Formative Evaluation of GPE's Support for Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

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Contents

Acronyms

AF	Accelerated Funding
AFD	Agence Francaise de Développement
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
CA	Coordinating Agency
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COSYDEP	Coalition of Organisations in Synergy for the Defense of Public Education
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EDMU	Education Development Management Unit
EiE	Education in Emergencies
EOI	Expression of Interest
EQ	Evaluation Question
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EOL	Education Out Loud
ESOMAR	European Society for Opinion and Market Research
ESP	Education Sector Plan
ESPDG	Education Sector Plan Development Grant
ESPIG	Education Sector Plan Implementation Grant
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GA	Grant Agent
GALOP	Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Program
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GEC	Girls Education Challenge
GES	Ghana Education Service
GhLA	Ghana Library Authority
GNKSB	Ghana National Knowledge and Skills Bank
GNPEF	Groupe National des Partenaires de l'Éducation et de la Formation-National Group of Partners of Education and Training
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GPRBA	Global Partnership for Results-Based Approaches
ICT	Information and communications technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IEF	Education and Training Inspectorates
JER	Joint Education Review
KII	Key Informant Interview
KIX	Knowledge and Information Exchange
LEG	Local Education Group
LMS	Learning Management System
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Accountability
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MOE	Ministry of Education
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NTN	National Television Network
OECS	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAQUET-EF	Education and Training Quality, Equity and Transparency Improvement Program
PASEC	Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Éducatifs de la CONFEMEN
PCFC	Partner countries affected by fragility and conflict
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
R&P	Results and Performance
RF	Results Framework
RREAL	Rapid Research Evaluation and Appraisal Lab
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SitRep	Situation Report
SMS	Short Message Service
TEP	Transitional Education Plan
TOR	Terms of Reference
TV	Television
UNEG	United Nation Evaluation Group International
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USD	United States of America Dollar
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive Summary

Overview

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to education systems globally, affecting the lives of more than 1.5 billion students and their families. At the peak of school closures, over 90% of the world's learners were estimated to be affected (April 2020). Globally, countries reported close to 50 days of in-person teaching and learning lost on average due to school closures. Large differences also already existed across different student populations (in terms of learning outcomes and access to education) prior to the pandemic which has only served to exacerbate these differences.

This unprecedented emergency required swift and far-reaching action from the international community. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE)[1] rapidly responded by mobilising more than USD 500 million[2] to support partner countries in their planning and implementation of their responses for mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic on education systems and on children's learning and access to educational services. Staying true to their principles, when the Covid-19 pandemic was declared, GPE continued to aim to promote coordinated responses that are country-driven and aligned behind government priorities, and to share information and experiences in the form of the Covid-19 Accelerated Funding. This Covid-19 related Accelerated Funding window is aiming to help governments sustain learning for up to 355 million children in 66 countries and this evaluation aims to assess early evidence on whether this intention is beginning to materialise.

Purpose and key objectives of the evaluation

This formative evaluation assesses the relevance, efficiency, and (early signs of) effectiveness of GPE's support to countries' Covid-19 response and provides recommendations for improvement. This information will aim to help strengthen how GPE (as a global and country-level partnership and a fund with its own set of mechanisms) approaches, facilitates and ensures the appropriateness of its support to emergency situations such as this pandemic, and learn from this, should crises such as the current one take place in the future.

The Evaluation Questions that frame this formative evaluation have been developed and agreed in consultation with colleagues from the GPE Secretariat. This evaluation aims to investigate three key domains:

1) **The suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis** (e.g., financing timing, mechanisms and amount, review and allocation process, effectiveness of consultations at the country-level including inclusion of LEG/other stakeholders and grant Monitoring and Evaluation).
2) **The type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE Covid-19 AF grants** (e.g., typology, intervention design and agility, vulnerable populations, gender

[1] Established in 2002 as the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative.

[2] At the time of writing this Inception Report, total approved global, country, and ESPDG grants adds up to USD 500.41 million (checked on 18 January 2021), https://www.globalpartnership.org/covid19?location=initial-view

equality, cross-sectoral care and well-being, capacity strengthening for preparedness and system agility and alignment between Covid-19 plans and AF grants and integration with Education Sector Plans (ESPs)/Transitional Education Plans (TEPs); and

3) **The efficiency and (early) effectiveness of GPE Covid-19 grants** (e.g., rollout, effectiveness and beneficiaries, coordination, analytical tools, innovations and scaling up, and partnerships).

Given that the pandemic is ongoing, as is countries' response, the formative nature of this evaluation aims to enable the GPE Board and Secretariat management to assess whether the funding and support are on track to deliver on GPE's intended objective of providing partner countries with quality support for responding to the crisis, and gauge early effects. This evaluation also has the objective of generating and promulgating new knowledge about effective responses to crises for GPE partner countries and other stakeholders. Finally, this evaluation aims to provide initial evidence that will feed into a broader summative evaluation of GPE's support to the pandemic response. It also generates questions that should be subsequently pursued as part of the summative evaluation which is expected to be conducted at a later date after the closing of GPE's Covid-19 related grants.

Evaluation methodology and analysis approach

This evaluation is objectives-based. It includes a small sample size (due to timing and budgetary constraints) and offers only an early review of COVID-19 AF grants, based mainly on a qualitative approach[3]. These findings will be further investigated in a forthcoming summative evaluation. Given the limited time available to the evaluators for collecting primary data and the resultant analysis, a series of six country reviews were conducted using a rapid qualitative research appraisal inquiry[4] (drawing on resources such as those from the Rapid Research, Evaluation and Appraisal Lab, RREAL). The final sample of countries that formed part of the country review included: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Ghana, Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), and Senegal.

This evaluation was executed using a mixed-methods design including the review of secondary data and documentation as well as the collection, remotely, of primary data from the sample of countries that form the basis of the desk reviews. This included conducting a desk-based literature review and analysis of Covid-related GPE documentation and data. In addition, a series of semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted in the six countries that formed part of the country review sample. These interviews were conducted from a range of stakeholders:

- at the global level (e.g. within the GPE Secretariat including the CEO, Regional Managers, Secretariat Country Leads, representatives from the Covid-19 Task Team etc. and beyond the GPE Secretariat including representatives from the Grant Agents e.g. the World Bank, UNICEF etc.) and

[3] Large-scale quantitative data could not be collected for analysis within this evaluation. For further details on the sample selection criteria, please see the Inception Report.

[4] https://www.rapidresearchandevaluation.com/

- at the country level (including representatives from the Coordinating Agencies, Ministry of Education representatives and Civil Society Organization and Teacher representatives from the Local Education Groups).

GPE data and documentation findings were triangulated with the evidence gathered from interview data to answer the evaluation questions. It must be noted that the interview data are only from six countries that formed part of the country reviews and provide very limited and early insights into how the interventions are playing out in these countries and whether they are showing signs of achieving desired outcomes. However, these insights, combined with some portfolio-level analysis of GPE data provide some recommendations for the GPE Board and Secretariat management to assess early effects and to determine whether the funding and support are on track to deliver on GPE's intended objective of providing partner countries with quality support for responding to the crisis.

Summary of Key Findings

EQ1: Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis

This evaluation has concluded that the financing of the Covid-19 AF grants was timely and the amount sufficient to meet the needs of the partner countries.

Given that Covid-19 was officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020, GPE took a '*breathtaking financial decision*'[5] and swiftly mobilized more than USD 500 million to support partner countries in planning and implementing their response to the crisis within an exceptionally quick time frame as compared to normal GPE granting procedures. This response was one of the earliest and one of the largest external aid programs dedicated to education[6]. At that time, by acting at the right time and at scale, GPE's Covid-19 funding was one of the largest sources of grants to education for Covid-19 worldwide[7].

Initial applications and approvals for GPE's Covid-19 AF funding were in motion from the 19th of April – within five weeks of the declaration by the WHO, with all 66 applications approved by the 30th of October 2020. According to the Covid-19 AF grants tracker[8] the time between the application received and the approval days ranges from as little as 7 days in Rwanda to 77 days in Mali. On average, grant proposals were approved within 32 calendar days after countries submitted applications to the Secretariat) as compared to regular AF grants which take on average 54 days to get approved.

[5] According to a key informant.
[6] The Education Cannot Wait Global Fund (ECW) released US$23 million in an initial series of emergency grants for the rapid delivery of holistic education services to protect and support vulnerable children and youth hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in 16 countries/emergency contexts. This response was declared in early April (2 April 2020) and funds released by 5 April. See https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Kb6_kAVqz6k0o8GVBaP2RHxY4DZpbOjg7HKgb_noSys/edit#gid=0 for details on timing and amount of national governments and other donor support for education in response to the pandemic.
[7] https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-12-GPE-factsheet-covid-19.pdf and https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Kb6_kAVqz6k0o8GVBaP2RHxY4DZpbOjg7HKgb_noSys/edit#gid=0
[8] Covid-19 AF tracker July 2020.

Primary data collection also provided evidence of the timeliness of GPE's response with country-level capacity being cited as one factor that particularly facilitated the submission of applications in a timely fashion. Having an existing AF grant mechanism in place at GPE overall played an important role in allowing this round of funding to be activated and processed more efficiently.

The financing mechanisms and processes were well aligned with the need for speed, relevance, and quality.

This was evidenced by secondary data and documentation as well as corroborated by stakeholder interviews that noted that the guidance provided by the GPE was highly comprehensive and easy to follow.

The majority of stakeholders interviewed indicated that the initial first-come-first-served approach was not the appropriate approach and the GPE Secretariat demonstrated adaptability and agility in moving to a more needs-based approach.

The internal grant application and review process was deemed to be both robust as well as replicable and trackable as evidenced by a review of the grant application and approval documents as well through key informant interviews.

It was concluded that an appropriate balance between efficiency and quality was maintained through delegation of authority to the CEO of grant approvals as well as through the adoption of a rigorous process that was highly transparent.

GPE Secretariat support and guidance were highlighted and commended by stakeholders in enabling them to submit their applications.

Monitoring on key indicators was required from all country partners who deemed the indicators as being clearly defined and useful.

In reviewing the implementation progress surveys as well as through interviews with key informants, this evaluation has found that the survey templates provided a clearly articulated reporting mechanism that not only allowed comparability through the reporting of core indicators but also allowed contextualisation through nuanced qualitative indicators that could be included.

According to stakeholders a major advantage of GPE's Covid-19-related monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (e.g. the monitoring surveys) is that they support government systems, have good accountability of performance to a range of education stakeholders and levels of transparency in terms of achieving the appropriate utilization of funds. There was mixed evidence on whether the quarterly reporting requirements were too frequent with some stakeholders pointing out that certain countries already constrained national systems do not have the capacity to meet stringent reporting requirements.

RQ2: Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE COVID-19 AF grants

GPE Covid-19 AF funding varied both in terms of amount, duration, and typology. However, there were key threads of similarity across much of the portfolio particularly in terms of use of technology and focus on gender and equity.

USD 467.22 million was allocated to 66 partner countries through grants ranging from 0.75 million to 20 million, and of up to 18 months duration. Thirty-five grants (USD 255.34 million) were allocated to fragile, or conflict affected countries[9]. The grants were allocated across mitigation and recovery efforts with **mitigation** accounting for 39% and **recovery** for 61% of the total funding. The grants were funded according to thematic alignment with GPE's three strategic goals under GPE 2020: **learning**, 36% (USD 160.61 million); **equity**, 40% (USD 179.58 million) and **system strengthening**, 24% (USD 109.45 million).

The mitigation allocation corresponded to distance learning methods, mainly including printed materials, radio, and TV. There was also an emphasis on accessing standards, curriculum and learning methods as well as distance learning training and support for teachers (USD 36.46 million). Priority was given to the most vulnerable children with greater than 80% of the grants (54 out of 66) including support for disability inclusion in remote learning content during school closures.

In terms of recovery, 20% and 3% of the grant allocations correspond to well-being programmes (USD 54.26 million) and activities related to back-to-school campaigns, respectively. This allocation also emphasised the strengthening of resilient education systems for safe school return. Over 75% of the grants for recovery have planned activities to address gender-specific barriers. Grant allocation by estimated number of beneficiaries is split 49.5% for girls and 50.5% for boys.

The pandemic and the resultant emergency response required brought to the fore already-recognised weaknesses within the education system and beyond and catalysed the need to address these. The focus on gender and other forms of marginalisation (e.g., children with disabilities) was a prevalent feature within the scoring criteria on which grant application proposals were assessed and this was, therefore, reflected in the Covid-19 AF grant applications. Across the grant applications, there was a spotlight on ICT (defined in the broader sense, referring to all communication technologies including internet, telephone, social networks, etc.). Eighty two percent of mitigation efforts in terms of learning included high/medium tech solutions such as tablets, mobile internet, and SMS interventions across the portfolio of grants.

This evaluation has found that the grants were relevant both in terms of alignment with contextual needs as well as with other national initiatives. This ensured that Covid-19 response efforts across all donors were comprehensive and complementary.

[9] Covid-19 AF Response: Mitigation and Recovery Thematic Grant Allocation, Version 04/21, https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2021-04-GPE-COVID-grant-thematic-coding.pdf

In terms of alignment across national strategies and plans, there was a prerequisite for Covid-19 AF grant applications to be based on Covid-19 response plans developed by partner countries and this helped lay important technical as well as process groundwork for grant development. Critically, GPE decided to fund plan development to support this development of national plans (through the multi-country response planning grant)[10].

Stakeholders highlighted this requirement for a clear and comprehensive national response plan as a critical and important element of their emergency response. These plans not only formed the basis of interventions designed and implemented using the GPE Covid-19 funding but also meant that other donors could align their initiatives with partner countries using the plans set out by national governments.

A crucial finding from both this evaluation and from the evaluation that is being conducted on 'The Effects of Covid-19 on Existing GPE Grants' is that the Covid-19 AF grants bridged a gap; namely that by addressing immediate emergency needs and ensuring the safe return to school this allowed the ongoing grants to remain focused on longer term educational goals.

This evaluation has found that whilst system strengthening and long-term capacity building were not primary goals of the Covid-19 AF grant mechanism, some of the interventions funded by these grants have the potential for more long-term systemic change.

The Covid-19 AF grants aimed to address the immediate crisis and were not designed for system strengthening and long-term capacity building. However, in several countries, emerging findings from primary data collection efforts would indicate some progress in this regard. For example, in Ghana the Learning Management System and in DRC the distance-learning strategy provide examples of initiatives funded by the Covid-19 AF grants that could potentially have more long-term benefits beyond the immediate Covid-19 crisis.

RQ3: Efficiency and (early) effectiveness of GPE COVID-19 grants

At the time of this evaluation, there is some evidence from GPE documentation and data as well as from interviews that key interventions have commenced rollout and that these initiatives are reaching key beneficiaries.

The Covid-19 AF funding has aimed to help governments support learning and equity for up to 355 million children in 66 countries. These grants also aimed to promote coordinated responses that were country driven, aligned behind government priorities, and aimed to share information and experiences[11]. Most AF grants started implementation within a month from approval. Out of 66 grants approved, 41 (62%) started implementation within a month from approval from the GPE CEO which is far shorter when compared to regular implementation grants which tend to take 5.2 months on average to start implementation

[10] "As requested by the GPE Board, applications should demonstrate the link with the response plan that determines the need for the funding, ability to utilize it within the grant timeframe, and a focus on the most vulnerable." GPE (2020). Guidelines for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Window, April 2020. https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-11-GPE-COVID-19-guidelines.pdf.
[11] https://www.globalpartnership.org/covid19?location=initial-view#results-stories

after approval)[12]. Where grants took longer to commence implementation, this was purported by interviewees to be due to external factors such as issues with procurement or context specific issues such restructuring of key ministerial positions.

Data as of the end of April 2021[13] (indicate that 59 out of the 66 grants have submitted at least one progress survey by the Grant Agent which has been reviewed by the GPE Secretariat for reporting progress made against outputs and outcomes planned. In terms of implementation progress ratings, according to estimates at the end of May 2021, 56 grants report their most recent progress rating as 'moderately satisfactory or above', and only 3 grants 'moderately unsatisfactory' or below. Utilization lag rates varied greatly among the six sampled countries (from -62% in OECS to -7% in DRC). However, caveats relate to the definition and formula for employed for 'utilization', for example, the current formula for utilization analysis may not be relevant for short-term grants such as the Covid-19 AF grant and the definition of 'utilization' tends to differ amongst GAs.

Data triangulation has revealed that there are some areas where 'early signs of effectiveness' in implementation have been seen and areas where challenges have been faced. For example, in terms of implementation proceeding (e.g. in particular with regards to WASH facilities) and early indications of effectiveness (e.g. distance-learning provisions reaching several children) and challenges being faced in implementing some interventions (e.g. teacher training given that schools were closed and teachers attention was focused on continuity of learning and the wellbeing of the children they teach as well as their own families).

There is evidence that some innovative practices and examples of good practice have emerged across key areas of focus including learning outcomes, access to education, gender equality, teachers, and the quality of teaching.

For example, innovative practices have emerged in addressing the challenges of measuring learning outcomes. The pandemic has not only forced the closure of schools and the need for countries to rapidly adapt their learning delivery to ensure continuity, but it has also resulted in a need to cancel/adapt planned and upcoming assessment exercises be they public exams, large scale assessments or classroom assessments. In this context, some countries have shifted public exams to online or alternative approaches (e.g., Cambodia, Senegal, Uzbekistan). Innovative practices to deal with these necessary shifts in formative assessment included for example the use of online quizzes, WhatsApp[14] or special administration of national assessments[15].

[12] See GPE Grant Status Report 2020 on how the process has been streamlined and accelerated. GPE (2020). Grant Status Report 2020. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/grant-status-report-2020-novemberdecember-2020.
[13] Covid-19 Accelerated Grants: Implementation Progress Estimates, published May 17th, 2021.
[14] UNESCO (2020). COVID-19: A Glance on National Coping Strategies on High-Stakes Examinations and Assessments (working document). Paris: UNESCO. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_review_of_high-stakes_exams_and_assessments_during_covid-19_en.pdf
[15] Oduor, A. (2021). "Learners to be assessed to determine grasp of subjects." The Standard. https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/education/article/2001399559/schools-mass-assessment (January 9, 2021).
[15] GPE (2020). Summary of activities funded by COVID-19 planning grants.

In terms of access to education, innovative practices have emerged in aiming to reach the most vulnerable populations particularly through engaging with technology (WhatsApp, TV, radio, etc.).

There is positive evidence from the interviews conducted that GPE Covid-19 AF support encouraged coordination (especially at the country level) as well as the sharing of learning and knowledge amongst partners.

This evaluation has found that country-level coordination mechanisms were deemed effective and there was positive evidence of ongoing consultations (beyond the planning and application stages of the Covid-19 AF grant) through the LEG mechanisms.

However, it was noted that cross-sectoral dialogue was limited, and that community engagement was lacking in some of the contexts sampled for the country reviews.

Evidence has also been found that strategic partnerships and collaborations were enhanced, activated, and leveraged through the grant process e.g., collaborations with private companies such as telecoms companies in some countries For example, in the OECS, a public-private collaboration with the telecoms company Digicel[16] enabled GPE-provided devices to be connected and for children (particularly the most vulnerable) to access learning platforms free of charge through the purchase of license agreements to close the digital divide through a partnership with Microsoft Teams.

This evaluation has identified several potential areas of focus for the forthcoming summative evaluation. The details are presented in the full report.

Recommendations

Suitability of grant mechanisms: Key Recommendations

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
A lesson learnt from this formative evaluation is that the processing of the Covid-19 AF grants that involved delegation of authority and power resulted in an efficient and streamlined grant application and review process. Given strong evidence that the Covid-19 AF grant application and review process was deemed to be both efficient and robust, the GPE Secretariat should review all existing grant application and review processes to identify opportunities for streamlining for efficiency for other grants.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
The GPE Secretariat should take into account country-level capacity and existing country monitoring and evaluation systems to make sure that already-constrained national systems have the capacity to meet GPE reporting needs around grant outputs and outcomes and if found lacking, to determine how they can be best supported. This includes assessing existing country-level data collection efforts in terms of content as well as in terms of frequency and mapping this against GPE requirements.

[16] OECS Covid-19 Quarterly Survey No. 1, 30 September 2020.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
The GPE Secretariat should assess the impact of the pandemic on Secretariat colleagues and take stock of how GPE Secretariat organized itself and implemented streamlined emergency planning policies to meet the needs of future emergency situations that may arise. This lesson learning will ensure that Secretariat staff are well-supported and well-resourced when faced with unexpected and sizeable increases in their workloads.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
The novel costed learning from evidence plans adopted during the Covid-19 AF grant process that provided real-time coding and costing as well as portfolio analysis and reporting should be continued and expanded particularly given the big increase in public accountability within the Secretariat as well as globally within the education sector.

Recommendation: For the GPE Board and Secretariat, in support of Ministries of Education in Partner Countries
This evaluation has found that many countries could benefit from enhanced GPE support vis-a-vis disaster preparedness and better emergency planning. This could take place at the national and sub-national levels to allow government responses to be swifter and more robust in response to emergencies that may occur in the future.

Typology and relevance of interventions: Key Recommendations

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat, vis-à-vis program alignment among donors
We recommend continued collaboration across GPE efforts and other in-country efforts to ensure strong alignment between GPE funding and any other initiatives being conducted at the country level. This coordination will ensure complementarity, prevention of duplication and a comprehensive, country-wide approach.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
The evaluators recommend continuing to use the review and approval approach and consider where it can be enhanced further given evidence that it was effective in mapping out the tasks, roles, and responsibilities of the GPE Secretariat staff.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
Assessing lessons learnt in terms of capacity strengthening for preparedness and system agility. Whilst the Covid-19 grants aimed to focus on the immediate crisis, 'building back better' should inform GPE's support in the long term. This can be part of the summative evaluation.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat vis-à-vis program alignment among donors
This evaluation recommends continued good practice of collaboration across GPE efforts and other in-country efforts to ensure strong alignment between GPE funding and any other initiatives being conducted at the country level. This coordination will ensure complementarity, the prevention of duplication and the adoption of a comprehensive, country-wide approach.

Recommendation: GPE Board and Secretariat in support of the Local Education Groups
This evaluation recommends that the good practice of GPE support and engagement with Local Education Groups in partner countries should be continued and should involve meaningful engagement with all stakeholders throughout the grant cycle (beyond planning). In particular, ensuring engagement of civil society and community members is critical to reach the most vulnerable and also to ensure effective implementation as well as sustainability of interventions.

Efficiency and (early effectiveness): Key Recommendations

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat, GAs, and CAs
The evaluators recommend reviewing the GPE definitions pertaining to utilisation, disbursement, and lags in order to evaluate these aspects more accurately and allow portfolio-level analysis of these aspects.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
Given that GPE has always had a strong focus on learning and knowledge sharing, this evaluation suggests that in the future these initiatives should continue to remain a focus but that they could be further enhanced by widening participation (representation from GAs, CAs, and partner countries) to further understand what has worked well, perpetuating improvement, as well as encouraging ongoing dialogue between all partners.

Recommendation: For the GPE Board and Secretariat with the wider education community
This evaluation recommends continuing the good practice of encouraging cross-sectoral dialogue further. As the Covid-19 crisis has highlighted, the education sector does not operate in isolation of the wider system and therefore it is all the more critical for different sectors to work together for example health and education ministries collaborating in their response to a health crisis that has had far reaching consequences for the education sector. This evaluation recommends GPE to spearhead better cross-sectoral dialogue and collaboration.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
Ensure that intentions are actualised using a wider range of evidence through more than results-based-monitoring to ensure that planned interventions are actually reaching those they intend to reach. For example, ensuring that data collected are not only timely and reliable but also robustly evaluated.

1. Introduction

Background

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption of education systems globally, affecting the lives of more than 1.5 billion students and their families. At the peak of school closures, over 90%[17] of the world's learners were estimated to be affected (April 2020). Globally, countries reported close to an average of 50 days of in-person teaching and learning lost due to school closures. This represents immense lost opportunities for learning with significant consequences for future economic and life outcomes and understanding exactly how much learning was lost has become critically important. Large differences also already existed in both access to schooling and in learning outcomes across different student populations prior to the pandemic which has only served to exacerbate these differences[18]. Many countries have introduced additional support programmes to remediate learning losses as schools open and a critical element in making these efforts effective is through estimating learning loss and subsequent improvements in learning levels and equity needed.

This unprecedented emergency required swift and far-reaching action from the international community. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE)[19] did this by rapidly mobilising more than USD 500 million[20] to support partner countries in their planning and implementation of their responses for mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic on education systems and on children's learning and access to educational services.

This formative evaluation assesses the relevance, efficiency, and (early signs of) effectiveness of GPE's support to countries' Covid-19 response and provides recommendations for improvement. This information will aim to help strengthen how GPE (as a global and country-level partnership and a fund with its own set of mechanisms) approaches, facilitates and ensures the appropriateness of its support to emergency situations such as this pandemic, and learn from this, should crises such as the current one take place in the future.

GPE is a multi-stakeholder partnership that focuses on financing and supporting basic education in developing countries with an aim to achieving equitable, quality learning outcomes for all children. GPE provides partner countries with support to strengthen education systems. GPE partnership and financing brings together developing countries, donor countries, international organisations, civil society, teacher organisations, the private sector and foundations in an approach that encourages harmonized responses from country actors through strong country ownership and national leadership. GPE provides different types of grants to countries throughout their education cycles[21]. One of the ways in which

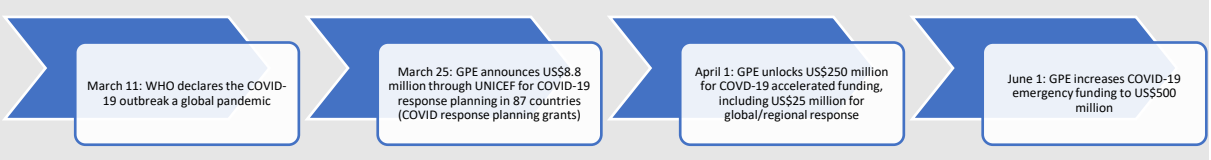
[17] UNESCO, UNICEF & The World Bank (2020), What have we learnt: overview of findings from a survey of Ministries of Education on National responses to Covid-19, UNESCO Paris.
[18] https://www.oecd.org/education/The-economic-impacts-of-coronavirus-covid-19-learning-losses.pdf
[19] Established in 2002 as the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative.
[20] At the time of writing this Inception Report, total approved global, country, and ESPDG grants adds up to USD 500.41 million (checked on 18 January 2021). https://www.globalpartnership.org/covid19?location=initial-view
[21] https://www.globalpartnership.org/funding/applying-for-grants

GPE finances education is through Accelerated Financing in emergency situations[22]. Additional details on how GPE finances education are available on the GPE website[23].

Staying true to their principles, when the Covid-19 pandemic was declared, GPE continued to aim to promote coordinated responses that are country-driven and aligned behind government priorities, and to share information and experiences in the form of the Covid-19 Accelerated Funding. This Covid-19 related accelerated funding window is aiming to help governments sustain learning for up to 355 million children in 66 countries and this evaluation aims to assess early evidence on whether this intention is beginning to materialise. Figure 1 below illustrates the GPE response timeline and highlights the speed with which GPE funding for Covid-19 response was mobilized.

Figure 1: GPE responded early and rapidly to the pandemic.

Timeline for GPE's COVID-19 support



Source: Global Partnership for Education Results Report 2021

As of 25th June 2021, 66 GPE Covid-19 Accelerated Funding (AF) grants (worth USD 467 million) have been approved to help partner countries address the immediate effects of the pandemic as well as plan for longer-term recovery (see Figure 2). Of these, 65 are in their implementation phase[24]. Another US$25 million financing was approved for UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank to establish a joint regional knowledge sharing and learning continuity-focused collaboration on the pandemic. GPE approved USD 8.8 million[25] in a multi-country allocation to UNICEF to develop system-wide, scaled-up responses to the Covid-19 crisis in 87 countries. A substantial portion of these GPE grants will run until around end of calendar year 2021, whilst those grants which became effective later will complete around mid-2022. Three critical response areas that these Covid-19 AF grants seek to tackle include: 1) equity[26], 2) learning[27] and 3) system resilience and school reopening[28][29]. These country grants aim to ensure that those children hardest hit by the pandemic, from the most marginalised backgrounds, are not left behind. Figure 2 illustrates the suite of support provided by GPE to meet partner countries needs to tackle the global pandemic.

[22] How to apply for grants | Program funding | Global Partnership for Education

[23] https://www.globalpartnership.org/

[24] GPE Friday Note, June 2021

[25] US$ 8.2 million excluding agency fee.

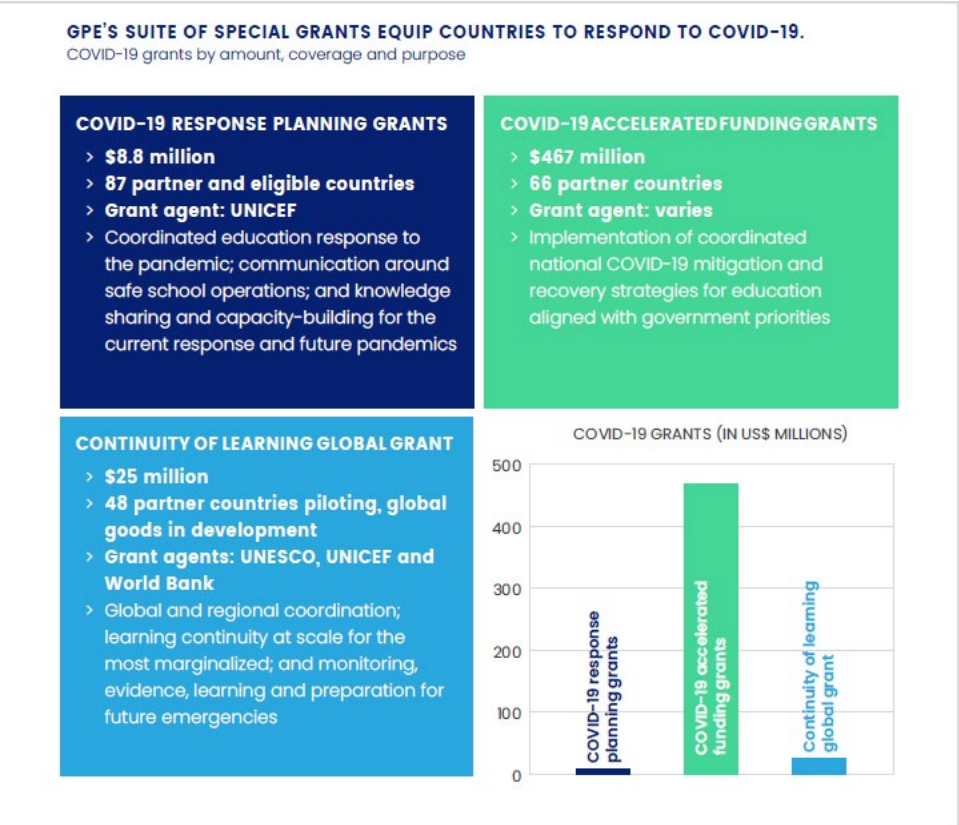
[26] Hygiene and psychosocial support programs, with priority for the most vulnerable children, including girls, children with disabilities, and refugees and IDPs.

[27] Distance learning initiatives, provision of learning materials, learning assessments, support to teachers in distance and accelerated remedial learning programs.

[28] System strengthening during school closure measures due to Covid-19 and, preparations for the reopening of schools by ensuring that students and teachers can return to safe education facilities.

[29] Specifically, 38% of the grants support low tech solutions for distance learning (e.g., radio and TV), 36% support printed materials and 26% support e-learning (www.globalpartnershipforeducation.org COVID-19 Fact Sheet, April 2021).

Figure 2: GPE's support of Covid-19 grants by amount, coverage, and purpose



Source: GPE Results Report, GPE Secretariat 2021, Figure A2.

Scope: Rationale and Focus of the Formative Evaluation

This formative evaluation examines GPE's support to partner countries' Covid-19 related responses up until the end of review of available secondary data (end May 2021). The Covid-19 crisis necessitated a rapid, well-coordinated response and provision of funding to support partner countries' efforts in mitigating the impact of the crisis. Equivalently, it is critical to take time to understand how these funds are being utilised and the efficiency and effectiveness of the interventions instituted in line with GPE's principles of learning from evidence. The agility of response also requires a mirrored agility in learning from evidence to sharpen the ongoing response to the crisis, document lessons for similar situations that might arise in the future, and for learning about innovations that work in crises but that might also hold promise for longer-term solutions. This will generate information on innovative practices that could be taken forward, partnerships that have formed and any details on the agility of processes that will help to generate better informed questions for the summative evaluation due to take place once the Covid-19 grants have closed.

Given that the pandemic is ongoing, as is countries' response, the formative nature of this evaluation aims to enable the GPE Board and Secretariat management to assess whether the funding and support are on track to deliver on GPE's intended objective of providing partner countries with quality support for responding to the crisis, and gauge early effects. This evaluation also has the objective of generating and promulgating new knowledge about effective responses to crises for GPE partner countries and other stakeholders. Finally, this

evaluation aims to provide initial evidence that will feed into a broader summative evaluation of GPE's support to the pandemic response. It also generates questions that should be subsequently pursued as part of the summative evaluation which is expected to be conducted at a later date after the closing of GPE's Covid-19 related grants.

Target Audience of the Evaluation

This evaluation serves to provide learnings to a range of stakeholders. In the immediate timeframe, at the GPE Secretariat level, the findings of this evaluation and the resultant recommendations aim to inform any adaptations to approaching accelerated funding in crisis situations of GPE's Covid-19 response. In doing so, the findings and recommendations will inform the GPE Board's long-term vision and provide mechanisms for GPE' support for future similar crises and for scaling up innovations that prove to be promising for 'building back better'. During the term of this evaluation, the new GPE operational model is being piloted. Therefore, this evaluation also provides an opportunity to leverage this momentum to shape GPE's approach to an agile approach in non-crisis situations. At the country level, the findings of this evaluation aim to enhance ways in which partner countries, GPE grant agents, Local Education Groups (LEGs), and other stakeholders involved are implementing the interventions, and how they collaborate when large-scale crises such as this pandemic disrupt education systems. The findings of this evaluation are also likely to be of interest the wider education, policy, and research community.

2. Impacts of Covid-19 on the education sector.

At the peak of school closures in April 2020, more than 90 percent of students – or 1.5 billion children – were out of school worldwide due to the Covid-19 pandemic[30]. This impact on children's education has been estimated to potentially lead to significant learning losses pushing an additional 72 million children of primary school age into learning poverty (i.e., children who are not reading by the age of 10) most of whom reside in GPE partner countries. For every 100-primary school-aged children in low- and middle-income countries, 53 were already in learning poverty before the pandemic and 10 more will enter learning poverty as a result of the pandemic[31]. This increase in the learning poverty rate is likely to undermine partner countries' ability to achieve SDG 4 goals[32]. According to calculations in the lost potential tracker[33] the cost of lifting 34 million additional children from low and lower-middle-income countries out of learning poverty can be estimated at $ 27 billion. The Covid-19 pandemic will not only affect the schooling of children (in terms of attendance and learning), but also the wider education system (in relation to school budgets) as well as on partner countries' economic outcomes in the long-run (in terms of GDP and growth).

The pandemic will have the most significant impact on the most marginalised: There is evidence that 382 million of the 720 million primary school children are out of school or are below the minimum proficiency level in reading i.e., 'learning poor' as of December 2020[34]. The true extent of the damage of Covid-19 to education will only be able to be fully determined in time. However, there is emerging strong evidence that these factors will disproportionately impact already disadvantaged populations of children. Patrinos and Donnelly's (2021) systematic review on learning losses during the pandemic has found evidence of learning losses (and some of learning gains) amongst the early studies as well as evidence on increased inequality with specific demographics of students experiencing learning losses more than others[35].

Josephson et al. (2020) also find that the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have deep and profound socioeconomic impacts in Sub-Saharan Africa (specifically in Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria, and Uganda): specifically, 77 percent of the population of the four countries is estimated to live in households that have lost income due to the pandemic and this is further exacerbated by a lack of access to health facilities and food especially for the already disadvantaged. Finally, the study notes that student-teacher contact in these contexts has also declined from 96 percent pre-Covid to just 17 percent among households with school age children. The Save Our Future Report (2020) also provides evidence that remote learning due to the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities with analysis of global estimates illustrating that at least 463 million (almost a third of students from pre-primary to upper

[30] https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition
[31] Based on simulations by the World Bank Learning Poverty Team and UIS. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/163871606851736436/pdf/Learning-Poverty-in-the-Time-of-COVID-19-A-Crisis-Within-a-Crisis.pdf
[32] GPE Results Report, GPE Secretariat 2021.
[33] https://lostpotential.one.org/
[34] https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/163871606851736436/pdf/Learning-Poverty-in-the-Time-of-COVID-19-A-Crisis-Within-a-Crisis.pdf
35 https://www.researchsquare.com/article/rs-518655/v1

secondary) have not been reached due to lack of remote learning policies or lack of technology (UNICEF 2020[36]).

The pandemic is likely to increase inequity and impact girls in detrimental ways: There is evidence that in 58 of the 76 partner countries, more than 160 million girls were affected by nationwide school closures[37]. The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have exacerbated the risks and inequalities for girls globally. These inequalities are likely to deepen already dire poverty levels and widen the existing gaps in economic, social, health and education outcomes[38]. The school closures are expected to further increase child pregnancy and early marriage, the risk of not returning to school and domestic and sexual violence amongst girls (Save Our Future Report 2020[39]). In addition to a significant health crisis, many families are also facing an unprecedented financial upheaval due to the pandemic which may force them to resort to more child labour simply to meet a subsistence existence. Not only are girls more likely to drop out of school (to support with household chores for example), but they are also more likely to face learning losses due to school closures as they have to engage with most household chores[40].

