

# Guidance Note: The Accelerator Investment Case

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## Background

In 2019, the World Bank introduced the concept of Learning Poverty, a measure of the percent of children who could not read and understand a simple text by age 10. Learning Poverty in low- and middle-income countries was estimated at 53 percent, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, the figure was close to 90%. Data show that progress towards reducing Learning Poverty has been slow, and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated what was already a deep and inequitable learning crisis through widespread disruptions to schooling. In low- and middle-income countries, Learning Poverty could rise from 53% to around 70%, making it difficult to reach the SDG 4 aspiration of quality education for all. As the economic crisis associated with COVID-19 poses fiscal constraints on governments' ability to increase or maintain current levels of education spending, there is a need to spend smarter. Tackling the learning crisis requires prioritizing and implementing evidence-based strategies to accelerate progress in learning.

Given this context, the Accelerator Program promotes activities that prioritize evidence-based and cost-effective interventions that can substantially accelerate progress on children's foundational learning outcomes, particularly foundational reading. To that end, the work under the Accelerator Program is guided by evidence underpinning how children learn to read, effective practices that foster literacy skills, and features of successful programs that have accelerated children's reading outcomes.

## What is the Accelerator Program?

The Accelerator Program provides evidence-backed technical assistance to help countries substantially increase their rates of progress in foundational learning skills, particularly early grade reading. Through this program, the World Bank, along with UNICEF and other development partners, is supporting a small cohort of governments that demonstrate strong political and financial commitment to reduce Learning Poverty,<sup>1</sup> are willing to measure and monitor learning outcomes over time, and are ready to implement an evidence-based plan to achieve significant improvements in foundational learning. To that end, the Accelerator program will provide resources to fund interventions likely to make the largest impact on foundational learning. The Accelerator Program focuses on the following activities:

- ***Establish and monitor government targets related to Learning Poverty (Target Setting):*** The target-setting exercise will identify a small set of foundational learning outcome indicators that a government will use as targets for improving learning. The targets will be easy to communicate and will serve as a reference point for progress towards reducing Learning Poverty. Focusing the government, development partners, and education stakeholders on a small set of measurable learning outcome indicators that are monitored over time can incentivize acceleration in learning outcomes.
- ***Create a roadmap of technical assistance based on evidence-backed, prioritized and costed interventions to accelerate progress towards foundational learning targets (Investment Case—as per the guidance in this document):*** The output of this exercise is referred to as the Accelerator Investment Case (IC), which is a roadmap to provide technical assistance and allocate resources towards a small number of evidence-backed interventions with the largest impact on foundational learning outcomes. The government, the World Bank team, and development partners will review how the country's existing activities and plans align with the evidence-backed interventions to

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<sup>1</sup> Here we are referring to the broader “concept” of Learning Poverty (“ability to read and understand a simple text by age 10”), rather than the specific Learning Poverty “indicator” that combines the share of primary-aged children who are out of school with share of pupils at the end of primary below a minimum proficiency in reading, using particular enrollment and assessment data.

improve foundational learning. Based on this, the Investment Case will propose interventions to accelerate foundational learning outcomes and meet the government’s learning targets.

- **Strengthen government implementation capacity to accelerate learning:** Using the interventions identified in the Investment Case, additional funding is allocated to strengthen implementation capacity for the country-based program. This support may take different forms, such as (i) technical support, and advisory services and analytics for implementation capacity development, (ii) a community of practice where countries and global experts can exchange and share knowledge, and (iii) practical and accessible materials and tools.

This document offers a conceptual overview and general guidance for developing the **Investment Case**. The document also presents a simple, customizable, and collaborative approach to estimate the cost of the Investment Case and develop sustainable financing strategies.

## What is an Investment Case?

The Investment Case is an **evidence-backed, prioritized and costed plan** to rapidly accelerate improvements in foundational learning. Development of the Investment Case involves taking stock of existing country efforts to improve foundational reading and comparing those efforts against a body of knowledge on how children learn to read, effective practices to foster reading skills, and frameworks of evidence-based approaches drawing on global efforts to improve foundational learning. Examples of frameworks include the World Bank’s [Literacy Policy Package](#), the BMGF-financed [Systems Implications for Core Instructional Support](#), [USAID’s Reading MATTERS](#), and [UNICEF’s FLN Hub](#). Based on this exercise, the Investment Case proposes a roadmap for improving foundational learning and achieving government-set learning targets through prioritized technical assistance. One key intended outcome of the exercise is greater alignment across the government and key partners towards an evidence-backed and costed approach to reach the government’s targets for foundational learning.

The Investment Case will be **costed with a realistic budget** and, where possible, mapped to an appropriate source.<sup>2</sup> It is also important that the Investment Case costing plan is aligned with the government’s budget cycle, and identifies areas where the government’s own resources may need to be re-allocated or supplemented in subsequent budgeting processes. One intended outcome of the exercise is to facilitate discussions among government and development partners on how each agency can support the pursuit of the government’s learning targets and contribute to filling financing gaps. The Accelerator Program also provides financial resources for prioritized interventions to improve foundational reading.

The Investment Case will guide country and partner decision-making on interventions required to accelerate progress in foundational learning outcomes, cost those needed interventions, and mobilize resources through domestic resource allocation and international aid budgets.

## Core Package of Interventions in an Investment Case

This section identifies the core interventions needed to improve foundational reading skills. These core interventions draw on a large body of evidence on **how children learn to read** and **what classroom practices work** to build children’s reading skills. These core interventions can help improve the existing instructional processes for effective reading instruction in early grades.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the Investment Case may say that financing for adapted teaching and learning materials will come from the Accelerator Program, teacher training program will be financed by domestic/government resources, a community engagement program will be financed by a new development partner project, etc.

