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WHAT DO THE COUNTRY-LEVEL EVALUATIONS TELL US ABOUT SECTOR MONITORING? - SOME KEY TAKEAWAYS

KEY TAKEAWAY 1: **Countries are progressing in strengthening their sector monitoring systems and results frameworks. However, the CLEs suggest these are sometimes too complex, too high level or lacking in specification to track progress effectively.**

Many countries have enhanced their arrangements for monitoring or tracking results in relation to their education sector plans – based on both periodic evidence gathering through education management information systems (EMIS) and other data gathering modalities and sources, including sector policy dialogue. However, results frameworks and indicators (as the guiding template for system-wide monitoring) are sometimes too complex, too high level or lacking in specification to track progress effectively.

Positive changes

The majority of countries have an overarching education sector results framework linked to their sector plan. In some countries, the viability of the sector plan has improved due to the creation of a results framework.

> In **Côte d'Ivoire**, for example, *the Plan décennal éducation et formation* (PDEF 2016-2025) now includes a comprehensive results framework with a baseline, indicators, milestones and identified sources of data for most indicators. This compares to the previous *Plan d'action à moyen terme* (PAMT 2012-2016) for which there was no central framework against which to peg data collection, analysis and reporting. Nor were sources of data identified for specific indicators, thereby preventing an assessment of planned versus actual achievements.

> In **Tajikistan**, the new 2018-2020 sector plan is accompanied by an explicit monitoring and evaluation plan clearly outlining expected results and articulating measurable performance indicators and targets. This constitutes a clear improvement over both the *National Strategy for Education Development* (NSED) and 2012-2014 and 2015-2017 *Medium-Term Education Action Plan* (MTEAPs), which included vague performance measures with no clear baselines or dated targets.

The arrangements for sector monitoring vary greatly across partner countries. Monitoring frameworks are context dependent (e.g. in relation to technical capacities, organizational arrangements and political economy), to suit countries' particular information needs and dynamics – signifying that monitoring frameworks are the product of both sociopolitical and technical environments of countries.

Some countries have had functioning, institutionalized sector monitoring systems for a number of years with broad use by stakeholder groups.

- In **Nepal**, for example, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) collects and analyzes data, most of which are collected at school level by teachers. Different government and nongovernmental organizations also keep records of different types of educational data and information for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Biannual joint sector reviews (JSRs) take place through joint review meetings and budget review meetings. Sector stakeholders also participate in joint quarterly meetings to monitor the progress of the *School Sector Development Plan (SSDP)* implementation and hold a joint consultative meeting each December. Various technical working groups allow for more detailed stakeholder consultation on issues like early grade reading, teacher professional development and the EMIS. The ministry produces annual strategic implementation plans as well as annual work plans and budgets as part of the JSR process. These reports provide detail on progress towards annual targets based on the sector plan's results framework.

- Other countries have progressively improved sector monitoring over successive policy cycles. For example, the *Programme de développement stratégique de l'éducation de base (PDSEB 2012-2021)* in **Burkina Faso** established a common monitoring system and framework for basic education. This allows for more systematic and transparent (sub) sector monitoring than was previously possible, including feedback loops. The monitoring system identifies roadblocks limiting implementation of the PDSEB, allowing for discussion of these roadblocks during the annual JSRs and the assignment of core issues to specific local thematic groups (of the local education group) for troubleshooting. Subsequent JSRs now report on progress towards the implementation of these recommendations.

The extent to which countries employ formal progress reporting on sector plan implementation, including its frequency and format, also varies across countries. Certain countries have introduced annual or quarterly sectoral performance reporting in recent years. About a third of countries reviewed in the CLEs conducted mid-term evaluations or equivalents of their sector plans, and another two countries had, in the past, carried out final reviews of their respective plans. Both types of evaluations were used to inform the development of the next sector plan, in relation to identifying progress made and remaining gaps related to key education sector indicators. In a few (rare) cases, countries developed solid monitoring/results frameworks and used them consistently throughout plan implementation.

- In **The Gambia**, periodic monitoring revolves around three mechanisms: coordinating committee meetings held at least once a year in each of the country's six regions; capital-based LEG meetings; and bi-yearly joint donor reviews. Coordinating committee meetings are a government-led partnership platform for sector monitoring held every two months for five days, each time in a different region, bringing together senior staff of the two ministries[1] and key stakeholders in the education sector (including development partners, civil society organizations, regional education directorates, teachers, learners and parents/community members) to observe policy implementation on the ground. The events include unannounced supervision visits to randomly selected schools. Using a standardized observation tool, these visits are used to assess whether schools meet agreed-upon minimum standards.