The pandemic has had an adverse impact on teachers: The Covid-19 pandemic has also significantly affected teachers with suggestions that in the 76 partner countries, more than 2.5 million teachers were affected by nationwide school closures. Emerging evidence of an evaluation of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, and Ghana has suggested that teachers have played an important role in the initiatives aimed at continuity of learning (Rose et al. forthcoming 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that teachers have had to adopt innovative tools and platforms in these challenging circumstances often with little support or training. This sudden change in education delivery may not only have impacted instruction time but may also have an influence on learners' achievement and educational performance (UNESCO 2020)[41].

The pandemic will have a detrimental impact on education budgets and the overall economy: There is also evidence that the pandemic will have an impact on education budgets with estimates from 29 sample countries indicating that education budgets post-Covid declined in 11 of the 17 low- and lower-middle-income countries, as compared to 4 out of 12 upper-middle- and upper-income countries[42]. It has been estimated that the drop in education in public education for low- and middle-income countries would amount to over USD 83 million in 2020 and USD 109 billion in 2021[43]. This is likely to have a consequential longer-term impact on education delivery across countries. The current generation of

[36] https://data.unicef.org/resources/remote-learning-reachability-factsheet/

[37] https://globaleducationcoalition.unesco.org/members/details/209

[38] see World Economic Forum https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/torn-safety-nets-shocks-to-schooling-in-developing-countries-during-coronavirus-crisis/

[39] Save our Future (2020), Save Our Future: Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World's Children, saveourfuture.world

[40] see Aslam, Rawal, Morrow and Sarfraz, 2021

[41] https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition

[42] https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/02/22/two-thirds-of-poorer-countries-are-cutting-education-budgets-due-to-covid-19; https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/507681613998942297/EFW-Report-2021-2-19.pdf

[43] https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17871/pdf/save_our_education_0.pdf

students stands to lose almost 10 percent of global GDP or an estimated trillion USD in potential future earnings due to the impact of the pandemic on school dropout[44]. Hanushek and Woessman (2020) estimate that students worldwide in grades 1-12 affected by Covid-19 related school closures may expect approximately 3 percent lower income over their entire lifetimes, with the impact being far greater for the more disadvantaged children.

With these crucial data in the backdrop, the Covid-19 AF response aims to mitigate the impact that the pandemic will have on the most vulnerable children and aims to support partner countries to build the resilience of education systems by working across the partnership to promote coordinated responses that are country driven, aligned behind government priorities and encourage knowledge sharing.

[44] https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2021/01/22/urgent-effective-action-required-to-quell-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-worldwide

3. Methodology and Tools

This section summarizes the methodology used during the evaluation with full details provided in the Inception Report that includes detailed information on proposed analytical approach and methodology; sampling procedure; data collection methods, tools and sources, analysis framework; risks and limitations to the evaluation; and finally, quality control and ethical framework.

The Evaluation Questions that frame this formative evaluation have been developed and agreed in consultation with colleagues from the GPE Secretariat. This evaluation aims to investigate three key domains:

a) **The suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms** (e.g., financing timing, mechanisms and amount, review and allocation process, effectiveness of consultations at the country-level including inclusion of LEG/other stakeholders and grant Monitoring and Evaluation).
b) **The type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE Covid-19 AF grants** (e.g., typology, intervention design and agility, vulnerable populations, gender equality, cross-sectoral care and well-being, capacity strengthening for preparedness and system agility and alignment between Covid-19 plans and AF grants and integration with Education Sector Plans (ESPs)/Transitional Education Plans (TEPs); and
c) **The efficiency and (early) effectiveness of GPE Covid-19 grants** (e.g., rollout, effectiveness and beneficiaries, coordination, analytical tools, innovations and scaling up, and partnerships).

For each question, this evaluation aims to understand some of the drivers that have facilitated change, the barriers that have presented challenges, and what lessons can be learnt from each of these. Additionally, for each question or theme, this evaluation aims to explore the corollaries of the findings for example in terms of actions to be considered by each stakeholder group (for instance under the new GPE strategic plan and operational model). The evaluation presents an overarching basic portfolio-level data analysis which is complemented mainly by illustrative country reviews (for six partner countries) and examples from other partner countries not included in the sample of six in this evaluation to allow for contextualized comparisons[45].

The Terms of Reference, the evaluation organization and activities and the risks and limitations faced by the evaluation are presented in the Inception Report. Annex A1 presents the Evaluation Matrix which not only explicates the Evaluation Questions but also maps them against the main source of evidence. Additionally, Annex A1 specifically identifies within the secondary data sources those that provide evidence for each of the evaluation questions as mapped out by GPE Secretariat colleagues. Several Evaluation Questions, whilst pertinent,

[45] Whilst the TORs proposed a very wide-ranging set of pertinent evaluation questions, limits on time and budget necessitated streamlining these questions to focus on those aspects deemed most critical (original TORs are available in the Inception Report) and, given the formative nature of the present exercise, availability of data to answer some of the questions also placed limitations on which evaluation questions could be answered at this stage and which would be better answered in the planned summative evaluation.

may be difficult to answer at this formative evaluation stage and were, therefore, deemed of lower priority for now and may be better addressed at a later stage of the summative evaluation.

This evaluation is objectives-based. It includes a small sample size of six GPE partner countries (due to timing and budgetary constraints) and offers only an early review of COVID-19 AF grants, based mainly on a qualitative approach[46]. These findings will be further investigated in the forthcoming summative evaluation.

Given the limited time available to the evaluators for collecting primary data and the resultant analysis, the country reviews were conducted using a **rapid qualitative research appraisal inquiry**[47] (drawing on resources such as those from the Rapid Research, Evaluation and Appraisal Lab, RREAL).

One key criterion that distinguishes the approach from other approaches is that the evaluation uses standards or markers of success to date, e.g., whether the grants are on track for implementation; whether they were aligned with Education Sector Plans and/or government response plans. This key feature differentiates this methodology from other rapid qualitative research approaches and delves into an objectives-based evaluation in answering some of the evaluation questions. This 'evaluation for learning' also looks at some initial signs of effectiveness and, critically, aims to examines '*why*' some grants may be on track and others not. Understanding these key drivers and challenges provide important learning through the implementation process. This mixed-methods approach (using interview data as well as GPE documentation and data) and triangulation of findings not only provides an additional level of rigour but also provide useful indications of avenues for further investigation and gaps in the evidence to guide the forthcoming summative evaluation. The challenges and limitations of this approach are fully explicated in the Inception Report.

The formative evaluation was executed through a mixed-methods design including the review of secondary data and documentation as well as the collection, remotely, of primary data from a sample of countries that form the basis of the desk reviews (as discussed below). This involved the following activities:

(i) **A desk-based literature review.**
(ii) **Desk-based analysis of Covid-19 related GPE documents and data**.
(iii) **Key informant interviews (semi-structured)** based on a sampling of GPE Secretariat stakeholders and grant agents (see below). Key Informant Interviews were conducted with country level and global level stakeholders (both within the Secretariat and beyond, see Figure 3 presented and discussed in detail below); A range of stakeholders were interviewed to ensure representation and in order to assess the inclusiveness of the grant development process. These categories of stakeholders are detailed in the stakeholder mapping below.
(iv) A series of **six country reviews** (desk-based) were developed. The findings of these reviews are presented by country in the Annexes to the Main Report (Annex 4).

[46] Large-scale quantitative data could not be collected for analysis within this evaluation.
[47] https://www.rapidresearchandevaluation.com/

However, critical findings are incorporated and interspersed into the relevant places within the narrative of this main report[48].

Annex A2 includes draft tools and the consent form that were used to conduct the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Annex A3 provides the ethics and confidentiality statements that have guided this evaluation. Table 1 summarizes the key features of the final sample of countries that was used for the country reviews.

Table 1: Country Review Sample

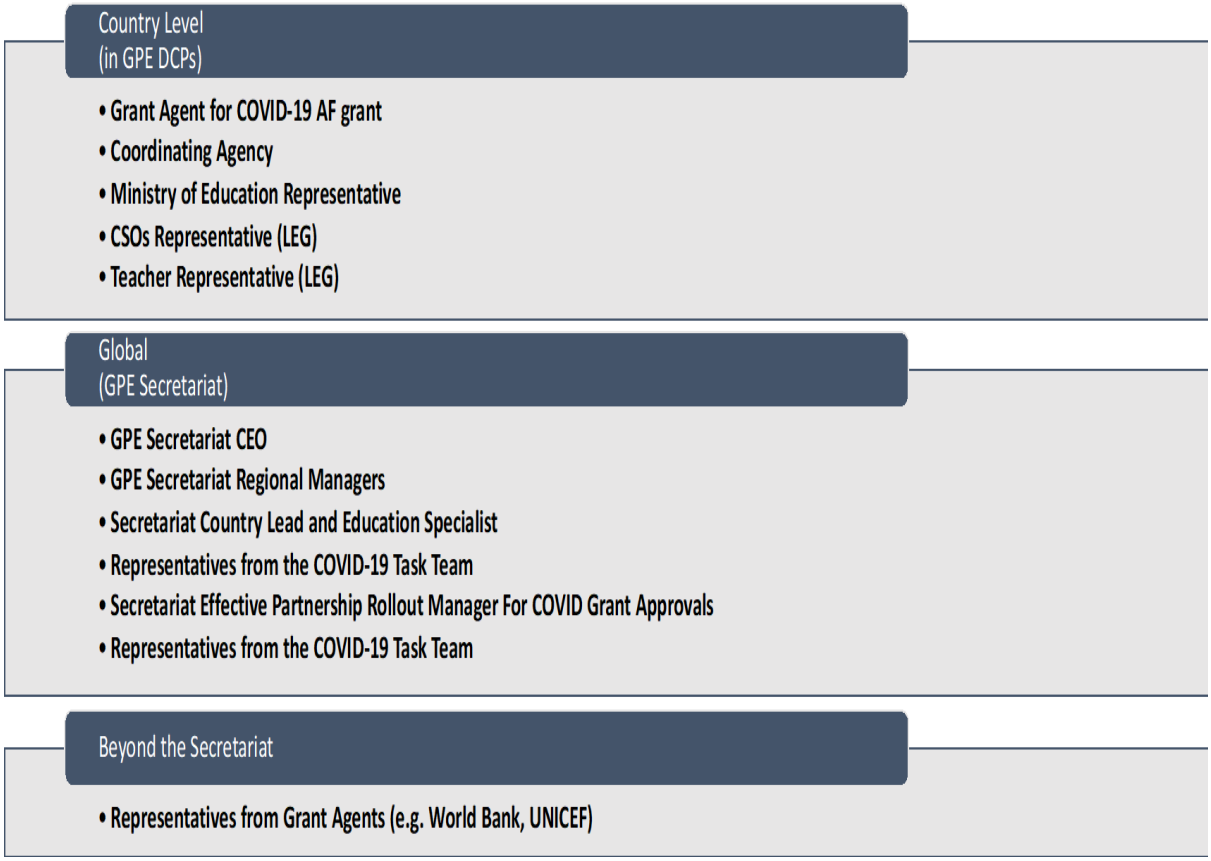
COUNTRY	PCFC STATUS, FY20	ECONOMIC STATUS[49]	REGION[50]	CSO REPRESENTATION ON THE LEG	TEACHER ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATION ON THE LEG	COVID-19 AF GRANT START DATE (GRANT EFFECTIVENESS DATE)	COVID-19 AF GRANT NUMBER OF MONTHS IN IMPLEMENTATION[51]	COVID-19 AF grant amount allocated (USD MILLION)	GRANT AGENT FOR THE COVID-19 AF GRANT
Afghanistan ***	Yes	Low income	South Asia	Yes	No	19/06/2020	7.2	11	UNICEF
DRC***	Yes	Low income	Sub-Saharan Africa	Yes	Yes	09/07/2020	6.5	15	UNICEF
Ghana	No	Lower middle income	Sub-Saharan Africa	Yes	Yes	21/07/2020	6.1	15	World Bank
Lesotho	No	Lower middle income	Sub-Saharan Africa	Yes	Yes	17/06/2020	7.2	3.47	UNICEF
OECS	No	Upper middle income	Latin America & Caribbean	Yes	Yes	05/06/2020	7.6	3	OECS
Senegal***	No	Lower middle income	Sub-Saharan Africa	Yes	Yes	30/06/2020	6.8	7	AFD

*** Denotes country that forms part of the Evaluation of COVID-19 Effects on Ongoing GPE Grants as well.

Figure 3 illustrates the Key informants that were interviewed as part of the primary data collection efforts. In total 46 interviews were conducted. These included 10 global stakeholders, 7 GPE Secretariat Country Lead representatives, 11 Grant Agent representatives, 6 Coordinating Agency representatives and 12 Local Education Group representatives.

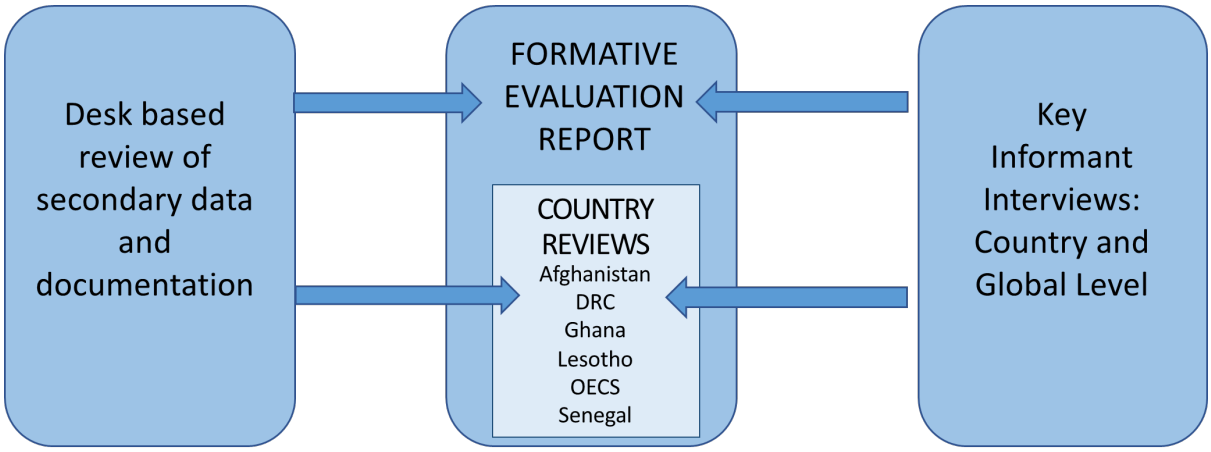
48 The purpose, scope and sampling details of the country reviews are included in the Inception Report.
49 Follows the most recent World Bank categorisations.
50 Follows the most recent World Bank categorisations.
51 As of 22nd January 2021, as of the date of sample selection.

Figure 3: Key Informants Interviewed for the Sampled Countries



The analysis approach is illustrated using Figure 4 below. The primary data collection efforts provided an opportunity to corroborate or harmonize evidence emerging from the secondary data analysis. Triangulation and complementarity between methods was sought, primarily the document review of GPE-related reports and key informant interviews. Triangulation also occurred within methods, such as comparing the perspectives of different stakeholders interviewed. Triangulation was achieved when two or more methods (or sources) of evidence were present, and the quality was deemed good. An iterative and consultative process was adopted including engagement with the GPE Secretariat and the consultant working on the review of 'The Effects of Covid-19 on Existing GPE Grants' to facilitate reflection and informal sharing of emerging findings. Further details on the analysis framework are available in the Inception Report.

Figure 4: Analytical Approach



4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 RQ1: Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis

The first key area of focus of this evaluation is the assessment of the suitability of GPE's support and grant mechanisms during the pandemic. In the first instance, this evaluation assessed whether the GPE Covid-19 Accelerated Funding was available in a timely fashion and was of sufficient amount. The evaluation then assesses other aspects of the grant such as the application process, the support provided by the GPE Secretariat and suitability and monitoring and evaluation requirements. The findings from individual country reviews are presented in Annex 4.

Financing timing and amount

Primary and secondary data collected during the course of this evaluation provides evidence that GPE funding was available in a timely fashion. Given that Covid-19 was officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020, GPE took a '*breathtaking financial decision*'[52] and swiftly mobilized more than USD 500 million to support partner countries in planning and implementing their response to the crisis within an exceptionally quick time frame as compared to normal GPE granting procedures. GPE's response was one of the earliest and one of the largest external aid programs dedicated to education[53]. By the 25th of March 2020, GPE had provided USD 8.8 million to UNICEF to kickstart education systems' response in 87 countries, supporting planning and coordination. Each country received a US$70,000 or US$140,000 allocation[54] to fund interventions in three main areas: (1) coordinated education response to the pandemic; (2) communication around safe school operations; and (3) knowledge sharing and capacity-building for the current response and future pandemics. The implementation period for the Covid planning grant is March 2020 to March 2021[55].

A board meeting was conducted on the 31st of March[56] and by the 1st of April, an additional USD 250 million of GPE funding was released as accelerated financing grants to help partner countries mitigate both the immediate and long-term impacts of Covid-19 on education, merely three weeks after the pandemic was declared. Forty-four applications for funding were received by the 15th of May which led to the Board decision to allocate a further USD 250 million to the Covid-19 accelerated funding window, bringing the Partnership's response

[52] According to a key informant.

[53] The Education Cannot Wait Global Fund (ECW) released US$23 million in an initial series of emergency grants for the rapid delivery of holistic education services to protect and support vulnerable children and youth hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in 16 countries/emergency contexts. This response was declared in early April (2 April 2020) and funds released by 5 April. See https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Kb6_kAVqz6k0o8GVBaP2RHxY4DZpbOjg7HKgb_noSys/edit#gid=0 for details on timing and amount of national governments and other donor support for education in response to the pandemic.

[54] The amount allocated to each country is calculated based on its total population and degree of centralization of the education system (Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report)

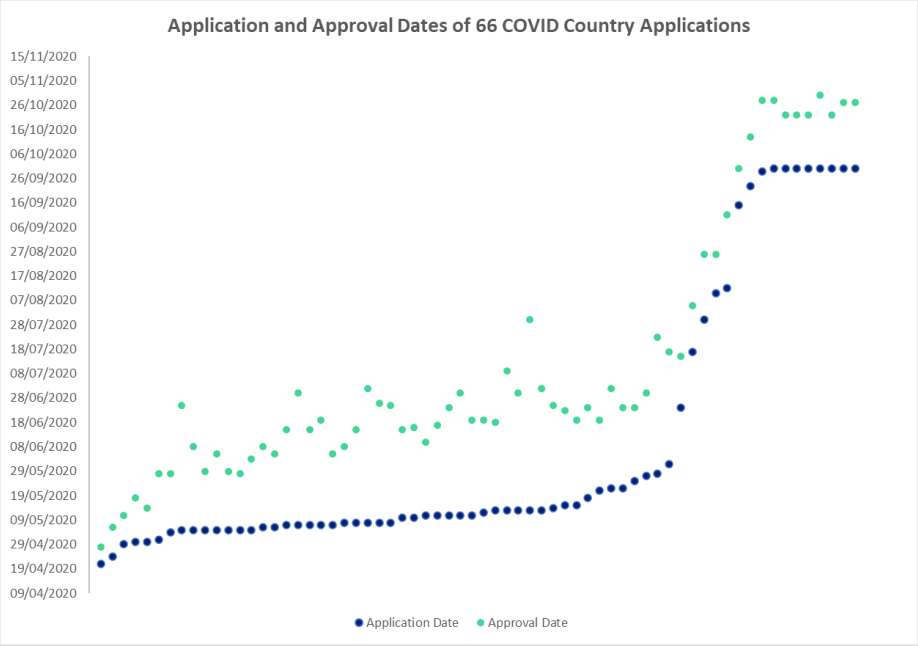
[55] Ibid.

[56] GPE Covid-19 Response, Meeting of the Board of Directors, 31 March 2020, Meeting notes.

to USD 509 million[57]. The Board took a decision to make the funding available to 67 ESPIG-eligible countries (rather than 87 ESPDG eligible countries, which include 20 countries that are not ESPIG eligible)[58].

Between April and October 2020, GPE approved USD 467 million in Covid-19 Accelerated Funding to 66 countries and another USD 25 million to UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank. At that time, by acting at the right time and at scale, GPE's Covid-19 funding was one of the largest sources of grants to education for Covid-19 worldwide[59]. Figure 5 shows that initial applications and approvals for GPE's Covid-19 AF funding were in motion from the 19th of April – within five weeks of the declaration by the WHO, with all 66 applications approved by the 30th of October 2020. According to the Covid-19 AF grants tracker[60] the time between the application received and the approval days ranges from as little as 7 days in Rwanda to 77 days in Mali. On average, grant proposals were approved within 32 calendar days after countries submitted applications to the Secretariat) as compared to regular AF grants which take on average 54 days to get approved[61].

Figure 5: Application and Approval Dates of 66 Covid-19 Country Applications



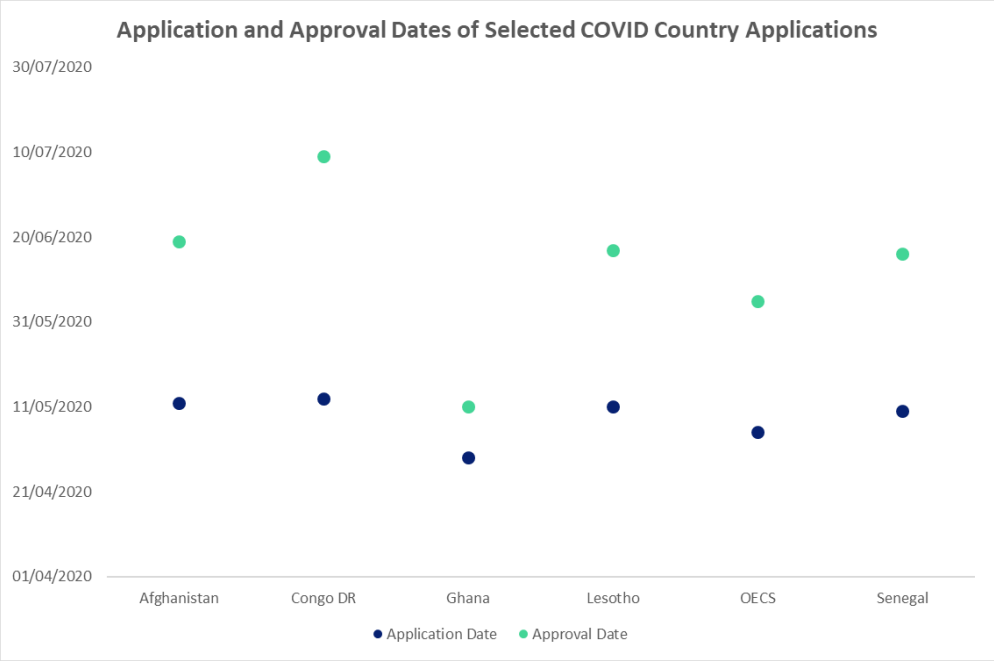
Source: GPE Secretariat

Figure 6 below illustrates the differences in the time between application and approval for the countries selected for the country reviews. In the evaluation sample of six countries, the gap between application submission and approval ranges from the least in Ghana (12 days) to the most in the Democratic Republic of Congo (approximately two months). According to

[57] https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-05-GPE-Board-COVID19-additional-funding-proposal_EN.pdf
[58] Ibid.
[59] https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-12-GPE-factsheet-covid-19.pdf and https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Kb6_kAVqz6k0o8GVBaP2RHxY4DZpbOjg7HKgb_noSys/edit#gid=0
[60] Covid-19 AF tracker July 2020.
[61] Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report

stakeholders, **country level capacity** (e.g. in Ghana) was one factor that facilitated the submission of a full and comprehensive application and, thereby, allowed the processing of the application to be more speedy whereas for other countries it required the Secretariat to revisit the application, request further details and amendments from the applicants and this resulted in a longer approval process due to the requirement for stringent quality standards (as designed by the GPE Secretariat) to be met. **Capacity differentials also occurred at the Secretariat level** according to stakeholders in terms of when the grant applications were received. In the initial stages, e.g. when Ghana's submission was received, there were far fewer applications to be processed than there were in the following months where there were a far larger volume of applications that needed to be processed with the same rigor.

Figure 6: Application and Approval Dates of the Covid-19 AF grant applications for six sampled countries



Source: GPE Secretariat

This evidence of timeliness was reiterated in the primary data collection efforts. All stakeholders interviewed (from within the GPE Secretariat as well at the country level from the sampled countries) emphasized the timeliness of the GPE response. For example, in DRC it was noted that GPE's quick and immediate funding was a '*life saver*', given that according to this interviewee it was the only funding available when the pandemic hit the country as they did not '*see mobilization from partners except GPE*'[62].

> ***"GPE filled a big hole… it was done quicky and efficiently"***

In commending the swift response by GPE, some stakeholders were of the opinion that **having an existing AF grant mechanism in place at GPE overall played an important role in allowing this round of funding to be activated and processed more efficiently**. This was in terms of

[62] One GPE Secretariat stakeholder noted that the delays in DRC were mainly due the fact that the GA and the country had to downsize the program from 20 to 15 million USD.

both the rapidity of the Covid-19 Accelerated Funding window design, review, and approval of grants to 66 countries but also in terms of GPE's responsiveness to further increase the funding window up to USD 500 million as indicated in the timeline above[63]. In terms of adequacy, overall country level stakeholders **greatly appreciated** the amounts of the grants, however, given the scale of the emergency and the immense challenges faced **no amount could be deemed enough**.

Table 2 below illustrates for the six sampled countries the amount the country was initially eligible for, the amount they requested through the Covid-19 AF window and the amount that was eventually approved. Stakeholders in the sampled countries noted that where delays occurred in the application process, these tended to be due to non-GPE related factors such as government capacity (e.g. in Afghanistan and Lesotho) or context-specific issues (e.g. in OECS the need to confer and coordinate across several islands).

In some countries, the amount applied for differed to the amount that was approved and received for various reasons, e.g. due to delays in the application process. According to stakeholders, this put some countries at a **'double disadvantage'** due to the delay in timing and a need to realign their plans based on the new lower funding amounts received e.g. Senegal.

Table 2: Covid-19 AF funding eligibility and final amounts approved for sampled countries

Country	Amount country initially eligible for	Amended eligibility	Amount requested	Amount approved
		In USD (million):		
Afghanistan	15.00	11.00	15.00	11.00
DRC	20.00	15.00	15.00	15.00
Ghana	15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00
Lesotho	5.00	3.47	3.47	3.47
OECS	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00
Senegal	10.00	7.00	10.00	7.00

Source: Covid-19 AF timelines tracker_July 2020 Spreadsheet

Financing Mechanisms and Review and Allocation Process

In terms of financing mechanisms and processes, assessment of secondary data and documentation would indicate that **the guidance standards and processes were well-aligned with the need for speed, relevance, and quality**. The guidance provided by the GPE was also noted to be highly comprehensive and easy to follow by key informants interviewed during the primary data collection effort. According to interviewees, an introductory meeting was facilitated by the GPE Secretariat where interested applicants were walked through the Covid-

[63] The summative evaluation could further investigate whether across all the countries having an existing AF mechanism in place played a role in determining the efficiency of the Covid-19 AF grant. From the six countries that formed a part of this sample, only one had an existing Accelerated Funding ESPIG in place (Afghanistan), and therefore this sample limitation meant that the evaluators could not examine this issue further.

19 AF funding process. In addition to setting out and clarifying partner countries questions, another critical benefit of this meeting was the ability to learn from other contexts. For example, stakeholders in OECS highlighted that they had the opportunity to hear from other countries e.g., Guyana and The Gambia which helped in the development of their own response plans. Therefore, this not only provided technical inputs from a range of stakeholders but also created synergies and coordination not only amongst development partners but also across a range of contexts.

Interviewees also noted that the application process was **flexible and agile** (e.g. in Ghana and Senegal). Key informants indicated that the support they received from GPE Secretariat Country Leads (for all six sampled countries) was instrumental in ensuring that their applications were supported and submitted in a smooth, streamlined, and timely manner. The GPE Secretariat Country Leads themselves indicated that other GPE Secretariat colleagues who were responsible for the Covid-19 AF grants were similarly critical in supporting their efforts and recognized that everyone was working under immense pressures, personally and professionally during these unprecedented times. Stakeholders in Afghanistan recognised the **flexibility[64] of the Covid-19 AF grant funding process as a significant improvement** to previous heavily-process oriented GPE protocols. In their opinion, the flexibility allowed in using existing budget templates were key benefits that expedited the process.

> The GPE framework for operating has one major differentiating advantage, namely that '*it brings a lot of partners around the table…and creates an opportunity for dialogue'*.

GPE is a multi-stakeholder partnership, bringing together partner countries, donors, international organizations, civil society, youth and teacher organizations and the private sector. This unique model collates a range of partners at the global and country level to work together for a common goal. Government stakeholders acknowledged the assistance they received from partner agencies as well as from GPE Secretariat Country Leads and other Secretariat colleagues that encouraged a participatory and inclusive application process (DRC and Lesotho). In Lesotho one stakeholder noted that the '*multi-stakeholder partnership really helped with government capacity*' in the application process. This evidence from Lesotho was reiterated in other contexts where it was noted that the **multi-stakeholder nature of the GPE operating model** allowed for the **strengths of many organizations** to be brought together to support partner countries. For example, UNICEF's experience in responding to emergencies was highlighted as an important factor as their existing relationships, structures and mechanism could be leveraged in response to this crisis. One example given by an interviewee was in terms of UNICEF's ability to meet challenges of procurement better than other organizations during the pandemic. In Senegal, according to stakeholders, the '*multi-participant*', *'inclusive*', *'flexible*' and '*collective nature*' of the GPE operating model is what differentiates it from other grant providers and critically, '*this is what distinguishes [GPE]…if they were exactly like other providers, it would not add value.*' This inclusive and flexible nature were important characteristics in terms of speed and effectiveness as they allowed funds to be mobilised quickly, grants to be developed

[64] In the application process, for example, one stakeholder in Afghanistan indicated that the ability to use existing budget templates rather than GPE Secretariat prescribed ones expedited the process significantly.

in a coordinated and efficient manner allowing several stakeholders to be involved in the grant development and application process. This multi-stakeholder nature was credited in Lesotho as playing an important role because it meant that both the World Bank (GA of existing ESPIG) and UNICEF (CA) were already in situ with the structures and relationships in place to allow for a smooth and efficient response to this emergency. The existence of limited development partners in this particular context meant that existing experience (of GPE partners through the GA and CA mechanism) within the country was all the more valuable given that there were not many options as regards development partners to undertake the emergency response.

According to Table 3, UNICEF plays a GA role for half of the Covid-19 grants and according to this secondary data, this underlines the organization's strong experience in emergency response and according to stakeholders this was a useful aspect in the planning and implementation of grants. Because the GPE is a multi-stakeholder partnership working with several grant agents, it could rely on different agencies to take the grants forward especially given its experience of working in emergency situations. Further analysis of the secondary data also indicates that there is no clear pattern between the number of days taken from application to approval and the grant agent responsible for managing the grant[65]. Annex 5 provides further details illustrating whether any of the six sample countries has the same GA for the Covid-19 AF grant as the existing ESPIG.

Table 3: Grant Agents, number of grants, and grant amounts (USD millions)

Row Labels	Number of Grants	Proportion of Grants	Grant amount (US$ million)	Proportion of grant amount
UNICEF	36.0	54.55%	203.9	43.64%
World Bank	18.0	27.27%	187.0	40.02%
IsDB	2.0	3.03%	14.5	3.10%
Save the Children	2.0	3.03%	6.2	1.32%
Agence Française de Développement (AFD) et UNICEF	1.0	1.52%	11.0	2.35%
UNESCO	1.0	1.52%	11.0	2.35%
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)	1.0	1.52%	15.2	3.24%
AFD	1.0	1.52%	7.0	1.50%
Agence Française de Développement(AFD)	1.0	1.52%	7.0	1.50%
Save the Children Australia	1.0	1.52%	0.7	0.16%
OECS	1.0	1.52%	3.0	0.64%
Save the Children USA	1.0	1.52%	0.8	0.16%
Grand Total	**66.0**	**100.00%**	**467.2**	**100.00%**

Source: Covid-19 AF timelines tracker. Based on calculations by the GPE Secretariat.

Findings from this evaluation indicate that another critical benefit of the GPE approach is that it **empowers governments to take ownership of the process** and Kenya has been cited as a good example in this regard. However, some stakeholders were of the opinion that grants could have even more country-level development with less top-down management (i.e., less Secretariat involvement and fewer GPE requirements). This engagement with national governments also results in other advantages e.g., in terms of alignment with national priorities (discussed below).

The majority of stakeholders interviewed were of the opinion that the **first come first served approach was not the appropriate strategy** as those countries with higher capacity were able to respond more quicky rather than those with the greatest need. **Some countries did benefit from this approach**. For example, Ghana was one of the first countries to respond and receive

[65] Source: Covid-19 AF timelines tracker_July 2020 Spreadsheet

funding and benefited from the first come first served approach in terms of timing as well as amount. This was attributed by several stakeholders to strong capacity at the country level as well as the existence of a well-functioning LEG and dynamic coordinating agencies. In Afghanistan, stakeholders also noted that the pressure of the first-come-first-served process was a positive factor in catalyzing action. For most countries, however, this approach did not necessarily work according to stakeholders interviewed and this was attributed by them to low government capacity (Sierra Leone, The Gambia), an inability to engage with several stakeholders in a timely manner (OECS and Lesotho) and delays in the selection of the Grant Agents (Sierra Leone and The Gambia).

According to GPE Secretariat staff, learnings from this experience through this formative and the proposed summative evaluation can aim to improve GPE's future responses to emergency situations and reduce any frustrations that partner countries faced due to the first-come-first-served nature of this response. According to country-level interviewees, there was uncertainty at the GPE Secretariat level as to what the uptake of funds and the extent of needs were at that time, and therefore, pressure was placed on countries to respond quickly with those that missed out being understandably frustrated when their vocalised needs could not be met in that they were unable to respond early. Once it became apparent how far reaching the needs were across the globe, GPE demonstrated agility by almost immediately committing a further USD 250 million to accommodate the response seen.

Similarly, GPE demonstrated agility in their recognition of a change being required to the first-come-first served process and, therefore, adapted to a more **needs-based approach.** This responsiveness by the GPE was appreciated by interviewed stakeholders as better meeting each countries' evolving needs.

Agility and adaptability with regards to GPE processes and mechanisms were also demonstrated and required due to the challenging and changing nature of the pandemic. Different countries were hit by the pandemic at different times in terms of not only the first wave of infections but also the subsequent ones. The nature of the response to these waves has differed across different countries, with some adopting a more structured approach in the first wave and vice versa in others (for example in terms of school closures and adopting rules and regulations such as social distancing etc.). In addition to the timing of the different waves, the timelines of school closures and openings have been different in different countries and ever changing. Therefore, there was a need to assess the ongoing relevance of the response as many countries may be in a different situation than anticipated when the funds were requested and even when the funds were granted. The provision of up to 25% adjustments to the grant proposals[66] without formal approval was highlighted as a critical advantage and demonstration of adaptability of the Covid-19 AF window. According to one GPE Secretariat country lead responsible for several countries, whilst none of the countries he managed exceeded the 25% threshold, all were reported to have made some changes to their initial applications (e.g. Zambia which made quite substantial changes albeit under 25%). This flexibility that was built into the grant mechanism was noted to be both '*useful and used*'. In Lesotho, there was a similar recognition that whilst original plans were relevant to the context at that time, as the situation evolved, so did the country's needs shift and, therefore,

[66] Interventions could be modified for up to 25% of the funding amount.

in developing proposals and adjustments thereof, it was challenging to assess needs and costs of what would be needed and when. Stakeholders in this context felt that the flexibility within the grant mechanism accommodated the need to be able to adjust in a non-cumbersome manner without excessive bureaucratic processes. Adaptability is a critical factor and plays an important role in the new operating model and the Covid-19 AF experience has perpetuated this recognition for the need for adaptability and the means for course correction within grant mechanisms.

"…swiftness was not a license for sloppiness…"

In terms of grant mechanisms, another key positive that was highlighted by stakeholders was the robust **internal grant application and review process that was both replicable and trackable,** in particular the use of a mixed menu or matrix approach. Another critical factor highlighted was the emergency delegation of authority to the CEO of grant approval as compared to the previous requirement of Board approval of all ESPIG grants over USD 10 million[67]. Of particular note was the fact that each of the applications[68] were not only reviewed but also approved by the CEO. The use of both of these approaches was deemed to be not only highly efficient in terms of timeliness but also ensured that the entire review and allocation process was coherent and well organized. Applicants had some latitude but there were certain requirements that had to be met. These findings were reiterated and triangulated through a review of the grant application/approval documents as well as through key informant interviews. It is important to note that this evaluation has found (from both the primary and secondary data analyzed) that despite tight application deadlines **high quality[69] Covid-19 grant applications were received** and ultimately approved. The evaluators reviewed the AF approval memos and checklists, the grant applications themselves, the Covid-19 country response plans, as well as the criteria created by the GPE Secretariat on which applications were judged.[70]. This included an assessment of both the process as well as the contents of these documents. This review examined all steps in the application review and approval process and based on that concluded that an **appropriate balance between efficiency and quality was maintained** through delegation and a rigorous process that could be replicated was adopted. This process was also highly transparent with the names of those who completed, reviewed, and approved the document being reported and dated prior to submission to the CEO for final approval. From the primary data, these findings were also reiterated by a range of stakeholders at the country level as well at the global level from within and beyond the Secretariat.

