation of project activities. Globally, to respond to COVID-19 crisis, UNICEF activated Level-3 Scale-Up Corporate Emergency Activation Procedure. Guided by the set of standards under Level-3, UNICEF now applies emergency fast track procedures for all partnerships (NGO partnerships included), contracting, supply/logistics, financial processes and transactions. Where necessary, UNICEF will discuss with the MoE the utilisation of the UN partnership portal with pre-approved and pre-registered NGOs for potential partnerships to fast track the implementation, depending on their experiences and geographical presence. Other partnerships, however, may also be sought based on their comparative advantage, cultural/social relevance and technical expertise.

Procurement of key and high-volume items will be done directly by UNICEF to facilitate timely delivery of procurement and implementation and value for money expenditures. Locally as well as globally,

UNICEF has Long-Term-Agreement contracts with sets of pre-approved/pre-assessed service providers and suppliers (supplies, consultancies and other services). Procurement will be fast-tracked from the LTA list where possible and relevant, and other procurement activities will be guided by the emergency Level-3 fast track procedures. When it is possible and relevant, UNICEF will make use of its policy of promoting local procurement to strengthen the local capacity and market.

The details of the financial and procurement rules and regulations as well as risk mitigation measures are presented in Annexes I and II.

Implementation Plan

The detailed action/milestone and implementation timeline per activity with roles and responsibilities is provided as Annex V. As it is not possible at this stage to know when schools will reopen in Liberia, the COVID -19 health risks will influence when certain activities will be conducted.

Fiduciary and Administrative Capacity

UNICEF Liberia has a solid governance structure and oversight arrangements. Globally UNICEF is governed by an Executive Board, which provides the high-level oversight on the entire organisation and is mandated to shape its strategic direction, review policies, programmes and budgets. UNICEF Zimbabwe is headed by Country Representative and supported by about 74 staff members.

An accountability framework, internal control policy, risk management procedures and a range of counter-fraud arrangements are in place. There are several governance structures in place for specific organizational task areas, including: Country Management Team (CMT), Programme Management Team (PMT), Partnership Review Committee (PRC), Contract Review Committee (CRC), Internal Controls and Risk Management Reference Group, Country Office Staff Association (COSA) and other office management committees that oversee the internal controls of the country programme and office management.

Audit and Risk Management

UNICEF has an internal audit function, an Audit Advisory Committee and is subject to external audit by the UN Board of Auditors. At the country level internal controls are monitored by the Operations team under the Deputy Representative-Operations with an independent line of reporting to the Country Representative. UNICEF reports directly to the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI) on potential fraud cases and other irregularities, and the annual reports of UNICEF's external auditors, Audit Advisory Committee and Country Programmes are published.

UNICEF uses the Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) system to identify and report on the most significant risks that can affect programme implementation and operations. Identified risks are reviewed quarterly by CMT and the risk register is further reviewed by the regional office and UNICEF HQs via the ERM system. The ERM system is currently being upgraded into a new integrated system called enterprise Governance, Risk and Compliance (EGRC). UNICEF has a specific policy to prohibit and combat fraud and corruption and its Anti-Fraud Strategy comprises of the tools, processes and practices for the organization to prevent, detect and respond to fraud.

Programme Operations

UNICEF applies the following modalities to implement program activities:

- **Cash:** UNICEF applies the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfer (HACT) procedure to implement program activities through direct cash transfers (advance, reimbursement, direct

payment). UNICEF's implementing partners (IPs), both governmental and non-governmental, are assessed and reviewed through required micro assessments, audits, spot checks and programmatic visits prior to, during and after the program implementation. If any risks are identified, UNICEF is obliged to directly engage with relevant IPs to address risks or issues and improve their capacities.

- **Supply:** UNICEF has the well-established supply procurement and logistics capacity at the country, regional and global levels, and engages in domestic and/or international procurement processes where appropriate. UNICEF follows the global supply procurement rules and regulations, which focus on transparent, open competitive processes but also ensures appropriate review of applicant suppliers' capacities for risk assessment and management.
- **Services:** UNICEF has the mechanism to engage with both individual and institutional consultancies, known as Special Service Agreements (SSAs), to provide necessary technical assistance to the program implementation.

UNICEF has a Programme Policy and Procedure (PPP) framework and manual which detail UNICEF's approach to country program, program preparation, implementation and management, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E). UNICEF also has a Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) in Humanitarian Actions framework to guide UNICEF's response to complex emergencies, humanitarian situations and fragile states. UNICEF uses a SAP based Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, called VISION, which provides program information, tracks performance and expenditure in line with the work plan and provides a tool for oversight of program operations.

