Boys look out a classroom window at Miga Central Primary School. Miga, Jigawa State, Nigeria

Credit: GPE/Kelley Lynch

CHAPTER 1

LEARNING OUTCOMES

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

IMPACT

GOAL 1

Improved and more equitable learning outcomes.

#1

Proportion of **partner countries with improved learning outcomes.**

–

*20 countries with data available.

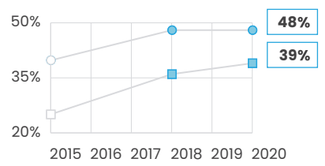
OUTCOME

GOAL 3

Effective and efficient education systems

#15

48% of partner countries had a learning assessment system that met quality standards.



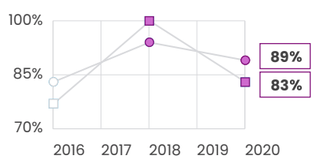
COUNTRY-LEVEL

OBJECTIVE 3

Effective and efficient GPE financing

#20

89% of grants **supported EMIS/LAS**.



*78% of active implementation grants in fiscal year 2020 invested in activities related to learning assessments.

	Baseline	Milestone met	Milestone not met	Insufficient data
Overall	○	● ●	●	–
PCFCs	□	■ ■	■	

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, 70 percent of partner countries with available data saw improvements in learning outcomes between 2010–15 and 2016–19.
- More GPE partner countries implemented learning assessments during the GPE 2020 period. In 2020, 27 countries had learning data available to measure progress, up from 20 countries in 2015.
- The quality of the learning assessment systems improved, as 48 percent of partner countries had a learning assessment system meeting quality standards in 2020, up from 40 percent in 2015.
- Despite the overall learning progress, learning outcomes still need to improve at a faster pace to meet the SGD 4 goal.
- Learning remained the largest investment area of GPE 2020. A total of US$775 million in funding was allocated to activities designed primarily to improve learning, representing 36 percent of GPE implementation funding approved between 2016 and 2020.

CHAPTER 1

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Improving learning outcomes for all is one of the main goals of the GPE 2020 strategic plan. This ambition is in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.[1] During the implementation of GPE 2020 (2016–20), some countries experienced improvements in learning outcomes. GPE's financial support contributed to boosting the quality of learning assessment systems, and thereby the availability of data to measure progress on learning. This chapter provides an overview of the progress in learning outcomes and an analysis of the status of learning assessment systems in partner countries. The chapter also discusses how GPE funds and programs support learning and the strengthening of learning assessment systems.

1.1. TRENDS IN LEARNING OUTCOMES IN PARTNER COUNTRIES (Indicator 1)

GPE tracks trends in learning outcomes using available international, regional and national learning assessments. Indicator 1 captures the proportion of partner countries showing improvements in learning outcomes in basic education over the implementation period of GPE 2020. The baseline data from 20 partner countries with at least two data points available for the 2000–2015 period showed some progress in learning outcomes during that time.[2] Overall, 65 percent of partner countries (13 out of 20) showed improvements in learning outcomes between the periods 2000–2010 and 2011–15. In partner countries affected by fragility and conflict (PCFCs), two out of four countries showed improvements.

The 2020 target measures improvements between 2010–15 and 2016–19.[3] Data from 141 learning assessments (90 national assessments, 42 regional assessments and nine international assessments) at the basic education level are available. These assessments were administered more than once, and 27 countries have at least two comparable learning data points that can be used to inform Indicator 1.[4] The number of partner countries with data available to measure progress in learning outcomes improved from the 20 countries at baseline. Of the available learning assessments, 77 measure reading abilities, while 64 assess learning outcomes in mathematics. Overall, 70 percent of partner countries with available data (19 out of 27) saw improvements in learning outcomes.[5] Learning outcomes declined in five countries[6] and remained stable in three countries.[7] PCFCs registered slower progress, with only

1. SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
2. To inform the learning outcomes indicator, data must meet three key criteria: (1) The data must be representative of the student population (including boys and girls) at either the national or subnational level; (2) the learning assessment must measure achievements in language, mathematics and/or other key subject areas in basic education; and (3) the data must include learning level scores that are comparable across years (same subjects, same scale, and drawing from equivalent samples of students). See appendix F. for more information on the learning assessment data used to inform Indicator 1. For details on any indicator methodology, replace X with the number of the indicator in the following URL address: https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/methodology-sheet-gpe-result-indicator-X.
3. The original methodology of Indicator 1 requires tracking learning improvement between 2011–15 and 2016–19. Given the timing of the learning assessments, including learning assessments administered in 2010 allows more robust comparisons with a higher number of comparable learning assessments.
4. The data from these 141 learning assessments were aggregated for each country following the Indicator 1 methodology. A total of 27 countries have data available in 2020, including 10 countries that were in the sample at baseline and 17 new countries.
5. Albania, Bangladesh, Benin, Cambodia, Chad, Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, The Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Honduras, Moldova, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.
6. Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ethiopia, Lesotho and Togo.
7. Cameroon, Madagascar and Mozambique.

