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Principles Toward Effective Local Education Groups

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Multi-stakeholder partnerships are considered effective when they demonstrate their “added-value” or “collaborative advantage,” i.e., what can be achieved thanks to the complementarity of members that couldn’t be achieved by individual stakeholders on their own.

“What Can LEGs Learn from Effective Coordination and Partnership Mechanisms?
- Key takeaways”, GPE 2019

Introduction

Education outcomes as a shared responsibility

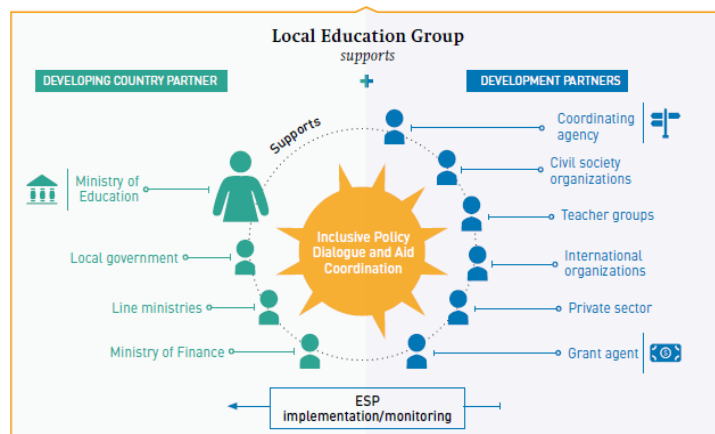
Achieving results in education can rarely be linked to individual actors and organizations. Rather, they are outcomes of complex interactions between governments and diverse stakeholders working within countries.¹ Results rely on coordinated actions, the fulfillment of agreed responsibilities and efficient and effective partnerships.

Multi-stakeholder education partnerships are sustained by country leadership and require a genuine willingness and commitment of all partners to work together to further countries education goals with mutual accountability for results. Recognizing the different challenges that development partnerships face more generally, they also require realistic strategies for overcoming obstacles to cooperation.

A fundamental objective of the Global Partnership for Education’s (GPE) work with its country partners is to support inclusive, evidence-based policy dialogue supporting national education systems through the engagement of national governments, donors, civil society, teachers, philanthropy and the private sector.

Dialogue may occur through the medium of a local education group, defined in the GPE Charter as “a collaborative forum for education sector policy dialogue under government leadership, where the primary consultation on education sector development takes place between a government and its partners.” However, this is just one name, or a generic term, to describe country-led arrangements for the governance of education sector policy dialogue. Names for education groups with similar dialogue functions include education coordinating group, education consultative group, education sector development committee and joint education sector working group.

Figure 1. Local education group



Understanding partnership success

The importance of efficient and effective multi-stakeholder partnerships in supporting sector outcomes is widely recognized. Nevertheless, the performance of LEGs (and their subgroups) in different country contexts has been marked by very mixed results and, until recently, there was little reflection on the conditions that influence the effectiveness of education sector policy dialogue. To

¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Accountability in Education: Meeting Our Commitments*, 2017/2018 Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2017).

better understand how LEGs function, and to draw guiding principles for improving their operational effectiveness, the GPE Secretariat examined research across a range of disciplines and fields of application on what makes coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships effective.²

The principles proposed in this document are one output of this review. They do NOT imply “minimum standards”; rather, they outline *the foundations* of a well-functioning sector dialogue and coordination mechanism.

What do we mean by ‘effectiveness’?



Local education groups are seen to be *strategically effective* when country-led policy dialogue contributes to accelerating progress in the planning, implementation and monitoring of a nationally owned education sector plan. Members are able to advance toward agreed policy dialogue objectives when sufficient *organizational and collaborative capacities* are in place or are being nurtured.

More specifically, the notion of effectiveness is unpacked as follows:

- **Strategic effectiveness** relates to the LEG’s performance in realizing its *policy dialogue functions* connected to national education goals across the *whole policy cycle*—from sector diagnosis, policy design, strategic and operational planning to joint monitoring—thereby contributing to improved education results. This includes its success in fostering synergies and harmonization of partners’ support to the sector and mutual accountability.

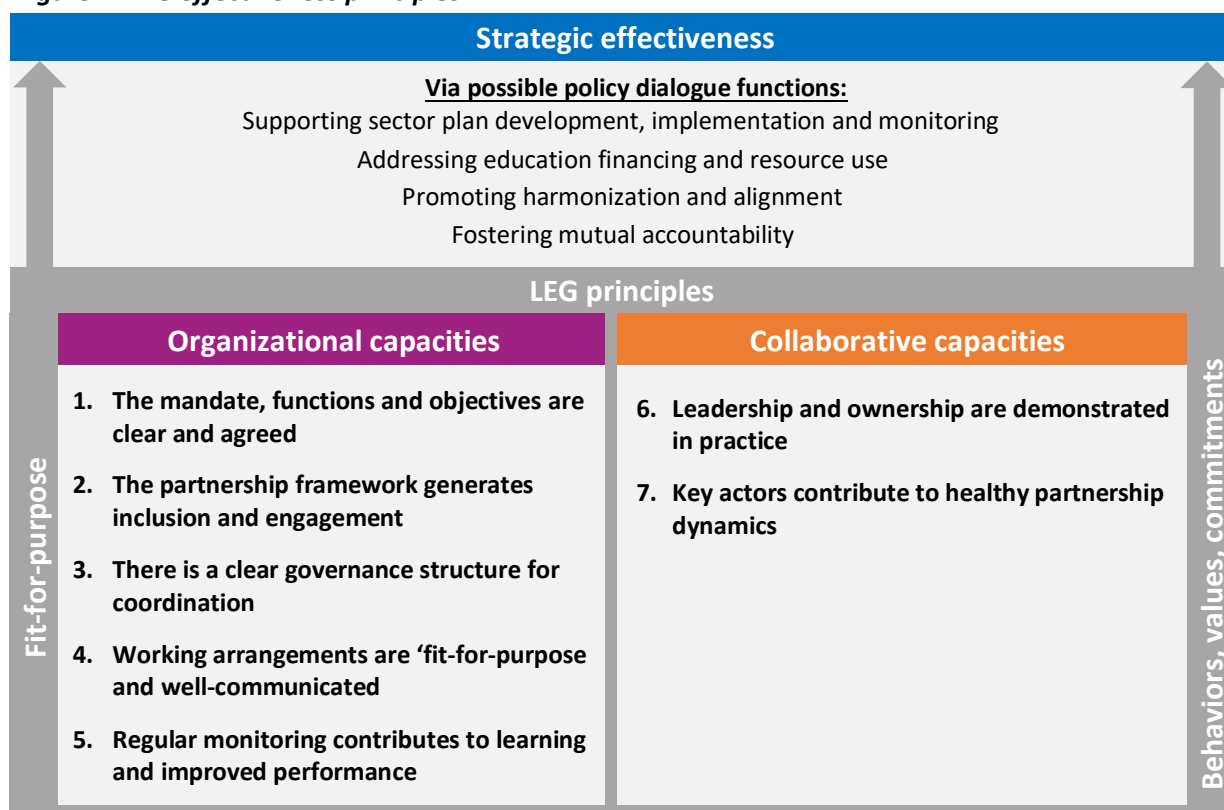
Achieving the policy dialogue functions depends on *operational effectiveness* emerging from the following capacities:

