
Monday, 16th September 2019 | 2:30—5:30 p.m.
Seminar Room 4, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, UK

Introduction and Concept Note

Despite the global education efforts to move away from access and towards learning as a key priority, sobering evidence now show that the world is off track to deliver its commitments by 2030. Projections by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring Report shows that by 2030, around 20 percent of youth and 30 percent of adults will still not be able to read in low-income countries. As a way of tracking and reporting on global education progress, many countries produce data on student learning, mainly from national in-school assessments. Given the large number of out-of-school children and high absenteeism rates, such learning assessments have been criticized for not being representative of a country’s entire population of children.

To respond to this gap, PAL Network, a growing movement of citizen-led household-based assessments, has played an important role in reorienting the global education agenda through their assessment findings. PAL Network, a South-South initiative which has now been widely mainstreamed (UIS 2017-2019) cited and used to support discussions on learning (Bangay, 2015) has also demonstrated that ordinary educated citizens can be mobilized for extraordinary actions empowered by evidence for action. By producing data that, over a 10-year period, repeatedly highlighted the severity of the learning crisis in children’s foundational skills, citizen-led assessments have provided evidence that have helped to make the case for an inclusive and equitable lifelong learning for all goal within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the 193-member UN General Assembly in September 2015.

Apart from measuring the magnitude of the learning crisis, another big educational challenge facing the policymakers, planners, practitioners and parents is: are there proven, cost-effective and scalable interventions that can significantly improve basic learning in primary schools? As a response to this, the member countries have developed models and methods to improve children’s basic reading and arithmetic abilities, and has tried them out at scale. While several countries are experimenting with innovative programmes aimed at improving learning, few (such as Accelerated Learning Program/Teaching at the Right Level) have been tested rigorously for impact and scalability in a government-run primary school system.
Objectives of Consultation

The inclusion of a learning goal in the post-2015 global agenda in SDGs 2030 and the call for countries to commit to education to get back on track places increased responsibility on existing large-scale assessments of learning and achievement (both more formal, government-led efforts and grassroots scaled up CLAs). There is also amplified appeal for more financial investments to produce frequent and better data that effectively track and report on SDG 4. Even more important is the call for collaboration between countries to generate comparable data that can inform educational policy development. And PAL Network is taking the lead in this area. This year, a cross-national assessment to generate comparable data will be conducted across 13 countries of the network to measure foundational learning competencies for children in grade 2 or 3.

Against this background, the PAL Network would like to bring together its partners and stakeholders for a stock take of the value addition made by citizen-led assessments till date both in the form of data collection and testing innovative learning solutions that are growing as TaRL, accelerated learning, tech enabled and creative learning methodologies, evidenced by learning gains in diverse settings (Latin America, Africa and South Asia. The objective of the consultation is to have a discussion on;

1) The efficacy of the citizen-led assessment and utilization of the data collected for SDGs 2030/SDG 4
2) Emergent and growing learning solutions to address result based outcomes for the learning crisis at hand

The consultation will thus be an opportunity to gather critical friends and supporters to generate recommendations and leverage them in order to strengthen the processes that generate local/social accountability and relationships for improving the quality of education in low and low middle income countries and indeed pockets of learning crises in developed countries as well. The goal is to find ways to enhance influence and capacity of citizen-led assessments and learning initiatives to address, equity and inclusion for stronger systems by improving their design, action, accountability and advocacy efforts for meeting SDG 4 targets. The discussion is proposed around three core areas:

1. Assessments and learning solutions as experienced under the PAL Network: What more? What next?
2. How can we position civil society for more purposeful engagement for educational growth?
3. What must civil society actors do to be better at promoting transparency and accountability and forging measurable implementation?

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