BOX 1.1. PASEC RESULTS SHOW SOME IMPROVEMENTS IN READING AND MATHEMATICS

Ten francophone countries in the West and Central Africa regions participated in the Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Éducatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC) test in reading and mathematics in 2014 and 2019.[a] Overall, the average reading score at grade 6 increased by 20 points (from 500 to 520, or a 4 percent increase) between 2014 and 2019. Six out of the 10 countries show significant improvement in reading at grade 6, and out of these Benin (+62, or 12 percent improvement from 2014), Republic of Congo (+39, or 8 percent), Niger (+67, or 17 percent) and Senegal (+27, or 5 percent) show remarkable progress. However, progress in mathematics at grade 6 is mixed. The average score only improved by 1.5 points (or 0.3 percent). Of the 10 countries with comparable data in 2014 and 2019, Benin (+37, or 7 percent) and Niger (+56, or 14 percent) are the only two with significant progress. The average mathematics score declined in Burundi (-48, or 8 percent decline from 2014), Côte d'Ivoire (-22, or 5 percent) and Togo (-25, or 5 percent) and remained stable in the rest of the countries. This shows that countries are overall facing challenges related to learning mathematics. At grade 2, the average learning score significantly improved between 2014 and 2019, by 33 points (7 percent) in reading and 38 points (8 percent) in mathematics. This means that preparedness at the beginning of primary school has improved, which could translate into future progress at the end of primary school, especially in mathematics.

Despite this apparent progress in learning outcomes in some countries, the PASEC 2019 report notes that inequality among students within countries overall increased from 2014 to 2019. Increased differences in the quality of schools is one of the main drivers of learning inequality among students. In addition, analysis by the Center for Global Development shows that learning levels are low in the PASEC countries when compared to international learning assessments. PASEC 2019 results show that 48 and 38 percent of students at the end of primary school reach the minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics, respectively. This means that the majority of PASEC students do not achieve the lowest PIRLS/TIMSS competency level. A comparison with the World Bank's Harmonized Learning Outcomes (HLO) score shows that while reading skills at the end of primary education have improved by 15 points on the HLO scale, if this rate of progress is maintained, these countries would nonetheless need 45 years to catch up with the current level of performance of European countries.

a. These countries are among the 27 countries included in the Indicator 1 calculation.

Sources: PASEC, *Rapport international PASEC2019* (Dakar: PASEC, 2020), https://www.confemen.org/rapport-international-pasec2019; A. Le Nestour, "New PASEC Results Show Modest Improvements in Student Learning in Francophone Africa, but Inequalities Are Widening," *Commentary and Analysis* (blog), Center for Global Development, January 19, 2021, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/new-pasec-results-show-modest-improvements-student-learning-francophone-africa.

