

Assessment for Learning (A4L)

An International Platform to Support National Learning Assessment Systems

Discussion Document

December 1, 2015



PREFACE

This concept note has been in development since June 2014. It originated from Phase 1.0 of the Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF), an international multi-stakeholder collaboration co-convened by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution, that seeks to improve learning outcomes through strengthening the use of assessment. In the second phase of the task force, organizations volunteered to work together, aligning their organizational expertise and mandates with one or more of the five result areas. The result areas are: 1) technical (indicator development), 2) institutional (Learning Champion¹ countries), 3) political (SDGs), 4) assessment as a global public good, 5) knowledge sharing (network and information sharing). In particular, the work on this concept note grew out of collaborative discussions among task force members during LMTF 2.0 on how to advance thinking around result area 4: developing a strategy for how learning assessment could be supported as a global public good.

An early concept paper was first presented at the Learning Metrics Task Force meeting in Brussels in June 2014. Based on the feedback received there, a first draft of the concept note was developed and circulated to a reference group of experts, international organizations, donors, implementers, civil society organizations, teachers unions, and other key players in the field of international education in October 2014. Following this, experts from regional and international assessment institutions were consulted directly for technical input. Refined accordingly, the concept was then presented in summary form at the February 2015 Learning Metrics Task Force Forum in Kigali, where feedback was sought expressly from representatives of 15 Learning Champion countries and cities as well as from Task Force members. It was then presented to 71 representatives from 49 Global Partnership for Education (GPE) developing country partners at the GPE Pre-Board Constituency Meetings in Dubai and Dakar in May 2015, and then at the Learning Metrics Task Force Advisory Committee Meeting in Washington in September 2015. The current version has been revised in response to inputs from all of these consultations, as well as other international education experts. In total, representatives from 81 organizations and 71 countries, including 61 developing countries, were consulted. Please see the Annex for a list of all those consulted.

¹ The Learning Champions program was designed to provide technical guidance to 15 countries, provinces, or cities, selected by application, in developing plans to adapt LMTF recommendations to their local contexts. See <http://www.brookings.edu/about/centers/universal-education/learning-metrics-task-force-2/learning-champions>

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Discussion Document

This paper proposes the creation of an **international platform to support national learning assessment systems: Assessment for Learning (A4L)**. A4L would aim to:

- Develop and strengthen national learning assessment systems
- Increase the availability of learning data at country, regional, and global levels
- Improve the use of learning data to inform educational policy and teacher training
- Develop new assessment tools to measure learning, including beyond reading and numeracy
- Create a clearinghouse where countries can exchange information with each other, with experts, and with assessment organizations

The A4L platform would channel financial and technical assistance to developing countries according to their individual needs and priorities, in order to build the capacity of national learning assessment systems with the aim of improving learning and equity. To this end, it would also convene and support existing initiatives and programs on learning assessments. Its scope would cover early childhood through secondary education.

1. RATIONALE

The world is facing a learning crisis. According to the Global Monitoring Report of UNESCO, **250 million children have not learned basic numeracy and literacy skills**, even though half of them have spent at least four years in school.² As a result, **there is a shift in emphasis at the global level from access to education to access *and* learning symbolized by the Sustainable Development Goal 4: “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.”**

At the heart of the challenge of improving learning, particularly in developing countries, is the measurement of learning. At the classroom level, measuring learning is critical to the learning process and at the core of teaching practice. At the system level, it is also crucial to measure learning in order to inform policy-making and monitor its results, thereby ensuring appropriate resource allocation and equity of learning among schools, regions and population groups. In short, **measuring learning is key to improving it.**

However, it is possible to measure learning without improving learning, as illustrated, for instance, by many countries with persistently poor results in international assessments. In order to be powerful and effective, the **results must be used at classroom, school, and system**

² EFA Global Monitoring Report Team. (2012). *2012 Education For All Global Monitoring Report: Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work*. Paris, France: UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2012/youth-and-skills-putting-education-work#sthash.LAUYHt4L.dpbs>.

levels to improve learning. This is why national learning assessment systems that ensure that results are used to inform policies and practices are critical for improving learning and thereby achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Here it would be helpful to define our terms: *Assessment* is “the process of gathering and evaluating information on what students know, understand, and can do in order to make an informed decision about next steps in the educational process,” whereas an *assessment system* is “a group of policies, structures, practices, and tools for generating and using information on student learning and achievement.”³ It is the use of this information that is key for improving learning, and for that to be possible, **learning data must be accompanied by contextual data** so that factors that impact learning can be identified and action taken. When we talk about a *national learning assessment system*, then, what we are talking about is a functional apparatus, usually housed within a Ministry of Education, that gathers information on learning – together with contextual data – nationwide and feeds this information back to the policy, management, and classroom levels to improve learning. As Pedro Ravela and his colleagues point out: “Assessment in and of itself does not produce improvement. There must be stable links between the domains of assessment and those of curriculum development, teacher training, research, policy design, communications and outreach, among others.”⁴ In this way, **a strong national learning assessment system closes the feedback loop to the rest of the education system to achieve meaningful improvement in learning.**

