Toolbox for facilitating cross-country knowledge exchange and peer learning

A complement to:

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|  | *Joint Sector Reviews in the Education Sector: A Practical Guide for Organizing Effective JSRs* |



**This toolbox offers four tools to facilitate the organization of cross-country exchange and peer learning, using the five dimensions for an effective JSR as an analytical lens (see below Note to the user). The tools have been conceived and used to help ensure a structured and focused approach in the exchange of experiences.1**

The toolbox includes the following:

1. *Preparatory reading guide* for participants who are going to observe a JSR in a partner country
2. *Observation grid* for observing JSR practices in a comparative perspective
3. *Daily debriefing sessions guide* to facilitate the discussions during JSR cross-country exchange
4. *Improvement agenda template* for outlining key follow-up actions in participants’ individual countries, based on lessons learned through the exchange.

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**Note to the user:** It is recommended to read through the general guidelines for joint sector reviews—*Joint Sector Reviews in the Education Sector—A practical guide for organizing effective JSRs*2—as a general introduction before using this Toolbox, specifically Chapter 2–JSR effectiveness framework, and the section on cross-country knowledge exchange and peer learning.

1 The tools proposed in the toolbox can also be useful in a single-country setup.

2 https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/practical-guide-effective-joint-sector-reviews-education-sector

**Tool 1: Preparatory Reading Guide**

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| **Guidelines for use:**  *For participants who are going to observe a joint sector review in a partner country*  To optimize the benefits of your participation in the joint sector review (JSR), and help you engage in constructive discussions with other participants, it is recommended that you become familiar with the following documents, and their use as reference document for planning and implementation before your participation to the JSR meeting. Having a good understanding of the content of these documents will help to support your observations and analysis during the JSR. |

| Sector documents | Available? | Notes/Comments |
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| 1. Current *education sector plan* (ESP) or *transitional education plan* (TEP) |  |  |
| 2. *Annual* or *multiyear operational plan* |  |  |
| 3. *Annual implementation report* |  |  |
| Documents linked to joint sector review | Available? | Notes/Comments |
| 4. *Terms of reference* for the JSR |  |  |
| 5. *Agenda* for the JSR meeting |  |  |
| 6. *Aide-memoire* from the previous JSR |  |  |
| 7. Any other document informing the JSR |  |  |

**1. Current education sector plan (ESP) or transitional education plan (TEP)**

**An *education sector plan* or a *transitional education plan* is a policy instrument elaborated under the responsibility of the government that translates its vision for the development of the national educa­tion system within a given time frame. When reviewing main sector planning documents, it is advised to reflect on the following aspects of the ESP/TEP:**

* Type of plan, period covered, date of endorsement, and education subsectors covered
* ESP/TEP mission statement which indicates overall direction of the plan
* Main challenges for sectors and their underlying causes
* ESP/TEP main programs and/or activities foreseen for the duration of the plan
* Cost of the plan, as well as corresponding financing sources (internal or external)
* ESP/TEP financial framework (national budget projections and resources allocated to the sector)
* Results framework and implementation arrangements
* Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

**2. Annual or multiyear operational plan**

**Short- to medium-term operational plans translate the education sector’s strategic vision into actionable programs and projects to help achieve overall education goals. Responsible entities, program implement­ers, and implementing budgets are specified in the operational plans. When reviewing the plan, it is advised to reflect on the following elements:**

* Consistency and linkage of the operational plan with the policy priorities and programs of the ESP/TEP
* For each program and activity: information on timing, inputs and outputs, roles and responsibilities, unit costs and overall costs, financial gaps, and source(s) of funding
* Alignment of the operational plan with the administrative or pedagogical structure of the ministry
* Estimated availability of financial resources and the contributions of sector partners

**3. Annual implementation report**

**The ESP *annual implementation report* (titled differently in different countries; e.g., *annual progress report*) is the key input document for informing the JSR discussions. It provides an overview of annual sector financial status and performance against agreed actions and indicators included in the ESP. When reviewing the annual implementation report, it is advised to pay attention to the following elements:**

* Sector progress reported against ESP/TEP results framework indicators (familiarity with specific areas and subsectors covered)
* Performance report on the implementation of the annual or multiyear operational plan, aligned with the ESP/TEP
* Report on education expenditures at the level of ESP/TEP programs or activities (covered by internal and external funding)
* Report on education expenditures at the sector level
* Diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the ESP/TEP
* Report on the implementation of recommendations from the previous JSR

