



Report Number: ICRR0023404

1. Project Data

Project ID

P174186

Project Name

Benin Covid-19 GPE Project

Country

Benin

Practice Area(Lead)

Education

L/C/TF Number(s)

TF-B3659

Closing Date (Original)

31-Dec-2021

Total Project Cost (USD)

6,787,530.21

Bank Approval Date

09-Sep-2020

Closing Date (Actual)

30-Jun-2022

IBRD/IDA (USD)
Grants (USD)

Original Commitment

6,850,000.00

6,850,000.00

Revised Commitment

6,850,000.00

6,850,000.00

Actual

6,787,530.21

6,787,530.21

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

According to the Grant Agreement (page 4) and the Project Appraisal Document (PAD, page 15), the project objectives were as follows:



- **To ensure continuity of teaching during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in deprived communes in the Recipient's territory and to increase the Government's preparedness to mitigate the effects of future crises.**

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?
No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?
No

d. Components

Component 1: Ensuring safe reopening of schools and return of students, especially in deprived communes (Appraisal: US\$ 5.74 million; Actual: US\$ 5.41 million): This component aimed to re-open schools safely and keep learners healthy. Activities included: community sensitization on the importance of returning to school, especially for girls, and for maintaining hygienic practices; provision of hand-washing facilities and hygiene materials; grants to schools to encourage vulnerable children to return to school (i.e. to provide school kits, school canteens); and remedial programs for students at risk of repetition and drop out.

Component 2: Improving preparedness to mitigate the effects of future crises (Appraisal: US\$ 0.72 million; Actual: US\$ 0.70 million): This component aimed to strengthen the education system's resilience in the medium- and long-term. Activities included: developing partnerships between Ministry of Education and radio/television; teacher training in distance learning methodology; development of distance learning content; and development of national strategy for learning continuity.

Component 3: Ensuring monitoring, management and coordination of the project (Appraisal: US\$ 0.39 million; Actual: US\$ 0.73 million): This component aimed to support project management and daily operations.

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates
Project cost

- The project cost at appraisal was US\$ 6.85 million. The actual project cost at closing was US\$ 6.79 million.

Financing

- The project was financed entirely by a Global Partnership for Education (GPE) grant of US\$ 6.85 million, of which US\$ 6.79 million disbursed.

Borrower contribution



- There was no planned Borrower contribution.

Dates

- *December 2021*: The project was restructured to extend the closing date from December 2021 to June 2022. The extension allowed for (i) the completion of the remedial programs for students at risk of repetition and dropping out; and (ii) compensation of part of incidental costs paid for school canteens in deprived communes. In addition, due to cost savings resulting from exchange rate gains, additional hand washing facilities were procured for additional schools.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

As with all other countries in the world, Benin was faced with an emergency crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All schools were closed in March 2020; schools re-opened for grades 6 and higher in May 2020 and were expected to re-open for grades 1-5 in September 2020. The impact on the education sector was potentially significant, including decreased expenditures on education, learning loss and increasing inequality (including for girls), increased dropouts, and decreased teacher quality. The effects were expected to be most severe for children, youth, and adults living in poverty and conflict contexts, those who have disabilities, those who are exposed to violence and oppressive conditions, and girls and women in contexts where they are expected to take on additional caregiving roles. Maintaining and/or increasing enrollment rates with the reopening of schools would require concerted actions particularly among these vulnerable groups.

The government prepared an education response plan to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, focusing on the safety of students and teachers, continuity of teaching, and education system resilience. The five strategic pillars outlined in the national action plan include: (i) country-level coordination, planning, and monitoring; (ii) risk communication and community engagement; (iii) surveillance, rapid response teams, cases investigation and entry points; (iv) equipment of national laboratory with necessary machines for diagnosis and testing; and (v) case management, infection prevention and control.

The Bank's Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for FY2019-23 included investing in human capital as a key Focus Area. Improving relevance of education and the quality of basic education were the articulated goals; these remain relevant even with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, although the CPF indicators did not include basic education outcomes.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)



OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

To ensure continuity of teaching during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in deprived communes in the Recipient's territory

Rationale

The theory of change was overall sound. The provision of fast disbursing resources to ensure continuity of teaching was likely to mitigate the risks of learning loss. The activities to provide equipment and supplies to safely re-open schools and protect teachers and students, remedial programs for students at risk, and grants to schools to offset the cost of schooling (i.e. school kits, canteens) were likely to contribute to the intended outcome. Furthermore, to maximize the impact of the project, the theory of change included a focus on deprived communes — geographic areas where the primary completion rate is currently below 50 percent - as the spillover effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were expected to be particularly severe in these communes. 20 out of the 77 communes in the country were selected, which represented 20% of primary students in public schools and 13% of lower secondary students in public schools.

