TARGETED FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS FOR ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING - STRENGTHENING LEARNING ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS INITIATIVE

For Decision

Please note: Board papers are deliberative in nature and, in accordance with the GPE Transparency Policy, are not public documents until the Board has considered them at the Board meeting.

STRATEGIC PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this Paper is for the Board to consider the recommendation from the Governance, Ethics, Risk and Finance Committee to approve the financing arrangements for the Strengthening Learning Assessment Systems (SLAS) Initiative, formerly known as A4L.

Summary of GERF Deliberations

The GERF met on November 2-3 in Washington D.C. to discuss the proposal; and recommended the proposal for Board approval.

The following points were discussed:

- First, there was a request for a framework for all the targeted financing proposals coming to GERF for recommendation to the Board. The Secretariat clarified by explaining that all these targeted financing initiatives were approved by the Board in June 2016 as part of the KGPE Strategy.
- Second, the GERF also asked for greater clarification on the selection process of interested countries to pilot the diagnostic work. The Secretariat explained the selection will be based on an analysis of the country process to prioritize interested countries that are in the right stage of their planning process and that they are selected from a diversity of geographic contexts. The selection of countries would be done through the LEGs following GPE country processes.
- Third, the GERF also inquired about the process of getting a grant agent for one of its activities and on the kind of financial reporting arrangements. The Secretariat indicated that one option could be to have the African Bank for Development as new grant agent or using an existing grant agent such as UNESCO. The Secretariat also clarified that there will not be separate financial reporting. Financial reporting will remain the same, as the same agreements will be signed.
Summary of GERF Deliberations

- Fourth, the GERF emphasized the importance of ensuring this initiative was not duplicating the work of UIS, particularly around globally comparable data. It was explained that the Secretariat is collaborating with UIS and this initiative is complementary to the work of UIS by focusing on strengthening national learning assessment systems. But it does not address the production of data per se.
- Fifth, the GERF asked if the outcome of this initiative would be sustainable in the selected countries and replicable in other countries. The Secretariat noted that the initiative will pilot a diagnostic approach that will inform the Education Sector Plans of selected countries. The diagnostic approach will also be available for use in other countries. The Secretariat reassured the GERF that the initiative will be inclusive as it will be discussed through the LEG and part of the normal planning process.
- The Secretariat indicated that point 5 of the decision language was amended to the following: **Requests the Secretariat to update the GERF, CGPC and SPC committees and Board annually on the status of this work, with particular attention on the issues of fragmentation and the transaction costs for the Developing Country Partners**
- Finally the GERF emphasised the importance of ensuring these projects are aligned with the GPE’s core mandate.

2. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

2.1 At the June 2016 Board meeting, the Board approved the pre-designation of two thematic initiatives for targeted financing for KGPE investments: Better Early Learning and Development at Scale (BELDS) and Assessment for Learning (A4L), as set out in Annex 2 and 3 to BOD/2016/06 DOC 16.

2.2 The proposed initiative, now renamed as SLAS, will be initially funded by the Porticus Foundation, with a pledged amount of US$2,540,000 over three years. Other funders may join the initiative during this period.

2.3 The SLAS funding will be received into the GPE pooled fund, through a signed contribution agreement with the funder.

2.4 SLAS funding of US$2,540,000 will be used over the course of 2017, 2018, and 2019 to help achieve learning related indicators in the GPE results framework and strengthen core business by supporting and linking together countries eligible for SLAS activities:

   a. US$600,000 will support in-country diagnostics of existing learning assessment systems in 3 countries. The diagnostic would be used to develop a strategy, knowledge products, and opportunities for sharing experiences and good practice. Since this
initiative will pilot diagnostics across 3 countries and there is a need to ensure consistency in the approach, a firm will be contracted to support national teams in coordination with the LEG to conduct the diagnostic at country level. The firm selection will comply with World Bank procurement processes.
b. US$1 million will be used to support two regional assessment networks, one in Africa and one in Asia-Pacific, to build technical capacity at national level and exchange knowledge and good practices to strengthen learning assessment systems in the two regions. Funding will be delivered through grant agents on behalf of NALA and NEQMAP, who will submit a three year proposal for review and approval by the Secretariat.
c. Another US$400,000 will support the implementation of new assessment tools that promote the measurement of socio-emotional skills, such as the Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes (MELQO) initiative. Funding will be delivered through grant agents, who will submit a proposal for review and approval by the Secretariat.
d. The remaining funds will be used for Secretariat administered activities to support a program specialist to manage and coordinate the initiative, as well as conduct a global landscape review of the measurement of 21st century skills. The Secretariat administered expenses for staff and the external firm will be accounted for separately from the core Secretariat budget and the staff position will not form part of the core Secretariat headcount as the position is specifically tied to these funds, unless otherwise determined by the Board.

