



Global Learning Portal: Supporting Strong Collaborative Networks for Education Development Global Assets Evaluation

Final Report

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USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

FINAL REPORT

**GLOBAL LEARNING PORTAL: SUPPORTING STRONG COLLABORATIVE
NETWORKS FOR
EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT**

**GLOBAL EVALUATION & MONITORING II
GEM II BPA Number EDH-E-00-08-00003-00**

Global Assets Evaluation

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OVERALL GLOBAL ASSETS EVALUATION REPORT

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FINAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

In response to a RFTOP from USAID to evaluate the results achieved and outputs, over the last 3 years, for two global assets – the Global Learning Portal (GLP) and Education Policy Data Center (EPDC) – Aguirre Division of JBS International Inc. undertook evaluation activities to address 4 broad issues:

1. What results and accomplishments have been achieved by each of the assets?
2. What problems and shortcomings are there for EPDC and GLP to date, and how have they been addressed?
3. What are the short term outputs and milestones that can be built on; and recommendations for building on them?
4. What are the recommendations for strengthening the use and utility of these assets by diverse audiences?

A workplan was developed to address these issues which deployed project effort in two phases. The first phase was devoted to discovery; and was reported in an Interim Report, tendered to USAID and the implementing management team in February 2009.¹ The second phase was devoted to field studies and assessment of risks and opportunities, and this report details the findings reached during those activities. The main focus of the work done aiming to yield the implications for building on the results and accomplishments achieved to date.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

After a brief introduction and report of the overarching methodology that unites the two evaluation efforts, this report will be divided into two general sections – one dedicated to each global asset. The Initial Workplan and the Interim Report associated with it are provided in a separate Appendix A in the first volume of report appendices. This evaluation is designed to be collaborative with the partners, thus all the findings from Phase I have been shared with them already. Reports were revised taking their feedback into account, and the follow-on work was planned taking into account their concerns. Phase I findings are therefore not repeated here in detail.

Report of the findings from the activities in Phase II are organized by evaluation question. The detailed information about each of the component activities – the methodology and what was found and specific implications entailed with those findings – are reported by activity and included in a separate Appendix for the report of each Asset.²

¹ See Appendix A for a summary of the findings presented to GAE management teams, and the Workplan for Phase II of the effort.

² GAE Evaluation Appendix Volume I includes general documents related to the scope of work, and work plans for this evaluation; Volume II includes the specific appendices related to the GLP; Volume III is specific to EPDC.

OVERARCHING WORKPLAN AND METHODOLOGY

Phase I tasks included review of documents, review of the websites, strategy, and usage, and initial conversations to understand issues and perspectives on the Assets from stakeholders or potential stakeholders.

In Phase II, tasks included developing case studies to identify user attitudes, experiences and users' perspectives related to the Assets, working collaboratively to review technical options for strengthening and enhancing web-based functions/sites, and sharpening stakeholder understanding of the vision and potential for each of these assets on behalf of educational development and capacity building. To these ends the workplan had the following activities, aimed at addressing the above questions:

Chart: Evaluation Focus, with Associated Activities for Each Global Asset

Evaluation Focus	Phase II Activity	Asset
1. Results and accomplishments that have been achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field Studies • Stakeholder interviews • Review of project reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPDC, GLP • EPDC, GLP • EPDC, GLP
2. Shortcomings or challenges to date and how have they been addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field Studies • Stakeholder interviews • Review of project reports • Traffic analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPDC, GLP • EPDC, GLP • EPDC, GLP • EPDC, GLP
3. Milestones and outcomes that can be built on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field Studies • Web review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPDC, GLP • EPDC, GLP
4. Recommendations	Synthesis and analysis of field studies, web review, stakeholder interviews, and reports to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPDC, GLP

The main focus of Phase II of the evaluation for **GLP** was to understand different strategies for deployment of the GLP, and what kinds of support were necessary to achieve the desired ends. Thus the "Field Studies" component was a very important emphasis for this evaluation, and they included work in Afghanistan, Rwanda, Zambia, and Kenya; as well as an additional study related to a special implementation of GLP for USAID.

As follow-up to Phase I findings about the audience and messaging on the GLP's home website, site analysis support through two workshops was provided to GLP staff through a sub-contractor to the evaluation team – Sonjara, which has long history with the GLP site. That work is summarized in terms of the objectives, findings, and accomplishments.³

³ See Appendix Volume II, specific to GLP, for more detailed reports on each of the activities.

THE GLOBAL LEARNING PORTAL (GLP)

OVERVIEW

The Global Learning Portal was set up in 2002 to pursue how use of the internet could help educators and related stakeholders communicate and share resources, especially in service Education for All goals. Over time the GLP has evolved into a distance-bridging on-line platform to support:

- Linking teachers and other educators together in networks to share ideas and resources
- Professional development resources and related opportunities for educators
- Libraries of educational materials that can be shared and adapted
- Archives of education project materials that otherwise might be lost once a project closed
- On-line policy discussions for USAID or other bilateral or multilateral organizations
- A communications platform for other (usually education-based) development communities
- Linking alliance partners into a global active support community

The organization was set up as an alliance of partners and supporters, with primary initial funding coming from USAID, but with financial contributions from AED (in which the GLP was housed) and in-kind or similar contributions coming from initial partners such as Sun Microsystems. The GLP also set up memoranda of understanding or other partnering mechanisms with groups like UNESCO, Education International, Apple, Google, and the Hewlett Foundation.

Over its six-year life, the GLP has established more than 100 networking support platforms for projects, archives, and communities⁴, but significant expected support from outside of USAID or other USG sources has been thin. A funding mechanism change in mid-course has allowed USAID missions and projects to “buy into” the GLP, significantly expanding how the GLP has been able to work with field projects. This has, in turn, moved the GLP to market itself more aggressively to education projects.

FORMATIVE EVALUATION

In 2008 this formative evaluation was funded to focus⁵ on assessing current capabilities and make recommendations for improved effectiveness going forward.

⁴ Education Global Development Alliance; Public Private Alliance in Education, 8th Semi-annual Report, April 2006 – October 2006, page 8.

⁵ As part of the accomplishments analysis, this evaluation was restricted by scope to the most recent three years' activities.

In Phase I⁶ of the evaluation we reviewed available documentation and interviewed USAID staff, bilateral (donor) and multilateral (e.g. UNESCO) representatives, clients, advisory board members, project staff, and other stakeholders to find out how the GLP was viewed, what perceived strengths and capabilities it brought to helping educators and policymakers bridge geography to share resources, and where and how the GLP could strengthen its contributions going forward. In addition, the evaluation team and its partners analyzed the GLP main website and community- or project-level implementations to assess its capabilities, how much traffic the sites generated, and how the sites might be improved to better serve its audiences. The GLP was also examined as a policy tool for on-line discussions through a broad survey of discussion participants. Results from the Phase I activities are detailed in the separate volume Evaluation Interim Report and were used to help structure and frame the follow-on study activities.

Recap of Phase I

Phase I reviewed historical accomplishments and evolution of the GLP platform, and how it has been used. Discussions with USAID and other policy-level bilateral and multilateral representatives showed mixed reactions to both the potential and practice of using the GLP for collaboration, archiving, and sharing information within and across projects.

Multi-lateral organization representatives who had used the GLP for on-line discussion were cautiously positive about the experience. USAID staff who had participated in online discussions were similarly ambivalent about the experience.

Technical reviews examined issues of site traffic, design, and usability, as well as how content and presentation on the main GLP.net relates to its intended audiences. Traffic analysis over a 13-month period revealed relatively low traffic counts across all sites, although a contextual analysis suggests that GLP installations that are paired with ongoing education projects show higher usage levels, and low counts for other sites corresponds reasonably with the aims of implementation. Sites that were created for issue-based “communities of practice” tended to have quite low traffic counts, and GLP staff acknowledged that they would for the most part phase out support for those communities. (Those communities also made little or no financial contribution to the GLP, which made them a sort of demonstration site “loss leader.”) Archiving sites set up for project document preservation similarly had understandably low traffic volumes.

Site design reviews showed that back-end and change-management processes were well structured and administered, but the public front-end of both the main GLP.net site and of most of the specific project or issue sites suffered from visual design weaknesses, problematic library organization issues, and some navigation difficulties. Where sites were established with stronger visual and organizational design results were dramatically more positive, demonstrating that design issues are not a drawback of the platform and that greater attention to design elements can dramatically improve the user experience.

Knowledge management practitioners who reviewed GLP.net found that content and presentation indicated that USAID seemed to be the primary audience, rather than teachers or other educational stakeholders. KM experts also remarked that building online communities required

⁶ See the GAE Interim Evaluation Report, tendered 17 February 2009.

significant and sustained promotion by community support staff or volunteers, so low site usage could be expected where such stewardship was not present. (Because the GLP does not have staffing resources to provide a sustained support role for non-paying communities of practice, the GLP is moving away from creating and supporting these platforms.)

Recap of Phase II

The main focus of Phase II for GLP was to examine how different implementation strategies and models have fared, to get direct feedback from portal users in the field, and to see how observations and findings could help the GLP structure its activities and tools for current and future projects. As the GLP has been chosen to implement the pilot project in Rwanda for the Africa Education Commons, the evaluations was especially mindful of how implementation and organizational lessons elsewhere might bear on that developing project.

Four main activities were undertaken to inform the Phase II GLP evaluation:

- 1- Review of accomplishments to date;
- 2- Field studies in Zambia, Afghanistan, and Rwanda to examine different GLP implementation models and to interview portal users and coordinators; additional conversations in Kenya examined a possible future collaboration;
- 3- A broad survey of those who participated in a large, on-line discussion of USAID education strategy, to gauge their reaction to both online forums generally and to how the GLP implements them.
- 4- Additional site technical and traffic analyses as well as hands-on coaching to provide assistance to the GLP as it revises its home site (GLP.net) to better serve its primary audience of educators and to present its capabilities on field project support, collaboration services, and online discussions.

Each of these activities will be reviewed in summary to see what was done and what was learned. Individual reports on the field studies and site analyses are provided in the GLP-specific appendices.

Overview of Accomplishments

Over the life of the project, the GLP has evolved from an effort to bring teachers from around the world into a shared space through a multitude of smaller community of practice initiatives, to a platform that helps groups and projects develop a community of practice and address more specific needs and objectives. Additionally, the GLP has begun to be employed more often to help USAID and its partners to converse about topical or strategic issues through online discussions.

In the last three years the GLP has continued to support issue-driven communities engaged in educational development, including groups like Escuelas Activas, a bilingual teacher forum based in Latin America, and the Echoes Schools program supported in part by the cocoa industry in West Africa. Archiving efforts have also been successful, preserving teacher-training materials developed in Central Asia through the PEAKS program, as well as women-in-development and gender-equality materials generated under the cross-project EQUATE program.

Projects outside of education have also bought into the GLP as a platform, notable the WilPower/Women in Law site supported through the US State Department/Middle East Partnership Initiative and the Palestinian Youth Portal supported by the US-Palestinian Partnership.

Funded education efforts attached to ministries and existing education projects have received the lion's share of attention, especially the Zambia College of Education support portal and the Afghanistan Higher Education Project portal, which are surveyed in detail in this evaluation. The GLP has become increasingly successful at leveraging USAID core funds to generate field-level project buy-ins.

Perhaps most important is the evolving nature of the GLP itself, moving from being a supplier of an internet platform to becoming an organization focused first on building networks and discovering areas for collaboration, and then structuring technical tools, materials, and human resources to support those networks. This new approach is underway with the Rwanda Education Commons, an experimental pilot of the Africa Education Commons concept of building networks of organizations and individuals to address educational needs. The REC holds a powerful spot in the Rwanda Ministry of Education's plans to radically remake and expand education in the country, tasked with finding methods for rapid development and deployment of resources to strengthen teacher knowledge. In addition, the REC will provide a coordination and gate-keeping role for the Ministry for the discovery, development, and deployment of ICT resources. The project is also unique because it is being implemented directly by GLP field staff rather than through implementing partners, and many of the recommendations developed through this evaluation effort apply directly to the unfolding REC.

A final area of advancement has come in the use of the GLP platform for policy level discussions sponsored by USAID and its implementing partners. (Other organizations such as the Fast Track Initiative Secretariat have also used the GLP for discussion purposes, but with mixed results.) The largest use of the platform to date came in January and February 2009, when the USAID Education Strategy forums attracted nearly 1000 participants. A broad survey of participant reaction showed generally positive results, with most respondents saying they would recommend use of the GLP for similar discussions in the future.

Further information on accomplishments is found under Achievements in the Findings section of this report and in Appendix Volume II.

Accomplishments as Influences on Phase II Evaluation Approach

As the major activity for Phase II studies, the evaluation team undertook a detailed look at four different recent implementations of the GLP to see what was working and not, how structures, tools, and training affect participant attitudes and behavior, and what lessons and recommendations can be derived and applied as the GLP moves again toward models that address national and regional educational issues, especially in Africa. An overview of these projects and observations follows in the next section.

The evaluation team recognizes that the GLP as an organization has tried various models, with various positive results and, of course some drawbacks, and is constantly experimenting to see what works. Overall the evaluation team has found some real and tangible gains made by the GLP: teachers are communicating and learning, have gained practical skills in using computers and the internet, and are genuinely interested and even excited about future opportunities to learn

from their peers and make creative contributions. Because the primary purpose of this evaluation is to make recommendations aimed at strengthening current and future GLP efforts, it would be easy to see this report as a litany of praise and criticism, but this is not the intention. The intention is to focus on recommendations for the future and ideas that can be used by its next phase of activities – the phase it is now in with the Rwanda Commons and other recent initiatives. Thus the evaluation team has presented both positive findings and findings of potential issues. The many positive gains achieved by GLP serve as a guide for the future; and so we have appreciated the gains but even so looked for potential areas for improvement – not taking any gain at face value, but seeing what further meaning we can draw from it that might be useful. The task of bringing together active participants in what has to be seen by them as a foreign environment, and in varied cultural and development contexts, is extremely difficult. The efforts necessary to “make it work” are anything but trivial. We appreciate what has been done, and hope that this evaluation contributes to positive future directions.

The Global Assets are Partnerships in Development. The Evaluation Team has led the evaluation as much as possible as a collaborative effort, soliciting and accepting suggestion and criticism, and revising approach and findings, as warranted, based on the input gathered. It is also certain that USAID and GLP staff will find errors of fact or observation within these Phase II explorations and reporting thereof, and the team is happy to hear about these issues and correct them. At the same time, the team hopes the critical reader will understand that recommendations are not a reaction to any single observation or conversation, but rather have developed out of an analysis of many elements.

Snapshot of Field Studies

As part of the Phase II work, we reviewed four different implementation strategies of the GLP:

Zambia

A GLP portal project was implemented by staff from an unrelated project, with no GLP-dedicated staff. (Reviewed by US evaluation staff)

Afghanistan

GLP was developed as a key feature of an ongoing project, with staff dedicated by the project and the GLP to develop and foster its success as a project tool. (Review designed, analyzed and reported by US evaluation staff, implemented by in-country team, data entered with initial summary and anecdotal report.)

Rwanda

GLP was established as the hub of evolving partnership- and resource-development activities, tasked with developing the concept and the project across agencies and international donors. (Reviewed by US evaluation staff)

USAID Education Strategy Discussion Group

GLP was brought in as an online tool to foster discussion from a worldwide audience on a specific set of policy issues. (Reviewed through a questionnaire developed by US staff and e-administered to participants)

Additionally, we also talked with stakeholders in Kenya to understand how civil society stakeholders were addressing issues of collaboration and coordination and, separately, how ICT⁷

⁷ Information and communication technologies (ICT)

materials development efforts there might inform similar efforts in Rwanda or other future projects.

To address the broader evaluation question, within each field study the evaluation team found it useful to frame conversations and inquiries around:

- Elements of success in engaging stakeholder (including Ministry) support and building ownership
- How well field projects provide a platform for engaging productively with other stakeholders
- Training issues and requirements, with relationships to monitoring outcomes
- Infrastructure contexts or issues that bear on how GLP can be implemented
- How GLP can inter-relate with other systems or initiatives to realize the vision of the Portal or to leverage shared resources

Since this is an Interim, and not a final evaluation of the GLP, the idea was to provide accurate and useful findings about what the implementations of the GLP concept tell us about potential directions for the future, and what recommendations we can make about how to enhance its viability and utility. The above questions were the focus of Phase II to help answer the larger issues, and the following descriptions and discussion builds in what we have learned about them in order to answer the basic questions for this evaluation.

Overall Field Study Methodology

The US-based team travelled to both Zambia and Rwanda to talk with project managers and GLP beneficiary/participants, as well as to Kenya to look specifically at materials development issues and to see an alternative networking design. For the Afghanistan study, US staff designed the evaluation strategy and instruments, and contracted with a Kabul-based field team to conduct the research there. The USAID Education Strategy Discussion Group participants were queried through e-mail and an online questionnaire, designed by the Evaluation Staff. More detailed descriptions of interviews, observations, and findings are found as Appendices B and C, in the GLP-specific appendix to this report (Volume II).

DESCRIPTION OF EVALUATION AND DATA GATHERING ACTIVITIES

We will review the findings from the studies relevant to the evaluation questions developed from Phase I evaluation work and subsequent discussions. Answers to these questions will blend results from each of the field studies, as well as be informed by other discussions and document analyses. However, as a point of departure, it will be useful to review the three field implementations, including their purposes and time frames, how each project is set up and how it relates to other interventions, and the context in which they have been pursued. The summaries are not exhaustive, and more detailed information is found in the specific field notes and reports, attached as Appendix C. A categorized compendium of GLP Accomplishments is also available in Volume II- specific to GLP.

- **Zambia**

The USAID Mission and EGAT/ED jointly funded this initiative beginning in 2007 to help link Zambia's faculty in 14 colleges of education through the GLP portal, with the aim of increasing communication and resource sharing within and across colleges while providing training and guidance on measures for connected-network sustainability. Portal capabilities were developed for use within the ministry and donor communities, and a database-backed project tracking component was developed. The field team interviewed ministry, Equip2, donor, Mission, and university staff and made field trips to two colleges that had received infrastructure improvements and connectivity.

Management and staffing

AED Equip2 staff was asked to implement the project partly as a matter of convenience and partly because that project was embedded within the Ministry, suggesting the portal could be sustained in the future through Ministry support. Equip2 had no field-level interventions or structures on which to hang the activity, but a knowledgeable Ministry-level coordinator was proposed to help colleges use the portal and develop the human network, and a technical coordinator was contracted.

- The Ministry refused to fund the programmatic coordinator, leaving no dedicated human networking staff for the project.
- Equip2 staff, very busy with the major priorities of the Ministry, attended to portal tasks as time and staff availability allowed.
- Equip2 will soon end, with no transition plan for the Ministry to absorb coordination functions.
- No inter-college committee or similar to self-sustain the network has been set up.

College Interventions

Direct and partner-provided trainings were carried out for 14 colleges of education on developing technology plans (including measure for sustainability) and technical use of networks, the internet, and computers. Five colleges (three additional planned) had received computer and networking equipment as well as time-limited financial support for internet connection charges. GLP developed a portal and Equip2 developed a starter-kit library of resources. All colleges were introduced to the portal via the trainings.

- At two colleges visited, Mufulira, one had a robust maintenance, expansion and cost-recovery system in place, managed by the administration and a faculty committee. Faculty could access the internet, and participants interviewed were both appreciative of the intervention and generally enthusiastic about the idea of collaboration across colleges and sharing resources.
- At the second college, Zamise, maintenance procedures were not well functioning and the network was not functioning, apparently halted by viruses. No faculty or committee was specifically tasked with maintenance, there was no cost-recovery program, and the administrator was unsure if there would be sufficient budget for maintaining the internet

connection. The administrator, faculty, and students were all enthusiastic about using the internet and for connecting with other institutions.

- In neither college was anyone using the GLP portal; in the second college no one even seemed aware of it. Conversations with partners who supplied some initial training and were working on other initiatives at various colleges revealed that “no one” ever talked about using the portal.

Ministry and Donor Interventions

The Ministry and sector donors were given a private space on the portal to develop a common library and to engage in discussions. An accessible project-tracking database was developed to inventory donor and NGO-funded education projects across the country.

- Donors were enthusiastic about mechanisms that might make the Ministry and its work more transparent. Likewise, Ministry staff said they were at least publicly happy to have a common repository for shared documents. However, there was no coordinating group to put the plan into effect, and the library was not being used.
- The “Project Tracker” was initially to have been part of the portal proper, but technical issues arose and the database was implemented using a different online system. At the time of the visit, the tracker was not being used.

• *Afghanistan*

GLP partnered in 2007 with the existing AED-led Higher Education Project (HEP) focused on improving teaching and faculty member preparation at 16 faculty of education institutions across the country. The GLP portal was introduced as the primary mode of distance collaboration, resource sharing, and document archiving, and GLP worked with HEP staff to develop the most extensive implementation of a GLP portal to date, and to foster effective use of it. The project helped attract positive attention from the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), and agreement has been reached for integration of the portal into the Ministry by the time the HEP project concludes in January 2011. Preparations for that transition are underway. The Afghan field team interviewed more than 50 faculty and project staff across several colleges, both within and outside Kabul, and observed faculty using the portal.

Management and Ministry Ownership

HEP project staff actively manages the portal as a tool of the larger faculty-support and teaching improvement project.

- Ministry staff was initially skeptical of the portal as a useful resource. However, with positive feedback from both HEP staff and from faculty participants, the Ministry has agreed to absorb and maintain the portal intervention. Transition plans are underway.
- It is unclear if the Ministry yet understands what tasks are involved in maintaining the current network (at either a technical or human level) or if questions of quality and engagement can be maintained.

College Interventions

Each college has a computer lab that provides faculty access to the internet and to the HEP portal (HE/P). HE/P is by far the most extensive field-based implementation of the GLP to date, with programmatic sections and associated tools, as well as spotlights on issues or faculty. Discussion forums are actively engaged. Technical coordinators assist faculty with mechanical difficulties and are the conduit for putting new content into the shared libraries. Trainings are offered in computer basics, use of the internet, and how to use the portal.

- The portal has more than 500 registered users, and as many as 400 faculty have been said to use it. It has an extensive set of resources within and outside of libraries. Traffic to the site is moderate but sustained, and interviews show that faculty are very positive about both using the internet and the portal resources, although in some cases enthusiasm outstrips actual use.
- Labs provide the only practical access to the internet for faculty, especially for women.
- Additional technical training is needed, and there are concerns that students may discover that their teachers don't know as much as they do. More training in evaluating and using materials is needed, as well as guidance on appropriate use and credit for others' work.
- Technical coordinators perform the programmatic function of vetting content from faculty members, but without guidelines or standards.

- ***Rwanda***

GLP was selected by USAID in 2008 to implement the pilot project for the planned Africa Education Commons, a collaborative framework for identifying and marshalling public and private resources to improve educational outcomes. The Rwanda Education Commons (REC) is a standalone project run by local GLP staff within the country, and is working with, but is not part of, the Rwanda Ministry of Education. It is intended to catalyze education assistance and resources in service to improving education capacity in the country, engaging a range of stakeholders including the Government, teachers, administrators, parents and PTAs, teachers' unions, private companies and business groups, and civil society organization. Its immediate tasks are to bring educational stakeholders to a common table, to inventory and assess existing ICT education projects throughout the country and help identify needs and gaps, and to structure partnerships to solve address current and future needs. The Commons will also coordinate partner contributions using collaborative tools (including a portal), and will facilitate production of new materials for teachers (and, eventually, students) while helping to build capacity within the country to develop ICT resources and capabilities. At the time of the site visit, the Rwanda project was only about six months into a planned four-year implementation.

Management, Structures, and Stakeholder Network Formation

GLP has its own staff in place in the form of the Commons, embedded within (but not strictly of) the Ministry of Education. Staff performs some specific roles for the Ministry (inventory and assessing ICT projects, gate-keeping of ICT-related potential public or private partners, coordinating development of learning materials for use within colleges of education and teacher resource centers).

- REC staff are in a uniquely powerful position to guide the development of collaborative mechanisms, both within and without a virtual (portal) space on behalf of education stakeholders, especially the Ministry.
- REC staff have already held multiple stakeholder meetings and even a “mini-conference” of more than 150 high-level participants, showing strong progress in partnership-building activities.

Teacher Baseline Issues

The Rwandan educational system, especially its teachers, is under stress from multiple policy decisions, including a rapid transition to English as the language of instruction, expansion of basic/free education to Grade 9, changing qualifications and teaching requirements for teachers, and growing student enrollment. In addition, the Government has set forth plans to rapidly move the country out of poverty, with an incumbent huge burden on the education system, and has said it wants the country to be a regional leader in technology.

- Teacher skills, and even literacy and numeracy, are judged to be low, especially in rural areas (most of the country). Rapid advances in educational outcomes will be difficult without higher-quality teaching.
- Teachers, especially in primary grades, are increasingly teaching double shifts, pushing all in-service trainings and similar to weekends or during their holidays. Pay remains low, with possible teacher retention consequences. Can tools and interventions be introduced to help teachers improve without adding even more pressures upon them in terms of training time and similar requirements?

Virtual space/portal development

REC will work with a technical group from the *Rwanda Development Gateway* (RDG) to develop the first portal instance by end-2009. This portal will form a major avenue for collaborative activities and resource delivery.

- RDG staff are very technically proficient and eager to learn new skills and platforms. However, given the current expertise available, GLP Washington and the REC may wish to explore a range of possible tools rather than decide up-front to use one sort of platform. In addition, the RDG and counterparts at the National University of Rwanda have strong experience in employing technologies such as GIS, providing an opportunity for experimenting with a richer set of tools than has usually been employed on GLP platforms.
- GLP is working with international technical partners like Cisco, Oracle, and Google on first-stage development of a platform that might serve multiple Commons countries. The GLP has the opportunity to involve groups like the RDG in cross-experience sharing and capacity building.
- REC has the opportunity to begin experimenting with stakeholder involvement in portal design (and expectations management) by structuring pilot activities around the existing REC portal, set up as a demonstration site.

ICT Resources and Capacity Building

REC is working through *Mindset Network* to develop teacher learning modules in math, science, and English. Mindset will also work with local partners like the National Curriculum Development Center so that module development skills are transferred.

- Mindset has set forth an inclusive, detailed development and training plan. Mindset staff have internalized lessons learned from its Kenya resource-development experience, with emphasis on beneficiary learner involvement, localization and skills transfer.
- Rwanda counterparts are enthusiastic about the development process. The Kenya experience suggests intensive and sustained interaction between Mindset and (e.g.) the NCDC will be needed to transfer skills and develop local capacity.

● ***USAID-sponsored Education Strategy Online Discussions***

In early 2009 USAID invited more than 1000 education-sector stakeholders from around the world to participate in on-line discussions about a vision for USAID's education strategy, using the GLP portal as a virtual discussion platform. About 600 participants logged onto the forums during the month-long discussion period, downloading and reading materials, posting discussion topics or responding to others' discussion topics. This was the largest such online discussion forum that USAID had engaged in via the GLP. Input was sought on a variety of strategy issues, at different times during the month, and moderators were assigned to help foster the communication process. GLP provided assistance to the contractor who was managing the discussion for USAID. USAID staff are expected to use insights gathered through the forums to inform the education strategy development process.

GLP as Platform for Discussions

Participants were queried on use of the GLP as an effective platform, including mechanical issues that helped or hindered participation.

- Most respondents declared use of the portal a success (conveniently bridges time and distance; includes voices from developing countries not usually included; all comments and documents in one place), and two-third said they would recommend using the portal in the future for similar discussions.
- Mechanics of logging in, navigation and posting presented few difficulties for most respondents, but about a third said they had significant difficulties, which colored the entire experience for them.
- The visual environment was judged poor, and respondents urged that visual cues and devices could help aid navigation and mental organization of the materials.

Utility of Online Discussions

Participants were queried about the utility of online forums for stimulating quality discussion and bringing a variety of voices to the table.

- The majority of respondents found the format valid, although a number of people said that additional modes (phone, email, meetings) should also be used to accommodate various work styles.
- Most said the time flexibility afforded by the platform was a plus, though others said the experience lacked immediacy or the stimulation of a real-time (even if virtual) discussion.
- The conversations were dominated by US voices, and some from developing countries said the process could be made more inclusive. The English-only capability was questioned, and the question of how to bring in voices that don't have good internet connections or tech experience was raised.
- Respondents said more focused moderation was needed to keep threads shorter and on-topic.

- ***Technical Analyses and Coaching Workshops***

Follow-on technical analyses from the larger Phase I efforts focused on re-examining traffic patterns to discern patterns within GLP implementation types and to make recommendations on how site back-end organization could make future analysis easier. Traffic analysis revealed few new results: For most non-project sites (e.g., archives or issue-centered communities), traffic tended to peak quickly after launch then rapidly drop as the community user base dwindled. This pattern tends to support general findings, as explored later, that online communities require much more sustained human stewardship than unfunded community sites can be provided. The traffic analysis report is found in Appendix Volume II.

As follow-up to Phase I technical assessments of the GLP platform and sites, Sonjara, Inc., a subcontractor under this evaluation with long history with the GLP, provided visioning workshops and other on-site assistance in helping GLP to reimagine how its central GLP.net site could be restructured and revised to better serve its intended audiences. As this report is being prepared, GLP is readying a new version of GLP.net intended to be easier to navigate, more visually pleasing, and organized to more clearly serve its various audiences. Sonjara also worked with the GLP to revise its Mission statement to better reflect its primary role as a provider of collaboration and communication services, rather than as a purely technical shop. (This changed role has also made more acute issues of confusion around the name "Global Learning Portal." Should the GLP organization find a name less directly related to the idea of an online portal?)

Sonjara's technical analyses, workshop resources and summary reports of the work are included within Appendix Volume II to this report.⁸

⁸ See Appendix Volume II, specific to GLP, for these detailed reports.

FINDINGS

The primary findings from all field studies, the site reviews and discussions, and traffic analyses are the following:

A. What results and accomplishments have been achieved?

Significant achievements have been made – when having a chance to be properly introduced, the GLP generates enthusiasm around new opportunities for discovering helpful information as well as connecting and sharing with peers. Stakeholders in developing countries can make use of the Portal, and can recognize and realize tangible benefits from it. These achievements need to be built upon to provide a sustainable action strategy for realizing the promise of the GLP. These include widening the scope of focus beyond the perimeters of the cyber-Portal to include what is required to enhance community support of it; and enhancements to the site to incorporate more modes of collaboration, in ways that accommodate constrained connection speeds.

B. Shortcomings or challenges to date and how have they been addressed

Stakeholders are positive about the need for and potential of a GLP approach that promotes sharing of ideas and resources. The on-the-ground, everyday stakeholder support for portal-enabled networks, however, is fragile and requires significant attention from GLP staff or its operational partners focused on helping participants and institutional "owners" grasp, at a nuts and bolts level, how to use such portals, what tangible results can be expected, and what it takes to realize them. This necessary support structure creates a significant resource challenge. However, meeting this challenge may be crucial both to sustainability and to realizing the potential benefits from the collaboration activities themselves. Participants and 'owners' expect quick and tangible results; sustainability may hinge on their recognition of what these results should look like, and that longer-term benefits flow from the collaborative process itself. Stakeholders need to have a clear idea what to expect, what effective use of the portal does for their work progress and for them, and how to build on these results on behalf of development.

C. Milestones and outcomes that can be built on

GLP has achieved some significant successes, and can build on what it has to enhance acceptance and ability to use the Portal for fostering educational capacity building and development.

D. What are the recommendations for strengthening the use and utility of these assets by diverse audiences?

GLP is moving as we write to make changes and incorporate some of the suggestions made. Recommendations for site improvement and for how to structure implementation to further support users are provided as part of this report, and in the sub-study reports included as appendices.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A variety of achievements have been discussed in brief throughout the first part of this report. However as we discuss the findings, it seemed important to describe in more detail the kinds of

activities that have marked the evolution of the GLP. We move from that discussion to summary responses to the initial questions posed with the evaluation; and then, at greater length, to the recommendations we would make toward building the capacity of the GLP to realize the large objectives set for it.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The following sections describe the types of projects and initiatives the GLP has engaged in to date, broken out roughly by type. This description is based on project documents, conversations with staff from GLP, USAID, and other organizations, and review of the GLP website. It is on these that the overall response to the first question is based, but it is not meant to be an exhaustive inventory of GLP efforts.

- *GLP Online Communities*⁹

During its first phase, the GLP worked with educational groups, projects or individuals interested in topical areas of education to establish on-line virtual spaces, archives or libraries and networks for sharing information and bridging distances via the internet. These projects are broadly known as Online Communities (OCs) and evolved out of the original purpose of linking teachers worldwide in a resource-sharing network. From 2004 the number of OCs on the site grew to 107m with 1,121 active members from over 80 countries. (See the GLP Project matrix, presented in the Interim Report. More recent prominent examples include **Escuelas Activas**, a bi-lingual practice for teachers mostly in Latin America and the **Echoes Schools** community to develop teacher resources and teacher exchange in Ghana and North Carolina. The GLP is now moving away from creating and supporting such virtual communities because their success depends on significant training and support resources that most communities have not financially contributed toward.

- *Project or Program Information Preservation*

The GLP also seeks to help projects preserve important information and lessons learned by providing an open space for document archiving. This archiving and preservation function is implicit in most GLP implementations but is explicit in projects like **PEAKS**, a now-closed teacher-training project in Central Asian countries. Similarly, project and issue documents for USAID programmatic areas such as the now-closed **EQUATE** project (focused on women in development and gender equality issues) are preserved via the GLP.

- *GLP-Supported In-Country Projects*

Although some Communities of Practice are still active and new ones are created occasionally, the GLP is now predominantly focusing their efforts on bigger, more sustainable portal applications and partnerships for project on the country level and with real practical implications. Such newer GLP projects include:

- Afghanistan Higher Education Project (HEP), Afghanistan - Begun in 2007, the GLP created the Higher Education Portal to support the Afghanistan Higher Education Project for teacher training faculties. It features online discussions, a content library in Dari and

⁹ Alternatively referred to as “Communities of Practice”

English, home pages for teaching faculties, and information about national education activities.

- Educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP2), Zambia - Working with the EQUIP2 project, the GLP established a project in 2007 to link faculties at 14 colleges of education throughout the country. The initiative has provided infrastructure and connectivity in five colleges and also created provided the Ministry of Education and local donor representatives with a secure online space for document exchange and message boards. Additional virtual spaces were created for community schools and the teacher's union. A "Project Tracker" was also created for the Ministry, donors, and relevant NGOs to enter and inventory education projects from around the country.
- Rwanda Education Commons (REC) - GLP signed a MOU with the Rwanda Ministry of Education in January 2009 that established a planned four-year, \$4.8 million cooperation framework to develop and implement the Rwanda Education Commons (REC) to bring together public and private stakeholders in partnerships to develop and deploy ICT resources for education. An associated MOU with Mindset Network for content development was signed in February 2009. Note that this project is a direct GLP initiative, with in-place Rwandan staff, in contrast to other field project initiatives that work through implementing partners. The REC is the pilot for the broader Africa Education Commons.
- Palestinian Youth Portal (PYP) - Working with the USAID/West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sports and the U.S.-Palestinian Partnership, GLP is implementing a portal to link and support the activities of Youth Development Resource Centers and their affiliated youth clubs in the West Bank. (The evaluation did not examine this project.)

- *Portal Support Projects*

GLP works with other development groups to establish platform and provide technical support. These projects use the GLP platform but otherwise operate independent of any GLP programmatic objectives and may not directly or solely address education issues. Examples of these funded partnerships or mechanisms include **Afterschool.org**, the **Women in Law Program (WILpower)**, **NGOConnect**, and **NPI-Connect**.

- *Non-Project Partnerships*

As part of its efforts to create links with established international education partners and to build support for supported portal implementations outside of the USAID sphere, the GLP has signed MOUs with organizations such as Education International (a teacher union umbrella group), UNESCO, tech firms like Oracle and Sun, the current port platform developer, (Liferay), the Hewlett Foundation, and content development or delivery groups like Widernet and (now operational) Mindset Network. While UNESCO and EI partnerships have produced few results, GLP is actively working with tech groups to explore a robust platform for implementing the Africa Education Commons and with Mindset on learning materials development.

- *Online Forums for Policy Discussions*

The GLP works with USAID and its partners, and with groups like the World Bank’s FTI Secretariat, to set up discussion platforms that provide a time zone- and distance-independent method for invited participants to weigh in on topics of interest. These discussions are usually time-limited (across a number of days) and allow participants to log on to the site, download or read documents and comments by others, and post replies, commentary, or additional documents. This report includes a closer look at participant reaction to a series of discussions held on Education Strategy in early 2009. See Appendix C in Volume II.

- *Platform and Technology*

In May 2007, the GLP signed an MOU with Liferay and migrated its then-current online communities to a new Liferay installation. Liferay provides a stable, structured portal environment with modules for content management, forums, calendars, document libraries, and other communications tools. The portal supports multiple languages, including Russian, Dari, and Arabic, and can be extended through module development. Previous platform technologies were either custom builds or based on technologies that proved unwieldy or inappropriate for GLP-type uses. Further information on platforms can be found in the Phase I evaluations documents included as appendices to this report.

- *Funding and sustainability*

The GLP was set up to be a partnership supported through buy-in mechanisms and was not intended to have long-term primary funding through USAID. Early efforts to establish funding partnerships for virtual communities proved problematic, and the GLP agreement with USAID was reformulated as a Leader with Associates structure to allow specific field projects to “buy into” the GLP to add portal support to their projects. This mechanism has made it much easier for GLP to gain additional income from operations, with the lion’s share coming from other AED-run field projects, USAID Missions, or (as with Rwanda) USAID Regional and Washington initiatives. In addition, the GLP has received support from the Hewlett Foundation, the State Department (via field projects and related partnerships) and the U.S. Department of Education. GLP staff also report that they have hired a business development officer. A non-exhaustive table of support examples is presented in the table below. Amounts are from GLP reports and other documents and are approximate.

Table: Examples of GLP Leveraged Support

Description	Amount US\$
Various	375,000
Equip2 Teacher Support Zambia (USAID EGAT/ED + Mission) *	500,000*
William & Flora Hewlett Foundation (Grant)	300,000
Women in Law Project (WILpower) (State Dept. MEPI)	140,000
Staff time/ afterschool.org/Africa Education Commons	190,000
Afghanistan Higher Education Project (HEP) (USAID/Afghanistan)	1,500,000
Student Fees/Barriers to Education Online Discussion (World Bank/FTI)	18,000
Participation Education & Knowledge Strengthening (PEAKS) Library in Russian and English (USAID/CAR)	18,000
Learning Modules in Arabic (Department of Education)	26,000
Palestinian Youth Portal (US-Palestinian Partnership)	300,000
Rwanda Education Commons	2,500,000

*Reported as \$400,000 by EQUIP2

These are substantial achievements, and the discussion that follows takes these achievements, also referenced in the first evaluation issue (A), for granted, and focuses on what they – and the observations we have made regarding them – mean for future activities.

SHORTCOMINGS AND MILESTONES (B) AND (C).

The phrasing of the second evaluation issue (B) in terms of shortcomings or problems seems unfortunate, and we believe it is less relevant to this evaluation, given the positive response of an overwhelming majority of users, than focusing on what is needed to strengthen the GLP in its next steps. This is consistent with the guidance we were given – to look at possibilities for the future – and with the role of this evaluation stated as a formative, interim evaluation.

To these ends, then, the following discussion focuses on objectives for focus or consideration by GLP, given what we have found about the achievements and observed as part of our work on the evaluation.

In particular, within this framework, we have seen four specific areas on which there have been some significant achievements, but which we believe could be built upon to good effect. The intention of these recommendations is to foster recognition that the Portal can be a viable and sustainable process nationally, regionally, and internationally, and that it can serve to bring together stakeholders to catalyze educational development and capacity building. The objectives are to:

- A. Strengthen stakeholder understanding of the purpose and tangible benefits of GLP
- B. Build technical and human capacity specifically oriented to sustainability
- C. Enable blending the portal with others' systems; applying a portal appropriately, and using alternative networking and delivery systems
- D. Expand the portal from a project base to a national network, and beyond

These are discussed in turn in the sections below, with specific recommendations for strategies to achieve them provided at the end of each section.

RECOMMENDATIONS (D)

The above objectives are essentially what we are recommending. We recognize that GLP has been focusing on these to some extent as part of their implementation. However we see some opportunities for making that work yield more tangible, recognizable benefits for stakeholders near term, that we think would enhance medium- and longer- term GLP outcomes. We discuss each of these in turn; provide what we have understood about them from the work done; and make recommendations deriving from that work.

Objective A: Strengthen Stakeholder Understanding of the Portal Purpose and Tangible Benefits

As pointed out by several of those interviewed in the field, and already understood by GLP staff, “build it and they will come” is not an easy strategy; for products that are beyond the usual

experience of its audience, it probably is never a workable strategy. As all of the stakeholders we talked with said, participants need to be involved early in weaving a web of connections that can be built on over time. Based on conversations about this, we found:

1. Portals need to have a coherent purpose with identifiable and visible benefits to participants.
2. Portals require stewardship by dedicated staff or through a network of enthusiastic champions.
3. Stakeholders need to own the portal.
4. Portals need to provide participants with engaging ways to use the site.

The above four interrelated findings may sound “obvious,” and to some extent they may be perceived as already being done; nevertheless, they were recurrent themes heard in the field. We hope these explorations can help reinforce areas that may need more attention or can bring more “bang” to efforts underway. Below are the observations that informed this objective area, with recommendations for structuring a productive portal environment.

1. Identifiable purpose with visible benefits.

The Zambia and HEP portal implementations show starkly contrasting results, mostly because one is used as a tool within, and integrated as a central part of, an existing project (HEP); the other was implemented as an add-on to a project not coherently related to the purposes for which the portal was set up, and outside any existing project or administrative structure (Zambia). It is not that the Portal would have been of any less use to Zambia – one can still hear reverberations of excitement about the concept in talking to local college staff. We think rather that there was no pathway to building Ministry understanding for the portal, and no human networks between colleges were forged as the portal was introduced. With HEP, an external administrative structure already existed to help support faculty in exploring use of the portal; in addition, by the time the Ministry was approached about integrating the portal into its work, Ministry staff had already heard from faculty and administrators that HE/P¹⁰ was doing something good for them; they could also see that teachers were using it.

Zambia was more a case of “build it and they will come.” HE/P more closely exemplifies “build it, show it, make the benefits palpable, and people will at least want to know more about it.” Still, even with HE/P, project staff express some concern that “maybe this won’t evolve into something useful...,” and there is some worry about whether or how the portal tool and resources will be able to retain integrity once the external HEP project struts are absorbed into the Ministry. Nevertheless, there are indicators of growing use and clear signals from faculty indicating they find worth in the portal as both shared resource and as gateway to the internet proper, which gives optimism¹¹.

¹⁰ For this report, we use HE/P as the convention to signify the Higher Education Portal, as distinct from the Higher Education Project that it serves.

¹¹ It is surely not possible that all concern can be avoided. Still, we think the suggestions might strengthen outcomes.

Without a significant restart, the same doesn't hold for Zambia. While it is conceivable that a portal could thrive as a network or virtual organization outside of a formal project structure, participants would need a guided process for building a durable framework. As a start, initial benefits would need to be identified and acknowledged, along with an understanding of how further benefits would evolve through use and experimentation.

In the case of Zambia, because the implementing project (Equip2) did not have a teacher training/direct support focus, and consequently had no field-level structures that would make the portal implementation an easy fit, it was difficult to build on the inputs provided at each college. GLP and Equip2 provided direct and indirect training, as well as infrastructure and connectivity for some colleges, all of which was highly appreciated; still, these efforts were not enough. It was clear that while participants could see how networking and resource-sharing within and across colleges could be beneficial, there were no models, mechanisms, or procedures to exercise the network, with the result that communication among colleges was abandoned before it could even begin. At the two colleges visited in May 2009, the GLP portal was already a hazy memory, at best.

We believe this could be instructive for the Rwanda Education Commons. REC is faced with a very tough task as it builds and deploys portal tools¹² to connect its various stakeholders – i.e., cultivating a community of support, understanding, and engagement among the eventual intended users. While the REC program has specific near-term objectives, one of which is developing a portal with other partners, the concept of using a portal to help stakeholders communicate is described in fairly generic ways like “sharing information and resources” or “holding discussions.” This is understandable given the early state of the project and that formal portal implementation is months out. However, as development plans evolve the GLP will need to explore much more tangible, attainable near-term results with stakeholders within the Ministry, the teacher-training and teacher corps, and with contributing partners.

The GLP staff in both Washington and Kigali will need to create governance and management structures to formalize how the portal functions, the role of participants, and an agreed-upon and monitored set of benefits or desirable outcomes. Additionally, and very importantly, they will need to set priorities about what kind of benefits the Portal will first be able to demonstrate, focusing first on teacher, teacher trainers and faculty, the Teacher Service Commission, and Ministry staff and its various interested arms. In the longer term, as more and more stakeholders are involved, articulating a clear pathway for the REC development in terms the intended users can visualize, and marking that progress, may make the pathway for realizing the goals of the REC smoother.

In a very different context, the GLP is being used to facilitate USAID policy discussions on an as-needed basis. Limited interviews with USAID staff during Phase I of the evaluation elicited few positives about previous such uses. Views of the capability from partner clients outside of USAID likewise revealed a lukewarm or hit-and-miss reaction to GLP-enabled discussions. However, reaction from large-scale discussions held in early 2009 (Education

¹² The evaluation team is aware that portal creation and deployment is not the primary purpose of the GLP/REC. However, a portal or similar networking platform is a significant deliverable in the first workplan and is seen both as a primary collaboration mechanism and as a delivery vehicle for resources developed or gathered through Commons initiatives and efforts.

Strategy) showed that participants found real benefits in the concept and were generally happy with the GLP implementation. This demonstrated benefit led about 2/3 of those who commented about the experience to say they would recommend using the GLP again, a significant attitudinal change.

1. Enhance Portal Stewardship Capacity

The HE/P portal has management-level staff to encourage use, guide training, and help structure and organize resources. The portal also has “technical coordinators” on hand to help faculty participants with specific questions or problems; in addition, project staff intend to engage returned faculty from US-based masters programs to act as human networking champions – not just for the physical Portal, but of the way materials can be used to improve teaching and of how discussions can happen across institutions (via the Portal) to expand and enhance learning and strengthen educational capacity.

In Zambia, Equip2 had early and correctly identified the need for a GLP coordinator, and had arranged for a knowledgeable and willing faculty member to be moved into a central role at the Ministry. Unfortunately, the Ministry itself never approved the position, leaving an organizational void. Champions at each institution were not initially networked, and no tools or processes for sustaining such a network exist.

For USAID internal needs, GLP staff respond quickly to calls for assistance and have provided trainings and briefings as requested. For the growing number of project/portal implementations, however, the GLP is not organizationally staffed to provide ongoing shepherding and cultivation of the resources it introduces for a distributed user base. Somewhere within local resources the stewardship function must be cultivated, ideally through participants themselves, through project owners (usually temporary), or through durable institutions like Ministries permanent associations such as teachers’ unions.

There are no structured mechanisms on the site to provide feedback from users about what they would suggest for improvement; nor have there been to our knowledge formal queries issued to request feedback from users. GLP is now planning usability testing related to the HE/P users, and it might be a good practice to hold periodic ‘interest group’ meetings with users to share what it has learned, good and bad, so that users can provide input and the GLP can more easily build on successes.

Stewardship can be, in part, through the site itself; but it needs a human counterpart, which may recede over time, as need allows, but probably will not disappear. Specifically the human counterpart is to help build and reinforce a culture of participatory ownership that sees value in bettering the portal tool to support higher-quality teaching and better outcomes. A steward can:

- *Engage the stakeholders to become involved – Visualize benefits of use with staff and stakeholders, how these could be/are realized, and could be enhanced; hold virtual meetings related to issues that could be addressed in part through the Portal, etc. Provide intra- and inter-institution exercises to get people using the resource, and solicit structured feedback from participants.*
- *Demonstrate worth – Show the capacity built and changes leveraged in part through the Portal, perhaps as news items or through quarterly bulletins; encourage feedback or*

additional information-gathering through knowledgeable participant stakeholders (“contact X to find out more or to get involved”); show usage statistics, possibly disaggregated by user group.

- *Create immediate success through start-up – Make start-up resources more comprehensive and organized into useful categories; provide links to outside useful (or even fun) sites and resources; provide examples and exercises to jump start practical use.*
- *Identify “enthusiastic champions” from among participants and link them within and across institutions. Give them specific, special roles to play in helping other participants, experimenting with new resources, or helping to solicit feedback. Prominently spotlight the role of champions for other participants to see.*
- *Engage the user – Provide feedback mechanisms on the site that are followed up locally; provide tools that allow participants to track the resources they use and what they have done with them; give participants tools practical and creative uses: wikis, or page-creation/mini-site templates*
- *Support existing users with “beyond the basics” – Provide engaging examples of collaborative processes, what’s required to make them really useful, and how to go about it; introduce new tools and provide tutorials, guides, and focused examples of how to use them*
- *Provide ways of building community – Spotlight successes on both local portals and on GLP.net; lead discussion groups and include outside guests; provide training and guidance to local moderators*

2. *Internalize Portal Ownership*

Related to both finding value and stewardship, who owns the initiative is critical in the long run.

The different implementations of GLP showed different ownership models, and the issues that might come along with them. In Zambia, the Ministry was offered ownership and eventually rejected it. In Afghanistan, the Ministry at first dismissed the Portal as a glorified virtual library, but because of subsequent demonstrated value from faculty have actually signed an agreement to take it on (though they may not be totally secure in what the portal “is” or what they will do with it).

USAID already “owns” the Portal in some senses, but its staff may not have felt all that comfortable in understanding it or what it could do for them, or in how to engage with GLP. So, while the organization owned it, the staff, effectively, did not. This goes along with others’ statements that stakeholders at each level need to be introduced to the portal or trained and brought along in understanding how the system works – the path already underway for HE/P.

Another ownership difficulty arises from control of the infrastructure on which a portal sits. In the global North countries, who owns the server, and “where” it is are questions asked more in the context of ISP capacity to maintain security, or its financial robustness, or its promise of a seamless, always-available online environment. For global South countries, however, the issues of ownership may not be so abstract. If the GLP in Washington houses the data and controls the servers and platform, and if that infrastructure is funded primarily by

the US Government, can a Ministry or school or teacher association in Africa or Asia really say they own a portal network and the information on it? This was brought up as a real concern in the Zambia context and may have contributed to the Zambian Ministry's eventual demurrals on staffing the project within the Ministry. If the answer is to physically install an instance of the portal software on servers in Rwanda, is there institutional capacity to fund, maintain, and upgrade the implementation? The GLP is cognizant of these issues but may not be addressing in a systematic way that actively engages the ultimate controlling stakeholders.

Another ownership/value issue concerns long-term quality of resources and how durable institutions (such as a Ministry) may view maintenance and support if a previously respected portal resource should begin to degrade. There are real concerns about such issues for Afghanistan, where the Ministry is sensitive to criticism. While the portal currently is seen as a high-quality and growing resource, soon the portal will be absorbed into Ministry structures. If the Ministry is not prepared to support the portal with enthusiasm and attention, and if college and university faculty cannot effectively police themselves in maintaining high standards around use of the portal and the resources that flow into it, there is a real threat that the Ministry might back away from the venture rather than risk criticism, even (or perhaps especially) if those weaknesses are a product of their own weaker stewardship. In such case the entire edifice could disappear very quickly.

To this end, the following are recommended:

- Reinforce that the [Ministry/stakeholder group] is the ultimate owner of the tool employed to increase *their* educational development and capacity. Explore the expected benefits of the initiative to reinforce why country ownership is desirable.
- Help the [Ministry] plan for internalization of the project and explore the costs, staffing, and expertise necessary to sustain it. Clearly describe the kinds of assistance available from the GLP (or its implementing partner), how long the assistance will be available, and what other resources can be called upon.
- Work with the [Ministry] to develop a transition plan and explore how the portal project may evolve as GLP/partner staff disengage over time. Include risk scenarios associated with content quality and control issues, and strategies and projected resources for mitigation. Develop monitoring and evaluation strategies to assure that sufficient value continues from the project to make ownership desirable.
- Ask the Ministry to commit real resources well before final transition in terms of direct staff involvement and other resources (pointing to sustainability).

HE/P is making real progress in its transition activities, moving into the internalization stage, and is beginning to address these issues with the Ministry. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to imagine how the wheels could fall off a portal project once it is outside the control of a dedicated project. GLP would be wise to follow the transition developments closely, both to offer timely assistance and to absorb lessons.

Certain components of the REC will be institutionalized through capacity-building both within the Ministry and in associated government agencies such as the National Curriculum Development Center. The issue of ownership is also complicated by the idea of the Commons itself. Is the long-term Commons an organization itself? A framework or association of

organizations? Will it continue ownership of the means of collaboration (one example being the portal) or will the Ministry or another body take operational control? These issues should be addressed as early as possible so that the idea of internalizing ownership can begin. The alternative is that every organization may think of the long-term ownership and stewardship as “someone else’s problem.”

3. *Improve Portal tools for engaging users in an active “community of learning”*

A common criticism among portal users and participants is that the toolset is limited and the overall environment is not as stimulating as it could be. As part of Phase II activities, the GLP team worked with coach Siobhan Green to examine this issue through the GLP.net home page and to see how that site addresses users, promotes or markets adoption of the portal, what resources that could be common to a variety of portal projects could be presented, and what new tools or capabilities could be enabled or developed to improve the user experience. A description of the workshops and outcomes is found as Appendix B, in Appendix Volume II of this report.