**4. Terms of reference for the JSR**

**The JSR *terms of reference* (TOR) articulate, within a succinct document, includes the objectives and methodology for conducting the JSR, as well as the expected outputs. When reviewing the terms of refer­ence, it is advised to pay attention to the following elements:**

* Purpose, objectives, and expected results of the JSR
* Methodology for reaching the expected results (preparation and dissemination of the annual imple­mentation report, approach to JSR meeting and dialogue, recommendation making process, aide-memoire production and endorsement)
* List of participants (sometimes attached to the agenda)

**5. Agenda for the JSR**

**The agenda of the JSR meeting is often annexed to the JSR TOR. When reviewing the JSR agenda, it is advised to pay attention to the following elements:**

* Organizational structure for discussions during the JSR meeting and feedback loops between plenaries and working groups
* Type of presenters, moderators, and other facilitators
* Specific issues and thematic areas covered and their relation to plan priorities
* Consistency between the objectives outlined in the JSR TOR and the organizational arrangements and structure of the JSR meeting

**6. Aide-memoire from the previous JSR**

**The *aide-memoire* is the critical document providing information on collective agreements, recommen­dations, and decisions taken during the JSR for improving sector ESP/TEP planning, implementation, and monitoring. Because it records decisions that were made during the previous JSR, the aide-memoire essentially works as an accountability framework and is therefore important to review in preparation for the upcoming JSR. It is advised to pay attention to the following elements:**

* Type of recommendations, responsible actors, and timelines
* Political endorsement of the JSR aide-memoire from the previous JSR
* Action plans, if included

**7. Any other document informing the JSR**

**Sometimes JSR include additional documents that can provide interesting background information for JSR participants. It can be a dataset or analytical studies, developed by one or a group of development partners or civil society organizations, which helps identify underlying issues for the sector, or provides additional evidence to support discussions. This can be for instance:**

* Education Sector Analysis or other sector diagnosis report, either as a draft or as a final document
* Report or dataset from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)
* Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reports
* Report from the Education Cluster
* Report from civil society organizations or teacher unions

**Tool 2: Observation Grid**

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| Guidelines for use:  *For participants who are observing a joint sector review in a partner country/or own country*  • This observation grid was designed to support observations during the JSR and deepen reflections around the five dimensions of an effective JSR.  • The tool can be used as part of a knowledge exchange initiative (first column) and/or within a single-country setup (second column).  • By facilitating reflection on the JSR meeting being observed, the tool can help visiting delegations to propose feedback to JSR organizers in the country being visited or in their own country.   * In the grid, comment on the quality of the JSR being observed, and reflect on issues/improvements that should be considered in the organization of future JSRs. |

Dimension 1: Inclusive and participatory

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|  | COMMENTS ON jsr BEING OBSERVED | cOMMENT ON your jsr |
| Compare the participants in situ with the participant list of the JSR meeting. Who are they and to which organization or administration do they belong? Are there any noticeable absences? Are any kinds of stakeholders overrepresented, and if so, which? |  |  |
| Observe and describe participant engagement. Are all participants listening actively? Do any leave the room for side discussions? Are participants conducting other work on their laptops (or appear to be doing so)? |  |  |
| Are most participants contributing effectively to the discussions? Do you feel that any participant contributions are redundant, irrelevant, or serving a hidden agenda? |  |  |
| Is the organization of the JSR led by the ministry (or ministries) in charge of education, or does it appear to be a joint endeavor between the government and its partners? |  |  |
| What is the attitude of the main development partners compared to the government? Are they supportive and involved in the process, or do they appear to be attending as “spectators”? |  |  |
| Observe and describe the dynamics between the presenters and the participants. Consider the level of interaction, types of interventions, openness to challenging remarks, transparency of organizers, respect for meeting protocol during the plenaries/working groups, etc. |  |  |
| Are any logistical difficulties impacting the flow  and/or quality of the JSR meeting (e.g., issues with equipment and/or facilities, absence of key or support staff)? What could have been done differently? |  |  |