- **Organizational capacities** include the strategies, resources and actions leveraged by the LEG to perform and fulfill its functions effectively, thus enabling it to be *fit-for-purpose*. These include a clear mandate and mutually agreed objectives, an inclusive and representative set of stakeholders engaging meaningfully throughout the policy cycle, good governance and clear working arrangements, and regular review of the LEG’s performance. When organizational capacities are enhanced, including working arrangements and external communications, this contributes to systems strengthening.
- **Collaborative capacities** relate to stakeholder *behaviours, values and commitments* and the way in which they work with each other, both from the perspective of country leadership and healthy partnership dynamics. A cohesive and successful LEG requires committed leadership and for the working culture to optimize the potential contribution of all education stakeholders. But each partner has a responsibility to contribute to sustaining a conducive environment for collaboration, putting aside individual agendas and respecting core partnership values such as equity in representation and mutual accountability.

The above draws on the key takeaways from the multi-stakeholder partnership literature and country practices and is further depicted in figure 2.

² Global Partnership for Education (GPE), “What Can Local Education Groups Learn From Effective Coordination and Partnership Mechanisms?,” internal working paper (GPE, 2019). Key takeaways to be made available.

Figure 2. LEG effectiveness principles



Purpose

This document has been conceived to facilitate reflection and guide countries in optimizing the potential of their education policy dialogue and sector coordination mechanisms. It brings into focus the possible core **functions of LEGs** (part I), the **main challenges to realizing these functions** (part II) and the **key principles for ensuring effective policy dialogue** (part III). It is accompanied by a *self-assessment tool* and related *practical guidance* which can be harnessed to operationalize the principles for effective partnership (figure 3).³

Intended users are stakeholders who lead and coordinate an education sector policy dialogue group or who have a stake in such a group, including government officials, coordinating/lead agencies,⁴ multi- and bilateral development partners, civil society organizations and coalitions, teacher representatives, education sector professionals and community education providers, as well as the private sector.⁵

³ The self-assessment tool will be piloted from November 2019 to March 2020 in volunteer countries. Practical guidance will further be developed during this pilot.

⁴ It is important to note that, while there are expectations of coordinating agencies in relation to GPE-specific processes, the main focus of the role is to support effective and harmonized dialogue between development partners and the government around the country-owned policy cycle while also promoting the inclusion of key stakeholders such as civil society and teachers in policy dialogue. Coordinating agencies are expected to do so in their own capacity as a partner to the country and contributor to, or stakeholder in, the education sector and, as applicable, as a member of GPE (ToR for Coordinating Agencies, GPE, 2019).

⁵ GPE defines "private sector" as follows: (1) companies that operate within and across countries and whose core business is primarily outside education, (2) membership associations (business associations/memberships/chambers of commerce) operating nationally and internationally, and (3) providers of ancillary education services.

The resource materials were developed by the GPE Secretariat in close consultation with partners to strengthen the country-level partnership. They can be used independently, or together, and are intended to:

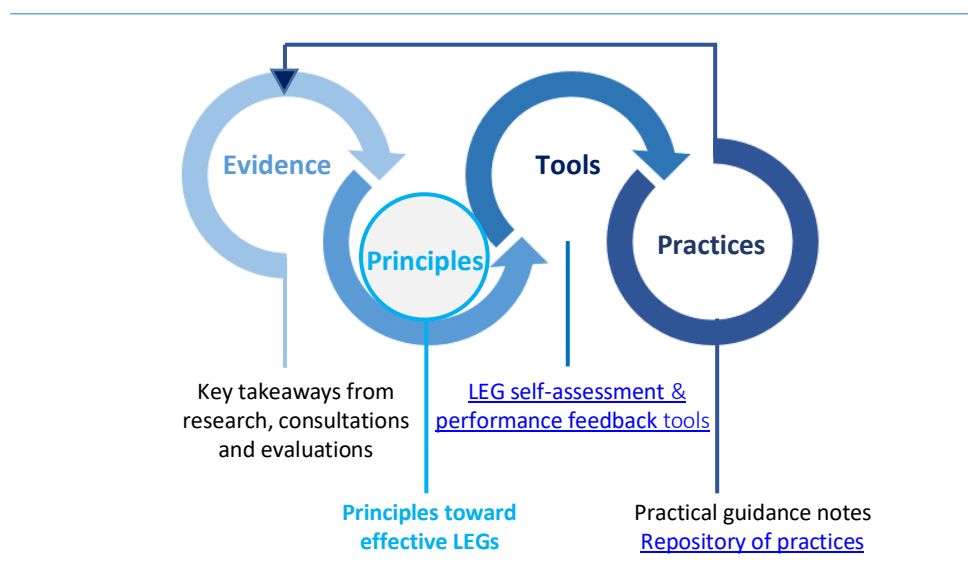
Facilitate reflection among LEG participants on the purposes of policy dialogue currently occurring within their LEG, key challenges and building blocks for strengthening effectiveness.

They should further enable stakeholders to do the following:

- Discuss the policy dialogue functions of LEGs in a structured and focused way.
- Reflect on the organizational capacities and development of their policy dialogue forum and partnership.
- Identify potential areas for stakeholder consolidation and partnership strengthening.

