

GPE Secretariat Terms of Reference for an Independent Evaluation of the Assessment for Learning (A4L) initiative

Background

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) works with almost 70 developing countries to ensure that every child receives a quality basic education, prioritizing the poorest, the most vulnerable and those living in fragile and conflict-affected countries. GPE mobilizes financing for education and supports developing countries to build effective education systems founded on evidence-based planning and policies. GPE is a global fund and a partnership whose members include developing country governments, more than 20 donor nations, multilateral development and humanitarian agencies, as well as organizations from the private sector, philanthropy, civil society and the teaching profession. The GPE Secretariat (Secretariat) is guided by a constituency-based Board of Directors sets policies and strategies and approves performance-based funding grants.

GPE's five-year Strategic Plan, GPE 2020, aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, 'to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' and has a core goal of improved and more equitable learning outcomes. Learning assessment is seen as a vital means for education systems to monitor and achieve such outcomes, as well as to inform evidence-based policymaking and reform processes and improve teaching and learning process. For GPE, high quality learning assessment systems are therefore a key element of effective and efficient education systems. They allow for the tracking of the progress of learning outcomes and equity-related factors and contribute to a strong evidence base for education sector planning and policy implementation.

As such, GPE requires countries that apply for its Education Sector Program Implementation Grants (ESPIGs) 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. As a result of this requirement and an increased momentum around the importance of assessing learning generally, close to 80% of currently active ESPIGs support some aspect of learning assessment systems. GPE also monitors the progress countries are making with building good quality learning assessment systems through Indicator 15 of the GPE Results Framework, which explores the proportion of developing country partners with a learning assessment system in place for the basic education cycle that meets quality standards.

Assessment for Learning initiative

To further strengthen the capacity of learning assessment systems in partner countries and to promote a holistic measurement of learning, the GPE Board approved the [Assessment for Learning \(A4L\) – Strengthening Learning Assessment Systems](#) initiative in December 2016. This followed the pre-designation of both A4L and another initiative (the Better Early Learning and Development at Scale initiative) as thematic initiatives for targeted financing under the Knowledge and Good Practice Exchange (KGPE) strategy of the GPE. Two foundations, notably Porticus and Dubai Cares, subsequently pledged

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and have been supporting A4L. The initiative was formally launched in July 2017 (with a conclusion date of July 2020), and a Senior Education Specialist was recruited by the Secretariat and commenced work in September 2017.

As per the Logic Model of A4L, the following activities and outputs were planned:

Activities:¹

1. Piloting of a diagnostic of national learning assessment systems (ANLAS) in three countries (Ethiopia, Vietnam and Mauritania) (*in order to develop evidence-based strategies to strengthen those systems*)
2. Support to two regional assessment networks (NEQMAP and TALENT) (*to build capacity at country level and share knowledge around strengthening learning assessment systems and holistic measurements of learning*)
3. Support to the dissemination of and reflection on new assessment tools that promote socio-emotional skills
4. Conduct of a global landscape review of the measurement of 21st century skills (*in order to identify current stakeholder efforts, opportunities for collaboration, and the role GPE could play in advancing these efforts*)
5. Knowledge products, dissemination events, partnerships and other initiatives

Outputs:

1. 3 technical diagnostic reports on learning assessment systems in 3 countries finalized.
2. Complete ANLAS toolkit finalized.
3. Landscape report on WCD metrics, including 21st century and socio-emotional skills, completed.
4. Convenings for the development and dissemination of assessment tools promoting social-emotional skills supported in two regions.
5. 8 regional capacity building workshops conducted, covering topics such as systems strengthening and holistic measurement of learning.
6. At least 3 knowledge products (newsletters, webinars, online information etc.) produced/disseminated to promote knowledge sharing at regional level.
7. Project presented in at least 3 international conferences/meetings

These outputs are meant to lead to the following intended outcomes:

Short-term outcomes:

1. Clear recommendations for how to strengthen learning assessment systems in three countries
2. Increased understanding of efforts to measure whole child development (WCD), such as 21st century and socio-emotional skills
3. Increased measurement of socio-emotional skills

¹ The text noted in italics refers to wording from the original A4L grant applications to Dubai Cares and Porticus.

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Medium-term outcomes:

1. Good practices on learning assessment systems embedded in countries (notably the three DCPs which piloted ANLAS), leading to stronger systems
2. Tool development for the measurement of WCD metrics, such as 21st century and socio-emotional skills is advanced through collaborative efforts
3. Countries are exposed to models for integrating holistic measures of learning

Through these outcomes, A4L is then meant to contribute towards **two long-term goals:**

1. Strengthened learning assessment systems, where data is used by teachers, schools, and government officials to inform instruction, teacher training, and system wide policies to improve learning for all children (GPE Results Framework Indicator 15)
2. Socio-emotional skills and other 21st century skills are measured, monitored, and promoted at national and global level as part of a holistic measurement of learning.

Purpose of the assignment

The purpose of this assignment is to conduct an independent summative evaluation of the A4L initiative, which is due to conclude in July 2020. This evaluation has been mandated in the design of A4L and will target the various stakeholders involved in the initiative (funders, technical partners, grantees, target countries) as well as the broader GPE partnership. The information gleaned from the exercise will be used to reflect on the experience of the initiative (including achievements, challenges and lessons learned) and to consider lessons for future GPE technical work in the area of learning assessment systems.

Indicative evaluation questions (which shall be refined and finalized during the inception stage) may include the following:

Effectiveness

1. To what extent has A4L achieved its intended outputs, on the basis of the established indicators?
2. To what extent has A4L achieved its intended short-term and medium-term outcomes, on the basis of the established indicators?
3. To what extent has A4L contributed towards its two intended long-term goals?
4. What were the most critical variances between planned and actual project implementation/ activities? Could these variances have been avoided, and if so how?