- In **Burkina Faso**, **Sindh (Pakistan)** and **Balochistan (Pakistan)**[2], the government has produced annual progress reports on plan implementation. In other countries (e.g. Liberia, The Gambia, Sierra Leone) some, though usually not all, of the plan indicators are used to develop background documents for JSRs.

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[1] Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE), Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MoHERST)

[2] CLE focuses on the two Pakistani provinces of Balochistan and Sindh given that GPE financial support has thus far focused on these two jurisdictions.

- In **Kenya**, monitoring instruments put forward in the *National Education Sector Strategic Plan* (NESSP 2018-2022) include quarterly reports on budget and activities/program implementation, and county-level reports; these are accompanied by bi-annual reviews, bi-annual JSRs (one with a small group focusing on budget and formative evaluation and one comprehensive review with a large audience to develop the annual report), as well as annual financial external audits.

- In **Côte d'Ivoire**, monitoring of the country's 2016-2025 sector plan has been systematic and thorough, based on a comprehensive results framework with indicators, milestones, and identified sources of data for most indicators, as well as established baseline data.

Ongoing challenges

A first set of challenges relates to the framing of indicators. Countries' results frameworks generally tend to focus on system- and impact-level indicators, without formulating results, targets and indicators at activity, output or intermediate outcome levels to monitor the specifics of plan implementation. Some results frameworks also lack data disaggregation by subgroups through markers such as gender or location. This means that sector monitoring cannot troubleshoot specific challenges for different population groups.

- In some countries (**Bangladesh, DRC, Mauritania, Rwanda, Senegal, The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo**, for example) results frameworks and subsequent data collection focus on relatively high-level sector indicators only while neglecting the output level. Consequently, collected data does not permit linking bigger picture trends to specific activities and short-term achievements, and thereby prevents assessing the effectiveness of sector plan implementation.

- In other countries (e.g. **Uganda**), data collection is overly focused on short-term output level indicators without linking related insights to bigger picture trends, again posing challenges to assessing the overall effectiveness of plan implementation.

- In a number of countries (e.g. **Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sindh and Balochistan, Zimbabwe**), there is also a need to further disaggregate important data on outcomes within a coordinated process to feed data back to frontline users.

A second challenge is that results frameworks are not consistently used by ministries of education and other sector actors to guide plan implementation work and subsequent data collection and reporting. There is also limited evidence of CLE countries regularly collecting and reporting data against their respective results frameworks. A number of reasons were identified for this:

- Where lower level indicators have not been elaborated, it becomes difficult to link sector plan objectives to activities undertaken, budgets released, outputs delivered and outcome indicator targets achieved.
- A clear division of labor is not sufficiently identified for monitoring and reporting responsibilities (also see below), or actors are not held to account for their reporting duties. This can lead to no reporting at all, or inconsistent reporting with indicators and targets used varyingly by year.
- Individual donor-funded projects that contribute to achieving national education results are not monitored and reported on through the lens of sector plan implementation. This includes their adherence to agreed implementation roles in relation to the plan and financial and non-financial inputs. These elements present a challenge to mutual accountability for commitments made.

- In **Guyana** and **Liberia**, the evidence from the CLE suggests that the existing results frameworks were not used and with no clear explanations for why. In the case of Guyana, this was in spite of the fact that the plan included clear information on monitoring roles and responsibilities.

- In **Burkina Faso**, the detailed results framework for *the Programme de développement stratégique de l'éducation de base (PDSEB)* was systematically applied, but the (different) frameworks for the overall education sector plan were not. As such, monitoring was conducted only for the basic education subsector.

- Several plans and related operational plans (e.g. in **Côte d'Ivoire, Sindh and Balochistan, Liberia, Sierra Leone**) lacked information on roles and responsibilities for plan implementation monitoring, as well as in relation to the nature and frequency of related data collection and reporting.

- In a number of cases (e.g. in **Guinea, Mozambique, Togo and Tajikistan**), formal annual/quarterly reports focused on what had been implemented, but without comparing this to what had been planned or explaining any variances. In some instances, data sources were unclear, and budgetary provisions and planned targets not always stipulated (e.g. Guinea).

Annual operational plans are not updated regularly, which presents a challenge for annual monitoring as it reduces clarity on which targets the annual implementation reports should report against. This is important as the annual operational plan lays the basis for annual monitoring by outlining financial and technical objectives for the year, along with corresponding indicators, cost estimates, and financing and implementation responsibilities.

- In **Guinea**, annual operational plans are supposed to be produced yearly by the various ministries and directorates, based on the existing agreed-upon sectoral plan (and its updated multi-annual action plan), and are to be aggregated into one overarching action plan encompassing all subsectors and all donor-financed activities. This mechanism dates back at least a decade. However, in practice such plans are not always produced or validated, meaning the sector operates without a harmonized plan.