**Reading with comprehension** is the most important skill that children need to acquire in their early schooling years. Fluent reading involves two main skill domains: the translation of print into recognizable words (decoding) and the translation of words into meaning (linguistic comprehension). Both are required for reading comprehension (Moats, forthcoming). To gain mastery in these two areas, children need to learn a set of sub-skills: to understand spoken words (oral language ability), hear and make the sounds of words, recognize letter names and sounds, use letters to make words, recognize words, and ultimately, read and write chains of words and sentences (Reading Rainbow, forthcoming). Some of these sub-skills (for example, letter name and sound identification) need to be learnt prior to others and largely in a sequence.<sup>3</sup> Word-reading ability, in particular, is a key determinant of reading comprehension in early years, when children are learning to read in a language they understand ([Castles, Rastle and Nation 2018](#)).

Similarly, an extensive body of knowledge on **effective practices to foster reading skills** shows that effective literacy instruction depends on three key factors: 1) the amount of reading instruction and literacy practice in which children are engaged, 2) the extent to which the curriculum is based on evidence-based approaches to developing literacy skills, and 3) the quality of instructional (teaching) practices used in the classroom (Shanahan, forthcoming). With the right amount of reading practice, an evidence-aligned curriculum that emphasizes developing reading skills, and effective teaching, most children are able to become proficient readers, that is, accurately reading 100 words per minute (Shanahan, forthcoming).

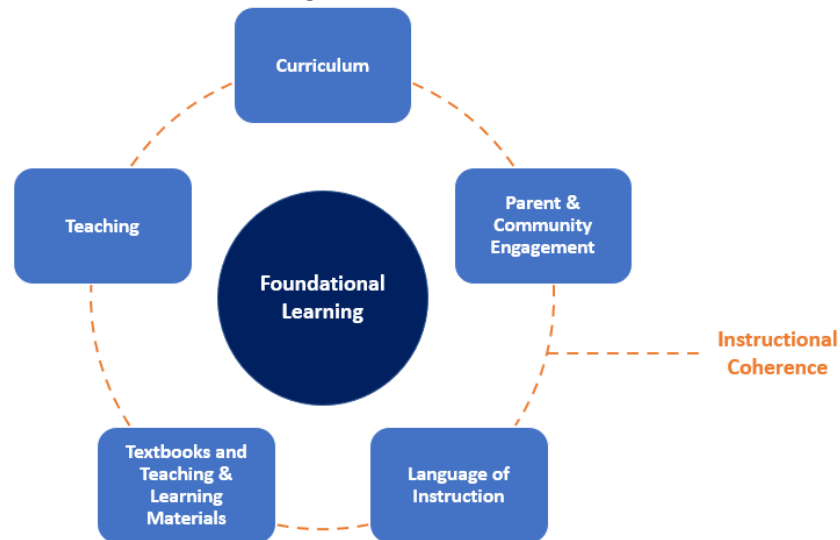
Finally, **lessons from reading programs around the world** over the past fifteen years demonstrate that improving student learning outcomes is feasible at a manageable cost, *if* education systems prioritize foundational learning and design and implement contextually appropriate interventions aligned with children’s learning levels ([Hwa et al. 2020](#); [USAID 2019](#)). Instructional approaches centered on effective teaching, high quality textbooks, teacher’s guides, books for reading practice, formative classroom assessment that is used to guide instruction, and the use of a language of instruction that children know have been trialed and evaluated, producing clear evidence about effective ways to improve learning at scale.

The Investment Case draws on this rich body of evidence on how children learn to read, what teaching practices foster the development of reading skills in children, and the foundational learning frameworks in use by USAID, UNICEF, RTI, FCDO, and others, to prioritize 6 core issues that are crucial to improve foundational learning (Figure 1).

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<sup>3</sup> The sequence described is for alphabetic languages (most common form of language/writing system and what characterizes most Learning Poverty), and the sequence varies somewhat for non-alphabetic writing systems.

**Figure 1. Six Core Issues for Foundational Learning**



### **Core Issue 1: Curriculum**

A well-planned and evidence-aligned curriculum is central to any effective program to improve foundational reading. An evidence-aligned curriculum emphasizes the development of the skills, abilities, and knowledge children need to become fluent readers ([Castles, Rastle and Nation 2018](#)). To advance foundational reading goals, the curriculum must adequately cover the development of reading skills in early years, appropriately sequencing the basic sub-skills required of proficient readers. The national reading curriculum and the school timetable should allocate at least 90-120 minutes a day to reading instruction ([USAID Reading MATTERS](#); Shanahan, forthcoming). The curriculum must also clearly specify standards for the knowledge and skills that students need to acquire every year ([World Bank 2021](#)).

Effective reading curricula for grades K-3:

- Include all four skill areas: Listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- Follow a skills-based content, scope, and sequence: Oral language development, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension (Reading Rainbow, forthcoming)
- Are guided by a linguistic-based content, scope, and sequence: Language-specific, introduces commonly used letters first
- Integrate formative assessments
- Match teacher and student abilities (Teaching and learning at the right level)
- Are contextualized: Fit classroom context, class size, and availability of instructional materials
- Are appropriately paced: Fit actual instructional time (day and year)

Potential Interventions:

- Review and revise curricula as needed: develop skills-based and linguistic-based content, scope, and sequence (Reading Rainbow, forthcoming)
- Use learning data to pilot and adjust revised curricula
- Adapt curricula for it to be implemented effectively in existing context (for example, de facto instructional time and teacher skills)

## **Core Issue 2: Teaching**

Successful acquisition of reading skills requires at least 90-120 minutes of effective instructional time per day ([USAID Reading MATTERS 2019](#); Shanahan, forthcoming), and additional time for practice. Students who come to school with lower levels of oral language, less knowledge of the language of instruction, and less preparation for school in an early childhood education setting require additional time to learn to read ([Abadzi 2009](#); [Andersen et al. 2016](#); [Benavot and Gad 2004](#)). For a typically developing learner in a well-equipped classroom in a high-resource context, learning to read fluently and with comprehension takes 3-4 years (Moats, forthcoming). Evidence-based instructional approaches, such as those that provide explicit instruction in phonics ([Castles, Rastle and Nation 2018](#); [Rose 2006](#)) and the mastery of a sequence of additional sub-skills critical for learning to read with comprehension (Reading Rainbow, forthcoming), can enable most children to become fluent readers (Moats, forthcoming).

