

 JUNE 13, 14, AND 16

# MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

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FOR INFORMATION

## REPORT FROM THE ACTING CEO

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the world grapples with severe crises today, the importance of GPE's mission is even more pronounced: to ensure a quality education for all children. This report highlights progress in the last six months and provides updates on a few key areas:

1. The GPE 2025 approach to systems transformation has been introduced in 34 countries, including mobilizing partners to put gender equality at the heart of national education systems. The Board approved Rwanda and El Salvador's allocation and strategic parameters for Multiplier Grant and El Salvador's Girls Education Accelerator Grant. The Board also approved Kenya's and Tajikistan's allocation and strategic parameters and invited applications for system transformation grants with data, evidence and domestic financing identified as high-priority enabling factor.
2. GPE is supporting the United Nations Secretary General's Transforming Education Summit in many ways, not least because it fully aligns our goal of supporting system transformation. We are actively preparing for the pre-summit in Paris, June 28–30, with a focus on partner countries sharing their experience of GPE's system transformation approach.
3. There are positive examples of how gender equality is integrated across the pathway to system transformation. Partner countries are strengthening the role of gender equality in country-level dialogue and rethinking how their own priority education reforms will help advance gender equality.
4. A learning framework to monitor progress on the operating model rollout is systematically capturing feedback to enable adaptation.
5. The Risk Report discussed with the Finance and Risk Committee in April concludes that the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on education and the economies of donor and partner countries will likely be exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine.
6. Within the Secretariat, we are finalizing a comprehensive plan, the Diversity and Inclusion Compact, that consolidates actions and initiatives on D&I within a cohesive framework aligned with our broader organizational effectiveness plan.

## OVERVIEW

1. **This is my first biannual report as acting CEO of GPE.** I want to take this opportunity to thank the Chair, Vice Chair and the entire Board for your trust in me to lead GPE during this transition period and to thank Alice Albright for her nine years of leadership. I look forward to working with all of you to achieve GPE's vitally important mission. As acting CEO, my mandate is to build on Alice's legacy to ensure that GPE delivers on its corporate priorities and to steer the course for the organization in the current challenging global context until the appointment of the new CEO. We have made significant progress over the past six months and the pace of implementation is accelerating.
2. **The report highlights progress in three critical areas in the last six months. First, GPE's operating model has been introduced in 34 countries,** including mobilizing partners to put gender equality at the heart of national education systems. Partner countries are actively adopting the [GPE 2025](#) approach, assessing their education systems and prioritizing actions to drive change and improve learning outcomes for all children regardless of gender, ability, ethnicity and location. Meanwhile, GPE is continuously learning from partner countries and adapting guidance and procedures to minimize transaction costs and improve clarity.
3. **Second, GPE continues to advocate for more and better financing for transforming education.** Partner countries and donor partners are feeling the strain of multiple economic pressures on national budgets, including COVID-19 recovery, growing debt burdens, war in Ukraine, refugees, food insecurity, natural disasters, and climate change. Budget allocations to education, by donors and partner countries, must be protected and expanded to avoid greater learning loss, and ensure the world can address today's and tomorrow's challenges. With thanks to Kenya's continued leadership, the number of signatories to the Heads of State Call to Action on Education Finance, are growing with Cambodia the latest country to endorse it. GPE also calls on all donors to maintain their commitments toward global education for the world's most vulnerable children and to secure a fully funded GPE.
4. **Third, GPE continues to engage in strategic efforts to elevate education on the international agenda.** The UN Secretary-General's **Transforming Education Summit (TES)** in New York in September 2022 and the pre-Summit in Paris at the end of June are exceptional opportunities to build political will at the highest levels and address challenges to meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4. GPE is supporting the TES in many ways, not least because it fully aligns with our goal of supporting system transformation.
5. **The Board will convene in June to make important decisions on financing and hosting.** On the first day the Board will discuss updates on the rollout out of the operating model and GPE's engagement in the Transforming Education Summit. The

second day is devoted to budgetary and financial decisions, including on costed extensions for Knowledge and Innovation Exchange and Education Out Loud. On the third day, the Board, with advice from the Executive Committee, will decide whether to narrow the options for GPE's future institutional arrangements.