[67] Sources: https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-02-GPE-country-level-guide.pdf and https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-05-GPE-policy-education-sector-program-implementation-grants-EN.pdf

[68] 65/66

[69] Quality has been judged by the evaluators in terms of the fact that the process was timely and that the grants met the requirements set out for grant assessment. This evaluation did not judge whether the standards themselves were the right ones or covered all quality dimensions.

[70] Program Standards for Assessment of Covid-19 AF Applications Country Grants: this is the matrix used to assess country applications for Covid-19 AF grants and includes aspects pertaining to eligibility, program design and coordination, budget, M&E Results Framework, implementation arrangements and readiness and risk assessment and mitigation criteria. This matrix was required to be completed, reviewed, and approved by GPE Secretariat members whose names and dates of approval were recorded prior to CEO decision.

GPE **Secretariat support and guidance was highlighted and commended** by stakeholders in the application process as having provided the support necessary to submit high quality grant applications. This support was also evidenced by the extensive guidance documents, templates, web pages and other support provisions created by GPE within a short time period[71].

Grant Monitoring & Evaluation

In collaboration with the GA, country partners were required to report on key indicators by the GPE Secretariat in the form of quarterly and six-monthly surveys. These surveys were used as monitoring tools to follow-up and assess on report-back actions defined in the approval letters e.g. additional information about a certain activity, detailed budget, or proof that a certain activity was removed/added from the program as indicated in the decision language of the approval letter.

The **indicators were noted by interviewees as being clearly defined and useful in ensuring comparability** across contexts. The Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Progress Surveys templates reviewed by the evaluators provided a clearly articulated reporting mechanism that comprehensively covered the ability to report on both core/required indicators and targets as well as providing the ability to add further details, contextualization and nuanced indicators as noted in the grant, if different. These templates provided clear guidance on filling out all the sections that pertained to the following: background information, disbursements, implementation progress, summary of progress against the main components (qualitative narrative format of progress against outcomes and main activities/achievements), impact stories, reporting on core (equivalent) indicators and finally, private sector engagement. The core indicators for mitigation and response included those pertaining to access, enabling environment, protection and well-being and teachers and the core indicators for recovery included: access, teachers, and learning.

According to stakeholders **GPE's Covid-19-related monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (e.g. the monitoring surveys) have good accountability of performance to a range of education stakeholders and levels of transparency in terms of achieving the appropriate utilization of funds**. Stakeholders in the OECS noted that similar to the ESPIG process, data and monitoring systems implemented by the GPE play a crucial role and provide a very good sense of progress in terms of the inputs and implementation of grants.

This evaluation also aimed to assess whether these requirements were challenging, produced data that was reliable and timely and aligned to country level decision-making processes. According to GPE Secretariat staff the M&E requirements for this grant mechanism were a '*real step up*' in that they aimed to provide real time, GPE Secretariat needs-based information. The key challenge highlighted by these stakeholders was the self-reported nature of these data, which whilst being both plentiful and timely, would need independent verification. As of the end of May 2021, 135 out of 160 surveys had been submitted (with a delay of 25 surveys)[72].

[71] https://www.globalpartnership.org/funding/applying-for-grants

[72] Information provided by the GPE Secretariat.

Some country-level stakeholders indicated that current **reporting requirements (quarterly) were not too burdensome, however others felt that they were too frequent** (e.g., in Ghana, semi-annual reporting was suggested as an alternative). It was also suggested that they could be better aligned with country's own reporting schedules. Some stakeholders also pointed out that certain countries' already constrained national systems did not have the capacity to meet these reporting requirements. For example, for Niger it was reported by GPE Secretariat colleagues that the high administrative costs in the national budget were reported by the country's level stakeholders as a reflection of the reporting requirements being so 'heavy' that the national systems were unable to meet them. Similarly, in Lesotho, it was reported that unless outside organizations are subcontracted to conduct research on the ground, country capacity does not allow the undertaken of this type of work. Therefore, a shortage of monitoring companies in the country hinders this process.

The evaluation team's review found that the for the specific activities included in the program documents, there were relevant indicators to measure progress, core indicators were required to be included (only when programs included the relevant activities, as applicable, in the programs' results frameworks) and that, finally, similar/equivalent indicators (to the core indicators proposed in the M&E guidance) were included and accepted. According to stakeholders interviewed, the reporting requirements were appropriate and relevant and the **ability to add contextual or qualitative reporting items** was noted as being **useful** given that the interventions in each country were so different and to provide context. According to some stakeholders (OECS), the monitoring, evaluation and learning aspects of the Covid-19 AF grants in some respects were confusing as guidance by the GPE Secretariat was being developed and shared with partners in a '*piecemea*l' and ongoing fashion as necessitated by the evolving nature of Covid-19 and the need to '*build the bike as we were riding it'*.

Additionally, whilst the quarterly/six-monthly reports were perceived to be potentially useful, it was noted that **certain critical elements of interventions may be more difficult to measure progress on** for example measuring whether out-of-school children received TV and radio learning services and how this met their learning needs (Ghana and Lesotho). It is also worth noting that these frequent surveys focus on outputs, which was the overarching purpose of the surveys. It is far more challenging to measure outcomes on such short timelines, hence the M&E guidelines suggested grants had elements of learning from evidence and build their M&E systems e.g., from country-level evaluations. It should be noted that these sorts of questions are evaluative and could form part of the learnings from evidence. Costed learning from evidence plans were required for all grants and were introduced for the first time with the Covid-19 AF grants and these could be used more extensively going forward.

However, other indicators such as those pertaining to school-building and handwashing facilities, whilst easier to measure, given that implementation may not have occurred, will provide useful monitoring data for the summative evaluation.

The need for timely and reliable data for the purposes for evidence-based planning and policy making has been recognized as a critical area of focus over the last few decades but the Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need for these data but also the differences across various countries in their capacity to collect such data. The pandemic has also made the

collection of data even more challenging due to school closures, travel restrictions and the inability of schools and teachers to report data as would be done in normal circumstances. To meet this challenge, GPE Covid-19 AF grants allocated USD 2.2 million in support of strengthening data systems in partner countries such as Benin (improving capacity to anticipate and cope with future shocks) and the Central African Republic (implement a real time monitoring and reporting of the country's Covid-19 response)[73]. These efforts are intended to strengthen education monitoring and evaluation systems in countries and have an impact beyond the immediate pandemic crisis[74] (see discussion on Ghana on the Ghana National Knowledge and Skills Bank and Ghana Learning Management Systems below and in the country review).

The primary data collection also corroborated this **need for reliable and timely data**. For example, some stakeholders (OECS) noted that the Covid-19 AF M&E process was an opportunity to recognize what was needed in terms of data systems for reporting across the region and that it *'…accelerated the process of making sure that this happens'*, namely that the Covid-19 AF reporting mechanisms encouraged this process. A few stakeholders emphasized that whilst some countries in the region have EMIS and open data systems, there is a need for the development of a region-wide EMIS system and evidence-based policy making (including independent evaluations that systematically assess the true impact of the various interventions and policies adopted during the emergency response period) and that the Covid-19 AF M&E requirements as well as **this formative and the forthcoming summative evaluations** of GPE's Covid-19 AF grants were noted to be **steps in the right direction**. Whether the data collected and compiled through the surveys was useful in improving implementation at the ground level could be examined during the summative evaluation.

In terms of evaluation, the approach adopted for the Covid-19 AF grants was novel given that this was the first time the Secretariat required costed learning from evidence plans and assessed whether these plans were present at the application review stage. As a result, all the grants have these plans, which describe what evaluation questions will be asked, who will conduct evaluations, and how the evidence generated will be used. Real-time coding and costing, portfolio analysis and reporting are available both publicly on the website and to the GPE Board and its committees. This entire evaluation uses these reports and dashboards extensively and has perceived them as being useful. This was also reiterated by interviewed stakeholders both within and outside the GPE Secretariat. According to most stakeholders there was the consensus that there had been **a big increase in public accountability** within the GPE Secretariat as well as globally across the education sector and therefore, these GPE requirements in terms of monitoring and evaluation were well-aligned with this development.

[73] Source: Covid-19 chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report ; According to a GPE Secretariat staff member, the Central African Republic and UNICEF have faced significant challenges as another crisis occurred (elections and severe violence in some regions leading to new school closure). As a result, implementation of program activities have been significantly impacted including setting up a monitoring system that has not yet been put in place and no reliable data could be shared through the surveys since December 2020. The initially 12-month program is being extended and could be restructured to reflect both challenges encountered and changes in the situation.
[74] Covid-19 chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report.

4.2 RQ2: Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE COVID-19 AF grants

The second area of focus of this evaluation is the assessment of the type and relevance of the interventions undertaken with GPE Covid-19 AF grants. This section examines the typology of the interventions that have been supported with the Covid-19 AF grants. It also examines the design of interventions, whether they meet the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged populations and finally whether they are aligned with other national initiatives. This section also discusses the relevance of interventions as well as considering whether the interventions built in long-term capacity strengthening at the systems level.

Typology of interventions

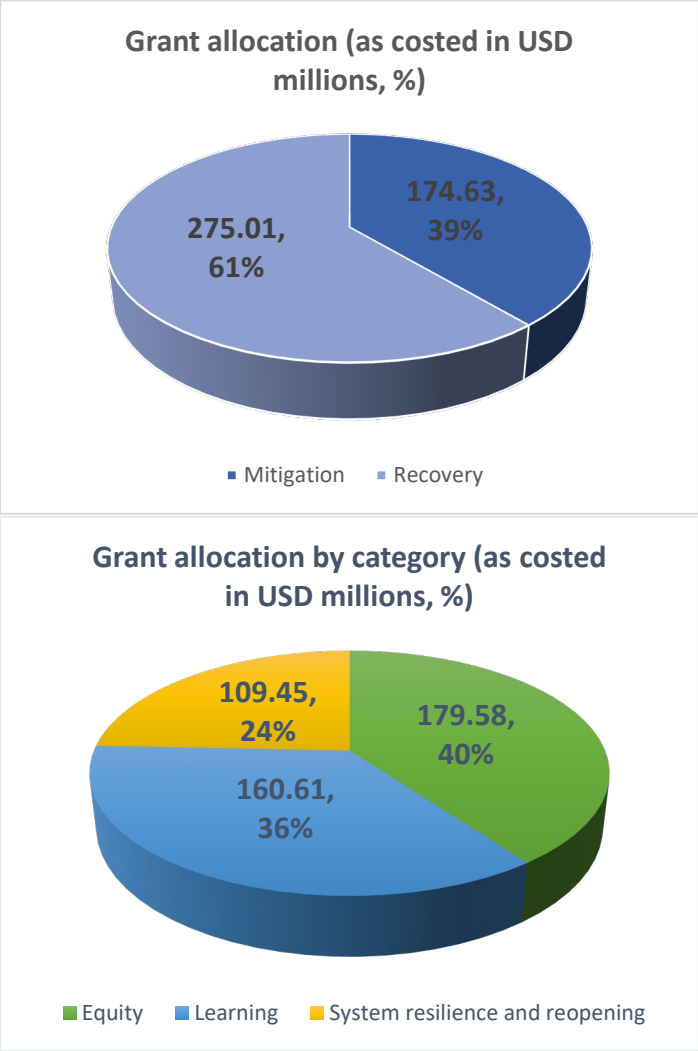
USD 467.22 million was allocated to 66 partner countries through grants ranging from 0.75 million to 20 million of up to 18 months duration). Thirty-five grants (USD 255.34 million) were allocated to fragile, or conflict affected countries[75].The pie charts below (Figure 7) illustrate how the Covid-19 AF grants were allocated across mitigation and recovery efforts: **mitigation** – 39% and **recovery** – 61%; and according to thematic alignment with GPE's three strategic goals under GPE 2020: **learning** - 36% (USD 160.61 million), **equity** – 40% (USD 179.58 million) and **system strengthening** – 24% (USD 109.45 million).

The mitigation allocation corresponded to distance learning methods, mainly including printed materials, radio, and TV. There was also an emphasis on accessing standards, curriculum and learning methods as well as distance learning training and support for teachers (USD 36.46 million). Priority was given to the most vulnerable children, with greater than 80% of the grants (54 out of 66) to include support for disability inclusion in remote learning content during school closures.

In terms of recovery, 20% and 3% of the grant allocations correspond to well-being programmes (USD 54.26 million) and activities related to back-to-school campaigns respectively. This allocation also emphasised the strengthening of resilient education systems for safe school return. Over 75% of the grants for recovery have planned activities to address gender-specific barriers. Grant allocation by estimated beneficiaries is split 49.5% for girls and 50.5% for boys (Ibid).

[75] Covid-19 AF Response: Mitigation and Recovery Thematic Grant Allocation, Version 04/21, https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2021-04-GPE-COVID-grant-thematic-coding.pdf

Figure 7: Covid-19 AF Grants allocation across mitigation and recovery



Source: created using data from Covid-19 AF Response: Mitigation and Recovery Thematic Grant Allocation, Version 04/21

Table 4: Covid-19 Accelerated Funding, by thematic area and activity (allocation, as costed; and thematic focus, as coded)

Focus	Thematic area	Activity	Allocation, as coded		Thematic focus, as coded	
			Amount allocated, as costed (in USD millions)	% of total mitigation funding	Number of grants, as coded	% of thematic area and focus coded (N= 66 grants)
Mitigation	**Equity**	Access to education for OOSC	0.5	0%	19	29%
		Addressing gender-specific barriers	3.2	2%	42	64%
		Cash transfers and other targeted incentives for children	1.7	1%	6	9%
		Children with disabilities and special needs	10.3	6%	54	82%
		Refugees and IDPs	3.8	2%	13	20%
		Support to marginalized children (gender equity/ low-income/rural)	29.0	17%	65	98%
		Well-being programs (Hygiene programs)	8.5	5%	36	55%
		Well-being programs (Nutritional programs)	1.3	1%	8	12%
		Well-being programs (Psychological support programs)	3.1	2%	40	61%
	Learning	Distance learning (Low tech - radio/TV)	20.2	12%	59	89%
		Distance learning (Medium/ High tech: Tablets/mobile internet/SMS)	13.9	8%	53	80%
		Distance learning (printed materials)	19.3	11%	55	83%
		Learning assessment systems	0.7	0%	22	33%
		Standards, curriculum, and learning materials	22.5	13%	65	98%
		Teacher development	17.2	10%	51	77%
	System	System strengthening	19.3	11%	61	92%
		Total Mitigation	**174.63**	**100%**	**n/a**	**n/a**
Recovery	**Equity**	Addressing gender-specific barriers	9.35	3%	51	77%
		All children return to school (including OOSC)	9.44	3%	52	79%
		Cash-transfers and other targeted incentives for children	2.56	1%	6	9%
		Children with disabilities and special needs	7.62	3%	34	52%
		Refugees and IDPs	3.61	1%	7	11%
		Support to marginalized children (gender equity/ low-income/rural)	31.26	11%	55	83%
		Well-being programs (Hygiene programs)	38.21	14%	60	91%
		Well-being programs (Nutritional programs)	7.30	3%	15	23%
		Well-being programs (Psychological support programs)	8.76	3%	49	74%
	Learning	Accelerated learning programs	17.34	6%	46	70%
		Learning assessment systems	6.81	2%	29	44%
		Standards, curriculum, and learning materials	23.33	8%	38	58%
		Teacher Development	19.27	7%	46	70%
	System resilience and reopening	Education facilities, reopening of schools	57.19	21%	60	91%
		EMIS	1.30	0%	24	36%
		System resilience and reopening	31.68	12%	66	100%
		Total Recovery	**275.01**	**33%**	**n/a**	**n/a**

Source: Covid-19 Coding Costing Spreadsheet Version as of April 30, 2021

Table 4 illustrates grant allocation across thematic areas but, in particular, how the grant interventions were focused on addressing the needs of specific vulnerable populations. This table shows that 82% of the grants include support to disability inclusion and 64% in addressing gender-specific barriers in remote learning content during school closings (as of end-April 2021). In all the countries sampled for the country reviews, stakeholders noted that **the pandemic and the resultant emergency response required brought to the fore already-recognised weaknesses within the education system and beyond and catalysed the need to address these**. The focus on gender and other forms of marginalisation (e.g., children with disabilities) was a prevalent feature within the scoring criteria on which grant application proposals were assessed and this was, therefore, reflected in the Covid-19 AF grant applications. For example, in Tanzania (Zanzibar), visually impaired students will receive braille and large print materials for home-based learning. In Zimbabwe, sign language will be added to educational programs on TV to cater to learners with hearing impairment[76]. Similarly, the country review for Lesotho has highlighted that funding was used to adapt and prepare materials for children with visual and auditory disabilities (see country review in Annex 4).

Table 5 below presents the grant allocation by mitigation and recovery, and by theme for partner countries that form part of the country review. The table indicates that within the sampled countries, differential amounts were allocated to both mitigation and recovery and within those on equity, learning and system strengthening aspects. For example, equity formed a core component of OECS's approach during mitigation efforts and not so much during recovery. On the other hand, in Senegal, equity formed a core focus during the recovery stage whilst not during mitigation.

Table 5: Grant allocation by mitigation and recovery and by theme for the sampled countries (USD and % of funds allocated to thematic area)

Country	Mitigation			Recovery			Total (sum to 100%)		
	Equity	Learning	System resilience and reopening	Equity	Learning	System resilience and reopening	Equity	Learning	System resilience and reopening
Afghanistan	2,346,875 (21%)	1,440,625 (13%)	1,059,375 (10%)	2,401,563 (22%)	1,098,438 (10%)	2,653,125 (24%)	4,748,438 (43%)	2,539,063 (23%)	3,712,500 (34%)
Congo DR	3,352,313 (24%)	2,657,632 (19%)	1,875,763 (13%)	1,389,907 (10%)	2,300,833 (16%)	2,687,442 (19%)	4,742,219 (33%)	4,958,465 (35%)	4,563,205 (32%)
Ghana	650,000 (4%)	6,100,000 (41%)	2,000,000 (14%)	550,000 (4%)	500,000 (3%)	5,000,000 (34%)	1,200,000 (8%)	6,600,000 (45%)	7,000,000 (47%)
Lesotho	584,086 (18%)	191,100 (6%)	1,000 (0%)	694,198 (21%)	137,500 (4%)	1,670,000 (51%)	1,278,284 (39%)	328,600 (10%)	1,671,000 (51%)
OECS	701,560 (25%)	1,242,560 (43%)	466,280 (16%)	113,600 (4%)	0 (0%)	334,000 (12%)	815,160 (29%)	1242,560 (43%)	800,280 (28%)
Senegal	86,157 (1%)	254,752 (4%)	186,434 (3%)	2,659,876 (39%)	918,083 (13%)	2,744,698 (40%)	2,746,033 (40%)	1,172,835 (17%)	2,931,132 (43%)

Source: Internal Secretariat R&P COVID AF grant costing/coding database as of April 30, 2021

[76] Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report.

Across the entire portfolio of grant applications, **there was a spotlight on ICT** (defined in the broader sense, referring to all communication technologies including internet, telephone, social networks etc.). Under the 'Mitigation' focus, 53 out of 66 grants (80%) included high/medium tech solutions such as tablets, mobile internet, and SMS interventions.. Whilst this was a focus of many grants, **contextual challenges have differentially impacted the implementation of these ICT initiatives** according to stakeholders interviewed for the country reviews. For example, many grant applications looked to support remote learning through online content as well as TV/Radio programmes with differing success. This was a particularly important learning delivery mechanism given the wide-ranging school closures across the globe and allowed many children to continue to access content despite not being able to attend school (e.g., Cambodia[77]). Low-income countries primarily used radio, TV, and printed materials to deliver distance learning with upper-middle-income countries allocating on average a higher proportion of distance learning through internet/phone-based learning. Precisely, 86% (6 out of 7) of upper-middle income countries and 70% (21 out of 30) of low-income countries reported using medium or high-tech modalities such as tablets, mobile, internet, or SMS for distance and home-based learning/tutoring programs during the pandemic ([78]. However, in some countries, despite being introduced, some such initiatives have been reported to have started but then stopped and then not been reinstated (e.g., Ghana, see country review and discussion on research question 3 below).

In the OECS context, it was noted by several stakeholders interviewed that **the provision of a relatively small number of devices had the potential to bridge the equity and digital gap in an effective manner** and whilst in any other context this may not have worked, given the OECS context, it was seen as one of the most effective use of funds. The bulk pooled procurement through GPE funding allowed for a more cost-effective purchase of tablets for the region than would have been obtained had the islands tried to procure devices on their own[79].

The extent to which these ICT-related initiatives could be implemented and effective are largely determined by both the tech and electricity landscapes in these contexts. The variability in access to internet across partner countries is immense, ranging from 63% in the Maldives to only 2% in Somalia and Burundi.[80]

Relevance of grants in terms of alignment with contextual needs and other national initiatives

[77] https://www.globalpartnership.org/news/radio-based-program-helps-multilingual-students-continue-learning-despite-school-closures?audience-profile=

[78] Based on analysis of the coding/costing data provided by the GPE Secretariat, as of April 30, 2021.

[79] According to key informants interviewed.

[80] The World Bank Database coding-costing July 2020

In terms of **alignment across national strategies and plans**, there was a prerequisite for Covid-19 AF grant applications to be based on Covid-19 response plans developed by partner countries and this helped lay important technical as well as process groundwork for grant development. Critically, GPE decided to fund plan development to support this development of national plans (through the multi-country response planning grant)[81].

> ***"Flexibility in terms of programmatic choice was key combined with the rigor of process"***

Stakeholders highlighted this **requirement for a clear and comprehensive national response plan** as a critical and important element of their emergency response. These plans not only formed the basis of interventions designed and implemented using the GPE Covid-19 funding but also meant that other donors could align their initiatives with partner countries using the plans set out by national governments (e.g., emphasised by stakeholders in Senegal). The GPE Secretariat provided partner countries with guidelines to help countries target their interventions, therefore, making these interventions not only aligned with other national initiatives but also ensuring that they were relevant to the country context. The provision of supporting guidance to create a response plan and the requirement for a response plan as the basis of the Covid-19 AF funding were noted by stakeholders as fundamental contributions of GPE's response in addition to the funds themselves. The plan ensured that Covid-19 response efforts across all donors were comprehensive and complementary. This **plan development supported by GPE was facilitated by the fact that GPE partner countries historically have experience of GPE-funded education sector plan development** given the GPE operating model. These findings from the primary data were also corroborated through secondary data analysis where it has been reported that not only did planning grants enable countries make evidence-based responses to the crisis, but also enabled them to use some of this funding to engage a range of stakeholders for a more timely, more coordinated and a better aligned response (67% of 87 countries that received planning grant funding used the allocation for national and sub-national level planning; in addition 69% of the countries used the funds to prepare alternative delivery systems and 45% for planning and implementation of safe school operation and risk communications[82]).

In the six case study countries that formed part of the primary data collection, **grants were found to be well-aligned** not only with national efforts (as was required) but **also with other efforts in country,** for example Education Cannot Wait (ECW). The engagement of the LEG during the design of the plans and interventions also resulted in greater alignment across initiatives. The application approval matrix that assessed all grant applications assessed whether the response plans included coordination efforts and whether they would be complementary to other government or donor-funded initiatives. Therefore, greater

[81] "As requested by the GPE Board, applications should demonstrate the link with the response plan that determines the need for the funding, ability to utilize it within the grant timeframe, and a focus on the most vulnerable." GPE (2020). Guidelines for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Window, April 2020. https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-11-GPE-COVID-19-guidelines.pdf.

[82] Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report, based on an analysis of a survey completed by UNICEF country offices.

alignment can be attributed to the GPE approach that requires extensive engagement of the LEG and assessed applications to ensure that this was achieved.

In Afghanistan for example, there was evidence from stakeholders of good alignment with Education Cannot Wait as the GPE Covid-19 AF funding went to other provinces not covered by ECW to avoid duplication. Some stakeholders interviewed suggested that given that UNICEF was the GA for both initiatives this may have played a role in this alignment. In Ghana, stakeholders also noted strong alignment across GPE Covid-19 AF funding and other initiatives being conducted in the country where it was possible to capitalize on the existing GALOP program (Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Program) given that this was co-funded by GPE and aligned with the Education Sector Plan. The 'matrix approach' to implementing various Covid-19 AF grant interventions (e.g. TV and radio programs) which were based on a matrix by subject and by class, identifying roles and responsibilities meant that '*nothing fell through the gaps'* and '*everyone knew who was doing what*' according to one stakeholder interviewed in relation to the Ghanaian context.

In DRC, interviewees recognized the importance of the fact that interventions were aligned with national priorities as defined by the government and as contained not only in the Covid-19 response plan, but also the education sector plan and the Humanitarian Response Plan. Each of these focus on access to and continuity of education but also the strengthening of sector coordination and building system resilience. Interview data from DRC also suggested that information-sharing at the central and regional levels and coordination amongst actors prevented the duplication of implementation activities at the ground level as well as allowing the identification of needs in terms of gaps to make coordinated requests of what was required. Similarly, it was noted that at the time the pandemic started, the existing ESPIG was being restructured and the existence of the Covid-19 AF grant meant that there was no need to change the direction of the ESPIG. The matrix approach (mentioned previously) was also highlighted as important in ensuring alignment and complementarity.

A crucial finding from both this evaluation and from the evaluation that is being conducted on the effects of Covid-19 on ongoing GPE grants is that the **Covid-19 AF grants bridged a gap**; namely that by addressing immediate emergency needs and ensuring the safe return to school, this allowed the ongoing grants to remain focused on longer term educational goals. This meant that the Covid-19 AF grants were highly relevant to the current needs of partner countries namely the health and social needs that resulted from the pandemic. For example, this includes the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), food, and other wider child wellbeing support. For example, another critical area of focus of Covid-19 AF grants pertains to **psychosocial support and wellbeing of children** with several countries indicating this as an area of focus of their Covid-19 response plans (e.g., Ghana, Mozambique, The Gambia, Liberia, Lao PDR, Myanmar etc.[83]). Table 4 above indicates that 12% (23%) of grants focused on nutritional programs, 61% (74%) on psychological support programs and 55% (91%) on hygiene programs during mitigation (recovery), as of end-April 2021. In several countries, psychosocial support for children was aimed to be provided through both teacher training, teacher training materials as well as through supporting parents to help reduce stress, anxiety, and trauma due to school closures and the pandemic. Psychosocial support

[83] See GPE's Covid-19 Emergency Funding Application Highlights October 30, 2020, Thematic Focus section, p.55.

was also provided to teachers, parents, and the wider community, e.g. in Ghana and Liberia (through establishing a help desk)[84]. Stakeholders in Senegal also reiterated that the first priority was addressing safeguarding and WASH and PPE provision as well as ensuring the continuity of learning.

Similarly, in OECS, there was also a focus on '**ensuring the wellbeing of students both in and out of schools'** (the third pillar of the OECS response and recovery plan) through supporting hygiene and sanitation initiatives in schools as well as ensuring that schools can support the physical, psychological and socioeconomic needs of both students and educators both in and out of schools[85]. Stakeholders also reiterated that there was an intention to support the psychosocial needs of children as well as implementing a school feeding program (through mobile meals), kitchen facilities and WASH facilities in schools. At the time of this evaluation, the implementation and utilization could not be assessed, however this should be an area of focus for the summative evaluation.

System strengthening and long-term capacity building

Covid-19 AF grants were not designed for **system strengthening and long-term capacity building**, however, in several countries, emerging findings from primary data collection efforts would indicate some progress in this regard. In Ghana, the development of a new Learning Management System to support learning continuity and the establishment of the Ghana National Knowledge and Skills Bank (GNKSB) and the establishment of a distance learning and teaching platform in Senegal are examples of when interventions funded by the Covid-19 AF grant resulted in efforts with potentially more long-term benefits beyond the immediate Covid-19 crisis. From the context of DRC, in terms of capacity strengthening for preparedness and system agility, whilst the Covid-19 grants aimed to focus on the immediate crisis, when 'building back better', stakeholders indicated that lessons can be learnt from this response to inform GPE's support in the long term about how countries can respond to crises in the future and 'build back better'. One stakeholder in DRC noted the need to continue work on a sectoral strategy for example on distance learning, not just to remedy the current pandemic but to adapt to and prepare for other crises in the future. Another recommendation suggested was that GPE, in order to reach its strategic objectives, should always pay due attention to the threats of potential emergencies in advance of them hitting. This could potentially be done, according to a GPE Secretariat interviewee, through the **incorporation of an emergency response team within the GPE Secretariat**. Countries can also gain to learn from this experience with some interviewees suggesting the need for better emergency planning and guidance being in place at the national and sub-national levels to allow national government responses to be swifter and more robust in the future.

> ***"We can benefit from the things done now long after the pandemic has ended"***

[84] Ibid.

[85] Covid-19 Accelerated Funding Request, OECS 5 May 2020.

4.3 RQ3: Efficiency and (early) effectiveness of GPE COVID-19 grants

Research question 3 assesses whether there are any early signs of certain categories or types of interventions being efficient (i.e., able to achieve desired outcomes with as little wastage as possible) or more effective in terms of implementation (i.e., capable of producing the desired output) than others. Efficiency and effectiveness are assessed in this section in terms of rollout, beneficiaries and any examples of innovative initiatives and new partnerships that may have been leveraged as result of the Covid-19 AF grants (i.e. the extent to which the grant achieved its objectives and how grant activities contributed to the achievement of those objectives).[86] It is likely that it is too early to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the Covid-19 AF grants comprehensively, however there are some early indications from the monitoring data and from the interviews conducted in the country review contexts of areas that have started to show promising results and some where it has been more challenging. It must also be noted that the interview data are only from six countries that formed part of the country reviews and provide very limited and early insights into how the interventions are playing out in these countries and whether they are showing signs of achieving desired outcomes. Therefore, at this stage, the main evaluation focus is on whether the designed interventions are actually being implemented.

Intervention rollout and reaching key beneficiaries

The Covid-19 AF **funding has aimed to help governments support learning and equity for up to 355 million children in 66 countries.** As mentioned in the previous section, it also aimed to promote coordinated responses that were country driven, aligned behind government priorities, and aimed to share information and experiences[87]. According to GPE documentation, most AF grants started implementation within a month from approval. Out of 66 grants approved, 41 (62%) started implementation within a month from approval from the GPE CEO which is far shorter when compared to regular implementation grants which tend to take 5.2 months on average to start implementation after approval)[88]. For some grants, the impact of a delayed start was mitigated using retroactive financing agreement of World Bank grants which enabled some countries to start some activities before the actual start dates for the Covid-19 AF grant[89].

Where grants took longer to commence implementation, this was purported by interviewees to be due to external factors such as issues with procurement (discussed in more detail below) **or context specific issues such restructuring of key ministerial positions** (e.g. in Afghanistan where both the quarterly surveys and interviews with stakeholders have noted that implementation has been impacted by changes in the MoE's leadership structure that resulted in school openings being postponed (due to ongoing waves of the pandemic) and implementation being resultantly delayed as well as due to existing contextual challenges given the ongoing conflict and existing fragility in the country). **Other external factors have**

[86] See Guidance on monitoring and evaluation of COVID-19 grants | Documents | Global Partnership for Education.
[87] https://www.globalpartnership.org/covid19?location=initial-view#results-stories
[88] See GPE Grant Status Report 2020 on how the process has been streamlined and accelerated. GPE (2020). Grant Status Report 2020. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/grant-status-report-2020-novemberdecember-2020.
[89] Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report.

also resulted in implementation delays. These include the 'extension of school closures which resulted in postponement of activities planned for after school reopening and limited capacity of staff to follow through the program implementation as well as due to other government restrictions, for example on mass gathering and domestic travel etc[90].

Data as of the end of April 2021[91] (indicate that 59 out of the 66 grants have submitted at least one progress survey by the Grant Agent which has been reviewed by the GPE Secretariat for reporting progress made against outputs and outcomes planned (Figure 8). In terms of implementation progress ratings, according to estimates at the end of May 2021, 56 grants report their most recent progress rating as 'moderately satisfactory or above', and only 3 grants 'moderately unsatisfactory or below.'[92]

Figure 8: Implementation Progress Ratings: Current Reporting Period (% of 59 grants in each rating group)

Source: Covid-19 Accelerated Grants: Implementation Progress Estimates, published May 17th, 2021

Country interviews have indicated that some of the countries that formed part of the sample have faced **issues with implementation** and in some of these contexts, these have been attributed to issues with procurement. According to stakeholders in some countries, these issues have been alleviated through GA procurement experience in emergency situations. UNICEF was highlighted by stakeholders as being particularly effective in this regard. In Lesotho, PPE procurement issues were noted to have not only impacted the slow reopening of schools but was suggested by some stakeholders as also affecting the implementation of certain planned interventions in this context.

In terms of disbursement versus utilisation[93] of funds, a cumulative amount of USD 399 million has been disbursed to grant agents as of end April 2021 (Ibid) of which GAs have

[90] Ibid.
[91] Covid-19 Accelerated Grants: Implementation Progress Estimates, published May 17th, 2021.
[92] See 'Guidance on monitoring and evaluation of COVID-19 grants | Documents | Global Partnership for Education' for how the progress ratings are determined.
[93] Once a grant application is approved, the grant funds are transferred from GPE's trust fund to the grant agent in batches, as per the financial agreement between the GPE Secretariat and the grant agent. This transaction is called "disbursement" in GPE's financial reporting. When the funds are then spent on the program, the grant

reported that USD 161 million were utilised out of a total of USD 400 million approved (59/66 Covid-19 AF grants).

Table 6 presents the utilization rate from fund lag[94] for the sample countries that form part of the country reviews. These are presented by grant agent. These differences in utilization can be driven by a multitude of factors that, in many situations are context specific. For the countries within the country review sample factors influencing utilization have been investigated, however, for the wider portfolio of all Covid-19 AF grants, examining why there are differences in utilization rates across countries and for the different GAs is beyond the scope of this evaluation. This is an area that could potentially be examined further in the summative evaluation. However, it must be noted that the formula used for utilization analysis (see footnote 94) may not be relevant for short-term grants such as the Covid-19 AF grant. However, given that there is currently no better alternative to assess utilization, these findings have been presented with this caveat. It should also be noted that the definition of utilization differs amongst GAs affecting the comparability of utilization thereof.

Table 6: Disbursement and Utilization Rate from Fund Lag, Sample Countries

Country	Grant Agent	Balance to be disbursed	Utilisation Rate from Fund Lag
Afghanistan	UNICEF	0	-49%
Democratic Republic of Congo	UNICEF	0	-7%
Ghana	World Bank	0	-63%
Lesotho	UNICEF	0	-39%
OECS	OECS	956,730	-62%
Senegal	AFD	0	-50%

Source: Disbursement and Utilization Report May 31, 2021_for external use, GPE Secretariat

Examining the quarterly/semi-annual reports submitted to GPE Secretariat (by partner countries) on core indicators (self-reported for all countries across the portfolio) against targets indicate that 95% of the grants include distance or home-based learning programs to support children and, similarly, 69% include distance/home-based teaching programs to support teachers during Covid-19 (Ibid). In terms of children supported with distance/home-based learning programs, a cumulative total of 29.06 million children out of a total of 96.98 million children targeted have been reached. A cumulative 12.5 million out of a total of 37.14 million girls targeted have been reached. In terms of teachers supported with distance/home-based teaching programs, a cumulative 0.15 million out of a total of 1.2 million teachers targeted have been reached and a cumulative 0.05 million out of a total of 0.21 million female teachers targeted have been reached[95].

money is then considered "utilized" in GPE's financial reporting (https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/docs/results-report-2021/en/2021-10-GPE-Results-Report-2021.pdf).

[94] The formula to calculate this lag is: Percentage Utilized - Percentage Time Elapsed. This metric examines whether utilization is keeping up with the intended timeframe for implementation. For example, the figure will be negative when a greater percentage of the grant 's duration has elapsed relative to the percentage of the grant that has been utilized.

[95] Current data available on 51 grants out of the total 66 grants to GPE partner countries. Data disaggregated by sex is available for 45 grants.

In terms of children previously enrolled who returned to school once the school system is reopened, a cumulative of 40.41 million out of a total of 100.36 million children targeted children have been reached. A cumulative 15.72 million out of a total of 38.87 million girls targeted have been reached. For children whose learning was assessed to evaluate loss of learning during school closure, a cumulative of 3.2 million out of a total of 17.8 million children targeted have been reached. A cumulative of 1.56 million out of a total of 4.69 million girls targeted have been reached[96]. In terms of teachers supported with distance/home-based teaching programs, 0.17 million out of a total of 1.18 million teachers targeted were reached. This included 0.06 million out of a total of 0.21 million women teachers targeted.

A cumulative of 51.48 million out of 84.62 million children targeted have been reached. A cumulative of 25.57 million out of a total of 40.38 million girls targeted have been reached in terms of children previously enrolled who returned to school once the schools reopened. In terms of teachers and officials in grant-supported schools, 82.64% of targeted teachers were reached which included a 100% of 0.3 million targeted women teachers. Additionally, 71.59% of schools targeted were reached which included 59.28% of schools targeted to be provided with minimum hygiene standards[97].