Outputs

- Media campaigns and community sensitization activities to ensure safe return to school. The project supported the establishment of partnerships with community radios and media stations (including training of 50 community radio hosts), with messages on the importance of sending children back to school, getting the COVID-19 vaccine, and maintaining good hygiene practices. These messages were deployed through local community organizers and facilitators. 2,489,585 children were reached through the campaigns (target: 2,400,000).
- Awareness campaigns for the education community (school management committees, pedagogical supervisors) on prevention of gender-based violence and sexual harassment, as part of efforts to encourage families to send girls back to school. The project supported preparation of a brochure on gender-based violence, guide for community radios on advocating for girls' schooling, and a competition within the 20 targeted communes on what measures could be implemented to prevent gender-based violence.
- Provision of 20,400 handwashing devices, with the support of UNICEF (target: 20,400).
- Provision of school grants as follows:
 - Hygiene kits and training to 1,871 schools, including soap, thermoflash thermometers, masks, and other hygiene supplies, and training for school infirmity staff on hygiene and disease prevention.
 - Learning kits (including textbooks) for 325,295 children in the 20 targeted communes (target: 89,000), including 162,295 kits to all the children in grades 1 and 2, and all female students in grades 7 and 8. Due to project cost savings, an additional 163,000 kits were ordered and received prior to project closing. These kits were delivered to school districts in May 2020 for distribution during school year 2022-2023. In addition, UNICEF acquired school kits from its own resources, of which 10,448 have been distributed to girls in grades 7 and 8 in disadvantaged communes.
 - Incidental costs for school canteens in 1,290 primary schools in deprived communes, thereby reducing school costs to parents and encouraging return to school. The grants covered three-fifths of the amount paid by parents for school canteens.



- Remedial programs in 1,900 schools (target: 1,870) for students at risk of repetition and dropping out, for grades 1-6 and grade 10 in the 20 targeted communes . This represented 98.9% of schools in the deprived communes (target: 60%). 246,783 children in grades 1-5 were assessed to evaluate learning loss (target: 208,000).

Outcomes

- 2,935,936 children were enrolled in school at project closing, surpassing the target of 2,533,000 children. This represented 104% of the children previously enrolled, surpassing the target of 85%. Of these, the percentage of females previously enrolled who returned to school was 104.7%, surpassing the target of 75%; and the percentage of deprived children was 103.5%, surpassing the target of 65%.
- 5,743 schools met minimum hygiene standards for the prevention of COVID-19, surpassing the target of 3,620 schools. This represented 57.3% of public primary and lower secondary schools nationwide, surpassing the target of 35%. However, according to the ICR (page 18), some of the handwashing devices provided were defective or in need of repair (UNICEF arranged to make the needed repairs) and there were challenges with maintenance at the schools. These challenges led the project team to recommend canceling the last batch of devices until repairs were completed for those already at the schools.
- 86.6% of students in the 20 targeted communes received remedial learning instruction. This represented 239,038 students in the first year, and then decreased to 215,297 students during the second school year of the project period. The ICR (page 19) noted that most of the decrease was attributed to boys in primary school, with the survey team anecdotally determining that boys were leaving school to help their parents on their farms and/or to work in the bordering country of Nigeria.

Rating

Substantial

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

To increase the Government's preparedness to mitigate the effects of future crises.

Rationale

The theory of change was overall sound. The activities to develop a national strategy and establish institutional partnerships, a distance learning platform and content would likely increase the government's capacity and strengthen the education system to response to future shocks.

Outputs

- Training of 14 pedagogical experts within Ministry of Education on distance learning methodology. These experts then trained 300 teachers in using digital distance tools and/or materials to support distance learning (target: 300). Of these, 40.3% were female (target: 30%).



- Production of over 500 video and audio digital courses, focused on the core subjects of French, math, science and technology, English, and social education, for pre-primary, primary and secondary levels. 300 tablets were provided for teachers to develop distance learning content and 120 tablets for education inspectors.
- Partnerships with local radio and television stations to broadcast distance learning content.
- Mechanisms for identifying vulnerable and at-risk children were developed and tested in five public primary schools and ten lower secondary schools, then validated by all stakeholders in the education system.
- Evaluation of COVID-19 education management, to identify areas of relative strength and weakness and to guide policies and practices during emergencies.
- Collection of citizen feedback on service delivery from the 20 targeted communes, and setting up of grievance redress mechanism, for which 100% of total grievance received were addressed (target: 90%).

