

# ACCELERATOR PROGRAM BRIEF FOR POLICYMAKERS



**WORLD BANK GROUP**  
Education



## Background

Even before COVID-19, the World Bank estimated that more than half of children in low- and middle-income countries were not acquiring the foundational reading skills – a key skill that underpins future learning. To shed light on the depth of the crisis, in September 2019, the World Bank introduced the concept of Learning Poverty (LP) and an accompanying global learning indicator constructed jointly with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Learning Poverty is defined as the percentage of 10-year-olds who cannot read and understand a simple story. At that time, 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries were estimated to be learning poor by the end of primary school. This situation has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which according to recent simulations, could drive Learning Poverty to a record 63 percent in low- and middle-income countries.

Especially in light of SDG4, we need to act today to accelerate learning and build back better performing education systems. Even though country challenges vary, a set of evidence-based interventions have successfully improved foundation learning across a range of contexts. Positive change *is* possible, and children’s foundational learning skills *can* be improved quickly. This requires technically sound interventions, as well as persistence and political will.

The Accelerator Program, [launched in late 2020](#), aims to recognize and support a small, global cohort of governments that exhibit the crucial ingredients in the fight against learning poverty. These governments demonstrate strong political and financial commitment to reducing learning poverty; willingness to measure and monitor learning outcomes; and readiness to implement large-scale, evidence-based foundational skills interventions. The initial cohort of Accelerators includes Brazil (state of Ceará), Ecuador, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria (Edo State), Pakistan, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone. By achieving success at scale, Accelerators can offer inspiration to one another, exchange experiences on what works, and motivate other countries showing how focused action and commitment can lead to relatively quick improvements in the education.



## Program Objectives

The objective of the Accelerator Program is to bolster support for governments to reduce learning poverty through focused, evidence-based action. The program aims to demonstrate that with technical support and specific evidence-based interventions, it is possible for governments to improve their foundational learning outcomes at scale within a 3-5-year period. To do this, the World Bank will work with governments to:

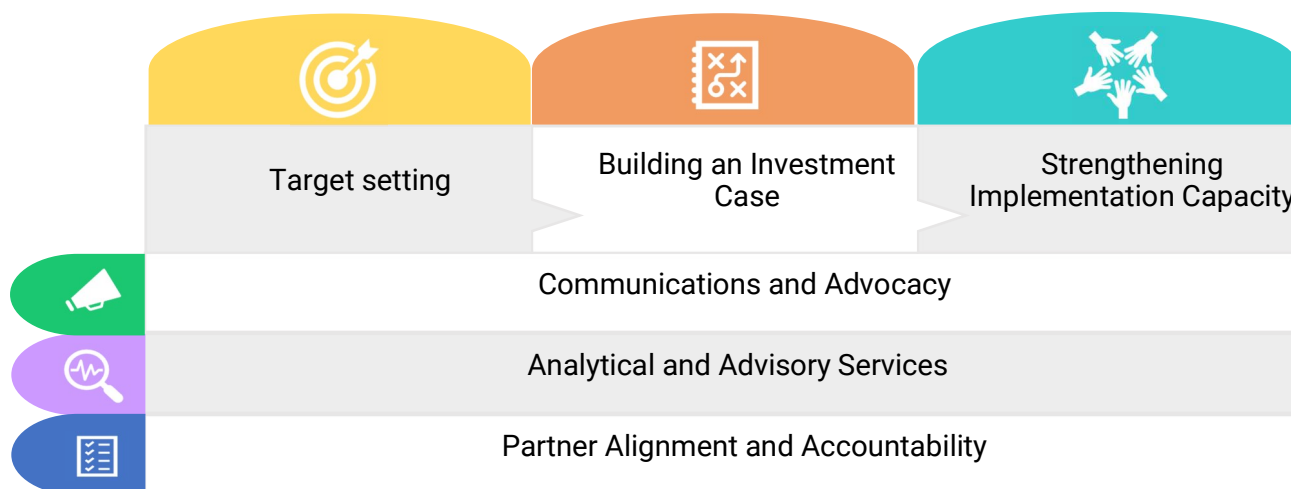
1. Set, measure, and monitor key targets with an emphasis on foundational learning.
2. Develop a clear, evidence-backed, costed, and realistic plan on how to reach the set learning targets (i.e., investment case).
3. Strengthen the governments' capacity to implement interventions and programs.