All GPE Covid-19 AF grants were required to include and therefore did include aspects pertaining to and including **gender** and **equity**[98]. The AF review matrix developed by the GPE Secretariat assessed all grants to ensure that their interventions programs had a sufficient degree of inclusion in terms of reaching the poor, vulnerable or other disadvantaged children, including girls affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

For **gender**, in particular, a Covid-19 AF gender database was created that included information (for each partner country receiving funding) on whether the AF program document proposed interventions on girls' education/gender and whether the program addressed these two issues according to the internal reviews matrix. This document also includes a comparison of girls' education/gender information in program documentation and compares this to the internal review matrix as a robustness check. For example, in Afghanistan, the program identified an increase in children's work activities and early marriage as a barrier to education and, to this end, the grant proposal suggested proactively reaching out to families with strong and tailored back to school messages stressing the application of protection measures and specifically targeting children at risk of work and early marriage. This program included 60% girls as its direct beneficiaries. Another example is provided in Sudan[99], where GPE-funded interventions aimed to protect girls from sexual abuse, violence, and pregnancy by using technology to disseminate health messages, encouraging parental participation in distance learning, and ensuring the safe opening of

[96] Current data available on 31 grants out of the total 66 grants to GPE partner countries. Data disaggregated by sex is available for 29 grants.

[97] Source: Covid-19 Accelerated Grants: Implementation Progress Estimates, June 17, 2021.

[98] COVID-19-AF Approval Memo and Checklists (various countries reviewed) and GPE's Covid-19 Emergency Funding Application Highlights October 30, 2020, Thematic Focus section, p.52.

[99] Read more on this grant at https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/sudan-coronavirus-pandemic-forces-schools-innovate.

schools (Covid-19 AF Gender Database). Similar interventions were also highlighted in this document across a range of countries with a range of programs aimed at mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on girls across gender-based issues such as gender-based violence, sexual and physical abuse, forced labor, early marriage, increased burden of household tasks (e.g. in Cambodia, Cameroon). Across the 67 country programs included in this database, each one identifies gender-based interventions. An additional example taken from the sampled countries is provided in Senegal, where flexible learning solutions for girls and protection from GBV and exploitation provide an example of best practice pertaining to gender equality according to stakeholders interviewed in this context.

In terms of other **equity** issues, other examples can be seen in the context of Zambia and the use of solar radios and SD cards with pre-recorded lessons that were provided through GPE-funded programs to remote vulnerable students to ensure access to distance learning content. In terms of children of disabilities, this was the area of focus across many countries such as Tanzania, Nepal, Zimbabwe, The Gambia, Benin, DRC, Mali, Vanuatu etc. through the use of Braille, large print, plain language etc. learning materials[100]. Interviews conducted in the sampled countries also highlighted the focus on equity and inclusion within grants (see country reviews).

The importance of **teachers as critical stakeholders and the role of quality teaching** are widely recognised as key determinants of children's education outcomes. The pandemic thrust unprepared teachers across the globe into the immense challenge of adapting to distance learning with little experience and/or support and with training on such delivery also restricted due to the pandemic. Teachers themselves faced psycho-social and economic and health stresses as well as needing to manage the impact the pandemic was having on their students (based on evidence gathered from the country reviews as well as from global literature). Examples of where teachers were trained at a distance on distance-learning delivery include The Maldives and Myanmar amongst many others and on the provision of psycho-social support in Vietnam and Nigeria amongst others.

The pandemic has further increased the recognition of the importance of teachers and the need to engage and support them. GPE has historically placed an importance on teachers on grants and the Covid-19 AF grants have similarly aimed to continue this support and engagement of teachers. Interviews conducted as part of this evaluation provided evidence that engaging with teachers as critical stakeholders in LEG activities (discussed previously) as well as through teacher training (e.g., in Lesotho, Zambia, Ghana, Timor-Leste, Djibouti etc.) have been key areas of focus of the GPE Covid-19 AF grant efforts. Given there is limited evidence from the primary data collection on the effectiveness of teacher related interventions in the six sampled countries (namely in terms of whether they had been implemented well, what challenges were faced and what were the lessons learnt), these aspects would need to be more deeply investigated at the summative evaluation stage.

[100] GPE's Covid-19 Emergency Funding Application Highlights October 30, 2020, Thematic Focus

Innovations and examples of good practice

Stakeholders interviewed as part of the country reviews highlighted **several innovative practices and examples of good practice** that have begun to emerge across key areas of focus (learning outcomes, access to education, gender equality, teachers and the quality of teaching and partnerships/collaborations). For example, innovative practices have emerged in addressing the challenges of measuring learning outcomes. The pandemic has not only forced the closure of schools and the need for countries to rapidly adapt their learning delivery to ensure continuity, but it has also resulted in a need to cancel/adapt planned and upcoming assessment exercises be they public exams, large scale assessments or classroom assessments. Some countries continued public exams as scheduled e.g., Eritrea, Kenya, and Lesotho whilst others cancelled (e.g., Comoros, The Gambia, Uganda), postponed (e.g., Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Mongolia) or shifted to online or alternative approaches (e.g., Cambodia, Senegal, Uzbekistan). Innovative practices to deal with these necessary shifts in formative assessment include using online tools such as quizzes, use of WhatsApp[101] or special administration of national assessments[102]. Other examples include the undertaking of quick sample-based assessments of literacy and numeracy in the early grades to monitor the efficacy of remote learning (Rwanda[103]) or the development of online or e-assessment platforms (Tanzania). Similar efforts to this end have been supported by the learning global grant that has supported the development of learning assessment tools such as text/SMS based quizzes to assess learning at a distance[104].

Hence, Covid-19 has also meant that **measuring learning outcomes has come to the fore globally** to a greater extent more than ever before. According to stakeholders building the capacity of the ministries to measure learning loss has occurred in some of the contexts where primary data were collected as a result of the GPE Covid-19 AF grants e.g., Afghanistan and Ghana (see country reviews for further details). The extent to which these efforts have been effective in measuring and helping plan remedying these learning losses should be a critical question for the forthcoming summative evaluation.

> ***"Some of the unfinished business problems before Covid-19 may … be addressable by some of the interventions tested as a result of Covid-19"***

In terms of **access to education,** according to stakeholders an innovative practice emerged in Pakistan where this emergency situation was used as an opportunity to engage with technology (through WhatsApp, web-based video lessons, nationally televised distance-

[101] UNESCO (2020). COVID-19: A Glance on National Coping Strategies on High-Stakes Examinations and Assessments (working document). Paris: UNESCO. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_review_of_high-stakes_exams_and_assessments_during_covid-19_en.pdf

[102] Oduor, A. (2021). "Learners to be assessed to determine grasp of subjects." The Standard. https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/education/article/2001399559/schools-mass-assessment (January 9, 2021).

[102] GPE (2020). Summary of activities funded by COVID-19 planning grants.

[103] GPE (2020). Summary of activities funded by COVID-19 planning grants. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/summary-activities-funded-covid-19-planning-grants

[104] Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report.

learning programs, radio and the internet[105]) which had not been used before and in particular to reach vulnerable populations (e.g. **out-of-school children and girls**) not reached in the past resulting in the potential for system strengthening and greater impact beyond the pandemic(according to a GPE Secretariat interviewee). GPE documentation and data have also noted that with GPE's support, the grant to Pakistan promotes equity in education by establishing new system of incentives for the provinces in the country to invest in the most disadvantaged geographical areas and to encourage alternative means of education delivery especially targeted at girls[106].

Similarly in Lesotho there has been the innovative use of WhatsApp for distance learning and the creation of audio books to **further reach**. In Ghana, stakeholders lauded EDMODO[107], a Ministry of Education digital learning initiative designed to connect Ghanaian learners to their teachers and to ensure the continuity of their learning. This collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service, and the Ghana Library Authority, resulted in an innovative e-learning platform launched in 2021, whose effectiveness at this current time whilst difficult to assess, however could be investigated during the summative evaluation stage. Therefore, there is evidence from primary and secondary data that innovative practices in terms of increasing educational access emerged through the Covid-19 AF grants. For example, secondary data analysis has revealed that in Pakistan[108] the use of a range of technologies from WhatsApp groups to biometric finger printing systems has helped building and restoring schools and improving teacher retention in remote regions.

However, given that existing GPE funding faces **immense challenges in aiming to reach the most marginalize**d, stakeholders interviewed from the GPE Secretariat noted that it would be interesting to see whether the Covid-19 AF grants were more effective at reaching populations not reached previously. However, in Lesotho, emerging findings from stakeholder interviews appear to suggest that the most marginalized populations were still as yet not being reached even by the Covid-19 AF grants. However, in DRC it was noted by interviewees that engaging with CSO organizations and NGOs alleviated this restriction and allowed better access to previously unreachable populations. Therefore, at this evaluation stage it would appear that reaching the most marginalized is very context-specific and varied from country to country.

The evidence from GPE data was also reiterated by some interviewees in that according to them there were some areas where '**early signs of effectiveness' were reported to be becoming apparent and others where challenges have been faced.** For example in terms of implementation proceeding, children returning to school and early indications that some children were indeed reached through distance-learning provisions. Overall, it was noted that it is important to have *'…a realistic approach…when assessing reach and learning.'* According

[105] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348002515_Education_technology_in_the_COVID-19_response_in_Pakistan

[106] Read more on this grant at https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/pakistan-expanding-equal-access-learning-during-coronavirus.

[107] https://finance.yahoo.com/news/netdragons-edmodo-selected-exclusive-online-055200620.html, the EDMODO initiative

[108] https://www.globalpartnership.org/results/stories-of-change/pakistan-technology-boosts-education-reform-remote-areas?utm_source=gpe_social_en&utm_medium=twitter_en&utm_campaign=results_stories

to stakeholders, realism is required in evaluating the sufficiency of AF grants because of the scale of the problem and given the availability of limited resources. Covid-19 led to immense challenges being faced particularly in reaching those where '*distance and remoteness is broader than money [can] solve*'. Therefore, according to stakeholders, reaching the most marginalized may not even be possible particularly where there are structural challenges in education systems (such as political economy aspects) that may hinder the impact of even the funding that was received.

Stakeholders also emphasized that **measuring reach and changes in learning levels are also difficult to ascertain** particularly in terms of the latter. Even if reach can be assessed, proving that learning actually happened is even more complex and assessing learning losses and any particular effectiveness of mitigation strategies may only truly come to light in the future. It is also important to note that the efficacy of certain types of interventions is particularly difficult to measure, for example, assessing the true reach of radio and television broadcasts. Therefore, whilst there is evidence that the current interventions are in progress (albeit to a varied degree), measuring and understanding which and how many children they are reaching and whether these children are continuing to learn is difficult to say at this point but needs to be assessed in the future.

The extent to which the intentions of design were **operationalised potentially differed across contexts** and is something that will need to be assessed going forward. For example, in Lesotho there were indications from stakeholders that the truly marginalised in very remote rural areas were not reached (potentially due to government offices being in urban areas) and whilst there were some efforts to reach children with disabilities, the extent to which this was actualised cannot be assessed robustly at this stage. Stakeholders indicated that Braille and Plain Language (PL) materials and videos for children with hearing difficulties were created but, according to them, these this did not reach those in rural areas who were also not able to access the government provided resources in Lesotho.

It has been noted from both GPE data and documentation as well as from interview data evidence that WASH facilities have been provided in schools, however, the extent to which these have been utilized is yet to be seen particularly given that many schools remained closed for long periods of time. Stakeholders also suggested the **need to focus on differences between provision and utilization**. This is another area that would be better assessed at the time of the summative evaluation. Table 7 summarizes the key activities undertaken in the six countries that formed part of the country reviews.

Table 7: Main activities and implementation progress reported for sample countries

Country	USD granted	USD utilised (cumulative amount dispersed)	Previous rating	Current rating	Main activities undertaken and achievement
Afghanistan	11 million	2,823,758.14	Moderately Unsatisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory	Handwashing stations procured and ready for distribution and installation to take place in early June 2021. Development of teaching and learning materials, and the learning assessment and remedial packages underway.
Democratic Republic of Congo.	15 million	8,027,643.38	Moderately Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	11,498, 185 children (5,933,627 girls) benefited from distance learning; beneficiaries are mainly in rural areas (7,154, 069). 36,402 primary school children (17,179 girls, 19,223 boys) received school feeding from WFP; 666,141 children (299,427 girls) were followed and maintained after the reopening of schools, receive quality inclusive education supported by teachers on a total target of 825,000 planned children. 54,658 children and adolescents (including 26,079 girls) benefited from school meals and nutrition programmes and/or hygiene and sanitation kits in the targeted schools.
Ghana	15 million	Not Available	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	The Six-Monthly Survey noted that remote education delivery in Ghana had been strengthened using Covid-19 AF grants with the Ministry, through various partners, successfully developing 1,641 TV and radio lessons for KG1 to SHS3 and also rolled out a number of distance learning modules to students across the country. These lessons include over 1000 lessons for Ghana Learning TV and online enhanced video library. In addition to this, evidence from secondary data indicates that the Ghana Learning Radio Lessons were accompanied by the development and distribution of printed student activity books. Progress was also reported in the development of teacher training modules and in the delivery of remedial and accelerated learning.
Lesotho	3.47 million	2,332,264	Moderately Unsatisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	According to the most recent Six-Monthly Survey, in terms of **learner support**, 216,000 primary and lower secondary learners and 24,000 children under the age of 5 including children with disabilities were given access to continued learning (deemed moderately unsatisfactory). In terms of **safe school reopening** schools in Lesotho received support on safe school operations and child protection and targeted schools were supported with provision of accessible WASH services and promotion of water saving techniques, and safe hygiene practices (deemed moderately satisfactory). Through **back-to-school campaigns disadvantaged and vulnerable children and adolescents** were targeted for outreach and financial support and accelerated learning programs (deemed moderately satisfactory).
OECS	4 million	3 million	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	According to the Six-Monthly Survey, significant progress has been made in the region. It was noted that significant work has been undertaken by the Project Management Team to prepare for the procurement of goods and services through the Covid-19 AF grant and there was the expectation that this would translate into larger disbursements and more efficient implementation of project activities. Good progress has been made in each project component and project implementation is expected to become more efficient in the first quarter of 2021 due to the adoption of risk mitigation strategies and the commencement of all key activities not yet implemented
Senegal	7 million	5,241,029 million	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	**Learning continuit**y: provision of terminals for distance training and production of TV broadcasts; **Supporting the safe reopening of schools**: distribution of masks, sanitary kits and handwashing devices to all public primary schools and colleges; assessing learning for remedial actions for certain students; effective financial transfer to the management committees of 5,455 primary schools for the purchase of cleaning products; Start of psychosocial support activities and radio sessions; start of school canteen services in all 637 public primary schools targeted by the programme. **Reinforcing a learning approach and resilience of the education system**: Completed assessment study and policy analysis note as part of monitoring and evaluation; formalization of a decentralized monitoring system.

This evaluation has also found that a **country's experience with emergency situations played an important role in determining a country's response** to the Covid-19 crisis – Ebola in DRC and conflict in Afghanistan. However, the type of emergency is also important e.g., Afghanistan, whilst having experienced conflict, had never undergone a health crisis and, therefore, did not have the mechanisms in place for such an emergency. Similarly, the countries in OECS, have faced natural disasters but stakeholders noted that these would usually affect one island and the other islands could step in to support. Covid-19 clearly led to neighbouring support being less of an option. Other countries that formed part of the primary data collection efforts did not have any such experience to fall back on e.g., Senegal. This experience in emergencies has also been indicated as important in relation to the GA e.g., UNICEF's experience in responding to emergencies was noted as being incredibly valuable in some partner countries (e.g., Afghanistan).

Coordination and partnerships

Next this evaluation focuses on coordination mechanisms and the engagement of stakeholders. This section assesses whether there is evidence that country level coordination mechanisms have been effective and whether all country level stakeholders interviewed suggested being meaningfully engaged and consulted during the grant design and implementation process and in particular whether communities were involved.

There is positive evidence from the interviews conducted that **GPE Covid-19 AF support encouraged global, regional and national coordination as well as the sharing of learning and knowledge amongst partners** given that interview data suggested that this occurred across all six countries that formed part of the country reviews This finding of learning and knowledge sharing amongst partners was also corroborated through secondary document analysis[109] and evidence such as the work being conducted to support learning continuity through the global grant and initiatives by Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX)[110] and Education Out Loud (EOL). Taken together with GPE efforts through the Covid-19 AF grants, these combined efforts highlight GPE's importance as a partnership in helping countries respond to the current pandemic as well as ensuring that they are better prepared for future crises.

> ***"Lots of people have come to the table …all working together for the good of the region"***

Interviews signaled that in general, country-level **coordination mechanisms were deemed effective** with the vast majority of country level stakeholders indicating that they had been meaningfully engaged and consulted during the grant application and planning process. Interviews suggested that the Local Education Groups played the most important role in these contexts. There were some differences in the frequency and the nature of LEG engagement across the contexts (for example in some countries technological limitations hindered the ability to conduct LEG meetings remotely) that formed the country

[109] Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report.

[110] Further information on KIX, see https://www.adeanet.org/en/kix-observatory and https://www-brookings-edu.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2021/04/21/how-do-government-decisionmakers-identify-and-adopt-innovations-for-scale/amp/

reviews (see Appendix 4 for country reviews for further details). Stakeholders interviewed in some contexts suggest that LEG activities engaged with certain stakeholders, both prior to and during Covid-19, and that other stakeholders who were not included in discussions previously, remained 'out'. From the six contexts that formed part of the country reviews, it is difficult to assess whether this was the case. However, those interviewed did feel meaningfully engaged and, in some contexts, e.g., Afghanistan, it was highlighted that certain stakeholders (implementing partners) were engaged in the proposal development stages who had previously not been consulted in such a way for other grant applications. In some contexts, it was noted that whilst the Covid-19 AF funding application process resulted in increased engagement across stakeholders (e.g., in OECS), sometimes these conversations occurred bilaterally as opposed to multilaterally (e.g., Ghana).

Positive evidence of ongoing consultations (beyond the planning and application stages of the Covid-19 AF grant) **through the LEG mechanism were provided** in the Six-Monthly Surveys. For example, in Lesotho it was noted that funds were reprogrammed towards procurement of protection kits following successful consultation and agreement with the LEG. While this activity had been planned and budgeted for, adjustments were made as the costs of this were significantly higher than originally anticipated and savings made in other areas were able to be reallocated to improve efficiency. This course correction provides an example of an instance where planned interventions were able to be adapted to better meet the needs of the country with cost savings also borne in mind. Initially, US$ 498,240 had been budgeted for procurement of protection kits, but the actual cost to cover 2,076 schools is far greater than anticipated. Therefore, US$ 500,000 cost savings from construction of handwashing facilities as well as US$ 206,000 from continuity of learning were reallocated towards procurement of protection kits.

Despite the wide engagement noted across education stakeholders, in most of the sampled countries it was noted that **cross-sectoral dialogue was limited** in that only some of the interviewees indicated that there was substantive discussion or coordination with sectors outside of the education sector although there were indications of some cross-sectoral dialogue in other contexts (e.g., OECS and Ghana). In Ghana, stakeholders indicated that cross-sectoral dialogue was initiated through the Covid-19 AF funding mechanism and that GPE played a critical role to facilitate dialogue through the LEG forum to ensure all voices are heard. Similarly, according to stakeholders, **community engagement was also lacking in some contexts**. For example, in Afghanistan, according to one stakeholder many projects have failed in the country because of a lack of engagement with local stakeholders and/or a lack of recognition of the needs of different groups. However, in Senegal adopting a differential approach to local engagement was noted to be effective in that '*Covid-19 did not reach everybody in the same way in the 14 regions…some regions have been spared more than others…there is a need to enable local authorities to build local responses to local questions'*. This stakeholder suggested that an even more decentralised approach, with more local advocacy and discourse amongst stakeholders, was required to build on the collaboration that was garnered through the GPE Covid-19 AF grant application process. Similarly, in DRC, engagement with community members was highlighted as an important factor in that country's context. It was noted that school resilience had improved due to the involvement of community representatives at the school level, known as 'school support community structures', through which contact with children could be continued whilst they

were at home. The involvement of the community was noted in this particular context to have ensured that children could continue with their education at home with the support of their parents and teachers through a feedback system that not only supported these children's learning but also allowed the monitoring of the number of children that were following the distance learning program.

Given that **community members** can be viewed as a critical group of stakeholders, the extent to which they were engaged with during Covid-19 across different contexts and the differential impact on effectiveness of interventions thereof could be an area of focus and potential improvement going forward. Whether all stakeholder groups (teachers, community members etc.) were meaningfully consulted and on an ongoing basis differed across the six contexts that formed part of the country review. The summative evaluation may be able to delve deeper and cover a wider range of contexts and more stakeholders to assess this aspect more rigorously.

There is evidence from the secondary data analysis and interviews with stakeholders that **strategic partnerships and collaborations were enhanced, activated, and leveraged through the grant process** e.g., collaborations with private companies such as telecoms companies in some countries. In the OECS, for example, to make the GPE-provided devices usable, a critical requirement was that of connectivity. Innovatively, a public-private collaboration with the telecoms company Digicel[111] met this need by enabling devices to be connected and for children (particularly the most vulnerable) to access learning platforms free of charge through the purchase of license agreements to close the digital divide through a partnership with Microsoft Teams. Other countries reported licensing agreements with service providers to zero-rate education content and allowed distance learning to continue e.g., in Ghana through the collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service, telecoms companies and service providers[112]. The true value-added of such partnerships (i.e., their effectiveness and sustainability) should be assessed at the summative evaluation stage.

[111] OECS Covid-19 Quarterly Survey No. 1, 30 September 2020.

[112] Ghana Covid-19 Quarterly Survey No. 1, 30 September 2020 and reiterated by stakeholders interviewed.

5. Potential areas of focus for the proposed summative evaluation of GPE's Covid-19 AF response (non-exhaustive)

This evaluation has highlighted some key areas of focus that could form part of the upcoming summative evaluation:

- *Existence of an AF mechanism:* the summative evaluation could further investigate whether across all the countries having an existing AF mechanism in place played a role in determining the efficiency of the Covid-19 AF grant. From the six countries that formed a part of this sample, only one had an existing Accelerated Funding ESPIG in place (Afghanistan), and therefore this sample limitation meant that the evaluators could not examine this issue further.
- *Assessing effectiveness of interventions*: it has been noted that it is too early to assess effectiveness of interventions in this formative evaluation. More specifically the summative evaluation could examine effectiveness by grant features (how well are the varied categories of interventions being achieved) as well as assessing whether the grants reached specific populations e.g., girls, marginalized populations, children with disabilities, refugees etc. The extent to which these initiatives could be implemented and effective are largely determined by both the technological and electricity landscapes in these contexts. The variability in access to internet across partner countries is immense, ranging from 63% in the Maldives to only 2% in Somalia and Burundi.[1] Whether the differences in the technology and electricity landscapes across contexts influenced the effectiveness of implementation of interventions could be examined in the forthcoming summative evaluation.
- *Meeting the needs of specific targeted populations:* this evaluation has highlighted that despite intentions some of the interventions may not have reached some particularly vulnerable populations e.g., reaching children with disabilities as mentioned earlier e.g., Lesotho). Another area for further examination could be the extent to which interventions focused on the early years as recent research has suggested that Covid-19 education response efforts have been lacking in this area as suggested was needed by both recent research[113]. Whilst some countries did focus on this phase of education in their grant applications (e.g., Liberia and Vanuatu[114]), given the importance of this phase of education, whether enough support was given to early childhood education and whether any support given was effective can be assessed in the summative evaluation.
- *Transaction costs and fiduciary risk*: Some stakeholders who were interviewed as part of the country reviews (e.g. from Senegal and within the Secretariat) raised concerns pertaining to transaction costs and fiduciary risk. In particular, unintended transaction costs (e.g., through choice of GA, heavy procedures, and increased bureaucratic processes) and fiduciary risk need to be managed for accelerated funding situations. This is something that cannot be ascertained at this point in time and during this

[113] https://riseprogramme.org/blog/learning-inequalities-widen-COVID-19-Ethiopia and a stakeholder in Lesotho suggesting that the Covid-19 response in the country did not focus on early years sufficiently.
[114] Liberia Approval Memo to the CEO and Vanuatu Approval Memo to the CEO, GPE Secretariat documents.

formative evaluation. However, it could potentially form an area of focus for the proposed forthcoming summative evaluation.

- *Management of reputational risk for the GPE:* the need to manage reputational risk for the GPE given that this was a unique and unprecedented situation which the Secretariat itself was itself also facing for the first time. The GPE Secretariat was under immense pressure to act quickly and yet maintain robustness and rigour in terms of quality assurance. Learnings from this experience will, therefore, help improve GPE's future responses to emergency situations and reduce any frustrations that partner countries faced e.g., in relation to the first-come-first-served nature of this response. According to interviewees, there was uncertainty at the GPE Secretariat level as to what the uptake of funds and extent of needs were at that time, and therefore, pressure was placed on countries to respond quickly with those that missed out being understandably frustrated when their vocalised needs could not be met when they were unable to respond early. In addition to this, GPE staff members were also facing the risks, pressures, and consequences of the pandemic themselves and therefore learnings from this may also help support the Secretariat and its members in the future as well.
- *Other suggested areas of focus include:* examining provision vs utilization (e.g. WASH as mentioned previously); specific indicators that have been particularly useful and any additional indicators that should have been included; identifying activities that can be sustained and scaled-up e.g. online content, blended education provision; leveraging collaborations with critical stakeholders such as teachers and communities; assessing the true value-added of the partnerships that have been engendered during Covid-19; cross-sectoral engagement with non-education specialists during the summative evaluation, e.g. health informants, WFP etc.
- *Cover other GPE response efforts not evaluated in this report:* see boxes below.

Box 1: The Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Observatory

The GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange has established an Observatory on COVID-19 responses in 41 GPE partner countries in Africa. With a budget of over USD 75 million, KIX is the largest fund solely dedicated to evidence generation and use to strengthen national systems[115].

A consortium of partners[116] is overseeing the implementation of this observatory. This initiative, funded for a period of 18 months, provides analysis on primary and secondary education in terms of the operation of education systems and the well-being of learners due to the negative consequences of school closures. It aims to provide evidence on promising policy practice and responses as well as providing examples of successful initiatives, lessons learned, and recommendations drawn from the evidence.

In addition, the four KIX hubs have organized a number of knowledge exchange events for partner countries. For instance, in November 2020, the KIX Africa 19 hub provided a virtual opportunity for country representatives from Lesotho, Malawi and Sierra Leone to share their teaching/learning responses, challenges and successes with other stakeholders. In February 2021, the KIX Latin America and the Caribbean

[115] globalpartnership.org/what-we-do/knowledge-innovation

[116] composed of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the African Union's International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA), with technical support from the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)

hub organized a discussion on the post-pandemic challenges and opportunities for education systems in the Eastern Caribbean countries[117].

Box 2: The Covid-19 Global Grant: Innovation for Inclusion[118]

The GPE Covid-19 Global Grant of USD 25 million is supported by a consortium composed of GPE, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank with the aim to leverage their expertise to develop teaching and learning solutions with the potential to be scaled up globally and to generate fresh evidence to support policy response. The interventions focus on three key priorities:

- **regional and global learning platforms** (facilitating knowledge sharing and developing national capacities. This includes the establishment of regional platforms of distance and blended learning to support learning continuity).
- **learning continuity at scale to reach the most marginalised** (supports country roll out of multifaceted remote learning using print, radio, television, and mobile technologies encompassing both home-based learning and accelerated learning programmes in schools); and
- **Monitoring, evidence, learning and preparation for future emergencies** (production of joint surveys, rapid impact assessments in Asia/Pacific and West and Central Africa, and reports on the gender impact of Covid-19).

[117] GPE Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report

[118] https://www.globalpartnership.org/what-we-do/knowledge-innovation/covid-19-global-grant

1. Conclusions and Recommendations

This formative evaluation assesses the relevance, efficiency, and (early signs of) effectiveness of GPE's support to countries' COVID-19 response and aims to provide recommendations for improvement. The evaluation investigated three key domains: the suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms; the type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE Covid-19 AF grants and the efficiency and (early) effectiveness of GPE Covid-19 grants.

Evaluation Question 1 (Suitability of grant mechanisms): Summary of Findings and Key Recommendations

In terms of the suitability of the GPE support and grant mechanism, both the primary and secondary data analysis presented evidence that the GPE Covid-19 AF grants were available in a timely and efficient fashion and whilst no amount could be deemed sufficient given the extent of the pandemic, the funding was appreciated and needed across all partner countries. In addition to GPE's swift response, another critical aspect was the balance achieved between the need for speed, relevance, and quality. There was also evidence of an appropriate balance between efficiency and quality with the internal process deemed to be well organised, robust, trackable, and replicable. In terms of monitoring, the core reporting indicators were deemed useful, however in some contexts, the quarterly reporting requirements proved burdensome given country capacities.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
A lesson learnt from this formative evaluation is that the processing of the Covid-19 AF grants that involved delegation of authority and power resulted in an efficient and streamlined grant application and review process. Given strong evidence that the Covid-19 AF grant application and review process was deemed to be both efficient and robust, the GPE Secretariat should review all existing grant application and review processes to identify opportunities for streamlining for efficiency for other grants.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
The GPE Secretariat should take into account country-level capacity and existing country monitoring and evaluation systems to make sure that already-constrained national systems have the capacity to meet GPE reporting needs around grant outputs and outcomes and if found lacking, to determine how they can be best supported. This includes assessing existing country-level data collection efforts in terms of content as well as in terms of frequency and mapping this against GPE requirements.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
The GPE Secretariat should assess the impact of the pandemic on Secretariat colleagues and take stock of how GPE Secretariat organized itself and implemented streamlined emergency planning policies to meet the needs of future emergency situations that may arise. This lesson learning will ensure that Secretariat staff are well-supported and well-resourced when faced with unexpected and sizeable increases in their workloads.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat

The novel costed learning from evidence plans adopted during the Covid-19 AF grant process that provided real-time coding and costing as well as portfolio analysis and reporting should be continued and expanded particularly given the big increase in public accountability within the Secretariat as well as globally within the education sector.

Recommendation: For the GPE Board and Secretariat, in support of Ministries of Education in Partner Countries
This evaluation has found that many countries could benefit from enhanced GPE support vis-a-vis disaster preparedness and better emergency planning. This could take place at the national and sub-national levels to allow government responses to be swifter and more robust in response to emergencies that may occur in the future.

Evaluation Question 2 (Typology and relevance of interventions): Summary of Findings and Key Recommendations

Interventions undertaken with GPE Covid-19 AF grants covered a range of typologies and there is evidence that they were not only well-aligned with contextual needs, national plans, and other efforts in country (e.g., ESPs, ECW, existing ESPDGs etc.), but also relevant given country needs. This evaluation has noted that a focus on gender and other forms of marginalisation as well as a focus on ICT were prevalent features across many grants. Low-income countries primarily used radio, TV, and printed materials to deliver distance learning with upper-middle-income countries allocating on average a higher proportion of distance learning through internet/phone-based learning (37.1% in upper-middle income countries as compared to 20.6% in low-income-countries)[119]. Given the requirement in the grant scoring criteria, grants and planned interventions aimed to address the needs of vulnerable populations and bore in mind gender/inclusion criteria and aspects pertaining to equity.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat, vis-à-vis program alignment among donors
We recommend continued collaboration across GPE efforts and other in-country efforts to ensure strong alignment between GPE funding and any other initiatives being conducted at the country level. This coordination will ensure complementarity, prevention of duplication and a comprehensive, country-wide approach.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
The evaluators recommend continuing to use the Covid-19 AF review and approval approach (such as the related utilization of matrices) and consider where it can be enhanced further given evidence that it was effective in mapping out the tasks, roles, and responsibilities of the GPE Secretariat staff.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
Assessing lessons learnt in terms of capacity strengthening for preparedness and system agility. Whilst the Covid-19 grants aimed to focus on the immediate crisis, 'building back better' should inform GPE's support in the long term. This can be part of the summative evaluation.

[119] Based on analysis of the coding/costing data provided by the GPE Secretariat.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat vis-à-vis program alignment among donors
This evaluation recommends continued good practice of collaboration across GPE efforts and other in-country efforts to ensure strong alignment between GPE funding and any other initiatives being conducted at the country level. This coordination will ensure complementarity, the prevention of duplication and the adoption of a comprehensive, country-wide approach.

Recommendation: GPE Board and Secretariat in support of the Local Education Groups
This evaluation recommends that the good practice of GPE support and engagement with Local Education Groups in partner countries should be continued and should involve meaningful engagement with all stakeholders throughout the grant cycle (beyond planning). In particular, ensuring engagement of civil society and community members is critical to reach the most vulnerable and also to ensure effective implementation as well as sustainability of interventions.

Evaluation Question 3 (Efficiency and (early) effectiveness): Summary of Findings and Key Recommendations

The extent to which the designed interventions were fully implemented as planned could not be fully assessed at this stage. There is some evidence from this evaluation that in addition to educational considerations, the interventions also addressed cross-sectoral care and well-being and the negative social and health consequences of the crisis on children. Long term system strengthening, and capacity building were not aims of the GPE Covid 19 AF grants but some interventions funded by these grants according to this evaluation appear to have resulted in long-term benefits beyond the immediate crisis.

This evaluation has also found from both primary and secondary data analysis that strategic partnerships and collaborations were enhanced, activated and/or leveraged through the grant process e.g., with private sector, through the LEGs and across sectors. As mentioned before, whilst it is too early to accurately assess efficiency and effectiveness of the grants there are several examples of innovations and good practice that have already emerged across a range of aspects including learning, access, gender equality, quality teaching, innovative partnerships.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat, GAs, and CAs
The evaluators recommend reviewing the GPE definitions pertaining to utilisation, disbursement, and lags in order to evaluate these aspects more accurately and allow portfolio-level analysis of these aspects.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
GPE has always had a strong focus on learning and knowledge sharing. This evaluation found evidence of stakeholder appreciation of this formative evaluation, the Covid-19 effects evaluation and of the forthcoming summative evaluation. Given this, GPE Secretariat should ensure continuing with these evaluation initiatives to further understand what has worked well, perpetuate improvement, and encourage ongoing dialogue and knowledge-sharing between all partners.

Recommendation: For the GPE Board and Secretariat with the wider education community
This evaluation recommends continuing the good practice of encouraging cross-sectoral dialogue further. As the Covid-19 crisis has highlighted, the education sector does not operate in isolation of the wider system and therefore it is all the more critical for different sectors to work together for example health and education ministries collaborating in their response to a health crisis that has had far reaching consequences for the education sector. This evaluation recommends GPE to spearhead better cross-sectoral dialogue and collaboration.

Recommendation: For the GPE Secretariat
Ensure that intentions are actualised using a wider range of evidence through more than results-based-monitoring to ensure that planned interventions are actually reaching those they intend to reach. For example, ensuring that data collected are not only timely and reliable but also robustly evaluated.

