

ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL LEARNING ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS [ANLAS]

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A GPE initiative to strengthen learning assessment systems

The *Analysis of National Learning Assessment Systems (ANLAS)* has been initiated by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) as part of the Assessment for Learning (A4L) initiative. ANLAS aims to provide a resource for developing country partners to build effective and sustainable learning assessment systems for evidence-based decision making in education policy and practice and to support education sector planning. Developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) on behalf of GPE, ANLAS provides a toolkit for countries to systematically gather and analyze information about their national learning assessment systems with the aim to inform the development and implementation of improvement strategies as part of the wider education sector planning process. Three of GPE's partner countries, notably Ethiopia, Mauritania and Vietnam, piloted the ANLAS approach during the first half of 2019.

Why is it important to analyze national learning assessment systems?

Learning assessments are essential tools for education systems around the world. They can generate sound, high quality data on learning and achievement that is used to monitor equitable educational outcomes, inform evidence-based policymaking and reform processes, and improve teaching and learning practice.¹ At the global level, the agenda around the Sustainable Development Goal for Education (SDG 4)² to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' by 2030, has reinforced a focus on learning assessment to gain data on learning that allow to establish and monitor education quality and learning progress.

The quality of the learning assessment programs administered is an important element of an assessment system. In addition, assessment systems are determined by contexts such as legislation and policy, institutional arrangements and governance structures, funding and leadership to achieve broad acceptance of learning assessment among all key stakeholders. The extent to which the contexts and assessment programs are consistent with other elements of the wider education system, for example with learning standards and curriculum, the structure of the education system, national education priorities and the ways in which assessment data is used for evidence-based policy and decision-making, is also an important element of the assessment system.³ In order to be effective in improving education quality and learning outcomes, learning assessment systems need to be regularly reviewed and constantly improved.⁴

¹ Cresswell, "System-Level Assessment and Educational Policy," 2017.

² Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, "Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators," 2016, 19.

³ Australian Council for Educational Research, "ANLAS. Manual," 2019, 1.

⁴ Braun, et al., "Improving Education through Assessment, Innovation, and Evaluation," 2006; Clarke, "What Matters Most for Student Assessment Systems: A Framework Paper: Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) Student Assessment Working Paper No. 1," 2012. Ravela, et al., *The Educational Assessments That Latin America Needs*, 2009.

For GPE, high quality learning assessment systems are a key element of effective and efficient education systems. As such, countries that apply for GPE Education Sector Program Implementation Grants (ESPIGs) are required to have a system or mechanism in place to capture learning data and to monitor student learning outcomes, or a time-bound plan to develop such mechanisms. In addition, GPE also offers results-based financing through the variable tranche of its ESPIGs in relation to a number of transformational and sector-level results, including in relation to learning outcomes. The progress countries are making with building good quality learning assessment systems is also monitored by GPE. Indicator 15 of the GPE Results Framework explores the proportion of developing country partners with a learning assessment system in place for the basic education cycle that meets quality standards.⁵ To further strengthen the capacity of learning assessment systems in partner countries, and to promote a holistic measurement of learning, GPE launched the Assessment for Learning (A4L) initiative in 2017. ANLAS is a major component of A4L, aiming to support and to provide guidance for partner countries to build and improve national learning assessment systems.

Embedded in the broader Education 2030 agenda to monitor progress towards achieving SDG 4, the ANLAS toolkit is provided by GPE as a global good for countries around the world that wish to undertake a comprehensive analysis of their national learning assessment system.

For the three piloting countries Ethiopia, Mauritania and Vietnam, a major motivation to implement ANLAS was the opportunity to gain systematic information about the national learning assessment system and, in consultation with various key stakeholders in the education system and in the assessment system, evaluate this information to identify areas of improvement that can be further translated into improvement strategies to be realized through education sector planning processes.

What is the content of ANLAS?

