The Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML)

Fourth meeting
Concept note

28-29 November 2017
Madrid, Spain

1. Background

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) plays a critical role[1] in the Education 2030 Agenda by producing cross-nationally-comparable education indicators and working with partners to develop new indicators, methodologies, statistical approaches and monitoring tools to better assess progress towards the international education targets. It has been designated as the lead agency for producing the indicators needed to track global progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, while sharing responsibility for some targets with other agencies.

The Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML) was convened by the UIS in early 2016 to provide concrete solutions to develop new indicators on learning (4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.6 and 4.7) needed to achieve SDG 4 and to set the standards for good practices on learning assessments by bringing together technical experts from around the world. Counting more than 250 members representing a wide range of stakeholders from Member States, academia, international organizations, NGOs, civil society and private sector, the Alliance is working to develop the standards and methodologies needed to measure learning globally, while helping countries to produce and use the information to achieve SDG 4.

To advance this work, the Alliance will hold its fourth meeting (GAML 4) on 28 and 29 November 2017 at the General Secretariat of the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) in Madrid, Spain.

2. GAML basic principles and components

Monitoring progress will require the measurement of student outcomes, in addition to youth and adults skills at several different stages of the life cycle in a broadly consistent way across education systems and socio-economic context. This is a challenge, given that learning, skills and the way they are measured vary widely across local contexts. For instance for the school-age points of measurement, education systems make independent interpretations and decisions about what learning means, how it is described in curriculum, and how it is assessed and reported.

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[1] Education 2030 Framework for Action, paragraph 100: "The UIS will remain the official source of cross-nationally-comparable data on education."

This does not mean that international alignment of learning outcomes and skills are out of reach, nor does it imply the need for the imposition of universal measurement processes. Rather, GAML's approach is informed by the following principles:

- a fit-for-purpose approach to international monitoring must be achieved that supports consistency in reporting of outcomes, while being flexible enough to accommodate a variety of approaches;

- the approach must provide access to tools and methods informed by international technical expertise, to assist education systems in building capacity; and

- the approach must be driven by commitment to meaningful assessment of learning and skills as a global public good, which is critical to the goal of quality education for all as stated in SDG 4.

GAML's approach comprises four key components:

- an interpretive backbone for understanding the SDG 4 learning domains, with sufficiently broad and detailed descriptions to accommodate the variations in interpretation of learning domains that exist across education systems;

- an independent articulation of good practice in assessment, informed by (but not prescribed by) principles and practices from leading assessment programmes;

- collection of robust information about the current state of assessment and evaluation systems around the world to guide reporting and capacity development; and

- exploration of alternative funding arrangements to allow expansion of coverage.

3. GAML implementation

Since its inception in 2016, GAML has made progress in three areas:

i)   resolving immediate issues in interim reporting on learning and skills;

ii)   collecting descriptive information for diagnostic purposes; and

iii)   developing methodologies, tools, standards and guidelines for sustainable reporting in the medium and long term.

Together, this suite of initiatives will equip education systems to maximise the consistency of their reporting against Indicator 4.1.1, as well as to pursue broader improvements to assessment and evaluation systems to drive improvement in student learning.

To answer some of the immediate issues and formulate a roadmap toward sustainable reporting, the GAML Secretariat has framed six task forces, one on each target (4.1, 4.2, 4.4,

4.6 and 4.7) and one crosscutting task force on assessment implementation, while a new one on capacity development will be discussed in GAML 4.

The Secretariat has also finalised the definition of GAML governance and the log frame to help provide clarity on the direction of technical discussions. Established before the third meeting of the Alliance, the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) oversees the operational effectiveness of the GAML agenda and the position of the Alliance within the broader SDG environment.

4. Conclusions from GAML 3 meeting

In the third GAML meeting, it was decided that the Secretariat would work with task force chairs to further develop the measurement strategy, log frame, products and timeline for each target. The Secretariat will set the overall direction with advice from the newly-established Strategic Planning Committee (SPC). The work should be supported by technical inputs to be commissioned by GAML on various relevant issues, in particular on the reporting scale, the development of a validation process and capacity-development tools in Task Forces 4.1 and Assessment Implementation.

5. Objectives for GAML 4 meeting

GAML 4 participants will be expected to:

- Receive updates on UN and Education 2030 processes regarding development indicators, as well as recommendations regarding reporting and capacity development with identification of the action items that have implication for GAML work programme;

- Discuss and endorse GAML governance and priorities in organization and communication;

- Review and endorse measurement strategies for each of the learning- and skills-related indicators under the responsibility of GAML;

- Discuss and approve the conceptual, methodological and reporting frameworks for indicator 4.1.1; and

- Finalise the learning outcomes and skills-related inputs to be integrated in the report prepared by the Technical Cooperation Group on SDG 4–Education 2030 Indicators (TCG) to the Education 2030 Steering Committee with detailed "work plan for each target together with an assessment of resources needed to fund the finalisation of the conceptual, methodological and operational work on the global indicators".