In addition, conversations with field participants, online community managers, and site analysts pointed to issues applicable to portal use in collaborative environments.

GLP portals are usually described as environments for collaboration, resource-sharing, and discussion. The current capabilities to carry out these activities are fairly constant among current installations and look generally like this, with HE/P used as the most rich example:

- A home page and one or more subject-area pages can be established by a site administrator in Washington or in-country, depending upon how the administrative structure has been set up. In HEP we see this functioning reasonably well, with many sections and sub-sections created to capture content by rubric. This also includes profiles of certain faculty or other “spotlighting” uses, glossaries, translation tools, and picture galleries. This structure and content are thus controlled by a managing group (project staff), with input from faculty participants and implemented by a site administrator.
- A resource library set up by project staff or Washington administrators. In HEP faculty may contribute to the library but must go through a technical coordinator. (This is via a policy decision, not a technical limitation.) Faculty may search the library and download and upload documents. These resources are presented by category, as a list of folders and any subfolders.
- Threaded discussions and similar forums are also available for posting issues and questions. In the case of HEP, registered participants may post new threads within a category or reply to current threads. They can also subscribe to a category to be notified when new postings appear. Categories are controlled by the site administrator and the management staff.

From the perspective of the participant, while there can be ample opportunity to find and read content, beyond uploading a document or making an occasional comment on a discussion thread, there is actually very little to do. If one objective is for participant faculty to develop a culture of learning based on shared ideas, experimentation, and creative reuse, the portal could be providing many more opportunities for active involvement. Further, if most of the content

and how it is presented is perceived as having come from some outside controlling authority (not necessarily a bad thing, depending on the context), participatory “ownership” of the portal will be largely absent.

The following questions help to point toward a more immersive and involving experience:

a. Can participants see themselves in the tool?

Participants need ways to use the tool that make them feel like active and valued participants in the collaboration. In Zambia both faculty and administrators immediately expressed that they would like to present content as web pages or similar, effectively to have more flexibility in how content is presented.

b. Do they have control over the environment, and do they have outlet for self-expression?

Participant profiles with pictures, descriptions of experience, and interest areas are a starting point for personalizing and customizing the environment. Giving participants their own content or interest pages is a second step.

c. How easy is it to find information in the portal? What are other people interested in?

Comprehensive and easy-to-use search tools are a basic of any content-rich environment. Search options should include libraries, page-based content, and participant profiles.

d. Are there ways for participants to organize themselves by interest area and to communicate in more targeted ways?

Social networking tools provide a way re-centering a community experience around the individual. Develop methods for individuals to create interest or issue groups themselves and to then invite others to join. Let groups create their own content pages and advertise themselves by displaying membership lists or photo galleries. Enable chat or messaging tools that allow private conversations among portal members or messages delivered to groups. Such tools can also be used effectively during online policy discussions such as Ed Strategy.

e. Are there models and examples that they can see and build upon?

A variety of content type examples should be available for participants to use, stimulating new ideas and experimentation. Stakeholders should be encouraged to share new examples of work or creative reuse of other’s work. For more complicated forms and tools, guided examples or tutorials should be available. Provide trainings or recruit competent participants who have mastered tools to lead their peers in new learning.

f. How do people know what’s a good resource, and do they have opportunities for commenting or rating?

Providing mechanisms to provide immediate commentary about resources gives participants a sense of control and ownership, helps other participants see what their peers have found interesting, and effectively separates weak from strong content, allowing for unused material to be tossed out or reworked into more usable form. Use ratings, content

tagging, and commenting. Highly rated content can be spotlighted on a project home page or on project-bridging sites like GLP.net.

- g. Are there site performance speed or mechanical issues that may affect the user experience, especially in a lower-bandwidth environment?*

Portal users in both US/western and field-based environments report that portal speed is not a serious consideration for use. Even so, site analysis reveals that the current site structure uses a significant bandwidth for a relatively limited amount of content. If the GLP implements additional tools and capabilities, it will need to experiment and test tools to assure that there are not significant performance hits.

For usability purposes, the GLP should work with and observe participants as they use a portal implementation to discover what operational or navigational difficulties they may have.

Objective B: Build technical capacity specifically oriented toward sustainability

Training issues have been covered to a great degree in earlier sections about building value, ownership, and stewardship. Additional observations below have been made in the context of training on technical issues, though findings are applicable beyond merely technical realms.

- 1. Trainers need to be skilled not only in technology, but also in working with users at different levels.*

In Afghanistan, as we imagine and have experienced in other settings, technical training issues were found to be a delicate subject. Frequently trainers who were adept with technology, were not skilled ‘teachers’, and their students who were older and more novice level for technology suffered. This was not just true for the HE/P, but also for other projects providing training in technology. Sometimes trainers felt they had to rush through their allotted syllabus, for example, to make sure ‘it was all covered,’ sometimes running over the students on the train. Additionally, culturally it was considered unacceptable for students to see that their teachers might be struggling with technical issues surrounding computer or internet use. This idea carried over even to peer groups by age. Suggested mechanisms for smoothing out knowledge and skill levels included mandating basic computer training for all faculty regardless of ability and to provide additional assistance in a secure environment away from the eyes of students; this latter was being done.

It was significantly noted that trainers need to have more than just technical skills. They need to have experience in training and learning theory so that they can provide blended examples for different learning styles and can look for proper cues from participants that learning is happening.

- 2. Training, including technical training, needs to be framed as part of the community-building and collaborative process, not as one-off or mere technical introductions to a subject*

Given that GLP operates in the context of collaboration and in environments in which participants are often geographically separated, training activities can be seen through the

frame of building collaborative links rather than as one-off preparatory activities. The Zambia project is instructive here.

Colleges were given initial trainings in developing technology plans, in basic computer use, in using the internet and the portal, and in maintaining internal networks and connections. At the two colleges visited, one college had internalized the lessons, creating a faculty management committee, constructing budgets, and implementing cost-recovery plans. The system was working, even though the college was not actually using the Portal for collaboration. At a second college, the facilities were slowly falling apart, sustainability plans were not in place, and no one even seemed aware of the portal. One college was sorely in need of additional training and assistance, and one was well placed to provide it, but no mechanisms or agents were in place to call for help or respond.

The idea of collaborative sharing across institutions had not been introduced in a practical fashion, and peer-to-peer training and assistance are the kind of first-line collaboration that both relieves pressure on the implementing partner, strengthens the objectives of collaboration, and builds sustainability. The identification of champions, as discussed in the first evaluation question above, finds practical application here.

3. *Monitoring tools and feedback procedures are critical to uncovering strengths and weaknesses; strengthening or corrective action resources should be developed and available*

In addition to building a distributed “training” network among participants, the GLP needs to provide practical monitoring tools to help participants and institutions measure progress against training goals. How does an institution know if its maintenance procedures are working; that participant computer skills are sufficient; that a sustainability plan actually leads to sustainability?

The tools also need to point participants and their institutions to resources they can use for self-help, or to peers who have demonstrated expertise in an area. Within a project such resources could be found on a Portal home or resource page. Across projects, GLP.net could highlight successful implementations, provide guidelines for adapting monitoring tools in different circumstances, and advertise project capabilities through success stories. GLP.net should also provide a knowledge base of questions and answers specific to portal implementations as well as links to applicable outside resources.

The larger the network grows, the more beneficial these network effects will be seen.

Objective C: Blend the portal with others systems

In most field environments, a portal will not exist in a void, at least not for long. As developing countries seek to expand a variety of electronic systems, usually in a context of decentralization, portal installations can be deployed strategically to both piggy-back off of other systems or provide alternative delivery vehicles for other efforts. At the same time, deployment has to follow a common-sense path, perhaps gently pushing the technological envelope in appropriate ways (as with the Zambia infrastructure initiatives) but also discovering and using other delivery systems as appropriate.

1. *How can a GLP portal blend with other technical tools and environments*

GLP staff in Washington and in the field should look out for opportunities to leverage opportunities with other (probably Ministry of Education) technical initiatives and expand use of a portal structure to weave together a wider body of stakeholders. An obvious use would be to work with Ministry staff or agents to incorporate input or output mechanisms for a developing EMIS. In all three African countries visited in the field studies, Ministries are pushing data-collection and, eventually, data analysis outside of capitals and into provinces and districts. Portal networks across colleges of education would provide additional points of data entry and, more importantly, open the door to introducing a richer understanding of data and its uses among the teacher and school administration corps. As a significant bonus, the Portal then becomes a tool of real value and significance to a Ministry.

The difficulty in this is to figure out how to carry embedded content within the structures that the portal allows. In Zambia, an initial attempt to integrate a database application (the “Project Tracker”) was deemed too complex and an entirely separate tool was used, never folded into Portal proper. The current GLP platform, Liferay, is considered robust and flexible, and integrating “windows into other systems” or pulling information directly in the portal via API-driven web services should be possible. Delivering on this type of capability will also open the door to many other possibilities and experiments.

Another opportunity related to EMIS would be looking for opportunities to join the GLP’s sister program, the Education Policy and Data Center. In the associated evaluation of that global asset, a major area of exploration involves making EPDC or country EMIS data, training materials, and future analysis and output tools accessible and available to ministry staff at both central and outlying areas, as well as to teachers, school administrators and management committees, and national or local civil society and watchdog groups. The portal could become a delivery platform for such content, with local guidelines or context documents. Again, the portal gains a new set of stakeholders, reinforcing its worth.

2. *Are there infrastructure contexts that are not amenable to an internet-based platform like the GLP, and what strategies would help in deployment?*

The internet infrastructure in much of the developing world, especially Africa, is still very sparse, although availability in capital cities or large town is becoming more common. Unlike cell phones, which have managed to spread almost everywhere despite a lack of electrical infrastructure, the current internet is still highly dependent on an AC power source and, usually, a hardwired phone network, both of which are missing from most of the terrain in sub-Saharan Africa. (Note that no one interviewed had yet developed or used a cell phone-based communications protocol that stood in proxy for an internet-type solution.)

Given this situation, and barring a rapid build-out of G3 cell phone networks and the availability of very affordable smart phones, GLP internet-based tools will need to be applied in contexts where institutional structures already have demonstrated capacity to support the existing infrastructure in a secure environment. The Zambia and HEP Portals are both employed within such institutions, and it is assumed that the unfolding technical plans in Rwanda will similarly be built out where they can be reasonably supported. Deployment is probably easier in areas that have other clients also seeking service, such as government local agencies or businesses.

Portal-type resources may be deployed narrowly to reach a very targeted audience, as with HEP and Zambia, or they might be deployed to reach a wider audience through strategic placement to reach a wide catchment area. In Rwanda, it is expected that a portal will be deployed to support teachers in colleges, in district-level teacher resource centers (to which teachers can travel) and perhaps at “Schools of Excellence” across the country. Though the actual number of internet-enabled facilities might be quite small, initially, attention to placement and accessibility could provide exposure to a great number of beneficiaries. Establishing a strong initial network of facilities (with clear and useful policies and procedures, as well as champions) will also make it possible to expand the network as the country’s infrastructure is built out and costing structures allow.

Sustainability is made more difficult because new internet-enabled initiatives involve both the maintenance and security of perhaps unfamiliar equipment and the addition of sometimes costly connection charges.

For the projects under review, it’s notable that GLP has been deployed in appropriate and realistic contexts; here, difficulties of viability and longevity (Zambia) have more to do with effective maintenance and cost-recovery training and preparedness than with infrastructure qualities.

3. *Where the internet is not feasible or inappropriate, what other networks or delivery mechanisms can be used, and are there working examples available either as models or as potential partners/platforms?*

Given the difficult infrastructure context in most areas of the countries in question, serving stakeholders especially in rural areas requires appropriate modes of delivery. As covered earlier, one electronic format that is widely available is cell phone networks, but no use examples with rich information surfaced during the field work. (This does not mean examples may not exist, and there is ample evidence that cell phone use is being explored.) It may be that within a fairly short timeframe 3G networks and smart phones will become the norm.

Two working and successful examples arose during the studies. Mindset Network will bring expertise gained in South Africa and Kenya to Rwandan teachers through content developed for CDs, DVDs, and computers. Also possible for Rwanda are radio broadcasts and the potential use of a satellite/server system pioneered by Mindset in which content on local servers is updated at night via satellite. (Investigations around satellite use are ongoing.)

For areas with no electricity or access to equipment, Mindset will work with counterparts to produce newspaper supplements to distribute content. It’s notable that the Elimu Yetu [Educational] Coalition in Kenya has worked with a national newspaper there; each Thursday the newspaper produces eight pages of educational content to supplement student learning.

In Zambia, EDC’s QUESTT project reaches a huge pool of students each day through 30-minute radio broadcasts that cover a variety of subjects. The project helps teachers to structure their learning and provides children with a highly interactive method of learning. For areas unreachable by radio, QUESTT distributes its content on iPods and speaker systems powered by solar or foot-powered generators. For technical support it has enlisted the help of Peace Corps volunteers across the country. (Note that such a technical support arrangement might still be applicable to the Zambia College networking initiative.)

Objective D: Expand the Portal from a project base to a national network, and beyond

The Global Learning Portal began as a project to link teachers around the world, an ambitious but unfocused concept. Soon afterward, country or sector-specific initiatives linked smaller groups of teacher or affinity groups, but this approach suffered from a sufficient financial support model. With a revised cooperative agreement with greater flexibility, the GLP has been able to market itself to Missions (Zambia), projects (Afghanistan), and public-private partnerships (Palestinian Youth Portal). The concept of a 'global asset' in these terms is an asset that is attractive, useful and potentially important in specific country locations. It needs to expand, both within countries and across, to make the asset really global, and this is a challenge that is now being addressed in part in the context of the REC.

With the advent of the Africa Education Commons, a new avenue has emerged that is both a larger concept (building a collaborative network of public and private partners to strengthen education) and a model that scales. Per the vision, Commons partnerships will develop within African countries, and over time these individual networks will join together in a cross-border web. The Rwanda Education Commons is the first instance of this model, and through it the GLP has the unique opportunity of applying both its tools and experience in community-building. While the initial activities directly address issues of teacher-readiness, interviews with all stakeholders make it clear that a much broader set of stakeholders, including students around the country, will be inevitably be part of the network.

This is a model which the HE/P could grow into, but it is not yet clear how or if the Ministry (once it has assumed operational control) will broaden use of the tool. It is clear from the interviews that there is an expectation about an expanded stakeholder and participant universe. An internal HEP assessment underway in Afghanistan is expected to look at this issue.

For the Africa Commons, it is early to predict mechanisms that will help a Commons-like structure to unfold, and stakeholder-development issues have been addressed extensively earlier in this report. Conversations in Kenya, however, suggest a promising tactic: in addition to trying to create networks of probable participants and beneficiaries around an idea, one can apply GLP tools to existing, functioning networks and associations challenged by issues of communication and coordination across distances.

The Elimu Yetu Coalition based in Nairobi is the coordinating body for all non-governmental organizations working in education throughout the country and counts more than 250 members. The coalition has no independent projects or initiatives but works solely through working groups composed of representatives from its members. Coordinators for the organization immediately recognized that a GLP portal could be a powerful enabling tool, so long as it was flexible enough to give (non-technical) member organizations easy and flexible mechanisms for distributing information about themselves, share information among working groups, and coordinate activities and information campaigns.

The GLP could explore working with Elimu Yetu as a country-spanning experiment. The potential benefits are numerous: learning how EYC operates as a network without internet-based tools; deploying a platform outside of a project context (but with a functioning organization); exploring the use of new tools by non-technical participants; developing monitoring and feedback mechanisms; and applying lessons learned in Rwanda and other countries. At the same time, working with EYC could be a demonstration project for a Commons-type initiative in Kenya

while building a possible initial cross-border network between Rwanda and Kenya. Happily, even if the initiative does not succeed, EYC's work continues.

In other contexts, such as Afghanistan, expansion of a collaborative network beyond the teacher colleges would help to institutionalize the human network concept while building additional stakeholders into the structure, strengthening it into the future even as the initial project structure is retired. Ministry departments dealing with teacher education or associated efforts are an obvious (and necessary) expansion point, while University participants could be recruited to help strengthen subject-area expertise among faculty and student teachers. As the active network expands it becomes less dependent on any one group. This is a challenging sustainability issue for HEP project managers as they transfer management of the portal tools and project concepts to the Ministry.

Implications for GLP governance, funding, and Mission support

The Global Learning Portal was established to be a “neutral” platform for delivery of collaboration services for teachers and educators worldwide in association with a variety of partners, with the intention that a variety of donors, public and private, would provide support through an Alliance. Its association with AED was intended to be of administrative convenience, with AED as an equal partner alongside other development groups or international organizations.

Although portal services have been purchased from a number of projects or donor-type organizations, most of the significant interventions to date have been funded through USAID, often in association with other AED-led projects. Limited conversations with “official” or potential alliance members have shown only limited interest in supporting portal-based interventions. The GLP needs to be able to demonstrate field successes to gain mindshare among potential partners. In the context of online discussions, the GLP may be able to get more traction given wide and generally positive exposure through the early-2009 Education Strategy talks.

With advent of the Rwanda Education Commons, the GLP has a powerful opportunity to reshape its methods and to build in new avenues of support. Because the Commons is specifically envisioned as a network of public and private partners, the REC's success in implementing this central vision may well determine whether a sea change in support is possible. The GLP continues to actively pursue funded partnerships and has recently increased its staffing capacity for business development.

The evaluation team believes formal governance structures¹³, including whether the GLP should further separate itself from AED or become associated with an agnostic third party organization, are best investigated when the GLP has achieved more durable and recognized successes.

A final area for exploration concerns how the GLP can work more closely with USAID to support Mission strategic objectives and to identify areas for cooperation and collaboration among education (or other development) projects, including ministry programs or projects supported by other bilateral or multilateral donors. The evaluation team feels that Missions are in a unique position to “see all the pieces on the board” and identify appropriate initiatives and partnerships that the GLP could support or join. Increasing communication among USAID-funded projects

¹³ Explored in “Options Paper for GLP Governance Structure” by Schwere, Rob, December 3, 2008

and across education sector players in a country could reduce duplication of effort, help spread information on what's working (or not), and potentially increase outside support for GLP collaboration and communication services.

CONCLUSIONS

The Global Learning Portal has entered a promising new phase, identifying and bringing together partners to solve problems in education, and providing communications tools that help resources be employed efficiently. The GLP may also be gaining greater capability as a policy-level resource for USAID and its partners.

GLP's previous and current efforts are instructive about what works and what does not, and why, and point to a number of areas for special attention as the Rwanda Education Commons, the coming Uganda Commons, and other future field efforts unfold:

- Stakeholders need to see the reasons for, and objectives and benefits of, being part of a network.
- Tools (like portals) employed to help these networks thrive – through communication and resource-sharing – need to let participants contribute in interesting and rewarding ways. A robust and easy-to-use toolset should encourage creative ways for getting information up and noticed while helping participants forge links.
- Stewardship is critical (via staff from an associated project or from within the network itself). Networks and enabling tools need support.
- Enthusiastic champions should be identified early and given useful, specific activities to jump-start use of portals or similar tools. Across distance or between organizations, champions can spread ideas about what works and what doesn't, and can act as evangelizers.
- Monitoring tools and feedback mechanisms need to be part of every effort so that problems are identified and addressed. Monitoring can also reveal strengths in individuals and organizations that can be employed to help peers.
- Training requirements may be broader and deeper than currently recognized.
- Ownership by beneficiary stakeholders is essential to sustainability. Where a Ministry or similar institution will take a management and financial-support role, Ministry staff should be drawn into the beneficiary participant pool as early as possible to demonstrate value.
- GLP.net should provide examples of content; tutorials and guides on content adaptation or creation techniques; practical advice and material guidance on maintenance, cost-recovery, and budgeting issues around computer labs and connectivity; information and practical guides on collaborative processes and methods; spotlights on network successes in the field; and up-front information on what has and hasn't worked in field implementations.

As the scope of GLP activities and objectives expand, matching staff expertise and capacity with project needs will become increasingly difficult. The GLP will have to conduct periodic "capabilities" audits to make sure staff are well matched to the challenges of the projects. It is also probable that the GLP will increasingly look to local-level expertise for field support of

networking initiatives. A technology portal doesn't really fit **all** that GLP is and should be doing. In this regard, as the GLP moves from an organization that "provides technology" to one that uses technology to provide communication and collaborative services, we would recommend that GLP should explore a change of name and rearticulating a clear purpose as part of its steps to move forward. The "Portal" tag could still be used in reference to the platform proper.

Appendices - Appendices to this report are in 2 volumes

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USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**GAE FINAL REPORT-
APPENDIX VOLUME I**

INTERIM REPORT FINDINGS AND PHASE II WORKPLAN

**GLOBAL EVALUATION & MONITORING II
GEM II BPA Number EDH-E-00-08-00003-00**

Global Assets Evaluation

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Appendix A1: Interim Report Summary

An Interim Report for the evaluation as presented to the CTO and management partners of the global assets at the end of January in 2009. On 3 February 2009 meetings were held sequentially with GLP management and EPDC management, each along with USAID CTO, to present the findings. Below is the agenda of the meeting and the summary of findings presented at that time. Following these meetings individual meetings were held with the partners, and the report was revised taking into account their concerns. A revised Interim Report was tendered on 17 February 2009.

GAE Evaluation Interim Report Meetings: 3 February 2009

The Wilard Room, Willard Hotel,

1453 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington DC 20004, 4th floor, suite 400,

- **GLP 2pm through 3:15pm;**
- **EPDC - 3:30pm through 4:45pm**

BRIEF AGENDA FOR BOTH MEETINGS

- 1 - Briefly go over what we have done to date and where the work plan said we should be, and the difference (10 min)
 - 2 - Briefly go over the findings to date from respondents, site traffic, and issues (20 min)
 - 3 - Discuss implications of the findings, where we go from here to be most useful; and what the outcomes should be to be most useful (30 min)
 - 4 - Next steps
-

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

A. Initial Evaluation Objectives

1. What results and accomplishments have been achieved by each of the assets, separately and together, over the past years; and how have they added to what was available through other sources? To what extent have they added to the basic inputs by mobilizing additional resources (not only monies but also through partnerships with synergistic initiatives)? Who are the primary users of these tools; and what kinds of local international capacity is created or fostered by virtue of these Assets; and how do they serve the overall EFA goals of fostering education quality and capacity across the spectrum?
2. What problems and shortcomings are there for EPDC and GLP to date, how have they been addressed, and what implications do they bear for the future use and value of the Assets? How do potential users/beneficiaries get to know about these Assets, and how easy or difficult is it for them to make (full) use of them? What kinds of users have not been able to do this, who could make good use of them; and how might this be addressed? To what extent have the Assets been able to garner and make use of stakeholders' and users' feedback and recommendations?
3. What are the short term outputs and milestones that can be built on; and recommendations for building on them? What barriers exist for building on them, and how can they be

addressed (if at all)? What is a baseline for viewing the accomplishments of these Assets that can be used for an impact evaluation?

4. What are recommendations for strengthening the use and utility of these assets by diverse audiences?

B. Tasks and Timeline from Initial Work Plan

Task	Timeline
1. Discovery History & Dev. This task tracks site/project development, trying to understand what approaches were developed, and what can be improved. Review of documents provided and initial interviews with staff managing and working on the project will inform the objective of this work; as well as limited interviews with other stakeholders.	Oct/Nov 2008 and Jan/Mar 2009
2. Technical Review This task focuses on the technical opportunities afforded or limited by site design and resources. Issues of user engagement with the sites, potential for customization to meet specific needs or to enhance engagement, administration, and focus will be addressed in part during this period, but will be expanded on in more detail through interviews conducted as part of customer discussion and site visits.	Oct/Nov 2008
3. Evaluation Tracking Tool	Nov 2008
4. Case Studies This task is central to the project for meeting actual current and past customers, as well as potential customers, for each of the resources, in order to understand how they have and to envision how they could use the resources to help enhance education sectoral work in a country. The interim report is intended to be based on a single case study: based on what was learned there, next steps and further case studies would be determined. The West Bank and Zambia were considered as case study sites for GLP; while Kenya and Zambia were considered initial site visits for EPDC.	Dec 2008, Jan/Feb 2009
5. Interim Findings & Report	Jan 2009
6. Additional Issue Survey	Jan/Feb 2009
Additional issue studies were considered as a possible task, based on the findings from an initial case study, to follow up on those findings. We suggested that potentially Mexico's TIES project might be useful for looking in depth at fostering productive user engagement with the resources; and we had discussed Rwanda Commons as a potential for reviewing data issues relevant to EPDC	
7. General User Survey	Dec 2008/Feb 2009
A general user survey was considered a useful task to report on over all level of use of the resources, as a tool for reflecting on return on investment and utility to date.	
8. Draft and Final Reports	Mar/May 2009

C. Progress to date

Task 1 – History and Discovery:

- 75 individuals, representing national and international and specific project focus in education, were identified as appropriate
- About half have been interviewed to date

Interview Profiles and Progress (continues)				
	EPDC		GLP	
	Total	Interviewed	Total	Interviewed
Current List	55	26	56	31
Of which:				
USAID	14	5	21	9
Other USG	1		1	
AED/GA Staff	5	5	4	4
AED/Other HQ	3	3	3	3
AED/Field	1	1	1	1
BiLaterals	2	1	2	1
Multi-Laterals	15	7	6	2
Foundations	2		1	
NGOs/Other Orgs	5	2	9	7
Partners			2	
Knowledge Managers	2	2	5	4
(Mail List, other) Users	5		1	

Task 2 - Technical and Qualitative Analysis:

- Initial traffic and bandwidth analysis has been completed for both resources.
- For the GLP, analysis focuses on the main GLP.net site but may refer to common elements in other GLP implementations.

Task 3 – Evaluation Tracking tool – Internal task

Task 4 - Case Studies:

- GLP - Planning was completed for case study in West Bank, but visit was postponed at request of Mission. Now in process of scheduling for February
- EPDC - Planning for Zambia and Kenya is under way

Task 5 – Interim Report

- Findings have been analyzed and initial hypotheses developed
- Meeting for presentation and discussion has been scheduled.

D: SPECIFIC FINDINGS FOR GLP & SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

Source: GAE Evaluation Interim Report Meetings, 3 February 2009

■ GLP

Initial hypotheses based on a small set of interviews, traffic analyses, and site review:

- *Traffic for all GLP totaled about 24,250 hits for the year (November 2007 to October 2008)*
- *GLP sites that are embedded as a tool within larger, coherent project - like HEP - appear to show more sustained traffic and to have a broader membership than GLP sites for small ad hoc groups (e.g. Wash in Schools)*
- *While GLP was praised for ease of set up, and, in Afghanistan, for the opportunity afforded women to voice opinions, to date we have heard mixed reactions regarding on-line collaboration as a focus for USAID*
- *A number of respondents indicated GLP.org site does not encourage community input, involvement, and systematic access to and use of resources in supporting education development –*
 - *Donor rather than Educational Community Design -the site seems static, and unless invited, potential users are not engaged*
 - *The purpose of the GLP home site is unclear;*
 - *Unclear who 'should' engage with it.*
 - *Opportunities offered by the GLP.net and how to make the most of it are not obvious*
 - *Resource organization and search capabilities are limited.*

Next Steps, based on consideration of the above

The GLP management team appears to have reoriented GLP efforts primarily toward US-funded projects, with generally good results. This strategy may broaden use of the GLP as a platform, but it may create difficulties seeing GLP as a tool for a broader donor base. This may or may not be an issue, as the Echoes projects, championed by the World Cocoa Foundation, may provide a counter exception. We think the utility of this strategy might be something that should be explored in the second part of the evaluation.

- *Envision 'value added' - focus more in depth on specific project sites with specific users to see how they have used and could use the discussion/collaborative utilities, and what it has (or could) help them do; how to frame the benefits from collaboration.*
- *Highlight 'effective practice' - what tools have in the field, how this fits in, and how it has been used;*
- *Highlight strategies to enhance ownership – work with local implementers and what they would want to provide input on*
- *Highlight 'users experiences with the sites - the issues (if any) in navigation, use of resources desired*
- *Highlight different strategies for fostering and exploring partnership opportunities*

■ EPDC

Initial preliminary findings or hypotheses based on a small set of interviews, traffic analyses, and site review:

- Overall, the EPDC staff and products are highly regarded, but the EPDC is considered of limited use by some: *How does the EPDC help in ways that other data sources do not?*
- Low traffic indicates a thin user base – 3600 visits over six month (March – September 2008): *What are the intended audiences, and how are they served? Are audiences being reached?*
- Audiences with distinct needs report being either well served (multilaterals, especially focused on reporting and projections) or not (USAID planners needing actionable data): *What questions does the EPDC answer? How can the EPDC provide more guidance and interpretation about how to use its data? If the multilaterals are deriving most of the benefit, why aren't they paying more?*
- The EPDC is largely invisible: *Success stories are not being circulated; the EPDC does not command mindshare at policy discussions; the EPDC site does not market capabilities and is not visible via search engines; what stories can the EPDC tell (both in a marketing sense and a usefulness sense)?*
- The EPDC site does not promote longer-term engagement with its audiences and does not actively solicit feedback: *Lack of feedback mechanisms (ratings, comments); methods for establishing on-going communications (easy subscription); personalization, collaboration, or ease-of-use tools (such as saved searches).*
- Unclear mechanisms on partnering, contracting, subscribing, and buy-in: *Whom is the EPDC for? Who can use it? What services are available, and under what bounds?*
- Direct association with AED and USAID creates barriers: *What relationship should bilaterals have with the EPDC? Other NGOs and contractors? Should the EPDC be housed within a foundation, other association, or a multilateral such as UIS or the World Bank?*
- The capabilities and use of the EPDC needs to be distributed closer to developing-country audiences: *Can the EPDC work with UIS (e.g.,) to establish regional capacity in places like Africa? Can these staff then work with country ministries using data the ministries are comfortable with (and that are more current)?*
- Planning and projections tools need explanation, guidelines, examples, and (in some cases) better interfaces
- Site design may be creating bandwidth barriers to use: *If intended audiences include ministry planners or others in probable slow-connection environments, load and database search times may rule out their participation.*

Next Steps, based on consideration of the above

From the above, the evaluation team solicits input on how it can focus its interview and case study inquiries in the next phase:

- *EPDC applicability* – Better define in what ways the EPDC serves needs, for whom, and how this relevance can be enhanced or broadened. Are there specific ways in which case studies or surveys should be focused to best get at use feasibility? How can ministry or planning groups get better value?
- *EPDC positioning* – What is the reasonable positioning of the EPDC relative to its peers? Is there overlap? Does the EPDC want to be a “go-to” source, or is it aiming for a smaller, niche audience?
- *Value beyond USAID*: Governance and “association” issues aside, are the EPDC concept and its products of sufficient value to promote increased sponsorship by bilateral donor and multilateral partners? What bears on this issue?
- *Linkages to other efforts* – Are there tie-ins (e.g., GIS) that haven’t been sufficiently explored which may provide increased value?
- *Site as marketing tool and storyteller* – What site aspects are ripe for short-term improvement? Which would take longer to implement? Are there conceptual or practical barriers to user engagement?
- *Partnering, sponsorship, and support* – Where are the most promising avenues for repositioning the EPDC as a global asset rather than a USG asset? Which bilateral or multilateral donors are most likely to buy into an improved EPDC?
- *Tool applicability and usefulness* – Are tools such as DemoEd not intended for use beyond educational economists? What about ministry planners? USAID education staff? Strategies for improvement?
- *Capacity-building and training* – Strategies/avenues for strengthening local capacity has the EPDC? For distributing effort beyond EPDC staff?

Appendix A2: Workplan

Global Assets Evaluation (GAE)

Phase II Evaluation Workplan

February 2009

Context

In early February 2009, the Aguirre Evaluation Team presented interim findings (hypotheses) derived from interviews, site analysis, and document reviews. These findings are detailed in the Interim Report (revised), submitted under separate cover.

Meetings with both USAID staff and project implementers (GLP and EPDC) explored areas deemed most useful to making the assets relevant and supportable, within and beyond USAID. These areas of further study are described below and within the proposed workplan elements.

Areas of Further Study

GLP

Project Implementations

The GLP has positioned itself as an information broker/collaborative platform for field-based standalone projects (e.g., Afghanistan Higher Education Program) and partnership-based projects (e.g., the Palestinian Youth Portal and the Rwanda Education Commons), as a resource for other USAID-funded initiatives (Ed Strategy discussion, etc.), and as a possible continued resource for non-USAID-funded initiatives (e.g., EFA or FTI discussions).

Site visits, described below, will help to answer questions around field-based projects:

- *What are the successful (or unsuccessful) elements of a project-based portal?*
- *What are key elements of success for collaboration with ministries and other implementing partners or stakeholders?*
- *What training issues are probable, and what level of training effort is necessary for success?*
- *Are there infrastructure contexts that are not amenable to an internet-based platform like the GLP?*
- *Who owns the effort, and what are necessary elements for sustainability?*
- *How does the GLP blend with other modes to provide appropriate educational content and opportunities for collaboration and sharing?*

- *How do field projects provide an opportunity for “selling” the GLP to other donors?*

GLP as First-Option Provider

Within the USAID realm, the GLP would like to be promoted as a first-option provider for project websites, portals, or other web-based resources so that projects do not have to “reinvent the wheel” when it comes to web-based resources.

- *Are current projects (HEP, Zambia, Rwanda) demonstrating good value for money?*
- *Are USAID staff likely to recommend use of the GLP either internally or to contractors/implementers given living examples or past experience with the GLP?*
- *What additional features or processes could be added to increase value and spur use of the GLP?*
- *Are costs related to “buy-in” clear? Are these costs perceived as reasonable, relative to looking elsewhere for web-based solutions?*

Collaborative Tool, or Collaborative Process?

Project staff at times described the GLP as “just a platform” for collaboration or resource-sharing, adding that content and use were not their concern. This may represent lost value for clients, since many platforms can be used for collaboration or storage. The Evaluation Team suggested that the GLP take a broader view of how resources are used and how collaboration leads to client objectives.

- *What is the current perceived value of the GLP for policy discussions or resource-sharing?*
- *Is collaboration framed within a broader set of objectives, e.g., how collaborative discussions would be followed up, and how follow-on decisions or policy positions could be implemented?*
- *Does the GLP offer a suite of tools that aid such processes? If not, what could add value?*
- *Does the GLP provide context and advice for how best to collaborate in an on-line environment? When other tools or methods might be more effective?*
- *Are current guidelines for setting up sites complemented with guides for community “champions” that give realistic expectations about use and provide strategies for maintaining interest and growing the membership pool?*

GLP.net as Demonstration Site

GLP staff have recognized the lost opportunity that the main portal site (GLP.net) could provide and broadly agreed with recommendations for improvement to make it a better illustration of GLP capabilities.

- *The Project Team requested help in prioritizing changes.*

EPDC

The Interim Report and follow-on discussions focused on a number of issues for improvement that could broaden the relevance and appeal of the EPDC for a variety of user groups. Those issues, in brief, are:

- *Clarifying the purpose of the EPDC and the audience it serves.*
- *Specifying the kinds of questions that the EPDC helps to answer.*
- *Increasing the visibility and “buzz” of the EPDC, both on the web and at policy discussions.*
- *Leveraging the goodwill and positive feedback of satisfied customers (GMR, FTI, IHSN) to publicize the EPDC and promote support by more donors.*
- *Differentiating the EPDC from other data-centered organizations such as UIS or EdStats, and explaining how it complements other organizations’ efforts.*
- *Increasing the appeal of the EPDC as a “go-to” data source and as a collaborative environment for education “data wonks” in other organizations and countries.*
- *Annotating and explaining data presentations (tabular or visual) to provide actionable information, especially for planners (including USAID staff).*
- *Explaining more fully how to use projection and analysis tools and providing contextual guidelines interpretation and use.*
- *Capturing, analyzing, and interpreting data more useful to and familiar to ministries. (An implication has been that the EPDC data is not fresh enough for short-term planning decisions.)*
- *Increasing analytical capacity beyond the EPDC, perhaps through partnerships with UIS, UNESCO, the World Bank, ADEA, or regional institutes in close proximity to the countries needing assistance.*
- *Broadening funding beyond USAID by repositioning the EPDC as a true global resource. Core funding from other country donors is seen as critical.*

Because these issues are interwoven, few workplan elements are tied directly to any one issue.

Workplan Elements

Stakeholder Interviews

The Evaluation Team will continue telephone stakeholder interviews with multi-lateral organizations, designated partners or alliance members, foundations, end-users, USAID staff, and others who may provide insight or ideas toward advancements and improvements in the assets. Some respondents may be interviewed in person rather than by phone. The respondent list, a living document, was provided as an annex to the Interim Report.

Accomplishments Matrices

The Evaluation Team will present an annotated table (or other appropriate format) of GLP and EPDC accomplishments to date.

GLP “Competitor” Update

The Evaluation Team has reviewed the previous Thurman study of GLP-type competitors and will provided an annotated list of current efforts roughly in the same market as the GLP. (Most of those in the Thurman study no longer exist.)

Site Traffic Analysis Follow-Up

The site traffic analyses will be reviewed and updated to clear up discrepancies and to provide more information on user groups, as possible with the data available.

GLP.net Priorities

The Evaluation Team will work with the Project Team to provide a prioritized set of suggestions for changes to GLP.net (easiest/cheapest to more difficult/costly), with the aim of making the site a better showcase for GLP capabilities.

GLP Education Strategy Collaborative Discussion Survey

The Evaluation Team will develop a survey of invitees and participants involved in the recent Education Strategy on-line discussion. The survey will seek to capture participation rates, reasons for non-participation, perceived value of on-line discussions, perceived value of the GLP implementation, specific issues around usability, and reflections on how on-line discussions fit in to a larger process of discussion, decision-making, and follow-on action.

EPDC Site Mockup

The Evaluation Team will prepare a basic site mockup illustrating possible changes as described in the Interim Report and explored in subsequent discussions. The mockup would highlight how the site can better explain:

- its purpose and intended audiences;
- its capabilities and how those capabilities are useful;
- what questions the EPDC helps to answer;
- how to interpret or use data results, presentations, and tools;
- how the EPDC complements (rather than duplicates) sites like UIS and EdStats;
- how others can partner or contract for services with the EPDC;
- how registration is beneficial and provides new options for the user;

- ways of soliciting feedback from users methods for personalization or increasing user efficiency

The mock-up may be used in face-to-face discussions with potential donors, multilaterals, and data analysts to describe how the EPDC can change to better serve their needs and foster collaboration among peers.

Site Visits

Site visits will be undertaken to more fully explore the questions and concepts described above.

EPDC

Zambia

What is happening: The EPDC is currently working with the Zambian Ministry of Education to develop District and Provincial Profiles detailing progress toward EFA goals and other objectives identified by the Ministry. The profiles use country-level data not publicly available (via usual data sources such as UIS, EPDC).

Visit rationale: The Evaluation Team will meet with ministry officials, education planners, others NGOs, donor agencies (Dutch, Irish), the Mission, and other stakeholders to explore how the exercise is useful to the ministry, donors, and education implementers, how the process increases understanding of needs at a sub-national level to inform education strategies, and what stakeholders would recommend in terms of data (output) improvements and how the process may advance planning capacity within the ministry.

Note: This visit is in conjunction with the GLP Zambia Site Visit.

Kenya

What has happened: Similar to the Zambian effort, the EPDC provided sub-national data analysis and visualizations to the Kenyan government approximately two years ago.

Visit rationale: It is not currently known what happened to the EPDC product, how it may or may not have been used, and what worth the Ministry found in the process. This visit would explore those questions and areas for improvement applicable to similar efforts the EPDC may undertake in other countries in the future.

Note: This visit is a relatively easy add-on to visits to Zambia and Rwanda (GLP).

Potential Donors, Multi-Lateral Organizations, and Data Analysis Groups

EPDC Objective: The EPDC seeks to expand its core funding to include donor agents such as the Netherlands, Spain, and Canada, and to explore the possibility of closer collaboration with (and support of some form from) multilaterals such as UNESCO EFA/GMR and the World Bank (FTI). The EPDC is effectively repositioning itself as a global asset rather than a USAID asset.

Rationale: The Evaluation Team would visit the Dutch, Spanish, and Canadians to describe the new EPDC strategies and explore how EPDC initiatives meet donor goals and objectives. (EPDC staff are already discussing a suite of products or services that may unlock Canadian funding.)

As feasible, the Evaluation Team would meet with UNESCO (EFA, GMR, IIEP, UIS) and the World Bank (FTI, EdStats) to explore how the EPDC can be properly differentiated from other data warehouse and analysis efforts, and how it can work productively with UNESCO to provide relevant planning tools and spread knowledge of how to use those tools through training.

The Evaluation Team will also explore conversations with education data analysis groups (possibly in Sweden and Spain) to explore avenue for collaboration and participation.

Note: The Evaluation Team will prepare a mock-up of a modified EPDC site that demonstrates what the EPDC offers to different audiences, shows ongoing support from agencies that have worked with the EPDC, annotates and contextualizes data presentations and tools, provides personalization and efficiency methods for registered users, and solicits feedback from those using the site.

GLP

Zambia

What has happened: The Zambia GLP initiative, undertaken in conjunction with AED's Equip2 project, aimed to provide teachers online resources through teacher-training colleges. The effort included an infrastructure-improvement component to provide internet access. Other components included a private discussion facility for donor agencies, a portal for community schools, and an "inventory" tool for the government, donors, and implementers to catalogue education projects throughout the country. The GLP has described this effort as having fallen short of its objectives.

Visit Rationale: This study will allow the Evaluation Team to explore how expectations may have fallen short in this project, including an analysis of ownership, teacher and staff buy-in, relevant training issues, sustainability concerns, and perceived value. Lessons learned may inform how other projects are structured going forward.

Note: This visit is in conjunction with the EPDC data analysis effort.

Afghanistan

What is happening: The Afghanistan Higher Education Project is using the GLP as a portal for professors of education to share ideas and resources via the internet while working at geographically disparate teacher-training locations throughout the country. The HEP portal, which has more than 400 registered users, has also been described as an avenue for women professors to exchange ideas and have their voices heard.

Rationale: GLP staff describe the HEP project as its biggest success to date. The visit will explore the terms of success, how the portal has allowed professors to share resources or ideas in new or improved ways, how ownership issues may have aided success, and how the Ministry is vested in the platform and is planning for its sustainability in the future. To the extent feasible, the study team will look at resource sharing outside the GLP network (via one or more projects not implemented by AED), and/or how other projects might be assisted by inclusion in a broadened GLP network of users.

Note: This study will be undertaken by JBS associates in-country.

Rwanda

What is happening: The GLP has undertaken a major initiative with the Rwandan Ministry of Education and other partners to develop the Rwanda Education Commons (REC), a resource platform aimed at strengthening education in the country through appropriate technology. The GLP will work within the Ministry to implement a portal and help coordinate related resources provided by other partners.

Rationale: The REC represents the GLP's most ambitious multi-stakeholder project to date. Although little tangible is expected to have been accomplished within the scope of this study because the REC is just getting underway, the study provides an opportunity to get a forward perspective on Ministry and partner expectations, how the partnering and alliance process is proceeding, the results of ICT planning and implementation efforts undertaken by the ministry (with help from WEF and the Jordan Education Initiative) that any internet-based portion of the REC will depend upon. (Unlike in Zambia, the GLP will not be providing infrastructure improvements.) The visit will also explore how other donors not directly contributing to the REC relate to the project.

Final Report

The Evaluation Team will prepare a Draft Final Report and provide an oral presentation to USAID and project implementing staff. Feedback oral and written will be incorporated into the Final Report.

Schedule

The Gantt chart below shows the proposed schedule for this workplan.

GAE Workplan Revision - February 2009

Week Beginning Sunday

	15-Feb	22-Feb	1-Mar	8-Mar	15-Mar	22-Mar	29-Mar	5-Apr	12-Apr	19-Apr	26-Apr	3-May	10-May	17-May	24-May	31-May	6-Jun	13-Jun
Stakeholder Interviews																		
Traffic Analysis Update																		
Technical Analysis Update																		
EPDC Mockup																		
GLP Competitor Scan																		
GLP.net Prioritization																		
GLP Ed Strategy Survey																		
Accomplishments Matrices																		
Africa Studies																		
Planning																		
Visits								Kenya	Rwanda	Zambia								
Reporting																		
Afghanistan Study																		
Planning																		
Visit																		
Reporting																		
Donor/Multilaterals - EPDC																		
Planning																		
Europe																		
Canada																		
Reporting																		
GAE Quarterly Report																		
Final Report																		
Draft Preparation																		
Draft Submission																		
Report Oral Presentation																		
Review Period																		
Revisions																		
Final Submission																		

Appendix A3: Full Global Assets Interim Report, with RfTOP and Phase I Workplan as appendices to it



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

GLOBAL EVALUATION & MONITORING II
GEM II BPA Number EDH-E-00-08-00003-00

Global Assets Evaluation

REVISED Interim Report

by

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17 February 2009

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INTERIM REPORT

★¹THE EVALUATION TEAM HAS STRUCTURED THIS WORK IN TWO PHASES. PHASE I AIMS TO DEVELOP AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AND ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF EACH OF THE USAID-SPONSORED WEB RESOURCES IN THEIR DEVELOPMENT, AS OF THE DATE OF THE EVALUATION. PHASE II OF THE EVALUATION AIMS TO EXAMINE THE POTENTIAL IN ADDRESSING AND MOVING BEYOND THESE ISSUES, IN TERMS OF POTENTIAL DIRECTIONS EACH MIGHT TAKE AND THE VALUE TO BE GAINED FROM THEM FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GLOBALLY. THIS DOCUMENT AIMS TO REPORT ON PHASE I - THE UNDERSTANDING GAINED BY THE EVALUATION TEAM – WITH THE INTENT OF BETTER FRAMING THE ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED AND HOW THEY WILL BE ADDRESSED IN THE SECOND PHASE OF WORK.

THIS REPORT WAS DEVELOPED BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH A SMALL SET OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND USERS WE HAD IDENTIFIED AS RELEVANT TO THE EVALUATION. ALTHOUGH WE HAD INTENDED TO HAVE COMPLETED A SITE VISIT DURING THIS SAME PERIOD, AND HAD COMPLETED PLANNING FOR ONE, UNFORTUNATELY BECAUSE OF TURMOIL IN THE REGION, THIS WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO COMPLETE. THUS, THE FINDINGS IN THIS REPORT IS BASED ON PHONE CONVERSATIONS, PRIMARILY, ALONG WITH INITIAL REVIEW OF SITE STRUCTURE AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT WITH IT; HOWEVER, UNFORTUNATELY, IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO INCLUDE DIRECT OBSERVATION OF HANDS-ON USE OF THE WEB RESOURCES. NONETHELESS, WE FEEL THE WORK DONE HAS PROVIDED A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE DEVELOPMENT TO DATE AND SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT ARE NOW BEING ADDRESSED. A DRAFT VERSION OF THIS REPORT WAS PRESENTED IN PERSON TO THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TEAMS (E.G. EPDC AND GLP SENIOR MANAGEMENT, AND THE COTR), ON 3 FEBRUARY 2009; AND A SUBSEQUENT MEETING WITH EACH TEAM WAS HELD DURING THAT WEEK TO FLESH OUT ISSUES THEY HAD WITH OUR FINDINGS, AND TO DISCUSS DIRECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE. THIS REPORT HAS BEEN REVISED TO REFLECT THE ISSUES RAISED BOTH IN THE PRESENTATION AND THE SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS.

A. Evaluation Overview

USAID has asked for (RFTOP page 4) an evaluation of the results achieved and outputs, over the last three years, from two global assets – the Global Learning Portal and the Education Policy Data Center. The intent of this request is to provide information that can serve as a guide to their resource mobilization strategies, inputs, and activities to help determine their future strategic directions, capacity strengthening, and expected goals. This is the function of the evaluations undertaken by Aguirre

¹ ★This marker indicates a new section, added to clarify findings.

Division, JBS International, Inc. To meet these needs the basic evaluation questions for both Assets are (cf the basic evaluation questions listed on pages 9 – 10 of the RFTOP):

5. What results and accomplishments have been achieved by each of the assets, separately and together, over the past years; and how have they added to what was available through other sources? To what extent have they added to the basic inputs by mobilizing additional resources (not only monies but also through partnerships with synergistic initiatives)? Who are the primary users of these tools; and what kinds of local international capacity is created or fostered by virtue of these Assets; and how do they serve the overall EFA goals of fostering education quality and capacity across the spectrum?
6. What problems and shortcomings are there for EPDC and GLP to date, how have they been addressed, and what implications do they bear for the future use and value of the Assets? How do potential users/beneficiaries get to know about these Assets, and how easy or difficult is it for them to make (full) use of them? What kinds of users have not been able to do this, who could make good use of them; and how might this be addressed? To what extent have the Assets been able to garner and make use of stakeholders' and users' feedback and recommendations?
7. What are the short term outputs and milestones that can be built on; and recommendations for building on them? What barriers exist for building on them, and how can they be addressed (if at all)? What is a baseline for viewing the accomplishments of these Assets that can be used for an impact evaluation?
8. What are recommendations for strengthening the use and utility of these assets by diverse audiences?

A workplan to address these issues was revised from the one in the proposal, based on an initial review of the web resources, discussion with consultants regarding the evolution of the web resources, the technical capacity afforded, and the extent of documented engagement in their use; and discussion with GAE project and USAID informants about the evolution of the portals and the roadmap for the future. This was submitted to the Project COTR on 7 November 2008. (See Appendix 1 for this document, and Appendix 2 for the initial proposal to do the work.)

The work of this evaluation was designed to be done in consultation with a Resources Management Team – namely the two managers of the web resources being evaluated, and the COTR of the project. This evaluation is formative in design and intended to be useful to the managers; thus, while the evaluation team is reviewing all aspects of the work done, there is in no sense a judgment being made by the evaluators regarding the ultimate use of the web resources. Rather, we are looking for lessons learned and opportunities for leveraging additional impact for the field.

This report aims to serve as a basis for the discussion. It provides a summary of progress to date against the revised workplan, preliminary findings for analyses underway or complete, and initial thoughts on activities and next steps for completion of the evaluation. Backup documentation appropriate to the effort so far is included as appendices to this report.

1. Tasks and Schedule

Eight tasks were identified for this project (as displayed in Table 1 below), with the interim report serving more as an opportunity for discussing what we have learned to date and what it means for what we should do in the next segment. Thus the nature of the 'discovery process' and the extent to which case studies or other activities were undertaken as part of this evaluation, were designed to be products

of the work done in the first months of discovery, and subject to discussion with the Web Resource Management team.

Table 1: Tasks and Timeline from Initial Work Plan

Task	Timeline
1. History and Development Discovery This task tracks site/project development, trying to understand what approaches were developed, and what can be improved. Review of documents provided and initial interviews with staff managing and working on the project will inform the objective of this work; as well as limited interviews with other stakeholders.	Oct/Nov 2008 and Jan/Mar 2009
2. Technical Review This task focuses on the technical opportunities afforded or limited by site design and resources. Issues of user engagement with the sites, potential for customization to meet specific needs or to enhance engagement, administration, and focus will be addressed in part during this period, but will be expanded on in more detail through interviews conducted as part of customer discussion and site visits.	Oct/Nov 2008
3. Evaluation Tracking Tool Dev	Nov 2008
4. Case Studies This task is central to the project for meeting actual current and past customers, as well as potential customers, for each of the resources, in order to understand how they have and to envision how they could use the resources to help enhance education sectoral work in a country. The interim report is intended to be based on a single case study: based on what was learned there, next steps and further case studies would be determined. The West Bank and Zambia were considered as case study sites for GLP; while Kenya and Zambia were considered initial site visits for EPDC.	Dec 2008, Jan/Feb 2009
5. Interim Findings and Report	Jan 2009
6. Additional Issue Survey Additional issue studies were considered as a possible task, based on the findings from an initial case study, to follow up on those findings. We suggested that potentially Mexico's TIES project might be useful for looking in depth at fostering productive user engagement with the resources; and we had discussed Rwanda Commons as a potential for reviewing data issues relevant to EPDC	Jan/Feb 2009
7. General User Survey A general user survey was considered a useful task to report on over all level of use of the resources, as a tool for reflecting on return on investment and utility to date.	Dec 2008/Feb 2009
8. Draft and Final Reports	Mar/May 2009

The next section discusses the progress to date, overall, on these tasks.

2. Summary of Progress to Date

No tasks in the above list were intended to be 'done' as of the Interim Report; but tasks 1 through 4 were intended to be started, and the Interim Report was to serve as a vantage point for discussing next steps. However, some work has been done on all 4 tasks intended to precede this report.

Task 1 – History and Discovery: As part of initial meetings with the Web Resources Management team, approximately 75 individuals, representing national and international and specific project focus in education, were identified as appropriate for informing understanding of the status of the two resources at this point. Initially we thought to wait to interview these staff until we had completed an initial site visit, in order to better understand what some of the issues and opportunities might be. However, because of the problems in setting up the initial site visit (as a result of the turmoil in Gaza), and as a result of opportunities offered by other projects of the staff involved, initial interviews have been undertaken. These interviews may be followed up in the future, when we are able to complete a site visit.

The evaluation team has conducted interviews with approximately half of the 75 people identified for top-line interviews in support of the evaluation, about evenly split between the two assets. Interview subjects have included USAID staff, Global Asset and other AED staff, World Bank and UNESCO, stated partners, and collaborators from other implementing organizations. About one-third of the interview subjects have been identified for both efforts. Interview lists for each project effort are included as an appendix to this report. A summary chart is shown here.