ANLAS is a *comprehensive, qualitative analysis* with a focus on three dimensions (see Exhibit 1):

- *Context* of the national learning assessment system
- *Quality* of the assessment programs administered, including national and international large-scale assessments, national and sub-national examinations and classroom assessment
- *Coherence* of the assessment system, with regard to the wider education system and other elements within the assessment system.⁶

Each dimension has several key areas (see Exhibit 1) with a defined quality objective against which the key area is evaluated. Based on this information, aspects that require improvement are identified, and recommendations are made about how the key areas can be improved.

An important cross-dimensional element of ANLAS is the application of knowledge and demonstration of 21st century skills – that is, skills that are considered important to succeed in today's knowledge-based society in which innovation and technology are predominant.⁷ Other terminology commonly used to describe this set of skills includes general capabilities, transversal competencies or cross-curricular competencies. Prominent examples of such skills are problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and social-emotional skills (for

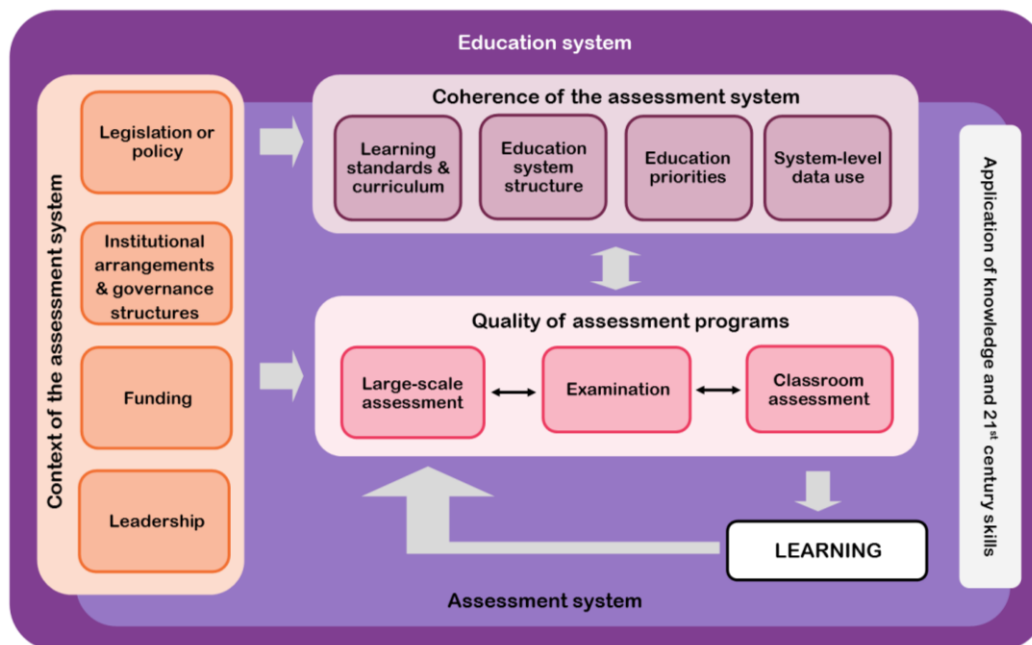
⁵ "Methodology Sheet for Global Partnership for Education Result Indicator 15," GPE, 2018, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/methodology-sheet-gpe-result-indicator-15>.

⁶ Australian Council for Educational Research, 2019, 1.

⁷ Care and Luo, "Assessment of Transversal Competencies: Policy and Practice in the Asia-Pacific Region," 2016.

example, intrapersonal, interpersonal, empathy).⁸ Assessing the application of knowledge and demonstration of skills is in contrast to approaches that solely focus on the demonstration of factual knowledge and routine procedures.⁹ Using ANLAS, countries can examine the extent to which 21st century skills are an integral part of the national assessment system (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: The ANLAS model¹⁰



The three dimensions of the assessment system – context, quality of assessment programs, and coherence – and the cross-dimensional element of application of knowledge and 21st century skills are integrated in the ANLAS model to favor the use of assessment data in education policy and practice, with the ultimate aim to *improve learning*.

How is ANLAS implemented?