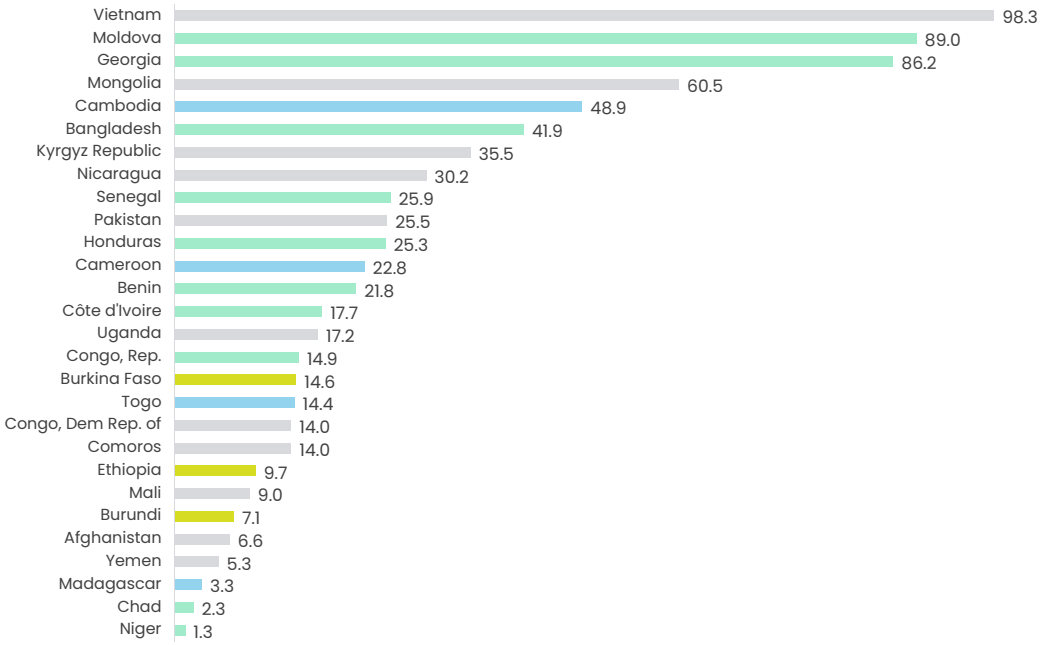
64 percent (7 out of 11 countries) showing improvements.[8] Learning declined in three PCFCs[9] and remained stable in one PCFC.[10] While not all learning assessment results are comparable over time, the relatively high number of partner countries participating in PASEC in 2014 and 2019 means that assessment can provide a useful window into country-level progress (box 1.1). While not all learning assessment results are comparable over time, the relatively high number of partner countries participating in PASEC in 2014 and 2019 means it can provide a useful window into country-level progress (box 1.1).

Despite the learning improvement captured by Indicator 1, overall learning levels are still low in GPE partner countries. According to the World Bank's learning poverty indicator, on average, 76.6 percent of children across 28 partner countries with data available (including out-of-school children) are not able to read and understand a simple text by age 10.[11] In other words, only 23.4 percent of children among the population of the end-of-primary age can read and understand a simple text. This shows that learning levels are low on average in partner countries with data. However, there are important

8. Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, The Gambia, Nepal, Rwanda and Zimbabwe.
9. Burundi, Ethiopia and Togo.
10. Madagascar.
11. Population-weighted average learning poverty. The data are compiled from 28 countries among the 61 GPE partner countries. Most recent data covering the period 2005–18 are used. The learning poverty indicator assumes that out-of-school children are in learning poverty.

FIGURE 1.1.

THERE ARE LARGE LEARNING DISPARITIES ACROSS PARTNER COUNTRIES.
Proportion of children who can read and understand a simple text by age 10



Source: World Bank, Washington DC.

Note: Green, chartreuse and blue bars show whether reading achievement increased, decreased or stagnated, respectively, between the period 2010–15 and the period 2016–19, according to Indicator 1. The gray bars show cases where trend data for learning outcomes are not available in the Indicator 1 database. Indicator 1 captures progress both in reading and mathematics. The share of children who are reading by age 10 is derived from the World Bank's learning poverty indicator (LPI). Indicator 1 captures improvements in learning scores while LPI measures the proportion of children achieving minimum proficiency level. Improvements in learning scores may not be translated into improvements in LPI.

disparities among partner countries: While some are lagging, others are performing relatively well in terms of this World Bank measure (figure 1.1).

In addition to the inequalities across countries, partner countries are facing huge learning inequalities among children within countries.[12] These disparities are mainly related to socioeconomic status (in favor of students from the wealthiest households) and location (in favor of students in urban areas).[13] Evidence suggests that poor and marginalized populations in developing countries, in general, are disadvantaged with regard to learning outcomes.[14] In most developing countries, any major improvement in learning outcomes will require focusing on those who are not learning at all.[15]

Another key measure of learning is the SDG 4.1.1 indicator, which measures the proportion of children achieving minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics at grades 2 or 3, the end of primary school and the end of lower secondary. The data show that 40.3 percent of the students in school (excluding