In addition to adequate and evidence-based instruction, effective literacy instruction requires practical, focused, and ongoing support to teachers ([Pushparatnam et al. 2021](#)), so that teachers can provide the instruction children need to become proficient readers. Effective teacher professional development programs reinforce evidence-based pedagogical approaches, content knowledge, and include ample guided practice with students. In some contexts, it is also important to provide literacy instruction for teachers in the language of instruction, to ensure that teachers are prepared to teach in that language. Furthermore, simple formative assessments can support teachers to determine student progress and tailor teaching practices accordingly.

Key features of effective reading instruction for grades K-3:

- Structured lesson plans and matching teacher’s guides and student books that are based on skills-based and linguistic-based content, scope, and sequence (Reading Rainbow, forthcoming)
- Tailored, practical (skills-based, with guided practice with students), focused and ongoing (multiple short training courses throughout the school year) professional development
- Coaching for teachers in their classrooms, as frequently as feasible, to support skills development and refine training
- Literacy instruction in the language of instruction, if needed
- The development and use of simple, practical methods for formative assessment
- Sufficient amounts of instructional and practice time: at least 90 minutes (preferably two hours) of instruction every day of the school year (which should be at least 180 days), with additional time for practice

Potential Interventions:

- Develop professional development programs and ensure reading courses are evidence-based and include sufficient practice
- Coaching: Develop supportive, learning-oriented approaches to support teachers in their classroom
- Ensure that all teachers are trained in the use of teacher’s guides containing structured lessons that are appropriate for their context
- Ensure that teachers are prepared to use formative assessments to improve learning

### **Core Issue 3: Textbooks & Teaching and Learning Materials**

A key determinant of reading acquisition is experience with print – children need exposure to as many words as possible ([Castles, Rastle and Nation 2018](#)). Access to evidence-based teacher’s guides, textbooks, and books for reading practice and content knowledge development, all in languages children and teachers know, is critical for developing foundational reading skills. All teachers need a teacher’s guide, every student needs a textbook, and sufficient books for practice should be available so that students are regularly exposed to new and different reading experiences. The use of effective procurement procedures and open source (typically Creative Commons-licensed) materials can greatly lower the costs and improve the quality of these books, so that more books can be provided to more students.

The effective use and provision of teacher’s guides, textbooks, and supplementary books for grades K-3 requires:

- Textbooks and teacher’s guides that are in a language students and teachers know, aligned with structured lesson plans, formative assessment, and contain additional text (fiction and non-fiction) for reading practice
- Textbooks and guides that are developed, piloted, and revised to ensure fit with context
- A strong and transparent book supply chain, including publishing, printing, procurement, distribution and use, resulting in students and teachers receiving the books they need when they need them.

Potential Interventions:

- Review existing teacher’s guides, textbooks, and supplementary books
- Review existing materials in neighboring countries or regions that use the same language(s) of instruction
- Revise and/or produce materials as needed, based on structured lessons, and in appropriate languages
- Analyze the book supply chain and act on resulting recommendations, across the entire chain
- Provide procurement support for textbook and book procurement to country teams and client country counterparts
- Ensure sufficient and stable long term funding for these instructional materials

### **Core Issue 4: Language of Instruction**

It is critical to teach students to read first in a language they speak and understand. Yet 37 percent of students in low- and middle-income countries are not being taught in the language they speak and understand. In some regions, this statistic is close to 90 percent ([World Bank 2021](#)). Foundational reading skills build on children’s oral language abilities, as children learn to match sound with print. That is why students learn to read more effectively when taught in a language that they know and understand ([Alidou et al. 2006](#); [Nag et al. 2014](#)).

Key features of effective language of instruction policy include:

- Students learn in a language they speak and understand
- Teachers are supported to teach in that language
- Textbooks, teacher’s guides, and additional teaching and learning materials are provided in that language

- Additional languages, if any, are introduced after students have mastered reading in their first language and developed strong oral language knowledge of the second language
- Content area instruction in the second language does not begin until late primary, at the earliest
- Appropriate strategies are developed for multilingual contexts

Potential interventions:

- Conduct a language mapping exercise to understand what language(s) children speak at home and what language(s) are used in their classroom
- Determine the appropriate language(s) of instruction to ensure children understand the language they are taught in
- Conduct social communication and advocacy campaigns targeting a range of stakeholders, especially parents and teachers, on the importance of teaching children in a language they understand
- Develop instructional materials in appropriate languages and train and support teachers to teach in those languages
- Develop appropriate assessments in appropriate languages so that children are assessed in a language they understand

### **Core Issue 5: Parent and Community Engagement**

Children’s early oral language development, from birth-age 5, is critical for the development of foundational reading skills. Supporting parents and communities in building the oral language skills of young children can assist children with reading acquisition once they enter school. Reading with a child during the early years is strongly associated with language and cognitive development ([World Bank 2021](#)). Children who are read to frequently can expect to be exposed to 1.4 million more words than children who are never read to ([Logan 2019](#)). Furthermore, parents can be encouraged to talk with children to develop their oral language abilities ([Hoff 2013](#); [Chiat & Roy 2013](#)). Families can also encourage reading through activities at home, for example, through reading together as a family. For example, in rural Kenya, provision of locally appropriate storybooks and dialogic reading training for parents that encourages parents to engage with children about the content of book (for example, asking child to identify illustrations, asking the child open-ended questions about the story, etc.) has shown to yield vocabulary gains for children with illiterate caregivers ([Knauer et al. 2020](#)).

