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Synthesis Report – Phase 1 (Final)

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List of abbreviations

CBE	Community Based Education
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESP	Education Sector Plan
GEA	Girls' Education Accelerator
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GPE 2020	GPE's Strategic Plan for 2016–2020
GPE 2025	GPE's Strategic Plan for 2021–2025
ITAP	Independent Technical Advisory Panel
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
LEG	Local Education Group
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MLT	Multiplier Grant
SCG	System Capacity Grant
STG	System Transformation Grant
TCLE	Thematic and Country Level Evaluation

Executive summary

Finding 1: The operating model is improving inclusive dialogue on identifying and prioritizing the conditions that impeded better education outcomes in partner countries

There is strong evidence of government-led inclusive dialogue in compact development processes. The operating model improved inclusive dialogue in the compact development process, with reports of increased engagement of a range of stakeholders in policy dialogue and reform prioritization. There was strong leadership from ministries of education, and civil society organizations (CSOs) and teacher associations were engaged and present in dialogue to a greater extent than in the past, although levels of participation varied across countries. However, there was little to no involvement of ministries of finance, who are crucial stakeholders since they made allocation decisions. Some countries raised concerns about low or unsustained engagement and low accountability of stakeholders. If there are lower levels of engagement during implementation, this may adversely affect the successful rollout of the priority reform.

Countries used evidence to identify challenges related to enabling factors more systematically than they had in the past because of the operating model. The enabling factors assessment in the case study countries was executed more robustly than previous problem identification efforts, with systematic use of existing evidence bases and extensive access to a variety of country-level data and documents. Countries valued the enabling factors assessment as a tool to identify potential bottlenecks, affecting priority reforms' design and implementation, and exploring the challenges highlighted by the education sector analyses. Plans to address identified bottlenecks varied across countries, and at this stage are inadequate to facilitate successful implementation of the priority reform. There was little evidence of a longer-term plan, or a systematic sequencing of activities aimed at addressing these gaps. Uncertainties about funding sources and the integration of various financial streams highlighted planning gaps.

The Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) has helped countries identify gender related challenges and to prioritize among potential actions to address the enabling factors. ITAP was widely acknowledged as enhancing the enabling factors assessment process, validating findings and adjusting priority ratings in four countries. The ITAP process guided countries to deepen their analysis and prioritize among specific challenges, advancing thinking on their self-assessment. ITAP was particularly useful in identifying gender-related bottlenecks (in capacity building, data, gender mainstreaming and applying a gender lens in teacher workforce planning) that were widely adopted. ITAP reports were generally well received by countries, contributing significantly to the refinement of their proposed funded activities. Through the system capacity grant (SCG), countries prioritized the interconnections and dependencies among various factors by implementing ITAP recommendations into their grant planning strategies.

Finding 1: Areas for attention

- To sustain the inclusive engagement and dialogue observed during the compact process throughout the design and rollout of the priority reform, collaborative engagement from the full range of stakeholders should be invested in and incentivized.

- Countries should be better supported to prioritize and sequence actions to address gaps in the enabling factors, focusing on those which are most urgent for reform success.

Finding 2: The priority reforms chosen by countries vary in their transformative potential and there are gaps in reform design

Although the problem diagnosis phase was well conceived, the solutions proposed to address the priority reforms were less well evidenced. Country-level data and evidence strongly underpinned the process of problem identification in all but one of the sampled countries, and all countries used evidence to identify priorities. Evidence included national-level assessment of past or ongoing reforms, education management information system (EMIS) data, and annual school censuses. The process of selecting appropriate solutions was significantly less evidence-based than identifying the problems themselves. The countries did not seem to have made extensive use of the existing (global) evidence base when designing their priority

reforms. The extent to which countries incorporated learning from successes and failures of past reforms when designing their priority reform was relatively limited.

There was widespread agreement on the need for transformative change but few examples of countries addressing the system transformation criteria in reform design or implementation. Government stakeholders and development partners appreciated the operating model's focus on system transformation, suggesting the appetite for system transformation was generally strong. Examining case study countries against the identified criteria for a system transformative reform, it was evident that countries clearly stated intentions to achieve improvements to learning with greater inclusion as part of their priority reform, more so than they did with speed or at scale. Case study countries did not make extensive use of the existing (global) evidence base when designing their priority reforms, or in the implementation (solutions). For the remaining criteria of addressing multiple systems constraints, aligning subsystems, and aligning the incentives of actors, there was evidence in only half of the case study countries of activities or intentions which satisfied these criteria.

Although priority reforms were more focused in the compacts than in education sector plans, the level of prioritization was generally insufficient (given country resources and capacities) to ensure effective implementation. Country-level stakeholders appreciated the emphasis on prioritization within system transformation. Challenges were noted in selecting well-defined reforms, reaching consensus among stakeholders, and aligning with transformation principles. Obstacles included government stakeholder misalignment on prioritization, lack of adequate capacity, and overambitious goals. Overall, priority reforms in the eight countries were well aligned with countries' education sector plans and did not significantly depart from their strategic objectives.

Priority reform theories of change showed shortcomings in terms of credibility, robustness, and internal coherence. All sampled countries included country-level theories of change in their compacts, but with varied conceptualization and utility for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). Country-level theories of change in six of the eight countries were limited in the extent to which they illustrated pathways to achieve objectives. Pathways were not sufficiently evidence-based or clear and did not demonstrate how the underlying interventions addressed multiple system constraints, a key aspect of system transformation. Overall, theories of change showed shortcomings in terms of their robustness, lacking some crucial components which limited their internal coherence and credibility. The linkages between the various components were often not very clear. Almost all sampled countries lacked associated metrics and indicators, including baseline and target values. The country-level theories of change do not currently fulfil their potential as tools useful for the implementation of the prioritized reform.

Finding 2: Areas for attention

- Strengthen systematic support for evidence use for identifying solutions and reform design, drawing on national data (from EMIS, surveys, etc.), global evidence and evidence from previous reform efforts.

- Support more effective prioritization of the priority reform. Prioritization should be based on clearly identified and articulated outcome goals, which are then considered alongside funding and capacity opportunities and constraints to determine ultimate scope of reform.

- Make clear to countries the significance and value of using theories of change as a fundamental tool for designing and implementing the priority reform and understanding the pathways of change and encourage countries to view theories of change as dynamic tools that allow for adaptation and iteration based on real-time feedback and evolving contexts.

Finding 3: There is limited evidence of adequate readiness for reform implementation beyond the emerging implementation arrangements for GPE grants and limited evidence of greater resource alignment in support of the priority reforms

While all countries have made some progress towards implementation planning for GPE grants contributing to the compact, there is little evidence of progress towards implementation for aspects of priority reforms not funded through GPE grants or those already being implemented as part of previous plans/policies. Most countries had started to make some progress towards planning for implementation for the priority reforms, but few had fully developed plans in place, and sometimes lacked clear

organizational and coordinating mechanisms when they did. Where implementation planning was not formalized, system transformation grant applications and risk identification efforts have nonetheless progressed. There was more limited evidence of progress in planning incentives for relevant actors (e.g., teachers, school inspectors) and aligning these incentives with different levels and aspects of the education system.

Documentation and information on reform costing and financing is not consistent and countries have not fully costed or budgeted their priority reforms. Information on the costing and financing of priority reforms for Phase 1 was inconsistent, and there was limited evidence that countries have systematically identified and are working to leverage either GPE or additional resources to fully support all of the facets of their priority reforms. However, there were positive signs that progress was being made on costing, mapping funding, and aligning resources with reforms.[1]

Various arrangements for MEL are in place or underway but further work is needed to ensure that they are adequate and cover all key aspects of the priority reform. Countries are expected to have MEL frameworks in place to track progress as implementation starts. Almost all countries demonstrated commitment to taking steps towards developing MEL frameworks. However, uneven progress in developing MEL plans means that there is currently a lack of clarity around mechanisms and conditions for MEL in the sampled countries. Challenges in relation to MEL included the identification and development of appropriate indicators for the priority reform, which related to wider challenges concerning the prioritization and focus of reforms, and challenges in establishing data collection systems and indicators. Due to the fact that implementation plans and MEL frameworks were still being developed, it was difficult to fully assess the approach to assessment and analysis of data and reporting.

There is little evidence that the operating model is contributing to the alignment of various (non-government) stakeholders' resources to the priority reforms. There was limited evidence to indicate that GPE's operating model was fostering resource alignment during and beyond the early-stage compact development process. Examples of progress included aligning policy instruments and administration around the priority reform, which should in turn support the alignment of financial resources through a combination of domestic financing, GPE grants and external funding sources. Ownership of implementation process and accountability for both coordination and delivery are key conditions for supporting alignment of resources. Leadership for reform has been taken by ministries of education across many partner countries. However, this leadership did not necessarily lead to the establishment of accountability mechanisms that united the members of the local education group and supported alignment of resources behind the priority reform.

Inadequate government capacity hinders the planning, coordination and delivery of priority reforms in several countries. The capacity for planning, coordination and delivery of priority reforms are key conditions for supporting implementation. In several countries, government capacity at various levels (national, regional and local) presented a substantial barrier to the successful planning and implementation of reforms. These capacity challenges included: understanding of roles and responsibilities, limitations in personnel (lack of people or skills), inadequate coordination mechanisms across tiers of government, and a general insufficiency of resources (budget, infrastructure etc.).

Finding 3: Areas for attention

- Plan for how the whole priority reform will be implemented. This planning can include a combination of individual program implementation plans, as part of the education sector plan, or a combination of these approaches.

- Ensure adequate costing has been conducted for the priority reform, in cooperation with budget holders, and map policy instruments and financial resources (non-domestic and domestic) which cover all aspects of the priority reform. As with implementation planning, costing and budgeting can

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[1] Countries were not required to develop a costing of their priority reform implementation during the compact development process recognizing the importance of focusing on the policy process during the design phase.

be approached through overall sectoral budget processes, through specific programs and grants or through both approaches.

- Establish MEL frameworks which comprehensively address all aspects of the priority reform and are integrated with existing sector MEL mechanisms. Frameworks should encompass all relevant indicators and incorporate adaptable methodologies to track and evaluate the progression of the reform effectively.

- Countries should establish clear ownership of the implementation process, corresponding MEL arrangements, roles and responsibilities for reform implementation, and accountability for coordination and delivery of the reform.

- Local and regional capacity should be considered in implementation planning. Weaknesses should be addressed as part of implementation.

Finding 4: GPE's added focus on the equity and efficiency of domestic finance, along with its volume, has led to context-relevant policy commitments on domestic finance, but its leverage on domestic finance decisions is limited

Enabling factors assessments were valuable for identifying bottlenecks, ensuring that countries went through problem identification processes and fostering discussions on domestic finance. Domestic finance was a high-priority issue in most sampled countries. The enabling factors assessment overall provided an opportunity to identify bottlenecks and ensure that the bottlenecks and corresponding policy actions were more context-relevant and evidence-based. Enabling factors assessment was useful in facilitating discussions on and elevating domestic finance issues throughout the compact development process. In addition, enabling factors assessment contributed to refining domestic finance policy actions, with half of the sampled countries proposing activities to address identified bottlenecks in grant programs. However, further uptake of enabling factors assessment results and successful implementation of domestic finance policy actions could be compromised by insufficient engagement of ministries of finance and capacity constraints.