12. Inequality among students within countries overall increased in the 10 PASEC countries (box 1.1). Because of data availably constraints, the trends of learning inequalities could not be analyzed in the other GPE partner countries.
13. GPE, *Results Report 2019* (Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education, 2019), https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/results-report-2019.
14. Disparities in learning outcomes in developing countries should be addressed by focusing on the bottom of the pyramid (poor and marginalized communities). See D. Wagner, S. Wolf and R. Boruch, *Learning at the Bottom of the Pyramid: Science, Measurement, and Policy in Low-Income Countries* (Paris: UNESCO-IIEP, 2018).
15. L. Crouch and M. Gustafsson, "Worldwide Inequality and Poverty in Cognitive Results: Cross-sectional Evidence and Time-based Trends" (RISE Working Paper Series 18/019, RISE, Oxford, UK, 2018). Some studies show that various factors, especially female teachers and/or head teachers, can help address learning inequalities (T. S. Dee, "Teachers and the Gender Gaps in Student Achievement," *Journal of Human Resources 42*, no. 3 [2007]: 528–54; K. Muralidharan and K. Sheth, "Bridging Education Gender Gaps in Developing Countries: The Role of Female Teachers" [Working Paper 19341, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, 2013]; A. Le Nestour and L. Moscoviz, "Six Things You Should Know about Female Teachers," *Commentary and Analysis* [blog], Center for Global Development, March 6, 2020, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/six-things-you-should-know-about-female-teachers).

out-of-school children) at the end of primary education in partner countries with data available are achieving the minimum proficiency level in reading.[16] Indicator 1 data show that learning scores improved on average by 2.4 percent annually (3.2 percent in reading and 1.7 percent in mathematics) over the last decade, for the 27 countries with data available.[17] Assuming the rate of progress derived from the Indicator 1 data, the proportion of children in school achieving minimum proficiency level in primary reading would increase by 5 percentage points by 2025.[18] However, it would take at least 40 years to achieve the SDG 4 goal related to learning at the primary education level.[19] It would take even longer to eliminate learning poverty as defined by the World Bank, given the high out-of-school rate.[20] For instance, if the rate of learning progress in the 10 PASEC countries is maintained, these countries would need 45 years to reach the current learning poverty level of the European countries (box 1.1).[21] GPE's strategic plan for 2021–25 aims to accelerate learning improvements and to address learning inequalities by supporting government-led education system transformation in key reform priority areas, including through identifying and unblocking implementation bottlenecks and strengthening the alignment of key actors. It is estimated that a successful replenishment for the period 2021–25 (US$5 billion direct contribution and $3 billion through the Multiplier fund) coupled with partner countries' engagement to prioritize learning could lead to an increase of the proportion of children in school achieving minimum reading proficiency by 7 percentage points by 2025, instead of 5 percentage points. GPE's financial support would prioritize the most marginalized and poorest children, especially in countries lagging behind in learning.

1.2. PROGRESS IN MEASURING LEARNING OUTCOMES (Indicator 15)

GPE 2020 recognizes that learning outcomes cannot be improved without actual data on children's learning. The regular administration of learning assessments is necessary to produce such data, and this requires the existence of quality learning assessment systems (LAS). Indicator 15 tracks the proportion of partner countries with a learning assessment system within the basic education cycle that meets quality standards. The indicator looks at large-scale assessments (national and international) and examinations and whether these meet standards in terms of enabling context (e.g., frequency, subjects measured, grade levels, institutional anchoring), assessment quality (e.g., technical methodology, reporting of results) and system alignment (the extent to which the assessment is based on official learning standards and/or curriculum). Based on these three dimensions, it uses a composite index to classify the overall system into one of four categories: established, under development, nascent or no information. A country's learning assessment system meets the quality standards when it is classified as established. While the indicator does not consider classroom assessment, GPE also supports its partner countries in strengthening systems and practices in this regard, in recognition of the importance of teachers being able to assess the learning of their students on an everyday basis in order to inform their practice and to improve learning.