- Complexities are also experienced in the use of monitoring data to compare trends against the implementation of earlier versions of education sector plans – both as a way of tracking long-term progress (e.g. in **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Nepal**), to learn from, and improve, current plan implementation and to elaborate future education sector plans.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2: Ministries of education often identify a lead task force, institution and expertise for sector monitoring. However, concrete roles and responsibilities for data collection and strategies for capacity development may be missing, generating a leadership and operationalization gap.

In certain cases, the lead task force or organization lacks the capacities for data gathering, analysis and management, or the authority and resources to carry out systematic data collection at central and decentralized levels. The overall impact of the leadership and capacity gap are low data quality in terms of completeness, validity and consistency, and dependence on external support for sector monitoring.

Positive changes

Local education groups are generally the dialogue body in charge of sector monitoring.

- In **Zimbabwe**, where the education coordination group takes the lead in education sector monitoring and is responsible for the organization of national sector reviews to ensure that there is overall and consistent monitoring and that changes and adjustments are made in a timely manner.
- In **Burkina Faso**, the permanent secretariat is responsible for monitoring and coordinating activities.

In some instances, special bodies/task forces were created, in part to fulfill these monitoring functions.

> ❯ In **Côte d'Ivoire**, a task force was for collecting and analyzing monitoring data and preparing monitoring reports on the country's *Plan décennal éducation et formation* (PDEF – 2016-2025), as well as organizing JSRs. A monitoring and evaluation expert was engaged by the task force (with support from AFD) with responsibility to collect and analyze PDEF monitoring data based on the annual action plan.

Ongoing challenges

Concrete leadership roles and responsibilities for monitoring are not always clearly articulated in the education sector plan and related operational plans. Monitoring bodies may also have limited capacity to fulfill their monitoring and evaluation functions, both in terms of number of staff available and technical ability, depending on the context. This is often driven by a lack of funding available.

> ❯ In **Togo**, there is a lack of resources available to train staff in data collection and database management, while the supervision of annual data collection is constrained by lack of funds.

Taken together, these elements present a challenge for mutual accountability and compromise the efficiency of both sector monitoring and implementation.

> ❯ In **Côte d'Ivoire**, in spite of a task force being designated to lead on monitoring, the relationships between it and the relevant departments in the Ministry of National Education and Technical Vocational Education and Training (MENETFP) were not laid out – so that leadership and accountability for PAMT monitoring was diffuse and limited. Nor did the task force have sufficient authority, financial or human resource capacity to actively take up its stated role.

> ❯ In **Rwanda**, clearly defined monitoring responsibilities and sources of data were lacking in the 2013-2018 *Education Sector Strategic plan (ESSP)*. Most indicators in the ESSP results framework were reported on through different mechanisms – either through the Annual Statistics Yearbook (the main source of education information in Rwanda) or reports from the Joint Review of the Education Sector (JRES). These mechanisms have not been able to track progress towards the achievement of output-level targets (i.e. planned ESSP interventions) in a consolidated way.

The fact that multiple education ministries need to coordinate to monitor plan implementation can overly complicate monitoring efforts.

> ❯ In **Mauritania**, for example, it was foreseen that the plan (PNDSE II) governance and performance oversight – which includes monitoring, sector review and accountability – would fall to the *Direction des Projets Éducation-Formation (DPEF)*, which is an inter-ministerial structure that includes representation from all five education ministries. The DPEF has been unable to assume this role as it has limited capacities to gather data independently and no authority over, or limited access to, data from individual ministries. Meanwhile, there is some duplication in the monitoring function due to departments of planning and strategy in each ministry which are also responsible for data management and analysis.

> ❯ In **Guinea**, despite recent progress in dialogue, the lack of effective inter-governmental coordination has hampered leadership in the sector, with the consequence that the government struggles to impose a harmonized vision, and that individual ministries are easily distracted from agreed-upon priorities by external funding opportunities. This issue of leadership has been compounded by frequent changes at the ministerial level in education ministries, due to several cabinet reshuffles.

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KEY TAKEAWAY 3: Education management information systems (EMIS) are improving, allowing countries to draw on periodic evidence for monitoring. However, the overall weakness of countries' EMIS, alongside the complexity of results frameworks and their data requirements, can undermine sector monitoring efforts and generate risks.