3. **RECOMMENDED DECISION**

3.1 The GERF recommends that the Board approve the following decision:

**BOD/2016/12-XX—Operationalization of the Strengthening Learning Assessment Systems initiative:** The Board of Directors:

1. Approves the receipt and use of targeted financing for the SLAS into the GPE pooled fund as outlined in BOD/2016/12 DOC 07.
2. Delegates authority to the Secretariat to review and approve proposals from grant agents to fund specified activities as outlined in BOD/2016/12 DOC 07.
3. Delegates authority to the Governance, Ethics, Risk, and Finance Committee to approve the arrangements for any additional targeted contributions in support of SLAS activities.
4. Delegates authority for potential revisions to the SLAS financing arrangements following final Foundation Board sign off to the Governance, Ethics, Risk, and Finance Committee, who may refer to matter back to the Board.

5. Requests the Secretariat to update the GERF, CGPC and SPC committees and Board annually on the status of this work, with particular attention on the issues of fragmentation and the transaction costs for the Developing Country Partners.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 At the June 2016 Board meeting, as part of the proposal submitted to the Board to strengthen country capacity through knowledge and good practice exchange, the Board approved the pre-designation of the Assessment for Learning (A4L) initiative, as set out in a concept note in Annex 3 of BOD/2016/06 DOC 16.

4.2 The Porticus Foundation has expressed interest to operationalize A4L under its new name, Strengthening Learning Assessment Systems (SLAS), with an initial pledge of US$2,540,000. Other funders may join the initiative during this period.

4.3 The SLAS initiative consists of a systems approach to measuring and improving learning. Working collaboratively with partners, SLAS activities aim to contribute to strengthening learning assessment systems by providing support to develop evidence-based strategies and build technical capacity at national level. SLAS activities also aim to promote holistic measurements of learning through its support to new assessment tools that promote socio-emotional skills and research to determine how GPE could best support efforts around the measurement of 21st century skills. Through these activities SLAS aims to support robust learning assessment systems, where learning data is used by teachers, schools, and government officials to inform instruction, teacher training, and system wide policies to ultimately improve learning for all children.

4.4 The SLAS funding will be received into the GPE pooled fund, through a standard signed contribution agreement with the foundation funders.

4.5 The budget below describes how the SLAS funding will be used over a three year period:

a. US$600,000 will be delivered as Secretariat administered funds through a competitive contract to support in country diagnostics. Diagnostics would be conducted with a national team supported by experts to build capacity and would build on the SABER framework and other available tools. The diagnostics will be used to develop a national strategy, and will inform knowledge products and opportunities for sharing experiences and good practice. Since this initiative will pilot diagnostics
across 3 countries and there is a need to ensure consistency in the approach, a firm will be contracted to support national teams in coordination with the LEG to conduct the diagnostic at country level. The firm selection will comply with World Bank procurement processes. About $24,000 of the funds will be allocated to the Secretariat to conduct country missions to supervise the implementation.

b. US$1 million will be used to support two regional assessment networks, one in Africa (NALA) and one in Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP1), over a period of three years. These networks aim to build technical capacity at national level and exchange knowledge and good practices around robust learning assessment systems and holistic measurements of learning. Regional assessment networks conduct regional and national workshops, analytical work, and nurture an active learning assessment community to meet their objectives. Funding will be delivered through grant agents on behalf of NALA and NEQMAP, who will submit a proposal for review and approval by the Secretariat.

c. US$400,000 will support the implementation of new assessment tools that foster and promote socio-emotional skills, such as the Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes (MELQO) initiative. MELQO has developed two open source tools which can be used across countries. The first tool measures child development and learning, and the second to measures the quality of learning environments in early childhood education. The implementation at country level will contribute to build capacity of national learning assessment systems. Funding will be delivered through grant agents, who will submit a proposal for review and approval by the Secretariat.

d. Secretariat executed funding will also include funds for a program specialist to manage and coordinate SLAS activities with various partners, develop a landscape review of the assessment of 21st century skills, ensure the integration of lessons learned to GPE operations and across the partnership, and coordinate follow-up activities should additional funders come forward.