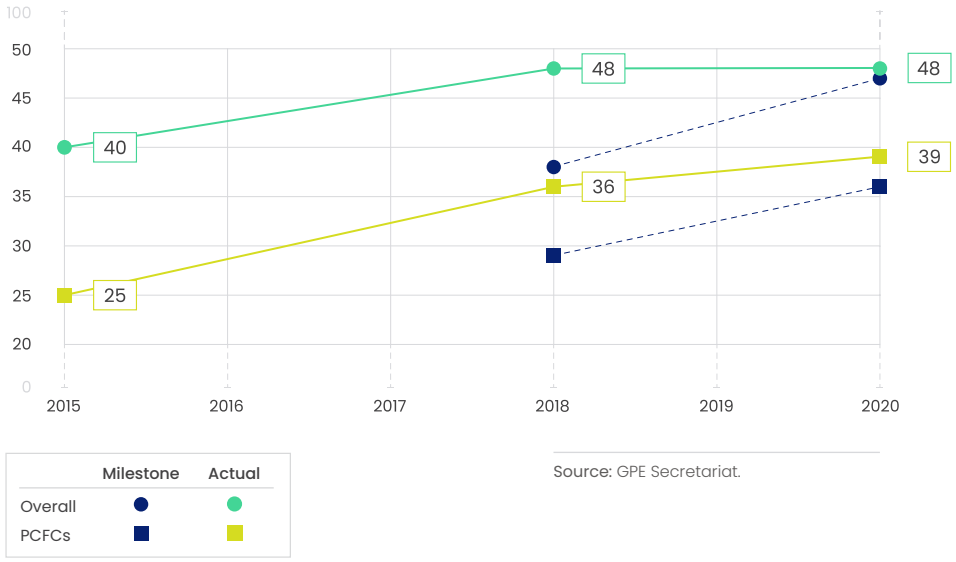
Over the implementation period of GPE 2020, the proportion of partner countries meeting the quality standards of Indicator 15 progressed from 40 percent (24 out of 60 countries) at baseline in 2015 to 48 percent (29 out of 60 countries) in 2020.[22] In partner countries facing fragility and conflict, the progress has been even more marked, from 25 percent (7 out of 28 PCFCs)

16. This is calculated using the most recent SDG 4.1.1 data in the period 2005–19 provided by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). The average is weighted by the primary enrollment. Thirty-two GPE partner countries have available data.
17. The average annual increase in the learning scores reported by 141 learning assessments is calculated. These learning assessments are not comparable across assessments and the scales are different. Progress may have different meanings across countries and learning assessments. The average annual increase is calculated for each learning assessment and aggregated using two weights: the number of learning assessments by country (to ensure that each country is equality represented) and the primary school enrollment in each country (to ensure that the size of the student population in each country is considered). The average annual increase in the learning scores reported by 141 learning assessments is calculated. These learning assessments are not comparable across assessments and the scales are different. Progress may have different meanings across countries and learning assessments. The average annual increase is calculated for each learning assessment and aggregated using two weights: the number of learning assessments by country (to ensure that each country is equality represented) and the primary school enrollment in each country (to ensure that the size of the student population in each country is considered).
18. This projection does not consider the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning.
19. It is assumed that the rate of progress derived from the Indicator 1 data translates into progress in the proportion of children achieving minimum proficiency level. This appears to be a relatively strong assumption given that the correlation between the improvement in the learning score as per Indicator 1 and that of the proportion of children achieving minimum proficiency is not perfect and mainly depends on the learning inequalities among students. The 40 years may be considered as the minimum number of years required to reach the SDG goal. This is a linear projection is based on the assumption that learning would improve following the trends captured by indicator 1 and any changes to the assumptions may lead to different results.
20. See chapter 2.
21. The World Bank also estimates that if progress continues at the rate achieved during 2000–2015, by 2030 learning poverty will fall only to 43 percent, a few percentage points lower than the current 53 percent in low- and middle-income countries. See World Bank, *Ending Learning Poverty: What Will It Take?* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2019), http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/395151571251399043/pdf/Ending-Learning-Poverty-What-Will-It-Take.pdf. According to a more recent study by the World Bank, while the share of children who are "learning-poor" has been declining, the pace of progress is far too slow to ensure that all children will be able to read by 2030. With progress at the rate we saw during 2000–2017—44 percent of children in 2030 will still be unable to read at age 10. See J. P. Azevedo et al., "Will Every Child Be Able to Read by 2030? Defining Learning Poverty and Mapping the Dimensions of the Challenge" (Policy Research Working Paper 9588, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2021), http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/258831616162286391/pdf/Will-Every-Child-Be-Able-to-Read-by-2030-Defining-Learning-Poverty-and-Mapping-the-Dimensions-of-the-Challenge.pdf.
22 See appendix G for a list of GPE partner countries' LAS classification.

FIGURE 1.2.

THE PROPORTION OF COUNTRIES WITH QUALITY LEARNING ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS HAS IMPROVED SINCE 2015, SURPASSING TARGETS.

