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Private sector engagement in education: Where, and how, are global dynamics heading?

Established in 2002, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is a multi-stakeholder partnership focused on supporting and financing education in low and lower middle income countries, contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal on Education (SDG 4).

In March 2017, the GPE Board approved the Financing and Funding Framework (FFF) in recognition that to successfully deliver on the ambition of GPE's strategic plan requires a significant increase in domestic, GPE and other international financing, including private foundations and the business community, combined with delivery mechanisms that respond to differentiated developing country partner needs at both global and country level.

With a core focus on basic education (one year of pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary education) GPE provides significant investment and support for the inclusion of Early Childhood Care and Education in national Education Sector Plans in its 89 partner countries - most of which is provided by non-state actors.

Using GPE data as a departure point, the presentation will then discuss recent research on key outcomes of increasing investments by the International Finance Corporation – the private sector arm of the World Bank Group – in private sector provision of education services, including fee-charging private schools.

It will also draw on comparative research to describe the education trajectories of six OECD countries (Canada, Chile, Cuba, Finland Sweden, and the United States) that pursued two different educational strategies – public investment and market-based privatisation – and illustrates how differing economic rationales, policy drivers, and education mechanisms have resulted in higher than average PISA scores for those that pursued public investment, and lower than average scores for those that pursued market-based privatisation.

Further, it will describe how international human rights law and associated economic, social and cultural rights conventions offer a framework for a discussion on private sector engagement in education that avoids a collapse in to a polarized public-versus-debate.

The presentation will close with GPE's current position on private sector engagement and pose questions for discussion within the symposium theme of global economic and political uncertainties.