



**GPE Secretariat Management Response (as of end-March 2022):**

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

The GPE Secretariat welcomes the [Formative evaluation of GPE’s support for response to the COVID-19 crisis](#) conducted by Dr Aslam and Dr Rawal from Oxford Partnership for Education Research and Analysis (OPERA) and thanks them for the useful analysis and lessons it provides. This interim evaluation offers timely and valuable information and appreciated recommendations on: the suitability of GPE support and grant mechanisms during the crisis, the type and relevance of interventions undertaken with GPE COVID-19 AF grants, and the efficiency and (early) effectiveness of GPE COVID-19 grants. 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.

The GPE Secretariat Management Team considers the evaluation findings **formulated for the Secretariat** to be fair and agrees with the recommendations made under the domains of relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness. Specifically, the Secretariat will take the actions outlined below in response to the recommendations.

Recommendations for GPE Secretariat	Actions	Status of actions as of end-March 2022	Comments
<b>Evaluation question 1: Suitability of grant mechanisms</b>			
1.1 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	Streamline GPE grant application and review processes	Completed	The COVID 19 AF review process built on similar processes applied to other GPE grants including clearly pre-defined quality assurance standards and specific assigned review roles. In the continuous process to further streamline grant application and review processes, the Secretariat has used the COVID 19 AF review process to further amend other processes, including simplification of decision memos and review templates as well as wider use of Teams channels to allow better monitoring of progress.

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all existing grant application and review processes to identify opportunities for streamlining for efficiency for other grants			
1.2 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	Build assessment of varied areas of country capacity into GPE's new operating model	Completed	Assessment of country level data collection is included in the enabling factors assessment under the new operating model which allow to consider available data capacity when developing a new program. Mechanism to monitor proposed programs are assessed during the Secretariat's quality assurance review.
1.3 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.	Broaden GPE Secretariat country teams; Decrease frequency of COVID-19 AF surveys	Completed	The original COVID-19 AF grant application process was mostly managed by a dedicated team, though it still relied on the existing country team leads to roll out in different countries. It shows the capacity of the Secretariat to create a dedicated team to deal with a huge and sudden influx for processing applications. The Secretariat has broadened the country teams, so that a country team lead can more rely on other team members in case of unexpected and sizeable increase in their workloads. This also helps mitigate the medium-term impact of the COVID-19 AFs on the Secretariat workload, as the addition of 66 grants substantially increased the number of grants that needed to be monitored, and the quarterly incidence of the surveys added to support to be provided.

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			This said, the frequency of COVID-19 AF surveys has been decreased as the workload started outweighing the additional information from quarterly reports, and the processing of the large number of extensions during the last quarter of calendar year 2021 has again increased pressure on operational staff during the roll out of the new operating model. As COVID 19-AFs are now gradually closing, this impact is diminishing.
1.4 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.	Implement real-time grant coding and costing exercises	Completed	Real-time coding and costing will be implemented for GPE grants going forward which will allow for continued portfolio analysis and reporting on how resources are allocated.
1.5 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	Insert disaster preparedness into the new GPE model; Mobilize the strategic capabilities mechanism around disaster preparedness issues	Completed	Disaster preparedness and emergency planning have been integrated in the enabling factors assessment which will allow local education groups to assess and take actions, which can be financed through the system capacity grant and other GPE grants. Language to clarify the use of the system capacity grant in this respect has been added to the guidelines.  Lastly, strategic capabilities may be developed to offer additional support in this area to select countries.
<b>Evaluation Question 2: Typology and relevance of interventions</b>			
2.1 We recommend continued collaboration across GPE efforts and other in-country efforts to ensure strong	Continue alignment between GPE	Completed	This recommendation confirms the core of the GPE approach that strongly encourages continued collaboration across GPE efforts and other in-country efforts to ensure strong alignment

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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.	funding and other initiatives, including through the new GPE model		between GPE funding and any other initiatives being conducted at the country level. The new operating model reinforces joint prioritization through the partnership compact.
2.2. 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.	See 1.1	Completed	See above 1.1
2.3 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.	Assess 'building back better' as part of the summative COVID-19 evaluation	Planned	We agree with this recommendation and will build this into the COVID-19 summative evaluation.
2.4 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	Continue collecting lessons on grant implementation from LEGs; Continue support to civil	Completed	<p>Inclusiveness of local education groups is at the core of the GPE operating model, and government and grant agents have been explicitly required to report at least twice per year to the local education group on lessons learned pertaining to implementation of the GPE grants.</p> <p>GPE also provides dedicated support to civil society through the Education Out Loud (EOL) program, which currently supports 84 grantees' engagement in education policy dialogue across GPE's</p>

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community members is critical to reach the most vulnerable and also to ensure effective implementation as well as sustainability of interventions	society through EOL		partner countries, many of which were able to respond agilely to the Covid pandemic. Regional trainings and dedicated capacity support have also been developed to improve the effectiveness of civil society engagement in GPE 2025 system transformation efforts. Lastly, the EOL mid-term review (expected to be finalized in April 2022) will provide insights on how CSO engagement can be strengthened; related recommendations will be addressed in a separate GPE Secretariat Management response.
<b>Evaluation Question 3: Efficiency and (early) effectiveness</b>			
3.1 The evaluators recommend reviewing the GPE definitions pertaining to utilization, disbursement, and lags in order to evaluate these aspects more accurately and allow portfolio-level analysis of these aspects	Reinforce quarterly reporting on utilization at grant level	Ongoing	The Secretariat has reinforced quarterly reporting on utilization, with clarification from each grant agent on what those figures reflect. They vary from liquidated expenditure to mere transfer to government and implementing partner for planned activities. The Secretariat can now consider these differences when monitoring the portfolio, though this still limits its capacity to analyze progress across, especially for accelerated funding. A next step is the integration of expenditure information in the new grant reporting templates. While some grant agents have indicated that it would seriously increase transactions to report on actual expenditure on a quarterly basis, most have agreed to do so annually through the new reporting template.
3.1 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,	Design and implement a summative evaluation of COVID-19 support	Planned	A summative evaluation for COVID-19 grants is planned for calendar year 2023, which will include a dissemination and learning strategy for all partners.

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and encourage ongoing dialogue and knowledge-sharing between all partners.			
3.2 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	Continue support to cross-sectoral dialogue, including through system capacity grants; Mobilize the strategic capabilities mechanism around dialogue issues	Ongoing	The system capacity grant can finance activities that strengthen cross-sectoral dialogue and collaboration, for example between the education and health sectors. Language to clarify the use of the system capacity grant in this respect has been added to the guidelines. In addition, strategic capabilities may be developed to offer additional support in this area to select countries.
3.3 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.	Strengthen GPE's approach to evidence base learning through improved monitoring and quality assurance processes and evaluation	Ongoing	The new GPE 2025 strategy places emphasis on evidence-based learning. The quality assurance process assesses the grant monitoring and evaluation frameworks; the GPE policy guides the focus on outcomes, and the GPE Board has approved a robust evaluation work programme, which will go beyond regular grant data collection to assess outcomes.