UNICEF will complement this effort and strengthen society-wide commitment and support by engaging in Accelerators to:

1. Design and implement an advocacy campaign to establish, publicize and secure wide-ranging support around government learning targets.
2. Make available a range of analytical and advisory services, in the form of global public goods (tools, guides, and technical support), to support governments as they plan and implement; and,
3. Increase partner alignment and accountability by facilitating coordination of donors, civil society (including teacher organizations), and the private sector around the learning targets, investment case, and programming support.

## Program Design

The Accelerator Program has six main components: Target Setting; Building an Investment Case; Strengthening Implementation Capacity; Communications and Advocacy; Analytical and Advisory Services; and Partner Alignment and Accountability.

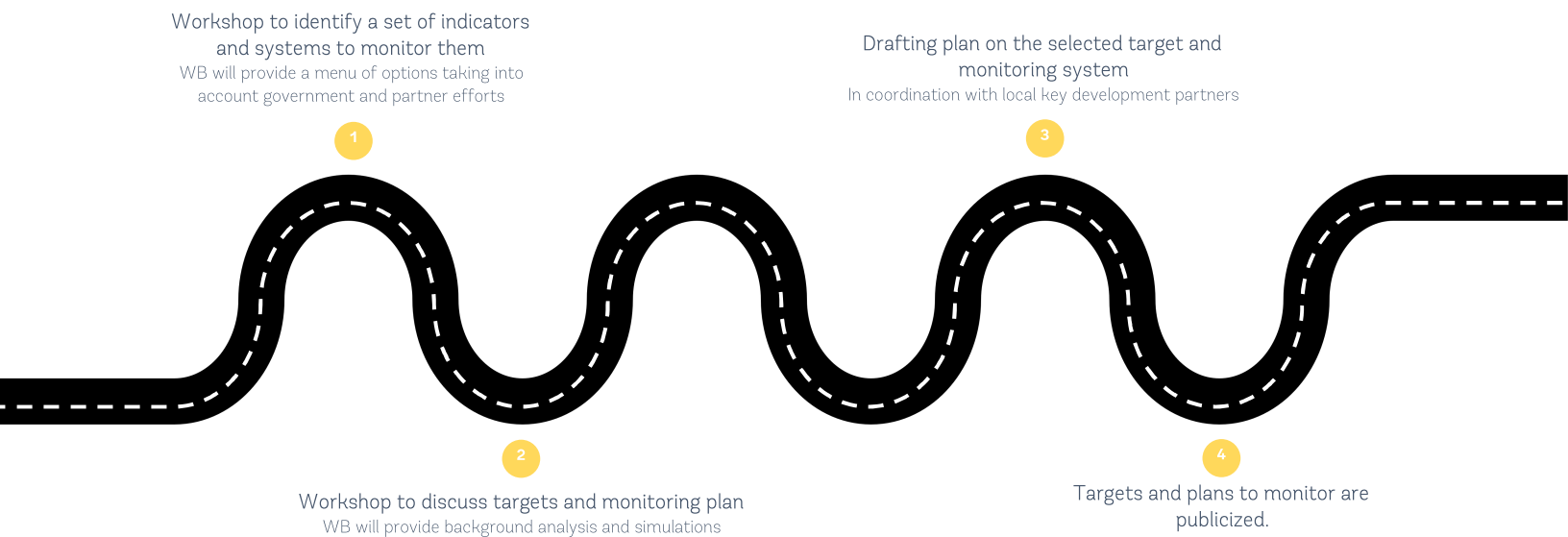




## 1. TARGET SETTING: Setting learning poverty targets and monitoring outcomes

This exercise will involve identifying a few key learning outcome indicators related to foundational skills that are easy to communicate and act upon. Governments will define the key learning outcome indicators that collective efforts hope to move and establish systems to monitor progress over time. Focusing the government and education stakeholders on a small set of ambitious but achievable outcome indicators is one source of potential acceleration. As final output of this activity, governments will set learning targets and strengthen their capabilities to monitor foundational learning outcomes.