Outcomes

- A national strategy for continuity of learning was developed and approved by government. The strategy included remote learning strategies based on international experience, operational action plan, implementation and monitoring mechanisms, and conditions of success. Guidelines for re-opening of schools in the event of floods or other natural disasters/ shocks and an emergency response action plan for education were also developed.
- Remote learning opportunities were expanded through the activities reported above.

Rating

Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

Achievement of the first objective to ensure continuity of teaching is rated Substantial due to evidence of children returning to school safely. Achievement of the second objective to increase preparedness for future crises is rated Substantial due to evidence of increased government capacity. Therefore, the overall efficacy is rated Substantial.

Overall Efficacy Rating

Substantial

5. Efficiency



At project appraisal, the PAD (Annex 5) discussed the economic rationale for investing in the education sector. It also estimated the economic cost of the COVID-19 pandemic using the World Bank's country tool for simulating the potential impacts. Results showed that, in the absence of effective policy action, each student from today's cohort in primary and secondary school could face, on average, a reduction of US\$45 in yearly earnings. This was approximately equivalent to US\$826 over a student's work life at present value. The PAD also estimated the cost of higher repetition rates due to school closures, with results showing that the public sector will incur the equivalent of CFA 119.6 million (about US\$0.20 million) in losses and households incur inefficiency-related costs equivalent CFA 664.6 million (about US\$1.13 million). Lastly, the PAD presented a cost-benefit analysis for the quality related interventions of the project: the net present value (NPV) of the intervention was US\$17.23 million with an internal rate of return (IRR) of 25.5%

The ICR (Annex 4) had a slightly different approach, estimating the impact of components 1 and 2 on lifetime income. The estimated impact was an increase in lifetime earnings by 10% for each project beneficiary. This methodology assumed that in the absence of the Project, 215,297 children without access to remote learning prior to the program would have missed out on the equivalent of an entire year of school. The net present value was therefore estimated at US\$ 47.7 million, with an IRR of 23.8%. Although not directly comparable to the PAD estimate, it is a favorable estimate of project impact.

The project disbursed 99% during the project period, albeit with a six month closing date extension. Implementation made use of existing arrangements from the ongoing GPE project. Targeting of most at risk children was effectively carried out and likely increased project impact. Due to project cost savings, an additional 163,000 school kits were ordered and received prior to project closing. However, there were challenges noted with defects and maintaining the handwashing devices procured for schools. In addition, there were other minor shortcomings in implementation that likely affected efficiency, including the failure to procure quality audio-visual equipment to produce digital content; delayed disbursement of grants to schools that impacted the provision of water in schools, delivery of remedial programs, and compensation for school canteens. Lastly, project management costs increased from planned US\$ 0.39 million to actual US\$ 0.73 million.

Efficiency Rating

Substantial

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal	✓	25.50	94.00 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate	✓	23.80	94.00 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.



6. Outcome

Relevance of project objectives is High due to strong alignment with country conditions, country COVID strategy, and Bank strategy. Efficacy is rated Substantial due achievement of the first objective to ensure continuity of teaching and children returning to school safely, and achievement of the second objective to increase preparedness for future crises with increased government capacity. Efficiency is rated Substantial due to favorable economic rate of return and indications of implementation efficiency.

a. Outcome Rating

Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

Institutional capacity for continuity of teaching has been strengthened, including through the development of a national strategy in the event of crises and school closures (the strategy was validated and disseminated through regional workshops), development and implementation of distance education programs, teacher training in distance learning methodologies, and establishment of partnerships with radio and television stations that facilitated the delivery of awareness campaigns as well as distance education programs. Other activities that provided direct support to schools and students are being continued under the ongoing GPE project (P167432).

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

The project was designed in relation to other ongoing Bank operations, namely the GPE 3 project (P167432), which addressed broader challenges in the education sector such as improving the quality of teaching and learning in basic education and strengthening equity in primary education. This meant that the same institutional arrangements were used, which facilitated the project launch. The design was guided by lessons learned from the Bank in its recent experience in the fight against the Ebola virus. However, despite being an emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was still conceptualized and designed within the existing education ecosystem, where key education reforms were still ongoing. This helped to ensure longer-term relevance and sustainability of the project.