Dimension 2: Aligned to Shared Policy Framework

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|  | COMMENTS ON jsr BEING OBSERVED | cOMMENT ON your jsr |
| To what extent does the ESP/TEP define the overall perimeter of the JSR meeting and supporting documents? |  |  |
| From your understanding of sector planning and JSR supporting documents familiarized through the Preparatory Reading Guide (Tool 1), do you see any disconnect between the contents of the ESP/TEP and what the JSR as a process monitors (sector/subsector  coverage, programs and activities, type of internal or external funding, etc.)? |  |  |
| In your opinion, what is the level of ownership remove and adoption of national development and education sector strategies by JSR participants? Do you think the level of ownership remove and adoption is the same for all participants? |  |  |
| Do participants contribute to JSR discussions by referring to programs and activities included in the ESP/TEP and its operational plans? |  |  |
| To what extent are development partners and civil society organizations (CSOs) given opportunities to report and explain their role in implementing the ESP/TEP and its operational plans? Do you feel like presentations and interventions from development partners and CSOs are consistent with ESP/TEP strategies, or does it appear that partners are reporting on their own projects? |  |  |
| Describe how the JSR monitors sector performance against the ESP/TEP results framework, and how the JSR has the occasion to hold partners accountable for their own commitments for achieving different ESP/TEP targets. |  |  |

Dimension 3: Based On Evidence

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|  | COMMENTS ON jsr BEING OBSERVED | cOMMENT ON your jsr |
| Have the main conclusions and analysis of the annual implementation report been presented to the audience? If so, describe how |  |  |
| Do JSR participants seem to generally agree with analysis and evidence included in the report? Are participants voicing any concerns over the comprehensiveness and reliability of the data and analysis presented in the report? |  |  |
| Has the data collection process informing the analysis in the report been explained? If so, who was involved in this process, and how long did it take? |  |  |
| Has anyone mentioned delays or difficulties in the data collection process that may have impacted the reliability of the data? Have other data and analyses produced by development partners and CSOs been used to inform the annual implementation report? If so, describe these. |  |  |
| Who was in charge of writing the report? If an external consultant (national or international) was involved, what was the working relationship/­reporting lines between the consultant and the national administration? |  |  |
| What was the consultation process for finalizing the report? Have development partners and CSOs been given the opportunity to provide comments? |  |  |
| When was the report shared with participants? If shared in advance, what is the level of appropriation of data and analyses included in the report by the different types of participants? |  |  |
| What are your thoughts on the overall quality of the data presented? Is data produced disaggregated enough (e.g., region, gender, ethnicity, disability, language group, socioeconomic level) to support discussions on inequality, inequities, and exclusion in the education system? |  |  |

Dimension 4: Monitoring Tool

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|  | COMMENTS ON jsr BEING OBSERVED | cOMMENT ON your jsr |
| In your opinion, how effective is the JSR in assessing progress in the implementation of the ESP/TEP and its annual or multiyear operational plan over the past year (i.e., backward looking)? Do the data allow participants to assess whether ESP/TEP targets were met? |  |  |
| To what extent does the JSR allow participants to monitor education outcomes in the areas of equity, efficiency, and learning outcomes? Do participants use the data and findings included in the annual implementation to support those discussions? |  |  |
| Does the JSR allow participants to monitor and evaluate the implementation of specific policy interventions and consequences for the education system? |  |  |
| In your opinion, how effective is the JSR in monitoring the implementation of agreed-upon recommendations from the previous JSR? Have previous recommendations been actioned and implemented? If not, what were the reasons? |  |  |
| Does the JSR allow for an analysis of bottlenecks in the implementation of education programs or identification of suitable solutions? In your opinion, do all the partners agree on the suggested problems and solutions? |  |  |
| Do financial data presented allow participants to engage in evidence-based discussions over efficient, equitable, and adequate levels of financing allocated to education? Do participants discuss donor funding and its level of predictability? |  |  |
| In your opinion, are development partners able to use the JSR as part of their monitoring and evaluation (M&E)? |  |  |

Dimension 5: An instrument for change effectively embedded in the policy change

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|  | COMMENTS ON jsr BEING OBSERVED | cOMMENT ON your jsr |
| How was agreement on JSR recommendations reached? Who participated in the process? Overall, how would you describe the process for reaching agreement (e.g., easy, laborious)? |  |  |
| Do you feel the recommendations clearly reflect the bottlenecks and challenges identified during the review? (If not, elaborate.) |  |  |
| Do you feel that the plenary sessions and working groups were effective mechanisms for elaborating recommendations coming out of the JSR? Please elaborate your answer. |  |  |
| Describe the procedure for drafting and validating the JSR aide-memoire. Have participants been informed about the timeline, roles, and responsibilities during this process? |  |  |
| Is a mechanism in place for monitoring the implementation of recommendations throughout the year? If so, is this monitoring effort efficient in your opinion? |  |  |
| Do you think this JSR will be able to influence policy decisions in the next ESP/TEP policy cycle? Explain your answer. |  |  |
| What is your overall impression of the JSR? What would you have done differently? What improvements/adjustments would you recommend to the organizers for the next JSR? |  |  |