*A roadmap for how the target setting and monitoring will be undertaken:*



## 2. INVESTMENT CASE: Developing a costed plan to reach the targets and to align internal and external actors and funding

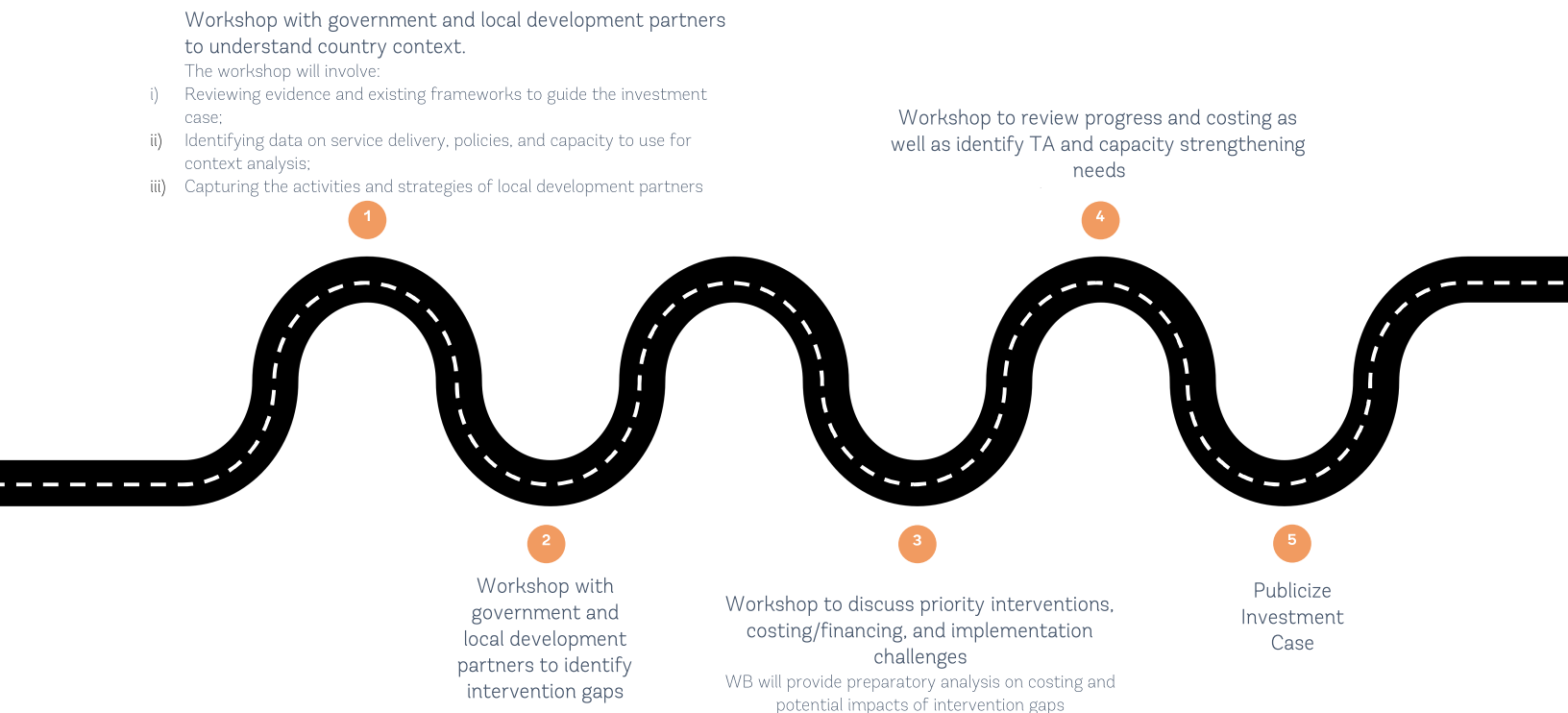
This exercise will result in an “investment case”: a compelling, clear, costed, and evidence-based roadmap for achieving the learning targets. The ambition of the targets should reflect the ambition of the plan. The Investment Case is narrower in scope than an Education Sector Plan with an exclusive focus on foundational learning, while also being broader than the design document of one particular project (such as the World Bank’s Project Appraisal Documents). The investment case should integrate partner interventions to achieve the target through a common strategy. The government, the WB team, UNICEF, and other interested development partners (e.g., USAID, FCDO, GPE, UNESCO,



etc.) will review how existing activities and plans align with key evidence-backed interventions and will analyze existing capacity to improve foundational learning.

