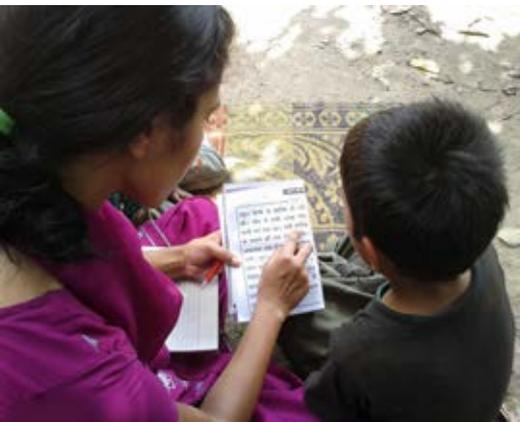




XALAPA 2017
Poder Para la Gente

INFORMATION BRIEF: SUB-THEME 3



Involving Citizen Volunteers Beyond The Assessments: Learning Interventions And Communication



PAL NETWORK
People's Action for Learning



**MEDICIÓN
INDEPENDIENTE
Aprendizajes**

Executive Summary

Over 80 participants from 19+ Global South countries attended PAL Network's 5th Annual meeting in Xalapa, Mexico to explore citizen participation in household-based learning assessments, under the meeting theme 'Power to the People'. Over the past 11 years, PAL Network member countries have recruited and trained more than half a million volunteers to conduct simple learning assessments in their communities. Every year, more than 68,000 citizens volunteer to traverse some of the most difficult and remote terrain in their countries, walking from house to house to find out if children are learning.

Beyond conducting learning assessments, some PAL Network member countries train volunteers for a number of additional projects aimed to catalyze conversations about learning and improve children's learning levels through targeted intervention programs. During the meeting, participants broke out into sub-theme groups to share information and discuss the potential role of the PAL Network in consolidating and learning from different countries' experiences.

It was agreed by participants that experiences from network members could benefit and inspire others to take similar actions – both within and outside the network. Participants agreed on four key steps to be taken by the PAL Network over the coming year, to encourage a variety of learning exchange opportunities to enable network members to further pilot and develop 'action' programs using citizen volunteers.

It was agreed that the first step would be for each country to document at least one case study of a program or initiative that they are piloting (or plan to pilot) in the 'action' space. Once each member country has documented their case study, the next step would involve mapping all the different pilot programs throughout the network to an 'Action Menu'. The Action Menu would allow members to learn more about each others; work and make direct contact for further information.

Following the creation of an Action Menu, participants agreed that it would be beneficial for PAL Network to organize different forums for a deeper exploration of action initiatives within the network. This could take the form of a series of online meetings, webinars or in-person workshops. Another idea that gained enthusiasm from participants was the potential for PAL Network to produce toolkits that would assist the network in obtaining simple, easy-to-access instructions on designing and executing a variety of different 'action' programs. Lastly, participants agreed that a natural next step to attending learning forums and having access to supporting materials would be to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanics of programs they planned to pilot. This would involve PAL Network facilitating learning exchange visits and fundraising for piloting action programs across network countries.

The 5th Annual PAL Network meeting was held in Xalapa, Mexico from 13th to 16th March 2017. The meeting was jointly hosted by Medición Independiente de Aprendizajes (MIA) and the PAL Network. The meeting provided structured opportunities for deep exploration of this year's theme: 'Power to the People'. The theme was critically explored by over 80 participants from more than 19 Global South countries in four different sub-theme groups. Each sub-theme focused on a different aspect of citizen participation in conducting household-based learning assessments with a focus on value, potential and next steps.

Power To The People

The power of this movement lies in the fact that it is led by citizens themselves. Every year, more than 68,000 citizens volunteer to traverse some of the most difficult and remote terrain in their countries, walking from house to house to find out if children are learning. Citizen-led assessments are "owned" by ordinary people, local leaders, local NGOs and other partner organizations at local and national level.

The PAL Network philosophy is simple. You cannot begin to find a solution without first understanding the problem. Finding solutions is not just the responsibility of policymakers, government leaders, head teachers and others, but includes parents and local citizens. The citizen-led assessment model allows hundreds of thousands of citizens to experience and understand the problem first hand in their own communities.

Citizen-Led Learning Assessments: What Do We Know?

Over the past 11 years, PAL Network member countries have collectively recruited and trained more than half a million citizen volunteers

Historically, volunteers have given between 1 and 3 days of their time to be trained, and approximately 2-3 additional days to conduct the assessment

The profile of PAL Network volunteers is as diverse as our communities themselves: in age, in occupation, in level of education, in socio-economic status, and many other indicators

PAL Network volunteers have different reasons and motivations for volunteering their time to conduct the assessment

Not all existing and past volunteers may be able, willing, or well equipped to participate or volunteer their time beyond conducting the assessment

Volunteers who are willing and able to participate in different types of activities like disseminating findings or in facilitating and supporting learning intervention programs may not be the same volunteers who conduct the assessment

Engaging Citizen Volunteers Beyond The Assessments

In some PAL Network countries, recruiting and training citizen volunteers to participate in the assessment is the first step towards facilitating citizen action to improve educational outcomes. In other countries, the assessment is a standalone process. And in others, citizen-led assessments are one of several parallel strategies to encourage citizen engagement with educational outcomes.