Human Resources (HR)

The UNICEF Liberia Country Office is headed by Country Representative and supported by 74 staff. The office has two main divisions – Programs headed by the Deputy Representative–Programs and Operations headed by the Deputy Representative–Operations. The Representative's Office is supported by Communication Section. The Education Programme is headed by Chief–Education and the Education Section currently has Programme Officers who support planning, managing, monitoring and reporting of donor funds and program implementation. Consultants and emergency surge staff are recruited as and when necessary.

UNICEF Liberia has the following program sections: Education, Child Protection, Child Survival and Development (Health, Nutrition and WASH). These are supported by the Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation and Communication for Development Unit. UNICEF has strong intersectoral programming capacities, such as WASH in school (WinS), school health, adolescents' nutrition, child protection in education, and life skills education. The diverse programs have resulted in more inter-sectoral programming and increased synergy while leveraging on each section's comparative advantage. For example, the UNICEF Education and WASH team work closely to ensure access to clean water and sanitation for the most disadvantaged schools.

UNICEF's Procurement Policy During Emergencies

UNICEF does not use its regular program procedures during an emergency in order to facilitate accelerated response. The work processes, including procurement, becomes more flexible to expedite work processes and program implementation. The UNICEF Executive Director declared level 3 emergencies for COVID-19 pandemic which allows UNICEF to use its entire global, or "corporate" human or financial resource base to respond. This has resulted in the prioritization of the COVID-19 procurement processes. UNICEF Liberia has already flown in an assortment of health and WASH supplies to support the COVID-19 response from Copenhagen, the UNICEF Supply Division

Headquarters. UNICEF thus has quick access to one of the largest emergency supply warehousing in the world, and this facilitates procurement of supplies.

UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) in Humanitarian Actions demonstrates the organizational commitments in emergency preparedness and response. Many of the UNICEF staff and partners have extensive experiences in emergency responses. UNICEF also has structures at the HQs and regional office level to provide timely and often rapid assistance and accelerated procedures to country offices to respond to emergencies and support critical interventions.

Considering the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF Liberia will utilize the current staff who have experience in different types of emergencies in Liberia and elsewhere. Once the ban on air travel is lifted, UNICEF can bring in staff from standby partners at short notice to assist with the response. These staff bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience in education in emergencies including support to coordination and implementation of education sector and cluster plans.

Since UNICEF strongly advocates for a children's rights to education and a protective learning environment, it establishes partnerships to safeguard learning for every child. UNICEF has established multiple partnerships with NGOs and CSOs to support MoE in both regular and humanitarian interventions. In an emergency, UNICEF can enter into new partnerships in a very short space of time.

Monitoring and Evaluation and GPE guidelines

The monitoring of the programme will utilize the existing sector dialogue structure. To support programme implementation, UNICEF will enhance its monitoring and evaluation capacity as well as the MoE's capacity to assess the situation and monitor the results in real time through a SMS-based survey tool (RapidPro), relevant Logframe and monitoring tools, and field visits. Frequent implementation and progress indicator monitoring will be led by Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Committee, a subcommittee of the EiE Technical Working Group. Policy and high-level decision making will be supported by the Local Education Group (LEG). The EiE Technical Working Group/Cluster will frequently review progress in implementation of activities against the result framework and discuss ground level bottlenecks for possible elevation of the matters to the LEG. Regular meetings will be held to review the progress indicators, challenges and mitigation measures.

Based on GPE guidelines, the progress report will be submitted after 12 months then the full programme report will be presented after the programme has been completed. Most indicators in the Results Framework will be monitored monthly or bi-monthly to facilitate GPE bi-monthly survey requirements.

UNICEF will make ensure that the monitoring practice for the program is guided by quality GPE Monitoring and Evaluation quality standards. Hence the program will collect and report on the required core indicators using the GPE Monitoring and Evaluation Guidance for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Grants. UNICEF will send progress reports using the standardised GPE reporting template. The program incorporates a gender and equity lens in conduction monitoring and evaluation activities. The core indicators specified in the GPE guidance will be disaggregated by gender.