Key features of effective parent and community engagement policy:

- Support parent and community engagement in children’s oral language development and other pre-literacy activities such as concepts of print
- Encourages parents and caregivers to take an active role in their children’s education
- Provides outreach, training, and materials that are context- and language- appropriate and support literate and less-literate parents and caregivers
- Promotes a love of language and reading among children and communities

Potential interventions:

- Review existing parent and community programs for whether they contain the elements in this list
- Develop reading-focused outreach activities especially those that hinge on supplementary reading materials that are graded and linked to the in-school lesson plans
- Produce context and language-appropriate materials for parents and caregivers



- Consider other delivery options to support parents in engaging with their children around literacy activities such as radio, TV, internet, among others, depending on context
- Enlist health care providers and social service workers to distribute books and informational materials to engage parents and caregivers, where possible and appropriate

### **Core Issue 6: Instructional Coherence**

Instructional coherence involves making all the pieces described under Core Issues 1-5 (curriculum, teaching, textbooks and teaching and learning materials, language of instruction, parent and community engagement) “fit together”. It involves ensuring that each of the five core issues and teams working on these issues are aligned with each other, and coherent around the goal of promoting foundational reading. For instance, in some countries, there may be incoherence between the curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments, with teachers incentivized to prepare students for exams, which may emphasize different topics or depths of knowledge of specific topics than the curriculum ([Atuhurra and Kaffenberger 2019](#)). Such incoherence can detract from the goal of attaining foundational reading.

Improving reading outcomes and reducing Learning Poverty requires coherent implementation of the core interventions noted above and highlighted here:

- Instruction in a known language
- Structured lesson plans that follow skills-based (Reading Rainbow, forthcoming) and linguistic-based content, scope, and sequence
- Effective instruction by prepared and supported teachers
- Effective coaching to support teachers
- A textbook for every student, a teacher’s guide for every teacher, and additional books for reading practice
- Sufficient instructional and practice time
- Formative assessment
- Parent and community engagement

The elements above have to be tightly integrated with each other, some more so than others. Structured lesson plans need to align with textbook content, but there are a range of effective strategies to increase parental engagement. Furthermore, effective mechanisms to ensure that alignment and coordination ought to exist.

### **Why an Investment Case?**

While an Investment Case builds on what already exists, such as Education Sector Plans, Project Appraisal Documents, National Strategies, it is different from these other resources due to the following features:

- **Prioritization:** The Investment Case guides decisions about how to allocate resources and technical assistance towards a small number of prioritized evidence-backed interventions with the largest impact on foundational learning outcomes. Furthermore, unlike national strategies and Education Sector Plans, which are often broad, the Investment Case focuses only on foundational learning, with a particular emphasis on foundational reading.
- **Alignment:** Given that activities outlined in strategies and sector plans often exceed available resources and capacity, partners and government officials do not often share a common understanding around prioritization of activities. This process results in fragmented responses to

the challenges of foundational learning, duplication of efforts and/or incoherence across the various interventions. By aligning partners and the government around a common strategy and set of activities to meet the government-set targets, an Investment Case can reduce fragmentation, which in turn can minimize duplication of efforts, allow more efficient resource allocation, foster coherence across various interventions, and amplify the impact on foundational learning outcomes.

- **Focus on returns on investment:** When limited resources are available to address the myriad priorities outlined in sector plans and national strategies, it becomes important to prioritize the activities that will have the greatest impact or those that tackle the biggest barriers to learning. The Investment Case offers a process by which country, partners, and relevant stakeholders can review how existing activities and plans align with the evidence-backed interventions and prioritize interventions that most efficiently move the needle on foundational learning.
- **Focus on implementation:** Fairly frequently, the question of implementation capacity is often overlooked. Yet, gaps in implementation capacity are often cited as a key reason for why interventions fail to deliver results. Particular attention should be paid to strengthening management capacity to (i) implement interventions in a coherent way and (ii) take an iterative and adaptive approach to implementing programs. In successful cases, a key focus has been on checking for, and insisting on, fidelity of implementation of agreed-upon evidence-based processes.
- **Accountability (lack of outcome targets):** Too often, plans and activities outline inputs as the targets to reach (E.g. X million books will be delivered, X million teachers will be trained), but very few actually set outcome-based targets to ensure that effectiveness is kept top-of-mind. While input-based targets can help ensure that program implementation is on track, setting outcome-based targets serves as a strong accountability mechanism since the focus shifts from “providing coaching to teachers” to “providing effective coaching to teachers so that learning gains can be realized.”

## What Does an Investment Case Document Look Like?

There is no predefined format for the Investment Case, as it will differ by country based on needs and priorities. In countries where there is already a sound strategy for tackling Learning Poverty, the Investment Case can be a short document that can be appended to the existing strategy. In other countries, where a new project is being prepared to alleviate Learning Poverty, the Investment Case can be developed as part of the Project Appraisal Document (PAD), and included as an annex. In countries where no such strategies exist or where the strategies exhibit noticeable shortfalls, the Investment Case can be further expanded into a longer document. To focus on progress in the short- to medium-term, the time period covered in the Investment Case is 3-5 years, although this can be adapted to country needs.

A good Investment Case should cover:

**Strategic context discussion:** This section should briefly summarize the progress and challenges in the country’s basic education system, particularly with respect to the six core issues related to improving foundational reading (see Section “Core Package of Interventions in an Investment Case”). The section can consider practices at the school level, policies responsible for those practices, and the political and

bureaucratic environment in which policies are created, for example, using [GEPD](#) data and/or framework. When describing the challenges, particular attention needs to be placed on cross-cutting themes such as gender, financing, and the extent to which the country leverages technology to enhance learning. In this section, the Investment Case should also outline clearly the ambition of the investment case, as measured through outcome-based learning targets.