**SLAS FINANCIAL ALLOCATIONS** (all amounts in US$)

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<tr>
<th>Secretariat Administered Funding</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Start Date</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Year 1</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Year 2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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1 NEQMAP is currently supported by a Global and Regional activities grant but the funding will stop in 2017.
1. Pilot diagnostic in 3 countries including Secretariat Travel (200,000 per country) | 200,000 | 400,000 | 0 | 600,000
2. Full-time program specialist (incl. of taxes and benefits) | 180,000 | 180,000 | 180,000 | 540,000

**Funding channeled via Grant Agents**

3. Support for 2 regional assessment networks in Africa and Asia-Pacific | 300,000 | 350,000 | 350,000 | 1,000,000
4. Support the implementation of new assessment tools promoting socio-emotional skills | 200,000 | 200,000 | 0 | 400,000

**GRAND TOTAL** | 880,000 | 1,130,000 | 530,000 | 2,540,000

4.6 The proposed initiative’s activities (described in Annex 1) aim to achieve the following objectives:

1. Strengthen capacity of developing country partners to develop sound national learning assessment strategies, contributing to strengthened learning assessment systems that use learning data to inform policy and practice, ultimately improving learning and equity.

2. Increase the availability of quality learning data to monitor learning outcomes at national and global level (SDG4)

3. Foster knowledge and good practice exchange to strengthen national learning assessment systems.

4. Promote holistic measurements of learning at national and global level, particularly around 21st century skills.

5. **IMPLICATIONS FOR SECRETARIAT RESOURCES**

5.1 The funding will support a program specialist whose primary responsibilities will be to manage the coordination of activities, collaborations with partners, handle the RFP processes as well as other arrangements, and ensure the integration of lessons learned to GPE operations and across the partnership. The program specialist will also be responsible for developing a landscape review of the assessment of 21st century skills and coordinate follow-up activities should additional funders come forward. These expenses will be accounted for separately from the core Secretariat budget and the staff position will not form part of the core Secretariat headcount as the position is specifically tied to these funds, unless otherwise determined by the Board.
5.2 The Program specialist will receive support from two GPE staff members. The GPE learning specialist will dedicate 15% of his or her time to support the work, particularly around the in-country diagnostics and regional assessment networks to knowledge generated is connected to other GPE development country partners and processes. A GPE Senior Advisor will dedicate 10% of his or her time to provide high level inputs, guidance, and oversight of the initiative.

6. **NEXT STEPS**

6.1 If the Board approves any recommendation, the Secretariat will work with the Trustee and the Foundation’s involved to finalize the contribution agreement to the GPE Fund.

6.2 Based on these arrangements, the Secretariat will recruit the program specialist, commence arrangements for the Secretariat executed activities, organize the grants to partnering networks and initiatives, and work with interested and eligible countries to pilot the diagnostic work.

6.3 The Secretariat will keep the Committees and Board informed of progress on a regular basis.

7. **PLEASE CONTACT** Jean Marc Bernard (jbernard@globalpartnership.org) and Talia de Chaisemartin (tdechaisemartin@globalpartnership.org) for further information.