How LEGs unfold and operate remains country specific. While the effectiveness principles are intended to support country-level efforts to generate more inclusive, results-focused policy dialogue, this document does not imply that partners should invest in all the dialogue functions and capacity enhancement strategies simultaneously. It is for stakeholders in each country to hone in on issues that need attention according to the order of priority, and the resources and capacities available for this purpose.


Figure 3. Quick links to resources



*Some of these resources are currently being prepared and will be linked when available.

I. The value of LEGs to policy dialogue

Strategic effectiveness	Dialogue functions	Supporting plan development, implementation and monitoring
		Addressing education financing and resource use
		Promoting harmonization and alignment
		Fostering mutual accountability

 LEGs undertake a number of recurring policy dialogue *functions* that, when the right conditions are in place, have positive impacts on the development of the sector. Stakeholders come together to discuss and support the core work of sector plan development, implementation and monitoring. The value of stakeholder dialogue lies in the opportunity to consider diverse perspectives at key junctures of the policy cycle and gather a wider set of inputs and monitoring information.

Supporting sector plan development, implementation and monitoring

Globally, multi-stakeholder policy dialogue mechanisms have been recognized as a crucial component of governance dynamics in country development efforts and essential to policymaking processes.

A well-managed policy dialogue agenda gathers evidence and insights from a wide range of state and non-state actors on policy successes and bottlenecks, including programming and spending decisions that have proven effective in the face of complex challenges at the local level. Policy dialogue also raises awareness around institutional and technical factors behind strong or weak execution rates at the level of line ministries and their sub-structures and helps strengthen mutual accountability among all actors.

Several development partners envision that an effective LEG has the ability to transform the education sector.

“What Can LEGs Learn from Effective Coordination and Partnership Mechanisms? - Key takeaways”, GPE 2019

As a multi-stakeholder forum, LEGs are well positioned to do the following:

- i. **Contribute to the planning, endorsement and regular review of sector plans** and related action plans and budgets through the policy cycle. This includes identifying policy priorities based on evidence and learning (for example with relation to quality and equity targets, gender responsiveness and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups and regional disparities), implementation strategies that build on country systems and improve absorptive capacity, the design of monitoring tools and joint sector monitoring exercises, revision of planning assumptions and implementation strategies, and review of financing arrangements (see below).
- ii. **Discuss specific implementation challenges** as reported by the stakeholder community. Based on stakeholders’ experiences, partners discuss the scope, technical and operational capacity requirements of subsector policies; projects and programs within the national sector plan; where additional investments are needed; and potential sources of financial and technical support.
- iii. **Promote knowledge generation and mobilization** toward better quality inputs to sector development and implementation, including through stakeholder-sourced evidence, analysis,

thematic studies and data relevant to good practice and innovation at systems and school levels. This also includes the outcomes of rapid assessments in crisis-affected countries and emergency settings. LEGs may engage in knowledge sharing and cross-country exchange, looking particularly at how persistent education challenges and bottlenecks are addressed in different contexts.

- iv. **Assess the potential of partnerships** with nongovernmental, civil society and private sector actors to reach education sector quality, equity and gender targets and ensure that partners' actions are aligned with sector priorities.

Addressing education financing and resource use

The capacity to mobilize financial resources is frequently mentioned in the development literature as a trait of multi-stakeholder partnerships' strategic effectiveness. Advocacy from specific constituencies can influence domestic resource mobilization and utilization around more equitable, gender-responsive and sustainable education strategies at sector-wide and subsector levels. LEGs also play an important role in strengthening capacities to formulate financially sound education sector plans and their anchoring within annual budgets and medium-term expenditure frameworks.

The capacity to mobilize resources is one of [key] qualities of an effective multi-stakeholder partnership ... and an expected outcome of increased coordination. This includes domestic resources and goes beyond traditional donor aid.

"What Can LEGs Learn from Effective Coordination and Partnership Mechanisms? – Key takeaways", GPE 2019

Taken together, good quality sector plans and advocacy contribute to greater prioritization of education financing in national budgets in line with the recommended international benchmarks (15 to 20 percent of public expenditure and at least 4 to 6 percent of gross domestic product),⁶ as well as increasing the share of education funds in humanitarian assistance programs.

The regular assembly of the LEG enables partners to do the following:

- i. **Advise ministries of education on sound financial planning and monitoring.** Where LEG partners have access to reliable data giving information on disbursements and actual rather than projected costs, they are in a better position to support budget monitoring. This includes discussion of government and donor commitments for both recurrent and capital expenditures and potential funding gaps.
- ii. **Identify more strategic uses of domestic and external financing** based on sector monitoring and evaluation results and implementation evidence from stakeholders. The LEG gathers diverse perspectives on how to increase resource efficiency and implementation effectiveness through improved utilization of financial resources and technical support, reduced leakage of funds and the scaling up of successful pilots.
- iii. **Identify additional sources of funding** to finance sector plan from national budgets, donors and households for upper education levels, as well as "blended" mixes of finance that may include private sector financing. In emergency settings, this includes education funds earmarked within humanitarian response plans.

⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4* (UNESCO, 2016).

Promoting harmonization and alignment

Dialogue and collaboration within LEGs are strongly associated with international aid effectiveness principles—promoting alignment and coherence between diverse sources of external development support and countries sector priorities—and collective support for a single country-led process that strengthens national education strategies while encouraging mutual accountability for results.

When “compacts” contribute to more aligned and harmonized practices, they are often translated into practical tools such as joint financing arrangements, joint financial management assessments or joint reporting and results frameworks.

“What Can LEGs Learn from Effective Coordination and Partnership Mechanisms? – Key takeaways”, GPE 2029

Harmonization and alignment are explicit objectives for governments in situations where fragmentation and transaction costs are high and there are resource inefficiencies owing to duplication of partner programming. Fragmented technical assistance and financial aid to the education sector imply higher transactions costs incurred by governments, as the number of donor relationships with line ministries and institutional actors, missions and required reporting lines are increased, along with greater diversity in donor rules and procedures for managing education projects and programs.

Special circumstances, such as humanitarian crises and emergency situations, create their own need for harmonization and alignment. The urgency of responding rapidly to a humanitarian crisis can lead to a multiplicity of sectoral and population-specific donor efforts, with initiatives overlapping with one another. This can lead to a dislocation of existing education strategies if sector dialogue is not closely aligned with the education cluster (if activated) and with humanitarian efforts in general. Such alignment is needed to ensure that quickly introduced education programs do not undo achievements, and that they consider aspects of ownership, leadership, capacity strengthening and coordination.