**Set of evidence-backed priorities:** This section should describe the extent to which the evidence-backed core package of interventions that promote foundational learning (See section “Core Package of Interventions in an Investment Case”) are being implemented in the country. This section maps current activities and describes interventions currently being financed and/or implemented by the government, World Bank, and partners. Based on this mapping of current activities and comparison with evidence-backed approaches to improved foundational learning, the Investment Case can highlight what interventions are already in place, are well-designed, implemented well, and are progressing adequately, what interventions need to be strengthened or scaled up, and what interventions are missing in the current landscape. With this information, the Investment Case can then propose a prioritized set of evidence-backed interventions that can enable the achievement of learning targets. The interventions should be clearly defined, articulate what problems they are addressing, and be accompanied by a clear theory of change, methodology, target areas, target population, and relevant measures that will enable the team to estimate impact. For each of these interventions, appropriate costing should be included.

**Implementation approach:** This section should describe the implementation strategy for each of the interventions. For each intervention, specificity should be added on who will support Ministry of Education (MoE) with the coordination and implementation of the intervention (E.g. World Bank, UNICEF, independent firm, etc.). This discussion should include plans on how to monitor progress for each intervention. For instance, if a coaching program is proposed, how will progress and impact be monitored and over what timeline? The section ideally will also discuss risks to implementation, potential bottlenecks and implementation capacity gaps that may need to be addressed through targeted assistance. Finally, it is critical to have coordinating mechanisms in place to ensure that the implemented interventions are aligned with each other.

## Costing and Financing an Investment Case

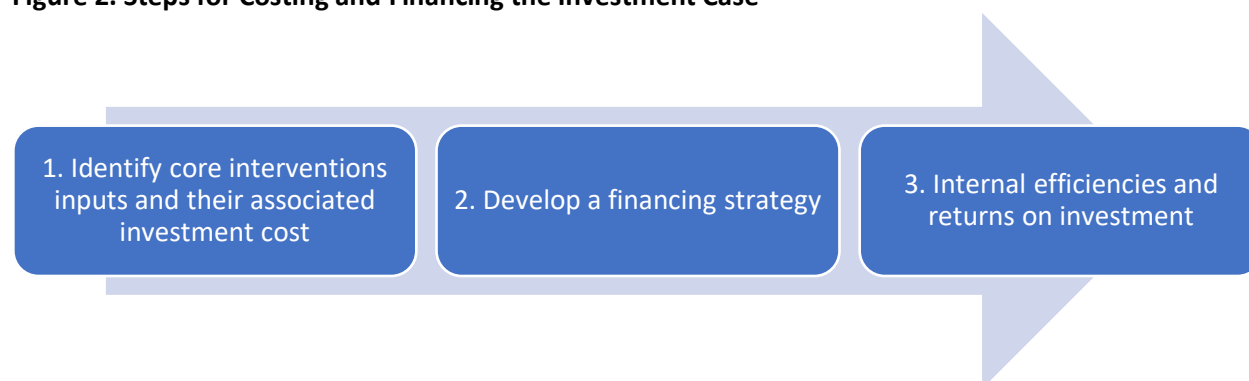
After the country specific key interventions for the Investment Case have been identified, the investments need to be costed, ensuring that there is clarity on the resource requirements for implementation, and the Returns of Investment (RoI) are understood. Framing the Investment Case in general, and the investment costs specifically, are current and historic national budgets, the national budgeting processes (National Education Accounts),<sup>4</sup> Education sector analysis/costed plans, Financial Rules and Regulations (FRR), and donor commitments. The approach will be adapted to the individual country contexts, based on the national priorities. Throughout the process, the country teams will lead the financing process as part of the ongoing and regular policy dialogues with governments, but with support, as required, from the education global team. The approach is built around three steps (Figure 2):

- 1. Identify inputs required for implementation of core interventions and their associated investment cost**
- 2. Develop a financing strategy**
- 3. Estimate internal efficiencies and returns on investment**

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<sup>4</sup> Where available

**Figure 2. Steps for Costing and Financing the Investment Case**



### 1. Identify core interventions inputs and their associated investment cost

Following the target setting, the identification of core interventions, the inputs required for specific interventions and their associated investment cost are mapped, recognizing those that are already costed out as part of the National Budget (MoE budget) and/of an education sector plan.<sup>5</sup> Key sources include Government price data, public expenditure data, National Education Accounts (NEA) data, education sector plans (ESP), budget/economic analyses by UN partners, and others,<sup>6</sup> and simulation model data from UNESCO. If possible, price indices derived from the International Comparison Program (ICP) dataset will be used for comparison. Following the identification of core interventions inputs and their investment costs, a succinct “Investment Proposition (IP)” document is produced, encompassing relevant information, including 1) Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) for the country specific investment costing process; 2) required analytics (PER, FinED); 3) sources of financial data/data gaps; 4) investment costing approach; 5) total investment costs anticipated from interventions; 6) expected outputs/returns of investments; 7) government and development partner resources; 8) resource/finance gap. The IP document should be drafted in conjunction with relevant government counterparts, and development partners where applicable, agreeing on the investment costing modalities (see separate detailed guidelines on the IP) process for country X. In accordance with government budget standards, the investment costing approach will outline a framework weighing multiple options for the investment case. Appropriate options will be identified by the country counterpart and may vary from country to country. Likely options are a; 1) *base* and; 2) an *accelerated* model.

- **The Base scenario** estimates the investment costs of selected interventions in country X (in line with the identified targets), with costs of inputs maintained at the most recent known level, equaling total investment costs of interventions over total period of implementation.<sup>7</sup>
- **The Accelerated scenario** assumes a more rapid and/or expanded scale up of all (or some) of the prioritized interventions, resources allowing, to achieve set targets scaled, or earlier than originally planned, with costs of inputs maintained at the most recent known level, equaling total investment costs of interventions over total period of implementation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The needs will vary from country to country. Priorities will include i) Estimating the upfront investment costs of all interventions inputs in the investment case; ii) clearly disaggregating investment costs to inform planning, government budgeting and implementation;<sup>5</sup> iii) cross-validating the investment costs estimates produced by the government, and iv) estimating the investment costs of implementing the investment case at various scales/levels.