Given challenges in increasing the volume of domestic finance, due to limited fiscal space, all countries planned some activities to improve efficiency in education spending as a more viable course of action. Countries identified a mix of bottlenecks in volume, equity, and efficiency, and planned activities to address several of these issues. All countries planned to tackle efficiency bottlenecks, as a more feasible solution given limited fiscal space and GPE's limited leverage on the volume of domestic finance. Addressing challenges related to volume and equity proved more difficult and countries did not always choose to plan policy actions to tackle them.

System capacity grants were somewhat useful in addressing domestic finance issues by focusing on finance-related capacity building for Ministries of Education. Half of the countries receiving SCGs used the grant to plan activities to address the domestic finance challenges identified during the enabling factors assessment process and in the ITAP report. Many activities focused on capacity building in planning and budgeting, technical assistance for financial simulations and sensitivity analysis.

The top-up portion of the system transformation grant played a role in eliciting country commitments to address domestic finance bottlenecks, but it is not yet known if the relatively limited top-up amounts, combined with limited engagement of ministries of finance, will be sufficient incentive for countries to drive changes in related domestic financing areas. The GPE 2025 strategy introduced a more targeted approach to results-based financing, allowing use of triggers directly related to domestic finance. Four out of five countries with top-up triggers used them to incentivize domestic finance activities. Each of the four countries had several domestic finance-related triggers, and in total, two countries designed triggers related to volume, three to efficiency, and three to equity. The efficiency-related triggers, being easily implemented, may make a more immediate contribution to domestic finance, but the achievement of equity-related triggers may result in outcomes over a longer term. On the other hand, the achievement of top-up triggers, particularly those related to volume, might not incentivize countries sufficiently to drive changes in domestic finance, given the small amount compared to the education budgets.

Finding 4: Areas for attention

- Incentivize ministries of finance and relevant finance departments in the ministries of education to engage in the process of identifying and developing solutions to domestic finance-related challenges.

- Incentivize and integrate a stronger focus on equity issues in domestic financing through the GPE model, in the same way, for instance, that gender is incentivized throughout all GPE grants.

- Incentivize the collection and use of data in domestic finance planning to better support improved public resource usage.

- Design the domestic finance related triggers to provide relevant and sufficient incentives at country level and ensure they are based on discussions (and a joint vision) between diverse stakeholders on what is achievable and realistic – as well as what is required to reach these triggers.

Finding 5. Gender equality is considered in all countries' reforms and across GPE grants, but different country capacities to address gender equality (for example through planning and monitoring) require reinforcement

Gender was not consistently considered across the assessment of all enabling factors in the sampled countries, however, all countries identified gender-related challenges within 'gender-responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring'. Gender was incorporated into the enabling factor 'gender-responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring', addressed in all sampled countries. This enabling factor was assigned a high priority in three countries, and medium in the remaining five, which led to most countries planning policy actions to address the identified bottlenecks. However, the consideration of gender across the remaining enabling factors was inconsistent, with only partial evidence that countries considered gender in the assessment of data and evidence, and domestic financing. Most countries' compacts included education sector analyses focusing on gender equality in *access to, within, and through education*.[2]

All sampled countries addressed gender considerations in their priority reforms, and half prioritized gender equality as a thematic area. Priority reform and gender-related activities were shaped by gender analysis in the compacts and identified gaps. Half of the sampled countries designated gender equality as a thematic priority area with dedicated workstreams in a theory of change, while the other half integrated gender considerations into their reforms at varying levels. Efforts to promote gender equality spanned from early childhood education enhancements and infrastructure improvements to specific interventions against school-related gender-based violence and teacher support activities.

While system capacity grants are supporting countries in addressing capacity gaps, diagnosing disparities and improving data collection with a gender focus, the system transformation grants enable them to focus on implementing activities aligning with broader bottlenecks in gender equality in access to, within and through education. Six out of eight countries plan to leverage the system capacity grant (SCG) to address gender issues with activities including diagnosing disparities, improving data collection, and enhancing policy planning. As for the system transformation grant (STG), sampled countries used it to bolster gender equality in education, with strategies ranging from strengthening gender-responsive systems and reviewing curriculum to improving gender-sensitive infrastructure and increasing the recruitment and retention of female teachers. Two sampled countries benefitting from Girls' Education Accelerator used it to improve conditions for girls' schooling and eradicate gender stereotypes in early childhood education.

There are incoherent interpretations of gender hardwiring across countries due to differences in the concept's understanding. The concept of "gender hardwiring" was interpreted differently across countries, with some countries misinterpreting it as a specific focus on girls' education, and others struggling to grasp the concept overall. This misinterpretation is concerning, especially in countries where

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[2] GPE applies a model that considers gender equality in access to, within and through education. This is described further in section 5.

intersectional analyses were conducted, but clear guidance on using existing analysis was missing during the pilot period (although it is noted this guidance has since been developed).

The potential for successful implementation of gender equality-related interventions varies across countries, with constraints imposed by capacity and resource gaps. Challenges that could hinder successful implementation included sustainability concerns (dependency on external funding, inadequate finance allocation), limited local capacity and lack of mechanisms to conduct intersectional analyses.

Finding 5: Areas for attention

- Support countries to more effectively and consistently integrate gender considerations into analyses across all enabling factors (data and evidence, volume, equity and efficiency of domestic finance, and sector coordination).

- Advise countries to leverage global evidence from programs and interventions on mechanisms to support gender equality and equity and to engage with gender innovation labs when planning for addressing gender intersectional issues.

- Promote consistency and comprehensiveness in evaluating gender equality and equity factors as countries develop their priority reforms and streamline gender analysis according to GPE's gender approach.

- Clarify the importance of gender hardwiring within GPE's approach to ensure that all countries adopt or strengthen their approaches for addressing barriers to education access and quality.

Introduction

To support the rollout of the operating model for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)'s 2025 strategy (GPE 2025), GPE has commissioned a four-year (2022–2026) country-level and thematic evaluation (TCLE) which is being conducted by a consortium comprising Triple Line, Learn More and Technopolis. The evaluation will progressively assess how GPE's operating model and 2025 strategy support partner countries to select and implement a chosen transformative reform and assess the likelihood of achieving the intended impact and its potential for sustainability.

This report is the **Phase 1 Synthesis Report**.[3] Phase 1 of the evaluation considers the GPE 2025 strategy and operating model and its early rollout and seeks to assess how it works to support GPE country partners to identify priority reforms, the suitability of the operating model for facilitating design and implementation of priority reforms and progress toward system transformation, and how the operating model works in alignment with countries' existing education policy systems and agendas as well as the wider education systems landscape. The evaluation examines both GPE's financial and non-financial support to reform efforts.

This synthesis report brings together the findings from across eight country-level case studies as well as from thematic case studies on domestic financing and gender equality. The eight country-level case studies include: **Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Tanzania and Uganda**. We drew case studies from the list of GPE partner countries who were eligible for support through GPE 2025 and had completed the compact development process.[4] Our sample included a diverse set of GPE partner country contexts in which GPE's operating model (and both financial and non-financial support more broadly) is being implemented,[5] in order to understand and generate learning on the conditions in which the GPE operating model and strategy has or has not been successful to support partner countries.[6]

Country-level primary data collection with key stakeholder interviews involved in country-level compact development processes took place between July and September 2023. The case studies and synthesis draw upon an extensive desk-based review of GPE program-level documentation, country-specific documents related to the GPE operating model and education sector planning, as well as global-level interviews with key stakeholders involved in the GPE operating model (including the GPE Secretariat). Our thematic case studies similarly draw upon data collected as part of the country-level case studies and additional, tailored desk-reviews.

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[3] Synthesis reports will be produced at the end of each phase of the evaluation. A total of three phases are planned.

[4] To define the partner countries eligible as a case study for this evaluation, we used the list of countries eligible for a GPE system transformation grant as a proxy for the countries who will be engaged in the GPE 2025 operating model. In total, 77 partner countries (or territories) were anticipated to be eligible for funding. We also considered countries that were not eligible for the system transformation grant (STG) but were eligible for the Girls' Education Accelerator (GEA) grant and therefore undertook the development of a partnership compact as part of the requirements for access (which includes an additional 22 partner countries or territories). More information on the sampling process and criteria can be found in the annexes of the TCLE inception report.

[5] As part of our sampling criteria, we considered contextual factors such as geographic diversity, status with regards to fragility and conflict, political and economic context, and education system structure and performance.

[6] This phase 1 synthesis report draws on evidence from countries engaged in the early rollout of the model. The findings do not take into account subsequent adaptations to the model and other responses to identified issues.

Findings

1. The operating model is improving inclusive dialogue on identifying and prioritizing the conditions that impeded better education outcomes in partner countries

1.1 There is strong evidence of government-led inclusive dialogue in compact development processes

The operating model has improved inclusive dialogue in the compact development process. Key informant interviews reported increased engagement of a range of stakeholders in policy dialogue and the process of reform prioritization in partner countries. There was strong leadership from ministries of education in the country case studies, with roles taken as leaders, co-chairs or coordinators of the local education groups, for example. Civil society organizations (CSOs) were engaged and present in dialogue to a greater extent than in the past, although their level of participation varied across countries.

The compositions of the local education groups were notably diverse, with varying levels of engagement by type of stakeholder. Teacher associations and unions were actively engaged in some countries (**Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tajikistan**) but their engagement was less pronounced in others (**Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda).** In **El Salvador**, engagement with stakeholders in early childhood education (beyond governmental entities) as well as with women, student, and educator groups in general was limited. Furthermore, in some instances the levels of engagement diminished after completion of the diagnosis and enabling factors assessment, with fewer stakeholders being engaged in selection of the priority reform. This is a risk to ongoing buy-in and to implementation of the priority reform.

There were low levels of engagement with ministries of finance, who are crucial stakeholders involved in making allocation decisions, and the main reasons for this are unclear. Their engagement was mostly absent in **El Salvador** and **Sierra Leone**. In **Tajikistan,** while information was shared with the ministry of finance, there was no engagement with the local education group, and in the case of **Democratic Republic of Congo,** although the compact was signed by the ministry of finance, formal engagement with the local education group was absent. Although the ministry of finance was present on the local education group in **Cambodia**, engagement was inconsistent, raising concerns over the allocation of domestic finance. In **Uganda**, the ministry of finance showed more consistent engagement, though not always through the local education group. In **Tanzania,** although the ministry of finance participated in the local education group and committed to increasing the education sector's budget share to 20% by 2025, they were notably absent from the Education Sector Development committee, which holds responsibility for addressing domestic finance issues related to the reform efforts.

The ways that the local education groups operated ranged from collaborative with active participation and cooperation among those involved (**Tajikistan, Cambodia**) to consultative whereby stakeholders' input and advice was sought before decisions were made (**El Salvador, Sierra Leone, Tanzania**), exhibiting various degrees of inclusivity in the process. **Tajikistan**, for example, explicitly recognized that previous efforts of reform suffered from a lack of shared vision among partners, that more collaboration was imperative in this process and that joint agreements on competence frameworks needed to be taken forward.

The way in which the local education group operated affected the extent to which civil society organizations, in particular, felt their voices were heard and accounted for in the operating model process. There were numerous reasons given for the variable levels of engagement of different types of stakeholders. One common feature was a lack of consensus on the definitions and practical implementation of systems transformation, which had implications for how partners understood, bought into and engaged with the process, as well as their commitment of resources.

In some of the country case studies, the interviews explicitly indicated concerns about low or unsustained engagement and accountability of stakeholders who were necessary to the success of the priority reform (**Democratic Republic of Congo**, **El Salvador**, **Cambodia**, **Tajikistan**). If there are lower levels of engagement during implementation, this may adversely affect the successful rollout of the priority reform. The other countries did not raise this in the interviews.