The dialogue within the LEG can add value to the harmonization of country-level development processes as a space for all stakeholders to do the following:

- i. **Discuss how their respective plans, investments and commitments contribute** to a single country-led process for strengthening national education strategies and mutual accountability for results, including the elaboration of reporting standards and timelines.
- ii. **Discuss how they can better align and harmonize external assistance**, or at least share information on programming priorities and approaches. This is also important in low-capacity contexts where fragmentation may be high, and in emergency and post-crisis settings where diverse organizations and actors may be providing assistance and influencing decision-making through the education cluster and other humanitarian coordination structures.
- iii. **Discuss the scope of new projects and programs, and the potential for joint approaches** to programming and/or implementing activities related to the education sector plan that build on country systems and existing capacities.
- iv. **Discuss the coherence between all aid flows to the sector**, and the choice of the most appropriate operational and financing modalities to different areas of the education sector plan, including the GPE grant and other external resources. In this way, the dialogue contributes to *identifying “fit-for-purpose” programming and financing modalities* (that is, budget support, pooled financing and project co-financing) at the sector level in line with country timetables and budget decisions.

Fostering mutual accountability

LEGs are part of the sector policy, planning and monitoring arrangements that governments and development partners establish with each other. The collaborative framework identifies the roles and responsibilities of different actors in planning for, and achieving, progress toward agreed development goals; generates discourse on how to foster more effective collaboration; and agrees on mechanisms for collectively monitoring progress toward results.

Partnerships need pluralistic accountability structures, such as professional peer accountability, reputational accountability, market accountability and financial/fiscal accountability.


“What Can LEGs Learn from Effective Coordination and Partnership Mechanisms?
- Key takeaways”, GPE 2019

In this context, mutual accountability is at the heart of the LEG, emphasizing the need to look regularly at how all stakeholders have performed on their respective commitments, roles and responsibilities in supporting the education sector plan. One concrete vehicle for multi-stakeholder participation in monitoring progress is the joint sector review, or other sector review processes, based on a schedule established between government and their development partners and that fit into the operational planning cycle. LEG actors adhere to the principle of mutual accountability when they do the following:

- i. **Share information transparently during these activities:**
 - Progress toward sectoral or thematic commitments and activities, including the outcomes of agency monitoring and reporting exercises aligned to education sector plan priorities and targets
 - Disclosure of financial information on education expenditures (against projected targets) and the outcomes of budget review exercises
 - Discussion on the extent to which joint sector review recommendations and follow-up has been actioned and implemented by the partners assigned with specific responsibilities
- ii. **Participate in the organization of robust joint monitoring exercises** as a specific vehicle for engaging in information sharing between LEG stakeholders and the wider public for regular monitoring and accountability purposes. In this way, the LEG complements existing mechanisms for *institutional accountability* (ministry and department responsibilities) and *domestic accountability* (ministry, department, donor and education stakeholder responsibilities).
- iii. **Are willing to engage in the regular monitoring of sector dialogue performance**, including monitoring of partnership dynamics and assessment of the extent to which key players fulfill their roles and responsibilities (see section III.5).

II. Why LEGs are not always effective

Common issues to overcome	Confusion around the LEG mandate and functions
	Hurdles to the quality of policy dialogue
	Gaps in participation and opportunities for meaningful engagement
	The complexity of governance arrangements and coordination
	Weak communications and working arrangements
	Absence of regular monitoring and reporting
	Difficulties in sustaining country leadership
	Diverse influences affecting partnership dynamics

 The strategic effectiveness of the LEG over the education policy cycle can be impacted by a number of factors and influences. The challenges in different country contexts are not generalized across all situations.⁷ However, country experiences have enabled us to identify frequently reported issues. These often arise from the difference between the theory and practice of LEGs and include confusion around the LEG mandate, its functional goals, governance and organizational arrangements, leadership and partnership capacities.

Consideration of the interplay and impact of different challenges has informed the formulation of guiding principles in part III of this document and the basic elements proposed to address them. The main challenges are outlined below.

Common issues and challenges

Beyond the potential benefits of coordination mechanisms and partnerships, LEGs face a paradox: while entangled in the ‘collective action problem’ they are trying to address - i.e. how to work together effectively? - they can be taken for a symptom of that very same problem when, for instance, they struggle to align stakeholders’ preferences, generate higher transaction costs or improve coordination for only a limited number of stakeholders. Building effective LEGs requires a mutual understanding of the type of outcomes LEGs can achieve according to where it can add most value and setting up key conditions to yield those outcomes.

“What Can LEGs Learn from Effective Coordination and Partnership Mechanisms? – Key takeaways”, GPE 2019

Confusion around the LEG mandate and functions

As with multi-stakeholder partnerships in other sectors, *education stakeholders sometimes have different perceptions on the LEG’s principal mandate, functions and goals*. While LEGs should be clearly situated within a broader country-owned framework governing development collaboration, issues arise when the status of the LEG and its relationships to both the national education sector strategy AND other policy dialogue forums are unclear. The lack of positioning can result in stakeholder confusion and functional overlap. Testimonies also reveal confusion around the day-to-day authorities of the LEG,

⁷ Global Partnership for Education, “What Can Local Education Groups Learn from Effective Coordination and Partnership Mechanisms?” internal working paper (GPE, 2019). Key takeaways to be made available.

with tension noted between the proponents of a consultative LEG and those with vision of a decision-making body.

It is true that LEGs usually coexist alongside multiple other institutional and subsector coordination structures within national education systems (for example, education clusters, Sustainable Development Goal 4 coordination mechanisms and so on). They also stand side-by-side with other inter-sectoral or macro-development coordination mechanisms led by the ministry of planning or finance (for example, poverty reduction policies, public finance reforms and so on). As a result, individual donors and LEG partners may be lead donors in a number of dialogue mechanisms. Where the LEG mandate becomes problematic is when dialogue functions are not clearly defined and agreed, the status of the LEG is not clarified, and donor processes are seen to overtake the broader LEG's sector dialogue role. This results in lost opportunities to address and mobilize support for sector-wide issues and partnership cohesion.