**Tool 3: Daily Debriefing and Discussion Guide**

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| Guidelines for use:  • This guide was designed to facilitate exchanges among JSR participants on the most critical aspects related to the preparation, conduct, and follow-up of a JSR meeting, for the specific purpose of lesson learning.  • The guide should be used by a facilitator to prompt discussions among JSR organizers, either in a single-country setup or as part of a knowledge exchange initiative with stakeholders from different countries.  • It can be used to reflect on previous JSRs, particularly by identifying elements that need heightened attention in an upcoming review. Because the first three dimensions influence the fourth and fifth, it is strongly recommended that the questions be addressed in order.   * There are many questions and these cannot realistically be answered in a single meeting. The facilitator is encouraged to choose those questions that are most relevant to the context of the discussions and most relevant to the day being debriefed. |

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| DIMENSION 1: INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY |
| 1. In your opinion, how inclusive is the JSR?  *Guide for discussion:*   * What is the process for selecting the participants at the JSR? How are invitations sent? * Are the following participants invited: representatives from political and technical divisions within the ministry (ies) in charge of education, development partners, Ministry of Finance, related ministries (e.g., youth and sport), subnational education offices, teachers and education unions, national and local CSOs, parents’ associations? * Which stakeholders are absent? What are the reasons given for their absence (declined/not invited)? * What is the total number of participants? Do you think this number is conducive to effective dialogue? |
| 2. In your opinion, how effective is stakeholder *participation* in the JSR meeting?  *Guide for discussion:*  • How engaged were the different stakeholders during the meeting? Which (if any) groups are not participating actively? How would you explain this (e.g., too many participants, lack of experience in policy dialogue, lack of facilitation capacity, restricted or tense policy dialogue, gender considerations)?  • How active are CSOs? How do they engage? Are their contributions welcomed by JSR organizers?  • Do high-level political authorities participate in the JSR? Does the presence of minister(s) appear to enable or hinder dialogue?  • What could have been done better? |
| 3. How would you describe the *dynamics* between presenters and participants during discussions?  *Guide for discussion:*  • Are participants systematically invited to react after presentations?  • What form do reactions tend to take, or what is the intention/purpose (e.g., present additional/complementary information, challenge claims, report on country experiences, analyze causes of bottlenecks, present good practices, propose recommendations)?  • Are the discussions dominated by any particular group?  • Do presenters and JSR organizers tend to address participants’ reactions?  • What could have been done better? |
| 4. Is the JSR *organized effectively*?  *Guide for discussion:*  • Who is in charge of organizing/managing the preparation of the JSR (event planning and report writing) and the actual plenary and working group meetings?  • Are the organizational arrangements embedded in routine M&E processes within the ministry or in existing national dialogue and coordination structures (e.g., the local education group/LEG)?  • What is the level of ownership of the Ministry of Education in the organization of the JSR (relative to the support provided by donors and international consultants)?  • What is the level of ownership across government stakeholders (e.g. interdepartmental, inter-ministerial, across national/subnational levels)?  • Are all ministry departments (technical and nontechnical) engaged in the meeting?  • Are logistic issues impacting the quality of the discussions?  • What could have been done better? |
| DIMENSION 2: ALIGNED TO SHARED POLICY FRAMEWORK |
| 1. Were the relevant *policy framework(s)* used effectively to define the scope of the JSR?  *Guide for discussion:*  • Is there an ESP/TEP in place? Is the plan endorsed by all education partners?  • Do participants appear to be familiar with the main strategies and objectives of the ESP/TEP?  • Was the annual implementation report made widely available? How effectively (in your opinion) does it align with and report on the ESP/TEP or equivalent (and their operational subset components) as a shared policy framework?  • Are the education sector policy framework and annual implementation report regularly referred to during the JSR presentations and/or discussions?  • What could have been done better? |
| 2. Are there any *parallel reviews* in your country of the ESP/TEP?  *Guide for discussion:*  • Does the Ministry of Education produce reports for donors other than those informing the JSR? (e.g., reviews to analyze disbursement-linked indicators; additional reports on donor projects or to satisfy donor requests for information/updates)  • Are certain development partners conducting annual reviews of sector or project performance outside of JSR processes?  • How could the scope of inputs be expanded to reduce transaction costs and/or improve alignment to policy framework?   * What could have been done better? |