Several countries have made efforts to strengthen their EMIS by harmonizing different existing data collection and data storage systems and upgrading the school data management system. But data reporting is often unaccompanied by analysis, contextualization and interpretation, i.e. discussing trends over time and their likely causes. This creates missed opportunities to explain improvements and persistent weaknesses and limits the potential use of data in decision-making. A dislocation is then noted between the data produced, countries' results frameworks and the subsequent take-up of findings during policy dialogue and planning meetings.

Positive changes

As mentioned earlier (see key takeaway 1), the arrangements for sector monitoring vary greatly across partner countries. Monitoring frameworks are context dependent (e.g. in relation to technical capacities, organizational arrangements, and political economy), to suit countries' particular information needs and dynamics, signifying that monitoring frameworks are the product of both sociopolitical and technical environments of countries.

All countries reviewed in the CLEs have an EMIS in place to track a variety of education indicators, in spite of varying levels of complexity and the quality of data. Several countries have made efforts to strengthen their existing EMIS by harmonizing different existing data collection and data storage systems and upgrading the school data management system.

> In **Cambodia** and **Nepal**, web-based EMIS was introduced to improve the timeliness and transparency of data collection. In Nepal, the EMIS was characterized by good disaggregation of data by sex, population groups, geography and disability, issues on which many countries do not systematically collect data.

Ongoing challenges

Across countries, it was noted that improvements to EMIS are largely dependent on external assistance, which undermines the long-term sustainability of efforts. Limitations were also noted in the amount or quality of data produced through EMIS architecture and related processes, and a dislocation between the data produced and results frameworks with the subsequent take-up of findings during policy dialogue and planning meetings. Indeed, general limitations were noted in countries' ability to make use of existing data without external support.

> In **Togo**, the EMIS was developed in collaboration with UNESCO's Institute of Statistics and with the majority of financial support provided by developing partners, primarily UNICEF. While EMIS quality has been improving slowly, the use of data for decision-making, policy-making and planning purposes is still largely dependent on the support of country education partners. In (only) a few countries (e.g. Cambodia and Senegal), data produced by EMIS are cited in government meetings and reports to underpin findings or decisions.

> In **Côte d'Ivoire**, not all data sources in the online EMIS database are currently available. The PDEF (2016-2025) results framework is also viewed by education stakeholders as overly complex (with over 200 indicators), making it administratively heavy and resource intensive to coordinate data collection, analysis and reporting against the adopted results framework. Since development partners continue to invest in their separate project monitoring and evaluation processes, this has presented additional costs and administrative burdens for all parties.

In at least half of the countries reviewed by the CLEs, data reporting was unaccompanied by analysis and interpretation (e.g. by discussing trends over time and likely causes for improvements or persistent weaknesses), limiting the potential use of data for informing decision-making. Lack of internal technical capabilities and organizational traditions that, until now, have not required this kind of analysis are among the factors likely underlying these shortcomings. Also, given the absence of output-level information, most of the reviewed countries faced challenges with tracking why higher-level indicators (i.e. those related to learning outcomes) are, or are not, changing over time.

Overall, weaknesses in EMIS contributed to limiting the extent to which countries were able to draw upon and/or effectively use reliable data to track and assess the effects of plan implementation over time. Taken together, the weakness of countries' EMIS, alongside the complexity of results frameworks and their data requirements, can undermine sector monitoring efforts and generate risks.

> In **Mali**, while there have been improvements to the EMIS, first through the *Mali Emergency Education For All* Project (MEEFAP), these improvements have not compensated for serious issues with the production and reporting of meaningful data on education sector performance. The upgrades have since focused on computerizing the data collection and the analysis process through the introduction of a virtual private network, an effort which MEEFAP was not successful in completing. Data currently produced in the annual education sector review focuses on tracking financial disbursement and listing output-level achievements. There is no data on intermediate outcomes related to the effectiveness of ministry outputs. A lack of a learning assessment system and the absence in the transitional education plan of a results framework (mapping a causal path from inputs to outcomes) means that there can be little monitoring of education sector performance.

KEY TAKEAWAY 4: Decentralized monitoring is becoming more effective in gathering evidence of progress and bottlenecks from the classroom level up, with greater efforts to seek qualitative information through fact finding missions. However, efforts to generate more responsive, agile planning are slowed by inconsistent capacities at the subnational level for monitoring and high-quality data collection throughout the year.

Countries acknowledge the need to better understand how education policy is translated into practice at school level to feed more agile planning processes, with more concerted efforts to connect district, provincial and national levels of data collection. However, feedback loops to quickly integrate data use from decentralized and provincial areas into policy-making, as well as information sharing across decentralized management areas, are not systematically developed. Certain countries demonstrate inconsistent capacities at the subnational level to sustain data collection throughout the year.