Efficiency

5. Has the management and coordination of the A4L initiative by the GPE Secretariat been efficient?
6. How efficient has the Secretariat been in terms of communication and dissemination around A4L activities and achievements?

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7. In retrospect, what aspects of project design and organization most contributed to its success and/or shortcomings?

Relevance & Sustainability

8. How relevant have the A4L activities/outputs been at country, regional and global levels in terms of strengthening learning assessment systems?
9. How do the A4L activities/outputs tie in with GPE's support to learning assessment systems at country level?
10. How do the A4L activities/outputs complement and/or add value to ongoing and planned efforts to strengthen learning assessment systems?
11. To what extent has A4L catalyzed support and investment in the area of learning assessment systems on the part of GPE (at both global and country level)?

Other

12. Has collaboration with the involved foundations, both as financers and thought partners, added value and/or brought a unique modality for GPE to support work in specific thematic areas?
13. What are the lessons learned on challenges and opportunities of this type of targeted engagement with foundations, taking into consideration GPE's modus operandi?
14. Has A4L allowed for building partnerships and collaboration with existing and new actors at global, regional and country levels in regard to strengthening learning assessment systems?

Methodology

The Secretariat proposes to hire a Short-Term Consultant (STC) for this evaluation exercise. The independence of the evaluation will be preserved by ensuring that the role of the Secretariat in the exercise will be to provide access to documents, facilitate communications and review the conceptual approach. Given that the Secretariat (including the A4L team) will be a unit of analysis for the evaluation, its role beyond this will be limited to fact checking. Furthermore, the findings of the evaluation will be shared with GPE's governing bodies through the final A4L report to them.

The STC shall develop an inception report in line with relevant UNEG norms and standards. The inception report will include an evaluation framework, outlining in detail the final research questions, methodology, methods/tools and analysis plans, the report outline, references, as well as a work plan for the evaluation exercise.

As part of the methodology, the STC shall:

Review documents, including but not limited to:

- GPE Board documents in relation to A4L
- Original grant proposals submitted by the Secretariat to Porticus and Dubai Cares

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- Annual reports submitted, as well as draft final reports to be submitted to Porticus and Dubai Cares
- Logic Model and Work Plan associated with grant from Porticus
- ANLAS summary report and toolkit
- ANLAS national reports, executive summaries and presentations for three pilot countries
- Original grant proposals submitted by NEQMAP (UNESCO Bangkok) and TALENT (UNESCO Dakar)
- Bi-annual narrative progress reports submitted by NEQMAP (UNESCO Bangkok) and TALENT (UNESCO Dakar)
- NEQMAP external evaluation
- Landscape review report on 21st century skills
- KIX discussion paper on Strengthening Learning Assessment Systems
- GPE country-level evaluation reports for countries which have been a focus of A4L (e.g. Ethiopia)
- Related reports produced/coordinated by the Brookings Institution (e.g. Asia and Africa mini-studies on 21st century skills)

Conduct interviews:

Develop and design a method to interview key stakeholders who are involved in A4L, notably relevant members of the Secretariat, representatives of Porticus and Dubai Cares as the funders of the initiative and representatives of the key organizations through which A4L has been implemented, notably the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), the Brookings Institution, NEQMAP/UNESCO Bangkok, TALENT/UNESCO Dakar and national focal points in the three ANLAS pilot countries. In addition, the STC is encouraged to arrange interviews with partner organizations with whom the Secretariat has been collaborating during the life of A4L, such as UNESCO UIS, UNESCO IIEP, the OECD, IEA and others, to be determined.

Deliverables and timelines

This assignment shall be carried over a period of five months, from February to June 2020.

The deliverables to be produced by the STC and their associated timelines are as follows:

1. An inception report (10-15 pages, not including annexes) with an evaluation framework, finalized set of evaluation questions, detailed methodology, methods/tools and analysis plans, report outline, references, and a work plan for the evaluation exercise, for review and feedback by the Secretariat (and funders if appropriate) – *March 15, 2020*
2. Draft evaluation report (25-30 pages, not including annexes), for fact-checking by the Secretariat (and funders if appropriate) – *April 30, 2020*
3. Final evaluation report (25-30 pages, not including annexes), as well as a PPT presentation showcasing the contents of the final evaluation report -- *June 30, 2020*

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The consultant will report to Raphaëlle Martinez, Senior Education Specialist and Team Lead for Education Policy & Learning at the GPE Secretariat. Ramya Vivekanandan, Senior Education Specialist and Thematic Lead for Learning Assessment Systems, will provide daily support to the consultant in terms of providing documents, facilitating communication, etc.

Selection Criteria

- Advanced university degree (Master's level or above) in education, social sciences, political sciences, economics or any related field
- Minimum of 10 years of professional experience in evaluating programs and/or projects at the international level or in an international setting. Proven experience in leading, evaluating or working in education programs or projects is an asset.
- Excellent knowledge of GPE, including how it works at both global and country levels
- Knowledge and experience in applying qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques
- Exceptional written and oral communication skills in English, with demonstrated ability to convey complex ideas in a clear and direct style
- Ability to work independently, operate under pressure, deliver high-quality work within deadlines, and meet team objectives
- Demonstrated knowledge and expertise related to Learning Assessment Systems is an asset.
- Fluency in French is an asset.

Please submit your CV and cover letter to (Ms.) Ramya Vivekanandan (rvivekanandan@globalpartnership.org) by February 7, 2020. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.