## DELIVERING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE THROUGH GPE 2025

6. **GPE is making progress with the rollout of the operating model in three country cohorts to 34 partner countries.** These 34 countries are convening local education groups to assess critical enabling factors for success and identify a single priority reform that can bring about [transformational change](#) in the country's education system. That priority and the collective commitment to addressing it are captured in a country-owned partnership compact. The Board then, considering the [partnership compact](#) and an independent assessment of the enabling factors, approves the funding level and focus of the grant.
7. **The pilot cohort countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Kenya, Nepal, Tajikistan, Uganda) have made significant progress, with three partnership compacts finalized and shared with the GPE Board (El Salvador, Kenya, Tajikistan). The Board approved El Salvador's allocation and strategic parameters for Multiplier Grant and Girls Education Accelerator Grant. The Board also approved Kenya's and Tajikistan's strategic parameters and invited applications for system transformation grants with data, evidence and domestic financing identified as high-priority enabling factors.** The [Tajikistan Partnership Compact](#), for example, proposes as its priority reform the "implementation of competency-based education for the benefit of all children and youth." The reform includes curriculum development, accompanied by new teaching and learning methods and assessments, and a new approach to teacher professional development, pedagogy and content knowledge. Osama Makkawi Khogali, a representative of UNICEF in Tajikistan, shares that "the compact represents an opportunity to accelerate results for achieving quality inclusive learning for all children in the Republic of Tajikistan; it also represents a milestone for leveraging additional financial resources needed to implement the national education reform on 21st-century skills and digital transformation."
8. **The second cohort of countries (Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Comoros, Fiji, The Gambia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, Tanzania, Zanzibar, Zimbabwe), begun in September 2021, is making steady progress. Seven countries are working on the enabling factors analysis;** three of them have submitted draft analyses and two have progressed to review by the provisional Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP). For Senegal, the process is leading to agreement that better coordinated external financing, aligned with the national budget and country financial management systems, is an

enabling factor with high potential to leverage transformations in the equity, effectiveness and efficiency of public expenditure for better education service delivery.

9. ***The third cohort of countries (Benin, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guyana, Maldives, Niger, Pacific Islands, Rwanda) began in January 2022. Rwanda has already secured Board approval for a \$30 million Multiplier grant with \$100 million in cofinancing from the World Bank.*** Rwanda will now work on its partnership compact, seeking to align efforts behind a priority reform and monitor delivery, with support from partners and a [GPE system transformation grant](#). This [Multiplier grant](#) approval for a cohort 3 country reflects GPE's ability and intention to support countries to adapt the operating model to best suit country processes, and to move at a pace that is appropriate to them.
10. **As the operating model is being implemented, positive examples are emerging of how gender equality is being integrated across the pathway to system transformation.** Country partners are strengthening the role of gender equality in country-level dialogue and rethinking how their own priority reforms will help the country advance gender equality. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a group member highlighted, *"It initially seemed to me that gender equality was just one aspect of accessibility. As work progressed, that perspective changed and gave rise to the need to make it a structural axis."*
11. **Building and strengthening partnerships continues to be crucial. GPE 2025 translates the hardwiring of gender equality to putting gender equality at the center of partnership discussions,** including dedicated sessions at the country level, with Board members, and in global forums. We continue to work on gender-responsive education sector planning and capacity building, including participating in the Gender at the Centre Initiative annual board meeting. The hardwiring of gender equality has also led GPE to engage in a wider set of issues that act as barriers to gender equality, including its participation in the Global Partnership Forum on Comprehensive Sexual Education.
12. **With the easing of the travel restrictions imposed by the pandemic, GPE staff are back on the road to meet partners across the globe.** During a recent [five-day visit to Kenya and Rwanda](#), I was grateful to hear and learn from partners and a diverse set of stakeholders about their experiences with the operating model as well as their achievements with prior GPE funding. The trip allowed us to witness system transformation in action by listening to voices from all levels, including politicians, teachers and students. We heard concerns from some partners about the new model's transaction costs, but there was also an interest in understanding what had driven the changes (for example, the introduction of the ITAP) and a desire to explore the potential of the partnership compact to support change and strengthen mutual accountability. These conversations reinforced the need for continued communication and dialogue around the overall ambition of the GPE strategy and operating model, recognizing the

Board's ambition to leverage the partnership in support of system transformation, above and beyond grant application processes. In-person conversations with partners helped assuage many concerns and questions. Overall, as I heard in Kenya and Rwanda and from other countries, there is appreciation for the inclusive process to identify the critical constraints in the education system. There is also an increased understanding of the usefulness of having critical conversations on sector constraints (such as domestic financing, or data) "front-loaded" and held with all partners before grant development work begins. As more lessons are learned, GPE will continue to seek improvements.