Appendices

A1: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Domain	Evaluation sub-domain	Evaluation Questions	Main sources of information – primary data	Main sources of information – secondary data
1. Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the Covid-19 crisis	**1.1 Financing timing and amount**	Was GPE financing available in a timely fashion and in sufficient amount to support countries as they were designing and rolling out their Covid-19 plans (based on needs identified in country Covid plans, and other Covid programmes)? Did all of the GPE partner countries which needed Covid-related funding, receive financial support (notion of coverage)?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	Board document on GPE Covid-19 response, March 2020 Board document on additional financing for Covid-19 response, May 2020 Covid-19 response mitigation and recovery thematic grant allocation GPE Covid-19 Response, Meeting of the Board of Directors, 31 March 2020, Meeting notes. https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-12-GPE-factsheet-covid-19.pdf Country AF grant application and program documents Covid-19 AF tracker July 2020. GPE (2020). Guidelines for Covid-19 Accelerated Funding Window, April 2020. GPE Grant Status Report 2020 Internal Secretariat Operations Covid tracker Internal GPR database of grant timing and timelines - as of summer, then Nov. 2020 Internal analysis on Covid AF grant timeliness (Covid19 grant section of 2020 Grant Performance Report) - updated as of Nov 2020

	1.2 Financing mechanisms	Were the financing guidance, standards, and processes aligned with the need for speed, relevance, and quality? What were the advantages and disadvantages of the GPE support mechanisms used? Where there any unintended consequences of the mechanisms used?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	GPE's Guidelines for Covid-19 accelerated funding window FAQ on COVID-19 accelerated financing Cover note for COVID-19 accelerated funding request AF timelines tracker_July 2020 Spreadsheet GPE Grant Status Report 2020 Internal GPR database of grant timing and timelines - as of summer, then Nov. 2020 Internal analysis on Covid AF grant timeliness (Covid19 grant section of 2020 Grant Performance Report) - updated as of Nov 2020
	1.3 Review and allocation process	Covid AF: What were the advantages and disadvantages (and unintended consequences) of taking a mixed competitive (demand-driven, 'first comes first served') and subsequent needs-based approach to the grant proposals (i.e., additional funding added afterward to the COVID window)? During the grant application phase, how suitable and well-organized were the streamlined application, quality assurance, and governance processes, vis-à-vis the need for quality and speediness? Were the GAs the same for the Covid grants as for ongoing grants in a given country, and how did this help/hinder the GPE processes and focus for Covid-related interventions? Covid ESPDG: What were the pros and cons of having a multi-country approach to the application process?	Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)	GPE's Guidelines for Covid-19 accelerated funding window FAQ on Covid-19 accelerated financing Cover note for Covid-19 accelerated funding request GPE's Guidance on monitoring and evaluation of Covid-19 grants Internal Secretariat lessons learned PowerPoint https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-02-GPE-country-level-guide.pdf and https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-05-GPE-policy-education-sector-program-implementation-grants-EN.pdf Program Standards for Assessment of Covid-19 AF Applications Country Grants Covid-AF Grant Review Matrices GPE (2020). Guidelines for Covid-19 Accelerated Funding Window, April 2020. https://www.globalpartnership.org/funding/applying-for-grants Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report, GPE Secretariat

				GPE Grant Status Report 2020 Internal Secretariat Operations Covid tracker Internal GPR database of grant timing and timelines - as of summer, then Nov. 2020 Internal analysis on Covid AF grant timeliness (Covid19 grant section of 2020 Grant Performance Report) - updated as of Nov 2020 Country AF grant application and program documents
	1.4 Grant M&E	Are the GPE's approach and requirements for Covid-related monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and learning (including periodic surveys, standard indicators etc.) producing reliable and timely information from a learning perspective, on how the grants are supporting Covid-related activities and what those activities are achieving? Are the periodic monitoring surveys useful to the grant agents, country-level partners, and the Secretariat/other global-level stakeholders?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials*	GPE (2020). Guidelines for Covid-19 Accelerated Funding Window, April 2020. GPE's Guidance on monitoring and evaluation of Covid-19 grants Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report, GPE Secretariat Covid-19 Response SitReps Internal Secretariat Operations Covid tracker
2. Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE COVID grants	**2.1 Typology**	What types of mitigation/recovery interventions are supported with GPE grants (breakdown by varied parameters as relevant)? Which subsectors have been more (or less) supported, and has subsector emphasis shifted compared to the pre-Covid era? Do Covid interventions look different in PCFC contexts?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2021-04-GPE-COVID-grant-thematic-coding.pdf Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report. Country AF Grant Application and Program Documents Covid-19 Emergency Funding Application Highlights October 30, 2020, Thematic Focus section Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys Internal Secretariat Operations Covid tracker

	2.2 Interventions design and agility	Are planned GPE-supported mitigation/recovery interventions well suited, based on (i) identified country issues and existing means/capacities, (ii) evidence of best practice (i.e., from previous disruptive events, from EiE programs etc.)? What factors or assessments, if any, determined the choice and design of the interventions selected? As the Covid crisis has unfolded, has there been continued relevance in the interventions; have grants demonstrated agility in changing pandemics circumstances?	Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)	https://www.globalpartnership.org/news/radio-based-program-helps-multilingual-students-continue-learning-despite-school-closures?audience-profile= Covid-19 Country Response Plans GPE (2020). Guidelines for Covid-19 Funding Window, April 2020. Covid-19 Emergency Funding Application Highlights October 30, 2020, Thematic Focus section Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys Internal Secretariat Operations Covid tracker Internal Secretariat R&P gender database
	2.3 Vulnerable populations	Do the mitigation/recovery interventions specifically address the needs of and barriers to education for vulnerable populations (as defined in the context of the grant, e.g., children with disabilities, etc.)? How and how well, based on specific country needs?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	Covid-19 Country Response Plans Covid-AF Grant Review Matrices Covid-19 Response SitReps Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys Internal Secretariat Operations Covid tracker Covid-19 Emergency Funding Application Highlights October 30, 2020, Thematic Focus section Internal Secretariat R&P gender database
	2.4 Gender equality	Do the grants mainstream gender equality in the planned interventions? How, and how well?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	Covid-19 Country Response Plans Covid-AF Grant Review Matrices Covid-19 Response SitReps Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys Internal Secretariat Operations Covid tracker

				Covid-19 Emergency Funding Application Highlights October 30, 2020, Thematic Focus section Internal Secretariat R&P gender database
	2.5 Cross-sectoral care and well-being	In addition to educational considerations, do the mitigation/recovery interventions specifically address the negative social and health consequences of the crisis on children and their families (such as intra-household violence and early marriage, access to regular immunizations, nutrition, psychological care, etc.)? How, and how well? How adequate were the grant requirements vis-à-vis the need for cross-sectoral care?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	Covid-19 Country Response Plans Covid-AF Grant Review Matrices Covid-19 Response SitReps Internal Secretariat Operations COVID tracker Covid-19 Emergency Funding Application Highlights October 30, 2020, Thematic Focus section
	2.6 Capacity strengthening for preparedness and system agility	Do GPE grants include interventions for long-term capacity strengthening at the systems level, to ensure governments have adequate resources to address this crisis and potentially other crises in the future? How, and how well?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	Covid-19 Country Response Plans Covid-AF Grant Review Matrices Covid-19 Response SitReps Covid-19 Emergency Funding Application Highlights October 30, 2020, Thematic Focus section
	2.7 Alignment between COVID plans and AF grants and integration with ESPs/TEPs	To what extent did the countries' early contingency response planning (i.e., through ESPDG etc.) support their subsequent Accelerated Funding programmes? Are the longer-term interventions aligned with national strategies and plans? Do GPE grants support longer-term 'build back better' activities, and how well do those interventions mesh/coordinate with more immediate emergency responses? How well are the COVID response plans integrated with the ESPs/TEPs, and what can they learn from each other?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	Covid-19 Country Response Plans Covid-AF Grant Review Matrices Covid-19 Response SitReps Covid-19 Emergency Funding Application Highlights October 30, 2020, Thematic Focus section Internal Secretariat R&P gender database
3. Efficiency and (early) effectiveness of GPE COVID grants	**3.1 Rollout**	How quickly and soundly were the mitigation/recovery interventions rolled out to the targeted populations? Have interventions suffered any delays or hurdles so far and if so, how well are these being remediated?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	https://www.globalpartnership.org/covid19?location=initial-view#results-stories GPE Grant Status Report 2020 Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report Covid-19 Response SitReps

				Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys Internal Secretariat Operations COVID tracker Internal Secretariat R&P Covid AF grant costing/coding database Internal Secretariat R&P gender database Covid-19-AFF Approval Memo and Checklists Disbursement and Utilisation Reports
	3.2 Effectiveness and beneficiaries	What is the early, relative effectiveness of the mitigation/recovery interventions, if possible, by different target groups (such as girls or children in poor and hard-to-reach areas)? Did the targeted groups benefit from the support as intended? Why or why not?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	GPE Grant Status Report 2020 Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report Covid-19 Response SitReps Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys Internal Secretariat Operations Covid tracker Internal Secretariat R&P Covid AF grant costing/coding database Covid-19-AFF Approval Memo and Checklists Disbursement and Utilisation Reports
	3.3 Coordination	Have country-level coordination mechanisms/GPE partners' architecture been used (or created) to address the crisis and for the design and delivery of the GPE grants (e.g., coordination with health agencies, civil society organizations, emergency clusters, LEGs, private sector etc.)? If yes, how, how quickly, and how successfully; if not, why not and which effect does this have? Have country-level stakeholders felt meaningfully involved/consulted with during the grant design and implementation processes? To what extent were communities involved? To what extent did GPE coordinate response to Covid with ECW at the country level? Were	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	GPE Grant Status Report 2020 Covid-19 Chapter, 2021 GPE Results Report Internal Secretariat Operations Covid tracker Internal Secretariat R&P Covid AF grant costing/coding database

		GPE grants and ECW support aligned in their approach?		
	3.4 Analytical tools	Have diagnostic tools been applied to assess the effects of Covid on education sectors, and required mitigation and recovery efforts? How, how well, and with what findings? Have grants instituted processes to measure the relevance and effectiveness of the mitigation/recovery interventions (such as, for example, beneficiary assessments). If yes, how is the information being used?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives*	Covid-19 Response SitReps Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys Internal Secretariat Operations Covid tracker Internal Secretariat R&P Covid AF grant costing/coding database
	3.5 Innovations and scaling up	Which innovative practices are being piloted? What constitutes 'innovation' in those contexts? How well, and how cost-efficiently, are they working so far?	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys
	3.6 Partnerships	Are partnerships or strategic collaborations (sectoral/cross-sectoral, public/private) activated or leveraged through the grants? If yes, are they improving the COVID response? Collaborations may be at: country, regional, or global levels. Collaborators may include ministries other than ministry of education, academic institutions, civil society, private sector or foundations, WHO, Red Cross, etc.	*Interviews with global and country level stakeholders, GPE Secretariat team members and other global stakeholders, grant agent representatives, coordinating agency representatives, Ministries of Education officials, LEG representatives (CSO/teacher associations)*	Covid-19 AF Response Quarterly/Six-Monthly Implementation Surveys

A2: Data collection tools / interview templates/consent form

These interview templates are not intended as questionnaires. It will not be possible to cover all issues in all categories with all individuals or groups. The evaluation team members will use their judgment and focus on areas which are likely to add most to the team's existing knowledge, while allowing interviewees and groups to highlight the issues that are most important to them.
The evaluators will formulate questions in a (non-technical) way that respondents can easily relate to, while generating evidence that is relevant to the evaluation questions that the evaluators have in mind.

Approach to interviews

- Interviews will be a major source of information for this evaluation. These will be a means to extract evidence, as well as to triangulate evidence drawn from other interviews and the document review and will form part of the consultative process.
- All interviews will comply with the team's commitment to the respective evaluation ethics (the work of the evaluation team will be guided by: OECD DAC Evaluation Quality Standards for Development Evaluation;[120] UNEG Norms, Standards, Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System;[121] the World Bank's principles and standards for evaluating global and regional partnership programs;[122] ALNAP's Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide;[123] the Sphere Handbook and Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation;[124] and Guidance on Ethical Research Involving Children.[125])
- Interviews will be conducted in confidence and usually on a one-to-one or one-to-two basis (to enable notetaking). Reports will not quote informants by name and will not include direct quotes where it could risk revealing the participant's identity or attribution without prior consent. A translator will be present for interviews conducted in French. To respect interviewee confidentiality, the interview notes will be accessible only to team members. The compendium of interview notes will facilitate analysis across all interviews and will enable searches on key thematic terms, initiatives and so on. This will maximize the analytical potential of interviews and the possibilities for triangulation.
- Some interviews may be conducted with more than one individual from the same category of key stakeholders. All such focus group discussions will reflect the evaluation team's commitment to appropriate evaluation ethics (as discussed above).

[120] http://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/qualitystandards.pdf
[121] http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/21 and http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/22 , http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/102 and http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/100
[122] http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGLOREGPARPROG/Resources/sourcebook.pdf
[123] http://www.alnap.org/resource/23592.aspx
[124] http://www.sphereproject.org/silo/files/sphere-for-monitoring-and-evaluation.pdf
[125] http://childethics.com/

Grant Agent, Coordinating Agency representative & GPE Secretariat stakeholders

Introduction

As we have mentioned in our previous communications, this formative evaluation aims to assess the relevance, efficiency, and (early signs of) effectiveness of GPE's support to countries' COVID-19 response and provide recommendations for improvement. This information will help strengthen how the GPE approaches, facilitates, and ensures the appropriateness of its support to emergency situations such as this pandemic, and learn from this, should crises such as the current one take place in the future.

As part of this evaluation, we are inviting key stakeholders such as yourself, to take part in interviews to capture your experiences, attitudes and opinions regarding GPE's support for the Covid-19 response. As you know, you have been invited to take part in an interview as we believe that you have valuable knowledge which would be very useful for our study.

Thank you for signing the consent form to be involved in this interview. We would like to remind you that you can withdraw from this interview at any time. We would also like to reiterate that all your answers will be kept confidential and that any of your responses may be attributed to your interviewee category (e.g., Grant Agent representative) but will not allow for you to be personally identified.

Would you be happy for this interview to be recorded, purely for notes-taking purposes?

In this interview we will be discussing three key areas:

- The suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis
- Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE Covid-19 grants
- The efficiency and (early) effectiveness of the GPE Covid-19 grants

Please could you briefly introduce yourself: what are your current roles and responsibilities? How long have you worked in the education sector and your current position?
Have you had much involvement in the GPE's funding for Covid-19 response? (based on the answer to this question, interviewers will ask some or all of the questions in the section below).

Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms in relation to the COVID-19 Accelerated Funding
In the first instance, I would like to ask you whether you felt that the GPE Covid-19 Accelerated Funding was available in a timely fashion and of sufficient amount in [country]? In terms of the financing mechanisms, did you feel that the guidance, standards, and processes were well-aligned with the need for speed, relevance, and quality? (advantages, disadvantages, unintended consequences)?

Only to be asked of GPE colleagues: What were the advantages and disadvantages of taking a mixed competitive (demand-driven) and needs-based approach to the grant proposals?

Only to be asked of GPE colleagues: in your opinion, how suitable and well organised were the quality assurance and governance processes relating to the funding process?

I would now like to get your inputs on the grant Monitoring & Evaluation processes:

Are the GPE's approach and requirements for Covid-related monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and learning (including periodic surveys, standard indicators etc.) producing reliable and timely information from a learning perspective, on how the grants are supporting Covid-related activities and what those activities are achieving?

Do you feel that the periodic monitoring surveys are useful to stakeholders (e.g., to the grant agents, country-level partners, the Secretariat/other global-level stakeholders etc.?)

Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE COVID grants

I would now like to ask you about the relevance of the interventions taken with GPE COVID-19 AF grants:

In your opinion, are planned GPE-supported mitigation/recovery interventions well suited, based on (i) identified [country] issues and existing means/capacities, (ii) evidence of best practice (i.e., from previous disruptive events, from EiE programs etc.)? For example, addressing the needs of specific vulnerable populations and/or mainstreaming gender equality.

What factors or assessments, if any, determined the choice and design of the interventions selected?

As the COVID crisis has unfolded, has there been continued relevance in the interventions; have grants demonstrated agility in changing pandemics circumstances?

Capacity strengthening for preparedness and system agility

In your opinion, do GPE grants include interventions for long-term capacity strengthening at the systems level in [country name], ensure governments have adequate resources to address this crisis and potentially other crises in the future? And if so, how well?

I would now like to ask your opinion on the alignment between Covid plans, the AF grants and integration with national strategies and plans (ESPs). Do you think all these elements are well-aligned and can learn from each other?

In terms of 'building back better', what do you think the key lessons are from this emergency response (Covid-19 AF grant) that can help inform GPE support in the longer term?

Efficiency and (early) effectiveness of GPE Covid grants

Finally, I would like to ask you about the efficiency and any (early) signs of effectiveness of the GPE COVID-19 AF grants.

Were mitigation and recovery strategies rolled out quickly and have the interventions suffered any delays or hurdles so far?

Do you have any view on the early, relative effectiveness of the mitigation/recovery interventions, if possible, by different target groups (such as girls or children in poor and hard-to-reach areas)?

Next, I would like to ask your opinions on coordination mechanisms and engagement of stakeholders.

Do you feel the country-level coordination mechanisms have been effective and do you think that all country-level stakeholders (including yourself) have been meaningfully engaged and consulted during the grant design and implementation process? To what extent were communities involved?

To what extent did GPE coordinate response to Covid with Education Cannot Wait (ECW) at the country level? Were GPE grants and ECW support aligned in their approach?

In your opinion, have partnerships or strategic collaborations (sectoral/cross-sectoral, public/private) been activated or leveraged through the grants? E.g., collaborations may be at: country, regional, or global levels. Collaborators may include ministries other than ministry of education, academic institutions, civil society, private sector or foundations, WHO, Red Cross, etc.

Are you aware of any innovative practices that are being piloted?

Only ask from GPE Country Leads: Have diagnostic tools been applied to assess the effects of COVID on education sectors, and required mitigation and recovery efforts?

Ministry of Education representatives

Introduction

As we have mentioned in our previous communications, this formative evaluation aims to assess the relevance, efficiency, and (early signs of) effectiveness of GPE's support to countries' Covid-19 response and provide recommendations for improvement. This information will help strengthen how the GPE approaches, facilitates, and ensures the appropriateness of its support to emergency situations such as this pandemic, and learn from this, should crises such as the current one take place in the future.

As part of this evaluation, we are inviting key stakeholders such as yourself, to take part in interviews to capture your experiences, attitudes and opinions regarding GPE's support for the Covid-19 response. As you know, you have been invited to take part in an interview as we believe that you have valuable knowledge which would be very useful for our study.

Thank you for signing the consent form to be involved in this interview. We would like to remind you that you can withdraw from this interview at any time. We would also like to reiterate that all your answers will be kept confidential and that any of your responses may be attributed to your interviewee category (e.g., Grant Agent representative) but will not allow for you to be personally identified.

Would you be happy for this interview to be recorded, purely for notes-taking purposes?

In this interview we will be discussing three key areas:

- The suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the Covid-19 crisis
- Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE Covid grants
- The efficiency and (early) effectiveness of the GPE Covid grants

Please could you briefly introduce yourself: what are your current roles and responsibilities? How long have you worked in the education sector and your current position?

Have you had much involvement in the GPE's funding for Covid-19 response? (based on the answer to this question, interviewers will ask some or all of the questions in the section below).

Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms
In the first instance, I would like to ask you whether you felt that the GPE Covid-19 Accelerated Funding was available in a timely fashion and of sufficient amount in [country]? In terms of the financing mechanisms/processes, did you feel that the guidance, standards, and processes were well-aligned with the need for speed, relevance, and quality? (advantages, disadvantages, unintended consequences)?

In particular, we would be interested in your views on the time it took from submission to approval, and how this compares with other grants/financing that you may have received.

I would now like to get your inputs on the grant Monitoring & Evaluation processes:

As part of the GPE's requirements for Covid-related monitoring, the [country] is meant to produce data (which feeds into periodic surveys, standard indicators etc.) in a reliable and timely manner. Do you find these requirements challenging and what are some of the challenges you have faced? Do you feel that the data required are relevant for your own decision-making processes or for other relevant stakeholders within the country?

Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE COVID grants

I would now like to ask you about the relevance of the interventions taken with GPE Covid-19 AF grants:

In your opinion, are planned GPE-supported mitigation/recovery interventions well suited, based on (i) identified [country] issues and existing means/capacities, (ii) evidence of best practice (i.e., from previous disruptive events, from EiE programs etc.)? For example, addressing the needs of specific vulnerable populations and/or mainstreaming gender equality.

What factors or assessments, if any, determined the choice and design of the interventions selected?

As the COVID crisis has unfolded, has there been continued relevance in the interventions; have grants demonstrated agility in changing pandemics circumstances?

Cross-sectoral care and well-being

In addition to educational considerations, do the mitigation/recovery interventions specifically address the negative social and health consequences of the crisis on children and their families (such as intra-household violence and early marriage, access to regular immunizations, nutrition, psychological care, etc.)? If so, how well?

In your opinion, how adequate were the grant requirements in terms of the need for cross-sectoral care?

Capacity strengthening for preparedness and system agility

In your opinion, do GPE grants include interventions for long-term capacity strengthening at the systems level in [country name], ensure governments have adequate resources to address this crisis and potentially other crises in the future? And if so, how well?

I would now like to ask your opinion on the alignment between Covid plans, the AF grants and integration with national strategies and plans. Do you think all these elements are well-aligned and can learn from each other?

In terms of 'building back better', what do you think the key lessons are from this emergency response (Covid-19 AF grant) that can help inform GPE support in the longer term?

Efficiency and (early) effectiveness of GPE COVID grants

Finally, I would like to ask you about the efficiency and any (early) signs of effectiveness of the GPE Covid-19 AF grants.

Were mitigation and recovery strategies rolled out quickly and have the interventions suffered any delays or hurdles so far?

Do you have any view on the early, relative effectiveness of the mitigation/recovery interventions, if possible, by different target groups (such as girls or children in poor and hard-to-reach areas)?

Next, I would like to ask your opinions on coordination mechanisms and engagement of stakeholders.

Do you feel the country-level coordination mechanisms have been effective and do you think that all country-level stakeholders (including yourself) have been meaningfully engaged and consulted during the grant design and implementation process? To what extent were communities involved?

To what extent did GPE coordinate response to Covid with Education Cannot Wait (ECW) at the country level? Were GPE grants and ECW support aligned in their approach?

In your opinion, have partnerships or strategic collaborations (sectoral/cross-sectoral, public/private) been activated or leveraged through the grants? E.g., collaborations may be at: country, regional, or global levels. Collaborators may include ministries other than ministry of education, academic institutions, civil society, private sector, or foundations, WHO, Red Cross, etc.

Are you aware of any innovative practices that are being piloted?

Teacher and CSO representatives

Introduction

As we have mentioned in our previous communications, this formative evaluation aims to assess the relevance, efficiency, and (early signs of) effectiveness of GPE's support to countries' Covid-19 response and provide recommendations for improvement. This information will help strengthen how the GPE approaches, facilitates, and ensures the appropriateness of its support to emergency situations such as this pandemic, and learn from this, should crises such as the current one take place in the future.

As part of this evaluation, we are inviting key stakeholders such as yourself, to take part in interviews to capture your experiences, attitudes and opinions regarding GPE's support for the Covid-19 response. As you know, you have been invited to take part in an interview as we believe that you have valuable knowledge which would be very useful for our study.

Thank you for signing the consent form to be involved in this interview. We would like to remind you that you can withdraw from this interview at any time. We would also like to reiterate that all your answers will be kept confidential and that any of your responses may be attributed to your interviewee category (e.g., Grant Agent representative) but will not allow for you to be personally identified.

Would you be happy for this interview to be recorded, purely for notes-taking purposes?

In this interview we will be discussing two key areas:

- Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE Covid grants and
- The efficiency and (early) effectiveness of the GPE Covid grants

Please could you briefly introduce yourself: what are your current roles and responsibilities? How long have you worked in the education sector and your current position?

Have you had much involvement in the GPE's funding for Covid-19 response? (based on the answer to this question, interviewers will ask some or all of the questions in the section below).

Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE Covid grants
Interventions design and agility Are you aware of the GPE-supported mitigation/recovery interventions in your country? For example, we are aware of the fact that in country X the following interventions were supported [adapt according to country]. Have you witnessed any of these? In your opinion, are planned GPE-supported mitigation/recovery interventions well suited, based on (i) identified [country] issues and existing means/capacities, (ii) evidence of best practice (i.e., from previous disruptive events, from EiE programs etc.)? For example, addressing the needs of specific vulnerable populations and/or mainstreaming gender equality (e.g., meeting the needs of girls or persons with disabilities)?

What factors or assessments, if any, determined the choice and design of the interventions selected?

As the Covid crisis has unfolded, has there been continued relevance in the interventions; have grants demonstrated agility in changing pandemics circumstances?

Cross-sectoral care and well-being

In addition to educational considerations, do the mitigation/recovery interventions specifically address the negative social and health consequences of the crisis on children and their families (such as intra-household violence and early marriage, access to regular immunizations, nutrition, psychological care, etc.)? If so, how well?

In your opinion, how adequate were the grant requirements in terms of the need for cross-sectoral care?

Capacity strengthening for preparedness and system agility

In your opinion, do GPE grants include interventions for long-term capacity strengthening at the systems level in [country name], ensure governments have adequate resources to address this crisis and potentially other crises in the future? And if so, how well?

In terms of 'building back better', what do you think the key lessons are from this emergency response (Covid-19 AF grant) that can help inform GPE support in the longer term?

Efficiency and (early) effectiveness of GPE COVID grants

Finally, I would like to ask you about the efficiency and any (early) signs of effectiveness of the GPE Covid-19 AF grants.

In your opinion, were mitigation and recovery strategies rolled out quickly and have the interventions suffered any delays or hurdles so far?

Do you have any view on the early, relative effectiveness of the mitigation/recovery interventions, if possible, by different target groups (such as girls or children in poor and hard-to-reach areas)?

Next, I would like to ask your opinions on coordination mechanisms and engagement of stakeholders.

Do you feel the country-level coordination mechanisms have been effective and do you think that all country-level stakeholders (including yourself) have been meaningfully engaged and consulted by the government in their response to Covid-19? To what extent were communities involved?

To what extent did GPE coordinate response to Covid with Education Cannot Wait (ECW) at the country level? Were GPE grants and ECW support aligned in their approach?

In your opinion, have partnerships or strategic collaborations (sectoral/cross-sectoral, public/private) been activated or leveraged through the Covid-19 period? E.g., collaborations may be at: country, regional, or global levels. Collaborators may include ministries other than ministry of education, academic institutions, civil society, private sector, or foundations, WHO, Red Cross, etc.

Are you aware of any innovative practices that are being piloted?

Stakeholder Consent Form and Ethics & Confidentiality Statements

To be read and signed by the respondents before the interview. The interviewer will also orally confirm that the interviewee has read and understood the contents of this statement and allow the interviewee to ask any questions before commencing the interview.

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted education for millions of children globally leading to an emergency that required action from the international community. GPE swiftly stepped up to support partner countries in their response to mitigating the effects of the pandemic on education systems and on children's' learning and access to educational services. Sixty-six countries have received GPE Accelerated Grants to date, which will run until the end of around 2021. GPE's partnership approach and financing, combined, seek to encourage harmonized responses from country-level actors, under the leadership of the country, to support education systems mitigate the negative effects of and recover from the pandemic. The pandemic also profoundly affected ongoing GPE ESPIG grants that were in activity when the crisis hit. In many cases, implementation suffered delays and changing circumstances which required to modify program design, planned interventions, and scope. GPE has commissioned two pieces of work to facilitate evidence-based decision-making and contribute to learning:

- **A formative evaluation of Covid-19 AF grants** (Afghanistan, DRC, Ghana, Lesotho, OECS, Senegal) aims to assess the relevance, efficiency, and (early signs of) effectiveness of GPE's support to countries' Covid-19 response and provide recommendations for improvement. This formative evaluation will examine GPE's support to partner countries' Covid-19 related response, up until the time of this evaluation.
- **A review of ESPIGs during Covid-19** (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, DRC, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone) will examine the effects of the Covid-19 crisis on ongoing GPE grants, including how grant stakeholders addressed this greatly disruptive event, and how the programs learned from it in terms of continued relevance and resilience.

Invitation and purpose
As part of these evaluation and learning activities, we are inviting key stakeholders to take part in interviews to capture their experiences, attitudes and opinions regarding GPE's support for the Covid-19 response. You have been invited to take part in an interview as we believe that you have valuable knowledge which would be very useful for our study. This information will help strengthen how GPE (as a global and country-level partnership and a fund with its own set of mechanisms) approaches, facilitates and ensures the appropriateness of its support to emergency situations such as this pandemic, and learn from this, should crises such as the current one take place in the future.

Voluntary participation
It is entirely your decision whether you would like to take part or not and there are no consequences for not taking part in the interviews. If you agree to take part, we will formally ask you for your consent and will then proceed with the interview. If you do choose to take part, our interview will take approximately 1 hour – during this time you are free to answer as many or as few answers as you like, and you are free to stop the interview at any time. Any

information you tell us will be kept confidential, unless you tell us something that may harm you or others, in which case we may have to inform a person of authority. The information may be published at a later stage, however you name will not appear anywhere, and we will make sure that no one will be able to identify you from your answers. We may, however, use answers you provide as direct quotations; however, they will not be attributed to your name. Responses may be allocated to categories of respondents (e.g., 'teacher representative' etc.), however this will be done in a manner to ensure that the specific individual cannot be identified. If you would rather your categorisation or direct quotations not be used, please inform the interviewer in advance of the interview.

All interviews will be conducted remotely and may be recorded to ensure that responses are accurately captured. The recordings will only be accessed by the research team. If you wish your interview not to be recorded, please let a member of the research team know before starting the interview.

Ethics statement
The members of the research team agree to abide by and uphold internationally recognized ethical practices and codes of conduct for evaluations, especially when they take place in humanitarian and conflict situations, and with affected and vulnerable populations.

For this evaluation the team has been guided by OECD DAC Evaluation Quality Standards for Development Evaluation; UNEG Norms, Standards, Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System; the World Bank's principles and standards for evaluating global and regional partnership programs; ALNAP's Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide; the Sphere Handbook and Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation; and Guidance on Ethical Research Involving Children. If respondents require further information on these guidelines, please contact Dr, Shenila Rawal (shenilarawal@aol.com), Dr. Monazza Aslam (monazza.aslam@wolfson.oxon.org) and Dr. Kerrie Proulx (proulx@lunenfeld.ca).

Confidentiality and Data Protection Statement
All data collected and processed for this contract will be collected, stored, and processed in line with regulations set out in the UK Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) (GDPR) and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. All research conducted by the research team is fully compliant with the ESOMAR International Code of Conduct on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics126. At the end of the contract, all hardcopy and electronic files will be archived in a secure site for a time-limited period proportional to the sensitivity of the data and likelihood of needing to un-anonymise the data at a later date. After this time, any identifying data will be securely deleted, and only fully anonymised data retained.

Where necessary, translators may be involved in taking notes during the interview. The research team will clearly introduce them and ensure respondents are aware of this.

126 ESOMAR (formerly the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research) standards are available here:https://www.esomar.org/uploads/pdf/professional- standards/ICCESOMAR_Code_English_.pdf

Ensuring confidentiality of the data collected and anonymity of the research participant(s) is of paramount importance. The research team will undertake the following measures: (1) interviewers will not share any information collected through the study with anyone outside of the research team; (2) interviews will be done in a private location where possible.

If you need any further information before proceeding with this interview or if you wish to withdraw consent, please feel free to get in touch with the members of the research team via email Dr, Shenila Rawal (shenilarawal@aol.com), Dr. Monazza Aslam (monazza.aslam@wolfson.oxon.org) and Dr. Kerrie Proulx (proulx@lunenfeld.ca).

Respondent's Statement
We are asking the respondents to read the following statements before giving consent:

I understand the purpose of this interview. I understand that I have the chance to ask questions prior to commencing the interview or during it. I know that participating in the interview is my choice. I am aware that I can change my mind during the course of the interview. I know that my answers will be kept confidential and am willing to participate in the interview.

DOES THE RESPONDENT AGREE TO THIS STATEMENT?

- ☐ YES, AGREES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERVIEW
- ☐ NO, DOES NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERVIEW

Name of Participant Giving Consent:

Signature of the Participant Giving Consent:

Date:

A3: Ethics, confidentiality, and quality control

Ethical guidelines for the evaluation

This section summarizes the ethical framework and guidelines that have applied to the design, implementation and reporting of all research and evaluation activities conducted as part of this independent evaluation. These ethical guidelines and quality assurance frameworks apply to all evaluators working on this activity. The ethics framework and data protection and quality assurance framework adhere to internationally recognized standards.

The members of the evaluation team agreed to abide by and uphold internationally recognized ethical practices and codes of conduct for evaluations, especially when they took place in humanitarian and conflict situations, and with affected and vulnerable populations. For this evaluation the team has been guided by: OECD DAC Evaluation Quality Standards for Development Evaluation; UNEG Norms, Standards, Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System; the World Bank's principles and standards for evaluating global and regional partnership programs; ALNAP's Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide; the Sphere Handbook and Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation; and Guidance on Ethical Research Involving Children. Annex A3 presents the stakeholder consent form and ethics and confidentiality statements for this evaluation.

Confidentiality

The evaluation team have ensured that the anonymity of all stakeholders is preserved when reporting the findings of this evaluation. Given the small sample of countries from which primary data is being collected and the limited categories of informants who are being approached, maintaining this confidentiality and anonymity is critical. This is particularly important given that the evaluation aims to disaggregate the analysis and triangulate viewpoints by interviewee category. All interviewees have been asked for permission for their stakeholder category to be identified within the report (without mentioning specific names). These categorizations are particularly important to look for commonalities in responses within countries but also to identify similarities or differences across countries for particular types of stakeholders. Given the evaluation team's direct involvement in conducting the GPE Country Level Evaluations, this extensive experience in balancing the need for anonymity with a need for depth of analysis and nuanced findings has been beneficial to this evaluation.

Quality control

The evaluation team has used the following quality assurance processes:

- **Personnel -** Any additional personnel employed (e.g. French translator) have been adequately vetted for suitability.
- **Data collection, treatment, and analysis -**
    - The evaluation framework outlined in the report clearly sets out the purpose of all data to be collected and analyzed. This includes how the data has been collected and by whom.
    - The team has ensured robust quality control of fieldwork and data collecting, input and cleaning.

- A systematic approach to data analysis, triangulation and synthesis enables the team to identify, explore and address any bias, inaccuracies, and contradictions in the data transparently and systematically.
- All data collected and processed for this contract has been collected, stored, and processed in line with regulations set out in the UK Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) (GDPR). All research conducted by the evaluation team is fully compliant with the ESOMAR International Code of Conduct on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics[127]. At the end of the contract, all hardcopy and electronic files will be archived in a secure site for a time-limited period proportional to the sensitivity of the data and likelihood of needing to un-anonymize the data at a later date. After this time, any identifying data will be securely deleted, and only fully anonymized data retained.

- **Deliverables** – internal quality assurance processes have been implemented for all deliverables including the final reports as well as PowerPoints and any other forms of dissemination materials. These include ensuring the accuracy of all information presented by triangulating findings and also reaching out to key informants as well as GPE Secretariat colleagues to verify the contents of these outputs. The evaluators have also collaborated with the evaluation lead for the Effects review to ensure synergies across the two evaluation activities. Within this evaluation, the evaluation team has also ensured that the country reviews are consistent across each of the contexts (e.g. through using a predetermined template to present findings, to ensure consistency of categories of key informants interviewed etc.). Roles and Responsibilities have been previously agreed with GPE Secretariat colleagues and have been documented in the Inception Report (January 2021).

127 ESOMAR (formerly the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research) standards are available here:https://www.esomar.org/uploads/pdf/professional- standards/ICCESOMAR_Code_English_.pdf

Annex A4: Country Reviews

Country Review: Afghanistan

Education in Afghanistan

The following are some illustrative statistics based on data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)[128]:

Children of school age: A total of 13.3 million children and adolescents from pre-primary through to upper secondary school age.
Out-of-school children: In 2018, 3.7 million children are out of school, 60% of them are girls[129].
Gross enrolment ratio: In 2018 the primary school gross enrolment ratio was 83% for girls and 124% for boys; Secondary gross enrolment ratio was 40% for girls and 70% for boys.
Literacy: In 2018 the literacy rate for 15–24-year-olds was 74% for boys and 56% for girls.
Government spending on education: In 2017, Afghanistan spent 15.7% of total government expenditure on education.

Afghanistan's education system and in particular the education of girls in rural and remote areas has been devastated by more than three decades of sustained conflict. Regional and national insecurity, persistent and deep-rooted socio-cultural factors that undermine girls' education and the lack of female teachers in rural schools have contributed significantly to this deterioration of the education system[130]. The country has, however, made progress with regards to access and girls' education since 2001 (according to the National Education Plan (NESP) III of 2017-2021). Since 2001, the number of children enrolled in General Education (grades 1-12) has risen more than nine-fold from 0.9 million (almost none of them girls) to 9.2 million (with 39% girls). The number of schools has also increased from 3,400 to 16,400. However, despite this progress, it is understood that significantly more needs to be done to improve access and efficiency and equity in education[131]. Many provinces in the country continue to have very low female student enrolment (with some provinces reporting female enrolment as low as 14%) and the lack of female teachers continues to remain a major challenge in the country (with NESP III reporting an average of 33% nationwide, ranging from 74% in some provinces to as low as 1.8%)[132]. A major challenge within the education system is with regards to efficiency with low attendance levels and high dropouts amongst enrolled students with wide disparities among provinces. Of the 42% of children aged 5-14 attending school, more than half of them (51%) are also involved in economic or household activities[133].

[128] uis.unesco.org/en/country/af, as of 2018 unless otherwise specified.
[129] UNICEF (2018), Global Initiative on Out of School Children, Afghanistan Country Study, Ministry of Education Afghanistan and UNICEF, Samuel Hall and USAID, Kabul 2018.
[130] Rose et al. (forthcoming, 2021).
[131] https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/afghanistan
[132] Ibid
[133] Ibid

GPE in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been a GPE partner country since 2011 with FCDO and UNESCO as the Coordinating Agencies. Since joining GPE in 2011, the country has received several grants that have targeted 13 of the most high-need provinces and districts where education challenges are most critical.

Most recently, Afghanistan has received the following GPE grants:

- USD 100 million[134] (ESPIG: World Bank is the Grant Agent): The Education Quality Reform in Afghanistan program (EQRA) aims to improve access and learning in both primary and secondary education with a particular focus on girls and within selected, lagging, provinces in the country. An additional USD 25 million additional financing was also approved in 2021[135].
- USD 20 million[136] (ESPIG Accelerated Funding: UNICEF is the Grant Agent): focuses on the expansion of community-based education (CBE) for children aged 7-9 years in grade 1 and alternative learning centres (ALCs) for children aged 10-14 years in grade 1 in emergency affected areas that house a large number of out-of-school children[137].
- USD 70,000 GPE grant given to the UNICEF office in Afghanistan to support the development of the pandemic response plan (March 2020).
- USD 11 million[138] (Covid-19 AF grant: UNICEF is the Grant Agent): discussed below.

In the country, GPE is aiming to focus on supporting the government in tackling educational inequality through reaching children in remote areas via alternative education centres and community-based education. In particular, there is a focus on enrolling girls into schools partly though the training of female teachers. The ESPIG aimed to support capacity development at the Ministry of Education and in particular had a focus on the construction of schools[139].