Proportion of partner countries with a learning assessment system within the basic education cycle that meets quality standards

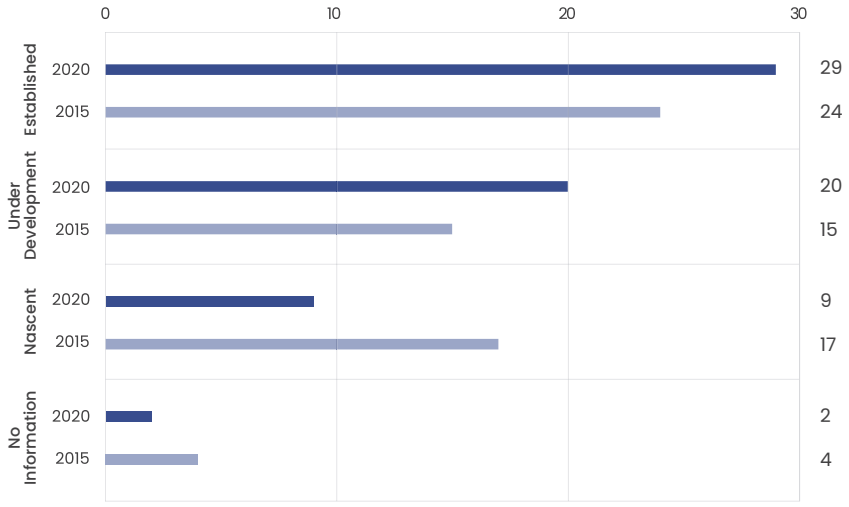


Source: GPE Secretariat.

FIGURE 1.3.

COUNTRIES WITH WEAKER LEARNING ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS ALSO MADE SOME PROGRESS SINCE 2015.

Number of countries by category of the learning assessment system



Source: GPE Secretariat.

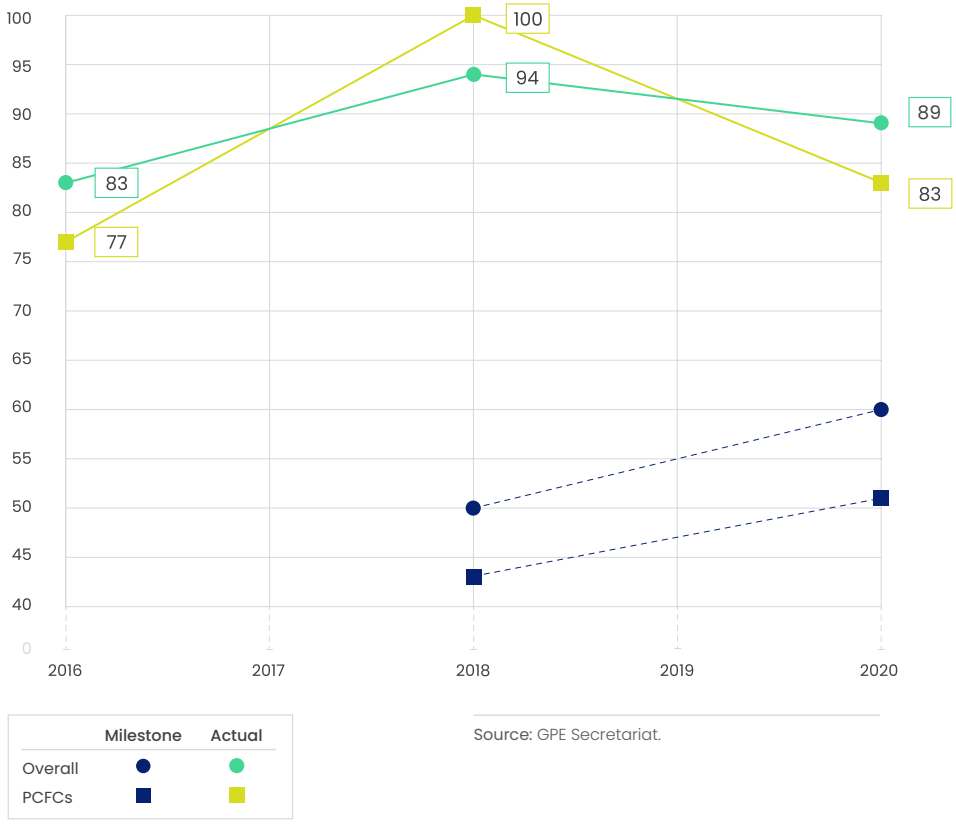
at baseline in 2015 to 39 percent (11 out of 28 PCFCs) in 2020. In both cases, the targets established for 2020 (47 percent overall and 36 percent for PCFCs) were surpassed by a small margin (figure 1.2).

Though some countries did not meet the quality standards through a classification as established, progress was made between 2018 and 2020 in the number of countries making the transition from nascent to under development. Over

FIGURE 1.4.