| DIMENSION 3: BASED ON EVIDENCE |
| 1. What are the *principal documents* feeding into the annual implementation report and how robust are they?  *Guide for discussion:*  • To what extent is the annual implementation report informed by EMIS and national survey data, financial reports, M&E reports, commissioned thematic reports, scientific evidence (such as impact evaluations), CSO reports, fieldwork reports, etc.?  • Who produces these input documents and data?  • Did the LEG members contribute to the preparation of the annual implementation report?  • What could have been done better? |
| 2. To what extent are the annual implementation report and JSR meeting discussions *grounded in analysis* of the qualitative and quantitative evidence sources below?  *Guide for discussion:*  • Sector results on the basis of the results framework as per subsectors covered (i.e., outcome level indicators, or other indicators from ESP/TEP results framework)  • Performance of the implementation of the ESP/TEP action plans (review of programs/activities or subsectors)  • Expenditures at program/activity level (covered by domestic and external funding)  • Expenditures at budget level  • Findings from rigorous studies on policy/program effectiveness  • What could have been done better? |
| 3. What is the overall *quality of the evidence base* (particularly quantitative data) presented in the annual implementation report?  *Guide for discussion:*  • Are quantitative data accurate and up to date with proven reliability and validity?  • How well are claims for progress backed up by quantitative and qualitative evidence?  • How well are different data sources and stakeholder perspectives integrated into the analysis and overview of progress and performance?  • What could have been done better? |
| DIMENSION 4: MONITORING TOOL |
| 1. Is the *performance analysis* within the JSR adequate?  *Guide for discussion:*  • Does the annual implementation report include a diagnosis of weaknesses and strengths in relation to sector trends, ESP implementation, and expenditures/financial progress?  • Does it track recommendations from preceding JSRs?  • Do the discussions include concrete recommendations on how to solve bottlenecks in implementation and delivery?  • Are issues prioritized?  • Do partners agree on weaknesses, priorities, and recommendations?  • What could have been done better? |
| 2. Do you think that the JSR has an *overall learning function*? Please explain your answer. |
| DIMENSION 5: AN INSTRUMENT FOR CHANGE EFFECTIVELY EMBEDDED IN THE POLICY CYCLE |
| 1. What is the *process for formulating recommendations*?  *Guide for discussion:*  • How are recommendations being formulated (e.g., synthesis of recommendations recorded during the plenaries/working group sessions; a limited set of recommendations suggested for vote and validation; recommendations selected/negotiated by a few participants in a smaller working group)?  • Is any particular stakeholder group key in the formulation of recommendations? If so, which?  • Did any organizational or capacity issues affect the formulation of recommendations (e.g., lack of note takers, poor quality or incomplete note taking, sessions poorly moderated, lack of time)?  • What could have been done better? |
| 2. What form have the *JSR recommendations* taken?  *Guide for discussion:*  • Have remedial actions to address weaknesses been identified?  • Have responsible parties been designated for implementation or action planning?  • Are the recommendations limited in number (judged as manageable) and include a timeline for implementation, or SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely)?  • What could have been done better? |
| 3. Are all participants *clear on the process* for drafting/finalizing/validating the JSR aide-memoire and following up on the JSR recommendations?  *Guide for discussion:*  • Is there agreement on a timeline for finalizing the aide-memoire?  • Was a committee created to draft and finalize the aide-memoire? If not, what were the alternative arrangements?  • What was the process for validating the aide-memoire?  • How were recommendations concretely taken forward? Through which institutional/organizational arrangements?   * What could have been done better? |
| 4. Do you think this JSR will be able to *influence strategic decisions* in the next ESP/TEP policy cycle? Please explain your answer. |
| 5. Do you think that the *JSR takes place at an appropriate moment* of the policy and budget cycle? Please elaborate. |

**Tool 4: Template—JSR Improvement Plan**

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| Guidelines for use:  Based on the outputs of the previous tools and the lessons learnt through the JSR observed, the following template is proposed to help translate those lessons into recommended actions to improve the JSR in the participant's own country (when applied in a cross-country exchange initiative), or the next JSR in question, as well as good practices observed, and aims to identify relevant actions for improvements of the JSR process and JSR meeting. |

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| **ISSUES and NEEDS** | **GOOD PRACTIVE** | **ACTION** | **RISKS** | **RESPONSIBLE** | **TIMELINE** |
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