Beyond training volunteers to conduct learning assessments, some PAL Network member countries recruit and train citizen volunteers for a number of projects and programs in the 'next steps' – typically assisting with the dissemination of assessment results or facilitating and supporting learning intervention programs. This has happened in different ways, at different levels, and at different points in the process.



Sharing Experiences Across The Network

A Summary Of Group Discussions

During the sub-theme sessions in Xalapa, Mexico, the first part of the session focused on sharing experiences across the network. Network members were keen to learn more from each other and asked some of the following questions:

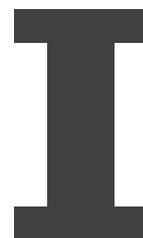
- 1 What is the typical profile of volunteers who conduct the assessments?
How do you train these volunteers?
- 2 Have you experimented with engaging citizen volunteers beyond conducting the assessment? What are the opportunities and challenges of this?
- 3 Is the profile of volunteers who are engaged in assessment Vs action? If so, how?
- 4 How are you sharing information about engaging volunteers in your country?

Experiences From Jangandoo In Senegal

“ The citizen-led assessment initiative in Senegal, Jangandoo, were keen to share their emphasis on high quality training. Volunteers participate in 5+ days’ training. In Senegal, the assessment takes place using electronic tablets, with the data being submitted in real time. Jangandoo staff ensure that all recruited volunteers are comfortable and confident using tablets to collect data and the most promising volunteers are promoted to interns. There are fewer than 10 interns recruited from the volunteer base every year, and they are given further training in



supervising data collection, data quality, and verifying the tablets are used in the field survey. Promising volunteers and interns have the opportunity to get promoted to supervisor roles within the Jangandoo structure. This motivates and inspires those exceptional volunteers to take on further responsibilities.



Experiences From Uwezo In Uganda

“ In Uganda, the citizen-led assessment initiative – Uwezo train volunteers to provide instant feedback to parents and guardians regarding the performance of their children. This happens in the household immediately after the assessment has taken place and provides an opportunity for conversations about learning to happen. Instant feedback can lead to further discussion about how parents and guardians can better support their children’s learning – both at home and in their school. In 2016, Uwezo Uganda piloted further engagement of citizen volunteers to convene local community meetings. This pilot took place in 2 districts. Selected volunteers were trained to convene a community meeting in their village immediately after



the assessment. Parents, school leaders and community leaders from the village were invited to attend, to talk about the results of the assessment and discuss what can be done to improve learning levels in the village. Every person attending the meeting was asked to commit to taking one action to help improve learning outcomes of local children. In 2017, Uwezo Uganda aim to produce accessible and simple communication materials that will be given to the volunteers to help convene and guide these meetings to catalyze community conversation and action.

Experiences From ASER In Pakistan

“ The citizen-led assessment initiative, ASER Pakistan, has been experimenting with a very similar model to that of Uwezo Uganda. ASER Pakistan are committed to the ongoing engagement of volunteers beyond conducting the assessment to lead dissemination activities in their local communities. Volunteers are trained and supported to communicate the findings locally, and at district level. At the village level, volunteers are responsible for organizing local gatherings and meetings, where they invite parents and teachers to come together and discuss the findings. At the district level, volunteers are encouraged to hold meetings with local



government officials to discuss the results of the assessment and raise awareness of poor learning levels. A small selection of the most engaged volunteers in ASER Pakistan have also volunteered as teaching assistants in local schools, prepared short report cards and written short stories and blogs about their experience in ASER which have been shared by ASER Pakistan as well as local media houses.

Experiences From Uwezo In Tanzania

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In 2016, Uwezo Tanzania conducted a pilot project in 9 districts. Selected volunteers were provided with additional training in communicating the assessment findings at local meetings, and then conducting 'mini assessments' to identify children who have already fallen behind. Through the 'mini assessments', volunteers were instructed to identify 10 children in their local community who were unable to read or complete basic maths. For a period of three months, the volunteers worked closely with the children and their parents to teach them how to read and do simple calculations. The volunteers found that engaged and optimistic parents were willing to work closely with them to help their children. In many cases, parents were just lacking the information to understand how they could help. After 12 weeks of support, approximately 70% of these children were able to read a Grade 2



level story and complete Grade 2 level arithmetic computations. Once equipped with some additional support, parents were able to continue supporting their children after the 12-week intervention. Two key challenges experienced by Uwezo were a) the sustained commitment of volunteers over a 12-week period and b) the skills and expertise required of these volunteers to teach the children and encourage the parents. In some instances, the volunteers were very committed but unable to do the job. In 2017, Uwezo Tanzania plans to conduct a similar 'action' project with systematic documentation of progress for wider sharing.

