

## USE OF LEARNING ASSESSMENT DATA IN THE PLANNING CYCLE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The newest data released by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) show that 617 million children and adolescents worldwide are not reaching minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics even if two-thirds of them are in school (UIS factsheet No. 46, 2017). For many students around the world schooling is producing little or no knowledge, a state of affairs which is often referred to as a global learning crisis. It is even more preoccupying that this crisis remains invisible in multiple contexts. Even if a number of countries conducting national, regional or international assessments has significantly increased over time (GEM-UNESCO, 2015), currently about 100 education systems still do not systematically assess student learning outcomes (UIS factsheet No. 46, 2017) and when assessment systems are in place, they frequently suffer from various quality issues (GPE, 2018).

While in some countries the key problem is the unavailability of learning assessment data and/or its low quality, it is increasingly available in others and yet is still not used in policy-making. Indeed, the existing evidence shows that information on student learning outcomes is not always used to inform the formulation or selection of education policy options in developing countries (UNESCO Bangkok, 2017; Best et al., 2013; Kellaghan et al., 2009).

This is a crucial issue as the ultimate value of information is its use and not its production (Custer et al., 2018). The available literature identifies various barriers to incorporating this data into the policy process, such as unfavourable political and institutional settings, lack of technical capacity to analyse the results, ineffective dissemination channels and irrelevance of the provided information.



The learning assessment data and its use are high-priority issues for many international organizations that are developing new initiatives to overcome these challenges. International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO) is also convinced that high quality learning assessment data interpreted together with other reliable evidence and considered in the light of national contexts should inform policies and the education planning cycle. It is therefore willing to contribute to international efforts to improve the use of learning data with a new research project focusing on its use in the planning cycle.

## Research objectives

The **general objective** of this research project is to generate context-specific knowledge and support some countries in the use of learning assessment data that would constructively inform the planning cycle. The project aims to achieve the following **specific objectives**:

1. Generate context-specific knowledge about the use of learning assessment data to inform national and global actors;
2. Produce specific recommendations to countries participating in the study to improve their practices when using learning assessment data in different phases of the planning cycle;
3. Inform IIEP technical cooperation work and training programmes with the up-to-date evidence on the use of learning data;
4. Engage in and foster partnerships working to improve the use of learning assessment data.

## Research questions

1. What is the intended use of learning assessment data as per regulatory frameworks and are different stakeholders aware of it?
2. How do countries use learning assessment data in different phases of the planning cycle?
3. What factors lead to the observed use of learning data?

The first question aims to explore how regulatory documents (e.g. laws, regulations, Memorandums of Understanding, contracts with assessment agencies) define the foreseen use of learning assessment data and whether different stakeholders are aware of it. The second question aims to observe the existing structures, processes, tools and practices around the use of learning assessment data in the planning cycle. These questions will allow IIEP to identify the disparities between the intended and observed uses of learning data. The third question aims to bring to light factors that lead to the observed use of learning data, paying particular attention to:

- institutional analysis elements,
- political economy elements (e.g. actors' interplay, stakeholders' power relations and interests),
- interaction of different barriers and enabling conditions,
- use of learning assessment data coming from different sources.



## Scope

**Geographical scope:** This research study will cover Sub-Saharan African countries. This region was selected because it is UNESCO's regional priority and their national assessment systems have received less attention in the literature.

**Assessment types and other evidence:** The study will examine the use of data generated by national, regional and international large-scale assessments. It will also consider citizen-led assessments and non-nationally representative assessments (e.g. EGRA/EGMA). However, it is understood that the learning assessment data are generated and used as part of an information ecosystem, where various information systems coexist and interact. The research will therefore analyse how learning assessment data are articulated with other available evidence such as EMIS data, national examinations, classroom assessments, household surveys, randomised control trials, national reports and donor project evaluations, that are all important information sources used in planning activities.

**Planning cycle:** This research project will focus on the use of learning data in the planning cycle and will explore how it is used in each of its phases (i.e. ESA, policy decision, ESP preparation, implementation and M&E). The study will focus on the central and regional/province/district levels. It will cover Basic Education.

## Methodology

As a general orientation to the conduct of this research, IIEP decided to opt for a **qualitative approach**. In line with research questions and the selected overall approach, the project will adopt a **multi-case study design**. It will allow analysing specific cases and national contexts to unveil the complexity lying in the interaction of different factors influencing the use of learning assessment data.

The research will use a combined approach of both **primary** and **secondary** information sources. Primary data will be generated from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions with key stakeholders and direct observations. Secondary data sources will be generated from a content analysis of documents available at the country level.

This research project will adopt a **practice-orientated** approach and will work with countries that are currently seeking to improve the use of learning assessment data in planning processes so that research results are **of direct use for their ministries of education**. The study will produce contextualised knowledge that can be communicated to national practitioners and development partners to improve the use of learning data.

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