13. **GPE is focused on ensuring all stakeholders—internal and external—are well equipped to implement the operating model.** This includes rolling out internal training as well as external partner engagement sessions to support learning and ownership of the model, and to collect targeted feedback on the enabling factors and partnership compact process. Since December 2021, GPE has held more than 20 partner engagement webinars with donor, multilateral and civil society agencies. The webinars have additionally been an extremely helpful avenue for collecting feedback and observations of the implementation of the operating model, and we thank everyone involved for their active participation.

## DEVELOPING AND DEPLOYING MECHANISMS TO CATALYZE MORE AND BETTER INVESTMENT

### INNOVATIVE FINANCING TOOLS

14. **GPE received \$37.5 million in additional commitments by partners for the Girls' Education Accelerator for a total of \$176.5 million as of May.** We are still \$73.5 million below the initial target, and we continue to reach out to partners to fill this gap. Substantial work has gone into completing the operational guideline, now available [online](#). Work is ongoing in supporting countries eligible for this thematic window. El Salvador's application is currently being finalized and includes the production and delivery of learning materials for children and families that promote gender role equity and a gender assessment of learning data for better decision making on girls' education.
15. **Following the December Board meeting, GPE and the Arab Coordination Group (ACG) launched the Smart Education Financing Initiative, generating half a billion dollars in innovative financing for education.** The agreement was signed by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) president and GPE Chair at the RewirEd summit. This is an innovative funding mechanism that provides \$4 for every \$1 mobilized from the [GPE Multiplier](#). The initiative leverages ACG and GPE funds of up to \$500 million in education financing for 37 countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, where 28 million children are out of school. A technical mission to Jeddah in March 2022 brought together

GPE and IsDB technical teams to discuss and put into operation the ACG Smart Education Financing Initiative.

16. *The [GPE Match](#) is another financing tool triggered through the Multiplier and the Girls' Education Accelerator. It facilitated an additional pledge from the LEGO Foundation of \$8 million to the Girls' Education Accelerator in January 2022.*
17. **Pilot sites are being identified for the new enhanced convening approach to support partner countries to crowd in additional resources to support national policy priorities.** We expect three pilots will commence in the coming period, including a potential regional thematic convening on early learning in sub-Saharan Africa.

## KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION EXCHANGE, EDUCATION OUT LOUD AND STRATEGIC CAPABILITIES

18. **[Education Out Loud](#), the grant program supporting local civil society advocacy for education and civil society's participation in policy discussion, has awarded 84 grants to civil society organizations in 60 countries.** GPE funds through Education Out Loud are [making a difference in girls' education](#), strengthening advocacy by [TaxEd Alliance](#) for domestic financing and successfully [monitoring readiness to return to classrooms after Covid-19](#) through the [MultiPLY-Ed Project](#), a youth-led initiative in the Philippines. Grantees are also learning more about system transformation and opportunities for engagement in inclusive education policy dialogue.
19. **[The Knowledge and Innovation Exchange](#) has made significant progress in its first two years of operations, is valued by its stakeholders, and is well positioned for impact.** During my visit to Kenya, I met with members from the KIX COVID-19 Observatory and learned about a three-part joint learning exercise developed between the KIX Africa 19 and KIX 21 Hubs, the Jacobs Foundation and the Brookings Institution on scaling impact in education. KIX research grants are generating traction at a national level. For example, Uganda is leveraging COVID-19 surveillance data between education and health with District Health Information Software. The KIX COVID-19 Observatory for Africa has generated new resources on learning assessment and the pandemic's impact on girls' education to support school reopening.
20. **GPE has established its first [strategic capability](#) to address country partner monitoring, evaluation and learning capacity needs, drawing on the Board's initial allocation of \$2 million to procure advisory services.** Responding to strong interest from several country partners, GPE is also scoping the potential for a strategic capability to help countries increase the resilience and responsiveness of education systems to climate change. GPE and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) will co-convene a discussion in June to explore potential partnership approaches to building "climate smart education systems." Driven by the demand for data capacity

and previous engagements with the private sector, GPE is also currently identifying challenges faced by partner countries that could be addressed by in-kind expertise and tools from a consortium of data-savvy companies through the Education Data Leadership Program strategic capability.