The intended outcome of the exercise is greater alignment across the government and key partners towards an evidence-backed approach to reaching the government’s targets to improve foundational learning outcomes. This alignment will allow the government to maximize the impact of technical and financial resources from partners. A secondary outcome of this exercise is potentially bringing in additional partners to collaborate to reach the government’s targets. The prioritization of evidence-backed interventions and strengthened alignment across interested partners are also expected to accelerate progress.

*A roadmap for how the investment case will be built:*



### 3. CAPACITY STRENGTHENING: Building the government’s implementation capacity to reach the set targets

The program will promote cross-country knowledge exchange of lessons learned from shared challenges and experiences. A Community of Practice will serve as a forum for this exchange. In addition, the program will facilitate access to strategic technical support and disseminate key resources, materials, and tools. Accelerator governments can benefit from support on the use of existing resources such as [TEACH](#), a free classroom observation tool developed for low- and middle-income countries, and [COACH](#), an accompanying initiative to build effective and powerful in-service



teacher professional development programs. Other materials will be curated specifically for the group and include a set of “playbooks” to guide implementation of interventions, and resources to support the design and delivery of formative assessment tools.

For some of the Accelerators (Kenya, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria-Edo State, and Rwanda), the *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation* (BMGF), via the Foundational Learning Compact umbrella trust fund, has provided additional funding which can be used for advisory services and analytics, technical assistance, or implementation capacity development (e.g., supporting increased coherence in the system between different interventions, supporting data collection and analysis, developing information systems, planning and implementing learning assessment strategies, re-evaluating interventions based on current context, etc.). Governments will have flexibility to adapt the technical assistance to their needs.

As part of this process, the [Global Education Policy Dashboard](#) may also be implemented (if it is not already in place) to generate evidence that can guide implementation and monitor progress over time. This dashboard collects data on the drivers of learning in terms of practices, policies, politics and bureaucratic capacity. It includes a set of 39 key indicators on areas such as teacher pedagogical skills and content knowledge, learner preparation, school management, accessibility of infrastructure, de facto policy implementation and bureaucratic capacity, highlighting gaps between current practice and what the evidence suggests would be most effective in promoting learning. Additional resources will hopefully be mobilized for Accelerators not covered by the BMGF grant

*A roadmap for how the program will aim to strengthen implementation capacity:*

Workshop to identify capacity-building needs and preferred mechanisms.

The workshop will involve:

- i) Identifying topics of interest for capacity strengthening
- ii) Discuss capacity strengthening/knowledge-sharing activities and venues suitable and feasible in each country

1

Additional intense tailored capacity building activities

For the subgroup of governments with BMGF funding

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Take advantage of capacity building activities and resources

These might involve a resource repository, workshops, seminars, south-to-south learning events, study tours, conferences, and others