However, the **current capacity of national learning assessment systems in the majority of developing countries is far from where it needs to be to address the learning crisis.** A recent analysis led by the GPE Secretariat assessed 60 of its member countries and found only 2 of them to have “established” learning assessment systems, while 15 were rated as “under development,” the intermediate classification used by the study, and the remainder need significant support to even begin the process.⁵ Moreover, the **use of learning data to inform policy remains a challenge:** Another recent study done by the GPE Secretariat shows that among 42 education plans analyzed, only 18, or 43%, had identified an evidence-based cause for quality challenges.⁶ This is due not only to lack of data, but also to the fact that even when evidence was available, it was not systematically used to inform policy decisions.

In order to deliver the level of capacity-building required to meet these needs, support to national learning assessment systems in developing countries must be scaled up in a coherent and consistent way. Resources should be available so that even the poorest countries are able

³ Clarke, M. (2012) “What Matters Most for Student Assessment Systems: A Framework Paper.” *SABER-Student Assessment Working Paper 1*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

⁴ Ravela, P. et al. (2008). “The Educational Assessment that Latin America Needs”. *Working Paper Series No. 40*. Washington, DC: PREAL, p. 17.

⁵ This credibility assessment, completed in August 2015 using information available to the public, found that of the 60 GPE countries studied, 2 were “established,” 15 were “under development,” and 35 were “nascent.” For the remaining 8 countries, there was no information on learning assessment systems publicly available.

⁶ J.-M. Bernard and T. de Chaisemartin. (2015). “Education Sector Planning in Developing Countries: An Analysis of 42 Education Plans.” Paper presented at the 13th UKFIET Conference on Education and Development, Oxford, UK.

to access the technical and financial resources needed to develop effective national learning assessment systems in order to improve learning for all.

Therefore, there is a **need for a global platform** to coordinate and strengthen support to meet the current level of need, especially among developing countries. The platform proposed here would be a **global public good**. It would aim to fill in the gap both in terms of **countries' capacity** to develop effective national learning assessment systems that improve learning, and in terms of the **financing** that is necessary to do so. Taking a partnership approach, it would help to **complement and support existing capacity-building efforts** at regional and global levels. It would also support **cross-national knowledge-sharing**. Such a platform would be crucial to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 4, Quality Learning, and indispensable for the monitoring of Target 4.1 regarding “relevant and effective learning outcomes” in primary and secondary education worldwide.

Photo: GPE / Olivier Badoh



2. VISION, MISSION AND GOALS

Assessment for Learning (A4L) would answer the call for a stronger and more systematic focus on improving the quality of learning⁷ by providing the necessary means of strengthening capacity at country, regional and global levels. A4L would support existing regional and country-level work on learning assessments and the use of their results to improve learning. At the global level, it would support research and the development of new assessment tools.

Vision: *National education systems that regularly assess learning and use results to ensure relevant and effective learning outcomes for all children and youth.*⁸

A4L's mandate would focus on developing and strengthening national learning assessment systems, as quality assessment systems are essential to improving learning. Assessment of learning is essential to inform teaching practices and policies. All countries, including the poorest, should be able to benefit from a sound national learning assessment system. A4L would focus its efforts on early childhood through secondary education.

Mission: *Strengthen and coordinate action to develop national learning assessment systems that contribute to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all children and youth.*

Increased and more systematic efforts are required to develop sound national learning assessment systems, particularly in the poorest countries. A4L would support the strengthening and coordination of existing efforts to make sure that countries do not lag behind for lack of money or capacity.

Goals:

Goal 1: *Sound national learning assessment systems in place, including in the least developed and most fragile countries.*

Sound national learning assessment systems are critical to improve learning. They are necessary to ensure that relevant learning data, including contextual and equity data, are regularly gathered, analyzed, and used to inform action in order to improve learning.

Goal 2: *Increased use of evidence about learning in policy and teacher training.*

⁷ This includes LMTF's call for action in its September 2013 Summary Report, *Toward Universal Learning*. (Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF) (2013). *Toward Universal Learning: What Every Child Should Learn*, Report No. 1 of the Learning Metrics Task Force. Montreal and Washington, D.C.: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution. Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2013/02/learning-metrics>)

⁸ In its vision, A4L aligns with Target 4.1 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 regarding "relevant and effective learning outcomes."