Interview Profiles and Progress (continues)					
		EPDC		GLP	
		Total	Interviewed	Total	Interviewed
Current List		55	26	56	31
Of which:					
	USAID	14	5	21	9
	Other USG	1		1	
	AED/GA Staff	5	5	4	4
	AED/Other HQ	3	3	3	3
	AED/Field	1	1	1	1
	BiLaterals	2	1	2	1
	Multi-Laterals	15	7	6	2
	Foundations	2		1	
	NGOs/Other Orgs	5	2	9	7
	Partners			2	
	Knowledge Managers	2	2	5	4
	(Mail List, other) Users	5		1	

Task 2 - Technical and Qualitative Analysis: Initial traffic and bandwidth analysis has been completed for both resources. These analyses have been completed by a consultant with special expertise in these areas. Platform technical and suitability analyses are still underway, and are being informed by one of the initial designers of the GLP platform, to whom we were referred by the project. For the GLP, analysis focuses on the main GLP.net site but may refer to common elements in other GLP implementations.

Task 3 – Evaluation Tracking Tools: This is a task related to organizing project tasks internal to the evaluation. To date we have implemented a respondent and reference tracking system.

Task 4 - Case Studies: Zambia and Kenya were identified as useful EPDC case studies, and Zambia and the West Bank were chosen for the GLP. Because of concerns about staff work overload or other situational concerns, the Kenya and Zambia site visits were deliberately delayed until at least February of 2009. Preparations for the Zambia visit are under development; Kenya site visit plans will be in progress soon. The evaluation team had originally planned to have completed the West Bank case study before presenting the interim report and findings, and to use observations and findings from that visit to inform future trips and secondary field analyses and surveys. While full planning for the West Bank field visit was completed in late December, tensions between Israel and Gaza eventually exploded into

full-scale turmoil in early January, prompting the West Bank/Gaza USAID Mission to delay the field visit until conditions would allow a successful visit. The evaluators recently received positive news to proceed with the case study site visit, so preparing a new overall site visit schedule is underway. A description of West Bank preparations, interview lists, and other activities is included as an appendix (#3) to this report.

Task 6 - Issue Studies: The focus and utility of secondary field studies, i.e. issue studies, is under review. The evaluation team is working with GLP staff to develop a list of GLP sites and contact names to inform a possible survey of users. For the EPDC, USAID DC- and field-based education staff are being queried about possible secondary interviews at Missions and in country ministries.

The following sections present very preliminary findings to date, based on interviews conducted, as well as on technical site reviews and site traffic analyses. Because of the limited scope of those interviewed so far, it may be best to think of these as working hypotheses until additional interviews can lend more weight. The point of the discussion around these hypotheses is to solicit feedback related to them from the Management team, in terms of their soundness, utility, and how they could be made more useful for guiding next steps.

B. Preliminary Findings and Hypotheses: Global Learning Portal (GLP)

The GLP is being promoted for a variety of targeted purposes. These include, for:

- *Policy discussions and similar input:* Providing a time-limited structure for discussing policy issues and collecting and sharing related documents. These private projects tend to link USAID staff, other bilateral and multilateral donors, and policymaking and coordinating bodies. Examples include the School Fee elimination discussion, UNAIDS/IATT meeting registration, the Education Strategies site, and joint-review document repositories.
- *Teacher networking or accessibility to instructional resources:* These sites usually are set up to operate through teacher training colleges or projects related to teacher training, and are accompanied by connectivity infrastructure improvement initiatives. Examples include the Afghanistan Higher Education Program, the Zambia Teacher-Training Project, Notre Dame of Marvel University (Philippines), and the Central Asian PEAKS program.
- *Global alliance efforts:* Projects often partially supported by USAID but involving other agencies, where GLP offers an organizing and centralizing capability. Examples include the Echoes and Echoes Schools sites, the Rwanda Education Commons, and the Palestinian Youth Portal.
- *Resource warehouse:* The GLP also is promoted as a place to preserve project-created resources once a project has closed. Currently the site has four ‘partner content collections’ and five ‘on-line courses’ (actually course collections) developed by others targeted to a variety of audiences, from individual learners wanting to improve their typing (Allison) to district level educators wanting to advance their ‘strategic decision making’ (GLP with George Washington Univ.) to multiple resources from UNESCO focusing on anything from ‘Social Problems’ and ‘Culture’ to ‘Computer Science and Information Management’.

★ These different purposes for GLP are consistent with GLP viewing itself as a ‘platform’ on which collaboration can take place or be fostered – and with which education leaders and manager can connect with for whatever educational purpose meets their needs. Some project managers have been encouraged to use it by others, and may not have understood quite what results could be expected, how much work was involved in using it, or how to make use of for their own collaborative purposes on behalf of development. Others have understood better its potential and GLP had a closer fit to the Project’s own purpose. Still others may have understood the product in the context of a particular need, and focused on short-term, time-limited use of the tool; utilizing only a limited range of the options for collaboration.

★ Currently, GLP appears to be moving away from the concept of itself as a ‘neutral platform’ and more toward a deliberate focus on how to make potential users make the most of its resource through using collaboration in context to achieve specific objectives for educational development. This comes out of securing specific investment in GLP, springing out of the work in Afghanistan for the Higher Education Project Portal; and is seen more clearly in the focus of its newer initiatives in Rwanda and Palestine. Because the evaluation team was not able to interact with users of these sites prior to this report, the main burden of our findings for this report are based on the work prior to this focus, some of the lessons to be learned from that work. However, the directions to focus on in the next phase to be of assistance to the project is very much based on this newer focus.

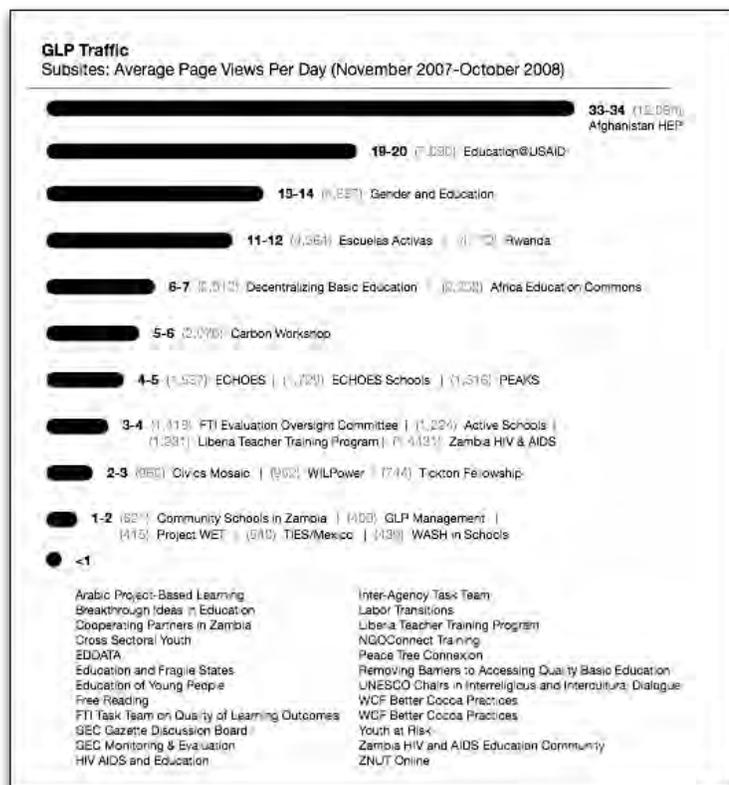
1. User Engagement with GLP, Viewed through the Lens of Site Traffic

An individual specializing in this work was asked to undertake the traffic analysis for the site; and GLP staff provided traffic data to that individual for this person. Traffic data were not available in reliable form for any GLP implementations before the move to the *Liferay* platform, and log data for those implementations would be difficult to interpret without a fuller understanding of those (now gone) installations. The period November 2007 through October 2008 was chosen as the analysis window because of the availability of both server logs and data derived from external tools such as Google Analytics. A preliminary report has been submitted by the analyst, summarized here.

★GLP has argued that traffic analysis is not as appropriate as it may seem, as GLP hosts different kinds of sites which are not comparable – the purposes stated earlier. For example there are discussion sites during which one can expect only a short period of contact; as well as project-based sites which potentially feature more opportunities for sustained collaboration, depending on the efforts of the project. Additionally, GLP can have public and private sites. Private sites are those not listed under “Communities” on the GLP main site, and those for which (usually) one must be a registered member to participate; and it may not be appropriate to compare public and private sites. Public communities are listed on the GLP as links. More sites have been private than public, often because the site is meant to serve a private group (say, policymakers involved in a specific policy discussion). A GLP project and community matrix is included as Appendix 4 to this report

★GLP argues that one needs to take into account the nature of the intended use of the site when reviewing traffic analyses, so that a generic ‘average’ is not appropriate. They also argue that at this point in their development the extent of traffic is less relevant than trends in re-use of the resource to foster collaboration. The first argument related to utility of traffic analysis for different types of sites is a reasonable argument, we feel, especially if one is either comparing sites or if one has as a clear objective specific hands-on work related to fostering ongoing collaboration as a tool for education development; rather than seeing the GLP as a platform which should be used, but which the type of use for educators is of less concern. Since the focus of the work up until recently has been seeing GLP as a platform, we feel this issue of ‘evaluation fairness’ is less relevant. Trends of re-use are relevant, but overall level still incorporates whether GLP has been able to cultivate users.

Moreover ‘discussion’ does not automatically pre-suppose short term use – the collaboration could be structured to engage the user in



commentary or summary of the ideas presented and conclusions about next steps, through feedback and other means. What low traffic or differentiated patterns of traffic may suggest for a ‘platform’ argument is that for some sorts of purposes, the utility of the platform long term has to be better understood; and perhaps more hands-on focus on how the platform might sustain collaboration about how conclusions from the discussions could be used. The issue of expected outcomes from the use of the site, and its relation to outcomes from the different types of collaboration, has to be further fleshed out; and this will be a focus of work in Phase II. In Phase II of the project a final analysis will be rendered, based on the discussions held regarding preliminary findings on these issues, and further analysis. The following, then, is based on the first period of project development

- *Traffic for all GLP totaled about 26,400 hits for the year (November 2007 to October 2008²), or a total of about 66 visits per day across all sites. About half these hits came from the North America. Significantly less traffic was recorded from Europe (2800 visits), Middle East/North Africa (2800), and Asia, with very little traffic from Africa, Central America, or South America. Although it was very difficult to differentiate between traffic coming from relative insiders, the high hit volume from the US and Canada during the traffic review period suggests that USAID-arranged discussion sites may be driving much of the overall usage. The most active current sites are the USAID internal Education Strategy, the Afghanistan Higher Education Program, Escuelas Activas, the Rwanda Education Commons (pilot/test site), Decentralized Education, and the Echoes/Echoes Schools projects.*
- *GLP sites that are embedded as a tool within larger, coherent projects appear to show more sustained traffic and to have a broader membership. As the chart on the previous page shows, recent implementations like the Afghanistan HEP (15 or more hits per day), are showing reasonably sustained traffic, as is the Rwanda Education Commons (more than 10 hits per day). Escuelas Activas, shown on the chart, is a special case, with most page views and activity happening within a much shorter time frame, with actual sustained traffic at much lower levels. Sites like Wash in Schools or HIV AIDS and Education, which are issue-based, rather than project-based, suffer from comparatively little interest or traffic, after a short peak usage. A refinement of the traffic analysis will include additional information, being gathered, about when sites were considered to be “active.”*

	Nov 2007 - Oct 2008	
	#	%
World	24 249	100
North America	12 565	52
Europe/Russia	2 824	12
Middle East/North Africa	2 765	11
South Asia	2 269	9
South America	1 068	4
Africa	978	4
Central America	805	3
Central-East Asia	711	3
Oceania	156	1
Caribbean	85	0
Undetermined	23	0

It should be noted that the GLP team is no longer pursuing a strategy of providing “free” sites, except as special cases (Jodi Lis, 2/5/09), so GLP efforts are expected to focus much more on larger field-based projects while continuing to promote the GLP as a collaboration platform within the larger USAID community.

Resulting hypotheses for the Management Team – ★The GLP management team has a variety of strategies in place at one time. With HEP it appears to have reoriented GLP efforts primarily toward US-funded projects, with generally good results, but with a potential down-side for other groups to

² This is the period for which GLP provided data on traffic for their sites.

‘buy in’. GLP work in Palestine and Rwanda, however, has a potential for multi-funder and user group adoption of the resource. The appropriate strategy for engaging potential users in the GLP as a resource – and the kinds of strategies used for visualizing outcomes from use of the GLP – needs to be dynamic and is a key issue for GLP. We think the issue of platform visualization, how to maintain and support the resource as a dynamic portal, rather than a project site; and how to cultivate multi-group ownership should be explored in the second part of the evaluation.

2. What Respondents Said about the GLP – the Concept, the Main Site, and Portal Design

To date we have discussed GLP with 31 individuals – nine within USAID, 3 from bilateral or multilateral organizations, 8 from within the project team or in other divisions of AED, and four knowledge managers. (See interview matrix, page 3.) Additionally, we talked with two GLP implementers from private organizations/NGOs working within an African context. These were just initial interviews to see to what extent they knew about and used GLP (if relevant), and what their experiences and perspectives were about it. See the interview questions included as *Appendix 3* of this report. We expect more in-depth information from site visits on GLP. However, for this report, we have a mixed picture over all, primarily from a small group of USG respondents. These have indicated:

the GLP Concept

- *Mixed reactions regarding on-line collaboration as a focus for USAID –*
On the whole, those interviewed were very positive toward the use of the internet as a collaboration and resource-sharing tool in the proper contexts, and were somewhat positive about the possibilities of the Global Learning Portal, but were not necessarily convinced USAID should be funding it as a priority. Respondents suggested that GLP sites were useful to some extent, and convenient; however they noted that the discussions in these kinds of environments tended to be less stimulating, and this led them to wonder about the value added. Several respondents remarked about USAID’s tendency to silo information in missions and within projects, and that the GLP discussion efforts seemed to be a legitimate attempt to free information from those silos. (The same respondents noted that USAID would probably benefit much more from a systemic overhaul of its knowledge management systems, but that the GLP was a good method of demonstrating that possibility.)

Resulting hypothesis for next steps for the Team – Responses have highlighted a need to focus more in depth on specific project sites with specific users to see how they have used and could use the discussion/collaborative utilities. Issues that might be relevant to address in detail concern (a) whether discussions have been easier to initiate; whether organization of discussions through GLP is more likely to make the results of discussions accessible and compelling, and whether it is easier to involve the right mix of stakeholders on key issues through GLP; (b) what discussion ‘events’ have led to; and (c) what ‘value added’ that can be envisioned.³

- *No specific reaction to the potential of GLP for engaging and enlarging resources for education –*
Those interviewed to date have been more of the policy maker group than the beneficiary type for whom GLP was originally targeted – those in the trenches of promoting improved education resources. It is therefore not surprising that we have not heard more about the GLP as a resource

³ Note: Project sites have not been examined closely pending field visits and interviews with project-level stakeholders.

for promoting improved educational training or practice – other than non-specific references to it ‘as a resource’.

- *Basic portal creation was easy and GLP Staff provided great Technical Assistance-* Those interviewed who had constructed GLP portals expressed universal satisfaction with the ease of setting up a basic site and had high praise for the assistance provided by GLP staff. It should be noted that the GLP staff works increasingly with local implementers to develop the portals, which increases capacity in the field.

Resulting hypothesis for next steps for the Team – Responses have highlighted a need to focus more in-depth on how educators in the field work with the site, how they conceptualize ‘collaboration’ and what it will do for them; and how they conceive use of GLP may benefit them. What other tools do educators in the field have and use, and how does GLP fit into these? We need to understand prospects, problems and visions for engaging – and sustaining engagement of – site users in asset creation: namely addressing need-identified issues and developing and maintaining resources within a context. We need to understand better how resources on GLP are used and can be used to foster the work of education development – both within a ‘project’ and generally. The GLP has been working increasingly with local implementers, which leads us to think that the evaluation could usefully examine how local development may facilitate target population input while expanding a GLP technical assistance network outside of the GLP staff. ★ Issues of concern relate to what it takes to use GLP in a way which catalyzes the significance of the collaboration – what do managers need to know; what happens when it works well; how much investment in site development needs to be ongoing; how much investment in local site managers by GLP, if any, needs to be ongoing.

About the GLP.net (main GLP site)

GLP.net, the home site for GLP, is the gateway to other public communities and the demonstration site for the portal’s capabilities. While many of the new portal implementations (e.g. Rwanda Education Commons, Afghanistan HEP, and their work with WilPower) convey a specific message, to a specific audience, the main site is the initial gateway. So we asked respondents – including knowledge management specialists affiliated with other international efforts – how they thought it functioned as a promotional tool for engaging potential users and educators who have heard about the site - a portal in its own right, as it were. ★ We did not observe actual users working with it, however, as we were unable to complete the planned site visit by the time of this report. The following is a summary of responses based on the interviews to date on this issue.

- *Donor rather than Educational Community Design* – Several knowledge management and communications specialists found that GLP.net projects a donor, rather than a user-community, perspective - “the product of inside-the-beltway politics and thinking,” as one respondent said. An ICT expert said it reflected a US-government perspective on educational priorities. Others interviewed said that site was not attractive – that it lacked energy and was unfocused.
- *The purpose of the GLP home site is unclear; as well as who ‘should’ engage with it.* Some respondents said they didn’t understand the purpose of GLP from looking at the home page - Is it a site about creating other portal sites or communities, or is it about “Connecting and Inspiring Educators Worldwide”? They said in either case it was unclear; and that the presentation of resources, links, and available tools didn’t suggest commitment to fulfilling any particular “promise.” The site needs a simple set of statements about how the GLP aids teachers and

policymakers, how it preserves important project or program resources, what benefits communities, programs, or projects gain by using the portal, and how the portal benefits education in developing countries. If the portal is meant as an invitation for education or development communities to use the GLP, this is not evident on the site. There are no clear indications as to who is eligible to participate, the process to follow, costs involved, or whom to contact to get started.

- *Opportunities offered by the GLP.net and how to make the most of it are not obvious* - For those who are already using the GLP, there are neither on-site resources nor links to example sites. The *Liferay* platform includes many “portlets” that can be used that may spur greater interest, or engagement with GLP portals. Some of these include: Polls and surveys, Event calendars and schedulers, Photo galleries, Commenting and tagging, User pages, personalization and rich user profiles; Wiki content creation tools; and Affinity/”friending” tools and tie-ins with social networking sites. The *Liferay platform* also provides multi-language capabilities, a quality often cited as one of its major strengths. While these tools are sometimes used on sites such as the Afghanistan Higher Education Project and PEAKS, there is no indication to the visiting educator what opportunities are possible by looking through the GLP home site. The evaluation team has also noted that GLP.net could better demonstrate the multi-language capability by more consistently providing full translations of HTML pages and adding additional, non-Roman alphabet version such as Arabic, Dari, Urdu, or Russian. Explicitly highlighting the multi-language capability with links to GLP sites in other languages may also be helpful.
- *The site seems static, and unless invited, potential users are not engaged* - GLP.Net does not have much in the way of engaging interactivity beyond uploadable /downloadable documents and threaded discussions. The audience is not involved in content or topic generation, in assessment of the utility of features or content, or asked what further might be needed or wanted. Nobody is invited to broaden site alliances, or help add to or manage resources. Several observers remarked that providing resources such as curricula or teaching aids usually involves scrutiny, analysis, and vetting; and it’s not clear who best benefits from what is currently there. As the GLP is not staffed to provide a vetting process, it needs to provide a user-driven rating system. At present all resources merit equal attention, and therefore minimal attention.
- *Navigation*. This can be slightly confusing because there are few visual cues to location within the site. The evaluation team has noted that returning to the main GLP.net site from subsites can sometimes be awkward because different URLs may be displayed for the same page.
- *Resource organization*. While the site contains a growing number of resources, they are not organized in such a way that makes them easily discoverable. Each section is wrapped in the same theme wrapper, making distinguishing content topics difficult. The evaluation team noted that whole sections of content (HIV AIDS, Fragile States, etc.) are almost buried in easy-to-miss links on the Resources page. Resource libraries seem to be duplicated or to have no obvious reason for being split into separate sections, which can be confusing. Within the libraries, clicking on a resource folder presents an undifferentiated list that, because of inappropriate text decoration (everything is underlined), is basically impossible to read. Library items are presented in one type of list, while the contents of Resources Folders are presented in another. Tags, while searchable (Resource Folder), are not themselves clickable to bring up other documents or resources with the same tag.
- *Search and the Limitations of public-private community definition*. The evaluation team noted that search functions are restricted to Public Communities (only the names of communities) or to uploaded resources (titles only), that there is no search function for the site generally (you cannot find text in HTML pages), and that it is not possible to search across sites for public resources.

Most of the GLP communities established so far have been set up as private communities, and this does create a conundrum for making ‘search’ a productive activity. Though in some cases (policy discussion groups, e.g.) such a setup may be appropriate, for others, knowledge managers noted, this structure may present an ‘artificial’ barrier that may operate to the detriment of sharing important information and attracting new members. One compromise possibility would be to have communities listed on the GLP.net site link to descriptive public pages. If membership is offered to newcomers, instructions could be provided for applying. Non-private resources offered by a site could be made available to a broader audience on public pages; limits of search could be specifically agreed to by ‘community owners’.

Resulting hypotheses for next steps for the team: A variety of issues have been identified, but mostly not by actual users of the site, more by policy makers, knowledge management and IT specialists and by the evaluation team itself. Phase II of the evaluation will focus on users’ experiences. As we go on site visits we will compile the issues raised as we go out to the field and to see how users experience the sites with which they interact in person; and to see how some of the features and issues affect usability and knowledge and action opportunities, and make the portal and its communities more useful to education development. While a graphic designer, information architect and library scientist with strong web experience could help rebrand the site with a user-centric feel and repackage different functional sections of the site, if desired, a first step would be to see what kinds of content and functions would aid education development, what education development issues might be addressed, how to best address them, and what the value added would be from any recommended change. The issues of ‘purpose’ and ‘organization’ are very much inter-related; and users will be a good source of information to bring to bear on these issues. Experienced *Liferay* developers may be able to suggest the best ways to incorporate other functionality into the site.

About Portal Design, in general

Knowledge management specialists and managers at Development Gateway, the Brookings Institution, Making Cents International, and the Center for International Private Enterprise stressed a number of common points about building strong COP portals. These points were elicited around a theoretical “good community” design conversation and were not being made in counterpoint to any specific GLP implementation. GLP staff have likewise expressed a similar understanding of positive drivers. Comments or observations from other interviews, as appropriate, are also included. These comments are included for us to consider as a group in terms of GLP and Funder priorities to further pursue through field work.

- The *audience must be well-defined*, and motivations for becoming a member (especially an active member) should be clear and should drive the portal structure, resources, and interactive elements. The idea that “if they build it, they will come” was rejected by almost all those consulted. This was acknowledged by a number of USAID and GLP insiders as a problem in earlier implementations.
- Introducing internet-based tools to audiences with little or no similar experience requires appropriate *practical training and repeated exposure*. In the case of communities from generally low-tech (often in least developed countries), participants may have little experience with computers or even keyboards (noted by a USAID staffer), much less with how to conduct research or collaborate in an on-line environment. One-time exposure to a new tool would not suggest quick adoption. Where repeated opportunity to experiment with the internet is unlikely,

a portal is likewise unlikely to be an effective resource. ICT supervisors/trainers in each of Ruwwad's Youth Development and Resource Centers are an example of planning for sustained training and practice for PYP users. (Subsequent discussions suggest that the GLP is now targeting only beneficiaries with computer experience (Lis, 2/5/09).

- While communities may be established in top-down fashion around a legitimate identified need, how the community is formed, what kinds of resources prove most helpful, and how members will interact with the site and each other is best determined by *involving the intended audience in the development of the portal* itself. Recent GLP efforts have included specific plans to include the target population in determining site requirements. Further, GLP staff have begun working with local implementing technical partners, building capacity while partially relieving GLP staff of providing ongoing support. A focus on specific recommendations from stakeholder involvement might be an important focus for phase 2 of the evaluation; additionally, tracking and helping users be conscious of what they will do with their experiences on the site might be something to focus on in part two of the evaluation.
- Traffic analysis and comments about the difficulties of finding time to engage with the site relates to another characteristic cited for successful communities of practice – namely the buy-in of one or more *community champions* who will spur dialogue, solicit feedback, and generally drive changes requested or indicated by the community members.
- Managers noted that portals require *patience* to allow interest and membership to grow, particularly with topic-based portals (as opposed to action, project, or objective-based portals). Several KM⁴ specialists noted that topical communities only become self-sustaining if 50 or more members are available to participate and contribute on a regular basis.
- Project- or objective-based portals are provided as a tool for meeting specific objectives and are therefore not dependent on a critical mass of participants. USAID and multilateral staff have suggested that *This suggests that building a portal around a specific project or set of objectives may be inherently easier to establish and maintain* but will probably be time-limited. The GLP has been deployed on this basis in joint reviews, USAID–implementer internal discussions, and for providing real- or time-shifted dialogue between the donor community and multilateral groups like the Fast Track Initiative. Several of those interviewed said they saw great potential for using the GLP for information-sharing around a specific project or process.
- *Private communities usually fail*, one knowledge manager said. Most communities rely on new members to bring fresh ideas and approaches. Where there are compelling reasons for limited access to information or privacy, portals can usually be structured to have a public area (including, usually, a method for requesting membership) and other areas reserved only for members or groups of members. See related information about the GLP.net (general) portal below. (This would not generally apply to groups with a tightly defined membership like USAID working groups.)

⁴ Knowledge management is abbreviated here as KM.

Resulting hypotheses for next steps for the team: In field interviews with users, the team can explore the validity of many of these concepts, including exposure and training issues, the presence or absence of community champions, resource sharing, member involvement in resource development and portal change or growth, and motivation around using the portal for specific purposes or objectives beyond concepts of “idea sharing” or “collaboration.”

3. Connectivity and Multiple Information Distribution Methods - Issues and Opportunities

As one professional put it, *When they get connected, with the GLP they'll have someplace to go.* The GLP has been promoted in part as a preliminary destination for those connected to the internet through Equip1, Equip2, or Equip3 projects in a variety of contexts. In some cases, the internet infrastructure expansion effort has been shaped by the project contexts through which the GLP was to be deployed. An example would be the expansion of internet connectivity in Zambia to link teachers through teacher-training institutions. The Rwanda Education Commons is an example in which the GLP effort is being developed as a complement to the country's broader efforts to expand internet access through schools.

Nevertheless, deploying internet-dependent resources and tools in countries that have demonstrably shaky infrastructures carries a number of concerns:

- *The New User* - As noted earlier, *target groups*, including teachers, may have little or no experience with computers or the internet. Being able to use the resources in an environment where almost no one else is connected (and therefore do not provide ready examples of how to use the internet) *will usually demand a sustained training program and repetitive exposure.* Teacher training colleges are highly advantageous venues to provide such training (as is being practiced in Afghanistan and Zambia). In some urban areas, target user groups may already have gotten significant exposure via internet cafés or similar, but rural teachers would usually not have this advantage. One alternative method for limited access of limited internet skills groups is to have a designated coordinator or “digital librarian” to take requests, perform research, or courier messages. Winrock International is establishing such a position in their home office, but field-based agents (such as teachers with a special affinity or interest in using the internet) might play this role closer to the need.
- *Telecommunications infrastructure does not exist alone.* Telephone lines sufficient to support internet connections usually run hand-in-hand with reliable electricity to power both the telecommunications network and the end-user computers necessary for connection. An unreliable electric grid will usually impact telecommunications, meaning either failure would interrupt connectivity. Reliance on generators presents additional difficulties around maintenance, cost, and sustainability, especially if there is no cost-recovery mechanism.

For this reason, some interviewed have recommended that *infrastructure expansion would best be reserved for environments with reasonably reliable existing infrastructure.* This does not negate the many observations made that least developed countries need and deserve reliable and affordable access to the internet. In an increasingly connected world, the least developed countries risk falling further behind. (One respondent lauded USAID for being bold in trying difficult projects such as the GLP, even if the chances for success at this point were less than favorable.)

Another respondent addressed this issue directly by suggesting that the GLP may redefine itself less as a provider of portal technology and more as a conduit of educational resources in formats that best match the experiences and infrastructure reality that teachers and educators function in. *As long as materials and resources exist in a rich and usable format (books, CD-ROM, etc.), connection to the internet can wait*, the respondent said.

One example of rich media resources in a non-connected environment is Widernet's eGranary project, in which thousands of websites (including those with dynamic back ends) are available on an eGranary external hard disk. The GLP has been developing a partnership agreement with Widernet to be included in the eGranary library. It is not yet known if the GLP would provide funding to Widernet for the effort.⁵ Tufts University is working on a similar non-connected network of library resources (currently social science materials) to be distributed on CD-ROMS. One respondent stressed that intranets that are periodically refreshed with updated material can serve teachers very well in off or usually-off-grid environments.

One alternative to computer- and grid-based access is cellphones. As a USAID staffer remarked, *Cellphones are much more available, known, immediate, and do not require the use of English*. For simple communication or short text treatments, cellphones may be sufficient for many collaborative and communications purposes. However, for longer documents, images, and the like, the form factor is currently not satisfactory, many respondents agreed.

Another alternative is to pursue other forms of electronic content delivery for teachers, including radio (including wind-up radios) and televisions able to be powered by car battery or similar. The GLP will be working with South Africa's Mindset to develop digital materials suitable not only for delivery over the internet but via radio, television, and physical media (CD-ROMs, etc.)

With the advent of truly capable smart phones like the iPhone and Blackberries, which should become much more affordable in short order, the cell networks may provide a reasonable alternative to a computer-based internet experience. Widernet's staff discussed the possibility of teachers' being able to carry the entire eGranary library on a smartphone; and noted they were currently investigating the best way to update the eGranary library remotely, replacing or updating only those sections requiring change whenever the cellphone is connected to the mobile network.

Resulting issues for the Management Team: The GLP management is already exploring the use of off-line resources such as eGranary. As it moves somewhat away from its past "developer" role and into an information resource broker role, the team may want to explore options beyond the wired internet and computers. The prevalence of cellphones – and their self-sustaining advantages – may offer new, cheaper linking options, and radio and television are already being used by organizations like Search for Common Ground. The GLP's partnership with South Africa's Mindset will allow further exploration.

⁵ Widernet respondent noted that one stumbling block for eGranary was the relative expense entailed with its \$750 disks within developing country environments.

C. Preliminary Findings and Hypotheses - Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC)

The EPDC site is a complex set of data tools that have been packaged for use by both data experts and laypersons. While EPDC contracts with some organizations to whom it provides data analyses, the majority of the use of the site is from government agencies, donors, and the public.

1. User Engagement with EPDC, Viewed through the Lens of Site Traffic⁶

*Over a six month period in 2008, between March and September, the number of recorded visits to the EPDC site is unclear. A large discrepancy became apparent during presentation of the draft findings for this report.⁷ Traffic analysis by the evaluation team calculated the total as 3,605, broken down geographically as shown in the table, with two third of all traffic coming from North and Central America. Traffic analysis by EPDC concluded something like 66,000 per week. However, in both cases, we think, most external link hits not from searches (Google, Yahoo, etc.) came from aed.org, glp.org, or the World Bank EdStats page. Use from outside North America and Europe constituted only about 15% of visits.

ET Analysis; Under Discussion		
EPDC Visits		
March–September 2008 (6 mos)		
	#	%
World	3 605	100
North America	2 404	67
Europe/Russia	675	19
Asia	292	8
South America	62	2
Africa	110	3
Oceania	48	1
Unknown	14	0

*Please note that the EPDC reports that it has logged much higher site traffic as measured with a different set of tools. The disparity between the numbers is under review and will be presented in the final evaluation report.

*Based on our analyses from Google Analytics, an average user visited about 3 pages during their time at the site, but less than 50% of visitors went on from the Home Page to report, search, or content pages. About 18% used data searches, and an additional 23% used some combination of map, country profile, or graph searches. About 4% looked at the reports page.

The primary reports requested were, for about 40% of the visitors, other EPDC /AED reports on educational data; a third of the visitors are reported to have reviewed the Iraq Education Data Sheet; about 20% downloaded an EFA report; and about 10% downloaded EQUIP2 reports.⁸

⁶ These data are primarily from Google Analytics for the period March through September, 2008, analyzed by Erik Schmidt, Information Architect, productops (www.productops.com). However, pdf reports downloaded are from site logs, as these data are not captured in the same way.

⁷ EPDC seems to calculate parts of pages rather than the page definition that Google Analytics uses. We think this is one reason for the big disparity in Evaluation Team and EPDC calculations on site use. However, this is still under discussion and review as of the time of this report revision.

⁸ Most frequent pdf reports downloaded are captured from site logs, and analyzed by Erik Schmidt, Information Architect, productops (www.productops.com).

★*Resulting hypotheses for next steps for the team:* A fuller understanding of who is using the site and in what ways is warranted from these preliminary results. Further, how traffic is being measured will be revisited, with recommendations on how to better gather and interpret traffic statistics.

Relatively low site traffic also supports the preliminary finding that the site is largely invisible to a broader audience (discussed in more depth below).

★One of the hypotheses from the initial analyses and follow-up discussions is that quantity of traffic analysis is likely to under-report the extent of use or value attached to the EPDC resource. The underlying rationale for this is that an efficient use of the site for data mining would be to download the data and to mine it from one's own 'station'. Thus one may be using the resources from the site much more than is captured from the traffic, per se. Phase II of the evaluation will aim, in part, to propose appropriate outcomes from the resource and ways to measure usage more clearly.

2. What Respondents Said about EPDC – the Concept, Its Datasets & Tools, and the Staffing

To date we have discussed EPDC with 26 individuals – five within USAID, nine within AED (EPDC Staff and others), eight within other bi-lateral or multi-lateral agencies, two among knowledge managers, and two from within other international organizations. These were just initial interviews to see to what extent they knew about and used EPDC (if relevant), and what their experiences and perspectives were about it. See the interview questions included as *Appendix 3* of this report. We expect more in-depth information from site visits around the EPDC, and from additional discussions with policy makers within the USG and other groups. To date, however, we have a mixed picture, over all, primarily from a small group of USG and Donor respondents. These have indicated the following issues:

About the EPDC Concept

- *Those who know EPDC and work closely with them appreciate their expertise* – International education data multi-lateral organizations were highly complimentary of EPDC's analytical skills, their innovative output (country profiles, demographic maps and charts), their projection tools, their ability to analyze and interpret data from a multitude of datasets, and their collaborative and flexible work style.
- *Who is the EPDC for?* – Bi-lateral donor planners and policy makers in 'data units' generally do not really know the EPDC. They use other reports, obtain their main data from other sources, and use EPDC primarily for sub-national data, if at all. Planners and policymakers recognized the quality of the EPDC's work, but noted that it was too old to be used for short- to medium-term planning purposes, are not the same data that ministry planners are using, and that planners do not know what to do with the demographic data provided. They say that what is good for reports is not helpful for making policy decisions, action plans, and funding decisions. Who is the EPDC's intended user? Is it people who want to produce descriptive reports and therefore like the maps and graphs the EPDC offers? Is it donors who want projections data to inform funding decisions? Is it ministry planners who are developing FTI-ready sector plans?
- *Who can use the EPDC and its services?* Although the EPDC was set up as an alliance to provide resources to the whole international education community, mechanisms for establishing relationships (contractual or via a kind of supporting membership) are not clear. Can other organizations such as AIR or EDC ask for services? Is there a fee structure? Can other

governments? The center's affiliation with AED and USAID creates certain natural barriers to partnership and broadened support. One policymaker familiar with the EPDC said that, despite generally good relations with USAID staff, it was very difficult for other donor agencies to see beyond the US government thumbprint and the recent administration's reputation, or to understand how (and why) they could or should contract to use of EPDC. This was not meant to be a hostile statement about the government, but rather projected lack of clarity about why EPDC existed and how USAID thought others (inside and outside the US) should relate to it.

Partnership opportunities and benefits were not clearly stated. *We can't just ask them to do work for us and let USAID pay*, one respondent said. *It seems a little embarrassing to ask*, said another. Others simply said it was remarkable that the EPDC staff was willing to provide custom assistance without compensation, suggesting it was a US-funded educational resource that didn't need assistance. While some groups clearly had no such reservations, having already contracted for services, apparently to some it was unclear.

- *What is the EPDC for?* - A main concern that almost all respondents had about the EPDC was a lack of clarity about its purpose. While most respondents had no difficulty in identifying interesting and positive aspects of the EPDC's work, most expressed their queries as *the data need to tell a story*. Another remarked that *there's a lot of Data in the EPDC, but not much Policy*. This may be part of a concern expressed about the lack of context in which the EPDC data is presented. Respondents remarked there was little in the way of interpretation or guidance in using the datasets and projections. While the experienced user can see the variety of reports on the site that provide context and relate to how to use these data, it seems the respondents who express bewilderment or frustration want more immediate context and guidance.
- *What questions can the EPDC help us answer?* Related to the above, respondents seemed unclear about what questions the EPDC can help them answer (and what questions they should go elsewhere for data to answer). Several respondents said it was crucial that the EPDC clarify how it differed from UIS, EdStats, and other similar organizations, and what capabilities it brings that are unique and useful. Projections analysis and tools were cited most often as the capability not offered by other groups, though others pointed to presentation and analysis of regional, sub-national and district-level data as a differentiator.
- *Funding and the long-term development focus* - The EPDC's data structures and projections analysis suggest that it is set up for the long term, but its funding structure is clearly short-term, making it difficult for outside agencies to consider the EPDC for strategic alliances. The issue seems to be whether EPDC is appropriate to work with when data updates have to be relied upon over time. Will it exist in two years if we start using their products?
- *EPDC is in many ways an invisible organization* – While there have been meetings to introduce donors to EPDC at conferences or workshops, international respondents indicated that EPDC was an unknown entity in donor and policy discussion forums. Some respondents went on to say that the EPDC was not marketing itself; and had not asked to be promoted in policy and donor circles, by others. EPDC has not adequately explained what questions can be answered through its data presentations and analysis. Even those who have been introduced to the EPDC have little to report about it to others. There is a lack of clarity about how different groups should relate to the EPDC, how it relates to other data shops, and, if a contractual relationship would be a good thing, what other groups would get of value from a formal partnership or contractual relationship. EPDC seems to exist without significant champions at policy and donor forums. Silence about EPDC may be

more dangerous than it seems, for, as some respondents expressed it, use of the EPDC's products would create positive *buzz*, while silence would likewise signal a lack of utility.

Resulting hypotheses for next steps for the team: There is some confusion about who and what the EPDC is for, how the EPDC offerings differ from others, and when, why and how to work with them as an organization. The value offered is confusing even to some in the US government, for those who are deriving a lot of benefit (UNESCO, World Bank) are perceived to pay very little, while staff at USAID, which pays much more, don't know how and when to use it, and don't use it very much, and have expressed frustration around receiving help interpreting EPDC data for planning purposes. This cost-benefit issue has created ongoing friction within USAID, but it also is confusing to outsiders. The above bullets represent a complex issue which we think will require sitting down with diverse audience groups to try to address. In part, the recent meeting about data needs, held at AED in January of this year, should have provided some thought-provoking input. We look forward to making use of that as part of subsequent analyses.

About EPDC Datasets and Tools

Respondents had a variety of views about EPDC data and toolsets:

- *Melding administrative and household survey data together* – This is seen as a positive advancement in understanding how demography affects education trends - especially at a sub-national level. The demographic expertise of EPDC staff in understanding how to compensate for country-specific data anomalies or characteristics was also seen as a significant asset.
- *EPDC data as reference* – Some respondents remarked that having a variety of data in one place was a time-saver, but none interviewed said they used the EPDC as their “go-to” data source. Most cited UIS as their standard of reference. (One respondent said that, personally, automatic reference to UIS or EdStats seemed more a habit than a conscious decision, suggesting that the EPDC could become a main data source.) One respondent expressed some doubt about the comparability of the data, though the timbre of the comment suggested more a lack of understanding about sources than a doubt about quality; nevertheless, that element of doubt prevented the respondent from using the EPDC. Field-level planners said they relied on more up-to-date (usually ministry) data.
- *Country Profiles, Maps, and Population Graphs* - Profiles, maps (especially maps with sub-national aspects), and population graphs were praised for bringing a visually attractive presentation of the data to the field. For publications like the FTI annual report, these were seen as a great improvement over long textual or tabular treatments.

Use of these kinds of data for planning - Planners we interviewed remarked that this treatment, while good for general reports, did not provide actionable information. Further, there was a suggestion that the EPDC staff have deliberately stayed away from interpreting or applying the data to planning tasks. (*When we asked them to help us interpret the data, they said the EPDC didn't do that*, one respondent remarked. Another respondent acknowledged that the EPDC was not currently funded to provide that level of analysis.)

- *Projections and Tools* - Projections analysis and tools (Human Capital, DemoEd) are seen by some respondents as the most important product of the EPDC. No other groups seem to be providing the level of analysis the EPDC brings. GMR staff were especially complimentary of the EPDC's willingness to work with them to develop a common set of tools and understanding, and praised the resulting contributions to its Report.

Tools were a little scary though, both in what they can do and the interface - One respondent commented that the tools, while useful for those with a reasonably nuanced understanding of data, could present difficulties for those with fewer skills or education in manipulating data. Therefore the tools needed a set of “governors” or data-bounding guidelines so that absurd planning scenarios wouldn’t be produced (*re DemoEd*). Others remarked that the tools would probably prove more popular if the interface were more attractive and interactive. Gapminder was brought up more than once as an example of a data-rich, user-friendly, and attractive environment for manipulating scenarios.

- *Country-Level Analyses and Local or Regional Capacity-Building* - The EPDC has performed detailed analyses for several countries, including Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia, for which rich profiles and presentation treatments were produced, at district or lower level.⁹ One respondent remarked that this could be a supportable niche for EPDC – having the EPDC produce country-level reports on a subset of least-developed countries each year (thus covering all countries through a multi-year cycle).

Producing data may not be enough; the EPDC may have to help users make sense of them – Another respondent, talking about the country-level analyses, said those treatments, while attractive, probably were not useful to the ministries. This person emphasized that Ministries needed to be able to interpret the data for their own use. So while these exercises demonstrated how the EPDC’s methods and products could be applied to ministry-level data, the EPDC would still need to work closely with willing governments to produce actionable conclusions. (Several respondents tied this closely to training and capacity-building.)

Resulting hypotheses for next steps for the team: Although EPDC data and tools are recognized and appreciated, how they relate to or should be used with other existing data tools does not seem to be recognized. Also, while those who have used the tools appreciate staff expertise applied to making the data useful and blending them together, potential users don’t know of this, and perhaps are afraid of all the data and tools on EPDC and what they would have to do themselves to use them appropriately. In addition to the audience-knowledge and resource marketing issues brought up earlier, this may be a data configuration and marketing issue: ways to make the data experience with the site more ‘personal’, to help potential users see the linkages and the distinctions between the data available on different sites, and to understand better what they would get out of using them. We think these are issues to address more actively in the next phase.

About EPDC Staffing and Support Strategies

- *EPDC staff were praised by all interviewed for their data knowledge and rigorous standards* – All staff are praised, even by project detractors, as intelligent and capable analysts, for their knowledge of data, their flexibility, and ability to work with other teams. Respondents noticed and appreciated the analytic rigor that has been brought to the task of melding so many datasets. Staff from organizations that have worked with them have expressed universal satisfaction with the results.
- *Data specialists, analysts* - Respondents talked about the trade-off between being or becoming an ‘Analyst shop’ and staying as a ‘Data warehouse’. Of course the more the EPDC works on interpreting data, the more it focuses on the user market, and the less it focuses on creating the data sets and tools, as it has done (given constant resources). There seems to be a divide, as expressed by

⁹ Note that ministries have not yet been interviewed about these efforts.

respondents, between the data tools and the ability to use them, as well as a lack of understanding of all the work EPDC has put in to helping users make sense of the data. Respondents spoke generally of finding value in increased effort toward time-sensitive interpretive analysis.

- *Addition of analysis staff with significant education experience would be helpful* – Some respondents indicated that while EPDC had excellent staff, it suffered from having no senior staff at with a deep background in education policy and education data. Such staff would help provide context for the interpretation and use of the data in Ministry and other administrative settings. Several respondents noted that a senior education analyst could help translate current EPDC output into a format and language that education planners and policymakers could better understand and use.
- *Internationally-based staff/colleagues and Regional training sessions* – Some donor and multilateral respondents suggested that the EPDC’s methods and tools (and use of the dataset) could be more broadly applied through increased training. Structured training programs, perhaps at a regional level in conjunction with UIS efforts (Africa was mentioned explicitly), would build awareness of the EPDC, strengthen local or regional capacity for using the data effectively, and spread the knowledge base beyond EPDC (and thus US) walls. With more international players using EPDC data, tools, and methods, especially those closer to the target beneficiaries, demand would necessarily be higher for the EPDC as a service, and the more-international flavor of this sort of partnership may invite support from a broader donor pool. Some training efforts have been carried out with Dutch-sponsored country participants, but a more systematic approach was recommended.
- *A Multi-national locus for EPDC might be appropriate* - The governance or “housing” structure of the EPDC, within AED and funded almost solely by USAID, was cited by some as barriers to natural consumers of the EPDC’s products.¹⁰ Several respondents suggested the EPDC should either be absorbed into a multinational structure such as UNESCO or the World Bank (especially since they seem to be the primary beneficiaries of the EPDC’s output at present and could then provide support from all donor governments) or that the EPDC should find a home within a large foundation or institution seen as reasonably agnostic. (Others expressed reservations about mirroring the EPDC in UN/UNESCO bureaucracy.) No respondents came up with a definitive solution but one suggested the US Institute for Peace, and another the Center for Global Development. (However, one respondent feared placing the EPDC in a large, multi-sectoral organization could separate it further from its intended audience.)

Resulting hypotheses for next steps for the team: As stated earlier, EPDC/AED recently hosted a meeting regarding data needs. We believe a number of interesting findings from those meetings emerged that should be combined with the staffing issues raised to look more in depth at what configuration of services and staffing would add value for users and potential users and would foster the visibility, usability, and sustainability of EPDC products and services.

¹⁰ This is nothing new, as AED leaders also acknowledged the difficulty of establishing a sense of independence from either USAID or AED but expressed no reservations about “democratizing” the governance structure if other supporters came to the table. *This was always meant to be an alliance*, one respondent said. Note that AED peer organizations have not yet interviewed.)

3. Respondents and Evaluation Team Reflections on the EPDC Site Design

The EPDC home page is the most important public face the project can present, its best way to become more visible. On that basis, an initial review of the site was undertaken. The site is structured chiefly around five components:

- Educational database (data searches past and projected)
- Country profiles (as well as charts and maps)
- EPDC Projections tools (Human Capital and DemoEd)
- Prepared analyses (Reports and policy papers)
- Links to other sites and Information about EPDC

The following describes the findings from these initial analyses. These findings are primarily from the technical review team, the and the evaluation team; however we have tied them into what the respondents stated earlier as issues; and some respondents noted these issues themselves. We suggest that we review these with the Management Team, and work in the second phase of the evaluation to better understand the impact of these for the users and potential users of the site, and make recommendations based on this.

- **Home Page:** The Home page says almost nothing about the EPDC as an organization, what the site offers, or why anyone should use it. It does not present itself as a ‘community’ resource, or a resource that has been used by missions, other donors, policy makers, or host country governments for any particular purposes. The Home page is by far the most important promotional opportunity the site presents, and could be an illustrated ‘showcase’ for the capabilities of the EPDC, highlighting significant or recent accomplishments and collaborations, and demonstrating to visitors why they can benefit from the collaboration.

Highlighting a few other organizations - The front-page section reserved for featured links, highlights one journal and one other organization – why these? The links feature at the top of the page gets to a full list of links, but again provides no context and no way of becoming one of them. What others might be highlighted? In all cases, there is no context for the links or why they appear on the front page. Some respondents (e.g. the GMR) said they could / would provide opportunity to link to a page describing the relationship between the EPDC and the Report, as well as commentary and quotes from participants involved in the effort about the service and value the EPDC provides.

Competing links and no pathways for a user - The Home page, effectively, is filled with competing links (via menus and on-page text links) to the same content. They rely on the user knowing what they want to do and how they want to do it on a ‘product’ by product basis. This reminded us of the respondent who said that there ‘needed to be a story’ (see the section above on Concept). The page is organized around EPDC sections, but without context, and not around potential different types of users and how those users are benefited by the various components of the site.

Finding out what EPDC can do; Sectional promotions – As mentioned by several respondents, there is limited context provided for any of the data or data tool sections. Looking at the site, we see that each major section could have a visual and contextual treatment, explaining the purpose of the content, its audiences, and providing additional information or links that aid the user’s understanding. While front-page textual links currently provide a doorway to a capability or resources page, they do not constitute ‘teasers’ in any way. There could be an explanatory page, which would contain visual and textual information about the content offered, whom it is intended for, links to guides or tutorials, etc. This ties into what some of the respondents we talked with stated as issues, presented in the earlier sections:

- What is the EPDC? This is often but not always encapsulated in the banner, with a link to more detailed information.
- What services will the EPDC provide, and to whom? (A link would provide the array of products or services, costs, (if any, and to whom), opportunities for membership, subscription, or affiliation, solicitations for partnership, etc.) Who are the contact people? What are the methods? Are there other human resources (say, regionally or by country) who can help with data searches, profiles, training, or analysis?
- What data are available, who uses it, and for what? (This points directly to the “What questions can the EPDC answer” criticism noted earlier.)
- What do products look like (show a piece of a map or graphic), and what can they say that a table or paragraph can’t? Who has used these products, and how?
- What are projections and the projection stools? What are they for, and who would use them?
- What is the audience for the reports and white papers?

Signing up and signing in: The sign-in process appears to make the site a private club, because site membership is stated to be by invitation only. Some people/organizations are invited to have accounts; others, not – the rationale or criteria for account eligibility are not described, nor are the benefits from having an account. Non account holders are able to use the public data, but this seems to court part time temporary use. It does not help create a relationship with the EPDC.

Respondents stated they were unclear about the way they should use the site (see the Concept section); the structure of the registration process seems to support this. Allowing membership can provide meaningful benefits to users and to the EPDC. By encouraging registration you can offer to keep members informed of changes to the site or new materials available, allow commenting and “grading” of materials and capabilities, and allow members to save complex searches in a custom toolbox or profile available each time they sign in. Users do not want to be forced to interact with a site, but they usually like the option of doing so. Registration could be short and relatively painless, and options could be offered contextually (e.g., a “save this search” message could appear with search results). Non-registered users can be subtly reminded of capabilities reserved for registered users. (“Registered users can save their searches.”) Registered users can also be polled from time to time to gather opinion or solicit suggestions. We agree that users should always be given easy opt-out options, and generated email should be infrequent; however, as structured, EPDC is not utilizing its potential and may be confusing or pushing away its user base.

EPDC Visibility: Respondents noted that EPDC was ‘invisible’ (discussed in the *Concept* section). From a search engine perspective, there is reinforcement for this. The EPDC site is almost invisible to Google and others. If exact words are not used in a search query, the EPDC usually does not appear on the first page of return hits, which is practically fatal to discovery if users are not reaching the sites through dedicated links (of which there are few). For example, neither “Education Data” nor “Education Policy” nor even “Education Policy Center” will pull the EPDC to the first page on Google, although “Education Policy Data” puts the EPDC at the top. The EPDC may wish to research effective keyword metadata for inclusion on the site. As noted earlier, getting links from other education and education data sites will also increase both site hits and page rankings.

- **User Experience Issues** – While, as users stated themselves, the site is reasonably straightforward, there are several user issues that may affect new or inexperienced users, in particular; and users at low-bandwidth locations.

Personalization of the site – The EPDC site treats each visitor as a one-off and forcing the visitor to save everything on her own. Essentially EPDC does almost nothing to build a relationship with the user, for longer term use of the site:

- *Providing input* – There is really no easy way to provide input or suggestions, to comment on a resource or capability, or to ask for help about a specific issue. Clicking *Contact* generates a blank ‘mailto’ call picked up by the user’s email client, but provides no context or information about subject matter that can be addressed or the expected response times. (Note that the evaluation team’s actual use of the contact form prompted a rapid, personal, and effective response.)

Error messages should generate notification to staff as well as provide a meaningful message to the user. Additionally, EPDC may want to provide mechanisms for commenting about or rating resources.

- *Personal spaces* – The user who is doing data extractions or projections or maps cannot save the request parameters, either for rerunning in the future or (for example) as a template for modification using another group of countries. This makes the site awkward to use and does not engage the user in ongoing experience.
- *Invitations to return - Update notices* – Systems can push out notices that bring the user back to a site. This is particularly relevant for a data site that updates reports and data at non-periodic (known) intervals.

Data search mechanisms: The search tools are relatively straightforward and provide great flexibility, although some observers have said they are ‘ugly.’ However, there are several features which do not make it user-friendly.

- *Processor capacity* - EPDC does not indicate, in any obvious way, how much a user is likely to be able to ask for (in terms of search parameters) before the analysis fails or times out. While this differs by users’ bandwidth, the site could support users with both friendlier error messages and indication of models of user requests (with the number of parameters) that work at different connection speeds – e.g. what to do to be as efficient as possible when your requests are ‘crashing’. Database hits and searches are the obvious slowdown in the mechanism, which can be frustrating, especially for those trying to be efficient by generating a large database to analyze on their own, or those with slow connections. The EPDC might consider implementing a version of the entire ‘dataset’ that can be downloaded as a hash table, which could then be searched locally at much greater speed. Such users could be informed about significant changes or updates to the database so that they could re-download the data during downtimes or off-hours.
- *Ways to save searches* – If a search fails, there is no way to re-try it without starting from scratch and manually entering it. This wastes a lot of user time.
- *Clearing data requests* – This can be problematic (is “clear all” clearing data from all categories or only the category currently open for change?), and there is no effective way of stopping a guided search query once it has begun.