<sup>6</sup> For example, budget briefs from UNICEF and simulations from UNESCO.

<sup>7</sup> Cost estimates adjusted for inflation (X year average/mean)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

The investment costs will be based on multiple sources to, as far as possible, safeguard accuracy in the investment costing model. The investment case costing will consider i) the current resources and operating characteristics of the national education system; ii) use agreed unit costs for consumables and human resources; iii) define annual targets (new resources and service coverage) to estimate the cost increment. The annual cost evolution will take the gradual growth in the volume of activities and the time to prepare and conduct the investments as they expand over time, into account as far as possible. The proposed approach will also assess to what extent the intervention will require engagement with National Directorates of Human Resources and Planning and Cooperation/Civil Service Boards, and the Ministry of Finance.

The investment cost estimates of intervention inputs covered in the plan are based on the education systems and services perspective and will not include wider societal costs or returns.<sup>9</sup> The investment cost parameters for the proposed interventions are of two main types:<sup>10</sup>

- **Recurrent investment cost:** Expenditure outlays necessary for the day-to-day running of and maintain service delivery.<sup>11</sup>
- **Capital investment cost:** Goods or assets that yield benefits for a period of more than one year. It includes expenditure for construction, renovation and major repairs of buildings and the purchase of heavy equipment or vehicles.

A taxonomy for the activity-based categories for investment cost measurement can be applied to the key activities related to the core interventions.<sup>12</sup> This can/should be linked to the Government budget classification.

## 2. Develop a financing strategy

Based on identified learning target(s), the prioritized core interventions, and the costed investment plan, the country team will prepare a financing proposal/model, estimating available financial resources, with inputs from government counterparts, relevant stakeholders, other World Bank teams, and the data repository collected for the Investment Proposition exercise. A short/medium term “*resource mapping*” accounting for the resources from government, development partners and other relevant stakeholders, will be completed. The resource mapping will provide a full overview of the resource commitments for the first three years of the Investment Case.<sup>13</sup> Data collected from partners is used to estimate the annual average external resource commitments, and following, the projected three to five years’ external resource commitments. Government data/commitments are estimated using national budget and expenditure/execution data, Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), Medium Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF), applying assumptions and projections from NEA and ESP data (if available). Incremental increases in annual commitments can be factored into the model. If needed, to narrow down the focus, the resource mapping can concentrate on activities that align with the key interventions under the six core issues of the Investment Case (See section “Core Package of Interventions in an Investment Case”). The Investment Case can be instrumental in leveraging additional resources for financing key interventions aimed at reducing Learning Poverty. Underpinning the assumptions and parameters of the Investment Case, and in order to realistically estimate the finance gap over time, is the understanding of the national education budget in general, and revenue projections specifically.

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<sup>9</sup> Neither will the benefits of successful implementation include expected societal outcomes beyond education.

<sup>10</sup> In health, the OneHealth tool is used extensively globally for costing and estimation purposes.

<sup>11</sup> Training and supervision expenses, remuneration and technical assistance.

<sup>12</sup> See section “Core Package of Interventions”.

<sup>13</sup> Only the first year should represent full disclosure of the commitments from the major Development Partners in the education sector.

### 3. Estimating internal efficiencies and returns on investment

Comparing the investment cost of the identified interventions and overall financial envelope (over the defined implementation period), the total investment costs, available financial resources, and resource gap is estimated. Following this, financing needs are addressed with concrete plans for potential resource mobilization and/or re-allocation. Financing the Investment Case will consider Government budgets and priorities, through annual budgetary appropriations, alongside financial support from the World Bank and Development Partners, aimed at closing the identified financial gap. In addition to the need to increase resource mobilization – and longer-term predictability of domestic and external resources – increasing efficiency and effectiveness from the existing resources is paramount.<sup>14</sup> The global education team will support the country teams, assume a “problem-driven analysis” aimed at identifying and analyse specific PFM bottlenecks that undermine service delivery.<sup>15</sup> The purposes is to identify specific PFM ‘bottlenecks’ that contribute to observed service delivery problems, linked to the identified core interventions of the Investment Case (for example, book supply chain challenges to schools). The subsequent benefit of this approach is that it focuses attention on *specific* flaws in financial management that are linked to service delivery problems (as opposed to general deficiencies in PFM systems). The three key questions that an analysis will seek to answer are:

1. What are the main systemic issues and problems in the basic education sector that hamper effective service delivery at the school level?<sup>16</sup>
2. Are some of these problems related to financial management? If so, where are the root causes of these bottlenecks located in the PFM system?
3. Are there current resources in the education budget that can be repurposed, that will enhance internal efficiency and effectiveness in spending on activities towards the identified Investment Case targets?

The education global team can assist the country team, and government counterparts, conducting an analysis comparing the potential options in three dimensions: i) targeted impact on foundational learning skills, particularly early grade reading; ii) total investment cost, and iii) cost-effectiveness and Return on Investment (RoI). The analysis can help the counterpart determine what interventions provide the highest dividends at the lowest cost. The global education team will support the the process from the *preparation* phase to the design and *adaptation* phase, as necessitated by the country team.

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<sup>14</sup> Improved governance; public financial management (PFM) in education)

<sup>15</sup> Applying the FinED tool is a possibility

<sup>16</sup> Teams should draw on the findings of existing World Bank analyses of the basic education sector, where available (e.g. from SABER, the SDIs and the Global Education Dashboard) but this isn't a pre-requisite for undertaking a FinEd assessment.

## Annex A: Frequently Asked Questions

### Conceptual Questions:

#### **What is the goal of the Investment Case (IC)?**

The primary goal of the Investment Case is to support government efforts to accelerate progress towards attaining foundational learning targets through key evidence-based, prioritized, and costed interventions. The process of developing an Investment Case is expected to align the governments and development partners on a unified plan for improving foundational learning.