Positive changes

Countries acknowledge the need to better understand how education policy is translated into practice and leads to improved results, and how education systems are performing at school level. This has led to more concerted efforts to connect district, provincial and national levels of data collection in certain countries and to include a broader spectrum of education actors in the monitoring effort.

> In **Zimbabwe**, there have been achievements in building capacities and initiating resources for the coordination especially in areas where the EMIS was previously 'non-existent' or not up to date.

> In **Mali**, regional fact-finding missions are a positive move towards more regional integration and inclusivity in sector monitoring and annual review processes. In 2016, the government conducted three missions to the Mopti, Sikasso, Koulikoro and Ségou regions consisting of interviews with a wide range of

stakeholders, including local governments and education departments and teacher training colleges. The ministry of education has also implemented a strategy to crowdsource ideas and planning priorities from regional and local education divisions.

Ongoing challenges

The vertical and horizontal integration of data systems presents some issues, while data collection and use is often challenged by technology-related limitations at local level.

> In **Nepal**, although the country has a longstanding monitoring system, difficulties are still experienced in creating a mechanism that links all the different education providers with their own data systems – both horizontally and vertically. While it is evident that the data generated within different systems can be used by the National Data Office to monitor progress and influence education reforms, the lack of connections and feedback mechanisms between and among the data suppliers and receivers, and the quality of data collected, are of significant concern. Data and information accumulated through the national EMIS also need to be shared with, and linked to, other governmental organizations at the national/district levels to reduce duplication of efforts and generate timely information.

> In **Guinea**, the utilization of digital tools for data reporting often remains challenging at the subnational level given the lack of equipment.

Improving monitoring at subnational governance levels is not always invested with resources and capacity development strategies, or fully integrated into the national monitoring effort. Subnational entities are asked to provide data to be aggregated up at the national level, but do not always participate in national monitoring reviews/meetings; this constitutes a multifaceted problem in terms of dialogue inclusion, relevance of the information collected/presented, and pertinent feedback loops.

> In **Guinea**, subnational education governance entities are not systematically represented at LEG meetings, although separate dialogue and coordination structures exist at community, departmental and regional levels. These structures are intended to support local annual planning and monitoring and include relevant local authorities. However, their functioning varies strongly from area to area, partly due to the absence of domestic funding for decentralized coordination. These entities therefore rely on external funding, which fluctuates and is unevenly distributed across the country. Even where they function well, *the Rapport d'État du Système Éducatif National* (RESEN) notes that the committees are not well known, and function more as reactive or information-sharing fora than as platforms for proactive planning and coordination. This is partly due to the historically highly centralized nature of sectoral management, with limited consideration for input from decentralized levels, which has gradually led to less interest in local coordination structure.

Within federal countries, building staff monitoring capacities to support state-level monitoring efforts can be inconsistent across states, undermining the overall effectiveness of countries' monitoring efforts.

> In **Nigeria**, the issue of state-level monitoring is marked by the lack of embedding of monitoring efforts within states' individual EMIS and inattention to capacity reinforcement of state-level actors to lead in the monitoring effort. The Annual Education Sector Performance Reports are the key monitoring system and documents currently being produced across the five states with funding from the Nigeria Partnership for Education Project. These were last produced by a third-party contractor in all five states in 2017 (per latest data available). The lack of embedding of education monitoring strategies has a number of spin-offs and raises questions regarding sustainability and continuity.

KEY TAKEAWAY 5: **Annual joint sector reviews generate dedicated opportunities for assessments of sector progress and are increasingly established in the education landscape. However, they are not always leveraged to track and improve sector plan implementation.**

Annual joint sector reviews (JSRs) generate opportunities for inclusive assessments of sector progress and are becoming a central feature of sector monitoring processes in many countries. These annual reviews are creating a regular space to appraise system-wide evidence of progress and monitoring data, while gathering stakeholder perspectives and generating collective agreement on strategies for course correction. Their value increases when the JSR is closely pegged to education sector planning, budgeting and reporting cycles. However, the CLEs did not reveal a clear pattern for education monitoring through JSRs.

Positive changes

Some countries now have a well-established JSR mechanism and are organizing periodic reviews. JSRs are generally perceived as useful forums for dialogue and, to varying degrees, for holding the respective government to account by requiring them to explicitly state and describe education sector achievements and shortcomings.

> The JSR process in **Malawi** appears to be a well-established and continuing form of reporting on progress towards sector targets and financing. This was made clear in the ESIP II action plan.

> Annual JSRs in **Côte d'Ivoire** are planned for May of each year to feed into the sector planning and budgeting process.