- *Bandwidth requirements* – We noted in the traffic analysis that relatively few users in regions with bandwidth issues made use of the system, and that length of time on the page increased, probably because of waiting rather than more intensive use. Though it is expected that the majority of EPDC users currently reside in the developed world and have fast access, if developing country planners are a true intended audience, they may find substantial barriers. Even simple pages are loaded with long scripts or long css files (often not needed on the pages being loaded) and are constructed with HTML table structures that can prevent sequential page loading. The home page, which presents almost no complexity at all, comes in at about 200K, even though the images (the usual bandwidth hogs) play almost no roll in the size. The EPDC may need to re-examine the time dependencies, provide the data and search tools in some off-line manner, or concede that many developing countries will not use the site pending a change in their connectivity.

Maps, Graphs, and Projection Tools: The maps and graph pages have been universally lauded as a clever and attractive treatment of data. The DemoEd projection tool was cited as an important advancement for being able to run “what-if” scenarios and to discover dependencies between general demography, enrollment trends, teacher loads, infrastructure and materials needs, and related costs. However, the power for the user from these tools is not illustrated. These pages are text heavy and illustration light – which, for a user with limited experience in policy or with data, is deadly. These tools, as signature ‘value added’ from EPDC, could be both more ‘illustrated’ and more user friendly.

- *Interfaces can be somewhat confusing.* The maps page does not always function as expected. There may be merit in providing a map interface for selecting countries or regions, similar to the maps interface under the Profile Explorer. The Projection tools are somewhat daunting, especially those that require outside tools that must be downloaded and installed (e.g., Vensim Reader), then linked to Excel. Further, one respondent worried about wrong-headed projections being done because of a lack of guidance about how far certain parameters can be pushed before absurdities are generated. Unconfident users may worry that they are indeed doing projections that aren’t warranted. More technical assistance on the page would be helpful. Some statistical packages, for example, provide a more dynamic manual that can go along with the system. (Note that one respondent said that the tools were straightforward for those knowledgeable about data manipulation, educational issues, and statistics, and suggested that those without sufficient expertise in the area may not be good candidates for use of those tools in any event. Real-world capacity-building to a broader user base may therefore invite a broader inquiry into the who’s and how’s of applying such tools.)
- *Maps: How to clear search criteria* - Although experimentation is easy, for any particular filtering rubric it is not evident how to clear a search.

Resulting hypotheses for next steps for the evaluation and management teams: There are a variety of user issues the Evaluation Team has identified, many of which reinforce what the respondents have identified as their concerns. No doubt EPDC has already considered many of these and made decisions based on them. For the next phase of the evaluation it may be useful to review these issues with the Evaluation Team and discuss which ones might be useful to focus on in more depth with users, either as things which could add value or which lower barriers.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This report is based, as stated, only on interviews with a few respondents and on no field work to date. The discussions around the presentation of these initial findings have been followed by individual meetings with the COTR and Project Directors. Based on the totality of these discussions, a follow-up workplan has been developed for each resource that will be presented to the Resource Management teams.

1. Select specific issues mentioned to date or discussed as part of new information from GLP and EPDC project work to focus on.
2. Identify key kinds of outcomes desired from the evaluation and how these will be developed
3. Tender a revised workplan based on this report and discussions, and implement that workplan.

Appendices

1. Workplan, annotated with GAE Management Team comments
2. Original Proposal
3. Interview Agenda for GLP and EPDC
4. GLP Project List (current version)

Mid-Course Evaluation of Global Learning Portal (GLP) and Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC) Project

GLOBAL EVALUATION & MONITORING II

GEM II BPA Number EDH-E-00-08-00003-00

REVISED WORKPLAN

Submitted

7 November 2008



Revised Work Plan submitted by the
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Revised Workplan Global Assets Evaluation

Note: This workplan is intended as a living document, subject to change as information and circumstance suggest. It builds on the plan submitted in the proposal, and does not repeat any of the basic information included in that one. Comments written into the document are based on reviews with Resource Managers

Objectives and Approach

The Global Assets Evaluation will explore the effectiveness of the Global Learning Portal (GLP) and the Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC) to date, but with special emphasis on strategic and tactical changes that the assets may adopt to be more responsive and effective in the future, leading to strengthened alliances and broader funding support. A path to sustainability is the primary goal.

Beyond document review and a technical analysis of the sites, the overall approach relies chiefly on interviews and surveys with stakeholders: funders, implementers, users, partners, alliance members, and others as determined during the course of discovery. Beyond regular interviews with stakeholders, the evaluation will look in-depth at several country initiatives (case studies), conduct field interviews in a number of additional countries or around specific issue areas, and survey as many users, past and present, as possible through email or web surveys.

An interim findings report will be presented in January 2009. The final report, after additional case studies, surveys, and analysis, will be produced in May.

Rationale and Genesis of the Approach

This document is based on the review of the resources, discussion with consultants regarding the evolution of the resources, the technical capacity afforded, and the extent of documented engagement in their use; discussion with project and USAID informants about the evolution of the portals and the roadmap for the future. The following has been a list of people interviewed to date, however additional work on the Web and review of documents provided by AED also has taken place.

Interviews:

GLP: Rob Schware, Steven Ehrenberg (Project Manager Afghanistan, Zambia), Jodi Lis (re Partnerships)

EPDC: George Ingram, Babbette Wills, Sarah Oliver (re technology),

Technical site review and traffic analysis: Siobhan Green (Sonjara); Erik Schmitt, (ProductOps),

USAID: Greg Loos, Joe Kitts (re Zambia site visit, and push/pull of entry process into of GLP); Buff McKenzie (re evolution and objectives of GLP)

Zambia operational context: Malcolm McPherson (Harvard)

Alternative delivery formats: Cliff Missen, Director eGranary, Widernet

As a result of the work done to date, we have become clearer about the nature of some of the issues to be addressed, how to address them, and with whom to address them, in order to flesh

out issues for effective use and how to conceive of opportunities for fostering appropriate use and appreciation of the resources.

Tasks and Schedule

The tasks below outline steps toward the evaluation goals. A Gantt chart, following, gives approximate dates for the activities related to these tasks. The timeline is based on site visit logistic requirements (e.g. Mission availability) as well as estimated time required for data collection and analysis.

The tasks below outline all of the activities for this evaluation, including some that have begun. Key stakeholders, for example, while already interviewed, we will be revisiting throughout the evaluation.

Task 1: History and Development Discovery

Timeline: Oct/Nov 2008 + Jan/Feb/Mar 2009

This discovery phase tracks the site/project development arc, from inception through changes over time, informed by objectives, agreements, workplans, funding agreements, and the opinions and impressions of interviewees. This phase chiefly addresses how the current products and project approaches were developed. Discussions with partners, alliance members, and potential donors also focus on how the projects can be improved and gain broader support. The first phase of key interviews with project implementation and management staff have been completed. Through those interviews we are not compiling a broader list of contacts; so we will expand these interview targets for the purpose of 'discovery' to include multi-lateral and bilateral donors, ngos, etc.

Activities

- Project – related Document Analysis (in-p)
 - Binders or electronic documentation provided by GLP/EPDC
 - Other documents provided in the course of interviews
 - Web-research on other resources in use and overlap of information
- Interviews with AED staff (may expand):
 - GLP: Rob Schware, Jodi Lis, Steven Ehrenburg, Sonja Hubbard, Bruce Geisert (past director); other GLP team members
 - EPDC: George Ingram, Babette Wils, Sarah Oliver, research associates
- Interviews with USAID staff (will expand):
 - Greg Loos, EGAT/HCD
 - Buff MacKenzie, EGAT/ED
 - Joe Kitts, AFR/SD
 - Others as determined, including at Missions
- With the assistance of AED project and USAID staff, develop contact lists for and conduct interviews with partners, alliance members, collaborators, clients, and possible donors:
 - UNESCO EFA; UIS
 - World Bank EdStats
 - IHSN, similar
 - FTI Secretariat
 - Other USG stakeholders (State, Congressional staff, other)

- World Economic Forum
- DFID
- MinBuza
- SIDA
- CIDA
- Mindset
- Widernet/eGranary

- Sun - off
- Intel - off
- Oracle - off

- Education International
- Civil Society organizations (West Bank, Zambia, Kenya)
- Millenium Challenge Corporation
- Business Roundtable
- Committee for Economic Development
- Chambers of Commerce
- Global Campaign for Education
- Interaction
- Others as determined

An issue which we will have to address in planning the evaluation of GLP is the emphasis accorded to the private sites they sponsor. Currently this seems to be the focus of a large proportion of user interaction with the resources. Because of the privacy agreements with these sites, it is not yet clear whether we will be granted access to these sites. Yet without access to site logs and the ability to contact private GLP site 'owners,' it really is not possible to say much about their use of the resources available, nor is it possible to evaluate the value added in any independent way. This would severely constrain any statements that can be made about the GLP, we believe. However if it is not considered to be an ongoing strategy, this may not be important. We will need to be advised by USAID on this issue.

Note – many interviews can be done over the phone or through e-mail. However in-person interviews are contemplated for international organizations with information development and dissemination 'briefs', because of the ability to best understand the resources they have and to talk with staffing working on the variety of related areas – in order to envision issues for collaboration. Interviews of this sort are contemplated with UNESCO, Education International, and others. When determined, these will be scheduled in conjunction with travel for country site visits, as feasible and warranted.

Task 2: Technical Review

Timeline: Oct/Nov 2008

The technical reviews will examine the site platforms for appropriateness (does the implementation advance the objectives of the project) and for usage (to determine how and how often they are used, and, as possible, who is using the sites and for what purpose).

The technical analysis will also address usability issues such as ease of discoverability (are the sites optimized for discovery on search engines), clarity and ease of navigation, page load-times, accessibility and availability of resources, as well as general aesthetic and look-and-feel issues.

As appropriate, issues of user customization, administrator training (chiefly GLP), or use of tools (chiefly EPDC at present) will be addressed.

From these reviews, we expect to develop a series of recommendations for an improved user experience, including personalization strategies, enhanced site visibility, improved navigation, and alternative ways of presenting content.

Activities

- Platform analysis
 - Do the current platforms advance the objectives of the program?
 - Is the technology appropriate, both as a delivery system and for the intended user groups?
 - Are there technical hindrances to use?
 - What platform or implementation changes could be made?
- Site traffic analysis (dependent on availability and clarity of data/logs)
 - User origins:
 - Domain type
 - Geography
 - Connection characteristics
 - Site usage:
 - Unique visits (volume and frequency)
 - Length of stay on site
 - User path and exit point characteristics
 - Page heat maps (which show where users click on a page, helpful in determining usage patterns and user confusion or clarity about page elements)
- Site experience:
 - Page load times and related speed issues
 - Site discoverability/search-engine optimization issues
 - Navigation and resource accessibility
 - Server response/latency issues
 - Content display aspects (primarily EPDC)
 - Aesthetics
 - User motivation issues (is site usage useful and rewarding)
- Customization, tool usage, and training:
 - GLP:
 - Ease of administration
 - Administrator (outside AED) customization issues
 - User and administrator training requirements
 - EPDC:
 - User training (for general site) requirements
 - User training (for projection tools or similar)

Task 3: Evaluation Tracking Tool Development

Timeline: Nov 2008, with later revisions

Data discovered through interviews and surveys are recorded, catalogued, and synthesized. Resources identified in interviews or separately are obtained, catalogued and reviewed. Additionally, resources will be collected that will be of interest to stakeholders on potentially interesting opportunities or directions that other organizations have undertaken. Tools used in other contexts will be adopted, potentially modified, and initiated to document the process of the evaluation and enable sharing of results and resources discovered periodically.

Activities

- Adopt and modify for use appropriate tools for tracking and documenting the data developed through the evaluation, the resources discovered, and the findings.

Task 4: Conduct of Case Studies

Timeline: Dec 2008 + Jan/Feb 2009

Case Studies provide opportunity to interview a wide range of stakeholders around individual educational or related initiatives. The case studies have been selected to provide both past, current, and future implementations of the GLP and EPDC. A good part of this initial period of discovery has been involved in understanding what would be useful case study sites – e.g. sites that will provide insights on effective practices and opportunities, and things which could be modified to improve the value of or user engagement with the resources.

The case study site visits determined as most useful are those presented below. Stakeholders will include ministry officials, teachers, union officials, education administrators and planners, USAID Mission staff, other user groups, partners, related NGOs, and [potential] bilateral and multilateral donors. Note that the West Bank case study/site visit will occur before the interim report (January 2009), while the Zambia and Kenya studies will occur afterward.

GLP:

West Bank: The Palestinian Youth Portal

This portal will provide a cross-sectoral commons bridging youth issues (e.g., education, out-of-school activities, vocational training, employment opportunities) while working with local implementing ICT partners to strengthen software development and systems implementation. (This effort may also involve discussions with Jordan Mission staff about replication in Jordan or a joint Palestine-Jordan Youth initiative.)

Zambia: Teacher Portal, Donor Discussion Portal, and Project Tracker

The Zambia Portal and Project Tracker were developed for three purposes:

- Teacher discussions, resource sharing, and professional development
- Donor discussions around education (private)
- Ability to track all education-related projects country-wide, with input from government, NGO, missionary/religious, community, or other sponsors. (This tracker is currently still under Ministry review but will be replicated in other environments such as the Rwanda Education Commons.

Kenya: FTI Regional Review Portal

The Kenya FTI Portal is not specifically a “case study” under this evaluation but will provide a close-up look at the use of the GLP for short-term collaboration. USAID Kenya is coordinating the joint regional review of FTI countries, and the GLP will be used as a forum for idea-sharing and as a document library.

EPDC:

Kenya: Regional, District, and School-Level Data Visualization

The Ministry of Education worked with EPDC staff to produce a detailed set of data charts, graphs, and projections based on national data not usually available in international datasets such as through Household Survey or UNESCO UIS sources. For this effort, a custom database was developed to capture data down to the school level.

Zambia: Education Data Visualization

Similar to the Kenya effort, the EPDC is currently working with Zambian Ministry of Education staff to analyze sub-national data and produce graphs, charts, projections, and other visualizations for education planning.

Activities

- With AED and USAID Mission and Washington staff assistance, develop contact lists and schedule interviews with local stakeholders (as appropriate for the type of study):
 - Ministry of Education officials
 - Teachers
 - Unions or Teachers Associations
 - Other identified user groups
 - Local partners
 - Alliance members
 - Civil Society groups
 - Chambers of Commerce, other business groups
 - PTT/CellCos/ISPs – telephone infrastructure and access providers
 - Donors
- Develop Interview Protocols and Instruments to capture info about tools or processes:
 - Knowledge of/familiarity
 - Usage patterns
 - Perceived advantages, drawbacks
 - Environmental conditions (infrastructure, cost)
 - Opportunities for collaboration and partnership (including ICT strengthening in both public and private arenas)
 - Training issues
 - Expansion/replication possibilities
 - Attitudinal issues around information sharing, information control
 - Perceived overall value
 - Possible support scenarios (probably chiefly a donor issue)
 - Areas for improvement
 - Outlook for future success
- Plan/Prepare for Travel

- Conduct Case Study Site Visits
- Develop Case study report

Task 5: Interim Findings and Report

Timeline: Jan 2009

The interim report will present preliminary findings from background and stakeholder interviews, as well as from the GLP West Bank Site Visit/Case Study.

Activities

- Compile and analyze data collected through discovery and interviews
- Perform follow-up interviews for clarification or to fill knowledge gaps
- Produce written report and oral presentation, for discussion
- Modify strategy, approach, and workplan, as appropriate, based on feedback from USAID and GLP/EPDC staff

Task 6: Conduct Additional Country/Issue Surveys (chiefly GLP)

Timeline: Jan/Feb 2009

Field agents will conduct additional surveys in at least 2 additional countries (Afghanistan, Mexico). This may be expanded to additional countries if appropriate. (Selection will depend upon contextual relevance and availability of in-country personnel.)

Additional interviews may be conducted around issue areas such as teacher association communication and training, collaborative opportunities outside of formal educational structures (WASH in Schools), and portal implementation in other arenas (World Cocoa Foundation/Making Cents).

For the EPDC issue areas include collaboration issues with data contributors, the value of the web asset vs. the value added analysis, and training and support issues concerning the use of the more complex instruments (projection tools, DemoEd).

Activities

- Identification of field agents, as appropriate
- With AED, develop contact lists and schedule interviews, either in-person or via telephone, as feasible
- Develop interview protocols and instruments (similar to the case study protocols, but abbreviated)
- Implement surveys
- Analyze and report findings from surveys

Task 7: Conduct General User Survey (email/web)

Timeline: Dec 2008/Jan 2009

The user survey will capture limited data about past and current use of the GLP portal and EPDC data and toolset.

Activities

- With AED, develop contact lists from GLP and EPDC user groups
- Develop survey protocol and instruments. This survey will be very limited, focusing on knowledge of the asset, characterization of usage, impressions of value, and possibly suggestions for improvement.
- Implement surveys
- Analyze and report findings from surveys

Task 8: Prepare Draft and Final Reports

Timeline: Mar/Apr/May 2009

The report will be issued in draft for review, and then revised for final form. USAID and Global Assets contractor will be briefed on the findings and feedback solicited.

Activities

- Analyze data collected since interim report, with modifications to previous information as appropriate
- Conduct follow-up interviews for clarification or to fill knowledge gaps
- Update the competitor matrix through interviews and related research
- Prepare draft report, including:
 - Results from interviews, case studies, and surveys
 - Analysis and interpretation of the results
 - Alternatives analysis
 - Future implementation strategy and recommendations for improvement (including element on alliance-building partnership development, technical and platform issues, user experience considerations, and donor cultivation and motivation
 -
- Review and discuss suggested changes with USAID and AED
- Submit final version of report, and brief USAID and AED

Products and Deliverables

As a result of the work undertaken for this evaluation, a series of products will be developed. These fall into two groups: (a) internal products that will be incorporated into the contracted deliverables and formal contracted deliverables.

Internal products

Evaluation Instruments

Case study reports

Survey reports

Interview reports

Technical review reports

Contracted deliverables

Workplan:

Interim Report: Oral and Written

Draft and Final Report: Draft, Oral and Written;

A Gantt chart summarizes the timeline for these tasks follows.

	October				November				December				January				February				March				April				May			
Global Assets Evaluation Workplan Activity Schedule	3-Oct	10-Oct	17-Oct	24-Oct	31-Oct	7-Nov	14-Nov	21-Nov	28-Nov	5-Dec	12-Dec	19-Dec	26-Dec	2-Jan	9-Jan	16-Jan	23-Jan	30-Jan	6-Feb	13-Feb	20-Feb	27-Feb	6-Mar	13-Mar	20-Mar	27-Mar	3-Apr	10-Apr	17-Apr	24-Apr	1-May	8-May
Backgrounding																																
-- Document Review																																
-- Discover l'views - AID/AED																																
-- Data compilation/entry																																
-- Asset Inventory (current)																																
-- Evaluation tracking tools dev.																																
-- Work Plan																																
Tech/Traffic Review																																
-- WebTrends/Traffic Analysis																																
-- Platform/usability review																																
S-holder Telephone Interviews																																
-- Informant List Dev't																																
-- Interview Protocol/Format																																
-- Interviews																																
-- Data compilation/entry																																
West Bank Case Study (GLP)																																
-- Travel Plans																																
-- Contact List Dev't/Sched																																
-- Portfolio Prep																																
-- Interview Protocol																																
-- Interview Instrument(s)																																
-- Site Visit - inclu. Prep and debrief																																
Email Survey - Users																																
-- Contact Dev't																																
-- Survey Instrument																																
-- Survey Implementat on																																
-- Data compilation/entry																																
Field Interviews (Additional Countries)																																
-- Field Surveyor contacts																																
-- Interviewee contact lists																																
-- Survey Instruments																																
-- Field Surveys																																
-- Data compilation/entry																																
-- Cleanup/Debrief																																
Interim Findings																																
-- Data analysis																																
-- Clarification interviews																																
-- Interim Report																																
Africa Case Studies (GLP/EPDC)																																
-- Travel Prep																																
-- Contact List Dev't/Schedule																																
-- EPDC Protocol/Instruments																																
-- GLP Protocol/Instruments																																
-- Site Visit Zambia																																
-- Site Visit Kenya																																
-- Data cleanup/debrief																																
Final Report																																
-- Data Analysis																																
-- Follow-up Interviews																																
-- Accomplishments Analysis																																
-- Future Strategy/Recs																																
-- Alternatives/competitor map																																
-- Draft Report and presentat on																																
-- Report Feedback/Revisions																																
-- Final Report and presentat on																																

Mid-Course Evaluation of Global Learning Portal (GLP) and Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC) Project

**GLOBAL EVALUATION & MONITORING II
GEM II BPA Number EDH-E-00-08-00003-00**

RFTOP M/OAA/EGAT-08-2008-02

August 27, 2008

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Introduction

As part of its Global Evaluation and Monitoring Contract with JBS International, USAID requested an evaluation of two pilot global partnership efforts, supported by USAID, in using and exploring the potential of using the Internet as a development tool. These efforts are the Global Learning Portal (GLP) and Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC).

USAID has noted (RFTOP, page 4) that *the spread of Internet-based communications technologies and the increase in connectedness will continue to enhance the potential for collaboration, cooperation, sharing, learning, self-engagement, mentoring, technical assistance, and knowledge dissemination. The challenge, however, is that in order to promote this type of broad-based cooperation, collaboration and networking among educators world-wide requires that global public goods or “global assets” be created. By their nature, these assets are open-access (meaning that they are available to anyone connected to the Internet) and non-rival (meaning that they can be used by many people simultaneously). Because of these features, there is no incentive for private operators (who would need to charge a fee for the service) to invest in them. Without public support, at least in their initial stages, these global assets will not materialize. As a means of furthering its goals of promoting equitable access to a quality education and the agenda of the Education For All (EFA) initiative, EGAT/ED in 2002 decided that a constructive and efficient use of its resources would be to create “global education assets” that were specifically designed to exploit the power of communications technology and the growing reach of international knowledge networks. The objective was to support activities that allowed educators world-wide, conveniently and at low cost, to interact, collaborate, cooperate, and network in ways that provided them with information on, and knowledge about, the latest developments in education methods and techniques, to become aware of practices and experience used in a wide variety of education settings, to expand their access to new material, and to develop approaches that offered them the means of raising their effectiveness as teachers and education administrators.*

USAID has asked for (page 4) *an evaluation of their results-achieved and outputs over the last three years, to serve as a guide to their resource mobilization strategies, inputs, and activities to help determine their future strategic directions, capacity strengthening, and their expected goals.* This is the function of the evaluations proposed here.

To meet these needs the basic evaluation questions for both Assets are (cf the basic evaluation questions listed on pages 9 – 10 of the RFTOP):

9. What results and accomplishments have been achieved by each of the assets, separately and together, over the past years; and how have they added to what was available through other sources? To what extent have they added to the basic inputs by mobilizing additional resources (not only monies but also through partnerships with synergistic initiatives)? Who are the primary users of these tools; and what kinds of local international capacity is created or fostered by virtue of these Assets; and how do they serve the overall EFA goals of fostering education quality and capacity across the spectrum?

10. What problems and shortcomings are there for EPDC and GLP to date, how have they been addressed, and what implications do they bear for the future use and value of the Assets? How do potential users/beneficiaries get to know about these Assets, and how easy or difficult is it for them to make (full) use of them? What kinds of users have not been able to do this, who could make good use of them; and how might this be addressed? To what extent have the Assets been able to garner and make use of stakeholders' and users' feedback and recommendations?
11. What are the short term outputs and milestones that can be built on; and recommendations for building on them? What barriers exist for building on them, and how can they be addressed (if at all)? What is a baseline for viewing the accomplishments of these Assets that can be used for an impact evaluation?
12. What are recommendations for strengthening the use and utility of these assets by diverse audiences?

Overall Approach

The Global Asset Evaluation will explore the history and evolution of the Global Learning Portal (GLP) and Education Policy Development Center (EPDC), their chief contributors and alliance partners, customer base, their perceived utility, how they've been used, what they have been used for, products from their use, and suggestions for improvement and sustainability into the future.

We recognize that both Portals are global partnerships, and the evaluation will utilize the principles set forth in the DAC Evaluation Standards (OECD, 2006) and elaborated on in the Sourcebook for Evaluating Global and Regional Partnership Programs (IEG, 2007).

The evaluations will proceed separately, but each will proceed through the phases below. Specific questions for each evaluation, evaluation tasks, staffing loads and products are detailed on subsequent pages. Some tasks may be able to be carried out jointly across the two Assets, however because of the different types of user groups, most will need to be done separately. The phases are the following:

1. *Interviews with USAID (funder) staff and other suggested informants, as well as with the implementing agency staff (AED).* These will be conducted to refine the scope of work and to clarify expectations. Document review will inform this phase.

This phase will refine the evaluation questions and outline the strategy for answering those questions. The deliverable from this phase will be a revised scope, strategy, and work plan document.

2. *Development of Inquiry Protocols and Procedures.* In this phase, extant data will be compiled into matrices detailing portal/center alliances, competitors, and user/customer groups.

Specific inquiry instruments (interview question lists; surveys and questionnaires, etc.) addressing each specific evaluation question, and criteria for reviewing the data management systems will be developed. We envision that it will be most useful to do one-on-one interviews, rather than focus groups with informants, because of the tight timelines, the detailed nature of the

information to be gathered, and the different experiences of potential users. The exception to this might be in proposed site visit to Rwanda, where we will be gathering information related to the start-up of the use of the Assets. Informant lists will be developed for each group and matched with the appropriate instrument(s).

3. *Conducting the evaluation.* The evaluation will consist of case studies, survey of users in additional locations, interviews with stakeholders in the US, and review of the resources overall.

Specific, in-depth case studies will focus on stakeholder groups in Rwanda, Zambia, and Kenya. (As currently envisioned, Rwanda will serve as a baseline/start-up case. Zambia and Kenya will represent ongoing cases for the GLP and EPDC, respectively.)

Revisions to these focus countries may change depending on background/data discovery, initial interviews, and conversations or similar during the Rwanda visit.

Surveys and possibly other structured investigations will be conducted in five other countries where user groups past and present had significant interaction with the assets. Countries we propose for this investigation are: Brazil, Afghanistan, Jordan, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan. These countries bring in more diversity of user groups, and types of deployment. However, Uganda, Mexico, and the Philippines, also might be useful. We will finalize the list with the assistance of USAID CTO. Local country resources will be employed to help manage the survey process in a cost-effective manner.

The portal/center content and utility will be assessed against stated goals and objectives, including an assessment of appropriateness for the target customers and ease of use for finding and sharing information, and for collaboration. Alternatives or off-line substitutions (e.g., via eGranary) will be explored. Site control, modification and customization, and related training issues will be addressed as part of this element.

Actual use, perceptions of use, benefits and outcomes from use, and feedback on use will be explored through interviews. In addition to Government staff and contractor interviews, country-level site visit will be important tools for improving our understanding of the ways in which the Portal/Data Center is used, their reach, the benefits gained, feedback available and how they has been used. Additionally, we will be concerned with how understanding of the assets has spread to encompass a variety of ‘user networks,’ and what might be competing sources of similar information or networking that are available. Portal/Center visibility and customer knowledge will be explored, as will the effectiveness of current marketing strategies.

Sustainability and improvement issues will be explored with alliance partners and customers. This section will be informed by current competitor efforts, with an eye to differentiation of services, data and data tools.

4. *Reporting on the evaluation.* Because this is a mid-term evaluation, we are allowed a great deal of latitude regarding collaboration, and, with Assets such as these and the complexity of sustainability issues to be addressed, we believe this latitude is crucially important to the

success and usefulness of the final product. As such, we will be consulting both with the client and the contractor on the design and interim findings, and status of remaining issues.

An interim report will be presented midway through the Evaluation phase, probably after the initial planned Rwanda visit. This report will present background information and the initial findings from interviews, surveys, and case study visits already performed. This report will include the results of initial site visits and discussions, the questions raised and status of responses, and the implications perceived for the remainder of the evaluation. It will be designed to provide opportunity for feedback and to direct any adjustments in the evaluation questions, methodologies, or protocols. This is important, we believe, as it is possible that case study site visits may raise different questions or issues than those originally posed.

The Final Report will provide a full description of the following:

- History and evolution of the portal/center, as well as of its goals and objectives, customers, and alliance partners.
- Accomplishments to date, including how well the portal/center addresses its goals and objectives, the utility of those objectives in strengthening educational goals, and the effectiveness of a web-based portal (GLP) in providing teachers with resources and opportunities for collaboration and professional development.
- Strategies and tactics for improvement of site design - including content, tools, and user-experience issues; marketing asset visibility and perceived utility; extant support for the assets among the range of potential alliance partners and future donors; and implications for use of the assets by the appropriate teacher (GLP) and policy-making (EPDC) groups.

Appendices detailing methodology, instruments, interview, survey, and case study results, and matrices of partners, customers, and competitors.

A broad preliminary schedule is found below.

<u>Deliverable</u>	<u>Process</u>	<u>Time frame</u>
Final Report	Submission Revisions	March 2009
Draft Report	Submission/Feedback Accomplishments Analysis Future Strategy/Recommendations	Feb/March 2009 December/January 2009
	Follow-up Interviews Case Study Site Visits	Nov 2008 – Jan 2009
Intermediate Results	Surveys/Interviews Summary – Oral and written Rwanda Site Visit Case Study Portfolio Preparation	September-December 2008 November 2008 Oct/Nov, 2008 September/October, 2008

	Stakeholder Interviews (initial)	
	Survey Strategy	
	Webtrends/Traffic Analyses	
Final Work plan	Submission	September 2008
	Document Review	
	Initial Discovery	
Scope of Work	Submission	September 2008
Revisions		

Although the original timeframe for these Global Assets Evaluation spanned approximately six months (as reflected in the above schedule), externalities such as the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays may push some tasks back. It is also possible that country-specific circumstances for the Case Study subjects may also necessitate scheduling that may push back certain activities and resultant deliverables.

I. Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC) Global Asset – Mid-term Evaluation

This document provides a preliminary work plan and deliverables for the EPDC portion of the evaluation effort.

The EPDC was developed to combine disparate sources of existing education data and make this data available to the interested public via the web, with an emphasis on making the data “come alive” visually through charts, graphs, and maps. In addition, the center provides country profile snapshots, some sub-national snapshots, and tools for projecting educational trends into the future. The EPDC has been funded primarily by USAID through EQUIP2, with the expectation that the EPDC would assemble a broad group of partner organizations that would allow it to continue into the future with an expanded base of support.

The Center provides data through its website and also prepares reports and presentations on a contract basis for other entities such as the Global Monitoring Report.

Areas of inquiry

The following areas will be explored within the tasks described in the Objectives and Tasks section of this work plan.

Goals/Objectives: To what extent have objectives been broadly achieved? How have the objectives or purposes of the EPDC changed over time, and what has driven these changes? Were these changes driven by funder considerations, client needs, or other circumstances?

User Groups: Who uses the EPDC, and for what purposes? Are usage patterns as envisioned? Are user groups (policymakers and administrators) using the data for planning purposes?

Have international education donor agencies (governments, UN agencies, foundations, the World Bank, IIEF, etc.) been significant consumers of the

information from the center? Are there obvious clients who do not use the center, and why not? Are there other user groups to whom the EPDC could be market beyond those currently envisioned?

Are there user groups who could find the EPDC data helpful, but who have inadequate access because of ICT issues? Are there alternatives (e.g., eGranary) for these groups, and what constraints would such off-line access involve?

EPDC Alliance: Is the EPDC supported by a broad coalition of partners? What are the challenges related to expanding the EPDC alliance? What improvements or changes to the center might enhance and expand the alliance?

Has USAID funding and sponsor identification made it difficult to market the EPDC? Has AED affiliation made it difficult to find partners who might normally be considered competitors?

Data sources: Are contributing sources such as UNICEF, World Bank, and IHSN willing and enthusiastic partners, or are they reluctant to share data? Do they find value in their contributing role, and are the packaged results of use to them? Do they perceive association with the EPDC as positive, and, if so, do they actively promote the center to their client and user bases?

Are contributors aware of EPDC processes for adapting raw data for use within the center? Do they offer substantive assistance toward making this process smoother?

Monitoring/Feedback: What feedback mechanisms are incorporated into the EPDC? Are they obvious and easy to use? Does the EPDC actively seek feedback from its users?

Does the EPDC have a method or strategy for improvement? Is there a structured monitoring component to the project? What types of data are collected for this feedback loop?

Competition: Are there other (competing) sources for similar education data, or is the EPDC's product unique?

Quality/Authority: Is the EPDC perceived as sufficiently authoritative to be used for planning purposes? Do countries find the EPDC useful in planning for EFA/FTI goals? Is the data considered good enough for illustrative – but not planning – purposes? Are the data available timely? What are the bases of these opinions?

Product Improvement: How might the EPDC improve its data packaging methods to produce better results? Would costs related to improvement be justified and borne by clients or supported by alliance partners?

Visibility/Marketing: Is the EPDC widely known? How do clients or interested user groups learn about the center? What marketing strategies or mechanisms does the EPDC use to promote itself, and are those mechanisms effective? How might the center be more effectively marketed?

Transparent Benefits: Are benefits of the EPDC self-evident to users visiting the site? Does it “sell itself”?

Usability/UX Issues: Is navigating and using the center intuitive and clear? Are the types of data available via the center obvious, or does it take significant time and effort to discover both the scope and limitations of data and how it can be presented or mined?

Are clients (users) able to formulate reasonable questions related to educational data and receive appropriate results via the EPDC? Are data issues inherently too complex to be mined and manipulated except by those with expert knowledge? Or, are mechanisms for custom mining and packaging overly complex or too time-consuming? Are improvements possible?

Are pre-packaged data blocks (such as country profiles) useful for planning purposes, or are these blocks overly broad except for illustrative purposes?

Training/Support: What training or orientation does the EPDC offer to its contributors (for data supply) and clients (for data extraction and packaging)? Is it perceived as helpful? Are stakeholders aware of such support?

To what extent does the EPDC need to support its client base in preparing data packages and presentations? Is such support reasonable and sustainable?

How can training and support be improved in a cost-effective way? How can such improvements be monitored and measured?

Sustainability: Will Ministries or other education planning agencies in developing countries contribute financially to the EPDC? Are there appropriate and convenient mechanisms for buy-in? If not, can the center be sustained solely through (chiefly developed country) Alliance partners?

Contracting

Mechanism: Has the contracting mechanism selected by USAID served EPDC's purposes well? Has it been sufficiently flexible to allow EPDC to evolve and respond to its users' needs and recommendations?

Objectives and Tasks

The following are the overall requirements for the work as stated in the task order:

Objective 1: Clarify Scope of Work

Tasks: Document review, development of draft evaluation strategy, meetings with key stakeholders
Interviews with USAID (HQ and certain missions), AED (implementer), and other identified stakeholders to clarify expectations on the scope of the evaluation.

Deliverables: *SOW addendum* (2 weeks after TO executed)

Status: EPDC Project documents were provided to JBS by AED, and are under review. Per the initial meetings between JBS with AED and USAID staff (23 June and 25 July, 2008), an emphasis was placed on the formative (rather than accomplishments) aspects of the evaluation, with the intent of strengthening the project in preparation for spinning off the GLP Alliance as an independent entity. This work plan begins with this understanding.

Objective 2: Finalize Work Plan

Tasks: Document review/discovery
Informant list and interview protocols, with analysis plan; cross reference how the information collected will be used in the analysis to reflect on the range of issues above.

Determine appropriate Case Study participants and feasible schedule for in-country interviews or similar tasks. Case study candidate types might include AID HQ and mission staff, Ministry of Education planning staff (e.g., Kenya), or funding entities or organizing structures such as the World Economic Forum.

Confirm viability of approach through initial interviews with outside stakeholders, EPDC users, and alliance partners to refine tasks and schedule.

Status/Notes: The evaluation team will take advantage of upcoming opportunities to meet contributing alliance partners or established or prospective clients. The team will prepare informant lists and interview protocols in timely fashion to take advantage of these upcoming opportunities.

Deliverables: *Final Work Plan* (1 month after TO executed)

Objective 3: EPDC Accomplishments Analysis

Tasks:

Analyze data collected from interviews and document discovery, to:

- Compare project objectives (as clarified in SOW, above) against demonstrated accomplishments
- Detail EPDC project history and evolution, including an inventory of changing capabilities and usage patterns
- Inventory center resources, including discoverable data elements as well as “packaged” products such as country and sub-national profiles.
- Construct alliance contributor matrix (data sources) and associated information (contribution profile, perceived benefits, marketing efforts)
- Construct client users and groups matrix (policymakers, planners, administrators, education funders, etc.) detailing usage patterns and purposes.
- Outline alliance collaboration mechanisms and contributions, including funding and sustainability.
- Develop surveys and other data collection instruments to get a broad view of use patterns, user impressions, and center strengths and weaknesses
- Develop user experience profiles, including ease-of-use and quality-of-output indicators.
- Detail training and support opportunities provided by the EPDC, and explore areas for possible improvement. Review cost-effectiveness of such support.
- Conduct site visit to Rwanda for face-to-face interviews and meetings with stakeholders (participants, alliance partners, funding organizations, MOE representatives, prospective collaborators); these meetings will inform modifications to survey or other data-collection instruments as well as to the expected interview participants
- Phone and other interviews with participants, alliance partners, MOE staff, USAID HQ and mission staff, and other stakeholders
- Conduct Case Studies to provide in-depth examples of use types.
- Identify opportunities for increasing project visibility, increasing alliance breadth and depth, improving real or perceived product quality, and increasing use of EPDC products

Deliverables: *Intermediate Evaluation Results* (November 2008; after Rwanda site visit)
Draft Accomplishments Report (part of Draft Final; February 2009)

Status/Notes: Informant lists will rely significantly on input from USAID, AID, and alliance contributor partners.
Matrices will be developed to provide a snapshot view of these stakeholders.
Surveys or similar instruments will be developed to gather consistent information from user groups and alliance partners.
The Rwanda site visit will provide opportunity to meet current and prospective EPDC stakeholders, to clarify appropriate interview subjects, and to make adjustments to survey and interview instruments. It is not yet clear if the other case study country visits will be conducted during the same trip or at a later time.

Case studies will probably include Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia, although USAID may suggest alterations to these sites.

Objective 4: Improvement Recommendations and Strategy for Future Viability

Tasks: Inventory current competitors in the education data space and detail areas of comparative advantage for the EPDC.

Identify strengths and weaknesses of the current implementation. Explore options to an on-line system (e.g., eGranary) and what limitations that would impose. (This may not be applicable if intended audience is reasonably expected to have consistent internet access.)

Develop survey instruments or similar to determine elements missing from the current implementation, including training and support issues, or other aspects identified for improvement. (These will probably be part of the same surveys noted in the accomplishments tasks, above.)

Survey/interview contributor and customers alliance partners and other stakeholders (via local or distance methods) to determine how to increase impression of EPDC worth.

As part of the case studies, conduct in-country interviews with participant groups, USAID mission staff, related government (MOE) parties, and international donor affiliates (UNICEF, WB) and/or donors.

Determine future-state wishes and needs in the case studies.

Deliverables: Country/Group Case Study Portfolios and Case Study Results
Strategy and Recommendation's Document (part of Draft Final; March 2009)

II. Global Learning Portal (GLP) – Midterm Evaluation

This document provides a preliminary work plan and deliverables for the GLP portion of the effort.

The Global Learning Portal was developed to provide teachers across the globe with on-line access to meaningful educational materials in a variety of languages, and to provide them with professional development resources, all in support of Education for All goals. By linking teachers across geographical and linguistic boundaries, the Portal would garner additional support beyond its seed funders (primarily USAID) and develop a GLP Alliance of partners for broad sustainability of the asset.

The Portal has evolved through a number of iterations, and a study in 2004/2005 determined that its ability to provide multi-lingual collaborative communities presented a strong comparative advantage relative to other on-line resources focused on education. A number of pilot projects were developed with teacher groups in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, some of which are extant. The latest platform version is based on open-source software, eliminating licensing fees.

The development arc for the project envisions the GLP as an independent entity able to draw on the support of a variety of international and local partners while providing local groups with a flexible platform for collaboration and information sharing. Over time the focus of the portal has moved from providing resources and collaboration across geographic boundaries to a mechanism for providing in-country groups with a flexible platform for communication, collaboration, and learning.

Areas of inquiry

The following areas will be explored within the tasks described in the Objectives section of this work plan.

Educational Goals: Does the Portal serve educational improvement goals through teacher support and professional development? Are resources appropriate, and are they easily accessed?

Modifications to Intent: How have objectives for the Portal been modified over time, and to what extent have the original purposes been replaced with new objectives?

User Groups: Who uses the Portal, in what ways, and how often? What benefits are described by current users, and what barriers or drawbacks can be identified from those who no longer use it?

Appropriate Tech: Is a web-based portal an appropriate mechanism to reach teachers in developing countries; to help them improve the quality or efficiency of their work? Are target groups rationally defined? Are there alternatives for teachers/other users who do not have consistent or adequate ICT resources?

Implementation: Is the Portal implementation technically appropriate? Are the capabilities well-suited to the user base, and can end-users administer and modify their own community environments in a cost-effective way? Is the Portal able to be (easily) integrated into organizations' other tools and strategies for discussion, collaboration, and professional development? Is the Portal easy to navigate and are appropriate resources available and discoverable? Is it easy for different user groups to share resources and collaborate? Are the multi-language capabilities of the portal appropriately exploited?

Competition: Does the Portal provide unique and desired capabilities not available elsewhere? Who are its competitors and what are their strengths and weaknesses? In what areas does the Portal have a comparative advantage? (This area is partially as follow-up to the 2004/2005 Thurman competitive landscape study.)

Marketing/Feedback: How is the Portal 'marketed,' or how does it currently become known to user groups? How is feedback obtained about Portal elements, what

feedback has been obtained; and how has it been used? Are users and user groups encouraged to provide feedback, and what mechanisms are in place to aid same? How have Portal staff worked with end users to be sure they are ‘getting the most out of’ the use of the Portal, and to see how it serves them and might be of better use? What mechanisms might improve and broaden usage? Is ‘word of mouth’ a significant element to broadening usage?

Transparent Benefits: Are Portal capabilities and benefits obvious when the (public) site is visited? How could the site be modified to better “sell itself”?

GLP Alliance Issues: Who are the Alliance partners, and how do they contribute to and derive benefit from the Portal? How can the Alliance be strengthened? Is the Portal sustainable with reduced funding levels from its current major supporters? How can the Portal garner additional and broader financial support? What are the barriers to expanding the Alliance? How can major economic development partners (e.g., the World Economic Forum, Gates Foundation) be brought on board as contributors and partners?

Sustainability: Will user groups or governmental agencies in developing countries contribute financially to the Portal? Are there appropriate and convenient mechanisms for buy-in? If not, can the Portal be sustained solely through Alliance partners?

Visibility: Are USAID missions and other international development/funding organizations aware of the Portal - e.g. Ministries of Education, foundations, UN agencies, NGOs, and teachers groups? How do they perceive the benefits, and the relation of this resource to specific needs and other resources that exist? How can the Portal’s benefits be better communicated to these groups?

Global Assets: What are the synergies between the GLP and the EPDC, and are these adequately exploited? Are there other resources or initiatives that could provide synergistic benefits?

Other Improvements: What other improvements to the Portal, or the ways in which it is presented or managed, will increase its viability into the future?

Objectives and Tasks

The following are the overall requirements for the work as stated in the task order:

Objective 1: Clarify Scope of Work

Tasks: Document review, development of draft evaluation strategy, meetings with key stakeholders

Interviews with USAID, AED (implementer), and other identified stakeholders to clarify expectations on the scope of the evaluation.

Deliverables: *SOW addendum* (2 weeks after TO executed)

Status/Notes: GLP Project notebooks were provided to JBS by AED, and are under review. Per the initial meetings between JBS with AED and USAID staff (23 June and 25 July, 2008), an emphasis was placed on the formative (rather than accomplishments) aspects of the evaluation, with the intent of strengthening the project in preparation for spinning off the GLP Alliance as an independent entity. This work plan begins with this understanding.

Objective 2: Finalize Work Plan

Tasks: Document review/discovery

Informant list and interview protocols, with analysis plan; cross reference how the information collected will be used in the analysis to reflect on the range of issues above.

Determine appropriate Case Study participants and feasible schedule for in-country interviews or similar tasks. (Preliminary study candidates include Rwanda and Zambia.)

Confirm viability of approach through initial interviews with outside stakeholders, portal users, and alliance partners to refine tasks and schedule

Status/Notes: AED and USAID staff have suggested some consultants (e.g., Siobhan Green); and discussions in June and July identified Rwanda as an appropriate location to start the review. Travel arrangements, informant lists, and interview protocols will need to be made promptly to take advantage of that opportunity.

Deliverables: *Final Work Plan* (1 month after TO executed)

Objective 3: Portal Accomplishments Analysis

Tasks: Visit Rwanda for face-to-face interviews with stakeholders (participants, alliance partners, funding organizations, MOE representatives, prospective collaborators); these meetings will inform modifications to survey or other data-collection instruments as well as to the expected interview participants.

Refine surveys and other data collection instruments to get a broad view of use patterns, user impressions, and portal strengths and weaknesses.

Conduct phone and other interviews with participants, alliance partners, MOE staff, USAID HQ and mission staff, and other stakeholders, as finalized with Objective 2. Conduct Case Studies to provide in-depth examples of use types.

Analyze data collected from interviews and document discovery, informing:

- Comparison of project objectives (as clarified in SOW, above) against demonstrated accomplishments
- Detailed portal history and evolution, including an inventory of changing capabilities and usage patterns
- Inventory of portal resources, including educational materials for teachers as well as professional development resources (on-line training modules) for teachers and administrators
- Development of a matrix of users and user groups (teachers, administrators, ministry officials, other participants) detailing usage patterns and purposes
- Development of an Alliance matrix (partners, funders, other contributing stakeholders), with contributions and perceived alliance benefits
- Outline alliance collaboration mechanisms and contributions, including funding
- Outline current methods and strategy for enabling user-driven portal administration and modification (training)
- Opportunities for development and increasing the value of the global asset.

Deliverables: *Intermediate Evaluation Results* (November 2008; after Rwanda Site Visit)
Draft Accomplishments Report (part of Draft Final; March 2009)

Status Notes: The GLP has gone through numerous revisions since its inception, including at least one major platform change. The original purpose of the portal, to provide a multi-language resource center for teachers, has undergone significant changes in scope, with a current major emphasis on providing a platform for individual groups to construct custom environments for internal collaboration. (The original intent of sharing teacher resources across borders and languages has receded, perhaps as a result of a 2004/2005 market analysis that stressed the portal's distinct advantage as a collaborative tool.)

A significant discovery effort will be necessary to inventory and detail past and current participant groups and how they use or have used the portal. Similar discovery will detail the GLP Alliance partners and how they contribute to and benefit from participation. Matrices will be developed to provide a snapshot view of these stakeholders. Surveys or similar instruments will be developed to gather consistent information from user groups and alliance partners.

Discovery will also detail usage patterns, including user counts and types, usage frequency, and access methods. An inventory of teaching and professional-development resources will be developed.

The Rwanda site visit will provide opportunity to meet current and prospective Portal stakeholder, to clarify appropriate interview subjects, and to make adjustments to survey and interview instruments. It is not yet clear if the case study country visits will be conducted during the same trip or at a later time.

Case studies will probably include Zambia and one other country user group, to be determined through initial interviews and discovery.

Objective 4: Improvement Recommendations and Strategy for Future Viability

Tasks: Inventory current competitors in the portal space and detail areas of comparative advantage for the GLP

Identify strengths and weaknesses of the current portal implementation. Explore options to an on-line system (e.g., eGranary) and what limitations an off-line, non-interactive system might impose.

As part of the earlier case study and informant interviews, determine elements missing from the current implementation, including training and support issues, or other portal aspects identified for improvement. (These will probably be part of the same surveys noted in the accomplishments tasks, above. However, we might recommend ‘call backs’ or focus groups to see if conclusions regarding ‘next steps’ resonate with particular user groups)

Survey/interview Alliance partners and other stakeholders to determine how to increase participation and support for the GLP as an independent entity. As with the previous task, this will be part of the initial work, however we might recommend follow-up discussion on the topic to test the utility of draft recommendations

As part of the case studies, conduct in-country interviews with participant groups, USAID staff, related government (MOE) and international donor affiliates (UNICEF, WB) or donors. Determine future-state wishes and needs in the case studies.

Deliverables: *Country/Group Case Study Portfolios and Case Study Results Strategy and Recommendation's Document (part of Draft Final; March 2009)*

APPENDIX 3 – Evaluation Interview Agenda

Note: The questions/topics listed are meant to inform conversational interviews but are not asked as a static list for all respondents. Respondents make remarks or pose questions that open specific avenues of inquiry that then become topic areas with other respondents.

GLP

1. GLP Awareness/Use

- Are you aware of the GLP?
 - Have you used it yourself?
 - Anyone in your group or organization? Other organization?
 - Are you aware of other tools that provide this kind of capability? (Provide description, if necessary.)
- If not used,
 - Why haven't you used the GLP?
 - Have no need for it? It does not provide value?
 - Is it duplicative? Are other tools used instead? (Examples?)
 - Is it confusing or difficult to use?
 - Problems with connectivity or speed?
 - Association with USAID or AED?
- If used,
 - What specific implementations or projects have you used it in?
 - Was this in a developed or developing country (infrastructure) environment?
 - What is or has been your purpose in using it?
 - Online discussions (such as USAID or education sector policy)
 - Document preservation
 - Resource libraries
 - Peer-to-peer communications/planning/sharing
 - Other uses
 - What are your impressions? (How do you gauge it as a tool?)
 - Is it useful, and in what ways?
 - Are there specific things that you like or dislike about it?
 - How does it compare with other sites or portals you may have used?
 - Was the interface and navigation easy to understand?
 - Did you find content on the site(s) to be useful?
 - Are discussion topics relevant? Is participation at an appropriate level?
 - Are library resources easy to get to and understand? Are they useful?
 - Are resources (such as curricula, lesson plans, teaching aids) vetted? Should they be, and who should be responsible?
 - The GLP is designed to be multi-language. Is this useful to you? Are there language issues not addressed?
 - [Developing country respondents] Do you communicate with your peers by internet or other electronic means? (Email, social network sites, phone, SMS, etc.?)
 - Are there communications methods you would like to see integrated into the GLP?

2. *Access Issues and GLP/Infrastructure relationships*

- In what context is the GLP (and tools like it) best applied?
- Are infrastructure problems too difficult in certain contexts?
- How important is access to the internet for teachers and educational planners (or other users, if applicable)?
- What alternatives are available or should be made available where connectivity isn't possible? (e.g., eGranary, off-line computers/intranets – traditional resources)
- Would using cell/mobile phones be easier to apply, or should combining computer and phone resources be explored? How would this work with sharing documents or other media?

3. *ICT experience/internet use + training issues for field-based users*

- Are target populations (teachers, planners, etc.) generally already familiar with computers? With the internet?
- Have they had reasonable experience in research and locating resources?
- How much emphasis needs to be paid to training?

4. *GLP as Developer vs. Resource Guide, and local implementers*

- Should the GLP be developing sites for others, or should it identify existing solutions to match situational needs?
- When is it appropriate to work with local implementers, and when should GLP staff implement solutions for other groups?
- Are platform development tools and resources available?
 - From GLP staff?
 - Other GLP project implementers?
 - On-line tutorials and guides, user forums?

5. *Changes/Future/Sustainability/Other Donors*

- Would it matter if the GLP disappeared? Would anything be lost?
- Does the GLP provide good value for the investment?
- Should donors other than USAID support the GLP? Why?
- Do business/industry have a stake in supporting this type of resource?
- Would there be benefit to moving the GLP outside of AED? Where?
- Should the GLP be more closely tied to existing projects?
- What changes or improvements could the GLP make to improve value?

6. *Alliances and partnerships*

- What is your organization's relationship with the GLP?
- Does the relationship provide value to both?
 - How does the GLP advance your goals?
 - How does your organizations advance the GLP's or contribute to its success?
- Do you publicize or link to the GLP? If so, does the GLP reciprocate (if desired)?
- Would you recommend that other organizations partner with the GLP? Why/not?

7. *Ministries or Similar*

- Does the GLP advance your educational goals? How?
- Does the GLP provide a good method of communicating with teachers or field administrators? Is the GLP good for spurring discussion?
- Have you explored using the GLP for professional development?
- Has the [Ministry] devoted resources to ICT/GLP training?
- What resources does the [Ministry] use to support or continue development of the GLP?
- Would the GLP be useful internally to the [Ministry]? In what ways could it be used?
- Is the GLP worth supporting in the future?
- How can ICT resources, including the GLP, be sustained into the future? Is there a plan in place? Discussions with donors?
- [Zambia, perhaps Rwanda] Are tools like the Project Tracker useful? How does the tracker tie in with other tools, like GIS/mapping resources?