Overall, increasing levels of engagement and dialogue were apparent, but there were inconsistent levels of engagement across important stakeholder types and not enough evidence of sustainable engagement.

1.2   Countries used evidence to identify challenges related to enabling factors more systematically than they had in the past because of the operating model

The enabling factors assessment appears to have been conducted in the case study countries more robustly than in past problem identification exercises. Existing country-level evidence bases were used more systematically and a wide range of country level data and documentation has been accessed to perform the assessments.

The countries found **value in the enabling factors assessment** as a mechanism for identifying potential bottlenecks that would affect the design and implementation of the priority reform. The process of undertaking the enabling factors assessment provided countries with an opportunity to dig deeper into issues raised by the education sector analyses.

Most case study countries identified bottlenecks related to the **volume, equity and efficiency of domestic finance,** and the enabling factor was rated as high priority in six of the eight case study countries. Particular challenges raised were improving financial management and improving financial data. **Data and evidence** was rated as a high priority in five case study countries with many citing a lack of data systems to poor quality, timeliness, capacity and accessibility of data. Although **gender responsive sector planning, policy and monitoring** was a high priority in only three countries, the lack of gender-responsive planning was noted as directly linked to stubborn trends in inequalities in educational outcomes and therefore important to address. **Sector coordination** was reported to be the enabling factor least in need of attention by countries, but the need to maintain ongoing engagement with community stakeholders downstream was acknowledged.

The most common types of policy action proposed in the case study countries in response to the results of the enabling factors assessment aimed at solving data and evidence-related gaps in order to improve country-level data availability. Improving efficiency of domestic public expenditure was also commonly discussed and corresponding policy actions were developed. Countries appeared to struggle to address volume and equity in domestic public expenditure in their compacts. Efficiency-related bottlenecks are more straightforward to address and tend to be within the remit of the ministries of education. Conversely, increasing domestic finance volume necessitates the engagement of the ministry of finance, while addressing equity-related issues is complex and demands a substantial degree of political will and robust data, among other requisites, in the case study countries.

The mechanisms planned by countries to address gaps in the enabling factors were diverse, and at this stage inadequate to facilitate successful implementation of the priority reform. Countries included plans to address gaps in the enabling factors through the GPE grants, other grants, and through wider education sector plans, but they lacked holistic approaches to sequencing or prioritization.

The system capacity grant (SCG) was particularly recognized for its role in addressing capacity gaps identified through the enabling factors assessment.[7] The planned SCG activities are broadly aligned

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[7] The system transformation grant (STG) is also used to cover gaps identified through the enabling factors assessment.

with the designated purposes of the SCGs stated in the compacts, almost all of which are to directly support the removal of gaps in the enabling factors. However, the scale of some of the gaps identified posed a significant challenge for the size of funding allocated through the SCG to be able to address them effectively. The Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) assessment has been important in informing the focus of the SCGs (see next section).

As already stated, there is little evidence from the desk review of a longer-term plan or the systematic sequencing or prioritization of activities aimed at addressing these gaps in enabling factors, which tend to stem from persistent systemic challenges. Whether the SCG focuses on the most critical elements is difficult to determine without having a full overview of all actions that are in place.

There were a number of instances where there was a lack of clarity on where other financing will come from to address enabling factors gaps, or how different funding streams will work together (Nepal, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda, for example). To some extent, this has been dealt with through the top up triggers and the alignment of other resources discussed below in section 3.

Overall, the gaps in the enabling factors identified through the evidence in the enabling factors assessment were considerable.

1.3   The Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) has helped countries identify gender related challenges and to prioritize among potential actions to address the enabling factors

ITAP was viewed positively in its support and, in some cases, for its validation of the enabling factors assessment process and its findings. ITAP made changes in the priority ratings in four of the sampled countries.[8] ITAP was reported to have supported some of the countries with identifying priorities among the many policy actions within each enabling factor category and countries incorporated ITAP recommendations into their compact or activities associated with the priority reform.[9] The ITAP process encouraged countries to go deeper into their enabling factors assessment and identify more specific challenges to address.

Country stakeholders mostly described the ITAP as helping them to advance their thinking on their self-assessments and all case study countries took note of and agreed with the ITAP assessments. Only Tajikistan reported any concerns over the timing and excessive rigidity of the process.[10] The recommendations arising from the ITAP assessments were seen as valuable to the countries.

An effect of ITAP was that further prioritization was made possible through the ITAP recommendations. This was seen notably in Nepal, Tajikistan, Cambodia and El Salvador. In Nepal the analysis provided by ITAP fed into the alignment of reform prioritization across the sector plan and the compact. The most likely reason for this is the overlap of timelines between the sector plan and the compact in Nepal which allowed for discussions on both processes to build on each other. The

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[8] The ratings for gender responsive education sector planning and sector coordination in Nepal were increased (for both, from low to medium), in Tanzania and Uganda sector coordination ratings were downgraded (from medium/low to low and high to medium respectively). Ratings for domestic financing increased in Cambodia (medium to high) and decreased for data and evidence in Tanzania (high to medium).

[9] Early ITAP reports included recommendations. However, based on lessons learned report, ITAP was asked to not make recommendations and only flag gaps for greater country leadership/ownership of resolving these gaps

[10] Tajikistan was the first country to go through ITAP and as such the process was still evolving.

ITAP was seen as validating the issues Nepal had already been discussing for the sector plan, adding additional weight.[11]

ITAP was particularly useful in **identifying gaps in gender and equality related issues in the enabling factors** assessments. There were examples in multiple countries where specific advice and guidance on these issues provided by the ITAP review was taken up by countries. Country stakeholders reported that recommendations from ITAP encouraged them to go further in planning for gender-sensitive data and indicators to not just distinguish between boys and girls but to also include specific characteristics of vulnerable populations (**El Salvador, Tajikistan**). Other examples included plans to incorporate capacity building on principles of gender equality and inclusion, for more timely and differentiated analysis of the data, using data effectively to unlock further bottlenecks to reform (**Tajikistan, Uganda, Cambodia**), ensuring disaggregated data was available at the regional and local level (e.g., **Nepal**), and including a gender lens in teacher workforce planning and management (**Tanzania**). In the case of **Tanzania,** gender mainstreaming was also revisited, and the focus shifted to disability as well as gender inclusion.

ITAP reports were generally well received by countries, contributing significantly to the refinement of their proposed funded activities. Sector coordination was an area where ITAP actively promoted a need for more attention, even when it was not a high or medium priority. The reports shone a light on the importance of including numerous stakeholders (with a focus on civil society organizations) throughout the entire design to implementation process of priority reforms, and with reference to the enabling factors, and how inclusion throughout the process can help to uncover bottlenecks along the way.

Often countries set out the various packages of activities to support the enabling factors and the priority reform. In particular, through the SCG, countries were able to prioritize horizontal linkages and interdependencies between different factors through taking forward recommendations from the ITAP and incorporating them into the plans for GPE grants.

Finding 1: Areas for attention

- To sustain the inclusive engagement and dialogue observed during the compact process throughout the design and rollout of the priority reform, collaborative engagement from the full range of stakeholders should be invested in and incentivized.

- Countries should be better supported to prioritize and sequence actions to address gaps in the enabling factors, focusing on those which are most urgent for reform success.

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[11] Nepal also has strong existing coordination mechanisms which largely helped avoid additional costs (e.g., Thematic Committees were already established for the sector plan and there was a recent education sector analysis done that they could use to help them inform the enabling factors assessment).

2. The priority reforms chosen by countries vary in their transformative potential and there are gaps in reform design

2.1 Although the problem diagnosis phase was well conceived, the solutions proposed to address the priority reforms were less well evidenced

Country-level data and evidence strongly underpinned the process of problem identification in seven of the eight sampled countries. All countries used evidence to identify priorities, with the types of evidence used varying across the countries. In Cambodia, El Salvador, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Uganda problem identification was mostly informed by national-level evidence. In El Salvador the priority was also informed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Office of the First Lady through listening to advice from UNICEF. Sierra Leone also used some global evidence to inform its priority on improving literacy, numeracy, curriculum, and learning materials.

Specific references to the use of studies on or assessments of past or ongoing reforms to help identify problems and related priorities were also evident in the partnership compacts of Tajikistan and Tanzania. These included references to national studies conducted by development partners as well as national data sources (including education management information system (EMIS) data and annual school censuses). In Tajikistan particularly, a stock-taking exercise, covering around 150 documents (national- and regional-level), was conducted ahead of the compact development process and identification of the priority reform. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a process of problem identification and prioritization took place during the compact development. However, it was not as evidence based and thorough as expected by the GPE operating model: the majority of the action points identified by ITAP to address enabling factors were not taken into account in the compact, and there was no detailed in-depth review of previous reforms and the reasons they might have not succeeded, nor a thorough review of the issues hindering gender equality in the education sector. This was postponed to the next phase of implementation.

The process of selecting the appropriate solutions was significantly less evidence-based than identifying the problems themselves (the reasons for this are not immediately apparent). Taking evidence-based approaches to designing the priority reform is one of the criteria used by the evaluation to assess system transformation in the context of the GPE operating model. Overall, the countries did not seem to have made extensive use of the existing (including global) evidence base when designing their priority reforms. The selected solutions either lacked references to underpinning evidence, or the use of evidence was not fully clear. For instance, in El Salvador evidence had been collected to justify and validate the choice of reform - improvement of the curriculum, development of better teacher profiles for early childhood care and strengthening teaching capacities - but it was not clear whether evidence had also been used for the selection of specific solutions (such as how the curriculum would be improved or what new profiles for teachers would include) and these were not set out in the compact, beyond some references to members of the local education group looking at academic literature and considering best practices from neighboring countries. In other countries, the intention to use evidence to inform implementation plans was deferred to the future (Tajikistan and Tanzania).

Cambodia was the exception, as it used a stronger evidence base to identify its priority reform. Its partnership compact most clearly exhibited a priority reform (improved student learning outcomes) with explicit references to both global and national-level evidence to support its selection of program areas. The design of Cambodia's priority reform included three evidence-based solutions to respond to learning loss: structured pedagogy, teaching at the right level, and remediation. These three approaches were thoroughly supported by evidence-based problem identification and prioritization processes and were clearly explained in the compact. The compact also built on national-level early-grade assessment data to inform design of the priority reform.

The extent to which countries have incorporated learning from successes and failures of past reforms when designing their priority reform is relatively limited. With the exception of Uganda, Tanzania and Sierra Leone, who built on previous reforms (albeit to a varying degree of clarity) in their

compacts, the case studies provided little evidence of lessons learnt informing the design of the priority reforms, as part of the compact development process. Furthermore, most current education sector plans do not offer adequate lessons learnt from the implementation of their predecessors.

2.2 There was widespread agreement on the need for transformative change but few examples of countries addressing the system transformation criteria in reform design or implementation

Driving education system transformation is at the heart of GPE's 2025 strategy to support partner countries achieve change by leveraging global and national relationships and financing in support of their priority reforms and activities.[12] **The case study countries appreciated the operating model's focus on system transformation,** referred to in the GPE partnership compact guidelines as 'a change with the potential to positively impact broader parts of the education system and improve service delivery at scale' and 'a change that contributes towards accelerated education progress, including addressing system inequities and gender inequality'.[13] This was particularly reflected back in interviews by government stakeholders (policy makers and ministry representatives) and development partners (such as donors). This suggests that **the appetite for system transformation was generally strong** in case study countries.

