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Mr. Efraim Gomez
DDG and Head of the UN Policy Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden

GPE Management Response to MOPAN 2017-2018 Assessment

Dear Mr. Gomez,

On behalf of the Management Team of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), I would like to thank the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) Secretariat for conducting the 2017-18 assessment of GPE and the MOPAN members, especially Norway and the United States as the institutional leads, for supporting this assessment. GPE appreciates the professional and constructive collaboration experienced throughout the assessment process, including the presentation of the findings to the GPE Board in June 2019.

The MOPAN evaluation finds GPE to be a global leader in education. The evaluation highlights GPE as a platform for education sector change, which is both accountable and flexible. As we move forward with our new Strategic Plan, we will seek to build upon these assets, and learn lessons from this evaluation.

Our management response is attached.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles North", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Charles North
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Ecopies to:

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The assessment comes at a critical time for GPE, as we embark on designing a new strategy that will begin in 2021. Based on what we have learned from the wealth of evidence and lessons of experience in GPE2020, including MOPAN, and broad consultations with our stakeholders and thought leaders, we are identifying transformative steps that we hope will underpin our new strategy. We are still at an early stage in strategy development, which will be determined by the direction set by our Board of Directors, but our initial thinking suggests that this is an optimal moment to **reaffirm our commitment to SDG4, put teaching and learning for all children at the core center of our work, and better leverage the partnership to deliver on its promise.** The implications of MOPAN findings are being considered in the context of the strategy renewal work that has launched and that will conclude by June 2020.

GPE appreciates the thorough and extensive review of GPE's documents, in-depth interviews, and the survey of GPE partners. We understand that the MOPAN 3.0 assessment methodology builds on previous iterations and offers stronger evidence with a more flexible approach to arrive at more robust conclusions. While we believe that the methodology generates information that enables some benchmarking across organizations, it remains somewhat inflexible and insufficiently sharp to account for the specific objectives, theories of change, and organizational and governance complexities of the organizations under review. We provide our response within the context of this larger issue noted with MOPAN's approach.

Key Findings and GPE's Response

Overall, our evaluation evidence shows that GPE has made progress against key objectives in our work to support children's learning and achievement, but that GPE's approach and theory change need to be refined and strengthened. This overarching finding is also noted in MOPAN. Education sector plans have improved, country-level policy dialogue is more inclusive, GPE support is well managed and aligned to sector plans, and overall financing to GPE has increased. However, there are challenges with plan implementation and monitoring, GPE transaction costs at the country-level can be high, and more needs to be done to realize the strategic potential of GPE's partnership approach at the country and global levels. Collectively these challenges currently limit impact through the GPE model. The new strategy provides an opportunity to reshape the way GPE works to achieve learning outcomes for all children.

MOPAN notes three strengths of GPE:

- 1. GPE is a global leader in the education sector.** GPE is building a solid reputation in advocacy and support for education sector development, as evidenced by the increasing leverage of funds from donors at the country level and by the Partnership's increasing engagement with the private sector. The growing focus on strengthening country education systems is a clear competitive advantage and strongly appreciated by country partners. MOPAN's survey of external partners confirms the value of the partnership modality of GPE.
- 2. GPE is creating a platform for education sector change.** As a global partnership, the Partnership faces management challenges stemming from this complex structure. The results reports provide emerging evidence that the Partnership is raising the profile of the education sector. GPE is promoting greater engagement from and coordination among all stakeholders to support the partnership and avoid costly fragmentation; it is creating a platform for education sector change.
- 3. The GPE model is both accountable and flexible to country conditions.** The GPE model is based on a sound organizational structure and sound financial processes. The grant mechanisms also help to provide a specific context of country partners and allow for responsiveness to country needs.

MOPAN also notes several areas for improvement:

At the same time, we agree that several areas in GPE's current approach merit review and change as part of our strategy renewal to sharpen and accelerate progress on learning. Below, we note the interrelated areas for improvement, which require a consolidated and coordinated set of actions, and outline some initial thoughts of how these might be addressed as part of our new strategy.