THE PROPORTION OF IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS SUPPORTING EMIS AND/OR LAS SURPASSED TARGETS.

Proportion of active implementation grants supporting education management information systems and/or learning assessment systems



Source: GPE Secretariat.

this period, the proportion of countries classified as nascent decreased from 23 percent (14 out of 60 countries) to 15 percent (9 out of 60). Several of these countries moved into the under development category, which increased from 25 percent (15 out of 60 countries) in 2018 to 33 percent (20 out of 60) in 2020. This trend can be observed from the baseline as well (figure 1.3).[23] This means that even in the case of countries that do not meet the quality standards, progress is being made. However, this is not to say that challenges do not remain. Over half of partner countries still do not meet quality standards in terms of their LAS, and countries such as Central African Republic, Djibouti, Liberia and Tajikistan have remained at the nascent level over the period of GPE 2020. Further efforts are needed to support these and other countries to make progress in this area.

Countries' progress in their LAS over the period of GPE 2020 is attributable to different factors, including administration of national large-scale assessment programs at regular intervals and sustained participation in international large-scale assessments such as PASEC and LLECE (for example, Burundi, Honduras, Niger). In regard to the latter, it is notable that almost all of the international large-scale assessments implemented a new round of their programs in the 2018–20 period (including the first-ever administration of two programs: PISA for Development and SEA-PLM). GPE partner countries are increasingly interested in participating in these programs, with a number planning to do so during the period of GPE 2025. In other cases, countries have made positive strides regarding other aspects of their assessment systems, such as setting up permanent institutions with responsibility for this area or ensuring the timely dissemination of results, which has allowed them to make progress in their overall classification. In some cases, these efforts are supported by GPE grants.

23. Two countries with no data in 2015 had LAS data available in 2020.

1.3. GPE SUPPORT TO IMPROVING LEARNING

GRANT SUPPORT TO DATA SYSTEMS (Indicator 20)

GPE's implementation grants provided support to various dimensions of learning assessment systems as well as to education management information systems (EMIS) during the GPE 2020 implementation period. Indicator 20 tracks the proportion of grants supporting EMIS and/or LAS. In 2020, 89 percent of all implementation grants (41 out of 46) and 83 percent of implementation grants in PCFCs (20 out of 24) supported EMIS and/or LAS (figure 1.4). There was slight progress from 2016, but a decline in the proportion of implementation grants supporting EMIS and/or LAS between 2018 and 2020, especially for PCFCs.[24] The target for Indicator 20 set for 2020 was surpassed by 29 percentage points overall and 32 percentage points in PCFCs.

Specifically, 83 percent of implementation grants (38 out of 46) supported LAS in 2020, up from 67 percent in 2016 (36 out of 54). Active implementation grants during the implementation of GPE 2020 supported various activities, including national assessments, classroom assessments, examinations, and participation in early grade reading assessments (EGRAs) and early grade mathematics assessments (EGMAs).

GPE remained actively engaged in supporting LAS in partner countries through international initiatives such as the Assessment for Learning (A4L) initiative (box 1.2).

GPE's financial support to learning through implementation grants was also considerable during the implementation of GPE 2020. Seventy-nine implementation grants were approved under GPE 2020 (from January 2016 to December 2020).[25] A total of $775 million in funding was allocated to activities designed primarily to improve learning (Funding Focus: Learning). This is one of the largest investment areas for GPE, representing 36 percent of all implementation grant funding approved during GPE 2020.

BOX 1.2. ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING (A4L) INITIATIVE

GPE recently concluded the Assessment for Learning (A4L) initiative, a three-year (2017–20) targeted financing initiative that complemented GPE's general country-level support and aimed to strengthen national learning assessment systems and to promote a more holistic measurement of learning. A4L supported the production of a diagnostic toolkit on learning assessment (ANLAS, or Analysis of National Learning Assessment Systems), which was piloted in Ethiopia, Mauritania and Vietnam and is now available in English, French and Spanish.[a] Through A4L, GPE also supported two regional networks on learning assessment—Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP) and Teaching and Learning: Educators' Network for Transformation (TALENT) in Sub-Saharan Africa—to conduct capacity development, research and knowledge sharing on assessment issues among the countries of the two regions. In addition, A4L allowed GPE to produce a landscape review on 21st-century skills, which has informed reflection as to the role that GPE can take in supporting partner countries in this area into the future.[b] An independent summative evaluation of A4L lauded the initiative's support to capacity-building and better tools to improve learning assessment systems.[c] The evaluation also noted areas for improvement that can inform GPE 2025 and any new strategic capabilities supported by GPE—in particular, strengthening the alignment of activities offered through this type of initiative and the demand from countries.