Indispensable to the improvement of learning outcomes is that the data collected be translated to education sector policy, teacher training, and teaching practices, closing the feedback loop with the classroom.

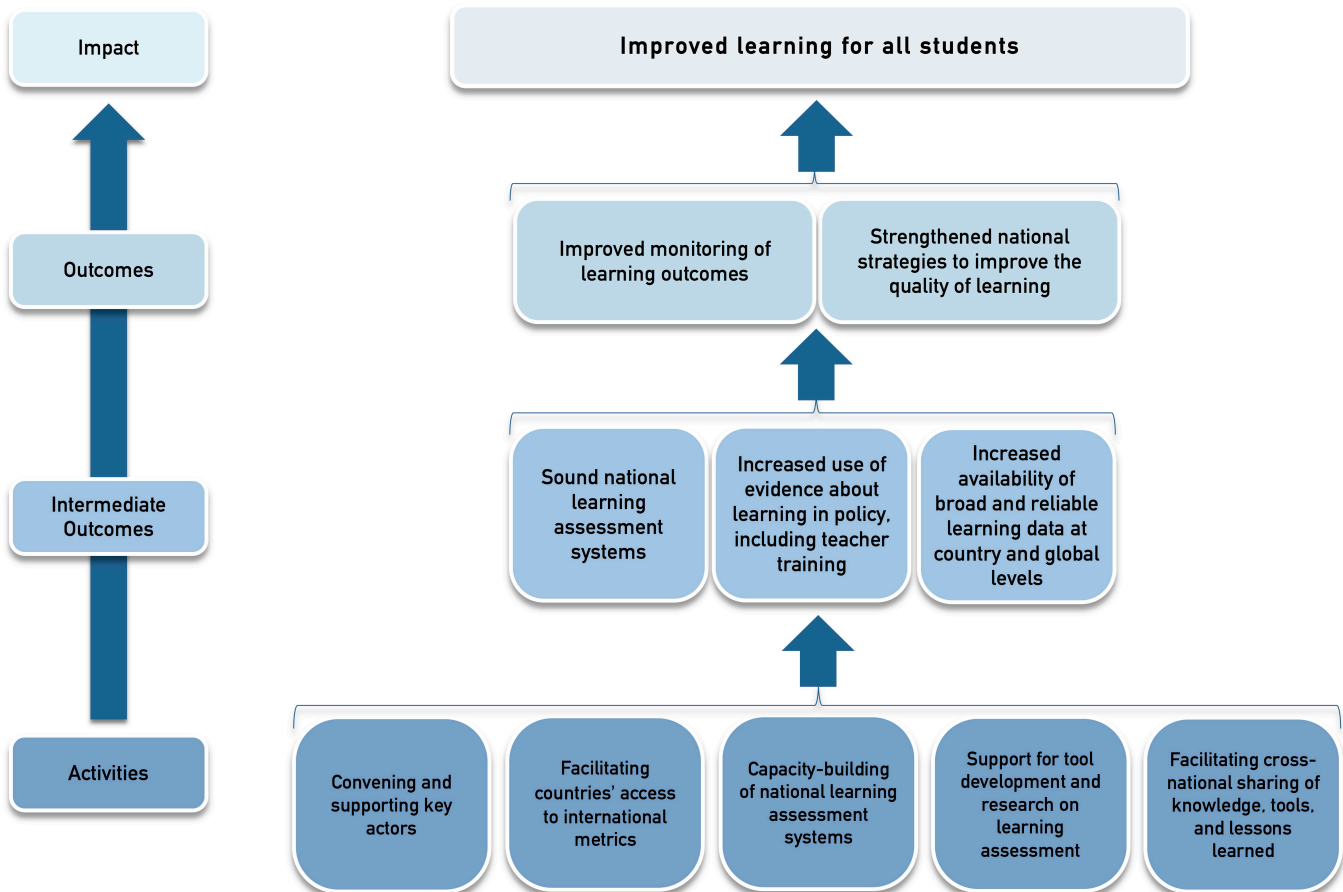
Goal 3: Increased availability of reliable learning data both at country and global levels.

In strengthening national learning assessment systems, A4L would increase the availability of data on learning, not only for countries' use, but also to close the global data gap and monitor progress on Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Target 4.1).

Figure 1: Theory of Change

Assessment for Learning (A4L) Theory of Change

Toward national education systems that regularly assess learning and use results to ensure relevant and effective learning outcomes for all children and youth.