8. *Other [Potential] Donors*

- Do you currently support the GLP financially or through other means?
 - Do you support other, similar efforts? Can you characterize how they differ?
 - Are support mechanisms clear and convenient?
- Does the GLP address real problems with realistic tools?
- Is the GLP valuable to stakeholders, and does it advance your objectives?
- What do you like or not like about the GLP, and what would you change?
 - Would those changes make it more likely that you would support the GLP?
- Does the GLP's affiliation with AED or USAID affect decisions about support?
 - If so, what changes could positively affect a decision to support the GLP?

EPDC Interview Agenda (Appendix 3, continued)

1. Data Challenges with Education Planning, and EPDC as a solution

- What kinds of needs for data do you have? & Does the EPDC provide such data?
- What data sources are most helpful? Are they available on EPDC?
 - Are the combined EPDC datasets (DHS, admin, UIS, ministry) helpful?
 - Are data available from major sources (e.g., UIS, EdStats) good for planning purposes, or only for illustrative or descriptive purposes? Is it usually necessary to access other/ministry sources for planning purposes?
- What data gaps hinder good planning? Solutions?
 - Does the EPDC help to fill these gaps or answer questions?
 - What does the EPDC provide that others do not? Does it have a value niche?
- What kinds of analyses are useful?
 - Who provides analyses? Have you requested assistance from the EPDC staff?
 - Was the EPDC responsive and helpful? Was it through a service contract or how paid for?
 - Were you able to get what you needed? Were you able to use what you got?
- If you have not used it,
 - Is there some reason in particular, why not?
 - Where do you find the kinds of data and analysis related to countries' national and sub-national education status? (i.e., Are there other tools like it?)
 - Were there issues of quality of the data on the site? Thoughts on completeness, usefulness, ease in making use of the dataset for particular purposes? Other issues?
 - Are there any particular obstacles that might have deterred you? – e.g. navigation issues, or knowledge of how to use projections; something else?
- If you have used it,
 - What are you using it for? (Planning? Reports?)
 - What are you using from the site-e.g., Reports, Maps, Projections, Country Profiles, raw data
 - How is the quality of the data on the site? Thoughts on completeness, usefulness, ease in making use of the dataset for particular purposes? Other issues?
 - Are the visual presentations of data attractive and useful? How could these be improved?
 - Are the search tools and mechanisms easy to use? Understandable? What could be improved? (e.g., saved searches, interface changes, info on/links to data sources)
 - Does the EPDC provide useful data and analysis tools? What is most useful? What is missing or incomplete?
 - Have you used any of the projection tools? Have you had training in how to use them?
 - Are the analysis tools usable by non-experts?
 - Have you downloaded a dataset from the site?
 - Was the process easy? How did it work for you?
 - Did you do your own analysis of the dataset, or did EPDC provide help?
 - What other data sets/tools do you or your org use? (Which sites are useful for what, and why? How do they solve planning questions?) How do they differ from the EPDC?
 - What would an ideal set of data and tools look like?

2. Relationships; generally, EPDC as a resource for your organization

- Are there ways in which the EPDC does or can augment the power of the work you do?
 - Do you consider that your organization has a relationship with EPDC, as a resource, that allows you to benefit from it? In what ways?
 - Is it reasonable to think of EPDC as a partner for your organization in this way? How could your organization benefit more from the EPDC?
- Is it clear who can work with and request services from the EPDC?
 - Are EPDC services free? Are there limits?
 - Are there clear mechanisms for service or subscription agreements? Partnerships or alliances?
- Is the EPDC's relationship with AED a hindrance to collaboration or partnership?
 - Would the EPDC be better served as an independent agent? Arm of UNESCO or similar? Within a foundation or institute
- Is EPDC's funding relationship with USAID an issue?
 - How does this affect how other donors may or may not support the EPDC? How could this be modified?
- Is there something more that EPDC could do to be more valuable?
 - For your organization? What/How?
 - Outside of your organization or for the education field generally?

3. Training and Capacity-Building

- Should the EPDC spend more resources on training and capacity-building?
 - What kinds of training should they provide, and on what?
 - To whom? What is the best way of distributing that capacity (within USAID? Ministries? UN? Regionally?)

4. Changes/Future/Sustainability, thinking about the future and support for EPDC

- What would be lost if the EPDC disappeared? [How] Would this affect you or your organization?
 - Would you encourage your organization/other orgs, and donors to support the EPDC?
- Do you see a future for the EPDC – How would you describe the value of it? Priority for funding?
- Right now USAID supports it, do you see other alternatives? What are they? What would EPDC need to do to merit this funding?

2. Special Insert for Organizations that Contribute to or Share Data with the EPDC

Relationship with EPDC

- How did it come about that you contribute data to the EPDC? And are there some data you contribute and some you do not?
 - Is there a memorandum of understanding regarding what data will be contributed, when, and what will be done with it?
 - Do you get any data from them? Is it an exchange, or mostly one way?
 - Has the exchange of data, or the relationship with EPDC, led to you doing anything differently in how you prepare or document or store the data? In what ways?
- Have you seen any benefits to your organization and the work you do, from collaborating with the EPDC in this way?
 - Is collaboration with EPDC easy? Are systems easy to work out for data exchange? Are staff responsive to your concerns?
 - Have you talked with EPDC staff about data needs or data quality issues in the field?

- Have you collected any special data, or asked EPDC to acquire any special data or do special analyses, to address needs you see, or that have come up in your discussions?
- Do you think the EPDC does a good job of merging data sources/preserving the fidelity of your data?
- Does the EPDC provide generally good analysis and products? Is anything they do unique or especially noteworthy/useful? (Compared with others.)
- If others organizations want to contact you or to use data that are not on EPDC directly, is there a way for them to get to you through the EPDC?
 - Do you publicize or link to the EPDC?
 - Does the EPDC reciprocate, if desired?

APPENDIX 4 – GLP Communities

See separate file

EPDC Appendices

D: Field Studies

1. Kenya
2. Zambia
3. UIS

E. Devis Vision of Projection Tool Functionality

F: Evaluation Team Vision of Site Navigation



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**GAE APPENDIX VOLUME II
GLP SPECIFIC**

**GLOBAL EVALUATION & MONITORING II
GEM II BPA Number EDH-E-00-08-00003-00**

Global Assets Evaluation

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REVISED FINAL

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GLP.net – Restructuring the GLP home site and its message

Submitted by Sonjara to JBS International by Sioban Green

Edited by JBS Evaluation Staff, as agreed

3 July 2009

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GLP staff have had a difficult time defining the work of the organization and have conflated organizational capabilities with its major tool, the Portal. Through the workshop, staff began separating these ideas.	4
Similarly, GLP.net (GLP Home) does not clearly tell the story of what the GLP does and does not speak to any specific audiences.	4
GLP.net does not reflect use of GLP processes and technology in the field or provide a space for sharing experiences across projects. Technology is currently stressed over those who benefit.	5
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GLP.net – Restructuring the GLP home site and its message

Background

A Phase I site analysis of GLP.net, the public face of the Global Learning Portal and entryway to sub sites for field projects and communities of practice, found that the site did not tell a strong story about the GLP’s mission and capabilities and did not encourage visitors to explore the GLP more fully. Although a library of education-related materials was assembled, the site did not provide other meaningful resources, internally or via links, on techniques and strategies for good collaboration, document sharing, resource vetting and distribution, or simple methods or ideas about how to customize a sub site for its specific audience.

The original GLP concept – linking large groups of teachers from disparate locations around the world in a network of resources and contacts – while still relevant and successful (as in Afghanistan) – seems to be giving way to other more hands-on activities and objectives for collaboration. The more recent drives – supporting participants associated with specific field projects (as with HEP or the Palestinian Youth Portal) and creating collaborative and coordinating mechanisms, at least partly through a portal structure (Rwanda Education Commons) – were highlighted as news items but not explicitly explored as strategies. The site also was not seen as an effective resource base for the GLP community, providing few tools for working with the platform, a difficult-to-read library of content materials for educators, few meaningful links to outside resources, and no real guidelines or strategies for on collaboration and resource sharing proper.

Over the life of the project, the GLP has evolved from an effort to bring teachers from around the world into a shared space through a multitude of smaller community of practice initiatives, to a platform that helps groups and projects develop a community of practice and address more specific needs and objectives. Additionally, the GLP has begun to be more employed to help USAID and its partners to converse about topical or strategic issues through online discussions.

Methods and Process

As follow-on to Phase I, GLP staff requested that Phase 2 activities include guided workshops and exercises to help the staff refine the mission and how it is portrayed, and to begin developing ways to modify the home site to better portray the objectives of capabilities and services provided by the GLP organization.

Siobhan Green of Sonjara, Inc., who provided design services early in the life of the GLP platform and performed a technical overview of the current platform in Phase I, conducted interviews and workshops with GLP staff during May and June.

The major question that the GLP staff identified repeatedly was “What is GLP?” GLP does a variety of activities, but much of it does not hang together with one core clear mission. Different people had different answers for key questions on mission, business model, audience, and GLP’s value-add to USAID programs.

GAE APPENDIC VOLUME II – GLP Specific

Therefore, it was decided that GLP needed to get back to the basics – what is GLP and what is it not, who does it serve and in what method, and how does it use the various resources to meet those needs? GLP as a program has more than five years of experience, large amounts of USAID and partner resources invested, a functioning platform, experienced staff, and other important resources to leverage; because GLP is not starting anew and because those resources need to be leveraged, it is important to determine what GLP is and has right now, and then figure out how to reshape and focus it to meet broader goals.

The process we used to address these core questions involved interviews with key staff (Rob Schware and Sonja Hubbard), coordinating discussions with Charles Ellmaker on field visits and two “all staff” workshops held at AED to gather staff feedback and input. The first workshop focused on defining the overall mission of GLP, working with the team on the “who, what, where, why, and how” of GLP. The second workshop helped the team identify and define the mission, purpose, objectives, and audience for GLP.NET – who are the current priority audiences, their descriptions and their needs.

Major Findings and Recommendations

(More findings and recommendations are found in the detailed sections following.)

GLP staff have had a difficult time defining the work of the organization and have conflated organizational capabilities with its major tool, the Portal. Through the workshop, staff began separating these ideas.

Because the Portal has been seen as the major product and platform of the GLP, separating the tool from the process is understandably difficult. That the organization and the portal tool have the same name reinforces the idea that they are identical.

By making explicit the distinction, staff may be able to better define the broader process of what makes effective communication and collaboration and describe future-state outcomes. In turn, this process can then help identify the variety of tools or methods needed to work toward such outcomes. These could include the current portal but also supporting mechanisms and materials to increase the likelihood of success.

Similarly, GLP.net (GLP Home) does not clearly tell the story of what the GLP does and does not speak to any specific audiences.

The workshops explored various core audiences, including donors, field project staff, and education specialists, as well as a matrix of needs for each of these groups. GLP.net will need to speak adequately to these needs to find relevance with its audiences. (The matrix is included in the appendices.)

GLP also needs to highlight capabilities, resources, and stories that directly speak to these audiences and showcase living examples of how strategic processes and supporting tools make collaboration work.

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GLP.net does not reflect use of GLP processes and technology in the field or provide a space for sharing experiences across projects. Technology is currently stressed over those who benefit.

GLP.net can demonstrate field results by providing a common space for projects to share and successes and difficulties. The GLP should also use the stories of people in the field to highlight how collaboration through technology strengthens educational development. These same stories can also serve to transfer methods and lessons learned across projects, releasing information from “project silos.” GLP should not be afraid to highlight problems or failures and solicit feedback from projects on what went wrong and how similar problems can be avoided or mitigated. Lessons learned need to be shared.

Making the site perform useful functions for its project clients will show other potential clients how the GLP can be useful to them. For GLP.net, marketing and utility can go hand in hand.

The Mission statement does not adequately communicate the purpose of the GLP or its current programmatic direction.

Through the workshops and interviews, staff began reformulating a statement of purpose that speaks to why organizations should partner with GLP for collaboration and communication. GLP will need to reintroduce itself to clients (donors, potential partners, field projects) to sweep away old conceptions.

The GLP will also need to speak directly to the qualities and requirements of different implementation designs: some projects are run through partners and will require strong partner-GLP communications mechanisms, while others will be run directly by GLP staff in the field. How GLP Washington assists these groups will vary.

While back-end technical processes for the Portal are strong, the public side of the site needs improvement.

GLP.net needs to make its home site (and, by extension, field sites) more dynamic and organized to tell a more coherent story. Navigation should be improved, graphic and visual design need refreshing, and mechanisms like search should work in more expected ways.

Stories, profiles, and project description (as well as links) about field projects need to be pulled from the “Communities” list onto the front page or onto additional issue pages, and both GLP staff and field participants need forums such as blogs to present ideas or updates.

Information and resource lists should be made clearer, and keyword tags need to be applied to content in useful ways. Free tagging and cloud tag displays could be a good start.

Additional capabilities of the Liferay platform need to be introduced at both the GLP.net and field levels, with good resources for local implementation and customization provided. Feedback mechanisms such as user ratings, comments, and technical queries need to be promoted.

Detailed Activities and Results

Workshop One

Process

An all-staff workshop was held for four hours to gather consensus and create discussion around core questions of GLP in order to gain staff input and consensus into what GLP is, its resources and experience, staff and team motivation and goals, and start creating consensus on what GLP should be.

Findings

At the outset, the staff tended to define GLP project as the portal platform, and not the project management experience they have gained. They started the session by identifying closely with the technology and feeling that GLP was defined as the technology platform they use. The website and the draft brochure content both reveal this “technology-centric” thinking in the GLP definitions.

However, most staff are education experts who know technology, not the other way around. They also mentioned that most of their successful targeted projects have large “offline” components, including training, guru support, policy, training of trainers, etc. In addition, a cross-program analysis of GLP programs shows remarkable diversity in how the platform is used to undertake development objectives.

Upon discussion, it was identified that there is a big difference between *Global Learning Portal: the project* and *Global Learning Portal: the website/Platform*. Most of GLP’s “real work” is through targeted activities, not through the main GLP.NET website, though they use the website as a means to support those targeted programs. The targeted activities have concrete development goals, specific audiences, and many off and online elements to make those projects successful. Most of GLP’s staff’s experiences in using collaboration technology for development outcomes are through these targeted initiatives. Each targeted initiative uses the collaboration platform in different, specific ways. The main GLP.NET is underused in supporting these targeted initiatives. The site is a place where people can get to targeted activity sites, plus some additional information, if they know what they are looking for, but is not talking to anyone in particular. Primarily, GLP.NET does not represent most of the experience or work of GLP.

During the workshop, the staff made it clear that GLP.NET is NOT a global network of teachers and educators beyond the targeted activities mentioned above (too expensive, other people doing it already, too broad). However, they do not have a clear idea of what the purpose of GLP.NET, nor who its audience is. Many would allow GLP.NET to disappear if politically feasible (which it isn’t, and they acknowledge this fact). The GLP team specifically mentioned however the need to support specific USAID Education officers’ need to have a free collaboration environment available to them for USAID and beyond discussions. They find GLP.NET platform very useful in responding to these (often ad hoc and short time-span) requests by USAID.

In addition to the lack of clarity about the role and purpose of GLP.NET, staff also remarked that GLP targeted activities are silo’d; experiences not formally shared amongst project staff, who were struggling with how to pull these experiences into larger whole. The staff also struggle with how to represent what GLP does (and does not do) to potential partners and clients, including AED. They know that GLP.NET does a poor job of representing GLP services and experience.

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Outcomes

The following decisions came out of the workshop and subsequent discussions with Rob Schware and Sonja Hubbard.

GLP is not its platform. GLP uses the platform to deliver educational reform and other development initiatives. The platform exists within a broader system of interventions delivered by GLP.

Therefore, GLP needs to see and define itself as a program which provides set of interventions using collaboration technologies to attain development goals. These programs include “offline” interventions, as well as “online” ones, and often involve partnering with implementing partners or subject matter experts outside of GLP team. Experiences of GLP through its targeted programs need to be captured, shared, and highlighted, using collaboration technologies.

In addition, GLP.NET needs to be reoriented as a space to support GLP the program, especially as a repository and resource for GLP experiences. GLP.NET needs to focus on collaboration and sharing experiences, over content – **people** vs. **text**. To this end, GLP.NET (and the Liferay Platform) is a useful technology tool, to support collaboration need, especially USAID collaboration on an as needed basis. In order to make GLP.NET serve GLP, the audiences for GLP.NET need to be defined more precisely and make sure the site is offering appropriate information and functionality to build those audiences. Please see “GLP Workshop 1 Write-Up”, below, for more on workshop outcomes.

Staff Interviews/Preparation

Process

Several major outcomes came from the first workshop and interviews with Rob Schware and Sonja Hubbard.

1. Draft mission statement for GLP the program
2. Draft mission statement for GLP.NET the website
3. Substantial feedback and edits on the GLP brochure to reflect this new direction.
4. Review of the usability of the GLP.NET website, including discussions on navigation, immediate search improvements, and other immediate fixes.
5. Decision to hold a second staff workshop to help identify core audiences for GLP.NET the website.

Draft Mission Statement for GLP

The following statements were drafted with the team as a preliminary new mission statement for GLP the project.

1. GLP offers targeted innovative collaboration technologies for education interventions for specific goals and audiences. Most activities integrate technology into broader development objectives.
2. GLP is made up of collaboration technologies for international development and education specialists who bring deep understanding of educators and education reform activities with experience of using these technologies to expand and leverage project investments.
3. GLP activities are multi-dimensional. The project provides:

GAE APPENDIC VOLUME II – GLP Specific

- a. Thorough needs assessments to understand the problem area, user base and planned intervention.
 - b. “Offline” support with the “online” work – training, championing, training of trainers, etc.
 - c. Advocacy for local software development, open source solutions, and increased usage of communications technology by underserved populations.
4. GLP is an international network of education professionals to discuss current issues in education reform, especially in the usage of collaboration and communications technology.

Mission statement for GLP.NET

The following draft mission and purpose were developed for internal discussion with GLP team to help guide the discussion on how to approach GLP.NET, the website.

Mission:

To support and expand the effective and sustainable use of collaboration technology for international educational reform.

Overarching purpose/goal:

- Encourage potential partners to use GLP program for their targeted initiatives; and
- Encourage potential partners and funders to support GLP knowledge repository, sharing and collaboration functions.

Usability Analysis

I met with Sonja Hubbard to discuss usability analysis on GLP.NET performed in the evaluation combined with the findings of the first workshop, with specific goals and tasks identified. We drafted the following which was shared with the GLP staff at workshop two, as part of the context of what GLP.NET would be providing and how.

Methods to achieve Mission/Purpose

- Highlight the role of **people**, especially in the field, as active contributors to the knowledge repository on collaboration technology for education reform.
- Represent and share the rich experience of GLP team ICT for education experience (and GLP partners and community members);
- Demonstrate thought leadership from all GLP users (especially under-heard voices) in the use of communications and collaboration technology for educational reform; and
- Make it easy for potential partners to see the benefits and value of using GLP interventions to support their for their educational reform programs.

Specific tasks:

- Reorganize the site to make content more easily searchable;
- Set up methods to encourage contributions and participation by SMEs - especially those in the field who normally don't get to contribute - to share their experience on the use of communications and collaboration technology for educational reform.
- Reuse and make more easily available content already captured/created for targeted programs, through the use of Cloud tagging or other elements.

GAE APPENDIC VOLUME II – GLP Specific

- Make management of the GLP.NET site low impact by identifying content generation/reuse opportunities within targeted programs. Also building in schedules and expectations with staff about when the site gets updated, what sort of content, etc. And the more audience building work you do, the more content will be developed by the audience (though moderation/community manager work will also increase).
- Add more information about how GLP the program works – how to get a project, case studies, examples of impact, contact information.

Workshop Two

Process

The second workshop had the following agenda:

- Review the draft mission statements and usability analysis for feedback and to put the exercise into context
- Identify and describe core audiences
- Prioritize audiences

After reviewing and agreeing in principle to the above text, the team worked together to identify and prioritize users for GLP.NET. We divided the group into teams of two or three, and each team described one audience group by demographics and then by need. Each team reported back to the group, and then we added, clarified, or debated each group. At the end, we prioritized the groups based on CURRENT priorities for GLP.NET, acknowledging that future audience priorities may be different if/when resources warrant.

Users Identified

This list is for current user in order of priority, based on current funding availability and goals. More work needs to be done to further elaborate the user groups, including audience building and social network support. Please see the full write up on these groups, below.

Donors/funders and other potential clients:

These users are mainly based in developed environment with broadband connectivity, and a high level of English. Their technology capacity ranges, with many highly proficient in social networking tools.

These users require programmatic information about GLP (funding, mechanism, and format) and evidence of how GLP leverages existing donor investments. Donors also may be looking for case studies/stories on how collaboration technology can be used to promote educational reform and international development. And USAID donors specifically need technology to support collaboration forums for their internal discussions.

NGO Program Staff

NGO program staff may be located in the US or in the field, but a high percentage are from the US/west or been educated in the US/West. Their level of English is high, but for some it is their second language. They have a large range of access and understanding of technology – ranging from none to high.

GAE APPENDIC VOLUME II – GLP Specific

These users are looking for professional networks of other program managers or subject matter experts. They are also looking for materials, documents, training tools, especially in local languages. They are seeking funding/partnering opportunities and/or low cost/easy to implement technology tools that they can use where they are. And finally, they are looking for ideas, best practices, and implementation tips to get ideas from on how to implement programs more effectively.

Education Specialists

This is a broad category that should be broken down and focused more precisely. Currently it includes policy makers, ICT for education specialists, and researchers. These education specialists are located all over the world – policy makers may be located in country, while ICT in education specialists and researchers may be located in the US or in the field, but a high percentage are from the US/west or been educated in the US/West. Their level of English ranges from mid to high. They have a large range of access and understanding of technology – ranging from none to high.

These users are looking for professional networks of subject matter experts. They are also looking for materials, documents, training tools, especially in local languages. These users require programmatic information about GLP (funding, mechanism, and format) and evidence of how GLP leverages existing donor investments. They also may be looking for case studies/stories on how collaboration technology can be used to promote educational reform and international development. And finally, they are looking for ideas, best practices, and implementation tips

Teachers/Educators

This final group is limited to those within targeted GLP Programs who find themselves on the GLP.NET site; this audience is not a priority one for the broader GLP.NET at this time, but should still be kept in mind when reorienting the site.

These teachers and educators are located in developing countries with a wide range of English skills, from none to mid-range, often as their second or third language. Their access to technology also ranges from none to high, and their need for “offline” support may be very high. They may not be familiar with many social networking conventions and they may not have access to computers on a frequent basis, and the access to computers is not personalized (i.e. they are accessing a shared computer).

These users are looking for professional networks of teachers and educators, and others who have materials they can use. They are also looking for curriculum materials, lesson plans, documents, training tools, especially in local languages. These users often need information on how to use GLP.NET for their goals.. And finally, they are looking for ideas, best practices, and implementation tips on how to use collaboration technologies to improve education.

Recommendations/Next Steps for GLP

The following are my recommendations and next steps for GLP to move forward with.

New Mission/Programmatic Direction

GLP will need to gain internal and funder acceptance of GLP and GLP.NET mission statements. This task includes an examination of how the new mission statement impacts the business model, especially in

GAE APPENDIC VOLUME II – GLP Specific

relation to the use and promotion of the Liferay platform. GLP needs to clarify what it is selling – not a platform but rather services that use technology and the larger framework of services surrounding the technology.

GLP also needs to identify strategic partnerships, especially within AED to expand client focus and subject matter expertise. GLP cannot be all things to all people; it needs to focus on its core competencies “collaboration technologies for education reform” and partner with other organizations or groups when necessary. At times, GLP will be the strategic partner in a larger development effort, where its role is solely focused on expanding and leveraging investments through the use of collaboration technologies. Other times it will be the prime implementer, primarily responsible for delivering the development impact. GLP needs to identify and standardize when it will take on different roles and what the limitations and parameters are within each role type.

GLP as a Thought Leader on Collaboration Technologies for Educational Reform/International Development

GLP needs to capitalize on its experience and staff skills both internally and externally. Internally, GLP should capture and integrate community/audience building and social networking support and facilitation into GLP activities across all programs. One example is to use the high quality change management and needs assessments documentation done for technology change and use them as templates for all interventions. They need to capitalize on the good investment in solid development infrastructure (including development environment separated from production, version control, and backup plans) combined with the needs analyses, user group identification, and other project management processes they use as demonstration models on how all collaboration technology for development projects should be approached. GLP.NET can be useful as a repository for this information.

Externally, GLP should share “lessons learned”, “case studies” and other experiences it has gained. Some ways to create and share these lessons are via blog posts, especially from field partners, and detailed staff and partner profiles. USAID discussions and targeted programs may also provide useful topics for conversation. GLP.NET should have a dedicated content manager to identify, shape and highlight relevant content for broader dissemination.

Improvements to GLP.NET¹

GLP needs to perform substantial redesign of the look and feel and user interface of GLP.NET, including changing navigation to make surfing the site easier to do, incorporating people and collaboration into the look and feel redesign by creating a place for blogging on the home page, and highlighting registered users. Other recommended improvements target search functionality such as cloud tagging and social media bookmarking content, and ways to make it easier for existing users to find related content via the targeted sub sites. Basic content about GLP.NET, how to access/use, and staff information would further the goals of the site. Finally, GLP as a whole should explore making some technology tools (such as creating web pages or blogs) more accessible to registered users, especially as part of an internal analysis of the targeted programs and user needs.

¹ Work has already started on this task, with a preliminary deadline of mid August.

Attachment 1

Global Learning Portal Workshop 1 Write Up

May 27th, 2009

Themes

1. GLP offers targeted innovative collaboration technologies for education interventions for specific goals and audiences. Most activities integrate technology into broader development objectives.
2. GLP is made up of collaboration technologies for international development and education specialists who bring deep understanding of educators and education reform activities with experience of using these technologies to expand and leverage project investments.
3. GLP activities are multi-dimensional:
 - a. Thorough needs assessments to understand the problem area, user base and planned intervention.
 - b. Provide “offline” support with the “online” work – training, championing, tot, etc.
 - c. Advocate for local software development, open source solutions, and increased usage of communications technology by underserved populations.
4. GLP is an international network of education professionals to discuss current issues in Education reform, especially in the usage of collaboration and communications technology.

Burning questions:

1. Difference between Global Learning Portal – the project and Global Learning Portal – the website.
2. How to address the general audience?
3. Work is silo'd -> how to pull into larger whole?
4. How to represent what GLP does (and does not do)?
5. How to leverage resources already captured, plus experience already gained for broader usage/promotion of GLP?

What do we do?	What are we?
Needs assessment	Holistic
Service supply	Innovative
Targeted communities	Responsive
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Libraries education resources• Discussion forums• Professional education technology• Train on webs	Neutral
Connect educators	Independent
Advocate open source	Non-profit
	Open source
	Cost sensitive
	sustainable

GAE APPENDIC VOLUME II – GLP Specific

<p>NOT DO</p> <p>Global network of teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not scalable • Not sustainable • Other people doing it • Other priorities • Field barriers 	
<p>Who do we serve</p> <p>Within targeted/specific country/program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers/educators • Youth • Ministry of education <p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education international development specialists • Donor community • NGO program staff 	<p>Who are we?</p> <p>ICT for education experts</p> <p>Developer</p> <p>Teacher trainer</p> <p>Program manager</p> <p>Project manager</p> <p>Business analyst</p> <p>Sys admin</p> <p>Technology analyst</p> <p>Global education partner development</p> <p>Outside support for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design • Back end development • Media relations • M&E • hosting
<p>Where are our users?</p> <p>Targeted programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministries in developing countries • Teacher training colleges • Developing country universities • NGO program staff <p>General</p> <p>US Universities</p>	<p>Where do we work (and not work)</p> <p>Developing countries</p> <p>US/Western Europe (but focused on impact in developing countries)</p> <p>NOT serve</p> <p>China</p> <p>India</p> <p>Students/secondary schools</p>
<p>Why do they use us?</p> <p>International experience</p> <p>Association with AED (AED resources)</p> <p>Program and technology is customized to their needs</p> <p>Neutral platform (within funding world, plus firewall/security constraints)</p> <p>Responsive client services</p> <p>Ease of internationalization/localization</p> <p>USAID investment in information infrastructure, applicable to any project</p> <p>USAID knowledge and mechanism</p> <p>Holistic innovative approach to meeting needs</p> <p>IT WORKS!</p>	<p>Why are we doing this?</p> <p>Targeted project implementations</p> <p>Technology as a tool for teaching and learning</p> <p>Connect beneficiaries (teachers, youth, etc), overcome distance, network people together</p> <p>Knowledge management – repository for project materials</p> <p>Collaborative problem solving/methodology</p> <p>Leverage additional investments – extending impact for ICT for D/Ed investments</p> <p>Advocating for ICT for Ed programs</p>
<p>How do THEY do it?</p>	<p>How do we do it?</p>

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<p>Specific to project Follow up to face to face meetings/ongoing discussion</p>	<p>Targeted technology based conversation Often needs additional technical support, such as training, localization, guidance, training of trainers Use champions in country Cascade effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of Trainers • Influencers <p>Underlying needs and requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of broader training • Loading approved document – access by community • Peer discussions • Recognition/ranking • Compliment/integrate into existing development activity – add value. <p>Creating a collaborative environment -> end project Local drivers of a project Develop local software economy, local use Internal software design documentation</p>
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Next steps

IA nuts and bolts

Awareness of common mission/consensus captured

Explore real potential of GLP

- Technical
- Experience and talents

Users of GLP.net

- Teachers/educators (via targeted communities) in developing countries.
 - Teaching materials
 - Methods/curriculum
 - Place to discuss /ask question
- Donors/funders
 - Best practices
 - Good ideas
 - Guidelines and tips
- Education Specialists

GAE APPENDIC VOLUME II – GLP Specific

- Best practices
- Case studies
- Good ideas
- NGO program staff
 - Case studies
 - Teaching materials
 - Good ideas
 - Best practices

Page elements

Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Library● Communities● Data resources	News events and blog	Who we are About GLP The staff Our partners Our projects How to create a community
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[Home](#) | [communities](#) | [library](#) | [elearning](#) | [news](#) | [about GLP](#)

Attachment 2

Global Learning Portal Workshop 2 – User Analysis Outcomes

June 16th, 2009

In order of priority:

1. Donors/funders
2. NGO Program Staff
3. Education Specialists (see note)
4. Teachers/Educators (see note)

1. Donors/Funders

Description	Needs
US Based mostly	Searchable information in detail and summary format
good connectivity	Testimonials
English proficiency	Video clips
Work experience varied	Marketing kits
Tech literate	Implementation process
Mixed levels of educational expertise	FAQs
Mostly international experience (Used USAID as prototype)	Media coverage
	Open source
	Advocacy – technology positioning
	Collective staff bios
	General program information
	Management capabilities
	Vision/goals/objectives
	How to leverage existing funding
	Impact assessments
	Broad but also detailed information requirements
	Alliance members and activities
	Other funders
	Information/data on users (stats aggregate)
	Digital library
	Successes/lessons learned
	Access to project reports and status reports
	Timely and accurate information
	Progress
	Stories
	Discussion forum
	How donor investment is useful

GAE APPENDIC VOLUME II – GLP Specific

2. NGO Program Staff

Description	Needs
Some based in the US, those in field often are American but some locals	Connection to other field based staff
Curious about other cultures	Opportunities for funding/projects
Good-willed	Access to training materials
Tolerant	Good practices about program design, implementation
Motivated	Professional networks for project alignment and expertise
Want to make a positive impact	Information on compliance, program management with donors
Internet access via the office (varying bandwidth)	Connection to HQ/Admin
English speakers	Some mechanism for knowledge sharing -> not reinventing wheel
Some junior, some senior (varying levels of experience)	
College educated	
Education specialization	

3. Education Specialists

It was agreed that this is a very broad category that needs to be subdivided down. Below in bold are potential priority groups with the related priority levels next t them.

Description	Needs
Textbook publishers 4	Sharing
Policy makers 2	Publish information
Toy companies 4	Access to information
Ministries/Dept of education 2	Training on technical literacy
Education experts 1	Link to external resources
Chancellors/deans 4	Examples of working policy
Researchers 1	Resources
ICT in education organizations 1	
Education companies 4	

4. Teachers/Educators

“Incidental users” – i.e. they are current users for the targeted programs, who may find useful content on main GLP.NET site. However, this category of users should not currently be prioritized.

Description	Needs
Developing country, educational reform targeted beneficiaries	Will use targeted site/project resources (not glp.net)
Small # outside targeted groups	Trust other teachers
	Use Google for research
	Ideas on how to/materials for use
	Curriculum design
	How to use GLP (resources)
	Skill building
	Access to other teachers/access to networks
	Relevant content



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

HE/P FIELD STUDY REPORT

**GLOBAL EVALUATION & MONITORING II
GEM II BPA Number EDH-E-00-08-00003-00**

Global Assets Evaluation

**Implementation of Global Learning Portal (GLP) as part of the Higher Education Project in
Afghanistan:**

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The HE/P - A Field Study: Implementation of Global Learning Portal (GLP) as part of the Higher Education Project in Afghanistan:

The objective of the field study of the Global Learning Portal (GLP) functioning in supporting educational development in Afghanistan was to gain insights about implementation issues and understand opportunities for further catalyzing the power and sustainability of the synergies between GLP as a resource and overall education system development. Because the current GAE evaluation is a mid-term one, the field research presents an opportunity to look at early stages of implementation while details are still fresh in key players' and beneficiaries' minds and, at the same time, examine issues related to future implementation and refinement.

The implementation of the GLP initiative in Afghanistan is typical of those we examined in some detail in that it has been clear to all involved that the GLP project in Afghanistan should be configured to respond to the specific context of the country—the education system's particular developmental needs, and the USAID Mission's overall strategy for achieving its strategic objectives in the education sector. This implies attention to both the barriers to be confronted in GLP implementation, and the available resources. This is, in principle, a sound strategy for implementation of a global initiative, inasmuch as it is clear from the outset that the most effective strategy on the ground would be one which both adheres to the primary strategic principles of the overall GLP initiative and which is also tailored to distinctive country needs. Therefore, as in Rwanda and Zambia, the Aguirre/JBS Afghanistan field research, conceptualized the evaluation of GLP implementation as a “snapshot” of an ongoing process of evolution through which the GLP portal would be introduced, broadened in scope, and refined in terms of priorities vis-à-vis teacher utilization/skills development and design features to contribute to the resource's utility.

As part of AED's Higher Education Project in Afghanistan (HEP), the Global Learning Portal (GLP – www.glp.net) has sought to provide faculty of education members in Afghanistan with learning resources and networking tools to support skills development among post-secondary teacher trainers and other education faculty: to improve their access to teaching pedagogical and content resources, to foster discussion about both how to use those resources effectively, and to provide a tool for faculty to identify and overcome other challenges to improving teacher education (as well as actual instruction of primary and secondary students eventually) through fostering discussion about those issues and sharing information.

Introduction

HEP provides an excellent venue and test bed for GLP implementation, because teacher training is at the top of Afghanistan's education system development priorities and has also been a major element in USAID's strategy in the country. In part because Taliban rule and the preceding 15 years of conflict during the Mujahidin period had so clearly made it difficult or impossible for teachers to get quality training, the Ministry of Education soon identified it as a top priority, and after a series of emergency schooling programs, by 2006 USAID had put in place two large in-service teacher training projects HEP, for teacher preparation through the training institutions of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), and BESST for improving primary school teacher preparation through the Ministry of Education (MoE), along with a program for supporting community schools teachers fill a needed role for Afghanistan's education system.

There are sound theoretical and practical reasons for focusing on GLP implementation in Afghanistan. The most obvious reason is that the country's transportation and communication infrastructure is still uneven—making in-person training workshops for teacher-trainers at best costly to arrange and, at worst, in possible. Moreover, in the cultural context of Afghanistan, electronic access to a virtual forum for discussion and resource-sharing was particularly important for female teachers, since most cannot travel unaccompanied.

Another notable organizational and cultural facet of HEP's overall approach and, specifically, the project's adoption of GLP as a project component, is that it targeted both universities and teacher training institutes (which are much lower in the organizational hierarchy than the universities—although often their faculty

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have educational qualifications quite similar to those of university faculty). Therefore, in a sense, GLP presented a promising option for HEP and USAID to assist Afghanistan's education system in overcoming organizational as well as physical barriers to peer-based skills development – including the position of women in society and the strong reliance on family relationships which can constrain contribution to important discussions.

It should be noted also that more effective use of distance learning and information technology resources is a general strategic direction highlighted in both the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and the Ministry of Education's Strategic Plan for Education. While the focus of the strategic plans had been on e-learning directly for students, rather than on teacher education, HEP's incorporation of GLP and its resources into its work to strengthen teacher training (by improving teacher trainers' skills development) was very consistent with the issues the Ministry faced in bringing teachers together for training in any sustainable way.

Background on the HEP Project in Afghanistan

AED, as the prime contractor for USAID's Higher Education Project is charged with developing sustainable capacity for teacher education in Afghanistan at the tertiary level, over a five year period. AED works in conjunction with Indiana University and the University of Massachusetts in implementing HEP. The project's emphasis has shifted from a fairly standard model which has long been used by development agencies (sending faculty or other trainees to the US for university-level training) to an emphasis on in-country development activities, and more diverse sources of university level training. It is working with 16 faculties of teacher education throughout the country. These include

- Kabul Education University (the national education university)
- Kabul University (the pre-eminent national university)
- Herat University (the leading regional university in western Afghanistan)
- Balkh University (the leading regional university in northern Afghanistan)
- Kandahar University (the leading regional university in southern Afghanistan)
- Nangarhar University (the leading regional university in eastern Afghanistan)

HEP also works with the smaller post-secondary teacher training institutions (formerly "pedagogic institutes", i.e. normal schools). The ones it works with are located in:

- Bamyan,
- Khost,
- Paktia,
- Takhar; and

It also works with the Teacher Training Institutes in:

- Badakshan,
- Baghlan,
- Faryab,
- Jowzjan,
- Kunduz, and
- Parwan

USAID supports improved teacher training through a variety of channels as part of HEP – development of standards, and materials which meet them, and training workshops to help faculty become acquainted and proficient in using them is one set of activities; individual learning and mentoring opportunities through USAID-sponsored trips to American and other institutions for subset of faculty also are supported.

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While HEP is the biggest project working with higher education in support of teacher training in Afghanistan, there are other organizations working toward improved teaching and learning.² Washington State University, for example, has a project related to curriculum development in higher education with the Ministry of Higher Education, funded by USAID. Creative Associates International Inc. works with a consortium of Afghan NGO's and the Ministry of Education to support improved teaching and teacher training at the elementary level, in Afghanistan; and BearingPoint works with Ministry and private sector institutions, and other international organizations have worked with higher education departments at Kabul University and other locations.

GLP Current Stage of Development

Overall, HEP contains over 500 registered users, the majority of which are faculty of education across the 16 institutions (the rest being HEP staff and educational stakeholders in Afghanistan). GLP staff have estimated that about 400 of the registered individual faculty members are using the GLP system www.glp.net/Afghanistan for a variety of purposes.³ Even if only 200 are using it, this is an impressive level of market penetration for a portal less than 2 years after the GLP resource was first envisioned as part of the project. As of May, 2009, HEP and the MoHE signed an agreement to transition HE/P to the Ministry at the conclusion of the project.⁴

Based on the information in the Portal, trainings have been held face-to-face as well as in the form of individual discussions. Resources related to standards for teaching and curriculum development have been posted and accessed via the portal where there is also an on-line library of materials that extend beyond the project walls. Additionally, there is project news and GLP news from other sites. The GLP site was designed for faculty, and only faculty can contribute, upload resources and participate in discussions; however, access to the resources is available to students and the general public as well.

Evaluation Field Research

The evaluation carried out studied GLP user experiences with the system. Since it is a mid-term evaluation and a particular concern was to incorporate into the evaluation attention to the sorts of questions which predominate in formative evaluations (where the emphasis is on program refinement/corrective action). The intent was to see what value was added to them, and the potential for the future of education development there.

The evaluation questions about the use of the GLP in the HEP context then, really need to address two different sets of concerns—encompassing elements of both formative and summative evaluation. First for the project: to what extent and in what ways has GLP contributed to project objective of developing teacher training resources and improving teacher education in Afghanistan; what does it take to do this; and what is the potential from maintaining, expanding, and sustaining it?⁵ Specifically –

Q1. How much are faculty using GLP? What are impediments and facilitators?

² <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Partners.aspx> has a full list of partners working with USAID to assist Afghanistan. Of course there are other international donor groups as well.

³ The site itself (<http://www.glp.net/afghanistan>) states that the 'HEP portal contains over 500 registered users, most of whom teach at teacher training institutions. The GLP conducts regular workshops for users and will work with Afghan education institutions to turn the management and maintenance of the portal over to them.'

⁴ <http://www.mohe.gov.af/?lang=en&p=projects&nid=48> reports the understanding reached.

⁵ When answering these questions it is important to note that the resource materials for faculties of education to use in their own languages are still in early stages of development; and just now as the evaluation ends the site is being put up in Pashtu (while it already was up in Dari, an official language of Afghanistan; Pashtu is the language of the majority of its people). Thus, in terms of download, it may be that we cannot expect to see much

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- Q2. What are they using GLP for? What are they not using it for, which, with project design modifications, they could?
- Q3. How does the portal work/not work for them, both in terms of technical connection speed and their ability to make use of it to gain the resources they need to further develop their skills or address other problems they face in providing effective, quality instruction to the teachers they train?
- Q4. To what extent is GLP a resource that they will use beyond HEP; what else might they use in place of GLP, if it were not there? What would be lost if they didn't use it?
- Q5. What kinds of things have they been able to accomplish through use of the GLP which they could not have achieved without it?
- Q6. What are the actual costs entailed in using GLP for the HEP project, the user, and GLP?
- Q7. Are there any policy implications for the institution, project, person that need to be considered?
- Q8. Is GLP worth the cost, to the project, the development community, and the users? What is a reasonable development trajectory and timeframe for seeing 'results'? What sort of results are reasonable to expect; and what sorts of involvement from GLP is necessary to product them?
- Q9. To what extent have other teacher training organizations have considered using the Portal in support of the similar work they are doing; or to use the resources on it? What novel opportunities might there be for collaboration in maintaining or further extending or enhancing GLP in Afghanistan?

The second set of concerns relates to what HEP's experience in Afghanistan, both in configuring the GLP design to a specific country context and in implementing the design, can tell us regarding current or future initiatives of this sort in other country contexts? For example,

- Q1. What are the successful or unsuccessful elements of a project-based portal in terms of fostering collaboration on development of education capacity?
- Q2. What training issues should be taken into account and what level of training effort should be anticipated to foster its success?
- Q3. How does the GLP bring in or blend with other modes of collaboration and other groups of collaborators to foster communication across the development community?
- Q4. Are there additional features or processes that could be added to increase value and spur the use of the system to develop education capacity?

This field study focuses, therefore, on users current experiences with the site and hopes for the future; and what that means for the overall goals of GLP to serve as catalyst for developing teacher-trainer capacity in education systems of countries such as Afghanistan which are experiencing high levels of stress (in responding to increased demand for schooling and, thus, teachers, concurrently with a push for improvements in very low current quality of instruction, in part via curriculum revision).

It is possible that not all of these questions can be definitively answered through the current evaluation; and it may be premature to answer some of them. However, it is often as important for a mid-term evaluation such as the current one to focus attention for future project enhancement and management as to develop a definitive analyses of "value added"—particularly because an inherent feature of the GLP initiative is that the community of users in each country can be involved in working collaboratively with USAID to map out future directions and enhancements.

Methodology (See Appendix 1 for full presentation of the Methodology)

The research utilized an interview protocol developed for this study, supplemented by respondent demonstration of practice, where interviews were held in person. Given the focus of the evaluation, the

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most relevant respondents were users of the system, and most relevant to interview those who had been trained in the Internet and the use of the system. In addition to the emphasis on users, both time constraints on the study and available resources made it a low priority to specifically identify and interview faculty who had not been trained or oriented to the GLP; or where GLP was not functioning. Such comparisons might yield relevant information to reliably assess the impact of GLP—but that was not the priority for this study. Therefore, based on a list of the 16 institutions in which HEP was primarily working, and the faculty of education at the institutions who had been trained in use of the GLP, as provided by the HEP, GLP administrator, the researchers selected a sample of five institutions and 50 faculty members. Institutions were selected to represent both sites nearer and further away from project headquarters in Kabul, and larger and smaller institutional size; Faculty were selected within sites following random research design procedures.

Who were the faculty that participated in the study?

All respondents were part of the Education Faculty in their institutions. About half (52%) specialized in math or the sciences (including psychology), one quarter (24%) specialized in literature or social science (including geography and history); 6% specialized in computer science, and 14% specialized in Pedagogy, Library, or Sports areas. Faculty varied in age from about 25 years old to 55 years (although one male respondent was older). The majority of interviews were with Assistant Professors (58%), however 36% of those interviewed were Associate; and three individuals were in division management positions.

The respondent sample appears to be quite representative of the overall post-secondary education faculty in terms of academic background and rank. The unusual distribution of academic specialization reflects overall patterns in higher education in Afghanistan (where prestigious specialties such as physics and economics are frequent university majors while less prestigious ones such as journalism, for example, are not).

The majority of faculty interviewed (50%) were between 25 and 35 years old. Males and Females were about the same age range. Female respondents had slightly longer time at the university - 54% of men interviewed had been there 4 years or less, while only 42% of the women had been there 4 years or less. **Table 1** provides an overview of the respondents to the questionnaire. Appendix 2 provides a copy of the data collection form used.

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Table 1: Who were the Respondents?

Specialty area	Number	% of total
General	2	4%
Sciences	13	26%
Psychology	13	26%
Computer Science	3	6%
Literature	8	16%
Geography, History	4	8%
Library	1	2%
Pedagogy	4	8%
Sports	2	4%
Total	50	100%
Faculty Level	Number	% of Total
Assistant Professor	29	58%
Associate Professor	18	36%
Full Professor*	3	6%
Note included Head of Library,		
How long in Position	Number	% of Total
1 year or less	6	12%
2 to 4 years	18	36%
5 to 9 years	8	16%
10 to 30 years	18	36%
Age	Number	% of Total
25 or younger	6	12%
26 to 35	25	50%
36 to 55	18	36%
56+	1	2%
Gender	Number	% of Total
Female	24	48%
Male	26	52%

Findings from the Study

The following reports the findings observed and those reported by the faculty and staff interviewed.⁶

Patterns of Internet Use by GLP Users

Most of the survey respondents used the Internet on average about 6 hours a week (42%). Some used it more (24%); some used it less (34%).⁷ This amounts to slightly over one hour per day and would seem to suggest a significant level of commitment to routinely using Internet resources. **Table 2** summarizes the findings.

⁶ Appendix 2 provides a copy of the data collection form used.

⁷ Mean use 5.7 hours; stddev 3.0: Q2a: How many hours per week do you use the Internet?

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Table 2: Use of the Internet

Time spent on the Internet/Week	Number	% of total
10 hours	12	24%
6 hours	21	42%
2.5 hours	14	28%
1 hour	1	2%
0.5 hours	2	4%
Ease of Access to Internet	Number	% of Total
Almost any time	27	54%
Without great difficulty	14	28%
With difficulty	9	18%
Where do you usually access the Internet	Number	% of Total
University/Institute	48	96%
Café as well	1	2%
Home as well	1	2%

It is important to remember that residential Internet access is not generally available in Afghanistan—even in major urban centers such as Kabul, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif (where Balkh University is located). Also, Internet access is not always available even at the universities, due to power outages.⁸ Almost all the faculty interviewed used the labs developed by the HEP project as the primary place to access the Internet (96%); more than three-quarters (76%) said this was the only place they accessed the Internet. However three individuals (6%) also accessed it at home or at a café; and some also used the Internet access points in other departments of their institution.⁹

Most respondents said they had no difficulty or no great difficulty accessing the Internet. However 18% (n=9) said they had some difficulty accessing the Internet. It was the women faculty who reported – and especially the older faculty (older than 35 years of age and at the Institution more than 3 years), who said they had more difficulty accessing the Internet. This is not surprising. Few have had prior opportunities for using the Internet. It also deserves note that some keyboard layout for both Dari and Pashto involves some fairly difficult procedures to access some characters.

Almost four out of five (78%) said the connection speed in the lab was adequate and fast; the remaining one-fifth (22%) said it was too slow. In anecdotal conversation it was reported that the labs were particularly important for women who would not feel comfortable going to a public place for use; it was not deemed proper.¹⁰

The above responses indicate that HEP/GLP has made a significant contribution simply by affording teacher trainers access to the Internet. The three-quarters (76%) of the survey respondents who report using the internet 6 or more hours a week are likely to have enough online time to make a substantial difference both in their access to content (i.e. posted resources, participation in dialogue with other education faculty) . Those with this level of access also are likely to have enough online time to give them opportunities to explore new ways in which online resources can inform their professional development and are also likely to continue to use the Internet wherever/whenever available. These new attitudes are almost inevitably likely to carry over to their students—although it is not clear to what extent this shift in attitudes might

⁸ Note that this may affect traffic numbers, as a user may lose connection occasionally and have to reload the site. This will inflate the number of site visits and is part of the reason why traffic analysis was not specifically used to assess the extent of use of the HEP site.

⁹ Q2b: Where do you access the Internet?

¹⁰ Q2e: How would you describe the connection speed at the place where you typically use the computer? (Interviewers instructed to watch to see how long it takes to download a 10 page document).

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impact overall attitudes about the nature of learning (i.e. as collaborative or as centered on limited resources, authoritative sources of information).

HEP’s Role in Catalyzing Users’ Internet Access

Most of the faculty interviewed were introduced to the Internet through HEP and the GLP (64%) – however 14% had learned it on their own, but then received training on specific uses of the GLP as an Internet resource through HEP; and 22% had learned to use the Internet on their own but had not gotten specific training from HEP on GLP.¹¹ Those who had learned the Internet on their own, but had not received an orientation about GLP, tended to have learned about the Portal from a class at the University (6 people) or a friend (4 people). **Table 3** illustrates HEP’s role in bringing Afghanistan’s higher education faculty into the world of the Internet.

Table 3: How Users were Introduced to the Internet and Technical Assistance Resources

How were you introduced to Internet*	Number	% of Total
HEP or HEP-GLP	31	64%
Myself, before HEP, but also through HEP	7	14%
Myself, before HEP or GLP, No HEP Training	11	22%
No training through HEP or any other provider	1	2%
If you have problems with the Internet, whom do you ask?	Number	% of Total
HEP Technical staff	27	54%
A colleague, not necessary a HEP staff	14	28%
Nobody, I figure it out or give up	9	18%
<i>*Note: Responses re introduction to Internet are a combination of answers as to whether a respondent got training from HEP and how they were Introduced to the Internet</i>		

Being trained on Internet use by HEP yielded some benefits, as faculty who encountered less problems in their use of the Internet were much less likely to give up than others ($p < .01$). We think this is probably in part because of the relationships with the trainer and maybe because of problem-solving techniques that were reinforced.

There was no significant difference in amount of use of the Internet by faculty gender; or whether they had been taught by HEP or on their own, or for how long they had been using it on a regular basis¹². However those who had been in their position less time ($p \leq .10$) and who were younger ($p < .01$), tended to access the Internet more than the others, whether trained by HEP or on their own.¹³

The survey reports regarding faculty use of the Internet underscore the importance of both the physical IT infrastructure and the training/technical assistance infrastructure as part of making the basic vision of Internet access a reality. While connection speed generally was reported as adequate, typically in Afghanistan, Internet connection speeds constrain access to some sorts of educational resources (e.g. graphics-intensive real-time materials with simulations of natural phenomena or experiments). Thus, as usage and resources build, we think this will remain an important consideration for the GLP in configuring its Portal and considering the skills development resources being made available to teacher trainers (or ultimately to teachers). They also point to the conclusion that the HEP/GLP’s initial opening of the portal, pointing users to the configuration of activities provided, was a reasonable first step in a phased

¹¹ Q2c: Have you received any training on use of the Internet or the Web, or taken a class in it? If Yes in what kind of place or with what kind of group or person provided it?

¹² Q2d: How long have you been using the Internet on a regular basis?

¹³ Q1d: How long have you been a faculty member at this or other universities?

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evolutionary approach to Portal configuration and expansion, and generated optimism and expectation, at least among most interviewed, of what will come next.

How Faculty Used HEP’s Global Learning Portal

Faculty respondents were asked what they did on the Internet the previous week to determine the extent to which they used GLP for professional skills development and the extent and how much of their Internet use was personal (e.g. writing e-mails to family and acquaintances, shopping).¹⁴ They could mention multiple sites that they visited, but if they didn’t, the interviewer prompted the respondent by asking if they ‘did anything else’ or ‘went to any other site,’ for up to 3 sites.¹⁵

Almost three-quarters (72%) of the respondents said they went to GLP as part of their visit (i.e. to one of the 3 sites). If they did report the use of the GLP, about half said they used the discussion features to read or post related to their teaching; the majority (83%), said they used it to get to the Internet for reviewing articles or materials for the classes they were teaching; about 11% said they went to GLP to figure out how it worked and learn more about it—a checkout or test drive.¹⁶ **Table 4** details faculty use of GLP.