Key Findings

Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis

GPE Covid-19 AF funding was the **major donor funding available in the immediate time frame** when the pandemic struck in Afghanistan. However, the funding was slightly delayed according to stakeholders due to non-GPE related factors (such as internal government delays) which resulted in the country receiving USD 11 million as compared to the USD 15 million for which it applied. Afghanistan was amongst the early applicants for the AF grant (application date 11th May 2020) and funding was approved on 20th June 2020 (see the figure in the main text illustrating the application and approval dates of the Covid-19 AF grant applications of the six sampled countries). The pressure of the first-come-first-served process was viewed by some stakeholders as a positive factor that catalyzed action. Stakeholders also

[134] 2019-2024
[135] Information provided by GPE Secretariat colleagues.
[136] https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/afghanistan
[137] https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/afghanistan
[138] July 2020 – June 2021
[139] Information provided by GPE Secretariat colleagues.

noted that given the immense challenges of this context, amount of the funding, whilst beneficial, could never be sufficient. Stakeholders indicated that due to GPE, within the country there was a healthy relationship between the Ministry of Education, the Local Education Group, and the Grant Agent and whilst the first-come-first served approach put pressure on the country, according to one stakeholder it was a positive influence in that it pushed these partners further to work with each other more closely and gave a sense of ownership to all partners. This was identified as one of the first times when implementing partners also had a say in the proposal. It was noted that due to the high number of participants in the LEG (75-80), each specializing on a different area of focus (disability, gender), incorporating all of their feedback was challenging, however, encouraged high levels of engagement. The leadership in the government were also noted to be highly engaged and things moved as quickly as possible given the circumstances.

Country stakeholders recognised the **flexibility of the Covid-19 AF grant funding process as a significant improvement** to previous heavily-process oriented GPE protocols. In this instance, the use of standard templates, the flexibility allowed in using existing budget templates, and the support given by GPE Secretariat during the application process were identified as additional factors that allowed the application process to be smoother, instilled a sense of ownership within the government and the Local Education Group, and resulted in a successful submission.

In relation to grant monitoring and evaluation indicators, stakeholders were of the opinion that whilst the **indicators required were clearly defined, the quantity of indicators on which reporting must be delivered created challenges** particularly given that only some of them were aligned to what was already being collected in Afghanistan's challenging context. Reporting frequency was not considered burdensome.

Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE COVID-19 AF grants

Covid-19 AF Grant Overview

GPE Covid-19 grant amount: US$11 million
Grant Agent: UNICEF
Coordinating Agency: FCDO and UNESCO
Project duration: July 2020-June 2021
Project outcome: School-aged girls and boys, especially the most vulnerable, continue to access relevant education opportunities and realize sustained learning outcomes throughout lockdown and recovery periods of Covid-19.
Focus population: Direct beneficiaries – 625000 (60% girls) primary students affected by school closures and 1500 (60% female) teachers; indirect beneficiaries – 6250 (30% female) school and shuras members.

Source: UNICEF Funding proposal to GPE, Access to Education for Covid-19 Emergency Affected Children in Afghanistan, UNICEF Afghanistan country office, July 2020.

In March 2020, a GPE grant of 70,000 USD was provided to UNICEF Afghanistan to assist in the development of a comprehensive Covid-19 response plan to assist mitigating the impact

of Covid-19 on the education system in the country. An additional 11 million USD (Covid-19 AF) was also approved with the following objectives:

Objective 1: Improving and sustaining safe school environments: access to clean water, hygiene kits, disinfectant and training needed to maintain safe school environments.
Objective 2: Sustaining inclusive and effective child-friendly learning environments: recruit volunteer teachers and encourage return of those previously in place, with specific focus on female teachers; provide training emphasizing strategies for continuous assessment of children's basic literacy/numeracy skills, and provide remedial support; and promote Shura, principal and teacher outreach to communities to mobilize return to school.
Objective 3: Enabling children's re-engagement with learning: starting as schools begin reopening to provide teachers with appropriate training to support children to study at the right level and avoid dropouts.

This Covid-19 Accelerated Funding aimed to support the following interventions:

- WASH and hygiene supplies to schools, including WASH and hygiene training to community members, school staff and students.
- The recruitment and deployment of volunteer teachers (particularly female teachers).
- Developing and implementing guidelines for student assessments and examinations.
- Distribution of student learning kits, teacher pedagogical support kits and classroom learning supplies.
- Supporting accelerated and remedial make up classes for students who have fallen below than grade level; and
- Ensuring that public schools are tracked, assessed and ready for reopening with the resources and information they need to keep themselves and teachers safe.

The grant was allocated to mitigation and recovery across the themes of equity, learning and systems according to the following allocations:

Country	Equity Mitigation	Learning Mitigation	System Mitigation	Equity Recovery	Learning Recovery	System Recovery	Equity Total	Learning Total	System Total
Afghanistan	2,162,719 (44%)	1,740,964 (63%)	285,486 (15%)	2,702,663 (56%)	1,034,280 (37%)	1,639,024 (85%)	4,865,382 (51%)	2,775,244 (29%)	1,924,510 (20%)

Source: Internal Secretariat R&P COVID AF grant costing/coding database

Overall, stakeholders felt that the types of interventions planned with the Covid-19 AF grant were relevant, however, Afghanistan is a very complex context and faces far ranging local challenges with '*each province [having] a different context and different barriers*'. Planning, including Covid-19 AF grant planning, tends to be done at the national level and, therefore, may not meet local needs. Stakeholders have suggested that all educational planning (supported through government or international initiatives) **should follow a more disaggregated approach** (i.e. at the local level) in order to effectively support those most in need. Similarly, it was noted by stakeholders that the provision of data at a subnational level will provide for more relevant planning that meets contextual needs within the country.

Furthermore, it was noted that the reach of the interventions are also potentially limited particularly due to the fact that UNICEF activities using the Covid-19 AF grant are focused on 10 out of the 24 most in need provinces in the country (out of a total of 34 provinces). In

particular, whilst some marginalized groups were targeted to be beneficiaries of the Covid-19 AF grants (females, residents of high-risk provinces etc.), the needs of certain marginalized groups appear not to have been met at this stage according to key informants (e.g. children with disabilities) despite being superficially mentioned in the grant application document[140]. According to one stakeholder, many donor projects in Afghanistan have failed because of a lack of engagement with local stakeholders and/or a lack of recognition of the needs of different groups.

The Covid-19 AFF Approval Memo and checklist provides evidence that the proposed activities are relevant given the needs of the country and that the activities are aligned with the response plan. For example, activities focus on the recruitment, deployment and training of volunteer teachers given that teacher shortages are expected and that extra teacher numbers would be needed for additional classes, distancing measures as well as longer hours to cover missed curriculum. Similarly, activities are aimed to meet the needs of school-aged children, particularly the most vulnerable in high-risk areas. Analysis of coding/costing data also indicates that the budget has been allocated with clear indications of how the activities will be funded across mitigation and recovery efforts as well as across learning, equity, and system thematic areas.

The grants received in Afghanistan (be they ESPIG, Covid-19 AF, ECW etc.) have been well aligned according to interviewees. For example, the Covid-19 AF grant funding was allocated to provinces not covered by ECW to avoid duplication. These **synergies across grants have been attributed to UNICEF being the grant agent** across several grants in the country.

Overall, stakeholders have suggested that **funding in the country needs to be more focused on long term systemic change** rather than short term projects, that have historically been the norm, in order to make a real difference in Afghanistan. However, it is recognized that this was not the purpose of the Covid-19 Accelerated Funding.

Efficiency and early (if any) signs of effectiveness of the GPE COVID-19 grant

According to the Quarterly Surveys for the period 12/19/2020 – 3/18/2021, of the USD 11 million granted to Afghanistan, USD 2,823,758.14 million is the cumulative amount that has been dispersed. According to the First Quarterly Survey (submitted on 1/11/2020), Afghanistan was rated '*Moderately Unsatisfactory*' (and this rating remains unchanged for the latest survey available to the evaluators (Second Survey, submitted: 4/28/2021). It has been noted by GPE Secretariat stakeholders that the grants focused on actions at the reopening of schools, but schools only reopened in March 2021 thereby delaying implementation.

The main activities undertaken and achieved (at the time of data collection for this evaluation), according to the Quarterly Surveys[141], included the procurement of handwashing stations which were ready for distribution and installation in early June 2021. Also, the

[140] Meeting the needs of children with disabilities should be a critical element to be examined in the forthcoming summative evaluation.

[141] First Quarterly Survey submitted on 1/11/2020 and Second Survey, submitted 4/28/2021

development of teaching and learning materials and learning assessment and remedial packages were reported to be underway at the time of submission of the latest quarterly report. The development of a learning assessment and remedial package based on the existing Ministry of Educations (MoE's) approved Formative Assessment Guidance was reported to be ongoing and due for completion at the time of the Second Quarterly report submission. This was then planned to be followed with identification of and recruitment of teachers to be trained and for their recruitment and training to be completed by the second half of June 2021. In terms of ensuring students resume their education and are able to study at the right grade level, student learning kits and teacher pedagogical support packages and classroom education supplies have been procured and were expected to be in country by the end of April 2021, according to the Second Quarterly Report. The assessment of children's learning in targeted schools was planned to take place immediately after the teacher training to allow for the implementation of school-based activities and the provision of remedial lessons including the possibility of double shift classes and/or morning classes during the weekend based on a needs assessment.

However, interviewees noted some critical factors that delayed implementation. One such factor was the contracting of implementing partners that was postponed during school closures when no implementation was taking place to avoid staff and administrative costs, but the signing of program documents was expected to be completed by the end of March 2021. Due to this delay in implementation, the effectiveness of the grant interventions cannot be explored due to data collection being undertaken in February 2021. As per the government's announcement, the academic year and school opening was planned from the 21 of March 2021 and, therefore, school-based activities could not be reported within the data collection period allocated to this evaluation.

Interviewed stakeholders noted that structural changes in government and procurement issues have posed challenges to implementation. These procurement delays and the impact of the restructuring of the MoE's leadership were also highlighted in the Quarterly Surveys as delaying implementation. Both the Covid-19 AF grant and the ESPIG grant were due to commence implementation in September 2020. However, stakeholders noted that this government restructuring resulted in school opening from being postponed (from September 2020 to March 2021), and the implementation of these grants was also delayed until March 2021 (corroborated by secondary data in the Quarterly Surveys, as noted above). Additionally, procurement issues also hindered program implementation. Only WASH implementation appears to have been delivered in a timely manner (as corroborated by secondary data). However, utilization of these facilities can only be effectively assessed at a later stage and potentially through the planned summative evaluation. It must be noted overall that stakeholders suggested that implementation generally in Taliban-held regions was challenging due to ongoing conflict.

Security remains a key challenge in Afghanistan that limited early implementation of key interventions of the Covid-19 AF grant and appears to be deteriorating according to one stakeholder. The Covid-19 AF application proposal recognizes unpredictable security conditions as a potential risk which it proposes will be mitigated through the engagement of communities in design, implementation, and assessment of activities to ensure access and acceptance of projects and implementers by communities. A key recommendation from a

stakeholder was the suggestion that at the government level, emergency response mechanisms should be budgeted and planned every year to meet future crises particularly as the lack of guidelines and response mechanisms appears to have severely hindered the response to Covid-19.

Given the experience of navigating and negotiating through multiple crises, there is a good relationship across relevant actors within the education sector in Afghanistan. Stakeholders indicated that the **LEG (Development Partner Group) has historically and continues to play a critical role in this context**. According to a key informant, a differentiating factor for LEG coordination in Afghanistan is that not only are all LEG members actively engaged but that they also feel empowered in the consultation process. Whilst LEG activities did not appear to be affected by Covid-19 (with several stakeholders noting that they continued virtually once the pandemic hit), stakeholders did indicate that LEG coordination occurred at the national level and therefore planning (also for the Covid-19 AF grant) was not devolved to the extent needed to meet local needs. It was also highlighted that given the high number of participants (circa 80) in the LEG, much coordination is required, however the GPE Covid-19 grant application process resulted in high levels of engagement across the many participants. Key informants interviews also mentioned that the Covid-19 AF grant process also engaged implementing partners (IP) who for the first time had a say in the proposal itself. This can be especially important where IPs have a specific agenda to support.

Stakeholders also recommended the need for continued engagement across actors but particularly with government given that politics plays a critical role in the education system. This is especially critical because the GPE operating model relies heavily on endorsement by the LEG and with a process that is country-owned and led which can be a virtue but can also hinder processes given that governments have ever-changing priorities based on economic and political factors that may be unrelated to education needs and agenda of the country.

Despite indications from several stakeholders of good stakeholder involvement and engagement, improving the engagement of civil society was highlighted as an area of potential improvement by one stakeholder who also stated that in their opinion there remains a ‘'*long distance between local people and donors in Afghanistan*'. According to this stakeholder, giving local people a sense of ownership of international projects will result in those projects being more successful. It was noted that whilst CSOs may not have the capacity to develop large proposals, their engagement with local needs and the advocacy for their rights are crucial reasons for their increased engagement in the coordination process.

Country Review: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The following are some illustrative statistics based on data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS):[142]

Children of school age: A total of approximately 36 million children and adolescents from pre-primary through to upper secondary school age.
Out-of-school children: 2727% children of primary school age are out of school.
Gross enrolment ratio: In 2018 the primary school gross enrolment ratio was 115% for girls and 122% for boys; Secondary gross enrolment ratio (2015) was 46% for males and females.
Literacy: in 2016 male literacy for 15–24-year-olds was 91% and for females 80%.%.
Government spending on education: In 2017, DRC spent 14% of total government expenditure on education.

Education in DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo has made significant progress over the last two decades in the education sector in terms of both access and quality of schooling. For instance, the completion rate at primary level has substantially increased from 29% in 2002 to 70% in 2014[143]. However, DRC remains one of the countries with the largest number of out-of-school children - 3.5 million or 26.7% of primary age children are out-of-school, of which 2.75 million live in rural areas[144]. The education sector in DRC is also facing a wide range of challenges with regard to quality, governance, and disparities for certain disadvantaged groups e.g., children with disabilities and girls. According to the 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), 20 per cent of children aged 5-17 years have functional difficulties and of these children, 23 per cent do not attend school particularly those from poorer families. In terms of gender equity, out of every ten children out of school, six are girls with gaps more pronounced for adolescent girls[145]. In order to tackle these challenges, the Democratic Republic of Congo has developed its Education Sector Plan for 2016–2025 with a focus on expanding access and equity, improving learning quality, and improving governance and management in the sector.

Three strategic objectives are stated in the sector plan including the (i) **promotion of an equitable education system for growth and employment** (by providing all children free primary education and focusing on the more marginalised populations including those with special needs; preparing the gradual extension of basic education to 8 years; adaptation of learning to promote social integration of young people); (ii) **creating an environment that boosts quality education systems by developing monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms** and (iii) **developing an education environment that is conducive to quality learning through the provision of learning materials and equipment for student and training teachers to improve transparency and efficiency of governance and management of the sector** (by establishing standards and transparent mechanism for resource management; enhancing efficient and equitable management at all education levels through improved

[142] uis.unesco.org/en/country/cd
[143] GPE's Covid-19 Emergency Funding: Application Highlights, 30 October 2020
[144] Ibid
[145] DRC Proposal for Accelerated Funding in Response to Covid-19, April 2020.

organisation of partnerships and decentralisation and community and civil society involvement).

The government has made efforts to meet these three goals with public financing of education having increased from 9% of public expenditures in 2010 to 14% in 2017. During the process of endorsing the new sector plan, the government has also committed an increased budget allocation to education (to 20% by 2018) and endeavours to maintain this until 2025[146].

GPE in DRC

DRC became a GPE partner country in 2012. Most recently DRC was awarded the following grants:

- USD 100 million grant (ESPIG: World Bank is the Grant Agent; UNICEF is the CA) in 2016 which has funded the Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP/PAQUE) to implement the sector plan.
- Has also received three CSEF allocations to the National Coalition for Education for All in DRC to support advocacy activities.
- In addition to the fixed components, DRC has also received a Variable Tranche where by 30% of EQUIP linked to transformative objectives[147].
- USD 70,000 GPE grant given to UNICEF office in DRC to support the development of the pandemic response plan (March 2020).
- USD 15 million (Covid-19 AF grant) to support distance education, including design, translation and audio recording of Maths and French lessons in local languages. Funds were also used to design homework exercise books in paper format for pre-school, primary and secondary schools. Further details below.
- An accelerated grant of $20 million for the 2020-2021 period is expected to benefit more than 200,000 primary and lower secondary school students affected by crises.

Key Findings

Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a fragile country with a history of crises, both health and natural disasters and a related influx of refugees. This has meant that the country has experience with dealing with emergency crises or as one stakeholder put it, the Covid-19 pandemic was '*just one crisis amongst others*'. However, national level school closures was a first in terms of scale and, therefore, impacted the level of action at the central level according to another interviewee. According to stakeholders in the country, whilst no amount of funding can be deemed sufficient given the scale of the crisis, stakeholders suggested that the GPE response was '*quick and immediate'* with funds available in a timely fashion to meet the needs off the country. One stakeholder, in noting the importance of GPE's funding, stated that not only was it immediately available and invited the government to take quick action, but also that this funding was a '*life saver'* for the DRC. According to information collected

[146] https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/democratic-republic-of-congo
[147] Prospective Evaluation of GPE's Country Level Support to Education: Democratic Republic of Congo, Second Annual Report, March 2020.

during the primary data collection of this evaluation, DRC did not receive any immediate emergency response from other partners when the pandemic hit except from GPE with one stakeholder stating that '*we were limited to good wishes…in terms of concrete resources we did not see mobilization from partners except GPE*'.

The quick reaction and availability of funding to partner countries was appreciated, however, one stakeholder felt that in the initial stages it was complicated and confusing as to how the funding was going to work and, in particular, determining exactly the amount available. This made planning more difficult. Overall, stakeholders felt that the grant application process was a very positive one and that the conducting of this evaluation will further support the efficacy of GPE processes going forward.

One stakeholder also noted that the GPE framework for operating has one major differentiating advantage, namely that '*it brings a lot of partners around the table…and creates an opportunity for dialogue'*. This meant that UNICEF and other partners could rely on their experience with Ebola in DRC. The collaboration and coordination amongst the different participants, especially the coordination between the GPE Secretariat, and the country-level partners was identified by stakeholders as a critical factor in ensuring that a funding agreement was reached in a timely manner and that education actors were mobilized quickly in response to the pandemic. Stakeholders also indicated that the grant application process was '*not restrictive, on the contrary, it allowed the support of all stakeholders…in a concerted manner*'.

Interviewees not only appreciated the participatory and inclusive manner within which the grant application process occurred but in particular in the choice of partner agent. It was noted that the choice of partner coordinating the entire effort (UNICEF) was an advantage given that '…*they have a good sense of the needs of the country*' given their experience in emergencies on a daily basis and in particular their experience with Ebola. Whilst only one Expression of Interest (EOI) for this role came from UNICF, according to an interviewee, this was a reflection of the consultation carried out between the partners of the education cluster with all the partners agreeing on a single application to facilitate and accelerate the process with the Ministry.

Additionally, interviewees highlighted the fact that they saw the alignment of GPE's support with the national priorities defined by the Congolese government as another benefit of the GPE mode.

Interviewees reiterated that the grant application process followed the standard GPE protocols and quality assurance procedures (identifying the country needs quickly based on available documents and secondary and primary data and ensuring a participative and inclusive process followed by endorsement by key partners) within a tight deadline. Stakeholders also noted that the grant application process was not cumbersome due to the existence of existing functional structures and a deeply engaged government as well as technical and financial partners, including civil society.

Stakeholders recognized that monitoring is a central and critical aspect allowing all stakeholders and in particular partner countries and ministry representatives to not only

reflect on progress but also to plan for adjustments particularly given that the Covid-19 involved a quickly evolving and unforeseen crisis. Interviewees considered the follow-up advocated by the GPE Secretariat through quarterly and semi-annual surveys as an important and useful feature, however, they noted that often indicators cannot fully capture progress that is being made on the ground as survey and data collection timelines may not align with project cycles. However, as a GPE Secretariat colleague noted, three-monthly updates allow tracking of progress which is particularly important in accelerated funding mechanism where are bi-yearly surveys tend to be more descriptive and invite the grant agent to report to the LEG and to the Ministry of ongoing progress. One stakeholder noted that UNICEF is also planning an evaluation and have, therefore designed monitoring tools to collect data that may be useful for the forthcoming summative evaluation.

Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with the GPE COVID-19 AF grant

Covid-19 AF Grant Overview

GPE Covid-19 grant amount: US$15 million
Grant Agent: UNICEF
Coordinating Agency: UNICEF
Project duration: June 2020 – November 2021
Project goal: Ensuring continuity of learning in a safe and protective environment for at least 13.9 million children and adolescents aged 3-15 affected by COVID-19 in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
Focus population: Direct beneficiaries - 1,3,968,531 children aged 3-15 years (at least 55% girls) of which 825,000 (55% of girls) receiving a more complete package; Indirect beneficiaries - 45,455 teachers (30% female teachers).

Source: UNICEF and Save the Children, DRC (April 2021), Proposal for joint project for accelerated funding of the Global Partnership for Education (SME) in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

DRC was the recipient of planning grant funding for preparing their pandemic response (USD 70,000) in late March 2020. The country also received USD 15 million Covid-19 AF grant which had the following objectives[148]:

General objective: ensuring continuity of learning in a safe and protective environment for at least 13.9 million children and adolescents aged 3-15 affected by COVID-19 in the Democratic Republic of Congo and specific objectives:

- O.S.1: Providing continued access to quality inclusive education for 13.9 million children aged 3-15 affected by COVID-19 in DRC
- O.S.2: Strengthen coordination and planning on the evidence-based basis for a better response to COVID-19's emergency in the education sector
- O.S.3: Strengthening the resilience of the education system and preventing and preparing the education response to the pandemic/epidemic of Covid-19

[148] DRC Proposal for Accelerated Funding in Response to Covid-19, April 2020.

The grant aimed to support some of the following critical interventions:

- A focus on basic education students through activities on the production of and distribution of learning materials. This aspect aimed to target 14 million students with a particular focus on the most vulnerable with specific activities focused on girls and children with disabilities.
- Capacity building of distance learning involving government partners and NGOs at the national and regional levels through evidence-based assessment.
- Campaigns focusing on gender sensitive and inclusion strategies and aiming at preventing abuse and sexual exploitation through training of government, NGO partners and educational staff.
- Production and distribution of print materials as well as other forms of media (e.g. radio and TV) to support learning continuity.
- Interventions pertaining to hygiene and psychosocial support.
- Development of contingency plans and the use of multimedia platforms etc. to strengthen the education system's resilience and finally.
- Interventions aimed at creating feedback mechanism between learners and teachers to facilitate distance learning and refresher courses for students.

The grant was allocated to mitigation and recovery across the themes of equity, learning and systems according to the following allocations:

Country	Equity Mitigation	Learning Mitigation	System Mitigation	Equity Recovery	Learning Recovery	System Recovery	Equity Total	Learning Total	System Total
DRC	3,352,313 (71%)	2,657,632 (54%)	1,875,763 (41%)	1,389,907 (29%)	2,300,833 (46%)	2,687,442 (59%)	4,742,219 (33%)	4,958,465 (35%)	4,563,205 (32%)

Source: Internal Secretariat R&P COVID AF grant costing/coding database

Stakeholders also reiterated that in the DRC, there was a strong emphasis on targeting the most vulnerable in the most disadvantaged regions of the country and in particular those children who did not have internet connectivity. In one stakeholder's opinion, distance learning was reaching 26 provinces. Primary data collected through interviews suggested that the funds that were mobilized pertained to both access to education via distance learning programs but also activities related to creating safe educational conditions were schools were able to reopen. GPE documentation indicates that distance/home-based learning/tutoring programs (no-tech print materials) were costed (with 72% of the total learning mitigation amount allocated to non-tech learning solutions using print materials, 14% to low-tech radio/TV provision and 14% to provision of tablets and mobile internet or SMS messages)[149]. Funding was also allocated to the provision of handwashing kits (1 per school) and hand washing stations for safe school reopening[150]. According to stakeholders, consideration was given in the design of interventions to equity issues, especially between different social groups, by identifying particular areas of need in relation to region or ethnicity. GPE documentation[151] also indicates that the design of interventions aimed to target the most vulnerable children who have been affected not just by the pandemic but also by other crises (e.g. the Ebola epidemic, armed conflicts etc.). The interventions also focus on rural and peri-

[149] Internal Secretariat R&P COVID AF grant costing/coding database

[150] Ibid

[151] DRC grant application and AF review matrix (DRC - COVID-19 AF: Approval Memo to CEO).

urban areas of the most marginalized regions. Efforts were also made to ensure that the interventions support the school feeding program undertaken by the WFP[152].

Interviewees recognized the importance of the fact that interventions were aligned with national priorities as defined by the government and as contained not only in the Covid-19 response plan, sector plan and the Humanitarian Response Plan. GPE documentation also illustrates clearly that efforts were made at the design stage to ensure that interventions aligned with government's key priorities. It is noted in the AF review matrix that the Education Covid-19 Response Plan is based on the National Multisectoral Covid-19 Response Plan and that the Covid-19 proposal is aligned on the Education Covid-19 Response Plan[153].

Each of the interventions focus on access to and continuity of education but also the strengthening of sector coordination and building system resilience. The review matrix indicates that the planned interventions aimed to strengthen education system's resilience as well prevention and preparation measures to effectively respond to the crisis (e.g. through creating awareness amongst parents on the importance of education continuity, capitalizing multimedia platforms to improve teacher distance training, developing sustainable radio learning models that can be used during crises as well as under normal conditions)[154]. The coding/costing data also indicate that funds were allocated for system resilience and reopening (during mitigation) and recovery efforts.

Interview data suggested that information-sharing at the central and regional levels and coordination amongst actors prevented the duplication of implementation activities on the ground as well as allowing the identification of needs in terms of gaps to make coordinated requests of what was required. Similarly, it was noted that at the time the pandemic started, the existing ESPIG was being restructured and the existence of the Covid-19 AF grant meant that there was no need to further change the direction of the ESPIG. Stakeholders lauded the formative evaluation process (both this Covid-19 AF evaluation and the evaluation of Covid-19 effects on ongoing GPE grants) as well as the planned summative evaluation as very useful in engaging ongoing dialogue between different partners and facilitating emergency responses in the future.

In terms of capacity strengthening for preparedness and system agility, whilst the Covid-19 grants aimed to focus on the immediate crisis, when 'building back better', lessons can be learnt from this response to inform GPE's support in the long term. One stakeholder noted the need to continue work on a sectoral strategy for example on distance learning, not just to remedy the current pandemic but to adapt to and prepare for other crises in the future. Another recommendation suggested was that GPE, in order to reach its strategic objectives, should always pay due attention to the threats of potential emergencies in advance of them hitting. Therefore, more robust planning in terms of mobilising an emergency response team and emergency response funds within the GPE Secretariat was suggested by an interviewee as an area of consideration for the future.

[152] Ibid.
[153] DRC - COVID-19 AF: Approval Memo to CEO
[154] Ibid.

Efficiency and early (if any) signs of effectiveness of the GPE COVID-19 grant

According to the Quarterly Surveys for the period 1/9/2021 – 4/8/2021, of the USD 15 million granted to DRC, USD 8,027,643.38 million is the cumulative amount that has been dispersed from the GPE trustee to the GA. According to the First Quarterly Survey (submitted on 10/30/2020), DRC was rated '*Moderately Unsatisfactory'* but according to the latest survey available to the evaluators (Second Survey, submitted: 4/30/2021), the rating for the country has changed to '*Satisfactory*'. This change in rating has been attributed to the fact that despite challenges, significant progress has been made in implementing specific interventions. This progress is discussed below.

According to the secondary data and in particular the Second Quarterly Report, despite the immense disruption of school closures (just over more than two months of interruption in schooling in the first semester of the current school year, closing on December 18th 2020 and reopening on February 22, 2021), the program in DRC has been reported to have witnessed progress which has been attributed to the already operational system of offering distance learning services through the radio teaching program and the distribution of exercise booklets to students. During the school closure period, secondary data suggests that the time was used to organize capacity-building workshops for project implementing partners in collaboration with Save the Children. These efforts in capacity building included the MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Accountability) system, the "safe school" approach, the distance education approach, the PSEA (Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation) and child protection. It was noted in the Quarterly Report that the use of Focal Point teachers in DRC played an important role in distance learning in their following up with parents to ensure that children were truly getting the benefit of the radio broadcasts and were able to practice with the exercise books at home given the barriers that some children faced in using these initiatives (e.g. due to illiteracy of parents, access to radio etc.).

It was reported that from January to March 2021, 217,189 new children and adolescents aged 3-15 years (142,724 girls) were reached by the programs funded using the Covid-19 AF grants through the distribution of exercise books bringing the total number of children to date by radio programs and the distribution of books to 11,498,185 children (5,933,627 girls) mainly in rural areas (Second Quarterly Report).

Whilst stakeholders indicated that the response in DRC was quick with stakeholders being mobilised and action being activated quickly in the context, it is still too early to fully evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the planned interventions. In assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the GPE Covid-related funding to DRC, as reiterated from the key informant interviews, it is important to measure the impact not only of the Covid-19 AF grant but also of the regular AF grant the country is receiving given that these grants both aim to respond to crises in this context and address system resilience and capacity.

Interviewees echoed that implementation was deemed 'satisfactory' and that activities were going ahead in a smooth and timely manner. One stakeholder noted that after barely six (6) months of implementation, the results were encouraging. By way of illustration, the stakeholder provided the following figures: 11,280,996 children (including (5,790,903 girls) were able to continue their distance learning on a target of 13.9 million. 909,185 children

received school materials (especially exercise books) out of a target of 1,316,045. According to the Second Quarterly Report, 11, 498,185 children (5,933,627 girls) benefited from distance learning with the majority of the beneficiaries in rural areas (7,154,069). The report also noted that 54,658 children and adolescents (26,079 girls) benefited from school meals and nutrition programs and/or hygiene/sanitation kits in the targeted schools.

A key challenge facing DRC, similar to other GPE partner countries, is the need for continuity of education following school closures. Given that schools had been closed since 18th December 2020, stakeholders credited the Covid-19 AF funding for allowing '*hundreds of thousands of children [to] continue education programs via…radio and also [through the] distribution of exercises programs for children staying at home…reached 11, 280 00 children including 5, 800 000 girls out of about 16 million school children. This was a significant result since the objective was 13, 900 000 children*'.

Stakeholders were of the opinion that the Covid-19 AF grant interventions were well designed and that an important feature of these grants was to reach the most vulnerable, remote, and rural areas where the government did not have easy access. Whilst it was noted that UNICEF was able, in collaboration with the Ministry and other stakeholders, to design a plan that best utilised the limited resources at the scale required and to reach as many beneficiaries as possible, there are particular areas that were unreachable. The innovative partnership that allowed engagement between CSOs and NGOs to implement activities in highly remote areas (where UNICEF did not have access) allowed these vulnerable groups to be reached. Whilst this was the view of interviewees, this is an aspect, the efficacy of which can be more appropriately determined during the summative evaluation.

Another important group of stakeholders engaged during the implementation of the Covid-19 AF grant implementations, highlighted by an interviewee as an important factor, were community members. It was noted that school resilience was improved due to the involvement of community representatives at the school level, known as 'school support community structures', through which contact with children could be continued whilst they were at home. The involvement of the community was noted to have ensured that children could continue with their education at home with the support of their parents and teachers through a feedback system that not only supported these children's learning but also allowed the monitoring of the number of children that were following the distance learning program. These grassroots community structures that bring together local stakeholders strengthen capacities and bring accountability and monitoring as well as support to the local level. Evidence from the interviews indicated that UNICEF staff, alongside provincial educational authorities, supported the development of contingency plans at the school level based on an analysis of the contextual situation in order to identify the priorities and actions needed for schools to be prepared for emergencies. This was viewed as a '*winning point of strength in the system'*. This engagement with communities was reiterated by the secondary data with the Second Quarterly Survey indicating that in terms of participation of communities, 13,771 members of parent's committees (6,156 women) have been directly involved in raising awareness themselves about the importance of continuing children's education during the pandemic.

In terms of country-level coordination, stakeholders interviewed indicated that the LEG in DRC is sporadically active and that there was more of a tendency for bilateral discussions. It was noted that connectivity and technical problems further hindered stakeholder engagement with the provinces during Covid-19. However, interviewees also noted that more engagement between partners and the central level did occur during the pandemic with ongoing dialogue and direct exchanges with GPE Secretariat colleagues being highlighted by stakeholders as an important feature as the pandemic evolved to assist with any difficulties faced as well as to account for and to make adjustments required in response to the changing needs of the country. It was also noted that an annual sector review is due to be conducted sometime in 2021 which would be an opportunity for further engagement across a variety of stakeholders. It was noted that the funding application process and the implementation of the program saw the mobilisation of a range of stakeholders including civil society, parents' associations, teachers' unions (noted to be critical actors in this context), government actors, NGOs, and technical and financial partners in the education sector and that the proposal was endorsed by these different actors.

Country Review: Ghana

Education in Ghana

The following are some illustrative statistics based on data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS):[155]

Children of school age: In 2019, there were 10.5 million children of pre-primary to secondary school age.
Out-of-school children: In 2019, there were a total of 35,000 (8,783783 girls; 26,649649 boys) out-of-school children and 208,000 adolescents (79,111 girls and 128,994 boys) out of school.
Gross enrolment ratio: In 2019, the primary school gross enrolment ratio was 106% for girls and 104% for boys; Secondary level gross enrolment ratio in 2019 was 75% for males and 75% for females.
Literacy: In 2018, the literacy for 15–24-year-olds was 93% for males and 92% for females.
Government spending on education: In 2018, Ghana spent 18.6% of total government expenditure on education. The country spent about 3.99 percent of its GDP on education in 2018[156].

Despite the achievements that the country has made in the education sector in terms of both access (through universalization of education) and the provision of quality schooling, it still faces several challenges which include attracting the remaining out-of-school children, poor learning outcomes in early grades, equity in access and learning, teacher time-on-task and deployment. More specifically, the number of out-of-school children aged 6-14 years (especially girls, children with disabilities and those belonging to low-income households) is expected to increase due to school closures during the outbreak[157].

Over the last few decades Ghana has made incredible strides and progress within the education sector.
The main priorities of the Education Sector Plan (2018-2030) in Ghana include:

- **Access and equity:** to ensure equal opportunity in terms of access to education and for children to learn as well as the provision of an environment that is conducive to learning and achievement of learning outcomes that demonstrate fair assessments.
- **Quality:** ensuring the achievement of high-level standards and system responsiveness at all levels of education.
- **Relevance**: ensuring learning, including skills development, to be responsive to individual, community and national development needs.
- **Efficiency and effectiveness:** management of resources that ensure value for money to achieve desired goals and
- **Sustainability:** Judicious utilization of human, financial and material resources to ensure balanced and continual development of the education system[158].

[155] uis.unesco.org/en/country/gh
[156] https://www.statista.com/topics/7282/education-in-ghana/#dossierSummary
[157] Ghana COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Application Form, application date: 4/29/2020
[158] Ghana Education Strategic Plan (2018-2030), Ministry of Education, Ghana.

GPE in Ghana

Ghana has been a GPE partner country since 2004. The GPE Covid-19 AF grant (USD 15 million) in Ghana aims to provide additional financing to the Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP) to support the Covid-19 Coordinated Education Response Plan for Ghana for continued learning, recovery, and resilience in basic education. The GALOP program is co-financed by a GPE ESPIG of USD 24.4 million and an IDA credit of USD 150 million. The GALOP was restructured to incorporate an Education Outcomes Fund Additional Financing of a US$25.5 million grant from the Global Partnership for Results-Based Approaches (GPRBA) Trust Fund and US$4.5 million financing from the Government of Ghana (GoG). The proposed Covid-19 Education Response AF funding aims to be supplementary to the ongoing education sector response and aims to leverage and accelerate the disbursement of critical funds to the government (Ghana COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Application Form, application date: 4/29/2020).

Key Findings

Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis

"We can benefit from the things done now long after the pandemic has ended."

Ghana was one of the first countries to apply and receive funding under the Covid-19 AF window, and this has been attributed by several stakeholders to the strong capacity at the country level. The first-come-first served approach was also noted to have benefited Ghana in terms of both the timing as well as amount received, however interviewees felt that this was not a suitable approach on the whole given GPE's focus on need and equity. Stakeholders were of the opinion that the grant was available in a timely manner and that the grant application process was streamlined and smooth and in particular this was noted as being due to the efforts of the GPE Secretariat country lead. It was also noted that given the Ghanaian government had a robust educational plan in place and the fact that GPE protocols require strong alignments between the GPE grants and the national planning cycles and processes, it was a matter of ear-marking GPE funding to support certain parts of the government-planned interventions and to avoid duplication. In addition to this, the GPE operational model which promotes engagement with governments through a multi-stakeholder approach was highlighted as a critical element in facilitating the timeliness of the engagement, the grant being approved and '*springing into action*' because all stakeholders (government, donor partners, etc.) already had the systems and relationships in place to expedite this process.

A stakeholder noted that the review process for this funding was expedited from the GPE Secretariat side which meant that unlike during non-Covid-19 times, the processes were condensed and timelier to meet the needs of the emergency. Several stakeholders lauded the flexibility and agility shown by the GPE Secretariat during the grant process with one stakeholder noting that there was a '*need for quality assurance versus speed…it needed to be very flexible and agile…we needed waivers…and GPE achieved that*'.