ANLAS is conceptualized as a *country-led, participative process* that is implemented by a national team, led by a team leader, and guided by a steering committee. The two main methods for completing the qualitative analysis in ANLAS are document review and consultations with key stakeholders in the education system and in the assessment system. The participative analysis process enables key stakeholders to collaboratively evaluate the learning assessment system, identify where improvements are required and make recommendations on how to strengthen the assessment system. A document and stakeholder mapping exercise is undertaken by the national team in order to identify the relevant documents to be reviewed as part of the analysis and the key stakeholders to be consulted.

The time required to undertake ANLAS varies, depending on the resources and needs of each country. However, a period of six months is considered as an indicative timeframe, with a national

⁸ Scouler and Care, "Teaching of Twenty-First Century Skills: Implications at System Levels in Australia " 2017.

⁹ Turner, "Described Proficiency Scales and Learning Metrics." Assessment Gems No. 4, 2014.

¹⁰ Australian Council for Educational Research, 2019, 4.

team of eight to 12 members working on ANLAS part-time. The time required for many of the processes of ANLAS is variable, depending on the country context.

It is encouraged that ANLAS be conducted as part of the broader education sector analysis and planning process in a country to ensure the findings feed into the development and implementation of improvement strategies included in a national Education Sector Plan (ESP). In other words, and as an example, ANLAS can be undertaken as a precursor to or as part of an education sector analysis process such that the key findings and recommendations can be subsequently reflected in an ESP. However, ANLAS can also be conducted during other phases of the policy cycle and re-injected into annual reviews or mid-term reviews that may eventually lead to revision of the ESP.¹¹

The ANLAS toolkit consists of the *ANLAS Manual*¹² and a *set of tools* (in the form of Microsoft Word (2013) and Microsoft Excel (2013) templates) to support the implementation process and to guide the analysis. Countries can adapt the processes and tools to best fit the national context. This contextualization ensures that the identified areas and concrete recommendations for improvement are relevant and appropriate.

The [ANLAS toolkit](#) can be accessed through the GPE website¹³.

What are the outcomes of ANLAS and how can they be used to make improvements?

ANLAS provides a detailed analysis of the national learning assessment system in the three dimensions, context of the assessment system, quality of the assessment programs, and coherence of the assessment system. The cross-dimensional consideration and focus on 21st century skills, the country-led, participative process involving key stakeholders in the education system and the assessment system, the contextualization of tools and its integration into education sector planning processes are distinctive features of ANLAS.

To support broad adoption, debate and use of the findings and recommendations resulting from ANLAS, reporting and dissemination are an essential part of ANLAS. Each country which conducts ANLAS develops dissemination products and a strategy to support the use of the findings and recommendations to develop detailed strategies that can be implemented through the country's education sector planning process, or other policy processes.

As the core dissemination product developed by the country, the national ANLAS report provides a comprehensive documentation of ANLAS in the country. It includes a general overview of the purpose of ANLAS, the ANLAS model, processes and tools, as well as a country-specific description of the purpose of undertaking ANLAS, its implementation in the country context and possible limitations. The core part of the ANLAS report is the presentation of findings for each dimension and key area. Describing the findings provides further opportunity to analyze the national learning assessment system, to identify patterns of strengths and weaknesses across key areas, dimensions or programs analyzed and to formulate recommendations for improvement.

In *Ethiopia* for example, under the dimension of coherence of the assessment system, it was found that the current assessment system provides relevant data for the key stages of primary and

¹¹ Australian Council for Educational Research, 2019.

¹² Australian Council for Educational Research, 2019, 1.