#### **How does an Investment Case (IC) differ from Education Sector Plans (ESPs)?**

An Investment Case will focus on a limited number of evidence-based prioritized activities needed to meet the foundational learning targets, with an emphasis on foundational reading, and as such will not be as expansive as ESPs. The IC also takes into consideration available resources and implementation capacity.

#### **How does an Investment Case (IC) differ from WBG Project Appraisal Documents (PADs)?**

The activities presented in the Investment Case are not constrained by what can be financed through World Bank investment projects or results-based financing. Information found in PADs (sector context, economic analysis, and other details) can be integrated into the investment case where relevant. The process of developing the Investment Case is also expected to be more participatory.

### Structure/Content:

#### **Is there a recommended number of priorities ?**

While there is no recommended number of priorities, the Investment Case should focus on a small number of primary priorities that can improve foundational learning outcomes quickly and effectively at the country level. Priorities should also take into account the specific country context and available resources.<sup>17</sup> The Investment Case may also include secondary priorities (interventions to pursue if capacity and resources allow).

#### **How specific should the intervention recommendations be?**

The Investment Case will aim to curate a limited number of interventions and describe them as specifically as possible. To allow for the estimation of both cost and impact, the descriptions will include the methodology, target areas, targeted population, and relevant measures. For illustration purposes of the specificity desired, please refer to Table A1 below.

**Table A1. Example Intervention in the Investment Case**

	<b>Intervention for strengthening teaching and learning</b>
General	Improve teacher training
Somewhat general	Train teachers on effective strategies to ensure development of reading skills of children
Somewhat specific	Build teacher capacity through innovative delivery of in-service training on pedagogical practices needed to improve reading skills of children

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<sup>17</sup>In the health sector, the Investment Cases that are part of the GFF tend to focus on an average of 5 priorities.



Very specific – desired case	Build teacher capacity through innovative delivery of in-service training on pedagogical practices needed to improve reading skills of children. Training will cover effective use of pedagogical practices like phonics to develop children’s reading sub-skills. A total of X teachers will be targeted. The in-service training will be based on X sessions spread over X weeks; with X% of the training taking place inside the classroom, to offer practical guidance to teachers. Associated with this training, follow-up in the form of monthly calls will be offered.
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**What time period should Investment Cases span?**

The time period covered is customized to the country needs. However, to ensure that prioritized objectives and targets can be advanced sufficiently, each Accelerator Investment Case should cover at least a 3-5 year time period.

**Development Process:**

**Who should lead the development of the Investment Case?**

The Investment Case will be co-led by the World Bank and the Ministry of Education teams.

**Which stakeholders within the country governments should be part of the development process?**

The development of the Investment Case will require a series of discussions with key stakeholders. Because the relevant stakeholders will vary from country to country, country teams will need to decide the composition of the workshops. Given the emphasis on planning specific interventions impacting early grade learning, it is suggested that the director-level representatives of the Ministry of Education offices in charge of curriculum, assessments, teacher professional development, early childhood education, primary education, pedagogical support (“inspection”), textbooks and teaching and learning materials, and (if it exists) bilingual education, along with other relevant development partners, NGOs and civil society representatives as needed. To ensure buy-in from the broader system, it is suggested that for the final workshop/meeting, the minister of education as well as some representation from the Ministry of Finance be invited to take part.

**How should the Investment Case consider existing plans and strategic analyses?**

The Investment Case will be aligned with existing plans, but it will try to prioritize those interventions that will likely yield best results in accelerating foundational learning outcomes. A section within each Investment Case will present this alignment with other plans and strategic documents. Where specific evidence-based and cost-effective priority interventions are not already covered under existing strategies, this will be communicated to country teams and MoE counterparts.

**What is the timeline of the development process?**

The duration of this activity will vary by country but is expected to take 2-4 months. In countries where there are already programs focused on reducing Learning Poverty, readily available data to set targets, and/or there has been a higher level of local coordination around these programs, the activity could take just 2 months. In other countries where this is not the case, it could take 4 months.



## Annex B. How to Develop an Investment Case Document?

The process for developing an investment case will vary by country context. In some countries, an ongoing process (such as the development of a new operation or a multi-donor consultation process) might be leveraged so that the Investment Case can complement the existing process. In others, the process may be independent. The steps, actions, and sequence below are suggestions that can be adapted for each country depending on contextual needs.

**Preparatory Work:** The preparatory work involves assessing what's already available and organizing the team that will support the development of the investment case.

- a) When **assessing what is already available**, it will be important to gather existing plans (Education Sector Plans, Human Capital Plans, National Education Strategies, Project Appraisal Documents, etc.), identify existing coordination mechanisms (LEGs, multi-donor partnerships, GPE compacts), data sources that would be useful for diagnosing problems in foundational learning (EMIS, GEPD, SDI, etc.), and a stakeholder mapping for the country (planned and conducted by UNICEF).
- b) When **arranging the team**, given that the process of developing the investment case will be largely overseen by the Country Office (CO) team, additional support might be needed. Particularly, there are two profiles that could be useful to recruit for to facilitate the development of the Investment Case. First, a [Senior Advisor](#) who can help lead the consultations with government and partners, facilitate workshops, and support the team in high-level dialogue for setting targets for foundational learning and developing a plan to reach those targets. Second, a [Project Coordinator/Research Analyst](#) who can organize workshops and consultations, organize resources, and conduct analytical tasks. In addition to the CO team, the global team will assist with key analytical tasks such as summarizing the evidence and defining the core package of interventions (and communicating it to stakeholders), assisting in the costing and resource mapping exercises, engaging with government counterparts, and helping estimate potential impact (when feasible).