> In **Mozambique**, the annual review meeting (Reunão Anual de Revisão, or RAR) fills the function of the JSR and has taken place in March or April of each year since 2000. The bi-annual Grupo do Comité Consultivo Alargado (GCC-Alargado) meetings, built around general budget support approval processes, serve to review sector progress and targets with donor partners, and also bring stakeholders to agreement on the following years annual Plano de Actividades (PdA) and Education Sector Support Fund expenditures.

> The main monitoring (and high-level dialogue) mechanism in **Rwanda** is the biannual Joint Review of the Education Sector (JRES). One annual meeting looks back at the period just passed while the other is forward looking. The JRES are organized jointly by MINEDUC, UNICEF and DFID and include a broad representation of all sector stakeholders. They report on ESSP implementation progress against 10 to 15 key (outcome-level) indicators, related policy actions taken by the government of Rwanda, and sector budget allocation/execution. In addition to discussing education results and sector financing, the forward-looking JRES meetings (held in June) provide recommendations on specific policy actions to be taken for the following year.

> Several countries' JSRs now meet, or approach, the goal of JSRs being comprehensive (e.g. **Liberia, Sindh and Balochistan**), evidence-based (e.g. **The Gambia, Sindh and Balochistan**), participatory and inclusive (e.g. **Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, the Gambia and Sierra Leone**), a viable monitoring instrument (e.g. Liberia) and anchored into an effective policy cycle (e.g. the Gambia).

Sector monitoring is becoming more inclusive as a result of JSRs, opening up opportunities for a broad range of sector education stakeholders to have their voices and perspectives heard – especially at lower levels of governance. The monitoring of indicators related to the variable tranche[3] has also generated incentives in

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[3] A country's program may include several types of results-based financing. In the GPE model, variable part financing is results-based financing that focuses on system-level results and is expected to meet the criteria outlined in the *Guidance*

certain countries, leading to stronger involvement of relevant education stakeholders in overall sector plan monitoring.

- > In **Burkina Faso**, stakeholders (including nongovernment representatives) have expressed satisfaction with the sector review modality that has increasingly allowed for their voices to be heard and their feedback to be taken into consideration in decision-making.

- > In **Côte d'Ivoire**, there now appears to be a stronger commitment by LEG members to closely monitor the implementation and results achievement of the PDEF as a result of greater consultation and inclusion in sector monitoring.

- > In **Nigeria**, the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All (CSACEFA) concretely engaged with the state ministries of education of the five Nigeria Partnership for Education Project (NIPEP) states in the development of their sector plans during the grant application process. The Coalition also engaged with these states for the plan appraisal.

- > In **DRC**, **Ethiopia** and **Zimbabwe**, stakeholders stated that the variable tranche helped to make sector dialogue more meaningful by instilling a focus for closely following (parts of) ESP implementation. In some countries, civil society organizations leveraged the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF) to carry out specific sector monitoring-related activities such as studies of particular thematic issues.

Certain countries have made deliberate efforts to improve the reporting on (and learning from) performance data, including more rigorous integration of reporting on data from subnational levels, the generation of thematic 'deep dives' and improved action planning and follow-up.

- > In **Mozambique**, the RAR, a new approach for reporting on sector performance, has been adopted since 2017. Prior to this, measurement of sector performance was based on the proportion of planned activities completed in a given year, and national and sub-sector programs were rated as "satisfactory" or "not satisfactory" based on level of effort. This measurement reflected favorably on sector performance given its emphasis on output indicators but was subjective (based on the judgment of each working group), overly generic, did not interrogate reasons for progress or lack of progress, and did not reflect prioritization of strategic issues. The new Annual Review Meeting is built around the close tracking of a smaller number of priority indicators and targets from each subsector program based on the key objectives of the 2012-2016/2019 Education Strategic Plan (PEE). Each of these indicators is now rated based on a "stoplight system" which assesses the likelihood of meeting the targets by the end of the PEE period. Working groups begin discussing and analyzing the performance of each subsector well before the annual meeting is held. The 2018 report also included provincial-level indicators for the first time.

In a few instances, JSRs have triggered a revision of priorities in the light of bottlenecks revealed in the practical application of sector operational plans and amendments to subsequent education policy.

- > This was the case in **Liberia**, for example, where the deliberations of the technical working groups of the Joint Education Sector Review (JESR) in 2015 presented subsector findings covering: early childhood education, basic and secondary education, tertiary education, teacher training, governance and management, technical and vocational education and training, and information and communication technologies. These findings allowed the government to identify nine specific priorities (narrowed from 15) that were included in the subsequent three-year operational plan and G2B Education Sector Plan. One stakeholder mentioned that the media attention brought from the JESR highlighted the challenges of the education sector to high-ranked government officials and the public.