Table 4: Use of GLP as a Tool for Higher Education Improvement

Q: If you used the Internet last week, what sites did you go to?	N	%	Q: What did you do when you went there	N	%
Didn’t go to any sites	1	2%	Didn’t go to GLP, or no details on use	14	28%
Went to GLP, at least one site listed	36	72%	Went to GLP	36	64%
Went only to sites <u>other than</u> GLP	13	26%	• Researched articles	30	83%
• Search engine	13	100%	• Prepared lecture notes	21	58%
• Ministry of Higher Education site	3	23%	• Participated in discussion	18	50%
• Personal work	6	46%	• Learned about the site	4	11%

A constant dilemma faced by portal designers seeking to promote use of their site for specific targeted skills development, as opposed to free form browsing, is whether it is worthwhile to seek to limit or discourage access to other sites. HEP’s decision to leave GLP open-ended, i.e. as a bona fide portal to an online universe, not simply to a special-purpose website, appears to have been the correct one. Even non-priority uses of the Internet (e.g. personal work) can contribute to users’ growing facility in using online resources, self-confidence, and positive attitudes regarding the value of Internet-based resources.

¹⁴ Q3: About your use of the Internet: a) What kinds of things did you do or look for on the Internet this week? (site name, purpose/what you did there/ did you download anything related to teacher training? Note the Interviewers observed the Faculty using the site while they were interviewing them (at least for those interviews held in person); if they could not find the site or the discussion section or something else they said they used, this was not counted as a use).

¹⁵ See Appendix 2 for a copy of the data collection form used for this research.

¹⁶ These figures are of those who reported they went to GLP during the past week at least one time (n=36).

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What Faculty Learned from Visiting HEP’s Global Learning Portal

A key issue in assessing the value of any education program or resource, in evaluations of either online resources or face-to-face training, is to go beyond examination of extent of exposure or attendance, to get an authentic expression of how an educational resource or program changed important knowledge and specific awareness of resources. This cannot be done with a pre-post test of knowledge, for it is not just an article reviewed or a piece of information acquired, the value has to speak to the personal importance and relevance of what was learned, as well as how it is shared and used. Thus, in the case of flexible, open-ended resources such as GLP, the assessment of the value of the resource is most appropriately open-ended—with users of the system framing (in some cases articulately but in other cases more generically) “what they learned”. These learning impacts are an important element, though not the only one, to examine in considering the contributions a new resource makes in contexts such as HEP GLP Afghanistan where the intervention is meant to strengthen teaching by strengthening the skills of teacher trainers.

Based on the above reasoning, we asked respondents what they learned from their work on the Internet with GLP.¹⁷ Half the teaching faculty surveyed responded with some comment as to how use of the HE/P - GLP impacted their perspective and teaching.¹⁸ Of those who did respond and said they used GLP in any substantial way, i.e. more than 1-2 hours per week or a few exploratory visits, about 85% said that GLP had a direct positive impact on their teaching, and enhanced their awareness of other ideas and strategies in teaching. Mostly this seemed to occur through materials and lecture notes faculty developed that benefitted from the materials on the site or the Internet in general. Many searched on the Internet specifically to these ends. In addition, there were some specific discussions or workshops that were held on the web related to grades or exams or some other form of teaching methodological issues. See **Tables 5** and **6** for tabular summaries of the responses to the questions asked about what they learned and how it helped them.

Table 5: What Faculty Learned from GLP Access

Q: What did you learn last week through your use of the GLP?	N	%	Q: Did anything change as a result of postings you read or initiated?	N	%
GLP helped me with teaching methods & materials -e.g. teaching standards; chemistry materials	12	24%	Pedagogy or Teaching Content – active student participation ; making questions; materials for chemistry	12	14%
GLP made it possible to compare views and expanding our knowledge base; exchange of ideas	6	12%	GLP helped with exchange of ideas – building a culture of discussion	4	8%
This was a whole new world; the Internet; GLP helped a lot (non-specific answers)	4	8%	GLP helped a lot (no further specifics)	6	12%
GLP helped a bit—it’s another resource when you need it	2	4%	GLP helped a little (no further specifics)	3	6%
NA, didn’t use GLP or can’t comment ¹⁹	25	50%	Not applicable or can’t comment	25	50%

The responses tabulated here in **Table 5** regarding faculty use of GLP provide a means to triangulate the responses regarding proportion of faculty who actually use and learn from GLP (as distinct from using other

¹⁷ See Appendix 2 for the data collection instrument – Q3 reflects the questions.

¹⁸ Q3b: Has having access to the Internet helped you in teacher education? If yes, How? Q3c2: What did you do on the site? What did you learn from it? What evidence do you have that others learned anything from it? Did anything change as a result of the posts?

¹⁹ These individuals either actually did not use GLP or did not use it enough to comment on it. They include those that may have used it for e-mail or other purposes not directly related to teaching.

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resources on the Internet or using the Internet for personal work such as e-mailing family members or friends). While the responses summarize in **Table 4** indicate that 36 of the respondents used GLP specifically, **Table 5** suggests that some of these, in fact, have used GLP but not enough to form an opinion or to recollect how it helped them with skills development. This is typical in distance learning; there is usually a core audience for either broadcast or online material which is strongly enough engaged that they can report about how their experience impacted them; yet there is also often a “fringe” audience segment also whose use is too casual for them to comment (thus their responses to specific probes such as those reported in **Table 5** are “can’t comment”, while another group are clearly users or non-users.

A key practical challenge for service providers such as HEP’s GLP is to move the “fringe” audience (user community) toward the audience/user community core. Further inquiry would be warranted about the reasons why those who gain less or are vague about what they learned or what the impact of visiting the site was for them. They may be likely to be the users who are less comfortable with the Internet or whose access is worse (making their exposure to the GLP site inevitably a casual one). However, there may be personal factors that might be addressed also—in GLP orientation sessions, in content, or in terms of organizational encouragement for engaging with the Portal.

To What Extent GLP Impacted Faculty Teaching

The evidence that HE/P-GLP was, in fact, seen as useful and used learning resources by the teaching faculty is an important indicator of success. However, further assessment of project impact rests on determining the extent to which nominal learning can be seen as translating into actual changes in instructional approach and classroom behavior. Ideally, this sort of impact should be observed through actual classroom observation. In the context of the current evaluation, that was not feasible so the evaluation team sought, instead, to secure the teaching faculty’s self-assessment as to whether (and if possible) how accessing GLP had affected their ability to teach effectively. **Table 6** reports their responses.

Table 6: Impact of HE/P - GLP Access on Faculty Teaching

Q. What has GLP helped you do that you couldn’t do before, or that you didn’t have access to doing before?		
Response	# respondents	% of all surveyed
A lot--through access to broader and different resources – e.g. Effects of culture on faith; clinical psychology on diseases and illnesses	8	16%
A lot-- wide range of issues – e.g. ‘brought 80% improvements’	4	8%
Specific -- change in instruction/curriculum– e.g. test construction, student circle idea	4	8%
Getting in touch with colleagues, and discussion in general	6	12%
Not yet or not much – primarily use facility for Internet access	9	18%
Don’t have time for GLP; never used it; not applicable; can’t comment	19	38%

We were pleased to see that, overall, one-third (32%) of the surveyed sample reported that accessing GLP had had definite impact (characterized as either specific or a lot) on their teaching and also could identify something clearly positive, and that another 12% felt that getting in touch with colleagues and discussion had been helpful. This is a reasonable “yield” in terms of distance learning impact since, inevitably, audience reach is greater than the proportion of a population which has been reached reporting learning outcomes which is, in turn, greater than those reporting that learning outcomes gave rise to actual changes in teaching behavior. HEP-GLP Afghanistan’s “internal efficiency” in contributing to systemic change in improving teaching in Afghanistan appears to be significant.

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Faculty Perspectives on the Value of GLP as a part of HEP

Faculty were asked how important GLP was as a learning/skills development/collaboration resource for them.²⁰ Some could not or would not say, either because they were too new to it, because they hadn't used it enough to say, or because they didn't want to (36%). However a majority said it was an important resource. At the same time, they saw the portal's value as stemming as much from its potential as much as from its present utility. Their view was that GLP should be actively and appropriately used, and that it should be linked to international libraries and be improved in other ways.

Only one person said there should not be further investments in GLP – and this respondent simply felt that face to face interactions were a better mode for discussion than online. The issue as to whether face-to-face is better or worse than on-line resources is one inherent in all efforts in distance learning—and several decades of studies (since the early days in which uses of television for distance learning were explored in the 1960's), it has been clear that structured in-person peer learning groups were a desirable program design feature.

Table 7 tabulates faculty survey responses about the value of GLP as compared to traditional different modes of interaction for learning, information-sharing, and discussion.

Table 7: Faculty opinions about Face-to-face vs. Online resources

Functionality	Online is better or more effective	Face to Face is better or more effective	There is no difference	Added comments
Resource sharing	30 (60%)	19 (38%)	1 (2%)	
Information sharing	27 (54%)	19 (38%)	1 (2%)	Access to internet (2); credibility of resources (1)
Discussion	15 (30%)	30 (60%)	5 (10%)	
Training	5 (10%)	43 (86%)	2 (4%)	

What is most interesting here is that GLP is recognized as being superior to old-fashioned modes for sharing instructional resources (e.g. syllabi, exercises) and information (e.g. articles, subject-related information, articles). Understandably, online discussion was considered less valuable than face-to-face discussion while online interactions for training were considered least useful for training—since the faculty recognized the utility of active interaction in a classroom setting.

Everybody pretty much agreed their department had face-to-face meetings – weekly, monthly, ad hoc, and the all-hands ones at the beginning and end of semester and these did provide a forum for discussion and collaboration—in principle. However as one person said it, they rarely dealt with library resources or sharing of resources and it is likely that the agendas for these meetings were more oriented toward organizational issues than toward practical exercises in developing novel or enhanced instructional approaches.

²⁰ Q3 section re the GLP specifically: Has the GLP helped you do something you didn't have access to before? Good things? Bad things? What could be improved; Is it an important resources, or should HEP devote its resources elsewhere; Q5 re the Value of GLP – What do you like, not like, why not? Is GLP something you would use beyond HEP: Why or why not? Anything else you want to say?

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Although GLP was supported as an important tool for them, the faculty were not totally on-board with online mechanisms replacing the face-to-face. The issue of how to use on-line resources seems not totally resolved, and it might benefit from further discussion with the faculty themselves. Several faculty requested further discussion on this topic. It would probably be wise, indeed, to pursue this discussion—not framed as an “either/or” debate but, rather, as a reflection about how each modality of information and resource-sharing might best support the other.

However, the most critical issue is not really whether face to face vs. online is “better” (each have their pros and cons)²¹ but rather is more related to the conditions in which information, opinions, and insights are shared, what information, how it is shared, for what purposes and via which processes. For GLP, as is the case with any online information portal, it is important to consider whether it brings in a wider range of resources, whether they are accessible to portal users (e.g. in the right language, framed clearly at a reasonable reading level), whether they are practically relevant to portal users’ information needs or skills development priorities. Questions relate to whether the resources shared are something that can be immediately applied to instructional issues. Or, perhaps alternatively, catalyze new inquiries/reflections from users/learners? Or simply strengthen motivation and ability to engage in self-directed learning? Four of the people in the sample had been on an internship outside the country or outside the institution; and two of them had used the GLP to share their experiences with their friends and colleagues back home. All four did it at faculty meetings; although it appears that two shared materials on line as well.

Regarding the use of GLP as a discussion forum, there seemed some concern (expressed by 60% of the surveyed faculty) that the discussions have not yet focused on the specific areas that are important for faculty to discuss; however 10% thought these priority topics were being (or beginning to be) discussed.²² Such topics included specific instructional techniques, and ways to improve teaching and changes in the current system overall, the university credit system, how to recruit freshmen and cultivate promising students to assure they would complete their university or post-secondary studies, curriculum development, student assessment, professional development for faculty and teachers, and teacher training overall.²³ These are useful insights for pursuing further refinements as GLP evolves. The reality is that Afghanistan’s movement toward broader and broader adoptions of democratic processes is a complex one—being played out not only in the mainstream political context but, also, within a range of institutions which include the universities and post-secondary teacher training institutes. There is, indeed, some impetus toward more “horizontal” organizational functioning, including more-inclusive and deeper dialogue about institutional governance and professional development. But, at the same time, there is some inertia and the very notion of “community dialogue” in either an actual or a virtual community forum is an evolving and somewhat tentative one. It seems clear that GLP has a potential role as a resource not simply to support information-sharing and dialogue but also for fostering a broader frame of reference for dialogue within university and teacher training institute communities.

²¹ Q4d: Are there any advantages/disadvantages to on-line discussions (etc.) vs. other ways to find or exchange ideas?

²² Q4b: what are the important topics you think should be discussed with your colleagues in teacher training here at this University? do you know if other colleagues (say in Kunduz or Parwan, think these are important issues or have discussed these? Would it be important to know this? Q4c: Has there been any discussion on GLP relevant to these issues? Have you participated in them? Were they good and/or useful discussions? Note: The remaining faculty did not express an opinion.

²³ Q: What are important topics you think should be discussed with you?

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Survey Respondents’ Summary Assessment of the Value of GLP

Almost all of the faculty were very enthusiastic about GLP. For some it was the first time they had access to the computer. There was a 70 year old in Herat who was entering his notes into a computer and he had only been introduced to it a year ago. At first the program folk (and Ministry) thought the GLP was just a glorified library. But they have found with people using it that it really is a tool for drawing people into improving and expanding the scope of their teaching.

Faculty have been taught keyboarding, typing, how to turn the computer on; how to search on the Internet; how to use the computer for entering and tracking grades; how to use the computer for creating syllabi; and some very basic educational preparation. All of these are things they need to develop capacity, improve teaching, and that they will use well beyond the immediate scope of HEP.

Whatever their attitudes toward on-line vs. face-to-face modes of information-sharing and collaboration, a high proportion all faculty said they were, or they would be supportive of further development of GLP if the system continued to improve, and were looking forward to using GLP beyond HEP; and they had a number of suggestions to make (see **Table 8** below).

Table 8: Perceived Value of GLP

Q. Is GLP An important Resource for HEP?	Number	% of total
Yes, or Yes but more work needed; or Yes if properly used; or Yes if linked to international libraries	31	62%
Maybe; Can be a valuable resource in the future	9	18%
NA can't say	9	18%
No, or no face-to-face is better	1	2%

This is a positive finding but it points also to the need for GLP to make visible progress in expanding the range of resources available via the portal and working systematically to introduce and encourage new modes of active collaboration using the portal. The world of “virtual community” in Afghanistan is one which engenders widespread curiosity and is seen as promising but it is still a “brave new world” which is not necessarily visualized in the same way by all. More important even than the actual range of resources added to HE/P-GLP will be their perceived utility and GLP’s ability to introduce potential supporters to the full range of possibilities for online self-directed learning (for teaching faculty but also, ultimately, for the teachers they train and students in the K-12 system) and online collaboration to enhance the availability of resources for teaching faculty and, ultimately teachers themselves (e.g. via regional, provincial, and district-level resource centers, a feature that was an integral part of the overall in-service training vision but not yet a reality).

Table 9 presents an additional indicator of the perceived value of GLP based on survey responses about continued use of GLP after/beyond the scope of the HEP project.

Table 9: Probability of Use of GLP beyond HEP

Q. Is GLP something you will use beyond HEP?	# of responses	% of responses
Yes, Definitely yes	38	76%
Yes, probably	10	20%
No Comment	1	2%
Not unless it improves	1	2%
No, Definitely not	0	0

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This indicator of GLP’s perceived value is consistent with others in showing that the general assessment of HEP’s current implementation of GLP is that it is a significant and positive initiative—but that its ultimate value will rest on further enhancements and structured efforts to not only make a useful information technology resource available but to realize its full promise for overcoming the physical and organizational barriers which impede face-to-face communication and collaboration in Afghanistan.

Respondents’ Suggestions for GLP Development/Evolution of the Portal

Survey respondents were asked to provide their suggestions about how to improve GLP. This question yielded a number of practically useful pointers—exactly the sort of information which is usually hoped for from formative evaluations. In the evaluation team’s view, each of these suggestions deserves attention. At the same time, we also see these suggestions as evidence of users’ active engagement with GLP and an additional indicator of the value of the initiative. Table 10 summarizes the suggestions made

Table 10: Suggestions for Further GLP Development

Q: What do you think can be improved (multiple answers possible)	#	% of total
Portal Presentation/Organization of Information:		
• All resources should be categorized, e.g. to indicate field(s) to which relevant	1	
• Navigation is difficult for some areas, should be improved	1	
• Field/user community should have more input into site organization and development	2	
• The site is not attractive, this needs to be paid attention to		
GLP Site Functionality Suggestions:		
• Chart creation or visual means of displaying data	2	
• Chat mechanism	1	
• Editing of posts should be facilitated	1	
GLP Content Principles Recommended:		
• (Recommended/vetted) Academic articles should be posted	1	
• Educational standards should be fostered; proof-reading of posted materials should be required	2	
• Feedback on information posted and articles from knowledgeable people should be solicited	1	
• Topic related discussions should be orchestrated to include faculties working on these issues	1	
• References/supporting information on any issues posted should be required	1	
• More on line library for posting (about to be) published materials – and sharing of lecture notes	4	
• Wider network within the University (i.e. Kabul Education U) so other faculties are involved	1	
GLP Resource Content Additions Recommended:		
• Teacher training section should be highlighted – e.g. with active instructional methods	4	
• There should be a course related to information or information management	1	
• GLP should include more resources and materials on it; or linked to international libraries	2	
• There should be more information on Biology, Masters program; Methods of teaching	3	
• GLP should provide a channel for teachers obtaining Masters’ Degrees	2	
Not prepared to comment; or not prepared yet to comment	19	(38%)

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In their post survey comments to the interviewers, participating faculty said that English language training, more computers for faculty, more inclusion of field related topics, and more work with the faculties generally about resources, seminars, trainings needed would be useful. A few strongly emphasized the desirability of expanding GLP access to students and to employees beyond faculty. A few felt concerned about the amount of training needed to use GLP, and possible favoritism in access to training or computer resources; and some trainings were specifically requested (e.g. statistical analysis, use of office, and other software, basic computer operations and Portal operations, technical teaching subjects, proposal writing).

Conclusions and Summary Discussion of Implications

Based on the analyses reported above, interviews with the HEP Director and Lead for GLP, interviews with the Technical Coordinators, and an interview with another USAID project working in Higher Education, but not using GLP and in fact having their own, the evaluation team considers GLP, how it has operated as a component of the HEP project, and its potential for higher education in general in Afghanistan to be very promising.

Summary Assessment of HEP's Implementation of GLP in Afghanistan

HEP's implementation of GLP has had remarkable success. Not only has it provided access to the Internet to faculty who have not been fully aware of what it offered them for teaching and who did not have much access to it, but, for faculty who did know about it and who were using it, GLP made improving teaching a credible and important discussion topic. GLP implementation in Afghanistan has been successful in part due to careful attention to country context, overall strategy for education system improvement, and practical factors which affect overall approaches to capacity-building within the higher education sector of the country's teacher training system. Because understanding of how project-based portals need to be supported continues to evolve, it is better to see HEP's successful implementation in Afghanistan should be less as a "model" to be replicated in other country contexts and more of an illuminating experience in adapting a basic strategic vision for education system learning (online access to material relevant to teacher preparation, online resource and information-sharing, and online discussion of issues of common concern) to the specific circumstances of a developing country with very limited financial resources and shaky organizational infrastructure. Additional experimentation in new contexts will doubtless shape the parameters of an adaptable framework.

HEP and its Afghan partners are using the Global Learning Portal as a project tool for encouraging faculty to enhance their teaching. Faculty are, as had been expected, using it as an entree into the Internet, and as a means for drawing on additional resources to prepare their instruction. To some extent they are using it for generating discussion on specific topic of concern. While it is possible for any member to start a discussion, interviews with staff and participated revealed the "starter" role usually falls to participants with more perceived or real status.

What they are not yet fully using GLP for is to create a cross-agency community of learning across higher education, including Ministry officials, and other service providers who work with higher education. They may be starting in this direction. However, additional staffing (staff dedicated to bringing in resources, initiating new organizational partnerships, and starting/cultivating discussions) may be necessary for this. Online forums seem to work best when someone are behind them—at least with not-yet experienced Internet users/online community member; when there is a perspective and a broader and deeper vision of the potential of the forum, it is possible to assist new users in "discovering" the full utility of the user.

Potential Immediate Next Steps

The evaluation team identified a few immediate next steps:

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A project-based structured approach for fostering further faculty engagement in skills development would be helpful; even a process for building recognition of what could be improved (both in terms of individual skills development and “for the field”). This approach will need to incorporate a strategy for breaking down the ongoing improvement process associated with continuous lifelong professional development (i.e. continuing education) into structured elements and enticing people to faculty to participate regularly—building on their initial exploratory experiences with GLP.

Professional development inevitably must take within the context of an organizational culture and be consistent with overall institutional policies and processes. This means it will be essential to get others engaged – e.g. others investors at the university; university administrators with staff; across levels of faculty; from Ministry to faculty to institution. Active project-based management and marketing will be needed for this--a community organizer who is both respected at the university level and knowledgeable about information technology and ways to use it as a community-building tool.

A lot of work will be needed to get more relevant materials and help people make sense of GLP in general and specific sorts of materials which are posted within the portal. A moderator will be needed for this (this person might be the “community organizer”, but perhaps might be slightly lower in skills). This might include a sort ‘newsletter’. More active attention to updating the portal’s and news will be needed—most website operators consistently under-estimate the burden of maintaining up-to-date engaging content and the experience generally has been that users are very sensitive to the presence of “stale” material or outdated news. This sort of need might, perhaps, be filled by providing internship for computer science students at the partner institutions where they would gain real-world experience and contribute to GLP maintenance.

Medium- And Long-Term Possibilities

There are a range of possible uses which have not yet been realized for deploying HE/P-GLP as a promotional tool for engaging teachers in professional skills development and university departments of education in organizational capacity building. For example posting faculty achievements, success stories, highlighting new developments and hot issues would build engagement, spark dialogue, and increase levels of interest and support. What’s on the current HE/P- GLP site seems like it could be made more ‘enthalling’ and relevant to the teacher trainers (both university faculty and teacher training institute) classes.

Another realm where HEP and its organizational partners, the teaching universities and teacher training institutes, are yet not fully using GLP is as a comprehensive resource for a full range of faculty and teacher trainer needs – e.g. as a tool to search for scholarships for professional development or further education; for special short courses elsewhere in Afghanistan (like AUF); and training programs elsewhere, like through e-learning, with financing. GLP could also provide models for reporting and writing to enhance faculty’s ability to produce articles that could be published in peer-reviewed international publications – as well as guidance regarding places to publish and links with professional associations. Some faculty asked for this – and mentioned something like a Facebook which would provide a means for the GLP user community to highlight their accomplishments, to advocate for new directions in the field, and respond to immediate concerns or pressing issues. This seems a very promising option to explore—since part of the potential of GLP is to facilitate not only receptive communication but, also, to build skills in generative communication, i.e. expressing one’s own identity and/or distinctive perspectives and opinions.

Nonetheless, even in its short history to date, HEP’s implementation of GLP has begun to raise the issue of a culture of discussion and to engage faculty in improving their own instruction. It has begun to bridge distant geographic locations and disparate faculties, who previously had been competing in the dark for scarce development resources and attention. It also has provided training to faculty who did not use it, so that better systems and notes of performance can be taken and preserved, and so they can access resources themselves.

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One of the real benefits of the HEP use of GLP at this juncture is that the ‘bling’ of the computer access has enabled the project to bring more attention to bear on basic teaching improvements needed (e.g. curriculum syllabus design; tracking student performance; writing exams). Where before we (and the author counts her own experience in this) had experience some attendance at workshops reflecting a ‘Yes Yes Nod Nod’ response to desired change; with GLP at this point in Afghanistan’s higher education development, syllabus writing is broken down into what format for best understanding and tracking; what it should be like for others to be able to use and understand it, etc – basic standards issues. These issues, which often led to bleary eyes and foggy minds before, are now more engaging. So kudos to HEP and to GLP for getting this far.

That being said, there are a number of challenges still facing HEP with GLP; and facing GLP if they want to move beyond a project Portal to a Portal for Higher Education. For example (and we believe some of these are being worked on right now, so this should reinforce and underscore that work)

1. Fostering the Evolution of Communities of Learning

Building Organizational Leadership and Acceptance of Online Collaboration Among Peers

Leadership in using site resources to solve common problems or to address novel issues or develop tools important to the higher education community also is a big issue. Various comments were made by respondents throughout this investigation regarding their uncertainty about what were good data/resources and credible sources; and, reciprocally, their wanting to contribute to collective efforts to address important issues and know what benefits resulted from their participation. The issue of vetting resources and conveying to potential users the extent to which resources have some official recognition or imprimatur is an issue, in some ways specific to the Afghanistan context, but at the same time not unlike the concerns of persons seeking reliable health advice via Internet .

Orientation of administrators and Ministry of Higher Education staff as well as faculty in other subject areas in universities will be important as part of HEP efforts to enhance the organizational environment in which GLP is embedded. However, equally important is engaging all stakeholder groups in governance and steering GLP in the most useful directions. Right now there is no recognition of the professional risks faculty are taking to post and respond in public. Explicit recognition of the social implications of faculty exchanging information and resources and discussing issues of common concern as a pathway toward greater faculty engagement in improving higher education and “ownership” of institutional development could and should be a part of the GLP. It is not now.

Nowhere on the GLP site now are achievements; nor is there really promotion of specific themes and who is working on them to what ends. When some faculty are requesting ‘a Facebook,’ we think they want more chance to promote and lead and see results. They may want to form sub-groups. They may want to specifically request faculty or administrator engagement in a topic. It seems confusing to some why groups and individuals choose to participate or not.

Essentially, the GLP is a prototype version of an incipient association of educators. Different technical interest groups want to be cognizant about what is happening in their area (hence requests from respondents to make sure those who are working on an issue in <x institution> are part of the GLP discussion); and they want to be able to post resources and easily find them and share notes in their own local forum. A conclusion we draw is that they want to launch their own sub-community, and be able to plan how it will go forward and what will be accomplished. Right now there is not that capability for the HEP portal; but there could be. We look forward to seeing from the results of the usability study GLP is about to engage in with HEP ways for sub-groups of participants to bring life to particular issues of concern; and for the achievements or milestones related to certain high stakes topics to be reported.

Accommodating Diversity and Facilitating Emergence of Common Ground

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There are and will always be, multiple communities of somewhat overlapping interests—in education worldwide and in Afghanistan; there are right now a variety of portals in Higher Education. However, in Afghanistan, as elsewhere there is, as well as common strands which bring professionals together, diverse interests and partnership networks. The eAlliance out of Washington University and individual faculties have been granted some Internet access(or developed their own). Yet, there is no mention on the HEP site of eAlliance, or vice versa. The issue of how to intelligently make these communities accessible to each other is an important one for GLP to address. From a theoretical perspective, as well as a practical one, the ideal configuration for information-sharing consists of networks of networks.²⁴

How resources are organized as well as overall ease of access is an important consideration. Just putting links to relevant publications or libraries on a site, does not help a relatively unfamiliar user, with little time, to access what's needed or to be encouraged to try something new. The way in which these resources are arrayed and the tools provided facilitate their use have to be worked out with the users. This is both a necessary condition for successful GLP implementation and an opportunity to build engagement and awareness of online resources among current and potential GLP users. Establishing an ongoing user advisory group, representing the full range of users envisioned, can help build commitment as well as providing guidance about the distinctive issues to be addressed with this particular audience.

At this point HEP is just beginning to address the issues related to refining GLP to respond to diverse user needs and interests. We understand a revision of the site is underway and a usability study will come with it. So looking forward we would expect to see more formal and informal mechanisms for eliciting and responding to user feedback with ongoing design modifications.

Training Potential and Current Users as A Vestibule for the Global Learning Portal

Training is of course one part of making GLP access easier. Trainers have to be bright technical savants. However they also have to know how to teach novices in technology who are, nonetheless, professors with high social status, without much time, and, in some cases, weak “foundation skills” for online exploration and self-directed learning.

E-Alliance, did a needs assessment nationally related to faculty learning needs re computers' They found that the needs were bifurcated between those who were young (we take to be 35 or below, based on our limited data; e-alliance didn't ask for age) and the older faculty (36+). The older faculty were not ready to move forward rapidly; the younger were. Aside from direct practical implications, this involved considerations of prestige and possibly losing face. Work-arounds will be needed—perhaps even private tutoring in computer basics—Information Access 101.

Faculty diversity in terms of educational attainment and basic skills for information technology is an issue in terms of training regarding ways in which online resources might inform instructional methodology. One respondent told the interviewer that in a training class for faculty fully half of the class had their eyes glazed over and were not getting it, while the others were anxious to move ahead; and the trainer felt he or she had to ‘cover the topic’ in the assigned amount of time. This only results in losing the folk who have been in the University longer or who are older and less experienced. With good trainers hard to get, and a variety of programs vying for them, it makes sense to share; to ensure adequate appraisal of what is required for the training; to attach the training to achieving specific content objectives for the participants; and to have multiple training staff with different types of expertise. Yes: challenging and expensive, but also able to be positively influenced, we think, by ongoing coaching and pre-course preparation; and design of trainings to yield immediately rewarding experiences. This speaks again to having a structured way for keeping in touch with users and providing an accessible channel for help on the site itself (not now there).

²⁴ Within communication and network analysis these multi-tiered network connections can be shown to facilitate speed of information dissemination and overall diffusion of innovation.

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To do all this, however, requires a great deal more support for site development and deployment from the field; the inclusion of more resources directly applicable to specific fields of study or issues; and direct engagement of all levels of faculty and administration in mobilizing credibility for the resources on the site and helping users make good decisions about priorities for their attention.

2. GLP writ large: HEP's GLP As A Pilot for Broader Initiatives in Appropriate Use of Information Technology

The success of HEP with its portal is in part a reflection of a situation where the Portal served a keystone function for the project and vice versa. Based on the foundation of success laid by HEP, it has made inroads into the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), and perhaps to other international and national groups wanting to improve education and provide resources for it. The plans are to move the portal to the Ministry so they can make it their own. The Ministry has showed some interest in this; and HEP is training some Ministry personnel to use GLP. The success of the Ministry with it will be to not only use it, but make use of it – for planning, data collection, reporting of accomplishments, leading discussions on quality; conducting webinars, etc. This will take a lot of envisioning. Right now the vision of the MoHE, per their Plan, seems to be on e-learning. That is only part of the issue. The focus on faculty development to foster learning overall and to sustain improvement efforts is what the Portal is about. We look forward to hearing what plans can be made to support the Ministry in this. We think more will need to be in the Portal, in a more structured way, as stated in the previous discussion, to foster creative deployment. There are so many failed IT efforts; floundering associations; old websites, tired newsletters, in order to make the portal a PORTAL, human resources will be required, we think, for cultivating, stocking, reviewing, encouraging, enticing, nagging, noticing, rewarding, and documenting. Up until the first quarter of 2009 the HEP project has had a relatively small staff dedicated to GLP. This is now changing, with the hiring of the technical coordinators and the forming of support groups at each faculty to build and sustain the portal. We think maybe a ‘community organizer’ and relatively high status education promoter may be required. We look forward to seeing what the new efforts of the GLP usability team will come up with as an ‘engine for reform’.

3. Policy Issues

Possible Extension of GLP As A Resource for In-Service Teacher Training

The lines between pre-service and in-service teacher training in Afghanistan are blurred. Many students who are nominally pre-service program participants because they are in *agir(temporary contract)* status (typically due to the fact they have less than 12 years of schooling and cannot, therefore, be “official” *karmand (regularized)* teachers). The student-teachers enrolled in the teacher training institutes, for example, are primarily current teachers.²⁵ In actuality, the vast majority of Afghanistan’s teaching labor force for the coming decade will consist of current teachers who, despite lower than expected educational attainment, are the core of the instructional labor force. GLP has particular potential relevance to them because resources for self-directed, flexible online learning are especially useful for working professionals (especially those who do not have the time to travel to in-person training). Online learning is likely to have particular promise because, as older teachers retire, an increasing proportion of the teacher population (which includes younger teachers who developed solid computer literacy in Iran or Pakistan during the 1990’s) will need less preparation and encouragement to effectively use online resources. An important issue for HEP to address, looking toward a future beyond its current partnership with universities and teacher training institutes charged with providing pre-service training

Staffing Levels and Leadership to Support Refinement and Expansion of GLP

²⁵ Edward Kissam field notes (2004 and 2006) from interviews with teacher training institute managers in Kunduz and in Sari Pul provinces.

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Up until April 2009, HEP's implementation of GLP really relied on a small team of people for developing site content, providing technical assistance, and for introducing the resource to university partners. This now has significantly changed. However it is not clear that HEP has an instructional leader/"community developer" someone who will move things along. What will be required a policy-oriented educationalist who is dedicated to development of the content and functionality of the portal, as well as guiding forward movement in building a community of users and in building institutional support for these "early adopters" who it might be hoped will be a nucleus for leveraging more awareness, interest, and acceptance of GLP among their colleagues.

Infrastructure, Facilitating Access, and Gender Equity

The HEP laboratory facilities are essential for female faculty to access the Internet. It is not culturally appropriate for them to go to Internet cafes and even some male faculty would not want to be seen in an Internet café by their students.

Upload and download speed can be expected to be issues in the future. Our impression is that Roshan's²⁶ IP infrastructure in northern Afghanistan permits adequate download/download speed to allow GLP to incorporate an enhanced functionality. At the same time, if Internet access is available in southeastern Afghanistan and the somewhat urban teacher training institute locations outside of the major urban areas, it is likely that there will be limitations and GLP will need to accommodate users with slower connection speed.

Content Quality Assurance

Some faculty were disturbed at the way in which things were posted on the site that had not been vetted; that had errors; that were copyrighted; and where the information was 'wrong'. We do not know the seriousness of this problem; but the issue of quality assurance is a valid concern. Lapses in quality give an excuse to opponents of innovation (once the newness wore off) to discard the site. One respondent talked about GLP being "dangerous" (presumably due to concerns that it facilitated access to immoral or politically questionable material; but others focused on the more immediate and mundane issue of lack of editing. Courses in critical reading and searches, that the faculty themselves could teach or could be part of their classes, might be a way to address this. Another way might be pop-up windows when users download (although that could be annoying). If this issue is not addressed, it could end up being a liability issue for the site. [GLP staff subsequently reported that the library is reviewed on a regular basis and documents are removed that are inappropriate and unsuitable as a resource.]

GLP Costs and Return on Investment

GLP direct implementations costs are actually not very high. Clearly the first year is a development year; the second year will need to be devoted to building a community of users – and it is only at that point that it will be possible to see solid results. However, as GLP utilization increases, as content and functionality evolve and expand, and as new possibilities are explored, costs are likely to increase and this is appropriate. As in most strategies based on "capacity-building" there is a lag on returns in investment because the logic model for the intervention is that investment will yield a chain of results—a sort of ripple-out effect—but this takes time.

GLP is quite similar to face-to-face train-the-trainer strategies or "cascade models" of intervention in fundamental strategy. The full benefits simply cannot be observed directly. If the investment is not prudent, there may well be early indicators of vision, technical design, or implementation. However, even when things are "progressing well", there are risks that successive phases in the ripple-down chain of effects will fail to demonstrate impact. For that reason, and because of GLP's promise, we recommend follow-up evaluation research designed to determine: a) to what extent access to GLP access impacts education department faculty's actual instructional behavior, b) to what extent enhanced instruction results

²⁶ Cell phone/communications company

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in improved teacher trainee preparation, c) to what extent teacher trainees can incorporate new instructional approaches into their own classroom instruction, and d) ultimately, impacts on student learning.

As various analysts of development strategy (e.g. Crouch, Moulton et al., Gillies et al) have noted, determinations regarding sustainability of education system change is difficult to predict. However, what is clear is that building a constituency genuinely committed to innovation and collaboration is a valuable step toward sustainability—since the evidence is that bottom-up social change, while often requiring top-down support to thrive, is more robust than more formal top-down institutional change. HE/P-GLP is not simply a portal to improved information; it is a portal which holds out the potential of fostering more engaged teachers committed to “open learning” and a lifelong commitment to self-directed learning. That fundamental paradigm change, even more than GLP’s role in facilitating access to technically useful information relevant to effective teaching is its real promise.

Appendix 1: Evaluation Scope and Methodology - HE/P GLP Field Study

As part of AED's Higher Education Project in Afghanistan (HEP), the Global Learning Portal (GLP – www.glp.net) has intended to provide faculty of education members in Afghanistan with learning resources and networking tools to support higher education faculty of education to improve their access to teaching pedagogical and content resources; to foster discussion about both how to use those resources effectively, and to provide a tool for faculty to identify and resolve other impediments to improved teacher education, through fostering discussion about those issues. The objective of this mini-assessment is to understand how the Global Learning Portal (GLP) has functioned in support of educational development in Afghanistan; and to understand opportunities for catalyzing the power and sustainability of development efforts through this resource.

Study Methodology

This was a study of GLP users—since it is a mid-term evaluation and a particular concern was to incorporate into the evaluation attention to the sorts of questions which predominate in formative evaluations (where the emphasis is on program refinement/corrective action). Given the time constraints on the study and limited resources, it was not a priority to interview faculty who had not been trained or oriented to the GLP; or where GLP was not functioning. Such comparisons might yield relevant and information to reliably assess the impact of GLP—but that was not the priority for this study. Therefore, based on a list of the 16 institutions in which HEP was primarily working, and the faculty of education at the institutions who had been trained in use of the GLP, as provided by the HEP, GLP administrator, the researchers selected a sample of five institutions and 50 faculty.

Approximately one month was available for the research implementation, after negotiations, design, and other commitments were taken into account. The majority of the interviews were to be done in person; and – whether or not in person - study procedures required interviews be done with access to the computer, so that the informant could demonstrate (or, if by phone, report) to the interviewer how they used the site, what posts they looked at, and what features they liked better or had trouble with. Thus each interview required about an hour, and put considerable constraint on how many interviews could be conducted within the time frame. The size of the sample was selected to represent a reasonable level of effort that could be accomplished in the timeframe and which would yield sufficient results to draw conclusions. Participation in the evaluation was entirely voluntary.

The Faculty Sample: The five institutions were selected to represent both the Kabul and the outside-Kabul experience (to see if distance from the 'project mother ship' made a difference); and to include both larger and smaller institutions (to see if faculty size made a difference). Because of cost and time constraints, only one trip to a University outside Kabul was feasible. Faculty were selected to interview within the institution through applying a random number²⁷ to identify the first faculty to select and then sequentially to meet the quota per institution; this process was applied to the list of male and female faculty separately. In the end, some had to be replaced because they were not available during the period, and in these cases the same procedures were used for replacement

Fifty Interviews were conducted – 26 with males 24 with female faculty members at five institutions – 76% in person and 24% over the telephone. At each institution roughly the same number of male and female interviews were conducted. Male respondents were interviewed by a male; and female respondents by a female interviewer. Additionally, four GLP/HEP technical staff also were interviewed; brief discussions were held with the Project Director and GLP Director for Afghanistan

²⁷ In person interviews were selected starting with the number 3 and selecting every 9th one; phone interviews started with the 3rd on the list, and selecting every 12th until reached the desired interview.

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Table 1: Interviews held by Institution and Type

Institution	Interview Type	Number	% of total
Herat Education University	Phone	6	12%
Kunduz Higher Education	Phone	6	12%
Balkh Education University	In Person	6	12%
Kabul Education University	In Person ²⁸	18	36%
Kabul University	In Person	14	28%
5 Institutions	2 modes	50	100%

All phone calls were made to HEP faculty and technical staff at each Professional Development Center (PDC) to ensure the availability and functionality of computers.

Technical Coordinators: In addition to the faculty, four technical coordinators of the HEP project tasked with support of GLP at the sites in the study also were interviewed, as well as the overall coordinator. The focus of these discussions were:

- Their view of GLP: What it does for faculty, what it doesn't, what it should do? What particular resources it should have, that it doesn't at the moment, and why?
- What kind of support do faculty members usually need? What constraints they feel GLP has?
- Structured mechanisms for information sharing between colleagues
- Has the GLP facilitated or coordinated linking the TTC's with outside organizations already developing teacher-training (or student education) modules?
- Has GLP facilitated links/relationships with experienced Library users/developers, which could help guide the colleges in getting more out of the platform?
- Does GLP allow local administrators or users to create topical content pages or sections?
- Are there identified and supported champions/go-to participants within and among the colleges who can act as coordinators and resource people? (Probably people with an inherent interest/affinity for computers/web.)

It was considered important to interview faculty 'in the center' (e.g. Kabul) and outside (e.g. in Baghlan, Nangarhar, etc.) to gain a good sense of the diversity of user needs GLP was addressing. Because of the cost and difficulties in travel and security associated with work in Afghanistan, it is unreasonable to expect to do in-person visits to faculty in all the different provinces, thus we are envisioning two different strategies – interviews in person where we look in depth in their use of the system and what they have learned from it or done with it; and phone interviews where we have a shorter inquiry set related to their experience with GLP and what kinds of things they have done or not done with it.

- Interview in person -10 faculty of Education in KEI and KU in person; and if possible in one of the universities outside of Kabul – e.g. Balkh;

In person interview: Locate list of full time faculty of education at the University. Start counting with the #3, and select every 9th one until you reach the number to be interviewed at that location. Interview them individually, if possible, where the online access point they use is; so you can look at GLP together. Start out, however, with general questions, not looking at GLP; then ask them if they would access the GLP

²⁸ Four of the individuals interviewed at this University were part of a HEP training at that time. Originally we had intended that interviews be held at the project trainings, as we thought this would be a good way to get 'in person' access to faculty from other provinces. However, this proved difficult for the researchers to schedule, and it was decided that it really did not provide the needed privacy. So of the 38 in person interviews, only 4 were completed at the trainings; and instead we paid for a trip to a University outside the Center – Balkh.

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- Interview by phone 12 faculty in each of Herat and Kunduz sites

Phone Interview: Locate list of full time faculty of education at that University. Start counting with the #3, and select every 12th one until you reach the number to be interviewed at that location. Interview them individually. Start out with general questions, not looking at the GLP. Then ask them if they would access the GLP.

Interview Protocol

The purpose of the in-person interviews in particular was to understand what it takes to use the GLP, to what extent, if at all, and how they have used it, and what they have gained from its use that adds particular value to the ability of the HEP project to foster and sustain improved teacher education. We want to see the faculty using the system, hear about their problems and successes with it, and talk to them about what it requires of them to make use of the variety of collaboration options on the site. We also want to hear their visions of how it could be better or easier; and find out about what else they use to provide them with the resources they need to do their work. The following are the items we are envisioning asking

Who Carried Out the Study

The evaluation research design and instrumentation was developed by the GAE project lead, Jo Ann Intili, with Charles Ellmaker and Rossen Tsanov. However in order to save costs to the evaluation, and to meet the requirements of native language competency, JBS International Inc. associates living in Afghanistan carried out the study. Mr. Emal Ghiassi, working in and managing Monitoring and Evaluation for USAID and other international donor projects in country from 2005 through the present, , and who also worked with us in the APEP project, with a Bachelor's in Business and business experience in designing data systems, was the lead; and he worked closely with his wife, Ms. Aarya Nijat, who has a Masters in International Relations and a BA in Law, with experience in policy analysis and reporting for international agencies, and functional with Internet . The selected evaluators each speak both the main languages of Afghanistan, Dari and Pashtu, and have proven expertise in carrying effective interviews and observations, managing data, summarizing information objectively, and reporting. Thus it was deemed that both (and each) were specifically qualified to carry out the required work, and would add value to it.

These consultants were oriented to the project through e-mail and e-versations²⁹. They provided input into the evaluation design, instrumentation, and procedures; conducted interviews, and provided a database of responses as well as the original instruments and a summary report of their findings. See Appendix 2 for a copy of the scope of work and instrumentation.

²⁹ Colloquial term for chats or e-mail threads meant to substitute for voice communication.

Appendix 2: Faculty Interview Data Collection Form

1. ABOUT YOURSELF

a) Name:	b) Title:
c1) Institution name:	
c2) Faculty: <input type="checkbox"/> Education <input type="checkbox"/> Other? _____	
d) How long have you been a faculty member, at this or other Universities? ___ Years, or if less than 1 year → ___ # months	e) Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
f) About how old are you → <input type="checkbox"/> 25 or younger; <input type="checkbox"/> 26 to 35 years old; <input type="checkbox"/> 36 to 45 years old; <input type="checkbox"/> 46 to 55 years old; <input type="checkbox"/> 56 to 65 years old; <input type="checkbox"/> 66 or older	

2. ABOUT YOUR ACCESS TO THE COMPUTER

a) About how many <u>hours</u> per week do you usually work on the Internet? (<i>check one response</i> →)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost never <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1/month <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1/week <input type="checkbox"/> one Hour/week <input type="checkbox"/> 2 – 3 hours/week <input type="checkbox"/> 4 – 9 hours/week <input type="checkbox"/> 10+ hours/week
b) Where do you access the Internet? (<i>check all that apply</i>)	at the <input type="checkbox"/> Univ. <input type="checkbox"/> Café <input type="checkbox"/> Home <input type="checkbox"/> at a friend's or family member's
c1) Have you received any training on use of the Internet or the Web, or taken a class in it?	<input type="checkbox"/> No, or not really (very informal) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but just the GLP, <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, beyond GLP
c2) If you did receive training, what kind of place or group or person provided it?	<input type="checkbox"/> University/class <input type="checkbox"/> HEP <input type="checkbox"/> 'class' or training from Other Organization <input type="checkbox"/> Friend, personal
d) How long have you been using the Internet on a regular basis?	___ years or if less than 1 year → ___ # months

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2e) How would you describe the connection speed at the place where you typically use the computer? [Interviewer - Watch to see how long it takes to download a 10 page document]....

- Extraordinarily slow – often cannot download a 10 page document without interruption
- Very slow – takes more than 5 minutes to download a 10 page document
- Fairly slow – takes 4 or 5 minutes to download a 10 page document
- Fairly fast – takes 2 to 3 minutes to download a 10 page document
- Very fast – takes 1 or 2 minutes to download a 10 page document
- Extraordinarily fast – takes only seconds to download a 10 page document

3. ABOUT YOUR USE OF THE INTERNET

a) What kinds of things did you do or look for on the Internet this week?

Site name	Purpose/ What you did there? (e.g. reviewed article, chatted, looked up reference)	Did you download anything related to teacher training?

b) Has having access to the Internet helped you in teacher education? If yes, How?

c) 1-if not mentioned above, How about the GLP, have you used that?

c) 2-Whether or not mentioned above, if used, show me what you have used that for?

EG - Did you participate in a discussion on GLP during the last week, Month?

- a. How did you come to do that – what were the circumstances
 - b. On what topic did you participate in the discussion
 - c. What did you do - Did you post or just read?
 - d. What did you learn from it?
 - e. What evidence do you have that others learned anything from it?
 - f. Did anything change as a result of the posts?
 - g. Was this a discussion which you have had in person with other faculty?
 - h. How does the discussion you had on line relate to in-person discussions you have had on this topic?
- EG - Did you access resources posted => which?

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RE the GLP, Specifically -

- i) Has the GLP helped you do something you didn't have access to before?

- e) What are the good things about the site?

- f) What do you think could be improved?

- g) Is this something that you think is an important resource for HEP, or should HEP devote its resources elsewhere?

4. ABOUT FOSTERING TEACHER EDUCATION

- a) In your department, do you have meetings regarding effective practice, standards, and important policies in education ?

- b) Are there other meetings you go to about these topics (e.g. in 'a') or something else important related to teacher training?
 - a. In person>?
 - On line?
 - What are the important topics you think should be discussed with your colleagues in teacher training here at this Univ.?
 - Do you know if other colleagues, say in Kunduz or in Parwan, think these are important issues or have discussed these?
 - Would it be/Is it important to know this?
- c) Has there been any discussion on GLP relevant to these issues?
 - Have you participated in them?
 - Were they good and / or useful discussions?
 - Why yes or no?

- d) Are there any advantages / disadvantages to

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- on-line discussions on these topics vs. other ways to find exchange ideas?
- on-line trainings on specific skill issues vs. other ways to learn?
- on-line information sharing on specific knowledge vs. other ways to find out what's going on?
- on-line sharing of specific resources vs. other ways to get access to important documents?

e) Have you gone on one of those Internships to India, Pakistan, the US or some other place as part of HEP?

- While you were away, did you communicate to the faculty back home anything you learned or experienced? through GLP?

YES/NO – not through glp (how?) ; YES/NO – through GLP;

Why Yes or No

- While others were away, did you communicate about anything they learned or experienced? through GLP?

YES/NO – not through glp (how?) ; YES/NO – through GLP;

Why Yes or No

- Once back from the internship – either you or some other faculty – were there discusses about what was learned or experienced or the resources found? through GLP?

YES/NO – not through glp (how?) ; YES/NO – through GLP;

Why Yes or No

5. VALUE OF GLP

- a) If you have used GLP at all
 - a) Do you like it? Why or why not
 - b) What do you like about it?
- b) Is GLP something you would use beyond HEP? What for? Why or why not
- c) Anything else?

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Appendix 3: Detailed Responses on How Respondents Used the Internet

1	First thing done on Internet, and purpose	Number	% of total
a	Did not use the internet last week	1	2%
b	GLP	3	6%
	• Used for Library and discussions (mentioned together)	1	2%
	• Read topics posted	1	2%
c	Search engines on the Internet	46	92%
	• Researching articles on subject matter (e.g. chemistry...)	28	58%
	• Lecture notes	13	27%
	• How to use GLP and software	2	4%
	• Personal e-mail and work	4	8%
	Downloads during week from first , and purpose	Number	% of total
	No	29	58%
	Yes – to prepare curriculum or lecture	2	4%
	Yes, in general	19	38%
2	Second site used on Internet, and purpose	Number	% of total
a	Did not use the internet last week	2	4%
b	GLP	10	20%
	• Research Articles	5	45%
	• Read topics posted/Discussion	4	36%
	• How to use the site	1	9%
c	Search engines on the Internet	30	60%
	• Researching articles on subject matter (e.g. chemistry...)	2	10%
	• Lecture notes	3	15%
	• Personal e-mail and work	25	75%
D	Access MoHE website	1	2%
E	Personal (e-mail and sites)	7	14%
	Downloads during week from first , and purpose	Number	% of total
	No	44	88%
	Yes, in general	6	12%
3	Third site used on Internet, and purpose	Number	% of total
a	Did not to a third site	10	20%
b	GLP	23	46%
	• Research Articles	5	
	• Lecture notes	3	
	• Read topics posted/Discussion	13	
	• How to use the site	1	
c	Search engines on the Internet	5	10%
	• Researching articles on subject matter (e.g. chemistry...)	0	
	• Lecture notes	0	
	• Personal e-mail and work	5	
D	Access MoHE website	5	10%
E	Personal (e-mail and sites)	7	14%
	Downloads during week from first , and purpose	Number	% of total
	No	48	96%
	Yes, in general	2	4%

Appendix C2: GLP Field Studies

From late April to late May, the evaluation team visited the GLP projects in Zambia, Rwanda, and Kenya and conducted a set of detailed interviews with participants and stakeholders there. The purpose of the field studies was to look at the implementation of the GLP concept as implemented through different strategies and in different context, to discover the strengths and weaknesses of those implementations, with a view to making recommendations for improvement.

The evaluators attempted to look broadly at the context of the implementations, at the objectives as set forth by the projects and at objectives as framed by participants, at elements and activities contributing to meeting those objectives, and at elements that seemed to be missing or in need of modification to make the projects more successful.

The next sections review results from Zambia, Rwanda and Kenya

Zambia - Field Study Overview

Although all of the GLP project implementations have similar aims, the Zambia project (GLP/Zambia) was included to explore the achievements and lessons learned from one portal development and deployment strategy and to report on implications from the project for other work. As of this date, the Zambia project from a portal-use perspective is quiescent, although at the point when the African Commons expands, it might re-energize and be part of a new initiative. Infrastructure improvements connecting teaching faculty to the internet are intact.

GLP/Zambia Project Summary

The USAID Mission and EGAT jointly funded GLP /Zambia to help teacher-training colleges get connected to the internet, develop technology plans, train teachers and staff, and share and archive information through an online portal. The project also aimed to improve IT and internet infrastructure, and promote communication and resource sharing among college tutors and administrations³⁰. In addition the project aimed to link donors and the Ministry of Education for collaboration and document sharing, and to develop a database for inventorying education projects throughout the country.

The Equip2 project embedded within the Ministry of Education and headed by AED was designated the implementing partner. Equip2 originally seemed like a good fit given its integration into the Ministry. The Portal was introduced to the Ministry as a potential added benefit from the existing Equip2 efforts, and the Ministry was urged to sign on by proposing it as an online system for country-wide inventorying of education projects (the “Project Tracker”) and for setting up a common library for use by the Ministry and donors. The portal was also marketed to the Mission and other donor-country representatives as a way of making business with the Ministry more transparent and for limiting the number of electronic documents in constant circulation by email.

There were no formal GLP staff in-country assigned to GLP/Zambia; rather GLP Washington staff supported existing Equip2 project staff. EQUIP2 intended to add direct support through a knowledgeable coordinator to be seconded to the Ministry, but the Ministry never approved this appointment or any direct staffing for the project, leaving the Equip2 team to support the GLP/Zambia through existing staff and in addition to ongoing responsibilities. (The proposed coordinator eventually joined the faculty of the University of Zambia as its ICT in Education coordinator, but with no connection to the GLP/Zambia initiative.) A technical support person was hired on contract basis, but his duties were consumed mostly by assisting colleges with setting up physical infrastructure and negotiating connectivity with ISPs.

Project Accomplishments

Equip2 worked with training partner VVOB to provide training to 14 colleges on developing technology plans (which included strategies for computer and LAN maintenance and security, cost recovery, and sustainability), technical training for college staff, and introduction to the GLP portal. GLP Washington staff provided some of this training directly.