The evaluation examined system transformation through the lens of pre-determined criteria, developed for the evaluation.[14] In this section, we summarize findings against the following three criteria:

- The reform endeavors to achieve improvements to learning with **greater speed, scale and inclusion** than past and/or business-as-usual reforms.

- The reform addresses **multiple system constraints** through a multi-faceted approach to change.

- The reform **aligns relevant subsystems, policies and practices**, such as teacher professional development, curriculum, assessment systems, education management and information systems (EMIS) and more, to achieve the intended outcomes.

These criteria were investigated to understand the extent to which the criteria were present as part of the priority reform, for instance if they were simply referenced in partnership compacts or whether the criteria were embedded in approaches to the priority reform design or implementation.

Countries did not embed accelerated education progress (speed) and only one country embedded improved service delivery at scale (scale) in the design of the priority reform. While all countries aimed to address system inequities and gender inequality (inclusion) only two demonstrated evidence of inclusion being taken into account in the reform designs and implementation.[15]

El Salvador was the only country that explicitly referenced the acceleration of progress towards improved learning outcomes (speed) as a goal for its priority reform. However, neither documents nor interviews offered evidence that speed was incorporated as a goal into the design or planning for implementation through approaches or interventions that imply or are intended to support greater speed of change. Additionally, there was a notable absence of references to specific qualifiers of

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[12] GPE 2025 Strategic Plan (2021), https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/gpe-2025-strategic-plan.

[13] GPE Partnership Compact Guidelines (2024). https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/partnership-compact-guidelines

[14] For an explanation of the full criteria used to define a system transformation approach, see: https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/gpe-2022-2026-study-country-level-and-thematic-evaluation-final-inception-report.

[15] Gender equality is addressed in more detail in section 0.

speed (e.g., improved learning outcomes for all by 2050) or data on previous trends as benchmarks. Other countries made no references to accelerated progress of the achievements of the reform in the design phase (including in their theories of change) or planning for implementation. There was also some skepticism reported by stakeholders regarding speed as a criterion for system transformation, recognizing the importance of allowing time for reform processes (**Nepal, Tanzania**). It is noted that in practically all of the eight countries, the theories of change did not have metrics and indicators (with baseline and desired target values) associated with them, therefore making it difficult to provide an independent assessment if the intention of the reform with regards to speed (and also scale).

A goal of delivery at scale was present in partnership compacts and acknowledged in interviews, as an intention of the priority reforms in **El Salvador, Nepal, Sierra Leone,** and **Tajikistan.**[16] However, only **Tajikistan's** reform design and implementation plans included evidence for the intention for delivery at scale. The priority reform intends to expand competency-based education (CBE) curriculum from primary, with documented plans for activities aimed at developing a national curriculum through to secondary level education.

Enhanced inclusion was an important goal in all priority reforms and referenced in documents and interviews. For the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, **El Salvador**, and **Tanzania,** supporting gender equality and inclusion was recognized as **fundamental to the achievement of system transformation** (for example, gender equity and inclusion is one of the three expected outcomes of the priority reform in **Tanzania**). Notably, the **Democratic Republic of Congo** and **Sierra Leone** compacts contained a stronger emphasis on inclusion than past reforms. However, only two countries showed strong evidence of inclusion being reflected in the design and implementation of the priority reforms. **El Salvador** provided evidence of the integration of the gender dimensions into new curricula and teaching materials as well as in their data collection practices and assessments. In the **Democratic Republic of Congo** inclusion is embedded into the priority reform design through a focus on education in emergency and securitization of school places for girls in particular. Weaker, although still present to some extent, were plans to operationalize inclusion in **Tajikistan. Tajikistan's** compact described disability, gender and some minority groups as a focus for the priority reform and is committed to the creation of better evidence in this area. There were reported efforts to hardwire gender and inclusion into activities, but minimal detail on how this was to be achieved.

While some countries have begun to integrate the criterion of multiple systems constraints and alignment of subsystems, policies, and practices, there remains significant progress to be made, **Addressing multiple systems constraints** through a multi-faceted approach to change was recognized in the design of reforms in four countries (**Tanzania, El Salvador, Tajikistan** and **Democratic Republic of Congo**). For example, in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the selected priority reform addressed multiple dimensions of the education system affecting the quality of teaching, from the management of the teaching staff to salaries, training, and teaching conditions. In the other four countries (**Cambodia, Uganda, Nepal, Sierra Leone**), the priority reforms did not address this transformation criterion of addressing multiple system constraints or addressed it to a small extent. In **Uganda,** the priority reform aimed to address constraints around improving quality of education outcomes through an understanding of the need for coherent interventions in literacy and numeracy (including pre-literacy and pre-numeracy) from pre-primary through to secondary levels. However, it did not fully address constraints to the ambition to improve and expand access to pre-primary education, such as the lack of a framework for public budgeting and investment, and prohibitive fees for private provision,

In four countries (**Uganda**, **Tajikistan**, **Sierra Leone**, **Nepal**), there was some evidence that the priority reforms **aligned relevant subsystems, policies and practices**. In **Tajikistan**, for example, the

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[16] All countries in interview, when prompted, saw scale as important but this did not always translate into the design and planning.

competency-based education curriculum with updated standards was being aligned with the continuous professional learning system for teachers. In **Sierra Leone,** the priority reform intends to align teacher professional development with changes to the curriculum. However, there are challenges to this alignment, particularly at subnational levels, where the absence of infrastructure (transportation, buildings, connectivity for example) hinders the alignment.

2.3 Although priority reforms were more focused in the compacts than in education sector plans, the level of prioritization was generally insufficient (given country resources and capacities) to ensure effective implementation

The focus on prioritization within system transformation was valued by countries. Across the case studies, four of the eight countries prioritized pre-primary education (**El Salvador, Nepal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda**) and six prioritized primary level education with their priority reforms.[17] All case study country priority reforms cover the thematic area of quality teaching and either learning or early learning, while five of the priority reforms explicitly target gender equality through their reforms (**Cambodia, El Salvador, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania**).

Tensions were evident between selecting well-defined priority reforms, reaching consensus across stakeholders, and aligning with the principles of transformation. GPE Secretariat country team leads reported that in some countries, development partners found it challenging to align around one or two priorities, particularly if the selected priority did not fit with their own policy priorities. This tension has yet to be resolved. Government stakeholders were also not always in agreement on how or to what extent to prioritize. For example, in the **Democratic Republic of Congo,** the proposed reforms are deemed as still not sufficiently prioritized. Furthermore, prioritization was interpreted negatively in some countries (e.g., in **Uganda**) as the narrowing down of policy options. As countries move further along into implementation, it will be interesting to see, in the next phase of the evaluation, if perceptions about prioritization change due to any positive gains arising from it.

Overall, the priority reforms in the eight countries were well aligned with countries' education sector plans.[18] The priority reforms do not significantly depart from the agreed strategic directions set out in the education plans in the countries. This applied to both past and current sector plans. Partnership compacts generally fit well with education sector plans, which covered a wider range of policies and set out objectives, goals and priorities in broad terms and their associated planned interventions.

In **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the current priority reform, quality teaching and teachers, remains aligned with the broader education strategy and the focus on quality teaching remains the same as in the past. However, despite benefitting from a greater degree of prioritization and inclusion than previous reforms, it is still seen as very wide-ranging. For example, one part of the priority is "Improving teaching-learning conditions at school and classroom level and preparing children, particularly girls, for successful schooling", which encompasses the review of legal and regulatory frameworks, substantial investment in infrastructure and facilities, the introduction of a new salary payment system, promoting pre-schooling programs and more. In **Nepal** and **Tajikistan,** the priority reforms are continuations of previous efforts, but both contain a stronger focus on teacher development. In **Nepal**, the reform focuses on ensuring a more effective delivery within the existing scope, rather than expansion, and in **Tajikistan**, the reform includes goals which are more specific, and is expected to be better institutionalized and firmly based on national development policy documents, which was not the case previously.

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[17] Only El Salvador and Nepal do not target primary education; they both target pre-primary only.

[18] The current education sector plans were prepared for different time periods in different countries, and do not share the same start year across the eight countries. Therefore, the previous sector plans are also included in the analysis, in addition to the current sector plans.

2.4 Priority reform theories of change showed shortcomings in terms of credibility, robustness and internal coherence

The evaluation looked at the potential for the countries' theories of change to guide implementation of the prioritized reforms and to monitor, evaluate, and learn from implementation.[19]

Country-level theories of change were developed and incorporated into all eight partnership compacts. There were some similarities and many differences in the way in which the theories of change were conceptualized and therefore their utility for monitoring, evaluation, learning and the implementation of the priority reform. In **Democratic Republic of Congo** and **Cambodia,** for example, the theories of change were designed by consultants and international organizations and it is not clear the extent to which any of the other theories of change were designed collaboratively.

In many partnership compacts, country-level theories of change, as designed, lacked some basic components, such as objectives, inputs (i.e., the resources expected to be invested into the prioritized reform, both monetary and non-monetary), activities and outputs.[20] In most cases, inputs, activities, and outputs were either missing, or they were formulated in an unclear way. All theories of change included articulated outcomes, and it was clear what results of the priority reforms in the eight countries were desired. Seven out of eight theories of change included an impact statement further emphasizing the anticipated transformative effects of the proposed reforms.

All eight country-level theories of change are built on identified problems which are articulated in the accompanying narratives. However, the extent of articulation varies among countries, with some offering only generic statements regarding the primary underlying issues. Although partnership compacts included dedicated chapters on enabling factors and constraints, only in one compact were these elements incorporated into the country-level theory of change (in **Uganda**, where they were formulated as enablers). **Assumptions** were formulated and explicitly mentioned in the theories of change of **Democratic Republic of Congo**, **Uganda**, **Tajikistan** and **Tanzania**. The theories of change in the remaining countries lacked explicit mentions. In **Democratic Republic of Congo**'s theory of change, the assumptions were formulated as risks, and as barriers in **Uganda**'s theory of change, both of which are acceptable, because it was clear what conditions must be/remain in place in order for the theory of change to work.

The evidence from a review by the evaluation team shows that the country-level theories of change in six of the eight countries were limited in the extent to which they illustrate pathways to achieve objectives (Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Nepal, Tajikistan, Tanzania). The pathways were not sufficiently evidence-based or clear and did not demonstrate how the underlying interventions address multiple system constraints, which is a key aspect of system transformation.

By contrast, in the theories of change for **Sierra Leone** and **Uganda**, pathways to change were evident and well-defined. It was possible to trace the intended progression along the pathway across the intervention chain, i.e., from inputs to impacts, and understand what the intervention intended to achieve across the various measures and how. For example, in **Sierra Leone**, one of the reform objectives, to raise children's readiness to learn through targeted pre-primary education, is clearly addressed through an array of relevant activities, such as defining and promoting quality standards and play-based approaches. This leads to an increased access to quality pre-primary education, which then leads to children entering primary school ready-to-learn, ultimately contributing to the overall impact ("all students acquire foundational skills and learning gaps for girls and other marginalized groups are closed"). In **Uganda**, taking the example of improved literacy and other basic primary level competences for secondary school readiness, the theory of change depicts a number of important

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[19] One of the evaluation questions for this study.

[20] Section 3 examines in more detail as to whether resourcing is available for the readiness of the reform.

activities from teacher training through to school feeding and also links this outcome through to other outcomes at pre-primary on the development of socio-emotional skills.