Experiences From ASER In India

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In India, ASER Centre has been conducting citizen-led assessments for 11 years. In each of India's 600 districts, ASER Centre works directly with a partner organization responsible for coordinating the assessment in that district. Volunteers are recruited through these partner organizations (NGOs, teacher training colleges, womens groups, or other community-based organizations). ASER Centre typically work with the same partner organizations year after year, forming a close relationship and getting to know the organization well. Every volunteer is trained through an ASER Partner institution. As a component of their training, the volunteers learn how to talk about the findings from the previous



assessment, and are trained to give the tests and tools to the village council head and the school headteacher. In addition, the volunteers carry two letters addressed to each of the above mentioned people, with the results from the previous assessment printed for their review. ASER Centre hopes that by sharing the tools and the findings, conversations will begin to understand why citizen-led assessments are done, and how they might be able to take some action of their own.

“ The citizen-led assessment initiative in Mexico, MIA, conducted several pilot projects in the state of Veracruz in 2016. The pilot programs trained local volunteers to participate and facilitate summer learning camps to help children who are falling behind. MIA worked in 5 local communities and 1 school in the region of Santiago Tuxtla and in 7 local communities in the region of Naolinco. In each community, MIA partnered with a local organization or a school. In each community, volunteers were recruited to facilitate the learning camps due to their previous engagement in conducting the MIA assessment. Additional volunteers were recruited for their experience and enthusiasm to help children learn and to gain valuable work experience. Volunteers were trained to help children learn through creative play, assessing their progress regularly using the MIA+ (MIA Plus) test. In maths, children are encouraged to learn how to count, add, subtract, divide and multiply using colourful bricks called Bancubi. Fun and interactive activities are planned for the children to learn how to read and write. In addition, some learning



camps incorporate agricultural activities (planting and growing vegetables), traditional dancing, as well as physical activities and games. The volunteers are trained by a team from MIA, supported by a small individual grant (USD \$75 per month) to develop and oversee the activities. MIA are currently in the process of learning from these pilot programs so that they can better document the processes and scale up.



What Is The Role Of The PAL Network?

After network members had shared their experiences of engaging citizen volunteers beyond the assessment cycle, the second part of the session focused on exploring what the role of the network might be in consolidating and learning from these different pilot programs. Some of the following questions were explored:

- 1 Is there something that can be done at a network-level to learn and share more about engaging citizen volunteers beyond the assessment? What might that look like?
- 2 At a network level, how can we better understand the impact of involving volunteers beyond the assessment?

From the rich and interesting discussions within this sub-theme group, it was agreed by participants that there is a wealth of experience and expertise within the network that could benefit and inspire others to take similar actions – both within and outside the network. The designing and piloting of programs that

go beyond conducting the assessment to engaging citizen volunteers to take actions to improve learning is a subject that is beginning to excite many people interested in seeing how assessments can be used to monitor learning progress through targeted intervention programs.



What Might The Future Look Like?

Next Steps For The PAL Network

After much discussion, participants agreed on four key steps to be taken by the PAL Network over the coming year, to ensure that we are capitalizing on sharing the rich experiences of network members

and encouraging a variety of learning exchange opportunities to enable network members to further pilot and develop 'action' programs using citizen volunteers.

1. Systematic Documentation Of Pilot Programs



One common thread repeated throughout the sub-theme discussions was the need for systematic documentation of these pilot programs. It was agreed that the first step would be for each country to document at least one case study of a program or initiative that they are piloting (or plan to pilot) in

the 'action' space. The participants agreed that it would be important to document the challenges and limitations of piloted approaches (as well as the successes) to avoid repeating mistakes that others have already learned from.

2. Mapping Study And Action Menu



Once each member country has documented at least one case study in the 'action' space, the next step would involve mapping all the different pilot programs throughout the network to an 'Action Menu'. The Action Menu would be shared amongst

network members and on the PAL Network website. This would allow members to learn more about the current work of the network and contact each other directly for further information.

3. Organizing Learning Forums And Materials



Following the creation of an Action Menu, participants agreed that it would be beneficial for PAL Network to organize different forums for a deeper exploration of action initiatives within the network. This could take the form of a series of online meetings, webinars or in-person

workshops. Another idea that gained enthusiasm from participants was the potential for PAL Network to produce toolkits that would assist the network in obtaining simple, easy-to-access instructions on designing and executing a variety of different 'action' programs.

4. In-Person Learning Exchanges And Funds To Pilot



One of the key challenges identified by participants in the sub-theme group was that of resources to visit and learn from other network members – in much the same way that the assessments first started. The second related challenge articulated by participants was obtaining funds to pilot such programs across the network. Participants agreed that

a natural next step to attending learning forums and having access to supporting materials would be to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanics of programs they planned to pilot. This would involve PAL Network facilitating learning exchange visits and fundraising for piloting action programs across network countries.



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