It was also noted by one stakeholder that it would be critical to ensure that intentions are actualized using real evidence by not only using results-based monitoring but actually pushing for results. In relation, in terms of the GPE grant monitoring indicators, some Ghanaian

stakeholders were of the opinions that more granularity was required in terms of the indicators reported. However, a GPE Secretariat colleague noted that Ghana, at the time of writing of this report, was behind on reporting and suggested that this may be due to the existing reporting requirements already being burdensome. It was also noted that the Covid-19 AF grant monitoring and reporting framework had resulted in a big increase in public accountability according to country stakeholders. Whilst the quarterly reports were perceived to be potentially useful, it was noted that certain critical elements of interventions may be more difficult to measure progress on for example measuring whether out-of-school children received TV and radio learning services and how this met their learning needs. It was also suggested that perhaps semi-annual reporting may be less burdensome given that there are several indicators on which reporting is requirement and this places burdens on already pressurized systems. The ever-changing nature of the pandemic, for example on school closing and re-opening, also meant that the relevance of some of these indicators and the ability to collect data on them became even more challenging.

Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with the GPE COVID-19 AF grant

Covid-19 AF Grant Overview

GPE Covid-19 grant amount: US$ 15 million
Grant Agents: UNICEF and the World Bank
Coordinating Agency: UNICEF
Project duration: July2020-November 2021
Project outcome: The Government of Ghana planned to implement a set of immediate actions to: (i) ensure continuity of learning during the crisis, (ii) prepare school systems to reopen once the pandemic subsides, and (iii) build resilience for a possible resurgence of the pandemic and other future crises.
Focus population: 3,500, 000 children to be supported with distance or home-based learning; 14,000 teachers trained in using distance learning methods and Accelerated Learning programs; 1.5 million children in targeted schools provided with functional handwashing facilities amongst other targets.

Source: Ghana COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Application Form, application date: 4/29/2020, Results Framework.

In late March 2020, the UNICEF office in Ghana received a GPE grant of US$70,000 to support the Ministry of Education with planning its COVID-19 response. These initiatives were developed based on the Ministry of Education COVID-19 response plan.

Further, as mentioned above, the Covid-19 AF grant in Ghana supplemented the GALOP program. The GPE COVID-19 Education Response Grant aimed to finance the proposed Additional Financing to the Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP) to support the COVID-19 Coordinated Education Response Plan for Ghana for continued learning, recovery, and resilience in basic education. The sub-objectives of the proposed AF were to support the COVID-19 Coordinated Education Response Plan for Ghana to:

- Enable continuity of learning for basic education during intermittent school closures using education technology as well as low-tech and no-tech solutions, with a special focus on equity considerations.
- Develop teaching and learning resources for distance and remote education.
- Strengthen teacher capacity to participate in distance and remote teacher professional development and develop skills to facilitate and deliver home-based, distance and remote education.
- Ensure wellbeing, health and safety of students and teachers during school closure, and upon return to school.
- Ensure equity, inclusion, and targeted support for the most vulnerable children (girls, children with disabilities, children in rural and remote areas, and from low-income families), to mitigate risks to their learning, safety, wellbeing, and re-entry to school; and
- Strengthen education system resilience and responsiveness to future emergencies.

Whilst GALOP was in existence prior to the pandemic, the COVID-19 AF grant aims to support existing interventions under the GALOP program including: [159]

- The development of accessible and inclusive learning modules through TV and radio.
- Distribution of printed teaching and learning materials.
- Distribution of pre-loaded content devices to vulnerable groups especially those lacking access to technology.
- In-service teacher training aimed at ensuring that teachers can effectively deliver lessons through innovative platforms.
- A new learning management system to support learning continuity.
- A new National Knowledge and Skills Bank to enable the curation of all education content linked to the new curriculum.
- Remedial and accelerated learning support for at-risk and poor performing students when schools reopen; and
- School grants to establish hand washing facilities or toilets in all schools.

The grant was allocated to mitigation and recovery across the themes of equity, learning and systems according to the following allocations:

Country	Equity Mitigation	Learning Mitigation	System Mitigation	Equity Recovery	Learning Recovery	System Recovery	Equity Total	Learning Total	System Total
Ghana	650,000 (54%)	6,100,000 (92%)	2,000,000 (29%	550,000 (46%)	500,000 (8%)	5,000,000 (71%)	1,200,000 (8%)	6,600,000 (45%)	7,000,000 (47%)

Source: Internal Secretariat R&P COVID AF grant costing/coding database

Stakeholders noted that the types of interventions planned were very well suited to the needs of the country. In particular, there was a focus on how learning losses could be minimized and learning continued, how to ensure the safe return of children to school and finally, how to be prepared for future potential crises. According to stakeholders, these issues and the associated interventions that had been initially planned continue to be relevant beyond the planning stages. In terms of mitigating learning losses according to grant application

[159] https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/ghana

documents, a critical element of the Ghanaian interventions was the use of ICT through TV and radio sessions, the distribution of pre-loaded content devices to ensure vulnerable groups that access to technology continue to learn, as well as the distribution of printed teaching and learning materials.

It was also noted that within Ghana there was political will and a strong desire on part of the partners to capitalize on the existing GALOP program. This is a 5-year World Bank program aligned with the Education Sector Plan and GPE is one of the co-funders (USD 209 million, started in 2020). GALOP is being implemented in all districts of the country, and targets 10,000 least performing basic schools across the country as well as special schools. Therefore, within this context, there is very strong alignment across GPE Covid-19 AF funding and other initiatives being conducted in the country.

Whilst the Covid-19 AF funding agenda was to meet the immediate needs of partner countries, and not aimed at system strengthening and long-term capacity strengthening, Ghana provides an example of where an intervention funded by the Covid-19 AF grant resulted in a potentially more long-term benefit beyond the immediate Covid-19 crisis. The development of a new Learning Management System to support learning continuity and the establishment of a Ghana National Knowledge and Skills Bank (GNKSB) have been noted by several stakeholders as examples of initiatives that have the potential for long term capacity strengthening at the systems level long after the pandemic is over. These examples of building back better have been noted by one stakeholder as '*the covid-19 pandemic giving us an opportunity to do something innovative…this is a new way of doing things…we are not going back…we are in a new place…Covid-19 has brought us here and GPE support has allowed us to do it.*' Another stakeholder agreed: '*what has been quite novel about this is a response needed to fill a gap…what has been achieved with remote learning and the Learning Management System is that we will be able to achieve benefits beyond the pandemic…this intervention has given (us) the ability for these things to be passed on after the pandemic*.'

Efficiency and early (if any) signs of effectiveness of the GPE COVID-19 grant

According to the first Six Monthly Survey (submitted on 1/8/2021), Ghana was rated as '*Satisfactory*' and this remained unchanged from the rating given according to the First Quarterly Survey (submitted on 9/21/20). At the time of writing this Formative Evaluation, the Second Quarterly Report had not yet been submitted by the GA to the GPE Secretariat and evidence from it could not be reviewed for this evaluation[160].

The Six-Monthly Survey noted that remote education delivery in Ghana had been strengthened using Covid-19 AF grants with the Ministry, through various partners, successfully developing 1,641 TV and radio lessons for KG1 to SHS3 and also rolled out a number of distance learning modules to students across the country. These lessons include over 1000 lessons for Ghana Learning TV and online enhanced video library. In addition to this, evidence from secondary data indicates that the Ghana Learning Radio Lessons were accompanied by the development and distribution of printed student activity books. GES and non-state actors also continued face-to-face community-based Complementary Basic

[160] The utilisation rate from fund lag for Ghana as of 31 May 2021 is -63% (see main text).

Education classes observing COVID-19 protocols in districts with limited access to digital learning options, to support over 30,000 out-of-school primary-age children (with UK FCDO funding). The Six-Monthly Survey also noted that the GALOP Covid-19 Response Technical Team has been established comprising of the MoE and several other actors. The Technical Team in collaboration with the MOE Planning Budget Monitoring and Evaluation (PBME) Unit is reported to have been coordinating research activities on the outreach of the education sector's Covid-19 response plan.

In addition to the aforementioned, secondary data also notes that progress is being made in the development of teacher training modules for digital literacy which will be available on the Edmodo platform. Additionally, it was noted that all the educational content uploaded on the GhLA (Ghana Library Authority) enhanced digital library was being linked to the Learning Management System.

The Six-Monthly Report also noted progress in the support of remedial and accelerated learning when schools reopen. It was noted that GES set up an INSET unit to coordinate all types of INSET which will include training on Targeted Instruction (TI) and rapid student assessment, to be rolled out in 10,000 schools. The Report notes that progress has been made in this regard with a review of materials for the Targeted Instruction completed for 5000 schools and training of over 70,000 teachers in the 10,000 GALOP beneficiary schools underway and expected to be completed by December 2020. The training was expected to be expanded to the remaining schools in January 2021[161].

Given the early stages at which the formative evaluation is being conducted, assessing efficiency and effectiveness may be better done at the summative evaluation stage for Ghana. However, during the formative evaluation primary data collection efforts, some stakeholders indicated that while the planned TV and radio sessions were implemented, however they did not continue for a long period of time and that the printed teacher and learning materials and devices did not appear, according to them, to reach some children and in particular the most vulnerable (e.g. those with disabilities).

According to an interviewee, Ghana went from having a limited educational management system to having a functional learning management system during the pandemic and mainly due to the Covid-19 AF funding, something they termed a '*big deal'*, and the next steps would be to evaluate not only in terms of its general utilization but in particular its utility as a tool in reaching the most vulnerable and finally, in the longer term, examining the extent to which these systems have helped mitigate learning losses or improve learning.

Ghana also aimed to use the Covid-19 AF funding to train teachers to provide psychosocial support to students, parents, and communities (according to grant documentation). Given the potential impact of Covid-19 on the social and emotional wellbeing of children, this will also be an important area of investigation for the summative evaluation, not only in terms of whether it was effectively implemented in Ghana but also across other partner countries, given the importance of this during the pandemic.

[161] At the time of this evaluation, further information on this was not available.

Finally, interviewees commended the 'matrix approach' to implementing various Covid-19 AF grant interventions (e.g. LMS and TV and radio programs) which were based on a matrix by subject and by class, identifying roles and responsibilities so that '*nothing fell through the gaps'* and '*everyone knew who was doing what*'.

According to stakeholders, during the Covid-19 period, a **milestone was achieved in developing new partnerships** as well as strengthening existing ones in Ghana. Additionally, within the Ministry of Education, high levels of collaboration across ministerial and other education stakeholders were supplemented with cross sectoral dialogue with other ministries (e.g. health). Similarly, stakeholders reported an increase in the frequency of LEG meetings in response to the emergency (with stakeholders noting meetings moving from monthly to weekly/fortnightly). According to key informants, donor partners and in particular the **GPE Secretariat played a critical role to facilitate dialogue through the LEG forum** to ensure all voices are heard. This was reiterated to have happened particularly during the Covid-19 AF grant planning process with key informants noting that different stakeholders were '*rounded up very quickly with development partners, the government and LEG coming together to prepare a proposal…and an aligned response'* in a '*highly engaged process'*. However, one stakeholder from civil society did feel that whilst there was collaboration, there was not enough transparency in terms of the grant application process itself with not all of the LEG members fully aware of what was included in the grant application in terms of planned interventions as many of these conversations did not appear to engage the wider education community and in particular civil society. This was recognized by donor agency representatives who indicated that efforts were being made to increase the voice of all LEG members (especially with civil society where whilst relationships exist in parallel with government, there is a more recognized need to conduct conversations in the wider LEG forum) and to further their voice, representation, and engagement.

Interviewees also commended the cross-sectoral approach that was adopted with the social protection, health and education sector stakeholders coming together during the pandemic to engage in a more '*holistic way'*. Interviewees also noted the efforts that the Government of Ghana has made to engage with key stakeholders including private sector actors such as the Ghana Education Service, Ghana Library Authority, Zoom (teacher access), Vodafone (connectivity), NTN (digital content) etc. in such a way that '*this crisis has really allowed such partnerships to blosso*m'. The extent of what these leveraged partnerships achieved should be an area of investigation for the summative evaluation.

Finally, in terms of innovative practices, another initiative lauded by interviewees was EDMODO[162] Ghana, a Ministry of Education digital learning initiative designed to connect Ghanaian learners to their teachers and to ensure the continuity of their learning. This collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service, and the Ghana Library Authority, resulted in an innovative e-learning platform launched in 2021, whose effectiveness at this current time whilst difficult to assess, however could be investigated during the summative evaluation stage.

[162] https://finance.yahoo.com/news/netdragons-edmodo-selected-exclusive-online-055200620.html

Country Review: Lesotho

Country Context

The following are some illustrative statistics based on data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)[163]:

Children of school age: In 2019, there were 665,094 children of pre-primary to secondary school age.
Out-of-school children: In 2017, there were a total of 7408 (3109 girls and 4299 boys) out-of-school children
Gross enrolment ratio: In 2017, the primary school gross enrolment ratio was 118% for girls and 124% for boys; Secondary gross enrolment ratio in 2017 was 53% for males and 71% for females.
Literacy: In 2014, the literacy rate for 15–24-year-old males was 80% and 94% for females.

Lesotho is a landlocked country encircled within South Africa. The population of country is mostly rural, and many families rely on herding cattle and farming for their survival and/or income. The Government of Lesotho noted that the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to compound an ongoing drought humanitarian crisis which affected a quarter of the population (508,125 people including 213,360 children) already in need of humanitarian assistance as well as populations struggling with diseases like HIV and tuberculosis[164].).

The country has made significant progress in its efforts towards Education for All by introducing Free Primary Education from 2000 through 2006, which was then reinforced to Free and Compulsory Primary Education by law in 2010[165]. The government has also taken tangible efforts towards financing its system: the education sector was allocated 23.3% of the government's recurrent budget on average, which corresponds to 9.2% of the national GDP.

However, despite this progress and the efforts that have been made in the education, challenges that existed prior to Covid-19 may be exacerbated by the pandemic: poor retention rates at primary and secondary levels, low levels of learning outcomes, inadequate skills for graduates, inefficiencies in the education system, HIV/AIDS, and poor governance. Boys' participation in education, especially those in rural mountain areas is particularly low and the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to disproportionately affect these populations and exacerbate differences.[166] Access and completion of schooling is hugely dependent on poverty, geography, and gender with only 1 in 10 children from poor households likely to complete secondary schooling as compared to 5 in 10 from wealthy households. Similarly, geographic differences persist with only 3 in 10 children in the rural areas in the Highlands likely to access secondary education as compared to 9 in 10 children from areas like Maseru. Learning indicators pre-Covid-19 were already low with less than half of children aged 7-14 years having foundational reading skills in English or Sesotho and only 15% of these children

[163]uis.unesco.org/en/country/ls
[164] Lesotho COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Application Form, application date: 5/13/2020
[165] https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/lesotho
[166] Lesotho COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Application Form, application date: 5/13/2020

demonstrating foundational skills (MICS Survey Bureau of Statistics 2018)[167]. In addition to this, the education sector lacks adequate facilities and there are immense disparities across districts with certain mountainous areas experiencing teacher shortages and poorer performance as compared to low-land districts[168].

GPE in Lesotho

Lesotho has been a GPE partner country since 2005 and has received several grants (including sector plan development grants, program development grants and program implementation grants). The most recent program implementation grant was awarded to the country in 2021 and amounts to USD 7.5 million (GA: World Bank). The objective of the **Basic Education Strengthening Project** is to improve student retention and teaching quality in junior secondary schools and support the rollout of a new curriculum. The program components include improved transition to, and retention of, students in junior secondary education in targeted regions, through improvements in mathematics and science instruction in schools located in these regions; providing system strengthening support to early childhood care and development (ECCD) to improve children's access to quality education; and project management, capacity building and technical support to the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET)[169]. The country has also received USD 3.47 million through the Covid-19 AF grant (further details below).

Key Findings

Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis

GPE's quick response and the initial USD 70,000 planning grant made available through UNICEF to Lesotho was needed and allowed the country to respond quickly within the education sector. In terms of the Covid-19 AF grant application the requirements from the GPE Secretariat on timing and turnaround were suggested by interviewees to work well in this context as stakeholders noted that this pressure encouraged stakeholders within the country to get mobilized more quickly than they would have done otherwise. In particular, the LEG had to be mobilized into action immediately because the national Covid response plan did not include education specifically. The GPE partnership structure was credited as facilitating the process given that the multi-stakeholder nature meant that both the World Bank (GA of existing ESPIG) and UNICEF (CA) were already in situ with the structures and relationships in place to allow for a smooth and efficient response to this emergency. The existence of few development partners in this context meant that this existing experience within the country of the World Bank and UNICEF was all the more valuable given that there were not many options as regards development partners to undertake the emergency response. UNICEF were nominated as the GA for the Covid-19 AF grant and UNICEF's existing emergency experience was noted to have helped the process. However, stakeholders did note that there was a heavy reliance on UNICEF across the grant application process due to

[167] https://lesotho.un.org/en/88439-keep-learning-alive-how-prevent-national-education-crisis

[168] https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/lesotho

[169] https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/lesotho

low government capacity, which also delayed the submission of the application. Delays in the application process were also attributed to difficulties in initially coordinating different stakeholders (with some noting the lack of connectivity and computers by various stakeholders to have further challenged the process).

In terms of adequacy of funds received, according to government stakeholders, the national Covid-19 response plan required approximately USD 10 million, of which approximately USD 3.5 million was received from the GPE AF grant. It should be noted that the GPE Board originally approved a USD 5 million allocation on 31st March 2020 which was subsequently revised to USD 3.5 million on May 29th 2020[170].Stakeholders acknowledged appreciation for the amount received, however with all countries evaluated as part of this evaluation, no amount could be deemed sufficient given the extent of the crisis and given that an original application with a higher amount had been approved. The proposed new budget of USD 3.5 million was deemed as reasonable according to the GPE Secretariat colleagues as per the AFF matrix. The memo also notes that this funding is complementary to the National Covid-19 response plan as well as having a focus on areas not covered by World Food Program and World Bank support.

Stakeholders were of the opinion that the guidance, standards, and processes of the Covid-19 AF grant mechanism as provided by the GPE Secretariat were well-aligned with the need for speed and quality and that the support was relevant both at the country and regional level in that stakeholders acknowledged the support of UNICEF colleagues at the country level. The guidance was noted to be highly comprehensive and easy to follow. Government stakeholders also acknowledged the assistance they received from UNICEF and the GPE Secretariat, noting that the '*multi-stakeholder partnership really helped with government capacity*' in the application process.

In terms of the GPE's approach and requirements pertaining to monitoring and evaluation reporting and data, stakeholders were of the opinion that whilst some of the indicators were producing relevant, reliable, and timely information, certain outcomes were more challenging to ascertain and measure. For example, within the Lesotho context, the use of TV and radio formed a part of the education delivery interventions, however, measuring 'reach' of these formats of delivery is very difficult to ascertain. In addition to this, within Lesotho, it was highlighted that there is a shortage of monitoring companies and unless outside organisations are brought in to conduct research on the ground, there is not capacity in the country to undertake this type of work. Furthermore, it was noted that the reporting requirements were not deemed as onerous (as compared to other donors and other types of funding modalities) within this context by stakeholders and the standard template that was provided by the Secretariat was appreciated and useful. The adaptations made by the Secretariat to the reporting templates to allow for background information to be noted in a more qualitative manner were commended.

[170] Covid-19 AF Approval Memo and Checklist: Lesotho

Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with the GPE COVID-19 AF grant

Covid-19 AF Grant Overview

GPE Covid-19 grant amount: US$ 3.47 million
Grant Agent: UNICEF
Coordinating Agency: UNICEF
Project duration: June 2020-December 2021
Project outcome: To support the government and partners in close collaboration with Local Education Group to reduce the risks of the social impacts of the coronavirus on the education of children. Ensuring safe school operations and the continuity of learning and well-being for children and youth, especially for the most vulnerable affected by the outbreak.
Focus population: A total of 477,612 learners from pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary levels will benefit from the grant.

Source: Lesotho COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Application Form, application date: 5/13/2020; Lesotho COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Approval Memo to the CEO (June 2020).

Given the immense scale of the crisis and its impact on the education sector in Lesotho, in utilising the USD 3.5 million, prioritising efforts was a critical factor. Plans with support from GPE funding in Lesotho aimed to focus on various aspects to support children's learning as well as to establish and provide handwashing and hygiene facilities in schools. The USD 3.47 million Covid-19 AF grant has the following objectives:

Overall objective: Support Governments and partners in close collaboration with Local Education Groups to reduce the risks of the social impacts of the coronavirus on the education of children. Ensuring safe school operations and the continuity of learning and well-being for children and youth, especially for the most vulnerable affected by the outbreak.

Specific objectives: Via this accelerated GPE funding, government and education sector partners will be supported technically and financially in close collaboration with Local Education Group to:
1. Improved capacity of Ministry of Education and district education teams to coordinate covid response at national and district level and improve real-time monitoring and evidence generation (focusing on the most vulnerable).
2. Improved capacity of schools to practice and implement safety and response measures for COVID, including hygiene promotion and risk communication.
3. Support continuity of learning through access to remote learning programs as appropriate for Lesotho.
4. Scale-up child protection and WASH services.
5. Open better through back-to-school campaigns, catch-up classes, and accelerated learning
6. Enhance knowledge sharing and capacity building both for the current response and future Pandemics.

The Covid-19 AF grant aims to support the following interventions[171]:

- Collect up-to-date information about the situation of children through SMS and social media channels for **real-time data collection** and mass-communication with program beneficiaries.
- Develop and roll-out **free and open digital tools** to support large-scale remote learning including educational TV and radio programs, online content, and print materials.
- Establish systems for remote support for **teachers.**
- Provision of **hand-washing facilities** in schools and hygiene supplies to students.
- Undertake **back to school campaigns, catch-up classes**, and **accelerated learning; Subsidize school fees** for disadvantaged lower secondary students for the remaining academic year.
- Develop and roll-out **child-friendly complaints and feedback mechanisms** in schools through helplines.
- Develop **accelerated learning guidelines** and support program targeting disadvantaged students, particularly adolescents transitioning from primary to lower secondary education with an emphasis on **rural boys;** and
- While the GPE program targets all districts in Lesotho, some areas will receive more support – particularly those where the **enrolment rates are lower, dropouts are higher**, and those with significant numbers of schools with **poor WASH facilities** and rural districts with **high concentration of poverty**.

The grant was allocated to mitigation and recovery across the themes of equity, learning and systems according to the following allocations:

Country	Equity Mitigation	Learning Mitigation	System Mitigation	Equity Recovery	Learning Recovery	System Recovery	Equity Total	Learning Total	System Total
Lesotho	584,086 (46%)	191,100 (58%)	1000 (0%)	694,198 (54%)	137,500 (42%)	1,670,000 (100%)	1,278,284 (39%)	328,600 (10%)	1,671,000 (51%)

Source: Internal Secretariat R&P COVID AF grant costing/coding database

Stakeholders were of the opinion that the interventions planned originally were highly relevant to context at that time. However, it was noted that, like with many other countries, things changed very rapidly on the ground as Covid-19 evolved and country needs shifted (e.g., in Lesotho, one stakeholder noted that when developing the proposal, it was challenging to get accurate estimates on costs as well as on estimates on what the requirements were and when). The flexibility within the grant mechanism accommodated the need to be able to adjust initial plans to meet these evolving requirements and the ability to adjust in a non-cumbersome manner meant that immediate priorities could be met without excessive bureaucratic processes.

According to stakeholders, the implementation of a majority of the planned interventions as part of the grant have been challenging. For example, initial activities around continuity of learning were particularly challenging because this is not an area that us well developed in Lesotho and according to stakeholders there are not many implementing partners on the ground (such as large-scale NGOs). Therefore, there was a heavy reliance on an already constrained Ministry of Education to support learning through distance training centres

[171] https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/lesotho

aimed at supporting out-of-school learners during the pandemic. Whilst the planned radio and TV lessons did appear to be relevant and activated in good time, much implementation faced delays and ultimately stopped altogether after a few months due to the breakdown in relationship between teachers' associations and the Ministry. Procurement issues, particularly of PPE, resulted in not only the slow reopening of schools but have also affected the implementation of planned interventions (e.g., provision of PPE to schools) Additionally, there were challenges noted in reaching the hardest-to-reach communities in remote areas and children with disabilities due to human resource capacity issues of partners on the ground[172]. One area that stakeholders mentioned as having gone relatively more smoothly, in their opinion, is pertaining to the provision of WASH facilities. This will need to be assessed more rigorously during the summative evaluation. It should also be noted that some indicators such as those pertaining to school building and handwashing facilities whilst easier to measure could not be assessed at the stage at which interviews were conducted for this evaluation given that implementation has been slow and this could form an important part of future evaluation work.

Efficiency and early (if any) signs of effectiveness of the GPE COVID-19 grant

According to the first Six Monthly Survey (submitted on 1/29/2021), Lesotho was rated as '*Moderately Satisfactory*' as compared to the previous rating of '*Moderately Unsatisfactory*' given according to the First Quarterly Survey (submitted on 11/8/20). Of the USD 3.47 million granted to them, Lesotho has utilized USD 2,332,264 million to date (i.e. upon submission of the Six-Monthly Survey). At the time of writing this Formative Evaluation, the Second Quarterly Report had not yet been submitted by the GA to the GPE Secretariat and evidence from it could not be reviewed for this evaluation[173].

This upgrade was made to reflect progress made in the implementation of continuity of learning (particularly on production of learner packs for primary and lower secondary grades covering all subjects) as well as safe schools' operations in preparation for the re-opening of schools (including the procurement of protection kits for schools and construction of handwashing facilities). Learner packs underwent quality check processes and improvements were made based on the findings thereof. Procurement of protection kits for 2,076 schools by the Ministry of Education was ongoing at the time of the survey as well as construction of handwashing facilities in 800 schools through the Lesotho Red Cross Society and World Vision Lesotho.

According to the most recent Six-Monthly Survey, in terms of **learner support**, 216,000 primary and lower secondary learners and 24,000 children under the age of 5 including children with disabilities were given access to continued learning (deemed moderately unsatisfactory). In terms of **safe school reopening** schools in Lesotho received support on safe school operations and child protection and targeted schools were supported with provision of accessible WASH services and promotion of water saving techniques, and safe hygiene practices (deemed moderately satisfactory). Through **back-to-school campaigns**

[172] First Quarterly Survey (November 2020).
[173] The ultization rate from fund lag as of May 2021 was -39%.

disadvantaged and vulnerable children and adolescents were targeted for outreach and financial support and accelerated learning programs (deemed moderately satisfactory).

According to the Six-Monthly Survey there were some new risks to implementation since last reporting that had arisen in the form of unwillingness of teachers to produce remote learning resources and provide support to learners on continuity of learning. Teachers also had concerns with regards to the quality of the learner packs. In order to mitigate the impact of this several strategies were identified and commenced: the formation of a new working group including teacher formations, subject associations, National Curriculum Development Centre and the Ministry of Education's Inspectors whose main task will be to oversee continuity of learning and engagement of teachers for production of remote learning resources and also manage teacher relations; engagement of a media company to support the design and dissemination of learner packs to make them more child-friendly and package them for different platforms etc.

The provision of learner guides (in particular targeting disadvantaged children, children with disabilities and adolescents transitioning from primary to lower secondary with an emphasis on rural boys) was prioritised[174]. Initial evidence garnered during this evaluation has suggested that reaching rural children has been an immense challenge (particularly for the print materials created and TV and Radio programs also were noted to have stopped after a few months). It was suggested that the inability to reach rural children may be due to the fact that most government offices are located in urban areas. It was also noted that whilst there was some focus on disabled children (Braille and PL materials and videos for children with hearing difficulties) it has been suggested that these interventions did not reach those in rural areas who were also not able to access the government-provided resources.

In terms of innovative practices that can attributed to the Covid-19 AF grant, two such examples given by stakeholders were the sharing of books on WhatsApp as well as the conversion of books to audio format to increase reach. The summative evaluation should explore the effectiveness of these practices.

According to stakeholders, LEG activities (albeit more challenging due to their virtual nature) continued during the Covid period (with fluctuating frequency) and a range of stakeholders were consulted and provided inputs into the Covid-19 AF application. One stakeholder noted that '*…the LEG reviewed the plan every step of the way until it was officially submitted.*' Stakeholders indicated involvement when proposals were being developed and noted that advocacy played a critical role in ensuring that a range of opinions were heard. More ongoing engagement during the pandemic was also noted to have been conducted, and in particular, the involvement of critical stakeholders such as teachers who were said to be trained by the Ministry and whose inputs were noted to be especially valuable for the safe reopening of schools (as previously mentioned in terms of the new risks and resultant mitigation strategies identified after the Six-Monthly Survey).

Another example of successful consultation and agreement with the LEG was also identified in the Six-Monthly Survey where it was noted that funds were reprogrammed towards

[174] GPE's Covid-19 Emergency Funding: Application Highlights, 30 October 2020.

procurement of protection kits following successful consultation and agreement with the LEG. While this activity had been planned and budgeted for, adjustments were made as the costs of this were significantly higher than originally anticipated and savings made in other areas were able to be reallocated to improve efficiency. This course correction provides an example of an instance where planned interventions were able to be adapted to better meet the needs of the country with cost savings also borne in mind. Initially, US$ 498,240 had been budgeted for procurement of protection kits, but the actual cost to cover 2,076 schools is far greater than anticipated. Therefore, US$ 500,000 cost savings from construction of handwashing facilities as well as US$ 206,000 from continuity of learning were reallocated towards the procurement of these protection kits.

However, it was noted that Joint Education Reviews (JERs), despite being required annually, had not occurred since 2018. Stakeholders were of the opinion that whilst the GPE Secretariat had been generous in supporting the JER process, a need still exists to monitor and hold government accountable to ensure that this commitment to engage in JERs regularly is met and that the enforcement of JERs is achieved. There was mention by stakeholders of the restructuring of the existing ESPIG by the World Bank during this time frame and according to stakeholders this allowed them to also support the ongoing Covid-19 response. LEG interviewees reiterated the benefits of the close collaboration that they have with UNICEF and the Bank. It was also noted that cross-sectoral dialogue, particularly with the health sector, despite Covid-19 being a health crisis, was non-existent.

Whilst there had been efforts made to establish an education emergency working group in response to the drought that the country had experienced previously, this was still at a nascent stage when the pandemic occurred. Going forward, stakeholders noted that this should be developed further to encourage a more effective and resilient response to future emergencies.

In terms of alignment of the Covid-19 AF interventions with existing plans and activities within the country, it has been suggested by stakeholders that these are very well aligned especially with the new (3 year) Education Sector Plan which was developed during the pandemic (and hence has activities related to Covid-19 budgeted within it) and based on the recognition that the longer term (10-year plan) required a more medium-term plan for monitoring purposes. Stakeholders in Lesotho noted the development of partnership and strategic collaborations that were activated through the Covid-19 AF grant. For example, the Ministry of Education was noted to have collaborated with World Vision who provided toilet facilities in some schools. Other partnerships that emerged during the course of the pandemic included those with technology firms and with NGOs (that provided community workshops with both teachers and learners).

Country Review: Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)

Education in the OECS

Based on data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)[175]:

St Vincent and the Grenadines:

Children of school age: In 2019, there were 23,597 children of pre-primary to secondary school age.
Out-of-school children: In 2017, there were a total of 58 children and 37 adolescents who were out of school.
Gross enrolment ratio: In 2018, the primary school gross enrolment ratio was 113% for girls and 114% for boys. Secondary gross enrolment ratio in 2018 was 106% for males and 109% for females.
Government spending on education: In 2018, St Vincent and the Grenadines spent 19% of total government expenditure on education.

St Lucia

Children of school age: In 2019, there were 31,940 children of pre-primary to secondary school age.
Out-of-school children: In 2019, there were a total of 260 children and 709 adolescents who were out of school.
Gross enrolment ratio: In 2019, the primary school gross enrolment ratio was 103% for girls and 101% for boys. Secondary gross enrolment ratio in 2019 was 91% for males and 89% for females.
Government spending on education: In 2019, St Lucia spent 14% of total government expenditure on education.

Grenada
Children of school age: In 2019, there were 12,734 children of pre-primary to secondary school age.
Out-of-school children: In 2018, there were a total of 94 out-of-school children.
Gross enrolment ratio: In 2018, the primary school gross enrolment ratio was 106% for girls and 108% for boys. Secondary gross enrolment ratio in 2018 was 118% for males and 122% for females.
Government spending on education: In 2017, Grenada spent 14% of total government expenditure on education.
Literacy: In 2014, the literacy rate was 99% for males and 99.5% for females.

Dominica

Children of school age: In 2019, there were 12,474 children of pre-primary to secondary school age.

[175] www.uis.unesco.org/en/home#tabs-0-uis_home_top_menus-3

Out-of-school children: In 2019, there were a total of 228 children and 36 adolescents out of school.
Gross enrolment ratio: In 2019, the primary school gross enrolment ratio was 99% for girls and 102% for boys. Secondary gross enrolment ratio in 2019 was 100% for males and 102% for females.
Government spending on education: In 2019, Dominica spent 8.3% of total government expenditure on education.

The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is an eleven-member grouping of islands spread across the Eastern Caribbean and comprise of Leeward Islands: Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat, Anguilla, and the British Virgin Islands; and the Windward Islands: Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. Of these, Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines are GPE partner countries.

The application for GPE COVID-19 funding was submitted by the OECS Commission on behalf of the four GPE member states (Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia, and St Vincent and the Grenadines) in response to the GPE Accelerated Funding Request. This application intended to provide support to the member states in addressing the myriad challenges created or exacerbated by COVID-19. The application was based on a regional *OECS Education Sector Response and Recovery Strategy to COVID-19*, which was developed on behalf of all the nine English-speaking OECS member states[176].

Significant progress has been made in education in the OECS region over the last two decades. There has been significant progress in some states in implementing universal early childhood education. There has also been good harmonisation of the education system across the region with OECS countries making significant financial contributions towards education. There are, however, some key areas of concern that remain. For example, net enrolment at pre-primary is at just over 66% and less than 15% of secondary school graduates pursuing post-secondary education. There are gender and socioeconomic disparities in performance e.g., declining participation of males at upper secondary and tertiary levels. Attracting and retaining quality teachers has also been a challenge in the region. Economic growth has been a challenge as have high levels of unemployment including among graduates (OECS Education Sector Strategy 2012-2021). Another key challenge facing the OECS region is that it remains prone to natural disasters. Whilst the experience of natural disasters has in some ways prepared the region for crises, it has been noted during primary data collection that the nature of crises in the past affected only one island or a few and others were able to provide assistance whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted each and every member state of the region, severely compromising their ability to respond.

GPE in OECS

The OECS has been a GPE partner since 2016 when they received a USD 2 million grant aimed at achieving the following objectives: (a) use quality learning standards to support evidence-

[176] https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/application-and-program-document-covid-19-accelerated-funding-oecs-april-2020

based teaching and learning at the primary level; (b) improve teacher practices at the primary level; (c) strengthen primary school leadership and accountability; and (d) initiate the strengthening of sector M&E capacity in support of evidence-based strategic management and decision making, all in the member countries[177]. The project targets children attending primary schools in Grenada (10,069), St Lucia (16,268), St Vincent and the Grenadines (12,014) and Dominica (4,866) as well as teachers and school leaders[178].

Key Findings

Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis

Stakeholders valued the timely availability of the grant funding received through UNICEF (with four OECS GPE countries receiving USD 70,000 and an additional USD 70,000 for the non-GPE countries in the OECS) as well as the GPE Covid-19 AF grant. It was noted that this funding was critical in allowing countries to develop response plans, align them with emergency needs and to use the funds for '*immediate firefighting*'. The nature of AF funding was also appreciated with one stakeholder noting that whilst most GPE grants (and other non-GPE grants) tend to be tied to country budgets, the AF grant was more efficient in its reduction of bureaucratic processes and immediate availability.

UNICEF's role for the planning grant was lauded by interviewees and it was recognised that the organisation's presence as well as their extensive experience in global emergency response allowed them to get mobilised and to mobilise other partners in an effective manner.

The GPE Secretariat country lead and GPE's support in the application development process were highlighted by stakeholders as instrumental in assisting OECS in applying for this funding. At the time of the Covid-19 AF grant application, OECS was also in the process of applying for a new ESPIG and whilst undertaking both at the same time placed pressures on constrained government systems, stakeholders suggested that the GPE Secretariat provided sufficient support to enable both processes to continue as smoothly as possible given the circumstances. Furthermore, according to stakeholder interviews, an introductory meeting was facilitated by the GPE Secretariat where all interested parties were walked through the Covid-19 AF funding process. In addition to setting out and clarifying partner countries questions, another critical benefit of this meeting was the ability to learn from other contexts. For example, stakeholders in OECS highlighted that they had the opportunity to hear from other countries e.g., Guyana and The Gambia which helped in the development of their own plans. In addition to this, they were able to learn from other development partners e.g., UNICEF and UNESCO given the multi-stakeholder partnership framework of GPE. Therefore, this not only provided technical inputs from a range of stakeholders but also created synergies and coordination not only amongst development partners but also across a range of contexts.

[177] Project Appraisal Document for Small Recipient Trust Fund Grant to OECS for a support to Implementation of the Regional Educational Strategy (March 2016).
[178] Ibid.

Stakeholders also acknowledged the speed at which the GPE Secretariat was able to mobilize the Covid-19 AF funds in a '*phenomenal*' manner and agreed that this was '*faster than anything…done at the GPE before'*. However, given that this was a regional grant for the OECS which required the coordination, agreement and collaboration across several stakeholders, the first-come-first-served system did not appear to favor this context. Nonetheless, given OECS's experience with coordination, these mechanisms for coordination already existed and were strong, which assisted the process. Despite this, the fact that the timelines were very tight and the need to revise the application several times (with further information being requested by the Secretariat) resulted in them receiving less funding than initially anticipated (initially applied for USD 4 million) due to the need to coordinate across several countries in a very short period of time. This, in turn, led to the need to adjust plans to align with the amount received. The need for constant communication, coordination and pressures of time imposed by the competitive approach was deemed to have '*created tension in this region*' according to stakeholders. However, interviewed participants also recognized that '*funding is relative and $ 3 million made a big difference in a small region'*. Additionally, stakeholders also recognized that the uncertainty for all those involved including the GPE Secretariat on how much funding would be available and which countries would be applying were all factors that were beyond the control of all those involved in this process (including the GPE Secretariat).