Overall, the theories of change showed shortcomings in terms of their robustness. Many of them lacked some of the crucial components, as outlined above, which limits their internal coherence and credibility. The linkages between the various components were often not very clear, and sometimes, the theory of change assumed a considerable "leap" would happen along the intervention chain, which was not properly explained. This was very evident in **Cambodia** and **Democratic Republic of Congo.** Even though **Cambodia** has a good evidence base in place, the theory of change lacks a clearly identified pathway to change for all three priority areas — quality learning, quality teaching, and gender equality — and the absence of a robust explanation of how the activities selected in the grants will lead to the identified reform. The shortcomings in the country-level theories of change could complicate, and possibly reduce, their future usability as a tool which can be revisited and revised to support the implementation of the priority reform.

As highlighted in section 2.2 the theories of change did not have metrics and indicators (with baseline and desired target values) associated with them.[21]

A good theory of change is a very supportive tool which can be used as countries move from design and planning towards implementation of the reform. Having a theory of change which properly reflects the priority reform and its implementation is important for progress monitoring and implementation. Nevertheless, due to the identified shortcomings, the country-level theories of change do not currently fulfill their potential as tools useful for the implementation of the prioritized reform.

Finding 2: Areas for attention

- Strengthen systematic support for evidence use for identifying solutions and reform design, drawing on national data (from EMIS, surveys, etc.), global evidence and evidence from previous reform efforts.

- Support more effective prioritization of the priority reform. Prioritization should be based on clearly identified and articulated outcome goals, which are then considered alongside funding and capacity opportunities and constraints to determine ultimate scope of reform.

- Make clear to countries the significance and value of using theories of change as a fundamental tool for designing and implementing the priority reform and understanding the pathways of change and encourage countries to view theories of change as dynamic tools that allow for adaptation and iteration based on real-time feedback and evolving contexts.

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[21] Section 3 provides more information on the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems in general.

3. There is limited evidence of adequate readiness for reform implementation beyond the emerging implementation arrangements for GPE grants and limited evidence of greater resource alignment in support of the priority reforms

3.1 While all countries have made some progress towards implementation planning for GPE grants contributing to the compact, there is little evidence of progress towards implementation for aspects of priority reforms not funded through GPE grants or those already being implemented as part of previous plans/policies

Most countries have started to make some progress towards planning for implementation for the priority reforms, but few have fully developed plans in place.[22] Nepal and Tajikistan are the two countries that had more specific implementation planning for the reform in place during the evaluation. Both countries are from cohort 1 (pilot). In Nepal, the Center for Education and Human Resource Development has drafted a Program Implementation Manual for approval by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The manual guides authorities at the central, provincial and local levels on grant use and on how to use additional funds from other grants and local revenues. In Tajikistan, implementation plans are in place through the National Roadmap for the Implementation of CBE with roles and responsibilities, budget and work plans which build on existing structures, clearly defined at a country level.

Five countries (Cambodia, Uganda, El Salvador, Sierra Leone, Tanzania) have made progress on elements of implementation planning specifically for the GPE grants. However, both Cambodia and Uganda still need to clarify their organizational and coordinating mechanisms (including roles and responsibilities) for implementation of the priority reform.

While El Salvador has yet to produce implementation planning which covers the priority reform, the Ministry of Education has made some progress, with support from Summa Lab (through the knowledge and innovation exchange, Latin America and the Caribbean - KIX LAC), on implementation plans for goals relating to gender inequality, an area which has been highlighted as critical through its work on identification of the priority reform and through the enabling factors assessment and ITAP. In Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education held an event focused on clarifying stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, but there is still a need for more detailed implementation planning. Tanzania has developed plans for development partner supported projects and programs, but not others, such as their STG-funded teacher support program.

The only country for which there was no evidence of implementation planning, or progress on this, was the Democratic Republic of Congo. Limited aspects of implementation have been addressed in the STG application, but significantly more detail and clarity is needed, particularly in relation to roles and responsibilities.

Although all partners need to make further progress in their implementation planning, it is nonetheless evident that countries have taken some steps towards identifying and mitigating risks to implementation of the priority reforms. To some extent, the progress made so far in this area is linked to GPE's operating model, which provided the impetus for partners to discuss and reflect on issues during the compact development process. The work undertaken by countries through their enabling factors assessment provides the richest evidence to identify issues, and thereby risks, that have the potential to affect their implementation of the priority reform.

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[22] When referring to implementation planning this could take many forms either separate for the priority reform or through enhancing existing plans to incorporate aspects of the priority reform (as appropriate).

Across all of the case study countries, there is more limited evidence of progress in **planning incentives for relevant actors (e.g., teachers, school inspectors) and aligning these incentives with different levels and aspects of the education system**. This lack of progress relates to wider issues around planning, as well as budgeting and alignment of resources (discussed in more detail below).

While **Cambodia** has attempted to balance competing stakeholder incentives, during the various stages of the GPE operating model, this has resulted in challenges around prioritization. **Nepal** and **Sierra Leone** have both acknowledged the need to engage in dialogue with the sector and coordinated action in order to align incentives for relevant actors but have not elaborated on how this will be achieved. Due to challenges in evidence collection, it is not possible to determine whether **Tajikistan** has aligned incentives of all actors at all levels. However, national stakeholders noted that providing adequate incentives for teachers would be crucial to the success of the priority reform. Similarly, stakeholders in **Tanzania** highlighted that 'partnership and alignment' were key criteria for assessing system transformation.

Although the **Democratic Republic of Congo** has made limited progress in implementation planning, the priority reform intends to address elements of the education system that affect teachers, such as training, pay, pensions and working conditions. Likewise, **Uganda**'s compact identifies specific incentives, including improving teacher salaries and motivation, as fundamental to achieving the priority reform, but there is limited evidence of planning in this area.

Given that the alignment of incentives is one of the drivers for system transformation, countries will need to address this area during implementation.

3.2 Documentation and information on reform costing and financing is not consistent and countries have not fully costed or budgeted their priority reforms

Information on the costing and financing of priority reforms for Phase 1 was inconsistent, and there was limited evidence that countries have systematically identified and are working to leverage either GPE or additional resources to fully support all of the facets of their priority reforms. However, there are positive signs that progress is being made on costing, mapping funding, and aligning resources with reforms.[23]

Five countries have made progress on aspects of costings and/or budgets for the reforms, although producing realistic budgets remains challenging (**Nepal, El Salvador, Tajikistan, Cambodia, Uganda**). **Nepal**'s education sector plan (2021-2030) includes a 5-year costed plan for the reform, which is accounted for in the national budget. There is not enough evidence from the desk review and interviews to confirm whether the budgeting exercises for the priority reform have been carried out and therefore it is not possible to assess whether the resources allocated are adequate. The Ministry for Education in **El Salvador** has engaged Summa Lab (through KIX LAC) to conduct studies on the estimated costs of the reform, although a budget for the reform has yet to be produced. While **Tajikistan** had not costed the priority reform, the costs of the national strategy (NSED-2030) aligned with the compact have been updated. **Cambodia** did not include costings or a detailed budget for the reform in the compact but did include detailed budgets in applications for SCG and STG grants and, therefore, the part to be funded through GPE. **Cambodia** is using SCG funding to improve overall budget processes. **Uganda**'s compact lacked budget details, and funding for key elements of the priority reform does not appear to be fully costed. There was no access to other national documents containing costings related to elements of the priority reform. The draft of **Uganda**'s STG was fully costed and detailed.

At the time of the evaluation, three countries had made minimal progress on costings and budgets for their priority reforms, primarily due to weak capacity and workflow issues within and across relevant

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[23] Countries were not required to develop a costing of their priority reform implementation during the compact development process recognizing the importance of focusing on the policy process during the design phase.

government departments. There is strong evidence, from both documentation and interviews, that neither **Democratic Republic of Congo** nor **Sierra Leone** has developed costings or a budget for the priority reform. **Sierra Leone** plans to use SCG funding to employ staff responsible for budgets and liaising with the Ministry of Finance, however. There does not appear to be budget for the priority reform in **Tanzania**. However, it is difficult to reliably assess this due to gaps in the evidence around financial planning in the country and the evaluators' lack of access to national documents.

3.3 Various arrangements for MEL are in place or underway but further work is needed to ensure that they are adequate and cover all key aspects of the priority reform

Countries are expected to have **monitoring, evaluation and learning** (MEL) frameworks in place to track progress in the reform area as implementation starts. Seven out of the eight countries show commitment to taking steps towards developing MEL frameworks. The **Democratic Republic of Congo** is the only country that had not outlined its approach to MEL, beyond ten key indicators set out in its compact, and had not yet come to a decision on who will drive the MEL process.

Compact MEL relies on various existing country MEL processes, but further work is needed by countries to ensure that they are adequate and cover all key aspects of the priority reform. **Cambodia**, **Nepal**, **Sierra Leone**, **Tajikistan** and **Tanzania** are using their Education Sector Plans' MEL plans as a starting point for development. Using existing MEL frameworks, their associated monitoring systems and indicators have the potential to create efficiencies, ensure coherence and avoid duplications of planning, monitoring and management instruments, when compared to developing an entirely new MEL framework solely for the priority reform. However, potential challenges in taking this approach have been raised by countries, such as the suitability and adaptation of indicators, clarity around the roles and responsibilities for the collection and analysis, and mobilization of data at the priority reform level. In multiple countries, stakeholders reported that partners need to ensure that problems identified in existing MEL mechanisms are addressed alongside efforts to incorporate the priority reform MEL work. Various stakeholders have raised concerns about the government's ability to sustain MEL systems in general.

More specific work on refining the MEL planning for the priority reform was already underway in **El Salvador**, **Nepal** and **Tajikistan**. **El Salvador** has outlined performance indicators, but the Ministry of Education had not yet defined baseline or end targets, nor who will monitor these. **Nepal** was actively integrating the MEL for the priority reform into its existing monitoring and evaluation processes and the country's processes for monitoring and reporting on data are already well-established and generally robust. Its EMIS was being enhanced alongside the priority reform with plans to promote even more effective tracking of educational outcomes. **Tajikistan** had a documented comprehensive approach to monitoring and evaluation for the priority reform, which, as highlighted, also built on existing structures, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined. Out of all the countries, **Nepal** is in the strongest position when it comes to data collection and monitoring.

Tajikistan, **Uganda**, **Cambodia** have also outlined MEL frameworks but only for specific GPE grants (in **Tajikistan** this forms part of their comprehensive approach). **Uganda** has a results-based grant design for the STG and multiplier grants, which has the ambition of further incentivizing improvements to wider monitoring and evaluation across the priority reform. The SCG in Uganda is being used as investment in the data system to support monitoring. **Sierra Leone** has chosen to finalize its MEL plan for the GPE grant closer to implementation, due to an investment that is being made in strengthening and unifying data systems.

Uneven progress in developing MEL plans meant that there was currently a lack of clarity around mechanisms and conditions for monitoring, evaluation and learning in the sampled countries. In all cases, MEL arrangements need to be developed further to ensure that they are adequate and cover all key aspects of the priority reform. Absent from the discussions was any focus on learning, with all countries currently looking at MEL as monitoring and evaluation.

Another major challenge in relation to monitoring evaluation and learning is the identification and development of appropriate indicators for the priority reform, which relates to wider challenges concerning the prioritization and focus of reforms. As previously noted, El Salvador has outlined performance indicators, but has not defined baseline or end targets.