Note on GPE Variable Part Financing: Education sector planning and program design in the context of results-based financing

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> ➤ In 2015, the **Burkina Faso** JSR noted inefficiencies in the delivery of existing school feeding programs due to a centralized approach to purchasing, stocking and transporting food. The JSR recommended the implementation of a decentralized approach, including the training of school management committees and open bank accounts at the commune level to allow for transfer of funds. In 2016, the JSR confirmed that these recommendations had been carried out.

Countries are investing in improvements to the format of JSRs and reflecting on how to improve their operational usefulness. Enhancements include combinations of the following:

- Increased involvement of different education ministries in monitoring exercises;
- Actual reporting against an agreed quality monitoring framework and related action planning (i.e. use of activity and impact-level indicators - with related targets and appropriate disaggregation);
- Exploration of implementation challenges and their likely reasons; formulation of forward-looking solutions and deliberate follow-up; local-level visits).

> ➤ In **Togo**, an international consultant was hired in 2017 with financial support from UNICEF to support the ministry of education in designing a new JSR meeting format, producing timely reports for JSR meeting discussions, and coordinating the JSR process. JSRs are now timed to inform the education planning and budgeting cycles, and annual *Plan Sectoriel d'Education (PSE)* implementation reports are disseminated before JSR meetings. Templates for JSR data collection and report preparation have been revised and now require additional information on progress and bottlenecks associated with key reforms by subsector. JSR meetings now include plenary and small group discussions around key education themes, which has helped deepening discussions and making them more participatory. The number of annual JSR recommendations has been narrowed, with associated timelines, tasks and responsibilities identified after the meeting.

> ➤ In **Zimbabwe**, the 2016 JSR was the first review of the 2016-2020 ESSP and the first to comprehensively report against a performance assessment framework comprising key indicators disaggregated to show learning variations by gender, geographic location, household poverty level, etc. Comprehensive documentation outlined the successes, challenges, lessons learnt and ways forward with regard to the current planning framework for the education sector. The JSR also included a review of Joint Monitoring Visits to schools, which was a useful mechanism for sharing best practice and for harmonizing governance in schools.

Using collegial approaches in deciding which improvements to take up has showed some success.

> ➤ In **Mauritania**, there has been considerable discussion in the LEG and among development partners on how to improve JSRs and sector monitoring more generally. In 2016, education partners agreed upon a variety of measures, including the modification of the timing of JSRs, the narrowing of their content focus, and the crucial role which needs to be played by the Inter-ministerial committee responsible for policy coordination to follow and act upon recommendations emerging from the JSRs. Partners and the Direction des Projets Education-Formation (DPEF) also called for the creation of a technical unit within the PNDSE II institutional structure, reporting directly to the inter-ministerial committee, which would be responsible for PNDSE II monitoring (instead of DPEF).

Ongoing challenges

GPE results framework ratings of JSR quality across the reviewed countries show a mixed picture, with some dimensions improving in certain countries, but other dimensions stagnating or declining without clear overall trends for most countries. There can be inconsistency in the engagement with stakeholders from year to year and the quality of implementation status and completion reports. This is in part due to the lack of systematic government commitment to sector review processes, as well as concerns from high-level stakeholders about

conducting resource- and time-intensive JSRs.

The policy cycle impact of the JSR is weakened when there is little effort to explicitly assess time-bound progress in implementing the current plan (often due to the absence of high-quality valid data), or to prioritize and quickly take up the recommendations coming out of the JSRs within plan implementation or budgeting cycles.

Stakeholders question the value of holding JSRs annually given that higher-level results are not perceptible in such a short time frame, or critique JSRs as having a focus on high-level indicators without explicitly linking observed trends to specific progress made in implementing the current sector plan, or other focus such as:

> basic education subsector progress alone, with no similar reviews of other subsectors, narrowing its scope (e.g. in **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia**);

> donor, as opposed to government and other stakeholder, needs and priorities (e.g. in **Ethiopia**);

> JSRs have been described as an exercise to meet donor expectations or viewed by high-level stakeholders as time-consuming and resource-intensive (e.g. **Liberia, Mauritania**).

JSR often remain limited to sharing information on the state of the education sector. As with results frameworks, JSRs are sometimes perceived to focus too much on high-level indicators and ministerial reporting lines, without going in depth into implementation issues at local level and formulating actionable and targeted recommendations with clear allocation of responsibilities and timelines. The monitoring reviews may thus be too narrow in scope and not adjusted to reflect actual progress.