## LEARNING AND ADAPTING THROUGH ONGOING MONITORING AND EVALUATION

21. **GPE is using a systematic learning framework to monitor progress on the operating model rollout. A systematic learning framework is not an evaluation, but rather an exercise to capture feedback to support learning and adaptation based on the rollout of the operating model.** In June, GPE will organize a learning webinar with countries that are piloting the operating model. It will build on and complement the work done through the learning framework on the enabling factors and the partnership compact stages.
22. **In April, early findings from the enabling factors assessment stage of the operating model were shared with the Performance, Impact and Learning Committee. The overall feedback was positive, showing that the process is promoting country dialogue and a focus on prioritization.** In a survey for pilot country local education group members, more than 80 percent of the respondents reported that the enabling factors process helped in identification of major system challenges and that gender was integrated across the enabling factors discussion. The survey also pointed to the need to pay attention to the intersection between gender and other dimensions of marginalization. The survey points to areas of improvement, which include decreasing transaction costs for countries, continued focus on ensuring country ownership and inclusive dialogue to focus on policy prioritization and improvements in the communication of key ideas, overall process, technical and financial support, and guidelines for countries.

## WORKING TOWARD IMPACT AT SCALE

### ACTIVE PORTFOLIO REPORT

23. **The full and successful operationalization of GPE 2025 will rest on high disbursements and more rapid future disbursements.** GPE shared the six-month status report on the [active portfolio](#) with the Executive Committee in April. The report noted that GPE's active grant portfolio had increased from \$1.77 billion in **June 2021** to \$2.17 billion in December 2021, mainly driven by 23 grants worth \$462 million becoming effective in the six-month period. Most grant agents report satisfactory implementation of active education sector program implementation grants, though with an increase from six to nine grants with issues that may limit achievement of targets. GPE notes the negative impact of coups d'état and other political disruptions, which may further jeopardize implementation. Implementation of some implementation grants at risk improved after restructuring; for

others, the impact was still mixed. Moreover, reactivity remains too slow, as some announced restructurings for off-track grants have not been submitted. Grant agents generally report positively on implementation progress for regular and COVID-19 accelerated funding. GPE is closely monitoring 15 COVID-19 accelerated funding grants at risk.

**24. *GPE is also continuously working toward expanding the pool of eligible grant agents.***

At present, there are 20 accredited grant agents, and 2 entities are currently undergoing the accreditation process. Since December 2021, 10 entities have expressed interest in becoming grant agents.

## **CONFLICT AND FRAGILITY**

**25. *GPE 2025 identifies support to countries affected by fragility and conflict as a key priority, in order to reach the children most in need of education support.***

Under [GPE's Operational Framework for Effective Support in Countries Affected by Fragility and Conflict](#), GPE may redirect resources to priority activities arising from an emergency. For example, up to \$300 million in GPE funds are available to support education for all children in Afghanistan in the next three years. GPE and Education Cannot Wait are coordinating to facilitate a thoughtful consultation with the education humanitarian cluster and the development partners' group. Once prioritization is finalized, partners are expected to submit an application for GPE grants. GPE is also extremely concerned about the situation in Ukraine. GPE is currently in discussions with a business partner to unlock a Multiplier grant for Ukraine. This would be the first time a private sector partner's in-kind support through **GPE Match** would be used to mobilize the Multiplier. GPE hopes to build on this initial allocation to provide further support to education in Ukraine.

## **RISKS AND STEWARDSHIP**

**26. *The Risk Report discussed with the Finance and Risk Committee in April concludes that the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on education and the economies of donor and partner countries will likely be exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine.***

The availability and price of global energy, transport and food, in addition to an increase in refugees in Europe, could add to pressure on both domestic financing and development assistance for education. There is an increasing risk to the management of the GPE Fund due to currency exchange and liquidity risks, exacerbated by the significant strengthening of the US dollar against some major currencies used for donor pledges. The Board will receive an update on key risk areas in June.

**27. *GPE proactively monitors the stewardship of grant funds, and when misuse does occur, our grant agents work to obtain repayment and learn lessons for the future.***

GPE is currently following five cases of alleged misuse of funds. GPE will continue to

regularly monitor these cases and provide further details to the Finance and Risk Committee and through the Board-restricted email list.