a. GPE. Toolkit for Analysis of National Learning Assessment Systems – ANLAS (Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education, 2019), https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/toolkit-analysis-national-learning-assessment-systems-anlas.
b. See GPE. 21st Century Skills: What Potential Role for the Global Partnership for Education, 2020. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/21st-century-skills-what-potential-role-global-partnership-education.
c. L. Read and K. Anderson, *Summative Evaluation of GPE's Assessment for Learning (A4L) Initiative* (Washington, DC: Unbounded Associates, 2021), https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/summative-evaluation-gpes-assessment-learning-a4l-initiative.

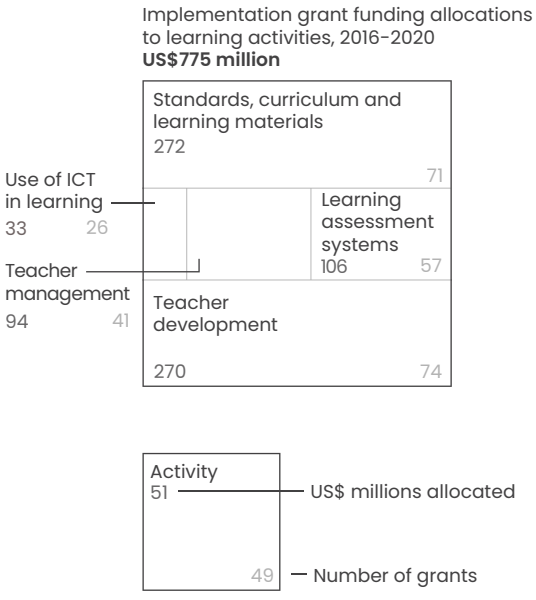
24. A new tool was introduced to collect more reliable data for Indicator 20. This makes the baseline data not directly comparable with the current data and the target underevaluated.
25. These grants do not include the COVID-19 accelerated funding grants.

TOWARD ACCELERATED PROGRESS IN LEARNING OUTCOMES

The paucity of new and comparable learning assessments for the countries that had learning data in 2010-15 makes it difficult to compare countries' achievement against the 2020 target for Indicator 1. Nonetheless, available data from 27 countries show that 70 percent of partner countries have seen some progress in learning outcomes over time, and learning scores have increased by 2.4 percent on average annually over the last decade. The number of countries (especially the number of PCFCs) with available data to measure learning progress has improved since 2015.

However, the current learning levels are low, and progress needs to accelerate to meet the SDG 4 target. On average, three out of four children in GPE partner countries with data available are affected by learning poverty and cannot read and understand a simple text by age 10. More than half of the students in school are not achieving minimum proficiency in reading at the end of primary education. At the current pace of progress, it would take at least 40 years to achieve the SGD 4 goal on learning outcomes.[26]

FUNDING FOCUS: LEARNING



SDG 4 could be achieved faster with efficient and focused financing of the education sector. For instance, a successful GPE replenishment for the period 2021-2025 (US$ 5 billion) coupled with increased investment by partner countries and other donors as well as improved efficiency of education spending could accelerate the progress toward the SDG 4 goal. The proportion of children in school achieving minimum reading proficiency could increase by 7 percentage points by 2025, instead of 5 percentage points assuming the current trends seen in Indicator 1.

There are important disparities among partner countries. For instance, countries such as Georgia and Cambodia have a relatively high proportion of children who can read a simple text and understand by age 10 and learning has overall improved. The proportion of children with minimum reading proficiency by age 10 is low in other partner countries such as Burkina Faso and Ethiopia and learning has overall decreased. In many other countries, learning could not be measured because of the lack of quality learning assessment systems.

On a positive note, partner countries' engagement to strengthen their learning assessment systems and to be able to properly measure learning outcomes is apparent. Indeed, 48 percent of learning assessment systems now meet quality standards—up from 40 percent in 2015. Countries with learning assessment systems that are not yet meeting quality standards have also made important progress since 2015. It is expected that stronger learning assessment systems would result in the availability of quality learning data in the future. The availability of learning data is critical to the design and the implementation of better policies to boost learning outcomes in partner countries.

26. In other words, the SDG 4 goal may not be achieved before 2061.