

UNICEF's engagement in the Global Partnership for Education

The partnership

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) – formerly the Education for All–Fast Track Initiative – provides developing country partners with the incentives, resources and technical support needed to develop and implement national education plans to ensure universal primary education. Partners include donor governments, developing countries, bilateral and multilateral organizations, regional and international agencies, development banks, the private sector and foundations, as well as local and global civil society organizations. Created in 2002, the GPE has provided US\$2.2 billion in financial aid between 2004 and 2010 and helped to ensure that an estimated 19 million children can attend school.

At the global level, UNICEF contributes to GPE's goal setting, policy harmonization, strategic analysis, monitoring and evaluation and joint advocacy efforts. And at the country level, it coordinates, manages or supervises GPE programmes.

The challenge

Despite dramatic improvements over the past decade, progress towards achieving universal primary education has slowed in recent years. Some 61 million children of primary school age and 71 million of lower secondary school age¹ are still out of school,² and many others have dropped out of the education system.

Universal primary education remains an elusive goal largely as a result of inequities. Children from the poorest households, those living in rural areas and girls, as well as those with disabilities, are the most likely to be out of school. Worldwide, among children of primary school age not in school, 42 per cent – 28 million – live in poor countries affected by conflict.³

Compounding the problem, approximately 200 million children are currently in school but learning very little. Between one quarter and three quarters of the children in poor countries cannot read a single word, even after several years in school;⁴ and 3 out of 10 youth in developing countries cannot do basic arithmetic.⁵

In addition, the Global Partnership for Education is faced with the daunting challenge of an estimated US\$8 billion gap in the funding needed to ensure a basic quality education for children and young people in the countries that it supports.

¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'UNESCO eAtlas of Out-of-School Children', 2012, <www.app.collinsindicade.com/uis-atlas-out-of-school-children/en-us>, accessed 26 July 2012.

² 'Out-of-school' refers to children who do not have access to a school in their community; do not enrol despite the availability of a school; enrol but do not attend school; or drop out of the education system.

³ United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2011*, UN, 2011, p. 5.

⁴ Global Partnership for Education, 'All Children Reading Workshops Information Document', GPE, 2012, p. 1.

⁵ Global Partnership for Education, *Investing in Early Grade Mathematics Education*, GPE, 2012, p. 1.



Background

In 2002, the international development community launched the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) to help developing countries accelerate progress towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 2, universal primary education by 2015. EFA-FTI had itself evolved from the Education for All movement, an earlier international partnership launched in 1990.⁶ Following an evaluation published in 2010,⁷ the EFA-FTI partnership was restructured and its mandate broadened and, in 2011, it was renamed as the Global Partnership for Education.

These earlier, less formalized partnerships have informed the work of the GPE and contributed to its success today. Once an informal arrangement working in seven countries, the GPE is now a long-term, formal partnership working in nearly 50 countries. The partnership aims to:

- Expand early childhood education;
- Provide free and compulsory basic education for all;
- Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults;
- Increase adult literacy;
- Achieve gender parity and gender equality;
- Improve the quality of education.

The GPE is governed by a 19-member Board representing its constituencies, with a fixed number of seats for donor and developing country partners, multilaterals, civil society organizations, private sector and foundations. Presided over by a Chair, currently former UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy, the Board works through a secretariat. The GPE Fund provides grants to support the development and implementation of national education sector plans.

UNICEF has actively contributed to the partnership from its earliest beginnings. At the global level, it serves on the GPE Board, its Financial Advisory Committee, and various task teams. At the country level, UNICEF partners with governments and others in building and sustaining strong education sectors. It has also developed studies and tools that are used within the framework of the GPE country-level processes.

Activities

In its policy dialogue, technical assistance and capacity development functions, the partnership now covers the whole education sector for all low-income countries, although, for the time being, most financing continues to be directed to basic education – defined as early childhood development and primary and lower secondary education. It also engages with fragile states, where there is often no robust education sector plan in place.

⁶ The Education for All movement, led by UNESCO, brought together UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank.

⁷ The Fast Track Initiative, *Mid-Term Evaluation of the EFA Fast Track Initiative*, EFA-FTI, 2010.

The GPE finances partnership activities including:

- Technical support to develop and implement education plans;
- Support to strengthen sector coordination and dialogue among governments, donor partners and civil society;
- Strategic information on global good practices, and opportunities to exchange with other countries on education policy and practice;
- Financial support for activities to develop an education plan and support its implementation.