Examples of core indicators and gender sensitive indicators to be tracked include:

- Number of children (and % of children in the relevant age-group in the program area) in the program area supported with distance/homebased learning/tutoring programs
- Number of children (and % of children in the relevant age-group in the program area)

provided access to programs and sensitization campaigns that aim at minimizing the negative impacts of school closure like psychological impacts, gender-based violence, and issues related to unequal social norms

- Number of teachers (and % of teachers in the program area) trained in using distance learning methods and/or provided materials to support distance learning
- Number (and %) of children previously enrolled in grant-supported schools who return to school once the school system is reopened
- Number (and % of schools in program area) of grant-supported schools reopened
- Number (and % of schools in program area) of grant-supported schools equipped with minimum hygiene standards for prevention of COVID-19
- Number of girls and boys reached through information and services on sexual and reproductive health
- Number of girls and boys reached through sensitization programs on early marriage, early pregnancies and importance of continuing learning
- Number of children provided with learning kits

Monitoring in the context of UNICEF's commitment to results-based management and the associated need for accountability and transparency, requires a strong monitoring and evaluation framework. UNICEF will therefore strive to 'add value' to such performance monitoring and associated evaluation commitments through its technical support for gender and child-sensitive methodologies and analyses and the application of evidence-based programming that is guided by the equity principle.

The program will be monitored at different levels to collect triangulated evidence where possible in order to assure that the program is not only delivering on the planned outcomes and outputs, but that the outcomes can be sustained. Monitoring and evaluation will serve three principal functions. The first will be the accountability function to various stakeholders including the funders, the target beneficiaries, and the government. The second will be to assess performance, whether the planned results are being realized and in tandem with the set objectives and goals. The third will be monitoring for learning that is to document and share all lessons right from the formative phases of the program to the end, with the view to teasing out major issues regarding sustainability and good practice.

The program will use the learning from evidence approach to generate knowledge and evidence particularly on the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the program. It is necessary to do some research to understand the effectiveness of the distance learning approaches being used and to analyze and document the practices and experiences of learners, teachers and parents. It is critical to investigate, within this context, to what extent vulnerable/disadvantaged learners have benefitted from distance learning and how the program addressed specific barriers to learning for such learners. The research will draw evidence and lessons for future programming using voices of learners, teachers, parents and other stakeholders.

Administrative Cost for Delivery of the Programme

As per the agreement between UNICEF and GPE, a 7% administrative against the total country allocated amount of US\$ 10 million will be required, and this amount will be contributed by GPE separately from the country allocated amount, that is, US\$ 10 million.

At the country level, UNICEF will require 7% against the country allocated amount for technical and operational support costs at UNICEF Liberia Country Office, which include: costs of staff directly involved in the program activities supported by this funding; office management costs and operational

support costs. Working closely with MoE and implementing partners, UNICEF will be engaged in disbursement of direct cash transfers (DCT), partnership agreements, supply procurement and logistic services, contracting of technical consultancies as and when necessary, technical and administrative support by UNICEF staff. UNICEF can perform and process necessary program implementation modalities directly and rapidly through DCT, direct payment to service providers, and direct supply procurement. This minimizes the administrative costs while maximizing the programmatic costs for program delivery.

Annex I. UNICEF Financial and Procurement Rules and Regulations

UNICEF's financial risk management is aligned to the UN standard Framework Harmonized Approach of Cash Transfers to Implementing Partners. The adoption of the new harmonized approach is a step in implementing the Rome Declaration on Harmonization and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which call for a closer alignment of development aid with national priorities and needs. The approach allows efforts to focus more on strengthening national capacities for management and accountability, with a view to gradually shift to utilizing national systems.

HACT is based on an assessment of the risks associated with transferring cash to implementing partners, including the risk that cash transferred to implementing partners may not be used or reported in accordance with agreements between the agency providing the cash resources and the implementing partner.

According to the UN HACT principle it is recognised that the level of risk can be different for each Implementing Partner. For each Implementing Partner, UN Agencies effectively and efficiently manage this risk by:

1. Assessing the Implementing Partners' financial management capacity (micro assessment of IP receiving over \$100,000 per year);
2. Applying appropriate procedures for the provision of cash transfers to the Implementing Partner (mitigation measures); and
3. Maintaining adequate awareness of the Implementing Partner's internal controls for cash transfers and proper utilization of resources to beneficiaries through assurance activities like regular financial 'spot checks', programmatic field visits or financial audits.