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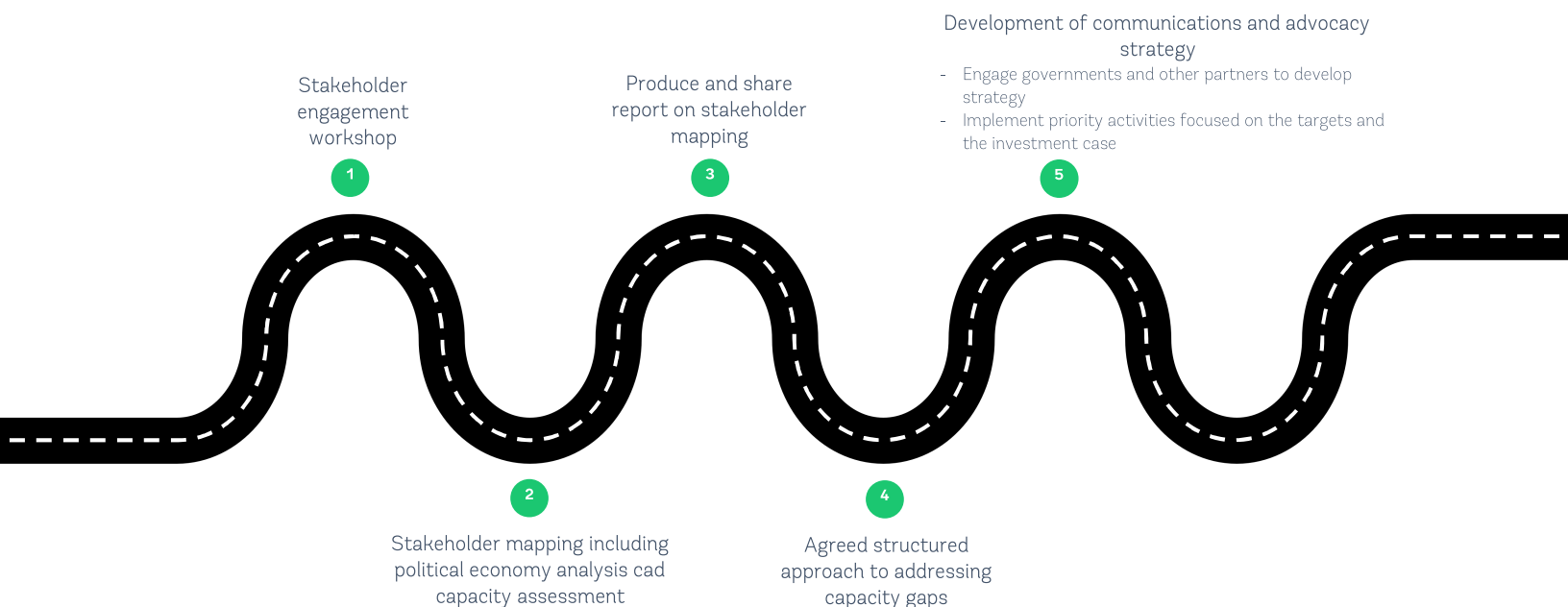
Implementation of the Global Education Policy Dashboard



**4. COMMUNICATIONS AND ADVOCACY: Informing and engaging national stakeholders behind the targets**

This exercise will leverage UNICEF’s leadership and expertise in advocacy to develop a communications and advocacy plan to inform and engage key national and local stakeholders around the government’s targets, the investment plan and the importance of focusing on foundational learning. Additionally, it will involve designing and implementing an accompanying resource mobilization strategy to “crowd in” financial resources to implement communication and advocacy plans at scale. The main aim of this exercise is to ensure strong ownership of and support for the targets amongst national and sub-national policy makers, influencers, and stakeholders.

*A roadmap for how the program will aim to strengthen communications and advocacy:*



**5. ANALYTICAL AND ADVISORY SERVICES: Supporting governments as they plan and implement**

UNICEF will coordinate with partners to deploy relevant analytical and advisory products (including global public goods) that provide a rich set of tools to support countries: i) a menu of evidence-based options for improving foundational learning thus providing accelerator governments with easy access to the latest research on what works; ii) a tool to assess the capacity of personnel to deliver accelerated programming; iii) training on how to develop tools and conduct assessments on foundational reading and math; and iv) support for small scale research on what works in each country and how to expand to national scale. The provision of these tools would depend on government demand.



*A roadmap for how the program will aim to provide analytical and advisory services:*

Develop global public goods to support evidence-based programming

These goods will include a menu of options to improve Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and modules and training materials on formative assessment

1

Provide technical assistance for local research on "what works" and "how to scale"

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Build and deploy a Capacity Review Tool through which government can assess their capacity to deliver accelerated FLN programs

## **6. PARTNER ALIGNMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY: Aligning development partners around the program**

UNICEF will advocate and orient the coordinating bodies to focus on the learning targets and identified evidence-based initiatives more explicitly, as well as strengthen accountability for foundational learning. This approach will involve working proactively through Local Education Groups (LEGs) and other coordinating bodies among government and the development partners in the Accelerator countries as platforms to achieve tighter alignment and common vision around the learning targets and the Accelerator Program. Support for the LEG will be focused explicitly on its strategic effectiveness, organizational capabilities, and collaboration capacities through the lens of the learning target. LEGs will more likely be explicitly oriented to hardwiring the objectives of the learning target into ESP development, implementation and monitoring, addressing financing and resource use, promoting harmonization and alignment, and fostering mutual accountability. This will be critical to align development partners around the targets, investment case, capacity strengthening, and funding.