Hurdles to the quality of policy dialogue

The scope and quality of policy discussions are diminished when LEGs do not have a *balanced agenda for addressing different sector and subsector issues*, and *all LEG stakeholders do not have access to up-to-date relevant information, evidence and analysis* to support their participation. In the latter case, this may partly be due to low institutional capacities to produce quantitative and qualitative evidence, but it is also connected to the lack of timely LEG communications, working arrangements and knowledge management to support the policy dialogue agenda.

The quality of dialogue around specific sector issues, including budget, financing and resource mobilization, is also limited when *concerned officials are absent from LEG meetings*. This may be due to competing priorities, or gaps in communication between the LEG, ministry of education departments and concerned finance actors.

Country experiences further suggest that the *policy dialogue is uneven throughout the policy cycle*. LEG partners tend to be more active during the planning and development phase of the education sector plan leading up to plan appraisal and endorsement, reducing their engagement during the implementation and monitoring stages. A possible explanation is the absence of clarity around the level of stakeholder commitment expected, and scarce communications to sustain momentum.

Gaps in participation and opportunities for meaningful engagement

Experiences underline the *difficulty in honoring the principle of inclusive policy dialogue*. Stakeholder groups in the LEG are not always representative of the constellation of non-state actors active in the sector. Even certain constituency groups, such as national civil society coalitions, may not be fully representative. Token inclusion of civil society organizations is reported in complex policy environments, and in situations where the government has been reluctant to engage with non-state and civil society constituencies. Both challenges can lead to important gaps in participation and levels of representation.

Another crucial consideration is that stakeholders do not always have the capacity to engage effectively within LEGs. The lack of policy dialogue experience can disadvantage civil society stakeholders in countries where there have been limited opportunities for discussion with government and they are unable to organize themselves. *Weak (or heavy) partnership design further undermines meaningful engagement and LEG efficiency* when LEGs, as a collaborative forum, are too large to be effective or only a small percentage of LEG partners actively participate because of broader sector commitments.

Where there is a concentration of policy dialogue at the national level, this can further reduce possibilities for stakeholders at subnational administration and provincial implementation levels to engage meaningfully. Moreover, it generates the perception that sector policy dialogue is delinked from local realities and disconnected from other levels of administration.

Emergency situations and humanitarian crises have their own particularities. Where decisions are moving quickly, it may not be easy to observe established processes for promoting inclusive sector dialogue and development coordination. In extreme cases of conflict, LEGs may meet less frequently or even be convened outside of the country, limiting the participation of local actors who are unable to travel.

The complexity of governance arrangements and coordination

LEGs gather diverse education stakeholders with different agendas, priorities, management practices, resources and capabilities. Inter-linked challenges to governance are *the lack of clarity in the status of the LEG (as indicated above), partner roles and responsibilities*. It is not always clear whose responsibility it is to lead on specific policy dialogue and task areas, or where one role starts and another ends. Where there are overlapping responsibilities, it may be difficult to identify who is responsible and accountable for what.

Critically, the leadership role of government and that of the lead agency (often the LEG chair and/or the lead of the donor group) may be unclear and interpreted “in situ.” In some countries, active coordination by government is expected, while in others, the coordinating/lead agency takes on more of a leadership role. Across diverse contexts, factors such as *high staff turnover can further undermine country capacities to lead the LEG with consistent engagement*.

The research also indicates that country and international stakeholders can be *resistant to (too much) coordination*. It is not even so much the formality or informality of the arrangements established for multi-stakeholder coordination that poses a problem, but rather the authority vested in that arrangement and the demands of the governance process. Education partners may quietly resist if they feel there will be a loss of sovereignty, ownership or leverage over decision-making processes. Donors and technical partners, seeking to maintain their visibility and attribute impacts to their funded activities, may also be less keen to relinquish their control within more participatory coordination structures. The political economy in which local education groups are nested may therefore pose a challenge to governance arrangements.

Weak communications and working arrangements

A number of LEG experiences suggest a *lack of clarity and communication on how policy dialogue is organized across the policy cycle*—that is, what will be addressed in the core group and when, and how stakeholders can request and receive information to be able to contribute effectively in technical working groups when existing.

This points to the *absence of dedicated logistics to support working arrangements and vertical and horizontal communication between the core and technical working groups and government actors at national and subnational levels*, meaning that actors are unable to contribute effectively to the quality of dialogue.

Limited capacity [for working arrangements] is reported as a main obstacle for effective coordination and takes various forms: lack of participation, heavy workloads, staff turnover and attrition, lack of capacity of the secretariat, limited capacity at provincial levels to cope with directions from the central level.

“What Can LEGs Learn from Effective Coordination and Partnership Mechanisms? – Key takeaways”, GPE 2019

Absence of regular monitoring and reporting

There is little documented evidence from country practice on whether *LEGs assess their own performance and progress* toward the achievement of results (what they have concretely achieved over a specific timeline) or the fulfilment of commitments by members. Performance indicators and accountability targets are rarely created or reported on.

The lack of documented evidence suggests that *resources and capacities are not assigned for monitoring and reporting purposes*. In their absence, mechanisms are unavailable to understand whether policy dialogue and partnership dynamics are evolving and improving over time. This further undermines a culture of mutual accountability, particularly when communication and information sharing is weak between the core and working groups comprising the LEG.

Difficulties in sustaining government leadership

A further set of challenges relates to sustaining country leadership in the LEG beyond sector plan development, appraisal and endorsement. There may be various reasons this - including insufficient capacities/bandwidth. LEG leaders and governance actors need *skills and resources to broker and manage partnerships effectively*. Actors within ministries of education and the coordinating/lead agency (in a support role) may not have the time and capacities to broker and manage the partnership over time to ensure healthy partnership dynamics. Other factors can include the lack of value attached to inclusive, multi-stakeholder policy dialogue, or the policy dialogue being driven by donor agendas leaving little room for government leadership.

In all cases, when government leadership is absent, there is evidence that de facto leadership goes to the coordinating/lead agency which, in turn, leads to LEG processes breaking down when the coordinating/lead agency is itself overstretched or inactive. In the absence of leadership, there is no clear direction for the LEG (outside of donor processes) or organizational responsibility (in terms of who does what). In the worst cases, LEGs appear to be dominated by donors, with over-reach of the coordinating/lead agency and a political climate not conducive to coordination and cooperation between stakeholders.

