

## ASPBAE update on the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) responses to COVID-19

6 April 2020, Virtual

ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, the alternate member of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Board representing the Southern CSO constituency (known as the CSO2 constituency in the GPE Board), gave a presentation during the all-in coalitions meeting with ASPBAE staff on 6 April 2020. The presentation was an update on responses from GPE to the coronavirus pandemic and the impact on education.



**In the first phase of its response, GPE offered a US\$ 8.8 million grant to UNICEF to assist 87 developing countries to support Local Education Groups (LEGs) and governments to respond to the crisis in emergency mode.**

According to UNESCO at end-March, a total of 1.7 billion students were affected due to (partial and full) school closures. In the first phase of its response, GPE offered a US\$ 8.8 million grant to UNICEF to assist 87 developing countries (ESPDG-eligible countries) to support Local Education Groups (LEGs) and governments to respond to the crisis in emergency mode. Funds will support governments in setting up their education systems to cope such as supporting alternative learning programs, public education on health, and developing messages in communities to prevent stigma due to coronavirus.

In its March 31 online Board Meeting, the GPE Board approved the second phase of the response: a US\$ 250 million grant which can be accessed by 67 eligible ESPIG countries (low income countries) to deliver interventions to strengthen the public education system on two fronts:

- 1) during the closure of schools – how education systems are able to promote the continuation of learning, and
- 2) when schools resume – to ensure that the education systems are able to recover quickly after the schools reopen.



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- 6) close the gap in learning, making sure that remedial and accelerated learning programs are put in place after schools re-open, and dealing with the ongoing impact of the crisis, and the cut in continuity in learning due to school closures.

There are 6 goals related to the use of these funds -

- 1) sustained high-quality learning continuity programs that reach the most marginalised;
- 2) include the most marginalised - identifying and addressing specific poverty and gender barriers to continuing learning, especially heightened by the economic crisis;
- 3) protecting children and the education workforce (including psychosocial support);
- 4) assessments – to know that learning is happening;
- 5) re-opening schools when safe - preparing the system, teachers and schools after long closures and supporting education financing after the economic shock of COVID-19;

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A smaller percentage of these funds will go to mitigation measures during the emergencies and a larger percentage to the catching up when schools reopen. About 10% of the grant, or US\$ 25 million, will be channeled through regional and global responses such as seeking efficiencies in procurement; ensuring same language radio programming; collaborating on guidance and messaging; ensuring lesson learning and developing/scaling up effective approaches.



On messaging and lessons-learned approaches, GPE is thinking of the Knowledge and Information Exchange (KIX) programme and the Education Out Loud (EOL) programme as the avenues by which these measures could be pursued. No guidelines are provided yet but GPE is considering how to work with CSOs through the EOL mechanism, given the roles of CSOs in social mobilisation, outreach, awareness raising, and monitoring, especially at the community level. Moneys under the \$250 million grant will go to government but there may be a chance for CSO and NGO participation in the \$25 million grant for regional and global responses.

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The CSO2 constituency of the GPE Board was concerned at the proposal to delegate approval of all grants under this COVID-19 facility fully to the GPE CEO/Secretariat. The first concern was that this might discourage optimizing the partnership for the emergency response. But many other constituencies were in favour of this delegated authority, as they were convinced that mechanisms for quick responses were needed in such an emergency situation. Because of the concerns raised by CSOs however -

- 1) the delegated authority was more explicitly made time bound, operational only until end September 2020;
- 2) the Coordination Committee was more explicitly asked to provide oversight to the CEO/Secretariat in terms of grant approvals.



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The second concern raised strongly by both CSOs and donors was the proposed disbursing approach that grants were to be offered on a demand-driven, first come first serve basis. Many countered that the approach must be more 'needs-based'. The fear was those countries that are better equipped to develop proposals, and not necessarily the most in need will then benefit disproportionately in terms of access to the grant. Given this concern, it was agreed to divide the grant in two parts: the first \$150 million will be disbursed on a first come-first serve basis; while \$100 million will be disbursed based on a prioritization criteria which will be evolved after

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(among other considerations) understanding the experience from the first set of grants, including an analysis of needs.

The CSO2 constituency had hoped that all 87 ESPDG eligible developing countries will be eligible for grants in this second phase, however many argued to focus limited resources on the 67 ESPIG eligible countries which are deemed to be in greater need.



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The CSO2 constituency raised other broader concerns such as a need to focus on equity. There were considerations about how the modes for distance learning and education can exacerbate education inequality. Even if radio and television are more accessible than internet-based learning tools, many children/learners would not have access to these due to the displacement and the loss of income of poor families during the emergency. CSO2 urged a holistic approach to the education responses, which includes attention to health and security, the loss of income, loss of nutrition, trauma associated with displacement, the need for social safety nets, for example through cash transfers and food aid. Along with school closures, access to school meals of many poor children was cut.



**CSO2 raised issues regarding the training teachers need, how they are overworked, issues of safety in light of exposure to the virus.**

processes need to be secured. Another CSO2 concern was that of 'disaster capitalism' - how the private sector can capitalize on the crisis and profit from the push for distance and online learning and teaching. To this end, the CSO constituencies called for ensuring that there is no relaxation on the conditions and limitations set in the GPE Private Sector Engagement Strategy in terms of the uses of the COVID-19 emergency funds.

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