

# COORDINATED ACTION TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION

# WHAT'S IN IT FOR PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS?



Maka Dieng Primary School in Tivaouane, Senegal.  
GPE/ Chantal Rigaud

Education transformation comes about when stakeholders in a system change how they interact with one another, purposefully aligning their actions to arrive at dramatically improved outcomes. Toward this goal, the **Global Partnership for Education (GPE)** supports partner countries in getting the most out of policy dialogue and coordination. This brief is part of a companion series to the [Principles toward Effective Local Education Groups](#), although the contents can apply to any mechanism or platform where stakeholders gather to coordinate their actions around national education policy.

**In the last two decades, private foundations and philanthropic organizations have emerged as full-fledged development partners. These groups not only make financial contributions on par with bilateral and multilateral actors but also deploy their networks, capabilities and expertise in support of innovation, research and advocacy. Although their collaboration with ministries of education, education institutions and other country-based partners is better known, their engagement with formal coordination and policy dialogue mechanisms such as local education groups remains underdocumented. The growing interest among private foundations in contributing to national and global education objectives, and in making an impact at scale, is redefining their participation in sector dialogue and coordination.**

## WHAT DO YOU AS A FOUNDATION GAIN THROUGH COORDINATED ACTION?

### Opportunities to increase effectiveness and efficiency

Participating in multi-stakeholder dialogue forums opens up opportunities to establish and nurture relationships with other stakeholders in the sector, to exchange information and to share learning. It also offers a platform for other actors to better understand your role(s) and approaches, and to leverage your work.

Coordination enables you to

- ▶ Access country analytics and a range of performance data (from government sources and other stakeholders), as well as other types of knowledge from education partners (such as due diligence assessments, impact evaluations,

problem analysis and gray or unpublished literature or data);

- Promote your specific comparative advantages as a foundation, such as operational flexibility, responsiveness in decision making, thematic expertise or partnership networks; and
- Make it easier for partners to consider your programming record and credibility, and to initiate collaboration.

### **A framework to align your work more purposefully with national education policies and contexts**

As you evolve toward more localized, transformational or catalytic engagement, your participation in sector dialogue generates a sounding board for emerging issues, including the continued relevance of your approaches to equity, inclusion and gender equality priorities or strengthening evidence-to-policy links. It also generates

- A closer understanding of countries' evolving needs and realities, their mid- to longer-term policy goals, existing financial and technical support strategies, and the configuration of the stakeholder ecosystem;
- Heightened awareness of how other stakeholders and partners (including other foundations) engage and where interests intersect—allowing for prioritization, collective action sequencing of efforts or alignment, and avoiding duplication, particularly in complex and fragile contexts including federal countries or conflict-affected territories; and

*"In Côte d'Ivoire, the Transforming Education in Cocoa Communities program is, by design, a multi-stakeholder coalition with traditional and new actors in the education space. We really believe that to achieve results in education requires effective partnerships and, hence, we want to be part of the local education group."*

Sabina Vigani, former Country Director, Jacobs Foundation, and former Chair of the local education group



Students in class, Côte d'Ivoire.  
GPE/Chantal Rigaud

- Opportunities to coordinate or pool resources and efforts in the adoption of high-impact, successful approaches that your foundation cannot single-handedly bring to scale.

### **Opportunities to influence education governance and partnership norms**

Through your growing involvement in the policy dialogue, you contribute more directly to the general policy, regulatory and legal frameworks in which foundations and their partners carry out their work.

Through that involvement you can also

- More easily navigate government systems and protocols;
- Share your perspectives and experiences on accountability and transparency toward more efficient and inclusive policy dialogue and coordination; and
- Contribute to evolving the infrastructure for coordinated action, including by generating a deeper understanding of what is needed at the country level to facilitate more inclusive dialogue, joint learning and cooperation.

## WHY DO FOUNDATIONS MATTER IN TRANSFORMING EDUCATION?

### You support the ideation needed to accelerate change, cultivate innovation and address emergent challenges

- ▶ You often champion the reimagining of education systems, fostering the search for approaches that have impact, and you provide the operational know-how to bring together corporate, civil society and government actors around shared goals including through innovation pipelines or thematic accelerators.
- ▶ Your financial independence and ability to question the status quo and invest in policy alternatives and best practices allow for stronger results and social impact.
- ▶ You encourage the generation of critical evidence and knowledge around promising models and policies; strive to document the insights, experiences and results of your work; and thus sharpen and enrich local and national policy discussions.