Micro-assessment

The first stage of the HACT financial management approach is to conduct a Micro-Assessment of the IP's financial management systems. Each micro-assessment concludes with a statement of the overall risk profile related to cash transfers, rated as 'low', 'moderate', 'significant', or 'high'. A 'low risk' rating indicates a well-developed financial system and function control framework. A 'significant risk' or 'high risk' rating is given if the system is more nascent and the control framework is inadequate to assure that cash transfers are used and reported as agreed with the Agencies. **The findings of the Micro-Assessment primarily guide the frequency and coverage of assurance activities (spot checks) and capacity building for enhancing financial systems of the IPs.**

The results of the micro assessment are valid for a period not to exceed the duration of the Country Programme Cycle (five years in Liberia) and may extend across programme cycles. For example, a micro assessment conducted at the beginning of the fourth year of a five-year country programme cycle will be valid up to the end of the third year of the following country programme cycle unless there was a change in the IP's management structure or processes and procedures as noted above. If significant changes to an IP's organizational management structure or processes and procedures with respect to the Programme are observed, a new micro assessment may be deemed necessary by the agency during the Programme cycle.

Spot Checks

At a minimum, one (1) spot check is required for all implementing partners reporting more than US\$50,000 expenditures in a year from funds provided by UNICEF. Significant negative spot check findings result in scheduling of additional assurance activities. A spot check is not required in the year when an audit is completed. These visits act as a 'mini audits' of financial expenditure against agreed project budget lines.

Audits

Any IP receiving more than \$100,000 per year might be sampled by HQ for a ‘special audit’ based on Risk level of that implementing partner. The risk-based audit methodology utilizes a comprehensive process for selecting implementing partners to be audited taking into consideration financial risks, the operating environment and prior audit results. The methodology allows for a robust global risk assessment and the ability to aggregate and analyze the audit results.

Procurement Procedure

UNICEF Financial regulation (article XII) obligates all UNICEF country offices and their staff to carry out any procurement (of services and goods) by means of competitive tenders. Major exceptions would be under acute emergency situations or prices are fixed by some regulatory bodies. Depending on the nature of purchases, either invitation of bid, request for proposals, request of quotations is issued to invite interested service providers.

Those proposals and bids are evaluated by two different panels, 1) technical panel comprising a group of expertise specialized in the area, subjects, items, and 2) financial panel comprising of a variety of officers in UNICEF including supply, financial and Programme units. Financial panel opens and reviews only those proposals that were successful in the technical review. Both evaluation results are tabulated and ranked for the final recommendation. The Contract Review Committee whose mandate is mainly to review if 1) appropriate authority has been obtained for making the commitment, 2) The interest of UNICEF and its funds (including donor’s contribution) are protected, and 3) the purchasing activities are carried out in conformity with the regulations and rules, then meets and reviews the whole selection process, and recommends or does not recommend commitment of funds. The process ensures that necessary steps are followed through and that any unnecessary and detectable misuse of funds are avoided.

Annex II. Risk Assessment and Mitigation Table

Risks	Mitigation measures
<p>High macro-economic and financial risks due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decline in investment in social services due to decline in revenue and debt servicing • Cash crises due to high inflation of commodities and uncertainty of currency • Lower purchasing power by MoE, schools, parents • Ongoing economic slowdown due to COVID-19 will worsen situation • Education programs likely to receive insufficient funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key partners in the sector to leverage technical assistance and financial resource flows to the sector. • Monitoring and evaluation framework to be used to monitor program implementation and timely adjustments to be made to address identified challenges • Implementation timeline to be used to guide interventions.

Medium to high Fiduciary risks –

Previous Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfer (HACT) Assurance activities have highlighted there is medium to high fiduciary risks the MoE internal control systems

- UNICEF has been working with MoE since 2019 to improve the internal financial control systems.
- The MoE established in 2019 a dedicated account for funds advanced by UNICEF which facilitates reconciliation of the funds
- The MOE has established a mobile money platform whose efficiency was tested and verified by UNICEF during in the last quarter of 2019
- UNICEF also pilot tested the use of direct transfer of funds through bank accounts to MoE workshop participants and service providers in 2019 to complement the use of Direct cash transfers
- UNICEF will disburse funds to MoE and implementing partners NGOs through the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfer (HACT) that has provision for periodic checks and balances through spot checks by UNICEF staff to complement with audit firms.
- UNICEF will conduct due diligence to ensure accountability of advances and standardization of accounting and reporting procedures agreed between UNICEF and implementing partners under the HACT framework which monitors the reach and effect of the grant disbursements to implementing partners. The framework requires UNICEF to conduct micro-assessments for partners that receive more than \$100,000; spot checks for partners receiving more than \$50,000; field monitoring for partners receiving more than \$2,500; and audits for partners receiving over \$500,000 during a program cycle.
- In cases where financial misappropriation is suspected, UNICEF will commission a special audit.”
- When risks are identified, UNICEF will support capacity building of MoE and partners’ staff to implement agreed action plans on financial management
- When necessary, UNICEF will enter into a Programme Cooperation Agreement (PCA) to establish the partnership framework. The PCA will define the rights and obligations of UNICEF and the NGOs, as well as the terms and conditions of the partnership. The PCA will be operationalized through program documents that define expected results, activities, related resource requirements and work plan.