It was highlighted from the key informant interviews that a major advantage of the GPE monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (including the reporting mechanism for the grant and the general M&E guidelines) is that they support government systems, have good accountability and levels of transparency in terms of securing the appropriate utilization of funds. Stakeholders noted that similar to the ESPIG process, data and monitoring systems implemented by the GPE play a crucial role and provide a very good sense of progress against grant planned activities. One area of focus for the future highlighted by a stakeholder was that whilst there is a well-established examination system in place and the OECS region has been making strides in terms of data monitoring mechanism at the country and regional levels (e.g. through capacity training under a GPE ESPDG grant), a critical question is whether this will help assess learning losses that have occurred due to the pandemic and inform planning in such a way that the impact of these learning losses can be mitigated.

However, according to some GPE Secretariat interviewees, the monitoring, evaluation and learning aspects of the Covid-19 AF grants in some respects were confusing as guidance by the GPE Secretariat was being developed and shared with partners in a '*piecemea*l' and ongoing fashion as necessitated by the evolving nature of Covid-19 and the need to '*build the bike as we were riding it'*. The choice of common indicators for tracking across all grants was noted to be useful in that it allows the GPE to capture a range of key outcomes. GPE Secretariat interviewees recognized the difficulty in balancing a large number of indicators to account for contextual differences whilst at the same time not placing undue burden on partner countries. However, according to country stakeholders, the survey process, through its pre-documented format resulted in ease of monitoring tasks for countries including the OECS and they did not feel the process was too burdensome. However, this approach did not allow for the fact that across contexts different programs are being implemented with their own nuances (e.g. the top-level indicators do not capture OECS-specific elements such as their initiatives to bridge the digital divide through the provision of additional devices).

It was noted, however, that some of the indicators that formed part of the Covid-19 AF grant reporting mechanism were very useful for the OECS context and there are plans to continue using these e.g. training teachers in digital education delivery. One stakeholder noted that '*Covid-19 has pushed us into thinking outside the box and in the digital space, therefore we need to maintain and monitor this on an ongoing basis*'. It was also highlighted that the periodic surveys allow qualitative notes to be added which was noted to be very helpful in providing context. Overall, stakeholders in OECS felt that the Covid-19 AF M&E process was an opportunity to recognize what was needed in terms of data systems for reporting across the region and that it *'…accelerated the process of making sure that this happens'*. A few stakeholders emphasized that whilst some countries in the region have EMIS and open data systems, there is a need for the development of a region-wide EMIS system and evidence-based policy making (including independent evaluations that systematically assess the true impact of the various interventions and policies adopted during the emergency response period) and this formative and forthcoming summative evaluations of GPE's Covid-19 AF grants were noted to be steps in the right direction.

Type and relevance of interventions undertaken with the GPE COVID-19 AF grant

Covid-19 AF Grant Overview

GPE Covid-19 grant amount: USD 3 million
Grant Agent: OECS Commission
Coordinating Agency: Caribbean Development Bank
Project duration: July 2021-September 2021
Project focus: Activities related to the strategies within four areas of focus: harmonization of policy response amongst member states, transition to distributive learning, ensuring the well-being of students in and out of school, and promoting engagement.
Focus population: Targets vulnerable students namely those who have special needs, children with disabilities and low socio-economic status groups who have been most affected due to the unavailability of: devices, access to online resources, teacher support due to school closures, and support from home to assist in learning.

Source: OECS COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Request 5/5/2020

The Covid-19 AF grant of USD 3 million in the Caribbean was a multi-country grant that supported a regional response to Covid-19 in the Eastern Caribbean. Grant funding was used to support the implementation of the regional response in four member countries: Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines). Within the region there are many countries that are officially mandated to coordinate with one another, but it should be noted that there only some countries that are GPE partner countries. The grant had the following objectives:

1. Develop a harmonized approach to policy on educational matters in response to COVID-19.
2. Increase access of the most disadvantaged students to materials, tools, facilities, and experiences to close the achievement gap for future success.
3. Provide opportunities for increased psychosocial support to teachers and students in the present pandemic.

4. Train educators and students in improving pedagogy and resilience in education.
5. Engage the public to achieve a unified approach in the response to COVID-19.
6. Support the educational recovery from COVID-19 to facilitate students' return to school.

The grant aimed to support the following activities:

- Harmonisation of education policies and procedures to ensure a coordinated and effective response across member states to the pandemic.
- Academic recovery program supporting vulnerable students (6-9 months duration).
- Provision of online learning.
- Procurement and distribution of devices for primary and lower secondary.
- Teacher training in primary and secondary schools.
- WASH support to vulnerable schools.

The grant was allocated to mitigation and recovery across the themes of equity, learning and systems according to the following allocations:

Country	Equity Mitigation	Learning Mitigation	System Mitigation	Equity Recovery	Learning Recovery	System Recovery	Equity Total	Learning Total	System Total
OECS	863,670 (91%)	1,316,670 (100%)	377,460 (60%)	85,200 (9%)	0 (0%)	250,500 (40%)	948,870 (33%)	1,316,670 (46%)	627,960 (22%)

Source: Internal Secretariat R&P COVID AF grant costing/coding database

These initiatives are based on the regional response plan that was endorsed and approved by the Ministry and partners across the four countries.

In late March 2020, the UNICEF office in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States received a GPE grant of US$70,000 to support the planning of the response to the pandemic.

Under the first pillar, an aspect of the Covid-19 AF grant in the OECS was the harmonization of the policies to allow for coordination amongst the islands and to make schools safe for the return of pupils through WASH provision but also to ensure continued learning and mitigate learning losses through academic recovery programs. The first pillar of **'harmonization of policy responses amongst member states**' focuses on collegiality and harmonization for education policy formation across all member states on an ongoing basis similar to that achieved when the region was created (Covid-19 Accelerated Funding Request, OECS 5 May 2020). Given the regional context, similarly stakeholders recognised that whilst a one-size-fits-all approach would not be appropriate, there was still a need for harmonisation across the OECS countries rather than individual policies being developed to ensure that the resource pool was effectively utilised and cross-country learnings were engendered to increase impact and reach. Stakeholders noted that a critical priority area was to adopt a learning management system not just for the immediate Covid-19 response but for the longer-term academic recovery programme. It was also noted that it was important to ensure that any interventions were geared towards the most vulnerable populations given that the pandemic would have a disproportionate impact on their lives and learning and, therefore, any programmes would need to embed specific interventions to help these children catch up in the main delivery of education agenda. Within this, stakeholders indicated that they had developed a framework for the academic recovery programme.

The second pillar focused on '**transition to distributed learning**'. The provision of devices was an important focus of the interventions adopted under the Covid-19 AF grant as this context required a more high-tech approach given that a majority of the population in the OECS already had online connectivity.

As part of ensuring that the most vulnerable children's needs were met, stakeholders highlighted that the interventions tried specifically to focus on disabled children to ensure that this population was well served. However, some stakeholders questioned the extent to which the interventions were truly able to reach the most vulnerable populations[179].

According to the OECS application for Covid-19 funding[180], GPE's support to help the OECS transition to online learning aimed to build back better in that it aimed to not only help address the most immediate educational challenge posed by the pandemic but also aimed to prepare the region to face future threats more effectively. Recognizing that the Caribbean is the second most environmental hazard prone region in the world, the effects of threats could be more effectively mitigated in the future based on the groundwork that this Covid-19 AF grant funding.

In the OECS context, it was noted by several stakeholders that the provision of a relatively small number of devices had the potential to bridge the equity and digital gap in an effective manner and whilst in any other context this may not have worked, given the OECS context. In this context, the islands have small populations (approximately 60 primary schools in each island) and given their small geographic size, connectivity is easier and there are no incredibly remote rural areas that are hard to access and therefore several stakeholders agreed that the provision of devises was one of the most effective use of funds. The bulk pooled procurement through GPE funding allowed for a more cost-effective purchase of tablets for the region than would have been obtained had the islands tried to procure devices on their own[181].

Additionally, delivery of education to all children through devices was further facilitated by the fact that laptop distribution to students had already started in the region since 2010 with both ICT integration and training of teachers (online training 2014-2016) well on its way by the time the pandemic unfolded which meant that not only did a large number of children had ICT capability but that several teachers were already trained to teach in this medium of education delivery.

In order to make these devices usable, the next critical requirement was one of connectivity. The GPE-supported interventions under the Covid-19 AF grant aimed to level the playing field by providing connectivity to the most vulnerable. The Covid-19 AF funding request document for OECS[182] highlighted that whilst there have been advances in increased internet access in

[179] This is partly due to data and identifying those who are considered most vulnerable. One stakeholder noted the need for future evaluations to focus on what actually happened during Covid-19: for example, identifying how many children at home were able to get access to online classes, how many girls were affected and how many boys etc.?

[180] GPE Covid-19 Emergency Funding: Application Highlights, updated 30 October 2020

[181] According to key informants interviewed.

[182] (Covid-19 Accelerated Funding Request, OECS 5 May 2020)

the region, some communities e.g. Dominica, still had limited access to the internet, leading to a situation of inequity in connectivity. Therefore, the application requested increased attention for disadvantaged students. Innovatively, a collaboration with telecoms companies met this need by enabling devices to be connected and for children (particularly the most vulnerable) to access learning platforms free of charge through the purchase of license agreements to close the digital divide (e.g. partnership with Microsoft Teams).

The third pillar focused on '**ensuring the wellbeing of students both in and out of schools'** through supporting hygiene and sanitation initiatives in schools as well as ensuring that schools can support the physical, psychological and socioeconomic needs of both students and educators both in and out of schools[183]. Stakeholders also reiterated that there was an intention to support the psychosocial needs of children as well as implementing a school feeding program (through mobile meals), kitchen facilities and WASH facilities in schools. At the time of this evaluation, the implementation and utilization could not be assessed, however this should be an area of focus for the summative evaluation.

Efficiency and early (if any) signs of effectiveness of the GPE COVID-19 grant

According to the first Six Monthly Survey (submitted on 12/23/2020), OECS was rated as '*Moderately Satisfactory*' and this remained unchanged from the rating given according to the First Quarterly Survey (submitted on 9/30/2020). At the time of writing this Formative Evaluation, the Second Quarterly Report had not yet been submitted by the GA to the GPE Secretariat and evidence from it could not be reviewed.

According to the Six-Monthly Survey, significant progress has been made in the region. Since the last reporting period, a monitoring and evaluation consultant was contracted (30 September, 2020) and a dedicated project manager joined the project (October 2020)[184]. It was noted that significant work has been undertaken by the Project Management Team to prepare for the procurement of goods (e.g. tendering process of e-learning devices) and services (such as nominating project coordinators) through the Covid-19 AF grant and there was the expectation that this would translate into larger disbursements and more efficient implementation of project activities. For example, with respect to goods, the team did not anticipate a failed first attempt in the tendering process of e-learning devices. This document noted that staffing issues have also resulted in delays in the procurement process of key activities such as the implementation certification trainings for MoE officials in education in emergencies and for teachers in effective pedagogy for distributed learning.

Despite these setbacks, the Six-Monthly review suggests that good progress has been made in each project component and project implementation is expected to become more efficient in the first quarter of 2021 due to the adoption of risk mitigation strategies and the commencement of all key activities not yet implemented.

The overarching outcome of 'improved ability of the Education Sector to respond to and recover from Covid-19 and similar health pandemics' has seen progress in implementation

[183] Covid-19 Accelerated Funding Request, OECS 5 May 2020.
[184] The Report noted that the first Project Steering Committee was held on 3 December 2020.

through the engagement of the consultant to design an Academic Recovery Program to mitigate the effects of learning losses as a result of school closures; the tender process for e-learning devices for under-resourced students and teachers to support distributed teaching and learning was also noted to have been successfully executed and progress has been made in ensuring the wellbeing of students both in the classroom and at home by undertaking the procurement of hygiene supplies to maintain student's health etc.

In terms of a focus on distributed learning, progress has been noted in the Six-Monthly Survey for example through the completion of a rapid assessment of learning management systems across the region, the creation of online learning videos and content for radio and revision of OECS guidelines for Continuity of Learning to support the application of distributed learning, etc.

In terms of student wellbeing, it was noted that 50% of vulnerable primary school children will have access to hygiene and sanitation kits and 200 schools will have access to water supply and sanitation facilities as well as the provision of tele psychosocial services available to students and teachers across member states (further details available in the Six-Monthly Report). However, whether this has actually happened cannot be evaluated at this stage and could be a focus of the summative evaluation.

'**Promoting engagement to facilitate coordination of interventions and to increase awareness of partnerships**' was the fourth critical pillar highlighted in the OECS funding request[185]. In practice, key informants were of the opinion that whilst there was much communication between different stakeholders and included much consultation in the past, at times this was not coordinated or systematic. During the Covid-19 time period, it was reported that a range of stakeholders in the region met regularly, continuously consulted and provided significant inputs into the response plan and the related grant application (one stakeholder noted that whilst the regional group for the OECS used to meet twice yearly prior to the pandemic, since the pandemic hit, they have been meeting (virtually) every other month and the frequency of meetings has increases substantially to match the needs with stakeholders '*meeting more and engaging more*'.

The OECS, given its nature, has well established coordination mechanisms but according to stakeholders the GPE Covid-19 AF funding has enhanced that dialogue and leveraged other development partners as well as making the dialogue more collaborative. The Education Development Management Unit (EDMU) is the main unit that facilitates and coordinates initiatives in education reform that for the OECS Member States. This unit was established in 1993 as the executive arm of the member states in coordinating the regional reform in education. The reform strategies were highlighted in two key documents: 1) Foundations for the Future and subsequently in the revised strategy, 2) Pillars for Partnership and Progress. These two documents have guided major regional reform initiatives which were facilitated by this Unit for nearly two decades. The EDMU's work has been noted to be adding value to the regional integration movement through achievement in several areas including harmonization of legislation, adoption of common policies, development of common curricula and engagement in common management practices in the education systems of the

[185] Covid-19 Accelerated Funding Request, OECS 5 May 2020.

OECS[186]. Stakeholders noted the critical role this unit has played in coordinating efforts during the Covid-19 AF grant process.

Whilst the regional LEG in the OECS is reportedly not as well defined as in other contexts (due to some countries who are part of the OECS but are not GPE partner countries), an education coordination group is in existence that brings together all the critical stakeholders involved in education across the region. In addition to this, partner countries also have local LEGs which can include teacher unions and business partners as well as other critical stakeholders from the education sector. According to one stakeholder, the Covid-19 AF grant application process resulted in *"Lots of people [coming] to the table … all working together for the good of the region"*.

Given that some OECS countries are GPE partners whilst others are not and that there is a mandate to coordinate across everyone, this makes the role of the coordinating agency more difficult at times. It was suggested by stakeholders that there was currently a process taking place to define what this regional educational group should look like, how they will coordinate within the sector and how the different aspects fit together. It was noted by stakeholders that '*GPE funding (has) anchored coordination between [the islands]*.' Stakeholders also noted that the region had experienced continued and increased cross-sectoral dialogue and engagement with the health and social development sectors during the emergency response period. In particular, some stakeholders highlighted an innovative side activity in which the OECS Commission has partnered with the social development sector to work closely on psychosocial and school-feeding programs. This activity was not funded by the AF grant but evolved during the course of the pandemic due to the thinking around the AF grant interventions. Working within the same regional cluster was noted as a key advantage which allowed critical stakeholders to meet frequently and at a regional level to subsequently promote the same thinking at the national level.

In terms of 'building back better' stakeholders identified some important lessons for themselves and for the GPE Secretariat in terms of the provision of GPE's support going forward. These included: continued and maintained engagement with all stakeholders in both the conceptualisation stage but also throughout the implementation process; ensuring realistic budgeting estimates for interventions; whilst planning interventions, ensuring that the process is steered better – for example, when interventions were being implemented in the OECS, the stakeholders were aware that the AF grant was only for a given duration and, with the unfolding crisis, it increasingly became clear that everything planned may not be fully executed. Therefore, the need for agile and nimble steering was highlighted as a lesson learnt for future emergency scenarios.

[186] http://www.bvi.gov.vg/sites/default/files/programme_coordinator_edmu.pdf

Country Review: Senegal

Education in Senegal

Key Education Statistics

Based on data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)[187] and the Annual Education Report, the following are some key statistics on education in Senegal (2019):

Children of school age: A total of 6.8 million children and adolescents from pre-primary through to upper secondary school age.
Out-of-school children: A total of 681,296 children out-of-school of which 407,132 are boys.
Gross enrolment ratio: The primary school gross enrolment ratio was 88% for girls and 77% for boys. Secondary gross enrolment ratio was 49% for girls and 43% for boys.
Literacy: In 2017 the literacy rate for 15–24-year-olds was 75.6% for males and 63.5% for females.
Government spending on education: In 2018, Senegal spent 21.5% of total government expenditure on education.

Senegal's long-term development vision is detailed in its 'Plan Senegal Emergent' sector plan, which was launched in 2103 and focuses on the 3 pillars of economic transformation, human capital improvement and strengthening the rule of law and governance and sets out an ambitious growth path towards 2035.

Senegal is one of the most politically stable countries in Africa with ever-strengthening democratic structures. However, poverty rates remain high due to poor economic growth and high population growth. The government has placed education as a strategic priority through the implementation of an educational sector development plan and programme that focuses on sector management and decentralisation. Despite key reforms and ongoing large-scale initiatives, there are certain critical challenges that still face the sector. These include large numbers of out-of-school children, persistently low levels of learning especially in reading and maths (as shown through PASEC 2014 results), and the need for quality teaching[188].

The education sector policy for Senegal has been set out in the Education and Training Quality, Equity and Transparency Improvement Program (PAQUET-EF) initially established for the period 2013-2025 and revised and extended by five years to be aligned with the international agenda (SDG 4, Strategy 2030). This sector policy document focuses on the following key objectives:

- substantially improve learning outcomes at all levels.
- promote coverage, diversification and integration of the education and training system at all levels.

[187] http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/sn

[188] Project paper on a proposed additional credit in the amount of 48.7 million euros to the Republic of Senegal for quality improvement and equity of basic education project document, May 9, 2018 http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/176681527996626963/pdf/SENEGAL-PAD-05112018.pdf

- introduce results-based transparent and effective sector governance.

The sector plan focuses on the initial objectives of quality, equity and good governance whilst also focusing on equity of access (by reducing vulnerabilities, developing the pre-primary level, and consolidating the basic education cycle). This plan also calls for incorporating all forms of teaching including non-formal teaching and the development of vocational counselling mechanisms to guide students toward the vocational and technical streams[189].

GPE in Senegal

Senegal has been a GPE partner country since 2006 and has received a total of six grants: the most recent Covid-19 AF grant, three programme implementation grants, a sector plan development grant, and a program development grant. The most recent sector plan that was supported by GPE funding is the PAQUET-EF 2018–2030 which the Country Level Evaluation of Senegal (2019)[190] indicated to be of good quality as per the GPE quality standards for Education Sector Plans showing improvements, particularly in terms of better addressing key challenges in sector management and the quality of the financial framework. The most recent program implementation grant (USD 42.6 million, which includes a Multiplier) 2019-2023 aims to improve the performance of the Senegalese education system in terms of quality, equity, and efficiency in a sustainable manner[191].

Key Findings

Suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis

Covid-19 is like no other humanitarian crisis in recent history given its global and unprecedented nature. The nature of this crisis meant its impact hit universally (not only affecting all partner countries but also affecting implementing partners, donor organisations, donor countries etc.). Senegal has been noted to have been completely unprepared for the large-scale humanitarian response that this crisis has required given that it has never experienced emergencies and crises to the extent that some of the other countries covered within this review have. Senegal has been previously grappling with challenges such as an influx of refugees and high malnutrition and, therefore, whilst there is a food security cluster, there are no humanitarian response plans and a limited number of implementing partners on the ground to support the scale of response needed. The GPE Secretariat, was noted to have played a critical and timely role in supporting the government in their response to this challenge.

In terms of the sufficiency of funding, stakeholders in Senegal noted that whilst the availability of these funds was efficient and the GPE Secretariat swiftly positioned itself to assist the country through their response plan, no amount could be deemed enough given the scale of the crisis. AFD (Agence Francaise de Développement), the grant agent of the Covid-19 AF

[189] Education in Senegal | Global Partnership for Education

[190] https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2019-08-summative-evaluation-gpe-country-level-support-education-for-senegal-august-2019.pdf

[191] Ibid

grant, working in direct partnership with other multilaterals, were deemed to be very quick in their support. According to stakeholders, the '*multi-participant*', *'inclusive*', *'flexible*' and '*collective nature*' of the GPE operating model is what differentiates it from other grant providers and critically, '*this is what distinguishes [GPE]…if they were exactly like other providers, it would not add value.*'

However, stakeholders did not feel that the first-come-first-served mechanism was appropriate and, according to one stakeholder, was a particular drawback for Senegal given that a coordinated, robust, response plan was required in such a short time frame and that too through a challenging virtual consultation process. Given that Senegal received USD 7 million as opposed to the USD 10 million initially applied for (Covid-19 AFF Approval Memo and Checklist Senegal), stakeholders viewed this as a '*double disadvantage*' given that they had designed their response based on a higher expected amount of funding and, therefore, needed to redesign their interventions based on lower actual amount granted.

Whilst one stakeholder indicated that the delay in the availability of French versions of the application forms and guidance notes placed Senegal at a disadvantage to Anglophone countries, analysis of secondary data indicates that French versions of documentation were posted on the GPE website either at the same time or at most two days after the English versions and not two weeks later as had been suggested (see Table below).

Document	English version (date posted on GPE website)	French version (date posted on GPE website)
Guidelines	7-Apr	9-Apr
Program standards (prior to merging with guidelines)	9-Apr	10-Apr
Application cover note	7-Apr	9-Apr
FAQs	13-Apr	15-Apr
M&E guidance	16-Apr	16-Apr

Source: Provided by the GPE Secretariat, May 2021.

Some stakeholders raised concerns pertaining to transaction costs and fiduciary risk. In particular, unintended transaction costs (e.g., through the choice of the GA, heavy procedures, and increased bureaucratic processes) and fiduciary risk need to be managed for accelerated funding situations This view contrasted with other country case studies and documentary evidence that has indicated that the grant application process was efficient. In addition to this, there was the need to manage reputational risk for the GPE given that this was a unique and unprecedented situation where the Secretariat itself was facing such a situation for the first time, was under immense pressure to act quickly and yet maintain robustness and rigour in terms of quality assurance. Learnings from this experience will, therefore, help improve GPE's future responses to emergency situations and reduce any frustrations that partner countries faced to the first-come-first-served nature of this response.

In terms of the GPE requirements for Covid-19 AF grant related monitoring, stakeholders noted that the survey and reporting requirements were clear and useful. It was mentioned that activity-related reporting was not complicated and made it easier to fulfil the requirement, however, the critical factor will be reporting against results and outcomes that may prove more challenging. It was noted by interviewees that the Ministry is currently

developing a monitoring system however, the current government data systems lack agility and whilst there is a need for real-time data collection, there are no plans for this to be provided. Stakeholders saw the Covid-19 crisis as an opportunity to place pressures on the old system to enforce change and update M&E capacity. It was noted, however, that the sheer scale of this task would make this very challenging. One innovation that was noted by a stakeholder was the collaboration of a research institution with the government that offered a means of supplementing the government's data collection systems with research, monitoring, and evaluation capacity through the creation of a research consortium, offering a '*new modality to address rapid needs of response'*.

The type and relevance of interventions undertaken with the GPE COVID-19 AF grant

Covid-19 AF Grant Overview

GPE Covid-19 grant amount: US$7 million
Grant Agent: AFD (Agence Française de Développement)
Coordinating Agency: UNESCO
Project duration: June 2020-December 2021
Project outcomes: Aims to support learning continuity including for the most vulnerable children; safe reopening of schools; learning assessment and remedial actions; psychosocial support and school canteens.
Focus population: specific support to students in exam years in grades 5 and 9.

Source: COVID-19 AFF Approval Memo and Checklist Senegal

In late March 2020, the UNICEF office in Senegal received a GPE grant of US$70,000 to support the Ministry of Education with developing an education sector response plan. This response plan formed the basis of the USD 7 million that was eventually funded. The grant objectives underpinning this support included the following:

General objective: to contribute to the implementation of the response education sector plan in response to the Covid-19 crisis in Senegal for the perimeter corresponding to the field of action of the Ministry of National Education by targeting primarily students, teachers, and public elementary schools.

Specific objectives:

OS-1: Contribute to mitigating the effects of the Covid19 crisis on the 2019/20 school year by ensuring the continuity of the educational system and services, in particular for vulnerable students.
OS-2: Support the reopening of schools for the year 2019/20 and / or the start and progress of the 2020/21 school year by ensuring the protection of students and staff and by stimulating attendance and academic success vulnerable students.
OS-3: Strengthen the learning process and the resilience of school administration and educational institutions based on evidence.

The resultant interventions that were funded by this grant included the following: **learning continuity**, including for the most vulnerable children (teacher training on distance learning

practices, production and dissemination of learning materials in print, radio/TV, offline/online); **ensuring the safe reopening of schools** (e.g. through provision of WASH facilities and PPE such as handwashing kits, masks, thermometers); **reinforcing a learning approach and resilience of the education system** with action-research activities; **enabling the participation and performance of vulnerable students** (e.g. children with disabilities through psychosocial support); **flexible and distance learning schedules** (e.g. television and radio programmes to reduce gender-based violence, early marriage and allow flexibility of learning around domestic chores especially for girls[192]). All of these activities are planned to be coordinated with other national efforts and other interventions in line with GPE norms and standards for joint sector monitoring and accountability[193].

The grant was allocated to mitigation and recovery across the themes of equity, learning and systems according to the following allocations:

Country	Equity Mitigation	Learning Mitigation	System Mitigation	Equity Recovery	Learning Recovery	System Recovery	Equity Total	Learning Total	System Total
Senegal	8,776 (0%)	511,853 (37%)	346,842 (13%)	2,707,360 (100%)	887,696 (63%)	2,254,375 (87%)	2,716,135 (40%)	1,399,549 (21%)	2,601,217 (39%)

Source: Internal Secretariat R&P COVID AF grant costing/coding database

Stakeholders reiterated that the first priority was to reinforce the resilience of the Senegalese educational system given that Covid-19 highlighted the limitations and obsoleteness of the existing system. Safeguarding, WASH and PPE provision (noted by stakeholders as examples of cross sectoral care and well-being) as well as ensuring the continuity of learning were highlighted as critical areas that required immediate attention. But in addition to this, the delivery of education required modernisation through the ability to deliver distance learning. As in other contexts, the pandemic and the resultant emergency response required brought to the fore already-recognised weaknesses within the education system and beyond and catalysed the need to address these. For example, disparities in access to electricity and connectivity became even more apparent as did the need for the Senegalese system to be more inclusive for marginalised and vulnerable pupils who became even more isolated due to Covid-19. The interventions that were proposed as a result of the GPE Covid-19 AF grant were noted by stakeholders to aim to address some of these challenges and weaknesses within the system.

Finally, it was also noted that because '*Covid-19 did not reach everybody in the same way in the 14 regions…some regions have been spared more than others…there is a need to enable local authorities to build local responses to local questions'*, through a more decentralised approach with more local advocacy and the type of discourse amongst stakeholders as that which was garnered through the GPE Covid-19 AF grant application process.

In terms of the continued relevance of the interventions, according to stakeholders, these have continued to be appropriate and therefore has been no need for a substantial reorientation of activities. The secondary data and documentation also suggest that a

[192] Covid-19 AF Approval Memo and Checklist Senegal.
[193] https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/senegal

substantial reorientation has not occurred[194]. However, the extent to which this remains the case can be more rigorously assessed at the time of the summative evaluation.

Whilst the GPE Covid-19 AF grants did not directly target long-term capacity strengthening at the systems level, according to stakeholders they have somewhat resulted in a reinforcement of capacities on a long-term basis and have enforced resilience into the education system in Senegal. According to stakeholders, GPE funding has reinforced the capability of the education sector in Senegal and it has been '*strengthened for the long term'*. Examples of this include the establishment of a distance learning and teaching platform that has proved a useful tool for this crisis and for the future. One critical and important element highlighted by stakeholders was the fact that the GPE Covid-19 AF grant required a quick and clear national response plan. This plan not only formed the basis of interventions implemented using the GPE Covid-19 funding but also meant that other financial partners could align their initiatives with this response plan set out by the Senegalese government. According to stakeholders in Senegal, this response plan meant that any Covid-19 AF grant initiatives were completely aligned with government plans and that all partners were engaged in a coordinated effort within the country. The provision of funds to create a response plan and the requirement for a response plan as the basis of the Covid-19 AF funding were noted by stakeholders as fundamental contributions of GPE's response in addition to the funds themselves.

Efficiency and early (if any) signs of effectiveness of the GPE COVID-19 grant

According to the Quarterly Surveys for the period 12/15/2020– 3/15/2021, of the USD 7 million granted to Senegal, USD 5,241,029 million is the cumulative amount that has been utilized. According to the First Quarterly Survey (submitted on 1/15/2021), Senegal was rated '*Satisfactory'* and according to the latest survey available to the evaluators (Second Survey, submitted: 5/7/2021), the rating for the country has remained '*Satisfactory*'. According to stakeholders, in their opinion, most interventions appear to be following the planned time frame (e.g., the actions put into place for the reopening of classes and examinations to be held in July 2020 and the re-opening of schools at all levels of schooling in November 2020 appear to have been achieved). Stakeholders reiterated that at the time of interview, 2 surveys had been received that appeared to indicate that implementation was progressing smoothly. Whilst revisions on initial plans had been made, in terms of reallocating budgets to distribute more masks than had been initially estimated and to extend learning support continuity from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021. The flexibility and agility within the GPE funding mechanism allowed for such an adaptation and was appreciated and required

The secondary data provides insights into how the interventions are progressing thus far. According to the Second Quarterly Report, progress has been made as follows:

- **Learning continuity**: Senegal has achieved the acquisition of 4,000 portable 4G terminals for the provision of distance training as well as planning the production of educational capsules for television broadcasting for intermediate classes of the primary cycle and the first cycle of secondary schooling. According to interviewees, it was noted that the distance learning programme was set up quickly and the community radio and educational channels on television worked well. It was also

[194] Quarterly Surveys for the period 12/15/2020– 3/15/2021

suggested that the *'…[implementation] of numerical learning resources faced challenges*' and that teacher and student training was required to improve implementation in this area. One critical hurdle in the face of implementation efforts, in the views of an interviewee, was the fact that a large number of parents were illiterate and, therefore, unable to support home schooling of their children even with the provision of learning materials. In terms of the use of technology for distance learning, it was noted that there has been a '*…margin of progression in covering more remote areas'*, and that there needs to be a larger plan of connectivity at the national level.

- **Supporting the safe reopening of schools**: 1. Distribution of washable masks to primary school students and teachers; finalization of the distribution of sanitary kits and handwashing devices to all public primary schools and colleges present in the territory. 2. Assessing learning with an aim to improve planning and operationalize remedial actions for certain students 3. Effective financial transfer to the management committees of 5,455 primary schools for the purchase of cleaning products for the sanitation of schools. 4. Start of psychosocial support activities for the benefit of the educational community and radio sessions to raise awareness of the measures taken in response to Covid19 within schools. 5. Effective start of school canteen services in all 637 public primary schools targeted by the program since February 2021.
- **Reinforcing a learning approach and resilience of the education system**: Completed assessment study and policy analysis note as part of monitoring and evaluation; formalization of a decentralized monitoring system.

As mentioned previously, according to key stakeholders the limited presence of a humanitarian community and, in particular, implementing partners, has been highlighted as a challenge in the rollout of mitigation and recovery strategies in Senegal. It was noted that there was a quick awareness of the particular needs in poor, remote and non-electrified areas and with the support of GPE funds, the government were able to pull into place a '*photocopying mechanism*' to deliver learning material to households according to stakeholders. According to interviewed stakeholders the delivery of hardcopy learning materials in areas of poor connectivity that did not have access to radio, television, or electricity, was '*timely and efficient*'. However, the effectiveness and results of these efforts can only be fully assessed at the summative evaluation stage.

It was highlighted during the primary data collection that AFD (the grant agent) had conducted a supervision mission in December 2020 and had a very clear sight of implementation of the Covid-19 AF grant. Activities that were being implemented by UNICEF and by the World Food Programme (WFP) as well as those being implemented by research institutions were noted to be '*well on track'* according to a key informant interviewed. As part of its COVID-19 Pandemic Response Plan, the Senegalese National Education Ministry launched a school feeding program on Thursday, March 18, 2021 with GPE funding and operational support from the WFP. This school feeding program aims to set up canteen services in public schools in the most disadvantaged rural and peri-urban areas hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The program aims to alleviate the health and socioeconomic impact of the pandemic on students and their families with a particular focus on the most marginalised and vulnerable students. 107,000 students are expected to benefit from the program in 637 primary schools across 23 Education and Training Inspectorates (IEF) in the

regions of Theis, Diourbel, Kaolack, Saint-Louis, Kolda, Sédhiou and Ziguinchor[195]. Programmes that were being implemented by the government were noted to be taking more time with stakeholders recognising that, unlike UNICEF or WFP that have established systems and protocols and 'one size fits all' approaches in place, the government was having to provide a more complicated and localised response with very limited resources, experience, and capacity.

Country-level coordination mechanisms and the engagement of country level stakeholders appear to have been an effective mechanism in supporting the response to Covid-19 in Senegal. Senegal's LEG, the GNPEF (Groupe National des Partenaires de l'Éducation et de la Formation-National Group of Partners of Education and Training), established in 2017, is chaired on rotation by the Minister of Education, the Minister of Training and Development and the Minister of Higher Education. The LEG includes a thematic group for development partners with three sub-committees, structured around ministry subsectors[196]. Stakeholders interviewed during the course of this evaluation noted that the GNPEF is a very large group with '*95 members*' and includes a range of stakeholders including unions, civil society representatives etc. This has resulted in the establishment of smaller steering groups such as COSYDEP – the Coalition of Organisations in Synergy for the Defense of Public Education (representing civil society, with about a 100 members including parents, media, universities, and others). This initiative is funded by Education Out Loud (through GPE funding) to strengthen the credibility of civil society in the development, implementation, and monitoring of education policies as well as the improvement of multistakeholder dialogue[197].

The GPE operating model, with UNESCO as the coordinating agency of the LEG, meant that stakeholders were engaged and included in the discussions pertaining to the development of the action plans and that efforts were complementary and not duplicated. As one stakeholder in Senegal put it '*…in GPE's spirit, it is always necessary to act together.*' The LEG framework allowed dialogue of a range of stakeholders with ministries and donors that ensured that there was coordination and coherence as well as that any obvious gaps were filled. However, whilst it was noted that many stakeholders were involved during the emergency response and planning process, there were some recommendations for even better inclusion and more transparency. Some stakeholders felt that there was not enough clarity in terms of '*…who does what…*' given that there is an '*…education window, humanitarian window, ECW, GPE…too many things happening*'. It was also noted that teacher unions played an important role in this dialogue but that direct engagement of civil society with donors (technical and financial partners) was a line of communication that could be further developed.

One stakeholder, however, noted that PAQUET (Programme pour l'amélioration de la qualité de l'équité et de la transparence dans le systeme éducatif – Programme for the improvement in the quality of equity and transparency in the educational system) was a forum through which social partners and members of civil society are presented with results and performances and have the opportunity to input and participate in a formal way on the quality of education and training in the country on an annual basis. During Covid-19, however,

[195] Launch of the school feeding program funded by GPE in Senegal | Infos | Global Partnership for Education
[196] https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2019-08-summative-evaluation-gpe-country-level-support-education-for-senegal-august-2019.pdf
[197] https://educationoutloud.org/cosydep-audible-voice

this stakeholder noted that civil society groups and unions were included in meetings led by the ministry of education pertaining to the Covid-19 response during the development of the Covid-19 AF proposal. One stakeholder also noted that whilst interventions and grant applications were being developed for the GPE Covid-19 AF window in collaboration and coordination with various stakeholders, once these programmes are enforced, it is essential to ensure that these lines of communication and collaboration are continued throughout implementation and up to the point of evaluation to ensure that these jointly planned responses were in fact effective.

A strategic collaboration that has been activated and leveraged during the Covid-19 period has been between different technology companies (e.g. Microsoft and Huawei, the latter were noted to have assisted the government in the provision of tablets for distance learning) although it was noted that this cannot be directly attributed to GPE's Covid-19 AF funding alone but was due to the '*intersectoral response that the government developed and through which all donors and the GPE funding have been integrated*'.

Annex 5: Application details for sample countries

Country	Same GA for existing ESPIG/AF and Covid-19 AF	Number of days taken from application to approval	GA fee (%)	Existing ESPIG?	Have existing Accelerated Funding ESPIG?
Afghanistan	Yes	34	7	Yes	Yes
DRC	No	57	7	Yes	No
Ghana	Yes	12	1.75	No	No
Lesotho	No	36	7	Yes	No
OECS	Yes	28	7	No	No
Senegal	Yes	37	5	Yes	No