8. **ANNEXES AND FURTHER INFORMATION**

This paper includes the following annex:

Annex 1 – Description of SLAS Activities

**ANNEX 1 – DESCRIPTION OF SLAS ACTIVITIES**
Activity #1: Diagnostic and strategy to strengthen national learning assessment systems

This activity would support a diagnostic of existing national learning assessment systems that would be used to develop an evidence-based strategy to strengthen the system. The diagnostic would cover all three types of assessments: formative assessments, examinations, and large scale assessments, as well as the linkages between them. Building on the SABER framework and other existing tools, it would look at characteristics of the enabling environment, assessment quality, and system alignment for each of these assessments, covering both policy intent and actual implementation. It would also investigate the extent to which information is linked to EMIS and flows to different parts of the education system, from curricula and textbooks to policy and pedagogy, to identify bottlenecks for the use of learning data. With consideration to the human, financial, and technical constraints of each context, the diagnostic would outline recommendations to strengthen the learning assessment system in a coherent and cost-effective way that meets the unique needs of each country.

The diagnostic will be piloted in a small number of GPE countries and would be conducted with a national team to build capacity. Experts would be brought on board to support the national team at country level. The coordination and management of the work would be supported by the GPE Secretariat. After the diagnostic has been piloted in a few countries, the national reports will be published, the approach and implementation process would be refined in collaboration with partners and shared as a public good.

Activity #2: Support to regional assessment networks

Regional assessment networks have proved to be a fruitful mechanism to build capacity at country level and engage the learning assessment community. Under this initiative, two regional assessment networks would receive support— the Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP) and the recently established Network for African Learning Assessment (NALA).

- **NEQMAP** is a membership network currently composed of 35 member institutions from 21 countries. It was established in 2013 with support from GPE and is headquartered in UNESCO’s regional bureau in Bangkok. Its main objective is to enhance the use of learning assessments with a focus on research, knowledge sharing, and capacity development. The network focuses on assessments as a key tool for monitoring education quality, while acknowledging the importance of maintaining strong linkages with other enablers of learning in classrooms, including curriculum and pedagogy. Since its inception, NEQMAP has held 7 capacity building workshops at the regional level and 3 at the national level. It has conducted several research studies including a regional mapping of learning assessments, created knowledge portal for relevant literature, and is currently working on a series of case studies to highlight best practices in the region. Reflecting on its experience, NEQMAP sees the tremendous advantage of working through a regional organization to harness networks, reach out to individual countries, and be able to convene and engage the diverse group of stakeholders in the learning assessment landscape.

- **NALA** is a regional assessment network being set up by ADEA that will sustain the momentum and collaboration around learning assessments in Africa. It originated from a recommendation from the LMTF that there was a need for cooperation between key actors at the global, regional, and country level. Their first meeting was launched in July 2016 and was assisted by 6 African member countries, regional assessment programs- SACMEQ and PASEC, citizen-led assessments in Africa, as well as development partners. Part of their vision is that in five years’ time “a critical mass of expertise in teaching, learning and assessment is developed and data consistently used to improve teaching and learning.” At
the meeting, an action plan was developed along five priority areas. Once the strategic plan is finalized and approved, NALA member countries will share the plan with other countries and partners to encourage them to join.

Under this initiative, support to NEQMAP and NALA would not only enable the networks to conduct their activities, it would also ensure that there is collaboration between the networks so they can learn from each other and maximize synergies to improve knowledge sharing activities.

**Activity #3: Support to broader measurements of learning**

This support would be offered to advance the development of new assessment tools that measure learning domains beyond literacy and numeracy, such as 21st century skills. Two activities are envisaged under this work stream. Both would follow a partnership approach involving key stakeholders to ensure synergy and avoid duplication of efforts.

- The first activity is a **landscape review of the measurement of 21st century skills**, which would pay particular attention to social and emotional skills that provide the foundation for the acquisition and use of other skills. The study would identify the various stakeholders working in the space, what each one is doing, what opportunities for collaboration exist, and what role GPE could play in convening partners to bolster this effort.

- The second activity would focus on new assessment tools that promote socio-emotional skills, such as the **Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes Project (MELQO)**. The aims of MELQO are to assess child development and learning as well as the quality of learning environments in early childhood education through a set of items and common constructs that are conceptually linked, open source, and can be used across countries. MELQO is co-led by UNICEF, World Bank, Brookings CUE, and UNESCO and is well positioned to inform monitoring of SDG4.2. To date, they have developed two sets of tools, which include the measurement of socio-emotional skills, which are being further refined and revised through pilots in several countries.