Due to the above factors, the project risk level was appropriately assessed as moderate, with mitigation measures centered on timely data collection and project monitoring, and capacity building activities. The M&E arrangements were simple and straightforward, utilizing existing monitoring systems



Quality-at-Entry Rating

Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

Project implementation got off to a smooth start due to the project implementing unit's ongoing experience with GPE operations. The existing collaboration with UNICEF also ensured that key outputs such as the handwashing devices and school kits were made available quickly. There were some delays in disbursing grants to schools that impacted the related outputs (the provision of water by schools, delivery of the remedial programs; and incidental costs for school canteens); however, the Bank team worked with the project implementing unit and the Ministry of Finance to disburse funds and resolve the issues.

Supervision missions were adequately staffed with technical experts in needed areas. The Bank team provided continuous capacity building support in the areas of procurement, financial management, development of communications and awareness campaigns, and safeguards, particularly related to violence against girls.

Quality of Supervision Rating

Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

The M&E framework was simple and straightforward, given the short-term nature of the project. Indicators were relevant and monitorable, with baseline and targets identified, including a focus on girls and targeted vulnerable children. Monitoring and data collection arrangements were clear, with the Ministry of Education responsible for collecting school data and reporting regularly on project implementation progress. Given the emergency nature of the project, there were no evaluative activities planned, aside from using routine monitoring to help identify corrective actions and a citizen feedback survey.

b. M&E Implementation

The performance indicators were tracked regularly and updated in a timely manner to inform supervision missions. School data for the 2020-21 school year was collected into a statistical yearbook produced in May 2021. Two citizen feedback surveys were conducted as planned.

c. M&E Utilization



According to the ICR (page 29), data was made available regularly for the results framework and was used to inform the analysis of project achievements at closing. The 2020-2021 statistical yearbook data was one data source used for reporting achievement project indicators. Two citizen feedback surveys were conducted as planned to identify and resolved complaints, as well as remove bottlenecks in project implementation, thereby establishing an important feedback loop for improving implementation

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

The project was classified as having a Moderate Environmental Risk, due to low expected environmental impact. An Environmental and Social Review Summary was prepared during project appraisal, as well as an Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP). Given that the project was prepared in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental and health/safety concerns were directly addressed by project interventions including handwashing devices, hygiene kits, and community awareness campaigns.

Safeguards performance was rated Moderately Unsatisfactory for the initial project period due to the fact that the PMU was not fully set up and recruitment of the environmental and safeguards (E&S) specialist was still ongoing. As a result, the quarterly reports were not being submitted and the ESMP had not been prepared. However, relevant staff was hired by December 2021, and the above activities and others were being conducted, including establishing the grievance redress mechanism and the action plan for the Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEA-SH). By project closing, the environmental and safeguards performance was upgraded to Satisfactory.

b. Fiduciary Compliance

Financial management: Financial management performance was rated in the satisfactory range throughout the project period. The unaudited interim financial reports were submitted and were of acceptable quality. Required audits were submitted to the Bank in accordance with the Financing Agreement, without qualifications. Capacity development support was provided by the Bank fiduciary specialists to ensure adherence to financial requirements and internal auditor recommendations.

Procurement: Procurement performance was rated in the satisfactory range throughout the project period. The Bank's procurement team conducted regular procurement performance rating assessment missions and provided support during implementation to ensure compliance with the procurement guidelines. However, there were some challenges with consistently entering all the procurement steps into the system. Procurement plans were updated and submitted regularly. According to the ICR, the procurement of audio-visual equipment to produce quality audio, visual and digital content was not completed under the project, due to difficulties in identifying the technical specifications and the lack of



qualified firms in country that could provide the equipment (hence two failed calls for tender). The equipment was later procured under the ongoing GPE project.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

d. Other

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

Lessons drawn from the ICR (pages 32-33), adapted by IEG:

- Ensuring that girls return to school following an emergency crisis can be supported through specific interventions aimed at multiple stakeholders. In the case of this project, specific activities covered parents, teachers, female students, and communities. These activities included a strong communications strategy to prevent gender-based violence in schools, teacher training, community-level competitions on ways to prevent gender-based violence in schools, and provision of learning kits for girls in grades 7-8.
- A quick-disbursing operation in response to an emergency crisis can be used as an opportunity to strengthen resilience in the system for future crises. In the case of this project, immediate outputs were financed to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while also developing protocols and guidelines, strengthening the online distance learning delivery system, and training staff. These helped to build the capacity of the education sector if future shocks arise.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No



14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR was concise, internally consistent, and consistent with guidelines. The quality of evidence was satisfactory, with strong data to support the analysis and clear links between project outputs and intended outcomes. Lessons usefully addressed both the short-term and longer-term goals of the operation.

a. Quality of ICR Rating

Substantial