Many countries indicated their intention to use existing indicators developed for established programs or specific grants. Less clear was the extent to which the focus, relevance and precision of these existing indicators had been assessed to ensure they could effectively monitor interventions which support the priority reform and measure success. Cambodia has outcome and outputs indicators for aspects of grants (STG, SCG), but these do not cover all key aspects of the priority reform. Tajikistan has indicators for outcome-level performance, but the number of indicators were viewed as excessive by ITAP and recommendations were put forward to streamline indicators and targets (reduce the number) to focus on competency-based education implementation. The strategic planning and coordination unit in the MoES, which was set up using SCG funding, will be working on this. Tanzania has pre-existing indicators which could be used but needs to add to these in order to fully monitor and measure the success of the priority reform. The indicators that Uganda has developed for its results framework do not cover all aspects of the reform.

The countries that have made least progress on developing indicators are Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone. At the time of the evaluation, Democratic Republic of Congo had proposed some indicators associated with the theory of change did not clarify essential details on operationalizing these indicators (baselines, targets, roles and responsibilities). Sierra Leone had not developed clear indicators or timeframes for measuring progress. The theory of change identifies results and outputs, but these need to be developed into specific, measurable and time-bound indicators.

As highlighted through the enabling factors assessment, all case study countries faced challenges related to data collection, which in turn posed barriers to implementing MEL frameworks in a systematic and robust manner. Several countries are taking steps to address these data issues, using GPE support. El Salvador, Tanzania and Uganda are using SCG funding to improve their EMIS systems and data integration. Similarly, part of Sierra Leone's SCG will be used to improve data collection and capacity.

Due to the fact that implementation plans and MEL frameworks are still being developed, it is difficult to fully assess the approach that will be taken to assessment and analysis of data and reporting. The countries with the strongest pre-existing approaches to data analysis are Nepal and Uganda. Nepal's data monitoring is frequent and comprehensive with periodic reports used to inform planning and reforms. In Uganda, monitoring of certain interventions is regular and well-structured, but data analysis remains challenging due to capacity issues (and is being supported through the SCG). At present, it is unclear how data will be analyzed and reported on in Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Sierra Leone and Tajikistan in order to develop and mobilize insights into the implementation of the priority reform. As noted, the majority of these countries are making improvements to their data collection and capacity.

3.4 There is little evidence that the operating model is contributing to the alignment of various (non-government) stakeholders' resources to the priority reforms

Alignment of external resources is at an early stage. From the case studies (interviews and desk review) there was limited evidence to indicate that GPE's operating model was fostering resource alignment beyond the early-stage compact development process (the exceptions were Tajikistan and El Salvador).

Tajikistan, Nepal and El Salvador were the examples which showed progress aligning policy instruments and administration around the priority reform, which should in turn support the alignment of financial resources through a combination of domestic financing, GPE grants and external funding sources. Tajikistan had alignment mechanisms within the Academy of Education, and development partners were organized through its Donor Coordination Committee (DCC), a cross-sectoral donor

coordination mechanism aimed to ensure that delivery partners work with the government in a harmonized manner (going wider than the priority reform).[24] Nepal used a sector wide approach to coordinate donor support. This included, among other things, a highly functional coordination mechanism to engage the local education group in overall sector planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. However, evidence from the case study suggests there remains some misalignment between national and sub national level policies, policy-making bodies and implementing agencies responsible for operationalizing the priority reform. In El Salvador, UNICEF, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank contributed technical support to policy development through the space created by the operating model and the local education group. Overall, the evidence remains limited regarding countries' proactive efforts to identify and leverage either GPE or additional resources to fully support all of the facets of their priority reforms, besides using existing mechanisms.

From the above examples of instrument alignment, Tajikistan and El Salvador have also begun to make progress towards aligning financial resources. Tajikistan has a map of all partners' funds for education which predates the GPE operating model, but as new funds have come on stream for the priority reform these have been added. Funds from UNESCO have been allocated for the priority reform as a consequence of their involvement in the local education group and compact discussion meetings. In El Salvador, the Inter-American Development Bank approved a project focused on early childhood education and the World Bank loan was restructured to align with the priority reform.

There was almost no resource alignment seen in Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo or Uganda.

Tanzania strongly advocated for resource alignment behind the priority reform and welcomed the operating model approach to identify priority reforms and focus on changing the ways in which partnerships respond collectively to challenges of education financing. Education Program for Results (EPforR II) provides the policy framework for alignment of development partners' support.[25] However, there remain challenges regarding coherence in implementation and oversight, and accountability structures and processes are not yet fully established. For Sierra Leone, while there was evidence of coordination efforts among development partners in their funding approach, it was not clear whether these intentions would lead to alignment of resources to support implementation. In the compact, the government detailed a plan to draw resources from donors in alignment with projects contributing to the attainment of the five pillars of the priority reform, however these plans were not confirmed.

Democratic Republic of Congo country stakeholders expressed a degree of frustration over efforts to trigger additional commitments and alignment behind the priority reform and a few stakeholders (international and national) highlighted the fact that there were not enough incentives built into the model and that international money was still paying for some essential nodes/mechanisms of the system, threatening sustainability. There remains no mapping of who funds what components of the priority reform. Uganda previously used Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp), which has left a legacy of coordination to support resource alignment. There was evidence of partner resources in Uganda being aligned around the fast tracking of the redevelopment of the EMIS, but no other information was available apart from the overview of where partners were planning to focus their efforts across the reform priorities in the compact.

The ownership of the implementation process and accountability for both coordination and delivery are key conditions for supporting alignment of resources. As highlighted, leadership for reform has

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[24] There is a DCC/LEG education working group in Tajikistan that focuses on promoting synergy, joint advocacy, discussion of priority policy agendas and reforms, collaboration in joint sector reviews and capacity of education authorities.

[25] Education Program for Results - a results-based financing program which incentivizes strengthening school education systems, building capacity of government ministries, and improving education outcomes in Tanzania.

been taken by the Ministry of Education across most case study countries. However, this did not necessarily lead to the establishment of accountability mechanisms that united the members of the local education group and supported alignment of resources behind the priority reform.

There are many reasons for this, including systemic issues (Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Uganda) which have the potential to undermine accountability, often linked to political agendas. Thus far, GPE's model has had a limited impact on improving accountability mechanisms. El Salvador and Uganda were the only exceptions. In El Salvador, the improvements to accountability and ownership within the technical units of the Ministry have been attributed to GPE's involvement. In Uganda, the adoption of a payment by results model has potential to improve accountability which will flow through to non-government stakeholders who provide funding.

3.5   Inadequate government capacity hinders the planning, coordination and delivery of priority reforms in several countries

The capacity for planning, coordination and delivery of priority reforms are key conditions for supporting implementation. In several countries, government capacity at various levels (national, regional and local) presented a substantial barrier to the successful planning and implementation of reforms (Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Tanzania and Uganda). These capacity challenges included: understanding of roles and responsibilities, limitations in personnel (lack of people or skills), inadequate coordination mechanisms across tiers of government, and a general insufficiency of resources (budget, infrastructure etc.).

In Democratic Republic of Congo, stakeholder interviews indicated that the weak prioritization coupled with the limited technical capacity for developing implementation plans within government were proving to be significant barriers to operationalizing the compact. SPACE (Secrétariat Permanent d'Appui et de Coordination du Secteur de l'Education) was reported to lack technical capacity. The degree of participation from stakeholders in the provinces was low, even though the education system is highly decentralized, and they did not have the resources to meaningfully engage (such as internet connection and printing facilities). Stakeholders reported they were unclear on the next steps for implementation.

Conversely, in El Salvador where the education system is highly centralized, there was no mention in the documents or interviews of the involvement of local and regional actors at an operational level. Engaging these local and regional stakeholders will be essential to the success of the priority reform and, therefore, further work is needed to clarify their roles in the implementation phase.

In Nepal, there were higher levels of capacity and alignment of government (as well as non-government) roles, in part due to the fact that implementation builds on existing roles and processes. However, since adopting a federalized approach to education, Nepal has faced challenges with coordination across different tiers of government. For example, the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA) is the current communication point for local governments which are responsible for delivering education but there is little interaction between the MoFAGA and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). While the government is introducing a new Education Act that outlines the general roles and responsibilities of local governments, ensuring there is clarity around stakeholders' roles in relation to the priority reform will be crucial. In Nepal, improvement plans are now in place to build capacity for planning and delivery of the priority reform at a local level (the School Education Sector Plan provides a roadmap to strengthen school education across all government tiers), which will be crucial to ensuring the success of the priority reform.[26] It was the only country showing a cohesive plan to increase capacity at a local level.

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[26] The plan covers compulsory and free education up to basic level and free education at secondary level.

In **Tajikistan**, roles and responsibilities were clear and coordination at a central level was relatively high because implementation harnessed existing roles and mechanisms, but rural areas faced significant capacity challenges, which also affected stakeholder engagement and alignment.

In **Sierra Leone**, weak implementation capacity at both central and local levels was a major problem and, based on current evidence, the operationalization of SCG and STG funding may not be sufficient to address shortfalls in capacity and additional resources have not been identified.

Tanzania also faced significant capacity issues at a government level and within the sector. There were poorly coordinated efforts by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) to build implementation capacity for the priority reform at various levels.

A significant rural-urban divide also presented challenges in **Uganda**, as well as differences between government and private schools. It is currently unclear whether the private sector, which has a significant role in education in the country (particularly in pre-primary education), has had sufficient involvement in consultation, and the coordination and implementation of reform efforts.

Finding 3: Areas for attention

- Plan for how the whole priority reform will be implemented. This planning can include a combination of individual program implementation plans, as part of the education sector plan, or a combination of these approaches.

- Ensure adequate costing has been conducted for the priority reform, in cooperation with budget holders, and map policy instruments and financial resources (non-domestic and domestic) which cover all aspects of the priority reform. As with implementation planning, costing and budgeting can be approached through overall sectoral budget processes, through specific programs and grants or through both approaches.

- Establish MEL frameworks which comprehensively address all aspects of the priority reform and are integrated with existing sector MEL mechanisms. Frameworks should encompass all relevant indicators and incorporate adaptable methodologies to track and evaluate the progression of the reform effectively.

- Countries should establish clear ownership of the implementation process, corresponding MEL arrangements, roles and responsibilities for reform implementation, and accountability for coordination and delivery of the reform.

- Local and regional capacity should be considered in implementation planning. Weaknesses should be addressed as part of implementation.

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4. GPE's added focus on the equity and efficiency of domestic finance, along with its volume, has led to context-relevant policy commitments on domestic finance, but its leverage on domestic finance decisions is limited

4.1 Enabling factors assessments were valuable for identifying bottlenecks, ensuring countries went through problem identification processes and fostering discussions on domestic finance

Volume, equity and efficiency of domestic finance was designated as a "high priority" enabling factor in most of the sampled countries (six out of eight) and more frequently than the other three enabling factors. The processes to undertake the enabling factors assessments (including country self-

assessments and ITAP reports) provided a valuable opportunity to identify bottlenecks and prioritize among them. Through the enabling factors assessment process, every country identified a combination of bottlenecks related to the volume, equity, and efficiency of domestic finance. Some countries recognized the value of these assessments in pinpointing financial gaps and inefficiencies in fund allocation and in directing resources to the most relevant bottlenecks.[27]

However, two countries (Cambodia and the Democratic Republic of Congo) yielded mixed or limited evidence on whether the enabling factors assessment enhanced the identification of domestic financing bottlenecks, instead incorporating previously known bottlenecks and activities from pre-existing programs into the compact. Despite an upgrade in the domestic finance rating from Medium to High by ITAP, Cambodia did not increase its focus on the importance of reaching expenditure goals. Following the change in the rating, Cambodia did not add any extra activities related to domestic finance in the compact or SCG documents (apart from those already planned), nor was there any re-prioritization of resources to address these issues.[28] This could possibly be due to the Ministry of Education's limited control over the education budget and inconsistent engagement of Ministry of Finance (see section 1.1. for more detail).