- **Limited Evidence on advancing gender equality.** Our results report notes progress towards gender *parity* in the completion of primary school, and, to a lesser extent, lower secondary. Progress towards advancing the broader goal of gender *equality* is less clear. We are considering how equity and gender equality can be accelerated in the new strategy. In the interim the GPE Management Team has agreed priority steps to strengthen capacity and oversight for gender equality.
- **Value of the partnership modality for GPE, but need for more effective ways of working in different country contexts.** GPE has begun work on differentiating how GPE's processes and tools work at the country level to better suit diverse country contexts. ***We will keep our focus on system strengthening to have impact at scale and transform the learning experience of all.*** We will build on the Effective Partnership Review work and deploy strategic uses of resources in response to specific country needs.
- **Need for balance between the partnership and efficient use of GPE Funds and greater focus on implementation.** In our initial strategy consultations, we are discussing shifting from the emphasis on planning to ***sharpening our approach and pivoting towards prioritized, evidence-based implementation focused on learning needs of children.*** We will support our developing country partners to use evidence in their sector planning, programming, and implementation. This may include, for example, improved assessment of country capacity to implement specific aspects of sector plans. This shift would enhance not only efficient use of GPE funds, but also encourage alignment across priorities, drive effective teaching, and support the learning needs of children.
- **Strong management processes and financing controls, but frequent disbursement and implementation delays:** We acknowledge that disbursement and implementation delays at the country level result in opportunity costs and affect GPE's effectiveness. We have investigated this point further in our 2019 Grant Performance Review (forthcoming) and our Grant Process Review and have made recommendations for consideration by the Grants Performance Committee, including looking at the thresholds for assessing project implementation readiness, strengthening monitoring of implementation and disbursement, and adapting implementation approaches in low capacity contexts.
- **Systems to track and report results require attention; they do not fully reflect the impact pathways that GPE support.** The report notes that processes and systems for country-level data generation and tracking do not allow GPE to demonstrate how it is delivering on its mandate. As part of the new strategy, we hope to adopt an approach that more closely traces updated GPE's theory of change. This new approach would test the pathways of change and optimize learning from and using evidence for course corrections on a regular basis for the entire partnership. ***It will also put country-level learning at the heart of the approach.***

MOPAN findings that require nuance:

Although MOPANs current methodology has generated a generally fair and comprehensive assessment of GPE, we also believe that the methodology is too straightjacketed and does not consider the context, design, and specific organizational and governance processes and arrangements of organizations under review. The assessment therefore at times confuses GPE as a partnership with GPE as the Secretariat and GPE as a fund.

The findings noted below have merit in that they help the partnership think about the issues raised, but we do not think that they capture the issue discussed accurately and with sufficient nuance:

GPE requires institutional strengthening in relation to its core and ancillary functions and needs to strike a balance between the partnership and efficient use of GPE Funds. We agree that in the near term there is need for balancing between GPE focusing on technical assistance, knowledge generation, and sharing lessons on the one hand and ensuring efficient flow of GPE financing on the other. We also agree that efficient flow of GPE funds is a challenge. However, ample evidence also indicates that financing will flow neither efficiently or nor effectively if there are fundamental bottlenecks to countries' knowledge of how best to use and monitor the scarce funding available for education. Targeted technical assistance, knowledge generation, and sharing lessons will assist countries in learning from each other about what works, what does not, and the practical ways to address the roadblocks to SDG4 in their own contexts. Thus, GPE's updated strategy will consider how best financing and knowledge can work together to unlock each country's potential. This approach will entail leveraging the knowledge assets of the entire GPE partnership, while also supporting efficient financing flows through GPE's grant instruments.

The causal linkages between the main focus of GPE's work and the end benefits for children are not clearly articulated. We agree that the message regarding end beneficiaries in GPE's theory of change is not clear. However, it is important to understand that the GPE theory of change is for the *partnership*. It postulates that collective action is required for strengthening the *national system* to reach all children. The specific causal linkages are articulated at the partnership level and not specifically for the GPE fund or for the actions of the grant agents and the Secretariat alone. Each country has its own pathway to reaching the end beneficiaries, and this notion is captured at the country operational model: *quality planning, implementation, and effective financing*. Thus, the Partnership supports the achievement of SDG4 through strengthening these three core elements of countries' education systems by working together at the global and national levels. By extension, the generic GPE theory of change is much more specific at the country level. Evidence shows however that all three elements of the operational model need to be enhanced and better supported.

GPE is hindered by its limited direct access to data that can demonstrate its performance. We agree that availability and use of data remain challenges across the partnership and that clearer data and evidence are required to confirm the claims of significant benefits from engaging in the Partnership. Effectiveness and efficiency of GPE funds need to be measured, but it is equally important to do it in ways that will strengthen **evidence-based learning and action across and at different levels of the partnership**. This approach implies generating and using data and evidence where it has the highest potential for driving actions for improvement: grants, national systems, overall impact. It also means drawing more systematically on partners' mandates, capacities, and initiatives to monitor effectiveness and impact – and avoiding duplication of effort. Thus, evidence and data are needed not just on a narrow slice of GPE funds but also on whether the partners' work at the country level is collectively strengthening national systems that lead to results. We therefore agree that a stronger database and evidence on GPE funds, as well as broader partnership efforts, requires firmer agreements with partners on provision of data. It also necessitates more direct investments in data generation and analysis at the country level.

Finally, we wish to note that the assessment does not cover effectiveness and efficiency related to governance processes, which are fundamental to how the Partnership operates and the results it achieves.

We would again like to thank MOPAN for the considerable thoughtful effort that went into the assessment and the collegial way in which the discussions were approached. We have benefitted tremendously from both the discussions and the report and are taking several findings into consideration as we embark on the upcoming strategy.