<p>Ministry of Education's implementation capacity and procurement process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MoE GPE focal points might be overstretched to facilitate GPE activities as they also have full responsibilities under the broader education sector activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When MoE procurement processes might be slower, UNICEF will make use of its direct procurement process including Long Term Agreements. Review technical assistance requirements and recruit Technical Assistants (TA) who will be fully dedicated to the GPE program The UNICEF Liberia country office will also make use of support from standby partners. The country office will also benefit from the technical assistance and experience sharing opportunities from HQ and the Regional Office. Decentralization of most of the GPE trainings to clusters and schools will accelerate implementation
<p>Quality of distance education contents and its alignment with the national curriculum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The contents development will be done through the identification of institutions/individuals with high expertise and wide range of experience in the field. The institutions/individuals will work closely with relevant Bureaus in MoE and the Center for Curriculum and Excellence which will provide quality assurance throughout the stages of identification, development, translation, voicing and recording of the lessons.
<p>COVID-19 induced risks related to restriction in movement and physical interactions limits regular stakeholders' consultative meetings, field visits to project sites and physical interactions with communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This will be mitigated using ICT platforms such as WebEx, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, texting, phone calls etc.
<p>Limited frequency coverage of radio stations being used for radio lessons</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In parts of the country where there is coverage, but the challenge is access to radios by learners, UNICEF will procure solar radios for use during the current emergency and for future emergencies which will result in closure of schools. In remote areas without radio frequency coverage, recorded lessons will be distributed to the most disadvantaged children to ensure continuity of learning. Learners in such remote areas will also be priority targets for catch-up and accelerated learning programs.
<p>Safeguarding issues (harm to children/people or environment)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNICEF uses strict global guidelines for environmental assessment and protection for any infrastructure related and procurement supports, including supporting the government on standards for WASH (borehole drilling and digging of wells). UNICEF's work is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF considers the welfare and protection of children, young people and vulnerable women as an organizational imperative and hence has zero-tolerance towards the harm of children, young people and vulnerable women. • UNICEF and partners will pay special interest to safeguarding the rights of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised children, with a special focus on girls who are prone to abuse during emergencies • UNICEF requires all implementing partners to adhere to the standards and requirements of the Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) for both emergency and development projects and programs. UNICEF conducts PSEA assessment of implementing partners, requires implementing partners to commit to PSEA by incorporating relevant clauses in program documents and supporting capacity building of partners on PSEA
<p>Readiness to implement emergency activities in timely manner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF Liberia has full operational functions (Programs, Finance, HR, Supply and Logistics, M&E and Quality Assurance), and is this able to deploy staff to provide support to accelerate implementation of interventions. • UNICEF will facilitate timely delivery of procurement and implementation through direct procurement. Locally as well as globally, UNICEF has Long-Term-Agreement contracts with sets of pre-approved/pre-assessed service providers and suppliers (supplies, consultancies and other services). Procurement will be fast-tracked from the LTA list where possible and relevant, and other procurement activities will also be guided by emergency Level-3 fast track procedures.
<p>Monitoring and Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak monitoring “system” to monitor progress against national targets and indicators • Monitoring reports from the field are not analyzed properly for actions. • No follow up of action points after monitoring • Lack of transport for effective monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF will support MoE and partners to develop a robust national M&E framework at all levels. • Regular submission of monitoring reports will be mandatory • Build capacity on data analysis especially the data from EMIS • Conduct joint monitoring visits by implementing partners and verification visits, when possible, based on monitoring and acquittal reports • The GPE supported program will be monitored simultaneously with other education programs • The GPE team will establish close and personal contact with structures at staff at the decentralized level to facilitate monitoring, for example, district and school level focal points

Annex III. Indicative Budget for GPE Accelerated Funding
Attached.

Annex IV. Results Framework
Attached.

Annex V. Implementation Timeline
Attached.