¹³ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/manual-analysis-national-learning-assessment-systems-anlas>

secondary school education in Ethiopia. Aspects that require improvement were identified in relation to education policy priorities and learning standards and curriculum such as a stronger focus on teaching, learning and assessing 21st century skills, assessing language skills including listening, writing and speaking and assessing practical activities like laboratory and other hands on performances. The integration of data from the National Learning Assessment and classroom assessments into the national Education Management Information System (EMIS) and resulting reports was also an important recommendation in this area based on the analysis.¹⁴ In *Vietnam*, under the dimension of quality of large-scale assessments and examinations, the analysis revealed that assessment frameworks, assessment instruments, sampling, field operations and data management are well established. However, it was noted that improvements are needed in regard to organization and resources, data analysis and reporting and dissemination. A number of concrete recommendations were formulated in regard to these issues, many of them focused on training and capacity building, for example specialized courses and post-graduate programs in educational assessment and evaluation, technical training on sampling and data analysis for new staff.¹⁵

In addition to the national report, countries conducting ANLAS also develop a key findings document and a key findings presentation, using templates provided as part of the toolkit. These are particularly designed to inform about the main findings and recommendations resulting from ANLAS during various dissemination activities such as meetings, workshops and similar forums. The national team also formulates a dissemination strategy in order to plan specific dissemination activities so as to enable broad application of the ANLAS findings and recommendations.

In *Mauritania* for example, the findings and recommendations resulting from ANLAS will be disseminated in three stages, with the aim to support the use of the findings. In the first stage the major findings will be shared and discussed with key stakeholders in order to increase awareness of the value of learning assessment at the different levels of the education system. As a part of this effort, it is also recommended that the ANLAS findings be shared during meetings concerning the sectoral reviews and diagnosis (RESEN2020). The second stage aims to gain Government commitment, in particular through the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training, to further prioritize and operationalize the various recommendations. This is followed by the third stage, which will focus on translating the findings into concrete activities to improve the national learning assessment system. The results of ANLAS are seen as an important element for the formulation of the sector's policy orientations, specifically in the 2021-2030 ESP and possibly in the 2019-2021 three-year action plan (Plan d'action triennal – PAT). Some of the concrete activities proposed are:

- The creation of a comprehensive learning assessment framework for all levels of education, including the dimensions, specifications and skill levels to be evaluated
- Improving the level of qualification and skills of the staff responsible for learning assessment and sectoral planning
- The development of learning assessment modules to be included in the initial training courses of the École Nationale des Instituteurs (ENI) and École Nationale Supérieure (ENS), and the reinforcement of the skills of the ENI and ENS teaching staff
- The implementation of an effective strategy to share, disseminate and use the results of various learning assessment programs
- The provision of the necessary financial resources for the organization of national examinations and large-scale national assessments under the best conditions

¹⁴ National Education Assessment and Examinations Agency, Ministry of Education (Ethiopia), 2019.

¹⁵ Ministry of Education and Training (Vietnam), 2019.

- The provision of the necessary human and logistical resources to ensure quality of classroom assessment practices
- Undertaking the necessary steps to participate in regional and international assessments, such as PASEC or the Service Delivery Indicators (SDI) survey
- Conducting periodic external evaluations of the national learning assessment system, such as ANLAS.¹⁶

The successful implementation of ANLAS in Ethiopia, Mauritania and Vietnam, and the documentation of the processes and findings in the three country reports, show proof of the feasibility and applicability of ANLAS in different country contexts, and of achieving the broader ANLAS objective of developing recommendations that can be used to inform strategies to build and improve assessment systems within education sector plans.

How can the ANLAS toolkit be accessed and how can ANLAS be initiated in a country?

The [ANLAS toolkit](#) is a global good available for download on the GPE website.¹⁷

ANLAS can be initiated by a unit or agency of the government, typically involved in education sector planning, or assessment, monitoring and evaluation. It can also be proposed by a development partner and subsequently initiated by the government. Since ANLAS is designed to be embedded into the broader education sector planning process, it is essential that senior representatives from the education planning unit are involved in the initiation and throughout the implementation of ANLAS.

Interested stakeholders in GPE partner countries that wish to undertake the analysis should discuss the opportunity with the Coordinating Agency in the country. For further information on the approach and tool, please contact Ramya Vivekanandan, Thematic Lead for Learning Assessment Systems at the GPE Secretariat (rvivekanandan at globalpartnership.org).

¹⁶ Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle (Mauritanie), 2019.

¹⁷ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/manual-analysis-national-learning-assessment-systems-anlas>

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