### You can broker dialogue across categories of education actors

- ▶ You help to break down policy silos and strengthen response capacities where your work addresses intersecting issues—such as school feeding, climate-relevant education, conflict and fragility, gender equality or child protection—by promoting dialogue and coordination across public, civil society and private actors.
- ▶ You deploy tools, assets and influence that go well beyond grant making; and you can drive impact at scale by galvanizing the attention of decision makers on underserved issues or communities,

*“With access to the wisdom of other donors, a wider network of advisors and other shared resources, collaboration can mitigate the risks of striking out on your own or duplicating efforts while you may still be learning about a specific sector or cause.”*

BridgeSpan

## MASTERCARD FOUNDATION IN SENEGAL

**The MasterCard Foundation has partnered with the government to support large-scale reforms to secondary and technical and vocational education.** The MasterCard Foundation has partnered with the government to support large-scale reforms to secondary and technical and vocational education. After a process of national consultations on education in 2014, Senegal identified needs and set ambitious goals around STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and entrepreneurship skills, but was faced with constrained and limited expertise of education actors. The [Mastercard Foundation](#) took this opportunity to promote the [APTE-Senegal](#) program on improving entrepreneurship and job market skills, building on the foundation’s areas of expertise and initiatives in the country, including the Partnership to Strengthen Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education.

The APTE program benefited over 30,000 students and embedded a strong element of policy dialogue, not only by resourcing dedicated coordination within each line ministry concerned (Ministry of National Education and Ministry for Vocational Training and Integration, and Apprenticeship) but also by pioneering and facilitating coordination across the two ministries. The close association of other actors—including civil society implementers, unions and representative organizations—with APTE supported a paradigm shift in the inclusion of transferable skills and competencies in curricula from lower secondary and across the education system, from local to national level. The experience also brought the Mastercard Foundation closer to more formal education coordination mechanisms, including the e-learning multi-stakeholder coordination platform (TeckTal) set up during COVID-19.

# LEMANN FOUNDATION IN BRAZIL\*

**The Lemann Foundation has bridged and facilitated broad sector dialogue for supporting the successful implementation of new policy priorities.** In 2013, once the National Plan for Education had established the National Learning Standards (NLS) as a “strategy for improving education in Brazil,” the debate about the form and content of the NLS gained momentum and increased public attention. The Lemann Foundation initiated a dialogue between government and civil society actors toward concrete collaboration and policy developments around the inclusive and sustainable implementation of the NLS. “We want to help Brazil to become more advanced and equitable to eradicate school illiteracy. One foundation could never do this alone and only the philanthropic sector could never do this alone either” (Lemann Foundation).

The coordinated movement quickly grew to other networks and actors, including teacher organizations, local communities and others. The group explored successful models in Australia, Chile, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States to build on evidence in the field and tailor learning standards to the Brazilian context. As these standards were being embedded into curricula, coordination efforts focused on effectiveness at district, municipal, school and classroom levels to ensure alignment of efforts toward the new NLS. This experience of theme-driven coordination has since been replicated in other segments of the Brazilian education system (including effective remote and digital learning approaches during COVID-19), under the continuous coordination of the Lemann Foundation.

*\*Brazil is not a GPE partner country.*

creating modalities for mobilizing support and sharing expertise across your networks, and brokering government adoption of proven solutions.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, you demonstrated how agile you can be in your support for and engagement with local partners, contributing to concrete advances in localizing aid in education.

## **You often champion accountability and transparency in the education sector**

You play a strategic role in strengthening the ecosystem needed to collectively shift accountability norms across the education sector, including

- Through collaboration with, and supporting the advocacy efforts of, local organizations, think tanks, professional associations and collective social movements (including the campaigns of national education coalitions and youth and community networks); and
- As a supporter of more inclusive dialogue toward transparent and accountable education systems

and a convener of empowered communities and strong civil society.

## **ADDITIONAL READINGS:**

- [Effective coordination mechanisms for philanthropic organizations](#). Acasus. 2023 (upcoming).
- [New philanthropy in the Dominican Republic](#). NORRAG. September 26, 2022.
- [Philanthropy's contribution to transforming education](#). IEFG. September 2022.
- [Moving past grant making: 4 trends of private philanthropy for education](#). GPE. May 11, 2022.
- [Education philanthropy and the pandemic](#). GPE. July 7, 2021.
- [Partnering for impact in Côte d'Ivoire](#). GPE. January 28, 2021.
- [Emerging roles and risks of philanthropy engagement](#). UNESCO. 2021.
- [Guidelines for Effective Philanthropic Engagement](#). OECD. 2019.

Also see the “Private foundations” page on GPE’s “Partners Portal” to better understand GPE’s and foundations’ roles and responsibilities in the partnership.

## **OTHER BRIEFS IN THE SAME SERIES:**

Ministries of education  
Civil society organizations  
Development partners

Humanitarian actors  
Private sector  
Teacher representatives