³⁰ EQUIP2 Zambia 2007 Work Plan

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The Portal resource library was front-loaded with a variety of materials, including policy and planning documents, ICT plans and recommendations, curricula, local lesson planning designs, official syllabi for schools, and other policy documents.

The project identified 8 colleges lacking in equipment and connectivity, and worked with the USAID Mission to provide computers, networking equipment, and connections to the internet through local ISPs. Equipment and connectivity had been arranged for four colleges (Mufulira, Chipata, Manse, ZAMISE) by the time of the site visit, with efforts continuing with the remaining colleges. As part of the infrastructure package, the project covers each college's internet connection costs for one year.

Relation of GLP/Zambia to Field Study Objectives

GLP/Zambia, then, was supportive of, but not directly tied to, general Ministry objectives for teacher training and expanded use of computer-based learning and professional development materials at colleges. EQUIP2 had no corresponding initiatives in teacher training to link the portal with. Intended use of the Portal in Lusaka dovetailed more closely Ministry and EQUIP2 management reforms.

This strategy for GLP/Zambia portal implementation is more in line with the beginnings of GLP site deployment at the start of the Higher Education Portal in Afghanistan than with the Rwanda Commons, or the Palestine Portal, and other more recent efforts. The Platform and tools on were of greater focus than the collaborative process of developing partnerships or multi-level stakeholder involvement. This was understood prior to the field visit, and the point of the visit was to understand better:

- What are the requirements of partnerships and champions, to achieve results;
- What kinds of strategies for generating interest and engagement seem to work better than others; and
- What kind of results and accountability is expected by stakeholders in-country for these kinds of activities;

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Preparation for the Visit.

To prepare for the visit brief discussions with the USAID Mission and EGAT/ED staff, EQUIP2 staff in Zambia, and GLP Technical Staff in the US led to identification of key stakeholders to interview. These included interviews with:

- USAID Mission
- Equip2 project staff
- Ministry of Education staff
- Dutch Aid/Embassy staff
- Administrators, faculty and students at Mulfira and Zamise Teacher Colleges
- University of Zambia ICT and Distance Education officers
- GLP/Zambia Training partners VVOB
- QUESTT Program (radio/iPod education) Chief of Party

Additionally, evaluation staff reviewed documents and data provided by the GLP project, and identified independently, related to the GLP/Zambia, a variety of documents and information about previous development initiatives, and needs.

Summary descriptions from these efforts are below, followed by aspects of the site visits and interviews that inform the evaluation questions identified in the Phase II Workplan.

Findings from the Field Study

Results of infrastructure improvements and training to college faculty on use the computers, the internet, and the GLP

As part of the field study evaluation staff visited two (Mufulira and Zamise) of the 14 colleges who received training in the GLP and the Internet.

- At **Mufulira College** in the Copper belt, a robust technology infrastructure had evolved, with faculty committees sharing responsibilities for maintenance, planning and expansion, while all beneficiaries (administrators, faculty, students) pay into a cost-recovery account. A full set of policies had been developed and were being followed, including procedures for keeping equipment secure and free of viruses. Computers and networks were in use and appeared to be in good working order. Staff reported they were satisfied with the system, that they were able to continue to pay for connectivity (about \$400/month) and that they had specific plans for expanding the internet connection to the student lab as soon as feasible.

Staff also expressed interest in expanding skills, in creating content for the web, and in learning to produce ICT materials for education, although they were unsure where any of this expertise would come from.

- At **ZAMISE**, the college dedicated to special education in Lusaka, staff and students were similarly enthusiastic about the use of the internet and computers but had not developed a workable policy or procedure infrastructure for maintenance of their systems or to sustain connectivity. The school reported to use its computers to produce teaching materials and promotional brochures, and a student/faculty discussion signaled enthusiasm for links to outside resources and training opportunities, especially connections and resources related to special education. The school reported

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no affiliations with other institutions enabled by the internet. The school also expressed great interest in tools for setting up a website, although Ministry policy appeared to interfere with that desire.

At the time of the visit, the faculty computer lab enabled through the project was effectively shut down because of virus problems, and there were no knowledgeable staff specifically devoted to maintaining equipment. No cost-recovery plan had been developed, and the school principal was unsure if they would have the budget to continue to pay the connection charges.

Administration and faculty confessed no knowledge of the GLP as a platform, or remembrance of any training or orientation in its use.

In neither case, then, was the college using the GLP platform, but they were using the provided equipment and connection to the internet, virus issues notwithstanding. While there were champions for use of the labs at both institutions, this role did not carry over to championing the GLP platform. At one college maintaining the technology resources themselves (e.g., the computer labs) seemed to require more ‘hands-on’ attention than was available or developed through equipment and use trainings. All staff contacted at the schools were interested in being involved, and enthusiastic about the potential technology, but so far had yet to be involved meaningfully in the development or use of the tools and resources available through the portal (at least to their memory).

The lesson here, then, is the nature of the investment it takes to develop participant commitment, linkages and capacity to maintain resources, in both the physical and policy infrastructure arenas.

Results Related to Educational Resource Coordination

Two specific GLP/Zambia Portal elements related to better coordination of educational projects and accomplishments on behalf of development of educational capacity in Zambia were the Project Tracker and the library and collaboration utilities that were to be part of the work done. As part of the field studies we talked to informants about them.

- A Project Tracker was developed. While the Ministry and Equip2 were continuing to develop a unified Zambian EMIS, there were many education projects going on across the country supported by international donors and NGOs and private groups that were generally operating independently. These were not being tracked nor integrated into broader education strategies. The idea was that the Tracker would allow approved stakeholders (including Ministry, donors, NGOs) to both examine and enter project information, creating a shared knowledge inventory. As an inventory example, the Donor Coordinating Committee was maintaining its own tracking system, but in an unstructured format that was incomplete and generally inaccessible outside of its membership. The merit of a Project Tracker on GLP was recognized as a benefit by donors and Ministry staff.

The Project Tracker was originally to have been integrated into the Portal proper, and was considered to be the major selling point for getting the Ministry to sign on to the GLP program. However, because a database-backed system did not seem to be a good fit with the GLP portal as set up then, the Project Tracker was eventually developed using a web-based system from Intuit. It was set up and demonstrated to the Ministry, but at the time of the site visit no one talked with at the Ministry or among donor agencies reported the Tracker being used. The EQUIP2 DCOP said the tracker had fallen off the Ministry radar screen for the time being but that the initiative would probably be reintroduced once political backing was

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restored. [Follow-up information from GLP staff indicate that the Ministry may now be more engaged in using the Project Tracker. Updated status reports from GLP to USAID are a more appropriate forum for this type of supplemental or follow-on information.]

- Site for Collaboration and Library of resources was developed. A Donor/Ministry collaboration and library site was promoted as a way of streamlining communication and for creating a shared repository of documents and other materials. This was thought of as a kind of “library of record” to obviate the need for Ministry staff and for each donor group to continually run after paper produced by the other; additionally, it could provide access to key policy and practice documents to educational leaders and administrators in Zambian educational institutions. The shared space was promoted as a way of making the workings and activities of the Ministry more transparent and accessible.

At the time of the field visit, none of this functionality was being used, as reported by Ministry, Donor agency, or USAID staff, or staff at the education institutions visited; there seemed to be little interest in using it, although one donor representative suggested that the idea could be revived if USAID championed the approach and took an active management role.

The lesson here, then, is very much the same as with the ICT resources at the colleges – namely the nature of the investment it takes to develop participant commitment, linkages and capacity to maintain resources. As the donor representative noted, it takes a ‘champion’ In this arena in particular, resources might not be used without a high-ranking champion to push the effort. One might see all the actors as a ‘community in waiting’; and as such the community members need encouragement and leadership in coming together to make use of the tools and build on them. This is a theme that has come through elsewhere. As before, real staff have to be dedicated to it. This is not stated as a GLP failing; staff were never formally approved by the Ministry. However it is a lesson learned.

Other Findings Related to ICT Materials for the Library

While the library of materials for colleges seems never to have gotten much use, there are a variety of disparate ICT materials development centers pursuing materials that might be useful for a library, if it were to be fully supported. These include Charles Lwanga College (assisted by VVOB) and Copperbelt College (assisted by IICD). In addition, EDC has a very large radio and iPod-based schools program (QUESTT³¹) aimed primarily at out-of-school and community school students who do not receive the same level of support as students in government schools. In addition a private ISP has developed a very sophisticated website for educational resource sharing (iSchool.zm) that archives all of the QUESTT radio programs as well as other ICT learning materials for students in all grades. It also provides teacher-centered materials such as curricula and video-based science lessons and promotes information sharing through open blogs and similar mechanisms.

³¹ QUESTT also works with Peace Corps volunteers to provide field-level technical assistance.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

▪ **Developing a Physical Platform as the Basis for GLP**

Developing the physical infrastructure and connectivity is necessary, but not sufficient. To be used as a resource for improving education capacity requires dedication of a human resource to cultivate that capacity. This is true on many fronts: to ensure that physical infrastructure stays viable, that staff can and are making use of its resources, and that it lives up to its potential as a means for catalyzing educational development through providing, in part, a forum for discussion of key issues and coordination of diverse development inputs and accomplishments.

Provisions of the physical infrastructure and connectivity within colleges has expanded opportunities for using the internet and is highly appreciated among college staff interviewed. Policies and procedures for maintenance, sustainability and the like are successful in some cases and not in others.

Coordination among colleges beyond an initial series of trainings appears largely absent, partially due to lack of dedicated personnel. Use of the Portal proper appears moribund even though college staff interviewed expressed interest in linkages and peer-to-peer learning.

Where accessible, staff are using the internet, but not necessarily to increase skills or find resources to advance teaching. While some faculty do search for teaching resources across the internet, they have no guiding documents on how to find those resources or how to judge what they find, and there are no pointers to credible sources or websites that could provide resources or guides on adapting resources.

Interest in the GLP platform proper flagged among all groups over time – among Ministry, Donors, and College administrators – at least partly because of lack of a highly respected champion of the GLP concept. It may still be viable, but nobody is there to dedicate the required time to mobilize support and help demonstrate benefits. It is worth noting that sophisticated Internet users within the donor groups, as well as others, did not end up using the portal as intended.³²

▪ **Differing Visions of GLP Mission, and Expectations for its Results**

There needs to be a clear and transparent development process, with ongoing briefings about intended and actual results, and a way to demonstrate value added along the way. Reasonable shared expectations need to be developed to spread ownership, especially with chief stakeholders such as ministries. Simple monitoring tools can help identify issues in a fair and transparent manner, easily communicated among stakeholders.

While the Zambian Ministry has signaled its intention to expand ICT and the internet as a tool within the system, it never fully embraced the GLP project as part of the effort and declined to devote significant resources. Part of this may spring from a sense that the GLP is foreign competition to its own efforts, signaling an ownership issue.

Further, expectations on usefulness of the resource may have been unbalanced. There were no clear, simple, agreed upon monitoring systems to measure outcomes against expected results. This would

³² If the idea is to regenerate interest, Equip2 or GLP Washington staff should query the Donors to discover more about the perceived usefulness of the tools provided or if externalities were preventing success.

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help demonstrate achievements and further needs, and potentially harmonize differences between expectations and outcomes.

Monitoring tools implemented locally would also give participant institutions reasonable standards for determining if policies and procedures were working for them, and whether their use of the portal and its resources was matching expectations. Monitoring also provides structured points for additional training and allows comparisons across participant groups to find stronger and weaker nodes.

- **Seeing Oneself in the Tools from the Outset is Crucially Important**

Developing the community capacity to ‘see the resource’ and continue to recognize its value through the initial phases of the development and deployment process requires direct attention. If participants cannot quickly see tangible benefits interest will as quickly flag.

Expected outcomes should include tools which can be immediately used by groups to see the value gained. For example, both colleges visited expressed a desire to create their own sites. Perhaps perceived and actual value could be increased, and the development time for some resources, could be cut down if interim tools could be provided so that groups can begin creating their own page content.

Provide methods for recognizing significant contributions by participants or participant groups and provide opportunities for sharing those contributions. Similarly, provide methods so that colleges can post announcements or notices on the GLP home page.

Identify champions within each group and link them together as an initial working group tasked with sharing information about the initial successes or difficulties of implementation. Groups will then be able to identify relative weaknesses and strengths of different components. Encourage groups to help strengthen peers through sharing the best resources, procedures, and ideas. (This also gives an initial purpose for using the portal proper.)

- **Selecting a Partner to Develop and Foster GLP Mission**

Choose an implementing partner well placed to address both content and operational issues. Equip2 was understaffed to implement the project and did not have a convenient field network through which to implement the project.

Equip2, as a project, was probably not as well suited to the purposes of GLP/Zambia as it appeared. This is partially because Equip2 was developed in Zambia to build and strengthen management capabilities within the ministry, not to implement field-level projects outside its core mission.

The project seems to have been chosen more as a matter of organizational convenience, than with any direct assessment of ‘fit,’ and as a result of this, the GLP project was an additional set of stressors on an already busy staff. Further, Equip2 was severely hampered when it was not permitted to hire a coordinator for the project, requiring staff dedicated to other initiatives to break free to implement the GLP objectives.

This does not mean that Equip2 did not have successes. Infrastructure and connectivity was provided to additional schools in the education network. Trainings were arranged and coordinated among

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several partners, in some cases with clear success that is allowing institutions to maintain and grow their new IT resources.

Partnerships could be expanded to include content sharing and related trainings. Possible additional field resources available to help with support issues include the Peace Corps, VSO, or similar volunteer groups.

The implementing agencies or groups should look for resources to support the social and cultural development process of learning about, contributing to, making use of, and achieving valuable outcomes from resources like GLP – for example developing champions who help spur productive engagement with the site, recognition of accomplishments from it, and who can help cultivate the culture of collaboration across programs and organizations to do what it takes to support education development.

- **Sustainability Requires Demonstration of Ongoing GLP/Zambia Support – Lessons Learned**

To be sustainable, GLP/Zambia requires Ministry Support. To obtain Ministry support, GLP/Zambia probably requires key donor support and on-going cultivation of recognizable and recognized achievements.

Initial interest by donors and the ministry in both a project database and shared library of materials flagged over time. The concepts still pertain, however, so the work done may not be lost.

From conversations with college of education staff and related organizations, interest in using the internet and ICT materials is clear, and capabilities in employing and expanding these capabilities exist within the country (ICT in education module development at several colleges and projects; distributed technical assistance through partners, etc.). The missing element seems to be getting those interested parties together to share information and methods.

If the Ministry does not support the concept/platform/deployment, the resources for realizing the benefits of collaboration have to come from the country's own education colleges. This is not viable.

Rwanda - Field Study Overview³³

Although all of the GLP project implementations aim to bring participants together in a collaborative environment, each has unique aspects worth noting. Thus the purpose of visiting the Rwanda Education Commons (REC) was to examine how it related to some of the other implementations, and to report on implications from the project made toward accomplishing its objectives.

Preparation for the Visit.

To prepare for the visit, brief discussions with the USAID Field Office, GLP Project Lead on site, and GLP Technical Staff in the US led to identification of key stakeholders to interview. These included interviews with:

- USAID Mission and Africa Bureau staff
- AED – International and local REC project staff
- Rwanda Ministry of Education staff connected with the REC
- the Rwanda Teacher Service Commission
- the National Curriculum Development Center
- the Kigali Institute of Education, a leading teacher-training and professional development institution, who are partners in developing and using Mindset/ICT materials with teachers (both pre- and in-service)
- Teachers at the Lycée de Kigali, to get representative input from the teacher beneficiary group
- UK Department for International Development (DFID), Human Development office
- SNV, a Dutch education development group, long active in education issues in the country
- National University of Rwanda (NUR)/Rwanda Development Gateway(RDG) , which will develop the initial online collaboration portal
- Agile Systems, the EMIS developer working alongside the REC
- Mindset Network (pre-visit telephone conversation)

Additionally, evaluation staff reviewed REC-related documents provided by the GLP project and held conversations with others with connections to the Commons concept (e.g. World Economic Forum, University of Washington). Information from these sources is added for context.

Summary descriptions from these consultations and visits are below, followed by aspects of the site visits and interviews that inform the evaluation questions identified in the Evaluation Phase II Workplan.

³³ Descriptive observations are based on document review and field or background conversations. Findings and Recommendations are conclusions and commentary from the evaluation team.

The REC ‘Project’

The Rwanda Education Commons (REC) is a new program to help support educational development through the building of public-private partnerships and the construction of a platform for collaboration, with the goal of advancing education capacity in the country. As part of its brief in forging the REC GLP are helping the Ministry of Education formalize and coordinate ICT-for-Education efforts within the country, build internal capacity in developing ICT/computer-based and other materials for teachers (and eventually, as evidenced by field conversations, students), and to develop tools and systems to bring education stakeholders together in a collaborative environment.

REC – Vision and Background and observations

The Rwanda Education Commons is the pilot model for a broader partnership framework that will eventually constitute the Africa Education Commons (AEC). In broad terms, the Commons is intended to bring together partners and resources within a structured system that includes methods for identifying needs, current resources, and resource gaps, with the intention of finding and integrating partners toward fulfilling those needs. The Education Commons concept grew out of the USAID-promoted Global Development Commons³⁴, which similarly seeks to promote public-private partnerships to address developing-country needs, in education and other sectors, and has been championed in part by the World Economic Forum.³⁵

Resources targeted appropriate for the Commons may be of any type, but it is assumed that access to those resources would be most beneficial if coordinated through a mechanism allowing ‘any time, any place’ communication, discussion, and review, – e.g. through some sort of internet-based portal.³⁶ Because of its background of establishing internet-based portals in other country contexts, and because of favorable funding mechanisms, the GLP was chosen to develop the Commons concept in Rwanda as a pilot case for the AEC.³⁷

The vision described was that an array of Commons structures and associated portals will be developed across the continent of Africa – within a country the Portal will link partners and provide resources, but over time those separate portals will become increasingly linked together so that resources developed in one country can be adapted and used in other countries. The intent is to facilitate improving the quality of education and access to tools for doing so. As an example, such a framework may facilitate the harmonization of educational standards and curricula (at one or more educational levels), allowing for the transfer of credits and the recognition of degrees or diplomas awarded across countries participating in the

³⁴From Africa Education Commons: Building a Multi-Stakeholder EFA Partnership for Education Quality and Relevance in Rwanda, Kitts, Joe (USAID) and Schware, Rob (AED), no date.

³⁵ Cf. http://www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/gdc/ and <http://www.globaldevelopmentcommons.net/>

³⁶ In the Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Rwanda, this objective is referred to as “establish a multi-channel platform for access to the REC network and resources.”

³⁷ The evaluation team is not evaluating the idea of the Commons and so has not looked critically at all of the elements of the Commons framework (e.g., governance, long-term technical capabilities) beyond observing initial stakeholder-building activities. Rather, the team has focused on aspects that the GLP has approached in its other projects: using collaborative tools and processes in a virtual space to develop, deploy, and share resources, and to build a community network of participants. Field conversations and observations suggest that lessons learned through other GLP projects find applicability in the Rwandan context, with an eye toward increasing the project’s chances for success.

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Commons. In addition, the Commons will facilitate links to resources outside one’s own country, but within the region, or in Africa at large, as well as outside Africa.

USAID and GLP staff have noted that implementation of the Commons will not look the same in each country because each country’s needs will be different. Nevertheless, the process for exploring those needs, coming up with agreed-upon strategies and policies, and supplying solutions is expected to evolve toward a recognizable and transferable framework. The internet portals, as one of the primary modes of communication, collaboration, and sharing, will need to be of sufficiently flexible design to accommodate a variety of users, be organized in such a way that resources are discoverable, and provide useful tools for archiving those resources and promoting communication both within and across Commons countries.

Rwandan Educational Context

The Rwandan educational system is in a period of great flux, putting pressures on teachers and administrators, the national budget, and students. The pressures on the system include the following:

- Change in the language of instruction from French/Kinyarwanda to English, mandated to begin in January 2009 with only two months’ notice; at least 80% of teachers are nominally francophone;
- Extending of basic (free) education from 6th grade through 9th grade, adding students to the system and increasing the responsibilities of the Ministry;
- Teacher repositioning, from teaching general (multi-subject) classes to subject-specific classes; this also requires additional qualifying courses and certifications, with the threat that those who do not qualify would eventually moved out of their jobs³⁸
- Teacher double-shifting because of increased enrollment (EFA/FTI effects), which has the effect of pushing in-service trainings to weekends and holidays
- Large student-teacher ratios – e.g. the current pupil-to-qualified-teacher ratio of 67 may worsen as a result of increased pressures to bring eligible students to school and the possibility that teachers may leave for lack of qualification or out of frustration
- Integration of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) into the Ministry of Education (formerly with the Ministry of Labor), another pressure on Ministry staff
- Reconstitution of the Ministry into political (“the Ministry”) and operational arms (the Rwanda Education Board)

The transition to an English-language environment weighed heavily in almost every conversation outside the immediate REC management team. The Ministry has, by policy, mandated an immediate language switch in secondary schools and upper basic, with follow-on transition to English all the way to Grade 1 in coming years. Teachers certainly were aware of this mandate, and interviews with Lycée de Kigali teachers revealed some trepidation about it, although generally they seemed cautiously hopeful about the transition. Overall, among practitioners, there seems to be a tacit acknowledgment that the transition will take several years whatever the official policy.

At the same time, the Rwandan government has set forth a number of aggressive goals toward pulling the country out of least-developed-country status, including radically changing educational attainment and

³⁸ From National Curriculum Development Center discussions; the NCDC produces distance education certification programs for teachers.

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positioning the country as a regional leader in Information Technology. Integration of computer- and internet-based tools into the education system is seen as an important solution to improving teacher readiness and, eventually, student achievement, while expanding IT capabilities within both the public and private arenas. The Commons concept expands upon that vision by actively engaging additional stakeholders in a development environment that gives the body of stakeholders a strong voice and role.

REC Near-Term Objectives, and Recent or Current Activities that Support Them

Within the framework of the Commons concept, the REC has set forth a number of specific objectives and strategies:

Coordination and Strategic Planning

The REC is embedded in the Ministry to assist with an overall coordination and strategic planning functions on IT and ICT-related initiatives. Specific activities with which they are charged are:

- 1 – Positioning the Commons as the gatekeeper and coordinator of the diverse ICT-related projects in the country (as reported by the GLP, the newly established ICT in Education Department will serve as the 'gatekeeper and coordinator')
- 2 – Forging the Commons collaborative framework
- 3 – Developing resources to help build teacher knowledge and skills, primarily in English, math, and science (and building country capacity in developing electronic/ICT resources in the future)

Positioning: To this end, the REC has conducted a mapping exercise to inventory all ICT-related education projects in the country. The REC is further tasked with determining if the various projects align well with ICT policies developed by the Rwanda IT Authority. The Commons will help the Ministry with identifying gaps in the strategy and helping integrate appropriate partners who can help fill those gaps.

At the same time, the REC is assisting in the development of an overall ICT Strategy for the Ministry. During the site visit, a Strategic Planning session with representatives from various Ministry departments proved highly participatory, with REC ICT Coordinator Albert Nsengiyumva soliciting viewpoints from every participant.

Forging the Commons In addition to and as part of developing a technical platform for collaboration, the REC is charged with bringing together education stakeholders - from government, private enterprise, NGO/civil society groups, and others - in order to discuss modes of cooperation and partnership in support of improving Rwanda's educational capacity and development. As of early June, the REC had convened four large workshops, including a recent small conference of about 160 participants to review the Strategic Plan, and establish cross-sectoral working groups on IT infrastructure, capacity-building, and ICT content creation. The participants included five ministers, representatives from 11 private sector firms, and all Rwandan universities.

Portal Development

The REC has hired a technical coordinator to work with the National University of Rwanda's Rwanda Development Gateway (RDG) group in developing the first version of an internet portal for collaboration, communication and resource archiving. In early stages, the portal is intended to link the Ministry, universities, provincial education offices, teacher resource centers, and possibly "schools of excellence."³⁹ The platform will provide tools for communication and collaboration as well as establish a shared library of resources, including materials to improve teachers' subject knowledge.

The Rwanda Development Gateway Group has developed a number of public, private, and University-oriented development sites broadly aimed at poverty reduction, and has also developed a substantial GIS platform. The RDG team said it was waiting for GLP staff to provide training on the Liferay platform and hoped to combine these new capabilities with their experience using a range of web tools – e.g. PHP-based SPIP, Moodle, and others. Staff also emphasized that input from teachers and teacher trainers/colleges of education on methods for collaboration would be important. A prototype portal is expected to be ready for testing by December 2009. RDG staff were still awaiting a refined scope of work and contract at the time of the visit.

The GLP is currently in discussions with international tech groups such as Cisco, Intel, Microsoft, and Google about developing requirements for a future platform that could span Commons countries. It is unclear if RDG or similar Rwandan technology groups would be involved in second-phase, cross-border development.

Developing Resources

Promoting Teacher Readiness and ICT Course Development and Capacity-Building

Discussions during the field visits with donor representatives, INGOs, and the Teacher Service Commission revealed the abilities and readiness of teachers for providing high quality instruction was a key capacity that had to be addressed for Rwanda to move forward. The situation faced by teachers and the Ministry was expressed many times in dire terms, as stated earlier; the REC was seen as an important tool for addressing the pressures, although some cautioned that adding yet another mode would itself add to the strain felt by teachers.

An early REC activity to improve teacher readiness is through developing electronic learning materials in math, science, and English to help teachers improve knowledge of these subject areas.

Mindset Network⁴⁰ - The Mindset Network is working with the Commons to develop ICT materials for teachers to improve knowledge in English, science and math, and recently presented an 18-month training and deployment plan for the materials. The Mindset model, which works directly with host-country

³⁹ 'Schools of excellence' refers to a model school or centers of excellence paradigm. It was a phrase used by respondents in the interviews.

⁴⁰ Cf. Mindset <http://www.mindset.co.za/>

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counterparts in developing both materials and training-use programs, is adapting materials developed for other contexts to requirements for education preparation in Rwanda.

Mindset has worked previously with Kenya education authorities⁴¹ to produce math and science curricula for use in teacher-training centers there, using a combination of video, server, and satellite services. In that context, Mindset had originally attempted to use materials developed for South Africa directly in Kenyan schools, but the Kenyan Ministry had objected. Eventually Mindset agreed to produce original materials with Kenyan counterparts, with results considered by USAID staff as highly successful. Mindset seems to have absorbed the necessity of localization fully in the Rwandan project.

As counterpoint, an Indian educational program had developed some 70 DVD-based modules across a variety of subjects for use in schools there, and the Rwanda Ministry has selected a small subset of those modules for adaptation for Rwandan schools. Under this process, the Indian development team will consult from a distance with its Rwandan counterparts on changes to be made and audio to be recorded, but all actual changes to the materials are performed in India, so few skills in electronic materials development are transferred to Rwandan educators.

NCDC: The National Curriculum Development Center's (NCDC) currently produced paper-based materials and has rapidly been switching to English-language materials. The NCDC is also interested in using the coming Portal to distribute materials to teachers in the field through teacher resource centers. As part of this interest, the ICT coordinator expressed a strong desire that his group learn to produce video and computer-based materials for both student and teacher education. He also stressed the value of learning to evaluate outside computer-based/ICT materials for relevance and quality and to learn how to adapt appropriate materials for use in the Rwandan environment.

KIE: The Kigali Institute of Education's (KIE) Academic Practices and Development Group also expressed enthusiasm about hands-on resource-development and use training to complement its ongoing relationship with the UK Open University's E-Learning group. To address the language transition, KIE has instituted its own after-hours English training courses for faculty and staff.⁴² KIE also seeks to produce training courses and materials for academic management and teacher professional development as well as begin to help integrating ICT modes into the curriculum at KIE and at four satellite centers (for distance education students).

TSC: The Teacher Service Commission has laid out a six-year training and transition program to move to English. They also viewed the transition as an opportunity to begin changing teacher attitudes and pedagogy from teacher-centered (rote memorization, lectures, copying from a blackboard) to learner-centered. ("We can use the change to English as a Trojan Horse.") An English Language Fellow working with the Teacher Service Commission remarked that there was some evidence that facility in English was trumping other attributes or experience in school and ministry personnel decisions, and she cautioned that heavily favoring English speakers in the near term could cause resentment within the teacher and school management corps. On a broader note, DFID's human development advisor was likewise concerned that French might be abandoned completely, removing Rwanda from a bridge-building role between Anglophone and francophone African countries.

⁴¹ Also under the auspices of USAID.

⁴² Staff remarked that students were demonstrating far greater facility in English than the faculty.

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The Ministry has a One Laptop Per Child initiative. While the Coordinator remarked that an initial OLPC distribution program was flawed by a lack of content on the computers, children nevertheless were seen rapidly “making do” in creative ways. A donor representative remarked that he regularly saw children with their OLPC laptops at the airport taking advantage of the free wifi offered there. Several of those interviewed suggested that students would immediately adopt good computer- or internet-based learning materials if they were available, allowing self-directed teaching while the teacher acted as a reference and a coach to guide learning. This may be complicated in some cases by ‘a generational fear of ICT’ assumed to apply to some teachers, and the lack of readiness for participating in the kinds of instruction that will be provided through the Internet for students.

For classroom teaching, the expected slow but steady expansion of the internet and electrical infrastructure through schools presupposes growing reliance on internet-based curricula and learning tools to help move Rwanda rapidly toward better educational attainment, though cautionary notes were sounded by donor representatives on both cost issues and teacher acceptance of new teaching modes. The common assumption was that Rwanda would not be able to solve its educational issues without using new tools, and KIE and the TSC staff cautioned that treating ICT as an add-on rather than a core tool would probably doom efforts to use ICT effectively.

Although the near-term REC workplan focuses solely on developing ICT curricula for teacher learning, the issue of follow-on ICT materials for students was in the foreground during most every interview. In the nearer term, solutions involving radio (“the universal medium”) and possibly television were suggested as media for spreading English language skills.

Findings and Recommendations

- The REC team appears to be successfully bringing a wide-ranging group of education stakeholders together to discuss solutions to education problems, with a focus on using technology and ICT resources⁴³. Some critical stakeholders, such as the Teacher Service Commission, who had not been at the table earlier, are expected to participate in the future.

The REC should continue to assure that critical stakeholders are fully at the table, informing stakeholder groups of progress and plans, and helping them to heighten awareness among their staff and constituents (e.g. other Departments and faculty members at the University). The REC will also need to manage expectations about target beneficiaries and achievable outcomes, and publicize such information to avoid confusion and avoid disappointment. It also should look for new stakeholders in Rwanda’s educational success who can help provide immediate ‘hands-on’ help in showing results and preparing teachers and school administrators for resources coming on line through the Portal (e.g. see the next recommendation).

- Teachers may be under more pressure than acknowledged because of language issues, specialization and qualification requirements, growing class sizes and longer workdays, and the expectation that time off will be eaten up by in-service trainings. This may decrease teacher retention, exacerbating pupil-teacher ratio issues and depressing academic achievement.

⁴³ Not all resources developed may be electronic given the current country infrastructure. One alternative mode discussed was to use newspapers as a means for distributing content.

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There is strong pressure on REC to show results; and that it is immediately addressing – and addressing successfully – key educational issues. It may need to further encourage partners to move quickly on teacher support, and, in the near term, to search for practical measures that will help teachers adapt to new circumstances with a minimum of extra disruption or pressure. English-language radio and television programming may move language acquisition and comfort levels forward.

With the return of Peace Corps to the country, the REC may want to broker a partnership between PC and the Ministry to provide English language and technology coaches within teacher training centers and Schools of Excellence.

The REC may also want to investigate interactive radio programs such as EDC's QUESTT project in Zambia, which has helped teachers strengthen student achievement in both rural and urban settings.

- Rwanda Development Gateway (RDG) IT staff be capable of developing “more portal” than expected, if they are provided with good links to outside resources for self-learning, peer/user-group reference, and experimentation. The idea that local staff are passively “waiting for training” seemed unfortunate given the RDG experience in developing sites.

The REC is faced with the twin needs of moving quickly on developing the Portal concept and associated resources for Rwanda while at the same time developing in-country capacity for the Portal. The REC cannot afford to ignore the second without affecting its ability to show results. We would suggest the REC attempt to catalyze capacity of in-country Portal development and deployment resources, through building links between the RDG development team, and other local groups, if desired and useful, and competent and helpful user groups (for Liferay, Joomla, Moodle, Wiki tools, and the like). This could build commitment to the Portal effort, as well as add resources and potential capacity for future work. It could be very productive follow-up to initial platform orientations.

- Conversations about how the Portal would be used seemed vague, with people talking generally about “sharing ideas or materials.” Similarly, there was little discussion of what end-user contributions might look like or how the platform might enable such contributions. (A portal that allows for little creativity on the part of end-users may not become a regularly used resource.⁴⁴)

This vagueness is understandable given that most involved have not yet been involved in developing or using a virtual space. Even so, cultivating the community of intended participants during development – to begin early in building the Portal community, as it were – may pay off at deployment, even if many would-be participants are not directly involved in the development phase.

Enthusiastic “early adopters” should be identified within each potential user group and location, to build interest in and use of the portal; and to identify people who can serve as local training resources. Concrete methods for sharing information about practical aspects of portal or ICT materials usage – as well as best practices on equipment maintenance, upkeep, and cost-recovery mechanisms – should be promoted.

⁴⁴ This was a learning from the Zambia field study.

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Tools for creating a variety of content types within the portal and for creating meaningful social networks should be researched, integrated, and championed. Local user groups can help generate ideas, based on testing and review. This can be a way of fostering vision and creativity on the ways in which the resources on the Portal can be of use to improving teachers' professional development and own learning; and for reinforcing the bases on which the utility of the Portal resources should be assessed – for understanding what to expect from the Portal.

The REC should develop mechanisms for informing its stakeholder partners about agreed-upon objectives, schedules for implementation, and set expectations about reasonable outcomes so that confusion or misunderstanding are minimized.

- Given the number of simultaneous initiatives unfolding within the educational system, the Portal may capitalize on these changes by folding these various audiences in early and creating a greater pool of early adopters.

There are many expectations for the Portal; and a variety of problems to which it is looked for as the solution. The range of ways in which it could address these issues should be periodically revisited to ensure that the structure permits these solutions; and a clear timeline and phase-in strategy should be made transparent to stakeholder groups. EMIS is an example here. The Portal could provide a window into output data from the developing dataset along with simple tools for interpretation. The REC and its partners would need to consider and prioritize such add-on capabilities.

- Children are seen as capable adopters of technology who could rapidly absorb ICT learning materials into their schoolwork. Teachers may benefit from student knowledge, while new modes of interaction between teachers and students may assist the transition toward a child-centered pedagogy.

Despite the current all-teacher focus of leaning materials, the REC may want to identify partners able to rapidly begin adapting or creating ICT learning materials for school children. Teachers willing to experiment with child-directed learning should be identified and supported.

GLP Field Studies - Kenya Site Visit

While the primary purpose of the site visit to Kenya was to collect information relevant to the other resource being evaluated under this contract, EPDC, two issues of interest related to GLP also focused the work here. First was to find out more information about the work of one of GLP's partners – Mindset, and its USAID-funded ICT curriculum development efforts with the Ministry. The intention was to find out more about Mindset's work in country and discover any issues that might bear on the REC (Rwanda Education Commons). Second was to meet with a strong civil-society group to find out how the Global Assets might aid them in support of their coordination, advocacy, and watchdog roles.

Preparation for the Visit

To prepare for the visit on behalf of the GLP, brief discussions with the USAID Field Office, GLP Technical Staff in the US, and local operators led to key interviews. These included interviews with:

- USAID Mission and Africa Bureau staff
- AED – international REC Project staff
- Mindset staff
- Elimu Yetu Coalition (Civil-Society/Watchdog) Director

Additionally, evaluation staff reviewed documents and data provided by the GLP project, and identified independently, related to the Kenya Mindset work, and concerning REC status of development, previous Kenya ICT development initiatives, and needs.

Summary descriptions from these efforts are below, followed by aspects of the site visits and interviews that inform the evaluation questions identified in the Phase II Workplan.

Kenya – Field Study Overview

The Kenyan Ministry of Education is implementing a broad restructuring and decentralization strategy designed to push decision-making and management efforts out from Nairobi to Districts and, eventually, to the school and community level, as appropriate. Efforts broadly align with a policy known as the Kenya Education Sector Support Program. The Ministry of Education is severely understaffed at the central level to implement nationwide training, curriculum dissemination, and data-collection schemes.

A district restructuring program redrawing the approximately 75 old districts onto more than 200 new districts has created delay and some confusion because of lack of clarity (or completeness) in determining district boundaries. This has caused some difficulty in implementing district-level efforts such as School/EMIS data collection and entry. In addition, the Ministry is searching for the right incentives to make good data collection a priority for schools and districts.

There are approximately 1900 public and 8000 private primary schools, and about 4500 public and 2400 private secondary schools in Kenya, as well as 39000 early childhood development centers. All schools prepare students for national-level examinations, and public schools (including community schools) have

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some sort of community or school management committee or board. PTAs or similar play a strong role in many communities, and Parliament provides “constituency development funds” to communities totaling approximately 5% of the national budget, some of which may be spent on schools. Significant numbers of teachers are not well trained, with many having basic literacy and numeracy issues.

Education funding for public schools is typically allocated on a per-student basis, although data collection and reporting weaknesses/inflation probably skew the distribution significantly. Community-level school management and policy decisions tend to be driven by inertia and local politics rather than data-illuminated need. Local ability to interpret data, even if available, is deemed weak.

Kenya is expecting a significant internet bandwidth upgrade in the next year as new undersea cables come in. Planners hope that a more-responsive network will allow computer resources (including EMIS and GIS systems) to be more widely adopted as “more internet” is available.

Findings

USAID is the current head of the Donor Group. USAID-sponsored programs and activities support seven of 23 areas identified by the Ministry of Education, including EMIS/DEMMIS, GIS mapping services and field surveys, education policy reform, support to orphans and vulnerable children (OVC, primarily via PEPFAR), teacher and administrator training at the district and zonal level, special education training programs, support to 19 teacher-training colleges, support for school management (Kenya Education Staff Institute) and development of electronic learning materials in basic reading and math (Mindset/Kenya Institute of Education).

Mindset: Lessons Learned from Kenya

The Mindset Network has a recognized innovative system for producing and distributing high-quality electronic and distance-education materials, mostly in South Africa. Course materials for students in primary and secondary schools, as well as training programs and guides for teachers, are produced as on-line content, on CD’s and DVD’s, as television and radio programs, and as computer-based content updated via satellite, and as newspaper supplements.

Mindset is currently working with through USAID with Kenyan Ministry of Education counterparts to produce math and science ICT materials for Kenyan students in grades 4 through 8. A field visit to Kenya presented an opportunity to briefly review the process with USAID staff and with Mindset’s Kenyan counterparts, and to see if there were any lessons learned that might apply as Mindset begins work through the REC to produce materials for Rwandan teachers. Earlier conversations with Mindset staff reviewed their processes and technical methods, but the Kenyan experience was addressed only briefly.

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Brief development and partnership history⁴⁵

In 2007, USAID originally partnered with Mindset in South Africa to produce materials for both the South African and Kenyan school systems. Rather than produce materials in tandem for the two countries, Mindset began by producing materials for the South African market, where they have substantial resources, and then brought basically finished products to Kenya for introduction there.

When presented with what was seen as a *fait accompli*, the Ministry rejected the materials as not Kenya-centric, and about a year disappeared as Mindset negotiated with the Ministry on how to proceed. Some areas of clarification included:

- Cultural “Kenyanization” localization of content and story-telling contexts
- copyright/ownership of the materials
- collaboration and skills transfer to Kenyan counterparts on producing materials
- deployment venues and contexts (where equipment and modules would be available)
- teacher-training issues, and
- materials conformity with Kenyan curriculum and examination standards
- using local Kenyan production studios and other resources in producing the content.

The original materials stood as a basis for significant adaptation to meet these Kenyan requirements.

This period of negotiation and “getting to know you” effectively used up the rest of the original budget, so USAID Kenya then re-contracted with Mindset to perform the newly framed work.

Results so far

USAID staff report that 2008 saw substantial progress on meeting curriculum and training objectives (science and math modules for Standard 4 and 5), and work continues on new modules (Standard 6 & 7) in 2009, with Standard 8 modules to follow. Mindset has worked with KIE subject-matter experts, the Kenya National Examinations Council, and the Ministry of Education Quality Assurance division to assure that science and math materials conform to national standards.

Likewise satisfied are representatives at the Kenya Institute of Education, a curriculum development arm for the Ministry of Education and the Kenyan counterpart to Mindset in the creation and distribution of ICT curricular materials.

KIE staff reported significant advances through the partnership:

1. A learning partnership between Mindset and the Ministry/educators.
2. Skills transfer in the design and development of materials, including technical skills in digital video. (Urban Brew, a local television production group, is contracted for studio space and production equipment.) Staff noted that additional training and experience would be needed and expressed hope that USAID might fund follow-on projects to continue capacity-development.

⁴⁵ Background materials come mostly from conversations with USAID Mission staff.

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3. Meaningful collaboration with Commonwealth of Learning, a distance/eLearning coalition of Commonwealth countries. COL hosts many of Mindsets training and development materials on its site.
4. Equipment, including servers, television, and set-top boxes. Computer-based materials are updated via satellite download. (Note: Could also serve as an update platform similar to what eGranary would like to provide.)
5. Training, TOT/cascade training and M&E tools. As with production capacity-building, staff said much more teacher training would be needed in the effective use of computer-based or video materials.

KIE also said a significant change from the original plan was moving the deployment sites from 20 pilot schools to 20 teacher-training and resource centers distributed throughout the country. While a school-based approach might seem more logical given that materials were developed specifically for students, initial deployment at teacher resource centers provided several key advantages:

1. More students and teachers can come into direct contact with the materials. Plans are for teachers to take groups of students to the resource centers on a rotational basis to introduce the method. KIE estimates that about 20% of school children are within the practical catchment area of the resource centers.
2. A uniform, staffed environment that will allow lessons learned to be captured. As each group of students and teachers uses the materials, information about effective uses and challenges can be captured. This knowledge can then be synthesized and passed to the next set of students and teachers. In addition, uniform policies and procedures around use of equipment and associated materials can be developed and instituted among the network of centers.
3. Infrastructure at the resource centers is expected to be uniformly more stable than that in schools. Electricity and security are two constants.
4. While the use of ICT materials is expected to expand out of the centers and to schools in due course, the initial deployment removes some issues of perceived favoritism or inequality among schools.

Mindset also works with KIE subject-matter experts, the Kenya National Examinations Council, and the Ministry of Education Quality Assurance division to assure that science and math materials conform to national curriculum standards.

Lessons learned and applicability in Rwanda

The Mindset/Kenya adaptation and learning experience appears to hold great applicability and promise for similar success in Rwanda. Mindset has already set forth a substantial development workplan that reflects internalization of the lessons gained so far in the Kenyan context.

Mindset staff themselves said earlier that they would not work on the Rwandan project if the Ministry did not have a guiding hand in setting objectives and expectations and if Rwandan counterparts did not have substantial roles in adapting existing materials to the new context and requirements.

The deployment of new ICT resources in teacher resource centers also offers an interesting model, both for experimentation with the teacher learning modules and for a concrete experience and information

sharing activity deployable on the future portal. The REC might consider proposing a teacher/student visitation model similar to that in Kenya to begin students to the use of ICT resources.

Building Civil Society Networks into the Commons

The Kenya Field Visit presented an opportunity for brief but substantive conversations with a major education-sector civil society coordination group, the Elimu Yetu Coalition (EYC), and the applicability of a portal structure for helping bridge communications within non-governmental groups.

EYC is a coalition of 246 local and international NGOs and associations dedicated to Education for All in Kenya. Founded in 1998, it was given quasi-governmental status as a Trust in 2006 and acts as the registrar for all NGOs working in education in the country.

EYC is on the East Africa board of the Africa Network Campaign for EFA (ANCEFA) and hopes to join the continent-wide board. It operates in all regions of the country through its thematic groups (quality, budgets, girls' education, teacher support etc.). Organizational representatives, when working as part of EYC, are asked to drop their organizational priorities.

The EYC also works with different ministries, parliamentary groups, and local/national media to advance EFA objectives. *The Standard* newspaper now publishes 8 pages each Thursday solely on education issues after working with EYC partners to develop the concept.

An organizational network linked by a virtual network?

The EYC views itself as an issue platform, not as an organization with its own sets of priorities. When discussing the GLP portal idea with evaluation staff, EYC representatives immediately remarked that their organizational structure mirrored the network concepts of an internet space. "That's a platform, and we're a platform."

At present EYC constituents communicate through face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, and email, and the EYC is now publishing an e-newsletter for distribution among its membership and to other stakeholders. Nevertheless, they have no common system for archiving and sharing information

Staff were immediately intrigued by the idea of a virtual community space.

A GLP-like portal would give the EYC a common platform for presenting ideas, harmonizing information, and coordinating its members. Thematic groups could coordinate meetings and events and organize materials which could be made available via the portal to both the public and constituent members. Given the relative inexperience most of its members have in using web tools, ease of use in navigation, organization, and the ability to create materials and pages was stressed. Giving member organizations both public and private areas on a portal would help build awareness of their organizations and work. Staff also said having a web presence would make it a stronger players within ANCEFA.

Applicability and Food for Thought

The Elimu Yetu Coalition structure and situation provides interest possibilities for thoughtful application of the GLP in both the REC and elsewhere.

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- The EYC is already a kind of functioning virtual community operating in diverse areas of the country and linking hundreds of members on a peer basis, but they are doing it without the internet. Are there organizational and purposeful lessons that could serve the REC as it brings together stakeholders?
- Could the REC extend a bridge to the EYC as a first step toward the kind of cross-border Commons-to-Commons networking envisioned under the Africa Education Commons?
- Could the GLP or the REC provide virtual space for EYC as a test case for applying a virtual portal space to an already functioning network? The GLP/REC would need to consider what training or other resources could be brought to bear, or whether a local funder in Kenya might support such a venture. A portal presence in Kenya might also spur interest in the Commons approach in the country.
- What site structures might serve the joint and individual needs of hundreds of independent organizations. Can tools be developed or made available for a non-technical audience to present itself effectively on the web? Can an effective cascade/TOT training method be applied to train representatives from all of the institutions over time? What monitoring tools would they need to stay on track?



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

USAID EDSTRATEGY DISCUSSION FIELD STUDY REPORT

**GLOBAL EVALUATION & MONITORING II
GEM II BPA Number EDH-E-00-08-00003-00**

Global Assets Evaluation

User Satisfaction Results –

**GLP Platform Education Strategy Online Discussions,
January/February 2009**

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Introduction

USAID's EGAT division made use of the Global Learning Portal (GLP) platform to host a series of online discussions about strategic issues they should consider in developing a vision for international assistance in the areas of basic education, higher education, and workforce development in early 2009. This activity provided an opportunity to assess participants' response to the use of the GLP as a "virtual agora" for a sub-group of global education policy analysts, stakeholders, and decision-makers. This activity was one of several 'field studies' of different types of GLP implementations, carried out by the evaluation team. Whereas the others involved face-to-face discussions, and dealt with a broad range of stakeholders, this study involved mostly international policy makers and donor agencies. Additionally, while the others focused on the range of activities GLP offers on its site, this one focused predominantly on the e-discussion portion. Additionally, in contrast to the GLP users surveyed in Afghanistan, and the Rwanda and Zambia field studies, who were more directly involved in the business of education, the participants in these discussions represented perhaps a more disparate community of program planners, policy analysts, managers, and decision-makers engaged in the business of strategic planning about education assistance.

The USAID Ed Strategy Forum

USAID EGAT division hosted an Education Strategy online forum between 26 January and 27 February 2009, with the intent of soliciting and obtaining feedback on issues it should consider in its vision of implications from global education needs for assistance strategy.

More than 1,000 education policy makers, donors, and stakeholders were invited to participate in the series of online discussions based on policy papers on the three topics of discussion. Participants were invited to log onto the GLP.net site, view or download the discussion papers, read and contribute to threaded discussions, or upload additional pertinent resources. Nearly 600 participants logged on at least once during the discussion period.

Evaluation Design

The GAE evaluation team developed a free-answer questionnaire to gauge participant experience using the portal and the portal threaded discussions, which was sent to all participants. Questions were aimed at use of the tool, not at the quality or content of the discussions, although questions about the general utility of web-based discussions were also posed. In particular, as is desirable in a mid-term evaluation of an ongoing project, overall assessment focused on input regarding the types of problems users encountered in using the GLP, and their suggestions for improvements. The idea was to provide useful practical guidance to GLP for refining the functioning of the site, and to raise issues related to effectively hosting interactive online forums in this context.

Respondents

Seventeen percent (17%) of the invitees who logged in to the discussions at least once provided responses to the online survey.⁴⁶ While this is a low rate of response, the responses to the query seemed to resonate with moderators' experiences with GLP in this context, and were consistent with the assessment in Afghanistan, and with earlier discussions with users. However, the results should not be viewed as statistically significant, but merely a source for formulating hypotheses about further issues to explore more systematically, if they turn out to be of interest.

⁴⁷

Findings

Our analysis of the findings from the survey are organized in two sections to address quite distinct questions which arise in evaluating GLP, namely: 1) the functionality of the actual GLP online resource and 2) the utility of the GLP as a resource to facilitate and enhance discussion and collaborative efforts to address global education issues.

Re: Registration, log-in, navigation, environment, and mechanics

Finding 1. Most participants had no significant difficulties accessing or navigating GLP

Over two-thirds of those who gave feedback on GLP registration and log-in said that they did not experience any significant mechanical issues and described the process of accessing and navigating GLP as understandable and straightforward. **Table 1** presents the results

Table 1: Registration and Sign in

	Responses	%
Easy	68	69
Challenging	28	29
N/A	2	1
Total	98	100

In terms of ease of navigation, the majority found the site to be logically organized and displayed. Respondents generally agreed that finding and downloading documents in the libraries was fast and easy. Even users who described themselves as “not computer savvy” or “with basic computer skills” stated that they were able to log in and make their way around the GLP. Even if you take into account the respondents who did not respond to this item, perhaps

⁴⁶ See Appendix A for a discussion of survey response rate, and a more detailed discussion of survey methodology. Total respondents were 98, approximately 58

⁴⁷ See Appendix B for the characteristics of the respondents.

because they found the registration/sign-in was so challenging they could not continue (maybe 7% or 8%), still the majority found the site easy to use. See **Table 2** for a summary of responses.

Table 2: Navigation

	Responses	%
Easy	60	61
Challenging	28	29
N/A	10	10
Total	98	100

Looking at the other side of the coin, however, we feel that although the overwhelming majority of Education Strategy respondents found registration, sign-in and navigation easy, GLP should not ignore the fact that almost one-third of the users found the registration and sign-in or the site navigation process challenging. This could be a significant concern vis-à-vis GLP acceptance, as GLP expands beyond its initial base. Marketers’ experience has been that even relatively small numbers of dissatisfied customers can have a negative impact on overall “community” acceptance of a product. So it is worth noting that respondents who reported difficulty with navigation tended to be the same participants who had difficulty with log-on. It seems that difficulty with log-on left a sour taste in the mouths of participants and colored answers to other questions. In some cases log-in and navigation issues ultimately discouraged participation or led respondents to question the overall value of the discussions.⁴⁸ We are happy to hear that GLP is doing a usability survey as part of its work with HEP, and hope that this will inform and yield useful results for them.

Types of Log-In, Registration, or Navigation Difficulties

A number of users provided feedback regarding the specific difficulties they experienced in logging-in, registering, or navigating the GLP Education Strategy Forum. This feedback is useful as guidance for future similar uses of GLP. Users who had specific difficulties with registration and log-in made explicit recommendations as to how glitches could be reduced. These are presented below, along with some reflections about what directions solutions might take.

Log in and password. Some respondents had not realized that login IDs and passwords used in previous discussions would still be valid. This was probably a function of the site design which seemed to imply that the different areas on which comment was solicited were completely distinct, managed by different moderators and USAID managers, and thus would be likely to require a different account. This prompted them to re-register with new accounts.

Navigation Issues. Respondents who found navigation difficult (about 30 percent across all declared skills levels) also reported that the process was not intuitive and was overwhelming. They reported that there were too many steps and said they felt they were going in circles to find

⁴⁸ This issue was also raised in interviews outside the scope of the questionnaire.

the right discussion thread, to follow the thread for reading and posting, or to navigate between threads.

From a technical standpoint, clear notification and guidelines would reduce these confusions. However it might be useful to consider that site managers may want to be able to post comments or guidance which they feel their own people will need, and so additional site personalization capability might be useful. For example requiring participants to log in twice – first at glp.net and then again on the discussion page – some participants found annoying, and saying something about that could be useful. Perhaps a ‘splash page’ summarizing what the user would do and why, might have been useful.

Additionally, an automated password ‘server,’ which can generate the password or user name of the person forgot it, might be useful to include, as this is a frequent helpdesk issue in many contexts, and some reported that here as well.

And then there are the several respondents who did not find registration and log in smooth due to reasons unrelated to the GLP *per se* – a slow internet connection or just being a first-time online forum user.

From a site manager perspective, we note that this instance of GLP implementation is very different from one that is part of the HE/P because the USAID- Discussion site manager⁴⁹ is not dealing over time with GLP as a key function of their work and with the same users of that site. This meant that preparation for the GLP facilitated USAID discussion was novel for all parties – the Site Manger, the Moderators, the Activity owner, and GLP staff facilitating the process. While GLP staff were unfailingly supportive and helpful, the site manager almost did not have time to ask, and probably did not have time to think very much about what to ask, and while actual materials were provided for training, the training was very much oriented to point and click issues. It may be that a different kind of support process might be useful for contexts like these, as we do not think these kinds of contexts are or will be that rare. A different kind of support process might be alerting the user to design issues for different types of users; helping the manager prepare their users; providing a more extensive feedback tool on the site itself.