By conducting the enabling factors assessment, sampled countries were able to identify domestic finance challenges and ensure that the policy actions to address them were more context-relevant and evidence-based. Under the GPE 2016-2020 strategic plan, there had been a focus on addressing domestic finance issues without a clear process for their identification and prioritization. The GPE 2025 strategic plan introduced guidance on enabling factors assessment for volume, equity, and efficiency of domestic finance issues (through the assessments).[96] This process encouraged countries to assess and diagnose the current state of domestic finance and identify the most relevant issues. The ITAP report then enhanced this process by reviewing bottlenecks and prioritization ratings based on the country's self-analysis, context and supporting documents to further guide the GPE Board's funding decisions and shape the partnership compacts.

The enabling factors assessment process also offered a platform for stimulating dialogue on complex domestic finance issues and shifting the discussion on domestic finance beyond volume. The resulting emphasis on efficiency and equity varied across the eight countries as described in section 4.2. Countries acknowledged that, when analyzing how to fund the compact, the discussions on financial resources predominantly focused on GPE grants and external contributions rather than on domestic financing.

The enabling factors assessment process was successful in elevating domestic finance questions at different stages of partnership compact development. However, capacity constraints in ministry of education finance divisions and lack of or limited involvement of ministries of finance in the compact development and enabling factors assessment process in most countries could somewhat limit how assessment results are used in the future, and whether the planned policy actions are implemented successfully.

In several countries, the enabling factors assessment process contributed to refining the domestic finance policy actions aimed at addressing the identified bottlenecks and proposed in the compacts

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[27] These hypotheses could be further reviewed in Phases 2 and 3 of the evaluation.

[28] Cambodia has two triggers related to domestic financing, including one related to volume. Trigger 1 seeks to increase the allocation of the School Operating Fund (for school-based grants) relative to non-wage expenditure year-on-year. While this would change the proportion of funding allocated within the education budget, this trigger would not increase the overall volume of domestic funding per se. A trigger related to the percentage of the budget allocated to education had been discussed initially but was eventually not selected.

or SCG/STG program documents. Most sampled countries proposed activities (described below in **section 4.2**) to address at least half of the identified bottlenecks.[29]

4.2 Given difficulties in increasing the volume of domestic finance, due to limited fiscal space, all countries planned some activities to improve efficiency in education spending as a more viable course of action

All sampled countries identified a mix of bottlenecks across **volume, equity**, and **efficiency**, and planned activities to address several of these challenges in their compact and program documents.[30] All the countries planned some activities related to identified efficiency bottlenecks, while solutions to address the identified volume and equity challenges were less frequently planned. As for volume, three countries planned activities to address identified volume bottlenecks, four countries did not plan corresponding policy actions to the identified bottlenecks, and one country did not identify volume-related challenges. Similarly for the equity of domestic financing, three countries planned activities to address identified equity bottlenecks, four countries did not plan corresponding policy actions to the identified bottlenecks, and one country did not identify any equity challenges.

Increasing the **volume** of domestic financing is challenging given the limited fiscal space in the sampled countries and GPE's limited leverage in this area. Three countries planned strategies to increase the volume: by creating a governance and M&E structure within the Ministry of Education to oversee funding sources and usage (**El Salvador**), by rebalancing the education sector budget (increasing non-salary recurrent expenditure) through strong evidence-based funding use and allocation (**Cambodia**), and by updating implementation costs in the education sector plan (NSED 2030) and transitioning to 12-year schooling (**Tajikistan**).

Four countries (**Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Tanzania and Uganda**) chose not to plan policy actions targeting **volume**-related challenges identified in the enabling factors assessment.[31] **Uganda**, for instance, plans to use top-up triggers to encourage an increase in the education budget share but did not provide detailed plans on how the increase would be achieved. Even in cases where the volume of domestic finance is not directly addressed in the compact, GPE cross country mechanisms support countries to develop innovative solutions to financing challenges. For example, GPE, through the Education Out Loud initiative, promotes the use of innovative mechanisms to stimulate the increase in the education budget by promoting evidence-based solutions centered on implementing progressive tax policies. The TaxEd Alliance, supported by Education Out Loud, facilitates dialogue among civil society, Tax Justice Network actors, and education stakeholders in several countries, including **Nepal**, to empower members through research and budget tracking for better taxation policies.[32]

All sampled countries chose to focus on **efficiency** which was likely an easier and more feasible approach given the difficulties in increasing the volume. The main policy actions planned to improve funding allocation efficiency in response to bottlenecks from the enabling factor analyses included financial simulation and sensitivity analysis (**Tajikistan**), updating costs of reform implementation and improving budget execution rates (**Sierra Leone**), rationalization of managing offices and teacher redeployment plans (**Nepal**) and collecting and consolidating financial data from various education sector stakeholders (**Democratic Republic of Congo**).

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[29] According to the evaluation team mapping exercise of challenges identified in ITAP reports and activities planned in compacts or GPE grant program documents (table 33 in the Findings Annex).

[30] According to the evaluation team mapping activity (see table 32 in the Findings Annex)

[31] For some of these countries (Uganda and Sierra Leone), some grant program documents are yet to be finalized.

[32] Global Partnership for Education (GPE), *Thinking outside the 'budget box' for better education financing*, (GPE, 2022), https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/thinking-outside-budget-box-better-education-financing.

Activities related to equity were planned in three countries with a primary focus on revising capitation formulas (Uganda) and student unit costs for greater inclusivity (Tajikistan and Tanzania). In two sampled countries, there are planned activities which are not directly focused on equity but have the potential to positively influence it if implemented effectively. For example, in Nepal, the teacher rationalization and redeployment plan has already and might in the future contribute to more equitable teacher distribution across the country; while Cambodia's plan to increase allocation to the School Operating Fund will allow for an increase in non-wage expenditures and more needs-based financing, especially in disadvantaged regions. Nevertheless, four sampled countries did not choose to plan policy actions to address equity-related bottlenecks identified through the enabling factors assessment process. These bottlenecks related to different forms of inequality: El Salvador and Sierra Leone do not address any of the identified equity bottlenecks, the Democratic Republic of Congo does not address inequalities in provincial fund distribution, and Tanzania overlooks disparities in favor of wealthier and urban populations in the allocation of domestic resources for teacher salaries and deployment.

Apart from direct focus on volume, equity and efficiency, several countries planned activities related to improving data and capacity. related to domestic finance, which speaks to the importance of looking at enabling factors more holistically. Several countries outlined the need for systemic and frequent data collection. For instance, in Tajikistan, limited data availability on crucial factors such as learning outcomes, repetition and dropout rates hindered calculation of the efficiency of public resource usage. Some countries proposed activities to address data and capacity issues. In Uganda planned improvements in EMIS and the provision of pertinent and aggregated data, if used to complement the government's plans to revise the capitation grants formula, could drive progress in achieving equity in domestic finance. In Sierra Leone, the local education group aims to collaborate on monitoring budget execution to enhance financial accountability, which aligns with the government's priority to "improve budget execution rate" as indicated by the STG top-up trigger 1.[33]

4.3 System capacity grants were somewhat useful in addressing domestic finance issues by focusing on finance-related capacity building for ministries of education

All countries in the study received SCGs, and half of them planned activities impacting domestic finance, typically responding to gaps highlighted in the enabling factors assessments and ITAP report.[34] This illustrates the connectivity across various stages of compact development and underscores the value of these analyses.

Activities within SCGs often aimed to build capacity within the ministries of education in key areas like planning and budgeting. Examples included the formation of a Thematic Consultation Committee on education financing, the revival of the Interministerial Committee for Budget Preparation and Monitoring, and training in budget planning and management (Democratic Republic of Congo) or efforts to strengthen systems development and ICT capacity (Cambodia). Other initiatives aimed at providing technical assistance for financial simulations (Cambodia and Tanzania) and sensitivity analysis based on macro-fiscal frameworks (Tajikistan). These initiatives might have the potential to enhance long-term capacity, improve budget planning, and foster a more efficient and equitable resource allocation (their effectiveness and actual contribution are areas for future consideration for Phase 2 and 3 of the evaluation).

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[33] Budget execution rate was 78% in 2019, according to the Public Expenditure Review (2021).

[34] Based on finalized applications and applications in the process of finalization as of the beginning of February 2024.

4.4 The top-up portion of the system transformation grant played a role in eliciting country commitments to address domestic finance bottlenecks, but it is not yet known if the relatively limited top-up amounts, combined with limited engagement of ministries of finance, will be sufficient incentive for countries to drive changes in related domestic financing areas

The GPE 2025 strategy introduces a more refined approach to results-based financing, focusing more directly on domestic finance issues, among others. The GPE 2025 strategy allows top-up triggers and incentives to precisely target bottlenecks in the volume, equity, and efficiency of domestic finance. This shift suggests a broader and more nuanced set of incentives aimed at addressing context-specific challenges, indicating an evolution to more targeted results-based financing.

Top-up triggers were incorporated into the STG for five sampled countries, and four countries used them to incentivize activities related to domestic finance bottlenecks. However, the triggers may have limited effect in driving significant increases in related areas of domestic finance given the small actual amount of top-up compared to the total education budgets in the countries.

Two sampled countries (Cambodia and Uganda) designed volume-related top-up triggers, but they might not be a sufficient incentive to increase the volume given that the amount of top-up is small compared to the overall education budgets and the GPE grants and co-funding for multipliers. In Uganda, the evaluation team notes that while the sector dialogue prompted by compact development had limited focus on domestic finance policies, there was a sign of emerging collaboration with selected education partners in reforming the capitation grant formula.

Efficiency-related top-up triggers (three sampled countries), such as improving financial projections in Tanzania and budget execution in Sierra Leone, might make a more immediate contribution to domestic finance. There are other top-up triggers that could bring positive changes in the efficiency of domestic finance. In Tanzania, a top-up trigger related to reviewing the education sector plan and enhancing financial projections might contribute to domestic finance efficiency. This initiative focused on refining financing strategies, notably around capitation grants, showing how strategic planning can lead to more effective and targeted improvements in the education sector's financial management. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the top-up trigger related to setting up a unique identifier for all teaching staff of the MEPST (Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Technique; Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education), paid by the national budget by 2025, which could improve administrative and professional management and allow for more control over the payroll and overall efficiency of public expenditure on education.

Conversely, equity-related triggers (three sampled countries) might yield benefits in the long term, as they often tackle broader issues not directly linked to domestic finance. Examples include incorporation of learning outcomes and learner disadvantages in teacher allocation mechanisms in Sierra Leone to allocate more equitable distribution of teachers to disadvantaged district areas; and ensuring increased allocation of School Operating Fund relative to non-wage expenditure year by year in Cambodia to allow for need-based financing.

Finding 4: Areas for attention

- Incentivize ministries of finance and relevant finance departments in the ministries of education to engage in the process of identifying and developing solutions to domestic finance-related challenges.

- Incentivize and integrate a stronger focus on equity issues in domestic financing through the GPE model, in the same way, for instance, that gender is incentivized throughout all GPE grants.

- Incentivize the collection and use of data in domestic finance planning to better support improved public resource usage.

- Design the domestic finance related triggers to provide relevant and sufficient incentives at country level and ensure they are based on discussions (and a joint vision) between diverse stakeholders on what is achievable and realistic – as well as what is required to reach these triggers.