Diverse influences on partnership dynamics

In pursuing the Sustainable Development Goal 4 agenda, there is general agreement that country success depends on all actors working together. However, diverse factors impact on the dynamics of collective action, with partners sometimes being pulled in different directions. In the case of LEGs, country experiences hint at recurrent influences affecting their work, including:

- i. The way in which partners come together and stay together—that is, how the LEG mandate was agreed upon and is reflected in practice, as well as the promotion of a constructive atmosphere and balanced policy dialogue agenda allowing for genuine discussion without fear or judgment
- ii. Stakeholder behaviors—for example, governments or partners seeing, or not seeing, the value of collaborative policy dialogue, pressure to show results or disburse funds rapidly, historical relationships between a donor and government, lack of incentives to cooperate
- iii. Unequal power dynamics that lead to certain categories of stakeholders being underrepresented in the LEG or overlooked for membership
- iv. LEGs meetings being too large to fulfill a specific purpose effectively

Trust breaks down when stakeholders perceive that certain LEG partners enjoy more status than others, or are unaccountable to the partner country or to the LEG. Where there is no code of conduct and communication and transparency are weak, trust in the LEG as an entity is further weakened.

As a result of different dynamics, LEGs are seen in certain countries as information-sharing mechanisms rather than a place for meaningful dialogue around sector policy priorities. They may transform into a forum, less for driving and monitoring sector progress and results than to ensure that donors are not duplicating one another's work. Attention to partnership dynamics is thus critical for ensuring that LEGs don't suffocate under their weight.

Trust or mistrust is usually perceived to be the consequence of the political or organizational challenges: diverging views or conflicting agendas between partners, conflicts of interest, unclear definition of stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, and/or inadequate or non-representative governance structures. Consequently, many articles infer that trust is built out of good practices in terms of governance and organization including monitoring practices and transparency

"What Can LEGs Learn from Effective Coordination and Partnership Mechanisms? - Key takeaways", GPE 2019

III. LEG principles

Organizational and collaborative capacities	1	The mandate, functions and objectives are clear and agreed
	2	The partnership framework generates inclusion and engagement
	3	There is a clear governance structure for sector coordination
	4	Working arrangements are 'fit-for-purpose' and well-communicated
	5	Regular monitoring contributes to learning and improved performance
	6	Leadership and ownership are demonstrated in practice
	7	Key actors contribute to healthy partnership dynamics



A number of supporting actions and capacities, characteristic of effective multi-stakeholder partnerships, have been employed by countries to support the LEG's core policy dialogue functions. These organizational and collaborative capacities have been distilled into *LEG principles* to respond to the common issues identified in part II.

Cutting across the different principles, leadership, clear communication and capacity strengthening are seen as both *inputs* to and *outcomes* of LEG effectiveness. Leadership and communication are the glue that create cohesion, preparedness, transparency and trust in the process. Organizational and collaborative capacities are about gathering the right combination of strategies, processes, skills and behaviors to achieve collective goals. It implies the ability of all stakeholders to participate meaningfully and fulfill their roles within the LEG.

Building an effective LEG is an ongoing process contributing to systems strengthening that reinforces itself through ongoing learning. Given the wide diversity of challenges, it goes without saying that the following principles are merely *indicative*. It is up to each country to identify their own priorities for strengthening the scope, quality and working arrangements for policy dialogue. The accompanying *LEG tools* and *practical LEG guidance* are intended to support them in doing so.⁸

1. The mandate, functions and objectives are clear and agreed

Experience points to the importance of a clear understanding and broad communication around the LEG's mandate or "raison d'être." Based on an appraisal of the current development context, a clear mandate is supported by realistically defined policy dialogue functions/objectives that are focused, compelling and aligned with priorities identified in the education sector plan and its annual/pluri-annual action plan.

Seeking consensus on the mandate, and regular review of its functions and goals, must be a country-led and country-facilitated process. The mandate can be formalized with a terms of reference (ToR), a

⁸ Link to [LEG tools](#). Practice guidance notes will further be developed as part of the pilot of the LEG self-assessment and performance feedback tools.

memorandum of understanding (MoU) or other partnership agreement that helps anchor country ownership and identify areas where the LEG can add real value and partners' potential roles and responsibilities.

Basic elements:

- The role of the LEG is formally mandated by government, with consensus building generating clarity on both the mandate and what the policy dialogue functions cover across the whole policy cycle.
- A formal partnership framework (ToR or MoU) outlines and communicates to the wider education community what the LEG does (mandate and functions), the position of the LEG in the country's institutional landscape, governance and working arrangements, roles and responsibilities, and "rules of the game" or a charter outlining expected partner commitments, values and behaviors. The ToR or MoU may include monitoring and accountability arrangements.
- Dedicated communications clearly explain the LEG's collaborative advantages in sector policy dialogue and link to the work of other dialogue/coordination bodies such as ministries of planning and finance, and education coordination bodies at decentralized levels.
- The policy dialogue functions are supported by a calendar for core and thematic/technical dialogue that is well communicated to the LEG participants and broader education community. The calendar ensures balance in the issues addressed (thereby reducing confusion and disparity between the theory and practice of what the LEGs have agreed to do) and gives structure and organizational form to the partnership's working arrangements and communications activities (see also working arrangements).
- LEG partners draw on good practice from education dialogue and coordination forums in other countries to support policy dialogue processes.
- The functions and goals of the partnership are reviewed by stakeholders on a regular basis to take on board the evolving education context.

While setting clear goals and strategies for the partnership itself is fundamental, it is also helpful to compare the partnership with other groups, networks or bodies that might be competing with the MSP's mandate. A broader agreement on the mandate also helps to lay out the comparative advantages of the partnership.

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2. The partnership framework generates inclusion and engagement

The partnership framework and operational setup of the LEG emphasizes the importance of inclusion and meaningful stakeholder engagement at key junctures of the policy cycle. Indeed, the quality of policy dialogue around specific sector issues (including plan development and endorsement, joint sector reviews and the review of sector monitoring evidence, financing and resource mobilization) in large part depends on the degree to which stakeholder experiences and expertise are gathered to hear different perspectives, extend the evidence base and inform the discussions. Inclusion further underpins the legitimacy and credibility of the partnership vis-à-vis national stakeholders and the public in the performance of the key LEG principle and function of mutual accountability for results.