**Engagement Work:** One key outcome of the Investment Case exercise is greater alignment across the government and key partners towards an evidence-backed, prioritized, and costed approach to achieve the government's targets for foundational learning. The process through which the evidence-based plan is designed is key, and needs to be informed by discussions with in-country counterparts. A series of conversations are needed to align government and partners around a common strategy and can occur over approximately 2 meetings/workshops over 2-4 months. The number of meetings/workshops, how these topics are discussed, and the specifics of each process will vary by country. The process of developing a good investment case will involve meetings/workshops that tackle the following questions:

- a) ***What are the key metrics on the state of the education system, particularly with respect to foundational learning?*** The goal of this discussion is to gain a common understanding of what the basic education system looks like, particularly with respect to foundational learning. What share of children are out of school? What share of children are in school and not learning basic foundational skills? What are the foundational learning levels of children in various subjects at different grades? How much instructional time do children receive? Do all children have access to textbooks and supplementary materials? In what language are children instructed? How many teachers are available? Do teachers have the appropriate subject knowledge and pedagogical skills? Do teachers have access to well-designed lesson plans? Do teachers get appropriate support and training to improve instructional practices? Etc.

- b) ***What are the key problems related to foundational learning in the country?*** This discussion goes over the available data to reach an understanding of what the key problems are in terms of foundational learning outcomes (what needs to be improved), particularly with respect to the 6 core areas, as well as the factors that could be driving such low/high learning (practices in the school, policies, and politics and bureaucratic capacity). This could already be captured in existing documents and data sources. A brief overview of the challenges can be a powerful way of aligning government and partners around a common understanding of what the key problems related to foundational learning are, before discussing priorities and specific interventions.
- c) ***What does the contextual evidence suggest is effective for promoting foundational learning?*** This includes discussions around what the evidence suggests is most important for promoting foundational learning. The core package of interventions to promote foundational learning will be provided by the global team, and are based on evidence related to the science of how children learn to read, effective practices to foster reading skills, and various evidence-based frameworks in use by World Bank, USAID, UNICEF, RTI, FCDO, and others. It will also include evidence from rigorous evaluations of successful programs within the country itself.
- d) ***Of these evidence-based interventions to improve foundational learning, what is being done in the country and by whom? Do they align with the identified problems?*** This discussion relates to the assessment of how the mapping of current and planned activities match what the evidence suggests can promote foundational learning. Part of this discussion involves mapping what's already being implemented or is already planned, and see the extent to which the identified problems are being addressed.
- e) ***Of the things that are being done to improve foundational learning, are they being done effectively? In a coherent way?*** The discussion tries to identify things that are working well and in a coherent way (e.g. effective training is provided to teachers on how to teach in the mother tongue and this is aligned with the procurement of teaching and learning materials in the mother tongue).
- f) ***What's missing from efforts to improve foundational learning? What could be improved?*** Based on the explicit comparison of what the evidence suggests is effective to promote foundational learning and what is already happening in practice, this conversation can identify impactful interventions that are missing, or interventions that are being implemented but need to be strengthened, aligned, or scaled up.
- g) ***Of those interventions, the absence of which one has the highest perceived negative impact on foundational learning?*** This discussion can be the first step in the prioritization process. In essence, of those missing interventions, are there any that must be addressed urgently to tackle an important issue affecting foundational learning?
- h) ***What has the highest potential for having a large positive impact on foundational learning?*** This question is to discuss, of those missing interventions, are there any that the evidence suggests would have the largest impact on foundational learning outcomes?
- i) ***Are key cross-cutting themes, such as gender, being considered in efforts to improve to improve foundational learning?*** How are girls integrated into the plan? The Investment Case should reflect any material differences in existing gender-disaggregated data and include interventions to address relevant gender disparities in foundational learning.
- j) ***How much do these interventions and/or refinements to improve foundational learning cost?*** This discussion leads to a better understanding of what the costs associated with each intervention to improve foundational learning are. This is a key piece of information needed to ensure that proposed interventions are funded through available resources. Specific costing information can be generated through a collaboration between the global and country teams, and government counterparts.

- k) ***Based on the identified problems, the evidence behind each intervention, and their cost, what interventions should be prioritized to improve foundational learning?*** This discussion can bring together the previous ones to prioritize a small set of evidence-based and cost-effective interventions to improve foundational learning.
- l) ***What are the challenges to implementing interventions to improve foundational learning?*** Once priorities to improve foundational learning are identified, a discussion is needed on how they should/could/will be implemented. In this discussion, it is important to identify potential implementation capacity gaps that might need to be addressed through targeted assistance. For instance, an intervention to improve foundational learning could relate to making sure that the foundational textbooks for reading are closely aligned with the lesson plans, in terms of content, scope, and sequence. For this, a functioning arrangement between donors working on these potentially separately-implemented aspects, and government, would be needed, and it would have to be ready to work effectively.
- m) ***What are the sources of funding for these interventions to improve foundational learning?*** A discussion to map proposed interventions to the sources of funding for each of them. For activities that require sustained support from the Ministry of Education beyond the initial upfront cost, a discussion should be had on the feasibility of sustaining such interventions in the medium- to long-term. For instance, the Accelerator Program may finance the development of a coaching program to improve foundational learning. However, that coaching program may require recurring financing from Ministry of Education to ensure that the program can be sustained over time.
- n) ***Are there funding gaps that need to be resolved to finance efforts to improve foundational learning?*** If additional priorities/interventions to improve foundational learning are identified for which funding is not available, this section can include alternative scenarios in which these priorities are costed, as a way of showing potential partners and stakeholders how additional resources would be invested if they were to become available.
- o) ***How to bring it all together?*** Final discussion on bringing those pieces together. By this point, there is a clear sense of the challenges, what is being done, what needs to be done, what the key priorities are, their cost, and how they will be financed, as well as how progress will be monitored.

**Analytical Work:** In parallel to the engagement work, analytical tasks may be needed, particularly on costing the interventions and technical assistance. This work can be supported by the global team and adapted to the particular needs of the country.

**Drafting Work:** As a last step, the Investment Case is drafted with the information gathered through the existing resources, the workshops/meetings, the analytical exercises, and the partner and government consultations. Once the Investment Case is finalized, it can be publicized and disseminated among all relevant stakeholders.