LEARNING IS AT THE HEART OF GPE 2020

In low and middle income countries, it is estimated that half of primary school children (274 million) are not learning basic foundational skills and three-quarters of secondary school students (468 million) are not learning basic secondary level skills. If current trends continue, by 2030 the numbers will increase to 420 million primary school children and 825 million secondary school students not learning. This is truly a crisis of enormous proportions.

SDG4 sets an ambitious vision to ensure learning for all — and this is a major preoccupation for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which is committed to improved and more equitable student outcomes, as the first goal of its strategic plan for 2016—2020 (GPE 2020).

GPE 2020 commits the partnership to improved and more equitable student learning outcomes through quality teaching and learning. The partnership is monitoring its performance in this area through its results framework, whose first indicator tracks improvements in learning achievement and sets targets for intended progress in its partner countries over the coming years.

A central challenge in reporting on Indicator 1 is the availability of data. Nearly a third of GPE developing country partners (19 out of 65, or 29 percent) had no large-scale learning assessment with available information for 2010—2015. Furthermore, less than a third of GPE developing country partners (20 out of 65, or 28 percent) have conducted more than one large-scale learning assessment over the baseline period.

GPE’s strategy is therefore two-fold — improve learning assessments, and then invest in the things that are proven to improve the teaching-learning process between students and teachers. Contributions to GPE’s replenishment will enable GPE to finance high quality education sector plans focused on learning, all of which will drive improvements in measuring learning and target the most effective national strategies to achieve equitable learning for all. It will also enable GPE to expand its global leadership to address the knowledge gaps in learning assessment systems, and support the mobilization of citizens for a better education through increased social accountability and advocacy.
MEASURING THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

The first step in knowing how to provide those children with safe, quality learning environments staffed with qualified teachers and appropriate learning materials is knowing who they are, and what their learning needs are.

At the national level, GPE is ensuring that its partner countries are equipped to answer those questions by requiring that all education sector strategies have a plan to get the data. One of the requirements of GPE’s funding focuses on the availability of learning data critical to monitor sector outcomes and progress. Countries must either have a system in place to monitor learning outcomes or a costed plan to develop one. From 2018, developing country partners without a system to monitor learning outcomes will need to use GPE funds to fill any gaps for the implementation of their learning assessment system strategy.

- For example, in Bangladesh, the Global Partnership for Education, government and development partners support the development and implementation of classroom-based assessments nationwide, as well as national learning assessments at systems level.
- For example, in Cambodia, the partnership supports the nationwide application of the early grade reading assessment (EGRA) and the early grade mathematics assessment (EGMA), the results of which will inform pedagogical and curricular improvements in the system. The GPE-funded program includes EGRA/EGMA training for school administrators and teachers as well as technical support to the national agency conducting the assessments.

This requirement is important because measuring learning is key to improving learning. At the classroom level, measuring learning is central to the learning process, helping teachers understand what students know and to adapt instruction accordingly. At the system level, measuring learning is needed to inform policymaking, gauge the impact of education reform, and target resources accordingly to ensure equity of learning among schools, regions, and populations. The availability of learning data can also leverage social accountability by providing citizens with evidence about learning outcomes.

GPE is also providing global and regional leadership and critical resources to address this challenge — for instance, through its Knowledge and Innovation Exchange funding mechanism, GPE is supporting the Assessment for Learning (A4L) initiative which — with the collaboration of the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML) - seeks to increase the availability of quality learning data and support its use to improve learning. The A4L initiative works in tandem with GPE’s funding model by investing in capacity-building to measure and improve learning, strengthening the capability of regional assessment networks in Africa and Asia-Pacific to build capacity and exchange knowledge and good practice at the regional level.

To be relevant and effective, policies need to tackle the root of the problem, not its symptoms, and must address key drivers of low learning levels particular to their context. The lack of evidence and use of evidence constitute major challenges in designing effective learning strategies in education sector plans, and thus present significant hurdles in improving learning outcomes in developing countries — hurdles which GPE is equipped to tackle.

HOW GPE 2020 IS ADDRESSING THE LEARNING CRISIS

With support from GPE implementation grants, partner developing countries are making significant investments to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Of the 41 active GPE grants in July 2017, 98 percent invested in teacher professional development, 85 percent in learning materials, 70 percent in learning assessment systems and 63 percent in teacher management.
The strong focus on improving teaching and learning though these kinds of investments demonstrates a much stronger focus on learning outcomes by partner countries, which is further incentivized by GPE’s results-based funding model. Disbursement of 30 percent of GPE funding for a country is linked to demonstrated progress toward sector results, including gains in learning. Results-based funding can help to shift the national dialogue to focus on outcomes rather than processes and ensure that investments move beyond school construction to focus on the quality of the interaction between teachers and students.