The specificity of multi-stakeholder partnerships is their capacity to connect various types of stakeholders and various issues. However, the inclusion of a wide array of stakeholders is not enough: equitable representation of diverse constituencies and meaningful participation and engagement are two conditions that make partnerships and coordination mechanisms truly inclusive. Genuine inclusion should be translated into fair procedures and avoid tokenism.

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With these aims in mind, good partnership design plays a pivotal role in (i) defining key categories of stakeholders to engage in the policy dialogue at different levels, (ii) ensuring that stakeholder engagement plans are in place and that the number of LEG actors is kept manageable and focused, and (iii) finding the optimal partner mix for different roles and responsibilities related to LEG governance and working arrangements.

Basic elements:

- Membership criteria are in place (and well communicated) to define key categories of stakeholders and types of members within each category at different levels of representation, including national, regional and local levels. In complex environments, development partners may need to engage in advocacy around the value of stakeholder participation in policy dialogue.
- The finance ministry is a key government entity in policy dialogue throughout the policy and operational planning cycle and is therefore important to include in the LEG.
- All stakeholders and constituencies know what is expected of them at different junctures throughout the policy cycle in relation to the LEG's strategic policy functions (see also working arrangements).
- Government and development partners deploy financial and logistical support to stakeholder groups that may otherwise be unable to participate in the LEG. To increase efficiency, LEG partners are supported to organize themselves and synthesize their inputs and policy positions based on their specific areas of practice and implementation experiences.
- The core policy dialogue is conducted in an environment that stimulates discussion and debate rather than just provides information and updates.
- The principles of equality, diversity and gender balance are included in formalized or informal "rules of the game" for policy dialogue (see section III.7), with all actors deserving a voice in the policy discussions.

3. There is a clear governance structure for sector coordination

The governance framework should establish clear jurisdiction over different types of policy dialogue and decision-making in the sector, including the relationships between the LEG and other sector dialogue and coordination bodies and national and international partners, in the realization of the LEGs functions. Governance also includes clarification of leadership roles and responsibilities and may include mechanisms for monitoring progress and documenting challenges in the implementation of agreed governance roles and activities. Such transparency in management practices helps to incentivize efficiency, trust and responsible actions within the LEG. All of these elements can be captured within a formalized ToR, MoU or partnership agreement covering both the LEG core group and technical working groups.

Coordination is a matter of equilibrium. The main question is not how to increase coordination but to what extent more coordination is beneficial for in the specific context. Finding the right equilibrium for coordination mechanisms is about aligning stakeholders' preferences and values; and increasing coherence, while leaving space for diversity.

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Basic elements:

- There may be several ministries of education, or a strong ministry of planning or other government entity, that determine what sector coordination looks like. But in all cases, the

government takes the lead in deciding the overall governance structure of the LEG based on the country context and in light of varying levels of stakeholder engagement and capacities to assume governance roles.

- LEG chairs, however they are appointed, have the authority to follow through on decision-making and recommendations. The identification of other governance roles is adjusted, as necessary, according to anticipated changes and partner capacities.
- LEG governance is formally captured in a ToR, MoU or other partnership framework that (i) provides clarity on expected leadership and management roles relating to the chair/co-chair and coordinating agency, (ii) captures lines of accountability and relationships between the various governance actors, and (iii) provides adequate “sovereignty” and national ownership.
- There is flexibility in all LEG governance arrangements and contexts, especially in those where participative dialogue mechanisms are only just beginning to gain traction.
- Key governance actors are supported, as needed, to carry out their expected roles as they relate to chairing, coordination and ensuring healthy partnership dynamics.
- Regular communication and sharing of information ensure transparency in all decision-making processes, including financial transparency.

4. Working arrangements are ‘fit-for-purpose’ and well-communicated

The organizational setup and working arrangements for the LEG core and technical working groups at the national and subnational levels are foundational to the quality of policy dialogue. The working arrangements should be robust and derived from a shared agenda between partners.

Both horizontal and vertical communication keep members continuously informed about the LEG’s road map and working arrangements for the policy dialogue and the nature of their expected participation—including the roles of key coordination actors and the expected roles and commitments of concerned line ministries and government departments (including the ministry of finance), the core dialogue group and LEG partners operating within thematic and technical working groups at national and subnational levels. Actors overseeing logistics for the LEG subgroups are also guided in how to ensure the quality and consistency of preparation, structure, convening and follow-up across the plan cycle.

The flow of communication is essential to the quality and effectiveness of the LEG’s activities, with communication and knowledge sharing between the different provincial LEGs ... LEGs also require high quality meeting preparation, structured meetings, follow-up processes and proper management to yield fruitful discussion.

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Basic elements:

- The LEG’s working arrangements include a road map for ensuring that the collectively agreed policy dialogue objectives are put into practice according to an agreed timeline (that is, what will be addressed, when, and at what level).
- The road map is supported by communication to ensure that the dialogue agenda is known by all stakeholders, with sufficient time for gathering inputs to support high-quality dialogue, and information sharing to prepare actors for meaningful participation in both the core and technical/groups, follow-up and monitoring arrangements as necessary.

- The road map is also supported by a mutually agreed stakeholder engagement plan with responsibilities and expectations for participation, indicated in the partnership framework/ToR.
- Responsibilities for LEG working arrangements are delineated in relation to the education sector plan over time, including the need for consistent logistical oversight of preparation for both core and thematic/technical subgroups at different junctures. Where possible, the arrangements build on the work of existing coordination structures to strengthen cooperative systems, generate resource efficiency and avoid duplication of efforts.
- To the extent possible, all LEG meetings are clearly structured with solid processes for preparation, follow-up and effective management to yield fruitful policy dialogue.
- Country contexts are factored in—for example, fragile/crisis situations, where time is limited and governments may be unable to consult in depth with a broad spectrum of education stakeholders.
- Where possible, actors with less experience and resources receive financial (or capacity development support) to undertake their assigned roles.

5. Regular monitoring contributes to learning and improved performance

Aside from the outcomes or results of the partnership, monitoring and evaluation should cover the functioning of the partnership itself. It includes both the assessment of the partnership as a whole and partner performance. Regarding the former, monitoring and evaluation should focus on identifying the critical factors for success... All monitoring and reporting work might converge towards a single platform or process, often considered to be the joint sector review.