JSRs can experience low representation from certain stakeholder groups – including senior institutional and development partner representatives, national teacher representative organizations, district government representatives, civil society representatives and parent teacher associations. JSRs also do not systematically assign roles to the broader education community (CSOs, teacher's organizations, community and school level stakeholders etc.) as part of the monitoring exercise. Civil society organizations, in particular, may not have a clear role in sector monitoring, nor in the organization and oversight of the JSR.

The frequency and format of JSR meetings can limit their usefulness. The format in which recommendations are formulated can be an impediment to their usefulness.

> In **Rwanda**, sector review processes (review meetings are planned for each trimester, semester, and annually) appear too frequent, while their purpose, format and focus are not adequately defined. Some development partners perceive that the structure of the meetings (compressed discussion time, large number of participants and multiple presentations) limits participant contributions, to some extent restricting their role to one of validating existing issues on the agenda.

> In **Mauritania**, recommendations vary in their format and content from year to year but generally tend to be quite numerous, lacking in prioritization and limited in the operational and budget detail to ensure they can be acted upon. It is difficult to assess the alignment between JSR recommendations and the content of subsequent annual or three-year plans.

Weak ministerial commitment and other factors have led to JSRs being cancelled in a few cases.

> The 2014 JESR in **Liberia** was cancelled because of the Ebola virus disease and the JESR intended for 2016 was restructured as an Education Roundtable, held on April 2016, which focused on the development of the G2B ESP.

> In **Mauritania**, the 2013 JSR failed to go ahead, while the 2016 JSR was not held due to the study undertaken on the PNDSE II institutional arrangements and the need to discuss study findings.

Capacity constraints, poor leadership buy-in, weak monitoring systems, and lack of data availability/quality are four limiting factors in the relevance and usefulness of JSRs.

- Stakeholders in **Mauritania** reported that the DPEF has limited available time to analyze data on education sector progress and limited capacity to interpret emerging results. Furthermore, government commitment to the JSR process has been weak or lukewarm in some countries (e.g. DRC, Mauritania).
- In **Sindh** and **Balochistan**, there is a lack of participation from senior development partner representatives, teacher organizations, district government representatives and parent teacher associations in the JSRs. Data gaps or limited data quality in terms of their completeness, validity and consistency (e.g. in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Sindh and Balochistan) hamper having a solid picture of performance and making evidence-based decisions.

The quality and depth of the dialogue during JSRs can be reduced if high-level indicators are delinked from the output, outcome and impact indicators they are trying to achieve (e.g. Burkina Faso, Rwanda and Zimbabwe). Insufficient time may be spent troubleshooting implementation issues or tracking progress (e.g. Ethiopia, Mauritania). JSR process also do not systematically address the question of whether, how and to what extent individual development partner's initiatives have contributed to progress towards plan implementation and the achievement of education sector goals.

- In **Sierra Leone**, for example, a one-time comprehensive mid-term evaluation of ESP 2014-2018 implementation was conducted in 2017 that reflected on progress made towards sector plan objectives and high-level indicators. Given its timing, the review helped inform development of the new ESP 2018-2020 rather than implementation of the 2014-2018 plan.
- While JSRs (RARs) in **Mozambique** now produce more and better information, this information is viewed by some stakeholders as not necessarily linked to an understanding of factors underlying sector performance, especially at the provincial level, with stakeholders feeling that there is a large disconnect between central-level processes and local-level realities. This is reinforced by the insufficient time allocated in JSRs to conducting joint monitoring visits to the Mozambican provinces. Provincial education directors participate in the RAR but are not involved in other discussions.
- JSRs mostly have not resulted in actionable recommendations on how to improve sector plan implementation, or, where recommendations were made, these were broadly formulated, with no clear allocation of responsibilities and timelines for addressing them (e.g. in **DRC, Sierra Leone**) – or there was limited evidence of these recommendations having been implemented during the subsequent JSR. Visible JSR influence on decision-making largely consisted of relatively high-level recommendations that informed priorities of the next sector plan (e.g., in **Sierra Leone, DRC**).

Commitments agreed upon during JSRs are not always acted upon by the ministry of education with little long-term follow-up on whether commitments made (as recorded in JSR aide-memoires) have been integrated into countries' implementation strategies.

- In **Rwanda**, there is no clear consequence for not implementing recommendations and no mechanism exists to follow up on their implementation (i.e. a plan with responsibilities and time frame).
- In **Mozambique**, education stakeholders struggled to name instances where JSR (RAR) discussions or recommendations have led to concrete changes in plan implementation and there is little to no accountability for acting on the previous year's recommendations. Some of these stakeholders also noted that the RAR is large, public and political, further decreasing the likelihood that important decisions would be made.