UNICEF contributes to the GPE in various ways. As Coordinating Agency in 21 of the 46 GPE-endorsed countries, it is responsible for coordinating all GPE-related activities with the governments and liaising between partners and the GPE secretariat. Based on its expertise in working in fragile contexts, UNICEF has, in exceptional instances, been designated as Managing Entity, responsible for implementing a part or the entire programme supported by the GPE. In one country, Afghanistan, UNICEF currently acts as Supervising Entity, responsible for receiving funds and supervising activities on behalf of the GPE.

Results

The Global Partnership for Education has contributed to significant improvements in access and quality of education. Between 2002 and 2009, partnership funding and technical support:

- aided the construction of more than 30,000 classrooms;
- financed a year's worth of training for 337,000 teachers;
- distributed more than 200 million textbooks; and
- assisted in reducing the number of out-of-school children by 10 million.⁸

In addition, 68 per cent of girls in partner developing countries completed the last grade of primary school in 2009, compared to 56 per cent in 2002,⁹ in part due to the GPE's activities. Comparative performance data show that countries receiving GPE support perform better in all basic education indicators than countries receiving no GPE support. Total enrolment is more than three times higher in GPE countries and children are twice as likely to complete primary school. GPE countries are also over three times more likely to have improvements in gender parity in primary completion.

On developing country financing commitments, GPE partner countries demonstrate significant increases in domestic budget allocations to education, as compared to non-GPE countries where these allocations are decreasing.¹⁰

In 2011, the partnership launched a three-year replenishment campaign aimed at adding US\$2.5 billion to the GPE Fund by 2014 and securing additional bilateral, multilateral, private sector and civil society commitments to fill the US\$8 billion unmet funding needs. The first GPE pledging conference in November 2011 resulted in pledges of more than US\$1.5 billion for the GPE Fund, which has since risen to around \$1.75 billion,¹¹ while developing countries promised to raise domestic basic education spending by more than US\$2.5 billion. Additional investments were made by the private sector and foundations, civil society and five major bilateral donors.

⁸ Global Partnership for Education, *The Case for Investment (2011-2014)*, GPE, 2011, p. 6.

⁹ Global Partnership for Education, 'Putting more girls in classrooms', GPE, 2008, p. 4.

¹⁰ Global Partnership for Education, *The Case for Investment (2011-2014)*, GPE, 2011, p. 6.

¹¹ Communication with the GPE, 23 August 2012



In Cambodia, the Global Partnership for Education has helped the government to reform the national education sector with funds pooled from the World Bank International Development Association (IDA) and other donors. As a result, the primary education dropout rate was reduced from 10.8 to 8.8 per cent between 2006 and 2009.



In Guinea, where UNICEF acts as Managing Entity, as a result of partnership collaboration, more than 25,000 adults in 595 centres began a nine-month literacy programme in January 2012, and almost half of the 240 classrooms to be constructed in the first phase of the project were completed in just 11 months.

Lessons learned and way forward

The change in the GPE's structure, which now includes developing country partners, foundations and civil society as constituents, has helped to overcome perceptions of the GPE as simply a donor financing mechanism. It has also increased the potential for greater harmonization and cost-effectiveness, and has provided a stronger platform for mobilizing domestic and external resources for education and for keeping the issue of education high on the development agenda.

UNICEF's strong commitment to the partnership has entailed the engagement of senior management at both global and country levels, as well as a significant commitment of resources and capacity, especially in countries where the organization has been called upon to serve as Supervising or Managing Entity.

The benefits for UNICEF of engagement in the partnership are considerable. The GPE has become a valuable platform to advocate for children's rights, to engage in policy work with national governments, to mainstream models that UNICEF is piloting at local levels, and to coordinate with partners on education planning and reform, knowledge and capacity-building, as well as to leverage substantial funding for country education sector plans. The GPE has also provided a multilateral aid channel for donors whose bilateral aid in education has been shrinking.

The GPE's strategy for 2011-2014 focuses on increasing support for fragile states, learning outcomes, quality education, and girls' transition to secondary education. These priorities provide greater opportunities for UNICEF to contribute to the partnership as they align with UNICEF's own priorities, in particular as they relate to equity, children in conflict and improved educational outcomes.

In sum, the Global Partnership for Education has transformed international cooperation in education, achieved specific results for children and young people, and significantly improved the overall global aid and financing architecture for education by intensifying investments, strengthening results and advancing compliance with the principles of development effectiveness.