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Setting clear milestones for what the LEG sets out to contribute in terms of its specific policy dialogue goals, as well as monitoring its operational performance and adherence to agreed partnership principles, helps stakeholders, in the first instance, understand the extent to which the LEG is maturing in the face of lessons learned (meta-assessment) and adding real value to countries efforts to deliver quality education. In the second instance, monitoring information can have an immediate impact in relation to mutual accountability for results when accompanied by effective communication within the LEG and the public overall. It further contributes to maintaining credibility and legitimacy in relation to the LEG’s

stakeholder base. The long-term evolution of the LEG in connection to the planning, implementation and monitoring of the education sector plan will depend on capturing such information and using it for organizational learning. However, the need for, and viability of, a LEG monitoring mechanism should be assessed against the country context, stakeholder appetite for monitoring, short- and long-term gains, and transaction costs for LEG partners.

Basic elements:

- LEG partners dialogue together on the expectations and opportunities of LEG monitoring, including what monitoring might look like and how to use the findings of monitoring exercises.
- Any milestones, performance indicators, roles and responsibilities for monitoring are agreed and prioritized, and formalized within the broader LEG ToR, partnership agreement or framework.
- The outcomes of monitoring are documented and regularly reported on (either through an annual joint sector review or at a specific time determined by government or collectively agreed by LEG partners).

- LEG performance monitoring may be through LEG self-assessment once a year, using the available LEG tools, tailored as most relevant to country context⁹.
- If an entity for coordination or LEG secretariat has been created, its resources should accommodate arrangements needed for regular LEG (self-)monitoring and follow-up, perhaps earmarked in the education sector budget. Resources may also be assigned to the LEG coordinating function, such as the coordinating/lead agency, for this purpose.

6. Leadership and ownership are demonstrated in practice

Country's leadership is deemed essential at all stages of a partnership. In practical terms, effective leadership translates into improved oversight on programmes, better attendance in coordination meetings, efficient decision-making and facilitation between different type of stakeholders, including different line ministries and parliamentarians ... the importance given to leadership underlines a more nuanced and less political approach where technical leadership is also important and wide consultation should not be hindered by strong leadership.

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Effective LEGs need leadership that goes beyond high-level political commitment and governance. Country leaders and LEG champions should demonstrate a willingness to support a culture of participatory policy dialogue and communicate clearly on the level of engagement expected of different stakeholder categories throughout the policy cycle.

Evidence shows that where leadership is in place and is demonstrated *in practice*, stakeholders are more committed to their participation, as well as their roles and responsibilities. Leadership thus drives stakeholder engagement and mutual accountability by setting an example from the highest level. Specific leadership capacities may be needed according to the maturity of the LEG. For example, in settings where stakeholder inclusion and representation in policy dialogue are less common, visioning and convening skills may be needed at the outset to

generate buy-in and build trust, while management and innovation skills may be needed in countries with a more established coordination mechanism. In all cases, leadership is critical to creating an organizational culture that underpins the orderly, ethical, efficient and effective conduct of the partnership.

Basic elements:

- The government's highest political authorities and officials demonstrate their commitment to leverage the LEG as a valuable policy dialogue forum by putting resources/systems/processes in place where possible to support inclusive dialogue.
- High-level officials from an appropriate government ministry are designated to chair the LEG, with the support of a coordinating/lead agency as appropriate.
- Designated "leaders" receive the support necessary to play their roles as partnership brokers, build healthy partnership dynamics, mediate and manage the dialogue, and communicate across partners.
- Leadership is further demonstrated by high-level representation in LEG meetings, particularly the attendance of specialized high-level ministry officials/decision-makers and partner representatives in dialogue dedicated to finance, budget and subsector thematic areas.

⁹ [LEG tools](#)

- Units within the line ministries support LEG working arrangements through staffing and/or resources, with rotation of staff as needed. The existence of a LEG secretariat, housed within the ministry of education (or within the coordinating/lead agency as a co-convenor), further reinforces national ownership and is considered an advantage for managing the number of meetings, agenda setting, and providing technical and communications support.
- The role of the coordinating/lead agency may rotate among partners at regular intervals to enable different development partners to take on this leadership role, if interested.

7. All LEG actors contribute to healthy partnership dynamics

As actors in a multi-stakeholder partnership, each LEG member should recognize and ensure the value of policy dialogue taking place within the LEG to the realization of the countries and their own sector support programs. But they also need to acknowledge how their interests, partnership interactions and dynamics can impact the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the LEG and actively contribute to sustaining an environment that is conducive to collaboration and policy dialogue.

Maintaining the partnership's consistency and commitment to its core values and mandate are key factors for its success ... The effect of power asymmetries can be balanced by clear roles and responsibilities, commitment to inclusiveness, fair and transparent procedures and accountability and by ensuring that conflict management mechanisms are in place.

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Healthy partnerships are built on a recognition of the different challenges that multi-stakeholder partnerships face and realistic strategies for overcoming them, as well as a genuine willingness and commitment of all partners to work together to accelerate education sector progress with mutual accountability for results. The pivotal role of the government and the coordinating/lead agency in building and maintaining good communication and trust, and in galvanizing all LEG partners within the group and fostering cooperation, is recognized.

Basic elements:

- Partners (with facilitated guidance and mediation if necessary) work to build an understanding of one another's interests, expectations and requirements—respecting personal and organizational positions and mandates, and genuinely valuing each other's contributions.
- The coordinating/lead agency supports the government in LEG leadership and helps galvanize the LEG as a group without removing responsibility from either the government or the LEG as a whole. The coordinating/lead agency should have, or receive, the capacity support and resources as needed in this endeavor.
- Clear communication throughout the policy cycle helps ensure that LEG partners feel consulted and recognize the benefits of the partnership.
- Partnership dynamics are further supported with a mutually agreed principles driving collaboration such as a charter, "rules of the game" or the equivalent, upholding shared partnership values such as fairness and equality (including gender equality), transparency and outlining LEG member's expected conduct or rules of engagement, as well as what essentially drives the collaboration. This may be included in the ToR, MoU or partnership agreement.
- The discussion of strategies for improving the overall effectiveness of partner actions within the LEG, is linked to, and sequenced with, the regular review of sector performance and joint sector review processes.