To give an example of the kind of ambition that the GPE model demands,

- In **DRC**, where less than half of all 4th graders can read a single word, GPE is supporting reading in the early grades through innovative teaching methods, overseen by a newly-established independent agency in charge of national assessments. Out of the $100 million grant allocated, 30 per cent is dependent on meeting agreed results in learning and equity, with $10 million specifically linked to achieving a 10 percent improvement in reading at grade 2 and 4 over just four years.

- In **Kenya**, GPE is providing support for a sister program to the DFID supported program to improve literacy. GPE’s funding helps to improve numeracy, training 70,000 teachers and head teachers in new methods of teaching math, and purchasing and distributing more than 2.3 million copies of new mathematics textbooks for grades 1 and 2.

- Countries that have applied for grants under the results-based funding model have chosen a range of other indicators to reflect a focus on results in learning. **Rwanda** is administering large-scale learning assessments for the first time and uses results to improve learning, while **Nepal** conducts early grade reading assessments (EGRAs) with parental involvement to improve reading. **Malawi** and **Mozambique** focus on teacher issues, with Malawi aiming to reduce the pupil to trained teacher ratio in its most disadvantaged districts and Mozambique increasing the number of teachers participating in comprehensive training.

### IMPROVING EARLY GRADE READING PERFORMANCE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is one of the latest examples of the strong focus placed on improving learning outcomes under the Global Partnership for Education’s funding model.

- In June 2016 the Board of Directors approved a US$100 million program implementation grant for the DRC for the period 2016—2020, with the variable tranche for learning amounting to US$10 million. Low student learning outcomes is one of the most pressing problems facing primary education in the DRC. The 2012 early grade reading assessments showed that 47 percent of fourth-grade students and 23 percent of sixth-grade students could not read a single word.

- To address this challenge, the DRC developed a new Education and Training Sector Strategy (2016—2025—SSEF), with three main strategies to improve learning outcomes: the promotion of innovative teaching methods, the introduction of a plan for teaching reading in early grades, and the establishment of an independent agency in charge of national assessments (CIEAS)* to guide policymaking in the education sector.

- The GPE-funded program was designed to support these objectives and enhance teacher effectiveness. It will do so by improving pre-service and in-service teacher training, developing new models of teacher support mechanisms and a transparent teacher recruitment mechanism, and distributing textbooks in national languages for the early grades. To disburse the grant’s variable part, the DRC is committed to achieving a 10 percent improvement in reading performance in grades 2 and 4, in a sample of 500 schools, over a four-year period. CIEAS will play a key role in meeting this target.
Once established, it will administer standardized assessments and disseminate results to local levels, including parents, to inform remedial actions for least-performing schools. In this way, the program will promote stronger accountability at the local level and a stronger culture of monitoring and evaluation.

**WHAT KENYA AND ITS PARTNERS ARE DOING TO IMPROVE LEARNING**

The Primary Education Development (PRIEDE) program in Kenya, supported by a GPE grant of US$88.4 million, has a strong focus on improving learning outcomes, especially numeracy outcomes.

The program was conceptualized as a sister program to the DFID and USAID supported TUSOME program, which focuses on improving literacy outcomes.

Other development partners, especially UNICEF and Canada, also provide critical support to improve the education system in the country.

PRIEDE has already printed and distributed more than 2.3 million copies of new mathematics textbooks for grades 1 and 2 and trained more than 70,000 teachers and head teachers in the new teaching methodologies.

The project has supported 4,000 schools in preparing improvement plans in order to reduce the student/teacher and student/textbook ratios, provide better water and hygiene facilities, especially for girls, and buy additional teaching and learning materials as necessary. These schools are about to receive grants to act on their plans.

The government is developing a new and more effective curriculum, introducing ICT for teaching and learning and new measures for school management. These, as well as the PRIEDE and TUSOME projects, are the right steps towards improving learning outcomes for Kenyan children.

**ETHIOPIA: IMPROVING LEARNING OUTCOMES THROUGH A HOLISTIC APPROACH**

Since joining the Global Partnership for Education in 2004, Ethiopia has received four grants totaling US$337 million to support its General Education Quality Improvement Program. The program is a nationwide reform to improve teaching and learning conditions in over 40,000 primary and secondary schools and to boost the education system’s capacity. Through GPE funding, more than 100,000 primary teachers and 17,000 secondary teachers are upgrading their qualifications.

Major gains have also been made in learning outcomes: national assessments show that the share of students achieving proficient and advanced levels in grade 4 mathematics increased significantly, from 13 percent in 2011 to 19 percent in 2015, while those not reaching basic declined from 55 percent to 37 percent. Learning outcomes in reading, however, did not improve.

In response to these trends, Ethiopia’s US$100 million implementation grant is focusing on aligning and integrating investments in training, learning materials and learning assessment systems. The grant funds the development of a national mother tongue curriculum, the training of teachers to deliver this curriculum and introduction of related teaching and learning materials.

Funding is also used for in-service and pre-service teacher training, while a new approach to teacher licensing assesses competence and charts a pathway for enhancing the capacity of individual teachers. Strengthening institutional capacity for national learning assessments and regional education bureaus are also a focus for GPE funding.