Re: Posting

Most people who commented found the posting easy. They said things like The structure of the site made it easy to post; and one person said that the online forum allowed for time for reflection before posting a comment, which was good.

Finding 2. Most respondents did not comment specifically about posting, however when they did, about two thirds said it was easy and one-third said it was challenging.

Table 3, on the next page, summarizes the responses; and is followed by discussion of the kinds of issues users cited, if they commented.

⁴⁹ Not the overall Site Manager, but the Ed Strategy Discussion Activity Site manager

Table 3: Posting to Threads

	Responses	%
Easy	16	16%
Challenging	9	9%
No Comment	73	75%
Total	98	100%

Types of Posting issues

Both social acceptance and technical issues were cited. The social issues related to awkwardness a couple of respondents had about posting anything. One respondent said, for example, that he or she was not used to posting to a large audience; and another said that while he or she had no problem posting, they noticed (and were slightly discouraged?) that not very many people responded to their post; and a third said something possibly tangentially related when they said they did not like posting without a clearer understanding of when the information would be used. Some of these kinds of comments generally are classified as ‘being new to posting’. However the issue of how to foster discussion among those who usually don’t may be something to consider – e.g. whether there is something GLP can do to help participants feel more part of a community; cultivating dialogue.⁵⁰

The mechanics of posting comments also presented a few issues. For some the posting function would not work at all, and participants resorted to emailing comments to an administrator to get them on the board. This may be because they were novices, or because of time-out functions on slow browsers, or something else.

We mention the time-out issue because several users found the time-out function in the GLP online discussion to be discouraging because they lost their contribution while they were thinking about or composing a post. This is an important consideration because the individuals who were timed-out due to being “slow responders” are most likely to have included both discussants that were slow because they were working hard to formulate a well-presented contribution to the discussion as well as those who had the least online skills or for whom English was a second language.

The difference between “respond to a thread” versus “post a new thread” or “respond to author of the thread” also created confusion for some, which may indicate unfamiliarity with forums in general. However, even experienced communicators may have different criteria for interpreting whether a relevant but somewhat tangential topic is a “new thread” or “response to a thread”.

⁵⁰ Obviously not everybody is going to post something, and that’s expected. Something that may or may not be relevant, but is interesting to consider is that the general call-in rate for talk radio, for example, is about 10% of listeners. Staples, Jessica. Call-In Talk Radio: A Uses And Gratifications Study Of Listeners, The issue here is what GLP can do to foster participation, if the person wants to participate in a discussion.

The twin issues of experience with the users and users' own experience in posting comments are crucial considerations in assessing how to enhance the utility of an online platform meant as a resource for collaborative, global, discussion. The objective is not simply to share information but to have close to real-time interaction in working together to refine, revise, and enhance perspectives on issues of common concern. The challenges are (or may be) different, as expressed with the previous issue, when a site manager works with the same users over time, and they really know the site manager (and vice versa), and when the users feel they are 'on their own,' as it were, in using a bridge to get their voice heard.

In the course of efforts to address this issue, it will be important to give careful attention to ways in which platform functionality impact ultimate forum objectives. One issue will be the way in which GLP functionality affects the pace, dynamics, and "feel" of discussion, given the broad objective of facilitating simulated inclusive "close to real time" discussions across multiple time zones world-wide. Another issue will be to consider how best to accommodate diversity and, in particular, discussants with lesser facility in English and/or participants with less-adequate internet access or computer skills. A third will be how to create community around a discussion topic, and beyond. The structure of the discussion itself may be an issue here, one that should be further discussed up front.

Tools for Enhancing the Participant's Experience

Generally, users with or without navigation problems all found the site to be static, not visually attractive, and not user-friendly enough. To deal with multiple discussion threads and large resource libraries, the survey respondents recommended adopting techniques and formats found in commercial websites. Recommendations included:

- Using **tabs** to visually organize the threads and supportive documents in a logical way, as well as clearly marking the currently active discussion thread.
- Using a **breadcrumb trail** on the top of the page that indicates user's current status and location
- Add the **ability to format** posts (bold, italics, bullet points)
- Provide **active moderation** and social networking features to make the environment feel "more alive" and of the moment. (These are discussed further in the report.)

The comments included not only the technical issues, however, but also some implications for how they come to be a community. For example, some respondents said they would like to be reminded about the discussions by advance email, and others said they would like to be able to subscribe to RSS feeds or email alerts for topics, threads, or responses to their own posts, capabilities found on many forum platforms.

Re: Online discussions, participation, and the GLP experience

The online request for feedback included a series of questions to determine to what extent the GLP provides an enabling, efficient, and stimulating environment for participation in discussions such as the Education Strategy Forum.

While most respondents stated they found the online discussion format helpful, several respondents pointed out that it is difficult to separate the quality of the discussion and its ultimate utility from the specific implementation on the GLP. This highlights the prior observation that how well the platform works directly impacts participant impressions about the utility of the overall activity. Observations about the concept were so often coupled with observations or recommendations about the format that these ideas have been left blended.

Finding 3. A large majority, more than two-thirds of respondents who responded to this question, agreed that online forums in general are a good way for gathering input and sharing ideas and resources, (Table 4) and a similar proportion said the GLP is a good implementation platform for those purposes (Table 5).

Table 4. Online Discussions' Merit

	Responses	%
There is	60	61
There isn't	27	28
N/A	11	11
<i>Total</i>	98	<i>100 %</i>

Table 5: GLP as Online Forum

	Responses	%
Like	43	44
Dislike	19	19
N/A	34	35
<i>Total</i>	98	<i>100%</i>

The above is good news, and consistent with what has been found elsewhere (in Afghanistan and with informal discussions with the Cocoa Foundation). Based on these other responses, however, and the large amount of people who did not respond here, however, we would caution that the continued acceptance probably relies on participants feeling their commentary achieves something, is welcomed, and recognized – the social community issues mentioned earlier and with the previous section.

Overall Assessment of the Education Strategy Forum on GLP

Finding 4: Respondents characterized their GLP experience as positive and rewarding overall, and more than two out of three (including two-thirds of the 15 USAID respondents would recommend the GLP for future collaboration and idea-sharing projects.

The overall utility of the platform for most users outweighs any mechanical difficulties encountered. See **Tables 6 and Table 7**. For USAID respondents, this is somewhat of a turnaround since our first interviews at the beginning of the evaluation. At that time, and as reported in our interim findings, most with whom we talked were really unfamiliar with the utility and not considering it relevant to them. By virtue of this experience, that attitude has dissipated, and there is optimism of what it can do for the field.

Table 6: Participants' Overall GLP Experience

	Responses	%
Positive	54	55
Negative	15	15
In between	15	15
N/A	14	14
<i>Total</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>100%</i>

Table 7: Would Participants Recommend the GLP for Future Collaborations?

	Responses	%
Yes	67	68
No	16	16
N/A	15	15
<i>Total</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>100%</i>

Types of Responses

One developing-country participant suggested that the GLP be used as a forum for sharing experience and expertise in service to education in developing countries, especially in the areas of eLearning, content delivery, and education discussions. (This mirrors other uses of the GLP.)

Five respondents said that they questioned the value of online discussions in general and preferred face-to-face interactions and methods such as meetings, workshops, conferences, seminars, the ACVFA model, or the SID model of live sessions with small break out groups (as circumstances allow). However, even the respondents who said they were not fond of online forums and preferred other methods said that their experience in the Education Strategy Forum made them reconsider their potential. Respondents saw virtual forums such as the GLP as an accessible, inclusive, and convenient method for gathering inputs from all around the world in a time-flexible fashion. Positive features identified included a potential to reach a large audience;

avoiding the circulation and accumulation of emails; allowing time for reflection before making a contribution (unlike conference calls, for example); and providing a common record.⁵¹

Levels of participation in the Education Strategy Forum via the GLP

Ideally, a global virtual forum would be expected to use information technology to facilitate active, engaged discussion by diverse participants with differing perspectives. As in the case of face-to-face forums, the ideal democratic forum in which all discussants are similarly engaged, equally informed, and provided similar opportunities to share their perspectives is not easy to achieve even with cutting-edge technology.

Finding 5. In terms of encouraging widespread participation, the Education Strategy Forum on GLP appears to have been quite successful, based on respondents’ feedback (although it is also likely that the survey respondents were more motivated and engaged than non-respondents).

Slightly more than one-third of survey respondents were “active” participants in the discussions – both reading and posting comments (**Table 8**). A slightly larger proportion of respondents were “passive,” downloading documents and reading comments, but not posting information.

Table 8: Mode of Participation in the Education Strategy Forum

Mode of Participation	Respondents	%
Active participation (posted comments)	35	36
Passive participation (read and downloaded documents)	41	42
Did not participate at all*	11	11
N/A	11	11
<i>Total</i>	98	100

**Slightly more than half of the non-participants reported that they were hampered by navigation or were otherwise discouraged by issues they encountered in using the platform.*

In assessing the success of the Education Strategy Forum’s implementation on GLP as a means of facilitating active, broadly-participatory involvement, it is helpful to look further into respondent comments about the experience.

Factors That Encouraged or Discouraged Participation in the Forum

Respondents pointed to several factors that encouraged participation:

- All information and resources were provided directly on the site instead of through links or references to external sites

⁵¹ However, some pointed out that the threads were later taken offline. This is not simply an issue of information management but of the meaning and worth of the effort to participate. The collaborative process suggests an arc, with goals or objectives, activities such as the discussions, and results expectations. What are the next steps? Will results be synthesized and distributed? How will the efforts of participants be used? Were the discussions only an illusion of participatory collaboration?

- The site presented each topic in a linear fashion, with an end date to the conversation, which helped keep the focus on a specific subject and helped to motivate participants to submit ideas within the window of the discussion (instead of at some distant future point)
- The forum presented interesting topics, and participants contributed thoughtful or provocative ideas and comments
- The format transcended time zones and allowed people on all continents to participate at their own convenience. (Compared with those who prefer real-time interactions, below.)

Among the reasons for not posting comments, respondents offered the following: they were first time users not familiar with the mechanism of the forum; they could not identify the currently active discussion; or they felt that topics were well covered and did not want to repeat information already conveyed on the forum. As noted before, some participants ran into mechanical difficulties when posting.

Some respondents found that they lacked sufficient time to absorb all of the content, reflect upon it, and then be able to contribute meaningfully within a topic's discussion period window (usually one to three days).

Participants pointed out that over the course of discussions, threads can become extremely long, making it difficult to keep information organized mentally. If one is interested in multiple topics being discussed simultaneously, the issue becomes compounded. Some respondents suggested keeping threads live for longer periods and preserving the threads in read-only mode even after the discussions are closed to new posts. Other suggested limiting in number or size the posts that one participant can have per thread, to encourage the more concise arguments.⁵²

Some respondents suggesting that a broadly-scheduled forum lacked immediacy and therefore was something one could get to anytime, translating into *never*. In addition, time-scheduled and moderated “virtual live sessions” could add stimulating debate and provide impetus to schedule time for reviewing materials beforehand.

Geography, connectivity, north-south issues, and other inclusiveness concerns

The demographic cut of those who participated (counting active and passive participants only) revealed that the majority of participation (62 percent) came from the U.S. (**Table 9**) but that significant participation came from individuals in developing countries. An aggregate table of respondents by geography is found in the Demographic section.

⁵² This function is, of course, akin to that of a “live moderator” in a face-to-face forum where it is often necessary to work diligently, skillfully, and sometimes aggressively, to assure that a single, voluble discussant not hijack a forum with their questions and perspectives.

Table 9: Participation by location and type

Location of Participation	Active Participants (% of type)	Passive Participants	Did not participate	No Answer	Total (% of all)
U.S.	24 (68%)	22 (52%)	6 (55%)	3 (27%)	55 (57%)
Developed country	0 (0%)	5 (12%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (5%)
Developing country**	10 (29%)	13 (32%)	5 (45%)	0 (0%)	28 (28%)
No answer	1 (3%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	8 (73%)	10 (10%)
Total (% of all)	35 (36%)	41 (42%)	11 (11%)	11 (11%)	98 (100%)

**Percentages are for mode of participation by location of online participation totals*

*** 9 “developing country” respondents were in USAID Missions*

Still, several participants in the discussion shared the impression that the majority of input was generated by the developed world in what was supposed to be an open and inclusive brainstorming to the benefit of the developing world, thus challenging the concept of inclusiveness and accessibility of online forums.

One respondent also asked that materials be provided in languages other than English. The issue of language as a factor affecting forum participation in contexts like this – providing feedback to USAID on their vision and strategy – may not be useful to GLP. However, it could be worthy to note that when forums intend to include participants who may not be totally bilingual with English as one of the languages, ability to participate and understand may be improved with special consideration – in terms of considering requirements for connection speed and special translation utilities, for example. This could be a factor recommended by GLP for consideration by the site managers. There is no easy solution to this issue, of course, but there may be some.⁵³

An overwhelming 85% of the respondents reported using a fast or broadband-type internet connection (see Appendix B *Profile*). Respondents expressed a concern that low levels of ICT penetration and on-line connectivity in the developing world precluded wider participation, so such discussions would by definition lack the voice of an important stakeholder group and must therefore call into question the applicability of an internet-based approach. Discussion organizers may need to consider field-based supplemental workshops or focus groups to bring in these voices.

Less experienced users reported that the GLP provided a great learning opportunity, both in the technical sense (the platform) and in terms of content, which indicates the potential for impact that the tool has. Users that reported more advanced ICT skills said the GLP was a comfortable environment and not only continuing in the future, but also being streamlined as a regular part of the information sharing toolkit.

⁵³ Linguistic accommodations could most easily involve translations of posted documents even if postings to the discussion would need to be in English. An alternative (but more expensive and cumbersome) process would be to provide the online equivalent of simultaneous interpretation by facilitating access to online translators who would mirror the English-language discussion strand in additional widely-used languages.

Structuring Discussion within the Online Forum

Finding 6. While citing a positive response to the GLP, many reported that the discussion group method is efficient but not sufficient. Respondents found it to be a good way of sharing resources and gathering input but lacking in stimulating lively but organized debate.

Numerous respondents stressed the crucial role of moderators for the success of online forums. For some, the Education Strategy Forum arguments seemed to become diluted and conversations got chaotic very quickly. They recommended the practices in the following section, which GLP could help site managers prepare to implement

Suggestions for Moderators

Respondents advised that active, real-time moderation could help make the process more efficient and less frustrating. Up-front guidelines and instructions on posting formats would be helpful; active intervention to steer discussions efficiently and summaries or synthesis were seen as crucial to keep threads from meandering too far off-topic.

One respondent said the moderator should find ways to get out of the administrative and technical framework of the discussion in the forum and create a more dynamic, personal, and interactive way of guiding the discussion and engaging participants.⁵⁴

It is useful to distinguish between moderation oriented toward general communication efficacy (e.g. requests for clarifications, linking a comment to a previous comment or opinion) and more subtle content-oriented moderation which insightfully, objectively, and diplomatically advances the discussion by seeking to provide, for example, background on the context of a particular discussion strand, or which seeks to encourage a discussant who posts a somewhat tentative comment, to expand and clarify the point they wish to make. The task of “structural” moderation of discussions is straightforward; the task of “content-oriented” moderation requires very substantial expertise—whether in face-to-face or virtual forums.

In terms of encouraging participation, the actual structure and mechanics of the GLP site was less important than the content of the discussion and effective moderation. This suggests that the GLP could work more closely with their partners to define effective moderation and topic presentation approaches.

⁵⁴ This is a chronic difficulty in forums consisting primarily of professional and technical discussants which seek to involve a broader range of people. Acronyms, jargon, and the relevance of specific policy documents which are referenced, and even general technical terminology need to be “translated” for even well-informed, intelligent and analytic audiences – particularly if there is an expectation that “outside” input might be useful in opening up discussions that have proceeded for a period of time without resolution.

GLP-Hosted Online Discussion as part of A Broader Collaborative Effort

Finding 7. A common recommendation from respondents was that the GLP could be more effective if discussion forums were part of a broader set of tools to engage participants.

Video-conferencing, teleconferencing, webinars, conference calls, and e-group communication were cited as valuable methods, some of which could also be applied to smaller expert, interest, or focus groups as follow-on exploration. The GLP could also be used to present synthesis and analysis of discussion results as well as next steps or conclusions.

Suggestions for Broader Collaborative Tools

When asked if there are any particular tools and applications that users prefer as alternatives to the GLP, respondents cited:

- UNESCO/UNEVOC online Forum (ongoing and without subject or time limitations)
- Google's interactive features (e.g. Google Docs and Google Sites)
- Wikis
- List-serves
- Blackboard
- Facebook & Ning

While the GLP was seen as an easy method for gathering and digesting multiple inputs, in terms of platform format and feel respondents said it felt sterile and lacking in sense of community. Some advocated for social networking capabilities such as found on *Facebook* or *Ning*, so that participants could personalize the virtual workspace for collaboration, find out more about other participants, start or participate in discussions or side conversations, and build networks through messaging, interest groups and knowledge about non-local events. This is a promising avenue to explore because the objectives of the Education Strategy Forum were not simply to generate a time-limited product but rather to contextualize the specific topical discussions as part of the ongoing continuum of "stakeholder" community discussion. Such an on-going discussion provides diverse perspectives and insights from various arms within USAID, as well as from external stakeholders that include technical staff, planners, managers, and decision-makers at multilateral organizations, international NGO's, U.S. development partner countries, and developing nations governments or civil society groups.

Some respondents hinted that *Facebook* or other established platforms might be used directly for discussions so that social networking capabilities don't have to be recreated on a new platform, leaving less technical work for GLP staff to worry about and giving them time to concentrate on content and facilitation issues.

Summary Conclusions

The Education Strategy Forum's use of GLP as a "virtual agora" has demonstrated the utility of online discussions to facilitate reasonably inclusive and participatory collaboration among a range of discussants.

The GLP platform provided adequate or better support for accessing the forum. However, a significant minority of participants mentioned having problems with log-in, registration or site navigation. It appears that these can be relatively easily addressed. Additionally, glitches with posting should be investigated, and internal time-out settings may need to be adjusted.

Some other issues relating to participant access to GLP (and to online forums in general) are more challenging: constraints on Internet speed in some country and organizational contexts, and constraints from English as the *lingua franca* given the desirability of securing perspectives from the broadest possible spectrum of stakeholders.

Online discussions were seen as an effective avenue to bring together perspectives, ideas, and contributions from diverse stakeholders in widely separated geographic areas; essentially the online Education Strategy forum functioned as a simulated real-time discussion among participants in multiple time zones.

Participant perspectives about organization of the forum varied, with some considering the format too loose while others believing the discussion threads should have been more actively moderated and more structured. Others found the time restrictions hampered or discouraged thoughtful participation. In balance, our conclusion is that more active moderation would be helpful and that attention should be given to the moderator's role both in facilitating communication/participation (a relatively straightforward task) and in deepening and contextualizing discussions to yield more productive, useful collaboration (a much more challenging task).

Participant input raised issues regarding the broader "meaning" of the Education Strategy Forum as implemented on the GLP, with some developing-country respondents expressing a concern that discussions were dominated by developed country (particularly U.S.) participants. Other respondents questioned the post-forum removal of the discussion threads as signaling inattention to the value of the discussion. USAID or similar groups organizing such discussions may also want to frame the discussions with a broader collaborative process and use the platform to present purposes, gather input on expectations and outcomes, summarize discussions afterward, and propose next steps or follow-on actions. This will also validate the effort of participation.

Summary of Recommendations

The following recommendations emerging from the survey seem particularly relevant and practically useful—given the nature of GLP as an evolving initiative in exploring the broader utility of contemporary information technology for facilitating and catalyzing broadly-participatory discussion and collaboration among international education stakeholders. It may be that GLP is already doing some of the below, and that some of the below are not fully the role of the GLP. The point here is to see how GLP can infuse into their support of the Portal,

- a) Enhanced ability by site managers to prepare for the effective interaction of their intended participants; and to help their intended participants to prepare;
- b) Enhanced feeling of community and ability to participate in educational development;
- c) Enhanced ability for participants and site managers to see the results of the collective participation;
- d) Enhanced tools for catalyzing participation – e.g. through video or personal interaction; and
- e) Simpler posting and discussion participation tools

The following sections summarize the findings presented earlier.

Site Mechanics/Functionality

- Conduct user testing to observe user behavior and determine problem areas; modify site mechanics to streamline the experience
- Notify users that any previous registration with the GLP remains valid to prevent re-registration
- Send email reminder notifications in advance of discussions
- Eliminate multiple log-in requirements
- Add visual cues and mechanisms such as tabs and breadcrumbs to help the user with orientation and how the site is organized
- Repair and adjust mechanisms that prevent participants from posting or time out too quickly

Organization and Moderation of On-line discussions

- Participants should be introduced to guidelines on how to post, as well norms for formats, length, and etiquette
- Discussions should be framed within a broader set of activities that suggest a directed outcome. Follow-on or related activities and opportunities for participation should be publicized. Results or outcomes should be posted as part of the overall framework.

- Discussions should be actively moderated to help keep conversations on track to help synthesize and summarize threads
- Explore methods for facilitating participation for those with slow or spotty access, including alternative models of interaction and participation.
- As reasonable and appropriate, provide ways to support those not fully bilingual in English to participate in discussion services. (Machine translation services like the free Google Language Tools could be employed.)

GLP capabilities and environment

- Improve visual design elements that stimulate discussion, aid navigation and orientation, and present a more polished appearance.
- Add site capabilities allowing for feedback and ratings systems, message-passing among participants and with moderators.
- Use social networking tools to allow participants to customize their experience, search for members with similar interests or questions, maintain and strengthen side networks, and create additional discussion threads and issue pages.
- The GLP may want to consider using established social networking platforms, allowing it to concentrate on framing policy discussions, moderating live boards, and strengthening links among participants across organizations and geography.

Appendix A: Methodology for Survey of GLP Users Participating in Online Education Strategy Discussion

Between 26 January and 27 February 2009, USAID hosted an online forum on Education Strategy, inviting more than 1,000 education policy makers, donors, and stakeholders to participate in a series of online discussions on basic education, higher education, and workforce development. The GLP Liferay platform was chosen as the online tool to host the discussions, handled through JBS International.

The discussions addressed policy papers submitted on the three topics of discussion, and participants were invited to log onto the GLP.net site, view or download the discussion papers, read and contribute to threaded discussions, or upload additional pertinent resources. Nearly 600 participants logged on at least once during the discussion period.

Evaluation Strategy

The focus of this research was on users' response to the forum, not on the broad reasons why users did or did not choose to participate in the first place. Thus, the evaluation team developed a focused questionnaire which solicited response either through an on-line Survey Monkey utility, or through response to a version generated through Adobe Acrobat to query users about their experience. Upon review, this was considered too burdensome, and that a free-form set of questions might get as good a response. This was not initially included in the evaluation project's phase II workplan, thus no resources had been allocated for it; and the timing did not permit articulation of a fully fledged survey plan, complete with OMB approval. Thus it seemed a more informal, open-ended strategy was appropriate

To these ends the evaluation team developed an open-ended query to gauge participant experience using the portal and the portal threaded discussions. This query was sent to all actual participants in the experience – e.g. those who logged on at least one time. Queries were aimed at use of the GLP platform as a tool, not at the quality or content of the discussions themselves, although questions about the general utility of web-based discussions were also posed.

Response to the Survey

Nearly 100 participants (about 17% of the total participants) responded either through a Survey Monkey form or by filling out a Word version and returning it by email, after a maximum of 3 reminders. While the response rate is definitely very low, a variety of reasons may account for it, and it is not possible to correct for it at this point, as, in order to protect privacy, no 'cookies'

were used thereby undercutting the ability to construct a valid basis for weighting⁵⁵ Thus no adjustments for small sample size or self-selection have been applied.⁵⁶

Responses were confidential but questions about demographics allowed for some disaggregation of responses. Responses to the survey were analyzed and categorized using standard textual analysis techniques.

The evaluation team believes responses to the questionnaire represent a good *indication* of user experience and attitudes, but the results should not be viewed as statistically significant. No controls or adjustments for small sample size or self-selection have been applied. Readers are cautioned that online and mail surveys with low response rates such as the current one are always subject to potential bias. That being said, a 17% response rate, would seem to indicate that either the respondents a) did not have time to do the required write-in responses, b) were not interested in the topic (e.g. committed to responding), or c) that they did not appreciate the survey.⁵⁷ We cannot tell which explanation or explanations are likely to be the case; however, we can say that the individuals who did respond seem to represent a diverse pool of participants. Appendix B profiles the respondents to this survey; and the survey instrument used is included as Appendix C of this report.

⁵⁵ The absence of 'cookies' does not allow sending tailored reminders or tracking actual respondents.

⁵⁶ The total number of respondents by question varied. In the tables, N/A represents either that no answer was given or the answer provided was considered off-topic (e.g. not applicable). Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

⁵⁷ The analysis of e-mail survey responses found at <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol6/issue2/sheehan.html>, might be interesting to the reader. However, a blog on the topic seemed to find even a 3% response quite pleasing; and a 10% response even more so - <http://lohavichan.wordpress.com/2007/08/23/survey-results/>.

Appendix B: Profile of Survey Respondents

Age		
	Responses	% of Total
35 or under	16	16
36 to 49	24	24
50 to 64	39	40
65 or older	9	9
No answer	10	10
<i>Total respondents</i>	98	100 %

Gender		
	Responses	% of Total
Female	38	39
Male	50	51
No answer	10	10
<i>Total respondents</i>	98	100 %

Affiliation		
	Responses	% of Total
Donor Country	3	3
USAID/USG	15	15
Multi-lateral	3	3
NGO/ Contractor	38	39
Other association	24	24
Not affiliated	5	5
No answer	10	10
<i>Total respondents</i>	98	100 %

Location		
	Responses	% of Total
In the US	55	56
In another 'developed' country	5	5
In a developing country	28	29
Other	0	0
No answer	10	10
<i>Total respondents</i>	98	100%

Internet Connection		
	Responses	% of Total
Broadband/Fast	83	85
Dialup/Slower	1	1
Other/Very Slow	4	4
No answer	10	10
<i>Total respondents</i>	98	100%

Appendix C: Education Strategy Online Discussions - GLP Questionnaire

1. Introduction

You recently logged onto an on-line discussion on the USAID Education Strategy moderated by JBS International. The tool (the discussion website) used for the discussions is called the Global Learning Portal (GLP). As follow-up, we would like to get your opinion about the use of the GLP. Your feedback will help improve the tool.

Please keep in mind that this questionnaire is about the on-line collaboration tool, the GLP, and on-line discussions generally. It is not about the substance of the discussions themselves.

This survey should not take longer than a few minutes, and we appreciate your feedback. Please try to complete the survey by **10 May 2009**.

Participation in this survey is optional and entirely voluntary, and your name is not requested.

Please accept our thanks!

2. Discussion Registration and Sign-In

(Questions are posed around each topic to help you think about the GLP experience in general. You do not have to address each question specifically when responding.)

How did you find the registration and sign-on process?
Was it straightforward and understandable?
Did you have any glitches or difficulties?

3. Navigation and Finding Things

How was your experience in navigating the site? Was it easy and intuitive?
Were you able to find the discussion topic areas and documents?
Were the discussions logically organized on the site to aid you?

4. Participation

Were you an active participant in the discussions, or did you only read others' comments or documents?
Did the site aid your participation in any way? Discourage participation?

If you wanted to contribute to the discussion, were you able to post comments?
Were you able to view or download documents?
Upload documents, if you wanted to?
Were these mechanics easy or were there problems?

5. On-Line Discussions and the GLP

Is an on-line discussion forum a good way of gathering input or sharing ideas on a subject, or do you prefer other methods?
What methods would you prefer?

If you think on-line discussions have merit, was this GLP site a good implementation for this purpose?
Are there other discussion sites that you feel work better? Which ones?
Do they have useful capabilities you found missing in the GLP?

6. Overall Opinion and Future GLP Use

How would you characterize the overall experience using the GLP?
Positive/rewarding? Not so positive/disappointing? Something in between?

Would you use or recommend the use of the GLP for future collaboration, idea-sharing or as a shared document library?
Why or why not?

Do you have any further thoughts, opinions or ideas about the GLP?

7. Please tell us a little about yourself

(Your responses are confidential but we would like to be able to review any differences by demographic and general affiliation categories.)

a) Age →	<input type="checkbox"/> 35 or under	<input type="checkbox"/> 36 to 49	<input type="checkbox"/> 50 to 64	<input type="checkbox"/> 65 or older
b) Gender →	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female		
c) Affiliation →	<input type="checkbox"/> USAID/USG	<input type="checkbox"/> NGO/ Contractor	<input type="checkbox"/> Donor Country	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-lateral	<input type="checkbox"/> Other association	<input type="checkbox"/> Not affiliated	
d) Your location during the discussion →	<input type="checkbox"/> In the US		<input type="checkbox"/> In a developing country	
	<input type="checkbox"/> In other 'developed' country		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
e) Web connection →	<input type="checkbox"/> Broadband/Fast	<input type="checkbox"/> Dialup/Slower	<input type="checkbox"/> Other/ Very Slow	

Thank You Very Much for Your Time and Feedback!

Appendix G: Traffic Analysis Report

Traffic analysis of GLP sites was conducted by a sub-contractor, *productOps*. Based on the review of the report and discussions with the consultant, we find the analysis not very useful for evaluation purposes at this time. Specifically:

Reading and analyzing site traffic patterns on GLP is difficult because of site structure issues and the way analysis software is being deployed on the site. Page views and visits (collections of page views) cannot be tracked in the same way, making it very hard to discern usage patterns. *Google Analytics should be properly configured on each sub site so that traffic data can be properly gathered for analysis.*

Findability and usability matter. Usability may be affected by page sizes and load times and traffic to the GLP.net home site may be hampered by findability issues and limited incoming links. *GLP should develop a findability plan and it may find that using social media tools could help drive traffic to the site.*

And, because of users being ‘knocked off’ the site due to power availability, users may be getting on and off the same page multiple times.

Phase II evaluation activities tried to consider ‘re-visits’ to the same site, by the same group, per discussion, post phase I, with GLP staff. This did not prove viable due to cookie and privacy issues. In the end we found that site traffic analysis for this purpose at this time, does not tell us anything much more than we knew through other reporting venues; and the variety of field studies provided more grist for development. As part of this realization, Evaluation staff provided a ‘site coach’ to GLP staff who discussed issues of audience, message, and site design. Discussion of that effort is found in Appendix B of these appendices.

GLP.net & Associated Sites **Traffic Analysis**

Covering traffic for November 1, 2007 – October 31, 2008

Prepared for Aguirre International by productUps

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Introduction & Purpose

This report synthesizes traffic, findability, and performance data for the GLP website (www.glp.net) and associated sites. The goal is to illuminate in broad strokes how intensively sites are used, where visitors originate, how they are using the site, and what steps if any should be taken to improve overall site performance and findability. This report does not cover user interface design, nor does it provide detailed site-by-site analysis of how visitors are reaching GLP sites, which pages are most visited or duration of average visits.

The report covers the 12-month period November 1, 2007 – October 31, 2008, and is based on Google Analytics access provided by the GLP site management team.

What Do Traffic Figures Tell Us, and How?

Visits and Page Views

Generally, traffic analysis tells us how many people are visiting a site, approximately how many pages they view during a visit, how they arrived at the site, and where they exit the site. These patterns may tell us something about the overall audience size, where that audience resides, how much people explore or use a site, whether the site is readily discoverable on the Web, and whether the site is meeting expectations about audience use.

It is important to consider that sites have different intended (or restricted) audiences, so looking at numbers in isolation does not say much. For example, a site with a general audience of teachers in the US might be considered successful with hundreds of thousands of page views per month. A site specifically for teachers in one school district might expect far fewer visits.

The purpose of the site will also determine how traffic figures are interpreted. A site designed for a time-limited or one-time use would not expect sustained traffic.

Geographic Origin and Paths to A Site

Visitors can be identified by their IP addresses, which usually (but not always) can be traced back to a geographic area. This may tell us if the intended audiences are being reached, given sites either targeted at, or appealing to, people from multiple countries.

In addition, referral information tells us which site a visitor was on before she got to the site being tracked. This can help tell us if visitors are finding the site through a Web search (Google, Yahoo, e.g.), if they get there via another site, or if the visitor entered the site address directly (perhaps through word of mouth or a bookmark). As with visit counts, referral information has to be interpreted in the context of the site purpose and intended audience. This information was not included in this report because Google Analytics has not yet been configured to treat each GLP sub site separately, making analysis prohibitively time-consuming.

Overall Findings

Traffic is light and the United States accounts for a majority of visits

GLP Fully 51% of visits to GLP.net are from the United States. The country with the next largest figure is the United Arab Emirates, with 1,694 visits to GLP. Afghanistan follows with 950 visits, and the figures trail off from there. Total traffic across all sites (not including Afterschool.org) totaled about 24 000 visits, or about 67 per day.

Expected vs. actual traffic counts are difficult to characterize across projects or in aggregate, as explained in the introduction, and depend greatly on site purpose. Visit by geography can be found on page 3.

Project traffic frequently spikes early then trails off

Many of the projects start with an initial surge in traffic, followed by a decline over the course of the following two or three months. Without knowing the specifics of how each project was managed and marketed to visitors, it is impossible to surmise what causes these traffic patterns. As a rule of thumb, traffic fall-off generally indicates a lack of content of interest to visitors, too little content, and/or not enough inbound links to sustain traffic.

Time-limited initiatives would expect to show more intense activity during the “active” period. Community of practice or issue sites might have more even usage. Usage patterns for project sites can be found starting on page 4.

Site configuration, usability, and findability

Site configuration, traffic analysis, and findability issues, while not major findings, are discussed under recommendations later in this report.

Geography of Visits

This count includes all traffic to the GLP and Afterschool websites, not just the projects examined later in this report. This is because the GLP site was not configured to track *visits* separately for each project (see Recommendations). Afterschool.org, primarily a domestic program that uses the GLP platform, is under a separate column because it separated from the main GLP report in Google Analytics.

	GLP	Afterschool
	24,249	11,552
	14,523	10,707
Americas		
United States	12,308	10,476
Mexico	455	-
Columbia	280	-
Canada	257	132
Venezuela	162	-
Guatemala	161	-
Argentina	154	-
Brazil	147	-
Peru	140	-
All others	459	99
	2,824	501
Europe		
Italy	687	-
France	468	-
UK	376	-
Germany	243	-
Spain	179	-
Ireland	-	203
All others	871	298
	5,619	218
Asia		
UAE	1,694	-
Afghanistan	950	-
Iran	750	-
Cyprus	515	-
India	445	-
China	126	-
Palestinian Territory	122	-
Mongolia	104	-
All others	885	218
	1,108	61
Africa		
Zambia	272	-
Kenya	178	-
All others	658	61
	156	57
Australia/Oceania		
Australia	135	-
All others	21	57

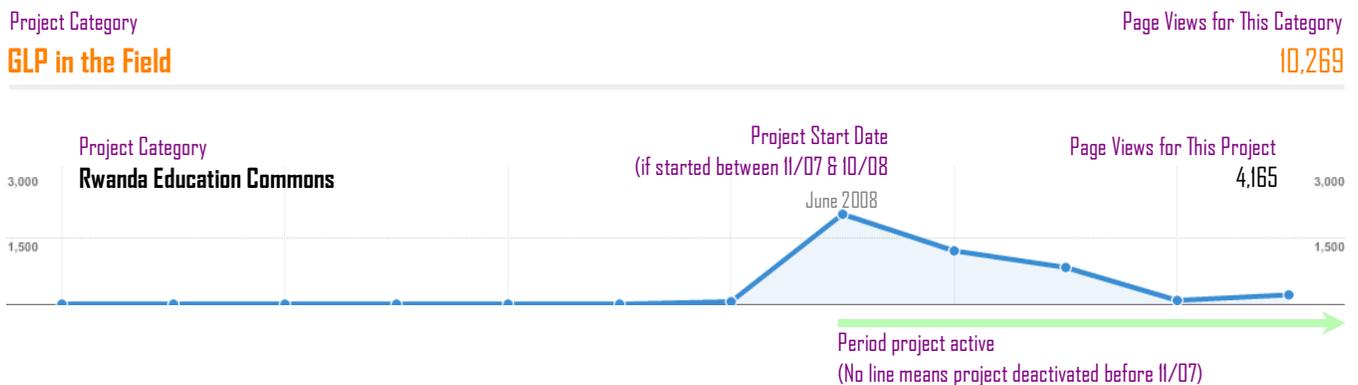
Page Views by Project Type

The following graphs show traffic patterns for GLP implementations during the one-year study period, organized by project type. Low-count sites are not included, and one should consider that visits can comprise one or more page views. The legend below describes elements of the graphs.

Note: Scales are not adjusted for traffic count sizes, so it is important to consider that the graphs show a pattern of usage rather than volume of usage from chart to chart. Total page views (volume) are provided.

Because of the way the site and the page-tagging methods are set up, it is not possible to relate views to the geography counts shown earlier.

Example/Legend



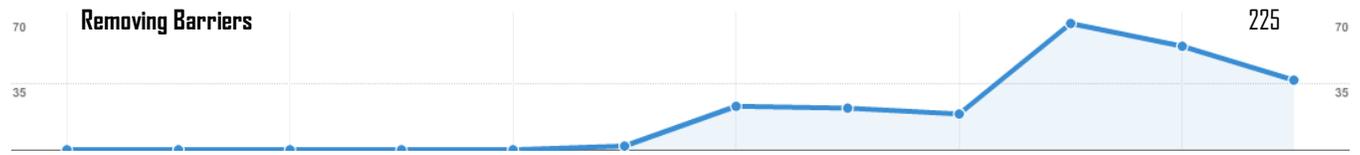
Summary of Page Views by Project Type

Forums & Events	225
Removing Barriers	225
GLP in the Field	10,269
Afghanistan HEP	5,700
Education in Zambia	157
Palestinian Youth Portal	347
Rwanda	4,165
Knowledge Sharing & Resource Communities	11,194
Carbon Workshop	1,362
Education & Fragile States	340
Escuelas Activas	4,365
Gender & Education	3,102
HIV AIDS & Education	225
Liberia Teacher Training Prog.	119
Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Education	70
Peace Tree Connexion	358
PEAKS Teacher Training	933
WASH in Schools	439
Internal Institutional Communication	7,412
Education @USAID	7,003
GLP Management	409
Collaboration	3,232
ECHOES Schools	1,634
FTI Evaluation	273
TIES/Mexico	540
Third Party Hosting	43,086
Afterschool	42,147
WILPower	939

Page Views by Project (continued)

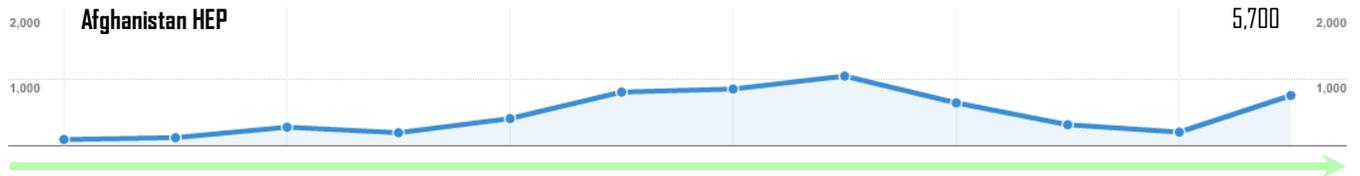
Forums & Events

225



GLP in the Field

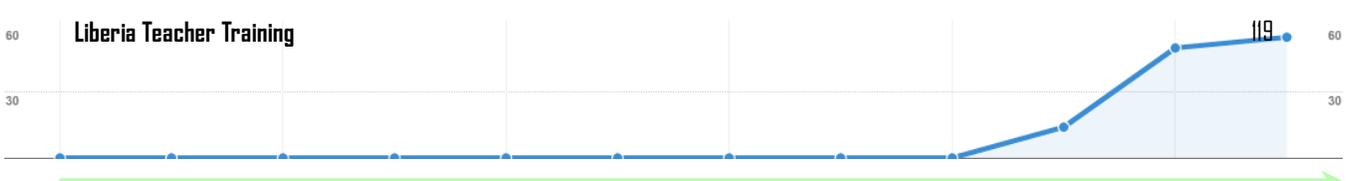
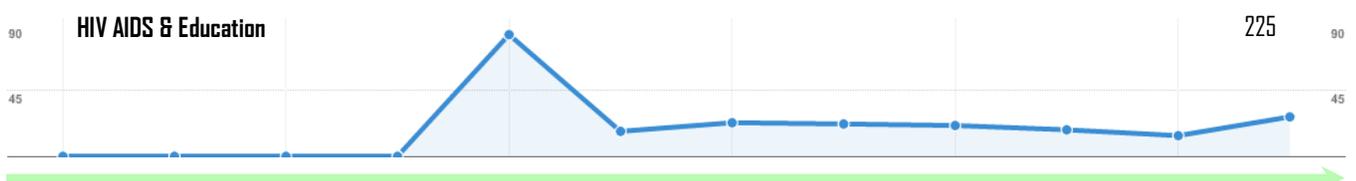
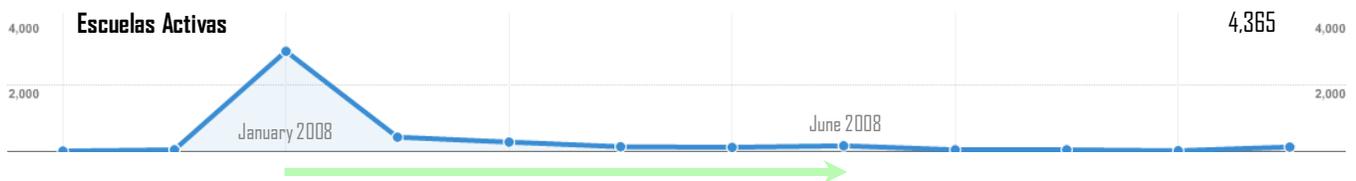
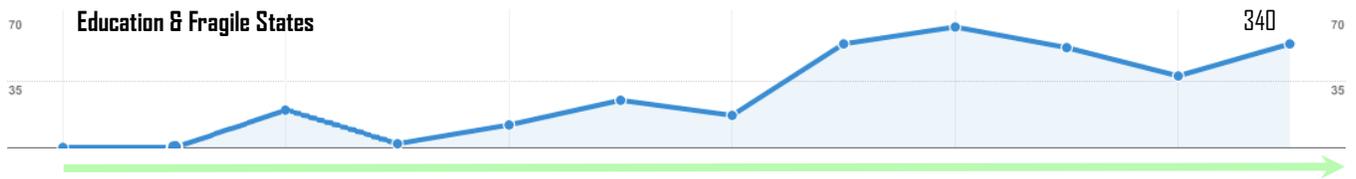
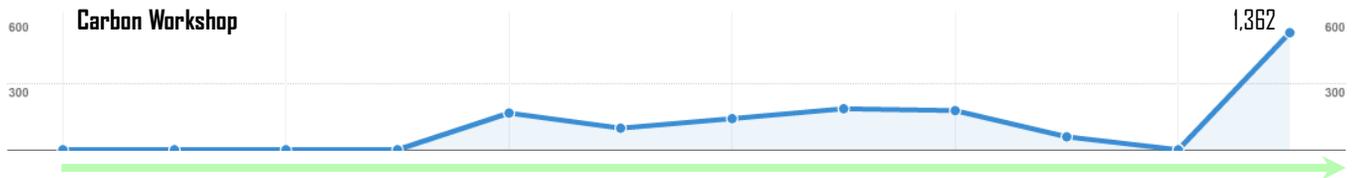
10,269



Page Views by Project (continued)

Knowledge Sharing & Resource Communities

11,194



Recommendations

Determine Traffic Goals and Develop a Findability Plan

Developing a findability plan requires some up front work, but can provide long-lasting benefits. Asking the right questions up front is important. How can the audience, whether focused or broader, best be reached? What are realistic site traffic goals, and what metrics will be most important? Is the goal to reach more people, or to encourage deeper use? Findability encompasses technology, content development, and social media strategy.

On the technology side, the Content Management System (CMS) used by GLP should be search engine optimized to provide maximum findability for content. Currently the HTML contains excessive white space, which can confuse search engine spiders. Currently header tags (<h1>, <h2>, etc.) are not being used. These tags provide a hierarchy of content importance, and improve the overall visibility of pages. The CMS creates code that places a large amount of code ahead of the content. If possible, configure the CMS to create HTML output with content higher in the page, so more relevant information will be gathered by the spider in the event it has to leave a page.

While a site that has been up longer is more visible than one that has only recently been created, Google and other search engines treat consistently updated sites more favorably than those that contain old content. Where possible, content should be added in small but regular chunks. One way to ensure that all content is indexed by search engine spiders is to include a regularly updated sitemap file. See www.google.com/webmasters/tools for more information.

Social media strategy need not be as complicated as it sounds. It can start with something as simple as all project members sending email messages with links to projects to their friends and colleagues. If one member of a project team obtains a Twitter account (www.twitter.com) and posts a message with a brief description and a link every time new content is added, those links will be findable through Twitter search immediately, as well days or weeks into the future. The same is true of Facebook messages.

The use of hashtags in social media messages makes tweets rise to the top in Twitter searches. For example, this tweet points to the Afghanistan HEP: USAID [#education](#) support in [#afghanistan hep.glp.net](#) .

For information about findability, see these starting points: *Ambient Findability*, by Peter Morville; and *Building Findable Websites: Web Standards, SEO, and Beyond*; by Aaron Walter.

Configure Google Analytics to Track Projects Separately

Currently the GLP web server is configured to use a separate directory for each project. However, Google Analytics is not configured to treat each project as a separate website. This means that while *page views* can be tracked by project, *visits* cannot. For example, if a visitor comes to the main GLP home page and follows links to home pages for several different projects, Google Analytics treats this as one visit, when for GLP purposes it would more accurately be treated as several different visits, one to each of the projects visited. Individual Google Analytics reports should be created for each project directory.

Use Off-Site Communication to Push Traffic

A site that is updated more frequently shows the audience that it is alive and well. Creating RSS feeds for each project, and encouraging visitors to subscribe helps them stay engaged with the site. By publishing these feeds with a service like Feedburner, extensive information about how the feeds are being viewed can be gathered. Social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter can also be useful in spreading the word about GLP and individual GLP projects. While RSS readers are likely not widespread among the GLP audience, RSS feeds are used by content aggregation services and can provide a multiplying effect to the visibility of content.

Methodology

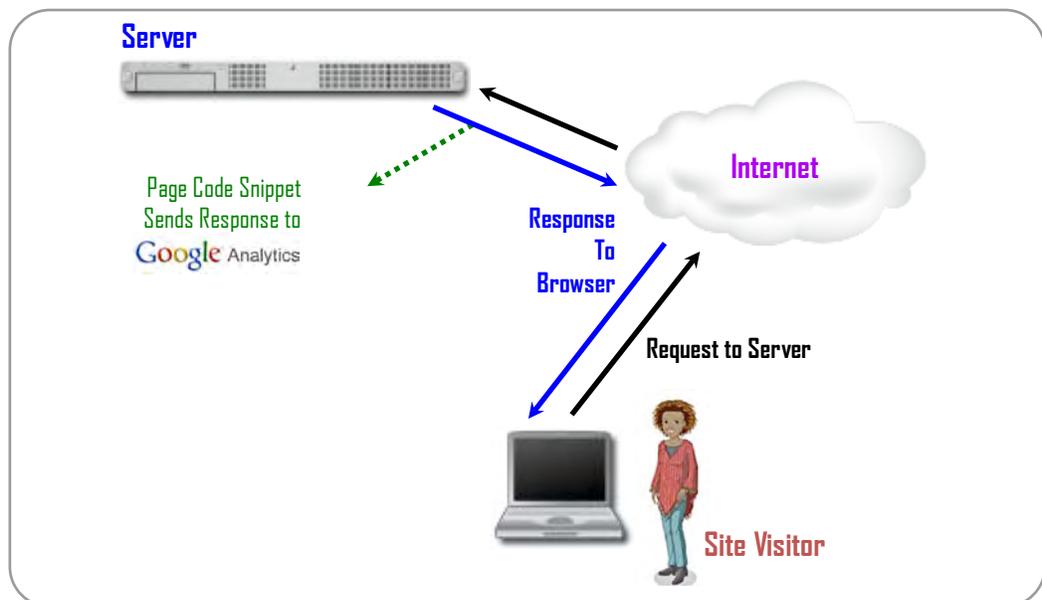
General

Traffic counts were undertaken to attempt to gauge gross use of GLP sites and to see if page visits revealed usage patterns. The period chosen was the most recent period (at the time the traffic analysis was begun) for which sufficient site logs existed for the site.

Page Tagging

Google Analytics uses the *page tagging* approach. A small piece of code is added to pages that the site manager wishes to track. The code sends a message to the analytics software with information about the requesting Internet address, the page requested, and so on. As with all traffic analysis techniques, page tagging is somewhat imprecise. Google Analytics does not know, for example, if more than one person is using the same Internet address, or if more than one person is using the same computer to access a site. Therefore it is most accurate when providing information about page views, rather than *visitors*.

How Analytics Data is Gathered

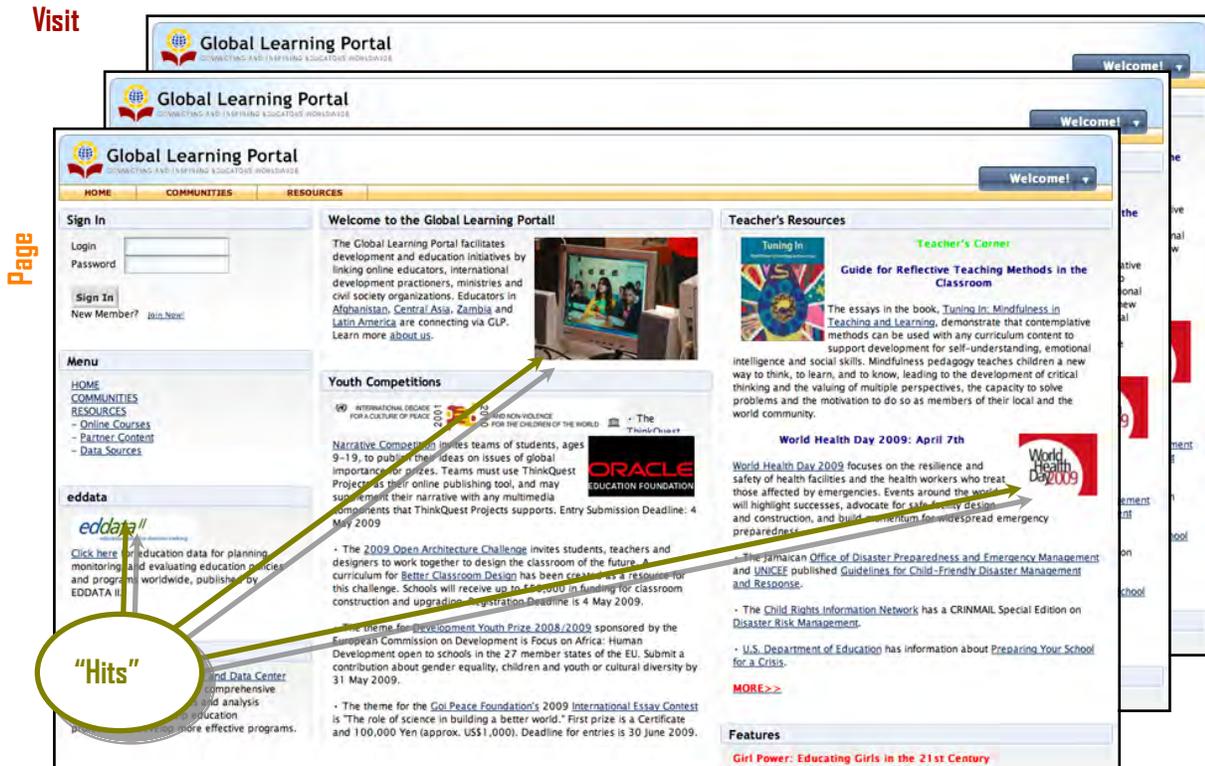


Limitations of Traffic Analysis

With any analytics tool, even simple terms like *visit* require somewhat arbitrary delineation. For example, Google Analytics considers a single server connection of more than 30 minutes in duration to be two *visits*. Geographic origin of visits relies on tables that compare Internet addresses to physical locations; these tables can sometimes be out of date or incomplete.

For this report discussion of visitor organizational types was avoided. The primary reason is that Top Level Domains (TLDs) such as .com, .net, .gov, .org and so on are no longer an accurate indicator of the organization with which a visitor is associated. Outside of large government and nonprofit networks, the .com, .net, and .org TLDs in particular frequently have no real meaning; .com is used for nonprofit as well as commercial sites, .net is no longer confined to use by network providers, and .org is often misused for sites that are not not-for-profit.

Analytics Definitions



Visitor

An individual visiting the website, who may or may not have previously visited – this figure is an estimate that assumes one visitor per Internet address

Visit

One visitor reaches the website and views one or more pages

Page

A combination of files that when rendered by a web browser show as a single web page – a single viewing of a page by a single visitor is a *page view*

Hit

A request from a web browser to the web server for a single file (HTML, image, server include, style sheet, etc.) – a term that is no longer used in behavior analytics because it does not reveal visitor behavior and distorts traffic analysis