*A roadmap for how the program will aim to increase partner alignment and accountability:*

Assess the capacity and functioning of the Local Education Group (LEG)

This will involve a "light touch assessment" of the LEG (building on the GPE LEG Assessment Tool)

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2

Develop a plan to strengthen the LEG's focus on foundational learning (including the learning target)

Map data sources and gaps and strengthen data systems and reporting

This will involve:

- i) Establishing a mechanism for monitoring progress of FLN and promoting harmonization and alignment among partners
- ii) Supporting improved sector reviews by strengthening the use of evidence and the focus on foundational learning

3





## Roles

The Accelerator program is led by the Education Ministries or relevant agencies of each participating country, supported by the World Bank and UNICEF offices, consultants hired at the country-level and global technical experts providing assistance as needed. Although members will vary from country to country, what follows provides a rough description of the participants in each group. The table does not mean to be exhaustive, and thus does not include important actors like the LEG and other local development partners.

### ACCELERATOR GOVERNMENT DELEGATION

Each partner government should dedicate an **Accelerator program focal point** to coordinate the work and communication towards the World Bank, UNICEF and other partners. This could be the same person as the primary focal point for the corresponding investment project.

In addition, the countries may want to identify 3-7 policymakers to form a country delegation committed to actively participate in the Accelerator program. Country delegations should be comprised of members from the following groups:

- **Core Team (3-5):** These are technical staff or managers in the Ministry of Education or relevant agencies. In particular, the Core team could be composed of:
  - Representative from the national assessment unit, the national assessment agency or the group in charge of creating the unit/agency to act as a main technical counterpart of the exercise of establishing and monitoring targets.
  - Representatives from Planning unit and the directorate of primary/basic education at the ministry of Education who will act as the main technical counterpart of the exercise of developing the investment case.
  - Representative with the expertise, interest and commitment to act as a counterpart to help the Global Accelerator Support Team identify the capacity strengthening needs in the country to achieving the learning targets and serve as a committed member in the cross-country community of practice.
- **Decision Makers (1-2):** These are higher-level officials responsible for policy decisions and resource allocation. Examples include Ministers, Vice Ministers and/or Permanent Secretaries of Education, Finance, or Planning.

### WORLD BANK

The World Bank country office education team will be the direct counterpart of the Accelerator country delegations for the first three components of the accelerator program, supporting them in *target setting*, the development of the *investment plan*, *capacity building* and throughout the program implementation. The country team will be supported by a global accelerator support team.

### UNICEF

The UNICEF country office education team will be the direct counterpart of the Accelerator country delegations for the following components of the accelerator program: advocacy and communications, analytic and advisory support, and accountability and alignment. The country team will lead day-to-day engagement on the program with support from regional and global education teams as required.



## In-country planning and ongoing support

The contextualization of the program is key. Thus, the World Bank and UNICEF Accelerator support teams will engage in planning and check-in meetings with each country team as follows:

1. **INITIAL PLANNING MEETING:** Prior to participation in program activities, each country delegation will meet with their country’s World Bank and UNICEF teams for an initial planning meeting to understand the accelerator program components and kick off the planning process. The World Bank staff, in collaboration with UNICEF, will work with the country delegation to develop a plan for the program design and implementation.
2. **REGULAR CHECK-IN MEETINGS:** Throughout the program, World Bank and UNICEF teams will periodically meet with their country delegation to ensure that the support offered by the Accelerator program is aligned with the country’s current activities and needs. Country delegations will be able to share feedback on program activities, iterate plans, and indicate areas where technical assistance and other capacity strengthening is needed.

## Timeline

The Accelerator Program is a multi-year effort spanning 3-5 years. Although implementation will vary to adjust to country contexts, below is an indicative timeline with key goalposts and milestones.