28. **GPE has zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) of any kind, whether by GPE staff, by GPE governance officials or in GPE-supported programs.** All grant agents are required to report credible cases of SEAH to GPE for onward communication to the Board. Currently, there are five SEAH cases pertaining to GPE programs, and only one grant agent has reported cases to GPE. GPE continues to engage with grant agents to ensure they have robust mechanisms to identify, investigate and communicate cases. GPE is monitoring these cases and more details will be provided to the Board via the Board-restricted email list.

## MOBILIZING THE PARTNERSHIP TO SECURE FINANCING AND DRIVE CHANGE

29. **Keeping education high on the international political agenda is challenging in the context of multiple emerging crises.** The UN Secretary General's Transforming Education Summit in New York in September is an opportunity for political leaders to make bold commitments to education. We are actively preparing for the pre-summit in Paris, June 28–30, 2022, and focusing on sharing partner country experiences of GPE's system transformation approach. As technical anchors of the TES Action Track on financing, GPE and the World Bank are working with partners to identify the best opportunities for generating more and better education financing.
30. **GPE youth leaders continue to advocate for education financing to be protected and increased.** Recent engagements include the [ECOSOC Youth Forum](#) and the [Africa](#) and [Asia-Pacific](#) Regional Development Sustainability Forums—as well as pushing the G7, through participation in the [Youth 7 Summit](#), [Women 7 Instagram Live](#), and delivering letters to world leaders, including UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.
31. **Business and philanthropy advocacy support for GPE and global education is steadily growing. PwC and Microsoft are official business champions for GPE in the United Kingdom.** GPE featured in recent partner-organized events, including Microsoft's education technology summit and Rotary International's conference. I was pleased to co-host with Rotary International an event in Nairobi to recognize the Girls' Education Awareness Program that was launched in Kenya in January. The social marketing campaigns, which will initially be rolled out in Ghana, Kenya and Zimbabwe, bring together a range of business partners, including Avanti Communications, Rotary International, PwC, Ecobank and Econet, to support ministries of education to raise awareness about girls' education.
32. **In the last six months, GPE has received new pledges from Denmark, the LEGO Foundation, Japan and Qatar.** At the Doha Forum in March, GPE also welcomed a \$30

million contribution in co-financing for the Multiplier from the Qatar Fund for Development through Education Above All to support innovative financing for transforming education. We were pleased to see the United States recently approved a \$125 million contribution to GPE for its fiscal year 2022, with the final figure to be finalized in the coming months.

## MAKING GPE A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

### 33. **GPE needs a highly talented and diverse workforce to deliver on the ambitions of GPE**

**2025.** With appreciation to the Board for approving increases in staffing levels, GPE has been hiring new staff to fill critical roles. We have been deliberate in our hiring to improve the diversity profile of GPE staff through sourcing, recruitment and retention strategies, monitoring and reporting to attract and retain a diverse pool of colleagues. With the pandemic still raging in various parts of the world, GPE has prioritized safety, security and workplace flexibility to stabilize the effects of COVID-19 and ensure staff feel safe to come back to in-person work.

### 34. **Two years ago, GPE embarked on a multiyear journey to address diversity and inclusion.**

A survey, conducted in September 2021 by an external contractor, established a baseline of the current state of **diversity and inclusion** in GPE. That survey informed follow-up conversations and immediate actions, many led by GPE's Diversity and Inclusion Task Team. We are finalizing a comprehensive plan, the Diversity and Inclusion Compact, that consolidates these and other actions and initiatives within a cohesive framework that is aligned with our broader organizational effectiveness plan. This compact will become the basis for reviewing our progress in a comprehensive manner.

### 35. **In these past months we supported the Board and the Executive Committee to establish a CEO Search Committee,**

hire an executive search firm (Russell Reynolds Associates) and advertise broadly for a new chief executive officer. Russell Reynolds solicited input from GPE staff, as well as Board members, on the qualities they would like to see in a new CEO.

## CONCLUSION

### 36. **As GPE marks its 20th year, we have embraced change and ensured progress to build a platform and set of capabilities to help improve the delivery of education for the most marginalized children in the world.**

And we continue to grow; we welcome the Philippines and Tunisia to the partnership, which brings the total number of GPE partner countries to 78. Much more remains to be done and the full impact of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic is yet to be clear. However, I believe that GPE, as a partnership and

a fund, is well placed to continue to lead on ensuring value and effectiveness in delivering on the most important task of this generation.

37. Let me conclude by recognizing the highly talented and dedicated GPE staff who are central to making the partnership effective. I look forward to seeing all Board members and alternates at the Board meeting in June.