5. Gender equality is considered in all countries' reforms and across GPE grants, but country capacities to address gender equality (for example through planning and monitoring) require reinforcement

5.1 Gender was not consistently considered across the assessment of all enabling factors in the sampled countries, however all countries identified gender-related challenges within "gender-responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring"

Looking first at gender considerations in **enabling factors assessments**, partnership compact guidelines say that "the enabling factors exercise should always be mindful of gender issues, considering the different needs of girls and boys and how each enabling factor promotes or impedes gender equality in the system".[35]

The gender-responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring enabling factor was rated high priority in three countries (**Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador**, and **Tanzania**), and medium priority in the remaining countries. High priority ratings resulted from limited evidence on gender barriers, recognition of significant challenges in mitigating inequalities at the national level, or inadequate prioritization of gender issues in national education plans.

Evidence that gender was considered across the assessment of all the enabling factors, as per the compact guidelines, is mixed. There were some indications of gender equality being considered across all four enabling factors, for example, most countries acknowledged the importance of regularly and methodically gathering and analyzing gender-disaggregated data. Related to domestic financing, two countries highlighted the need for greater inclusiveness and gender responsiveness when revising per-capita funding (**Tajikistan**, for example, is trying to account for minorities and vulnerable groups in the formula) or capitation grant formula (**Uganda** is planning to account for girls in the grant formula).

Most countries developed policy actions targeting gaps identified in the gender responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring enabling factor. Examples of policy actions in this area included enhancing planning or monitoring capacities, planning harmonization and theory of change integration (**Cambodia**), prioritizing equity in planning and crisis education plans (**Democratic Republic of Congo**) or reviewing M&E frameworks to account for inclusive indicators (**Tajikistan**). **El Salvador** and **Uganda** focused on gender-related policy improvements, with **Uganda** using the SCG for gender-responsive pedagogy, while **El Salvador** established a Gender Management Unit. Other countries focused on teacher deployment plans which included a gender lens: **Nepal** planned to enhance equitable teacher-student ratios through redeployment, while **Tanzania** tried to improve teacher recruitment (improve female participation in teacher workforce and school leadership).

The majority of compacts featured a broader education sector analysis based on the criteria of gender equality in access to, within, and through education, albeit with varying levels of depth and quality.[36] These analyses aided countries in pinpointing barriers to gender equality within their

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[35] After the sampled countries submitted their partnership compacts, GPE revised the Enabling Factors Analysis and Compact guidelines to include a more explicit cross-cutting gender analysis across all four enabling factors. However, the current analysis considers the earlier guidelines used by the sampled countries. For TCLE's Midline phase, it might be beneficial to consider the updated guidelines for evaluation and assess their impact on the compact development process, particularly in terms of gender-focused analysis and planning.

[36] GPE applies a model that considers gender equality in access to, within and through education. 'Gender equality in access to' education recognizes the causes of exclusion based on individual characteristics such as gender, alongside context and system-level challenges. 'Gender equality within' education refers to policies and practices that apply to the school environment, promote gender-responsive teaching and curricula and create safe spaces for all. 'Gender equality through' education refers to engaging young people to be part of changing harmful norms, and schools modelling environments where people have opportunities to thrive regardless of gender.

education sectors and in formulating actions in their compacts that aligned with those findings. Notably, Tajikistan and Democratic Republic of Congo stood out as the sole countries lacking significant gender analysis in their compacts, although a more detailed examination was included in grant applications.

Gender-related reforms across many countries were rooted in evidence primarily related to gender equality *in access to* education, with analyses of enrollment, survival, and completion rates, alongside disaggregated student assessment results, informing reform strategies (Cambodia, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda). Moreover, some countries, such as El Salvador, identified gender biases *within* education systems, particularly in formative assessment tools lacking gender perspectives, while others, like Cambodia and Tanzania, highlighted gender imbalances in teaching and leadership positions within schools, demonstrating an understanding of gender equality *through* education.

Activities developed by the eight countries aligned with their gender-related analyses, with variations reflecting identified priorities. For example, Cambodia targeted gender equality *in access to* education by focusing on teaching quality and providing remedial support, while Nepal prioritized creating safe environments free from gender-based violence to foster equal access. Although only El Salvador's compact mentioned gender analysis in student assessment, many countries designed policies targeting gender inequalities *within* education, including curricula reviews and teacher training. Examples included Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. Aligning with their analyses of gender equality *through* education, Cambodia and Tanzania designed activities to enhance gender-equitable professional environments.

5.2 All sampled countries addressed gender considerations in priority reforms, and half prioritized gender equality as a thematic area

The analysis and identification of gaps in the enabling factors or obstacles to gender equality in access to, within and through education shaped the priority reforms and gender-related initiatives of partner countries. In half of the countries (Cambodia, El Salvador, Nepal, and Tanzania), gender equality was a thematic priority area, with a dedicated workstream of activities within the theory of change solely aimed at enhancing gender equality. Conversely, in other countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, and Uganda), gender considerations were integrated to varying degrees into their priority reforms.[37]

The priority reforms targeted various aspects to promote gender equality in education, such as early childhood education (El Salvador), infrastructure improvements for better access (Tanzania), and strengthening government capacity for gender-responsive planning and policy enforcement in schools (Nepal). Additionally, addressing school-related gender-based violence was one of the gender-related activities proposed in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, while other countries focused on improving teaching quality, emphasizing career support for educators (Cambodia, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo) and teacher training (Nepal, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan). In Tajikistan, Nepal, and Sierra Leone, gender-related activities in the priority reforms focused on enhancing data collection and analysis for evidence-based planning, although in Sierra Leone, this fell under the broader "Radical Inclusion Policy." Uganda's domestic finance measure incorporated gender considerations in funding allocation without explicit mention as a gender equality measure.

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[37] The thematic priority areas selected by the eight case study countries are provided in Table 1, Annex 1: Analytical findings report.

5.3 While system capacity grants support countries to address capacity gaps, diagnose disparities, and improve data collection with a gender focus, the system transformation grants enable them to focus on implementing activities aligned to broader bottlenecks in gender equality in access to, within and through education

The grant applications align with the gender analyses and policy actions described in the compacts, further enriching the scope of the priority reform or targeting other relevant enabling factors related to gender equality. While the SCG mainly supported countries in capacity building and improved analysis and policy planning (see section below for further details), the STG applications were designed to better support each country to implement programs that contribute to their specific system transformation.

Six of the eight countries (**Cambodia**, **El Salvador**, **Democratic Republic of Congo**, **Sierra Leone**, **Tanzania**, and **Tajikistan**) used the SCG to strengthen their capacity for integrating gender and inclusion perspectives into priority reforms. **Cambodia** and **El Salvador** focused on diagnosing specific disparities and improving data collection, while **Tanzania** and **Tajikistan** emphasized broader data system strengthening with a significant emphasis on gender equality and inclusion. Additionally, some countries (**Cambodia**, **Tanzania**, **Democratic Republic of Congo**, and **Tajikistan**) used the SCG for capacity building and improved planning, such as enhancing gender-responsive policy development and conducting staff training for gender-sensitive policy planning. These efforts align with ITAP reports, categorizing both data and evidence and gender-responsive sector planning enabling factors as medium to high priorities in all these countries.

As for the STG, some countries used it to enhance measures and build capacity for promoting gender equality *in access to* education, employing diverse strategies. **Cambodia**, **Democratic Republic of Congo**, **Tanzania**, and **El Salvador** prioritized strengthening systems for gender-responsive education analysis, policy, and planning, while **Tajikistan** and **Uganda** focused on practical aspects like gender-sensitive infrastructure. Moreover, some countries addressed inequalities *within* education, focusing on curriculum reviews aiming to eliminate stereotypes and discrimination (**Cambodia**, **Democratic Republic of Congo**, **El Salvador**, and **Tajikistan**), while others implemented specific teacher training (**Democratic Republic of Congo** and **Tajikistan**) on gender issues or challenged stereotypes in the classroom (**Nepal**). Additionally, certain countries aimed to enhance broader societal gender perceptions through education, relying on activities like gender-based violence prevention in **Uganda** and advocacy for equitable working conditions in **Cambodia**. Lastly, in **Sierra Leone**, efforts were made to recruit and retain more female teachers in male-dominated primary education, contributing to broader gender equality goals.

From the sampled countries, only the **Democratic Republic of Congo** and **El Salvador** qualified for the Girls' Education Accelerator. In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, it supports teacher effectiveness and conditions for girls' schooling, while in **El Salvador**, it focuses on eradicating gender stereotypes in early childhood education and providing gender analysis for decision-making support.

5.4 There are incoherent interpretations of gender hardwiring across countries due to differences in the concept's understanding

The concept of "gender hardwiring" lacked coherence across countries, due to varied interpretations. In some cases, such as **Cambodia** and **Tanzania**, there was a tendency to interpret GPE's mandate as solely focusing on girls' education. This has raised concerns, especially in countries like **Nepal** and **Tanzania**, where intersectional analyses have been conducted, but clear guidance on using existing analysis is lacking, possibly hindering the inclusion of broader intersectional considerations in their

priority reforms. Other countries, like Tajikistan and Sierra Leone, have struggled to grasp the concept altogether.[38]

The requirement by GPE to prioritize gender, coupled with an insufficient understanding of GPE's approach to hardwiring gender equality, has led to inconsistent interpretations among countries. This resulted in limited alignment with GPE's definition of gender hardwiring when countries developed priority reforms in their compacts.

5.5 The potential for successful implementation of gender equality-related interventions varies across countries, with constraints imposed by capacity and resource gaps

The potential for the successful implementation of gender equality-related policy actions and planned reform and program activities varies significantly across countries. Most sampled countries (five out of eight) planned activities that aligned with the gaps identified during the enabling factors assessment process. However, many other challenges could impede the successful realization of gender equality initiatives, primarily related to the sustainability and holistic nature of the reforms, local capacity and the availability of resources and mechanisms. There is insufficient evidence to comment on the potential for successful implementation of gender components of priority reforms beyond the broader findings on implementation potential discussed in **section 3**.

Countries such as **Nepal** and **El Salvador** benefit from having established mechanisms and the availability of gender-disaggregated data, which are critical for planning and assessing gender-related reforms. However, **Tajikistan**, **Cambodia**, and **Sierra Leone** face significant capacity gaps in conducting intersectional analyses of gender equality in education and lack gender expertise, despite ongoing actions to address these issues. **Tanzania**'s challenges with identifying gender issues and analyzing systematic root causes could hinder transformative gender reforms. In **Cambodia**, potential risks for sustainability (of the whole reform, not only in relation to gender equality) include coordination challenges among grant agents and weak accountability mechanisms, underscoring the need for sustained funding to ensure the success of gender-related reforms.

Finding 5: Areas for attention

- Support countries to more effectively and consistently integrate gender considerations into analyses across all enabling factors (data and evidence, volume, equity and efficiency of domestic finance, and sector coordination).

- Advise countries to leverage global evidence from programs and interventions on mechanisms to support gender equality and equity and to engage with gender innovation labs when planning for addressing gender intersectional issues.

- Promote consistency and comprehensiveness in evaluating gender equality and equity factors as countries develop their priority reforms and streamline gender analysis according to GPE's gender approach.

- Clarify the importance of gender hardwiring within GPE's approach to ensure that all countries adopt or strengthen their approaches for addressing barriers to education access and quality.

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[38] With the term *intersectionality* we refer to the way in which different forms of discrimination and disadvantage combine and overlap.