3. PRINCIPLES

In all of its activities, Assessment for Learning would follow the principles below:

- **Global public good:** A4L would introduce significant economies of scale, as well as positive externalities among countries, and non-rivalrous, non-excludible knowledge. All data, tools and resources developed with A4L support would be made available free of any licensing fees.
- **National ownership:** Support to countries would be provided upon request by national governments, and in a contextualized and consultative manner, based on an analysis of existing learning assessment systems at the country level.
- **Transparency:** Results of assessments supported by A4L would be made public (through reporting to the UIS, as well as other means), and should be published at both the national and the global level. This would not only expand the availability of learning data, but also help to facilitate the transparency and participatory processes that can lead to the expanded use of data in policy.
- **Partnership:** A4L would ensure complementarity and support to partners such as the UIS, the World Bank-SABER and READ, regional assessment initiatives (such as LLECE, PASEC, and SACMEQ), the IEA, the OECD, civil society-led assessments, global efforts such as EGRA/EGMA and other initiatives that seek to contribute to measuring or improving the quality of learning.
- **Equity focus:** Special attention would be paid to disaggregating data to better capture learning for underserved areas and populations, such as the poor, the rural, children with disabilities, girls, and countries in situations of fragility. Using an equity lens in the analysis of learning assessment results would help to inform policy-making and monitor progress in providing all children with quality learning opportunities.

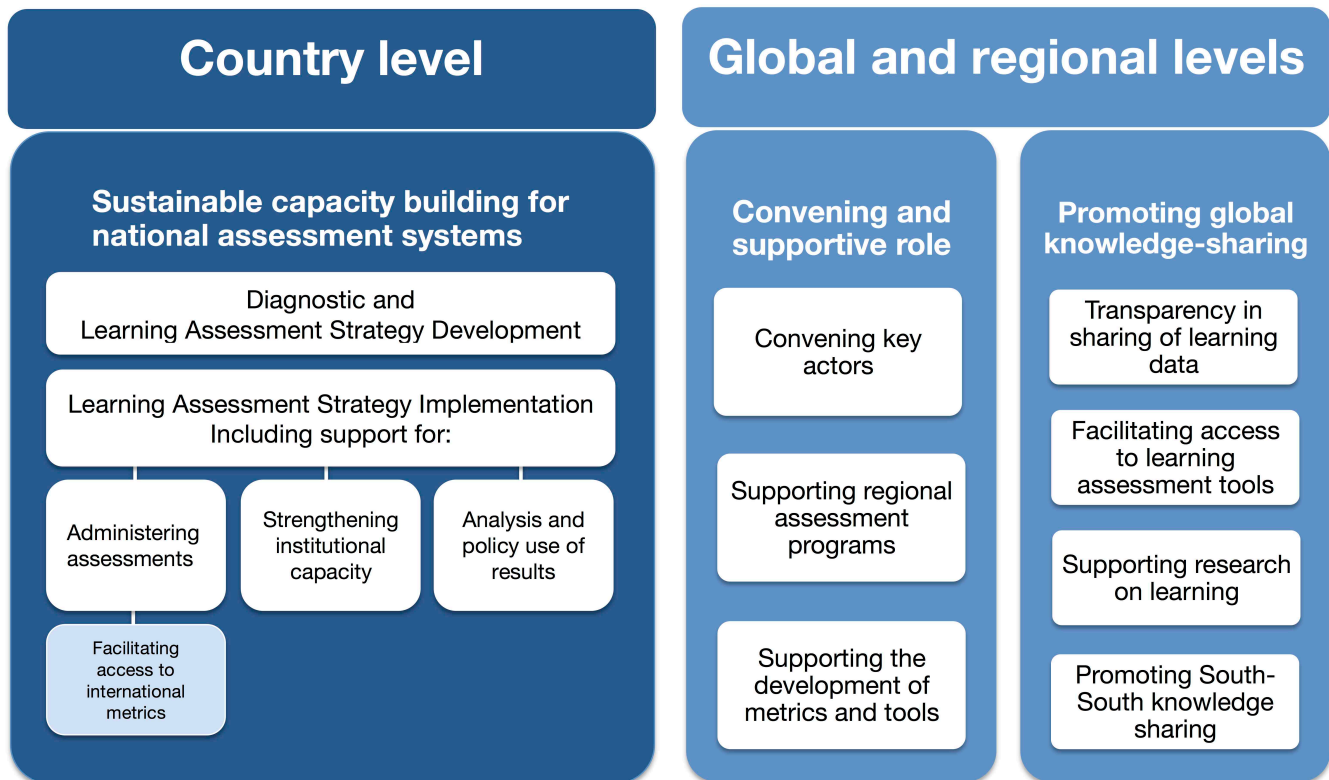
Photo: GPE / Paul Martinez



4. ACTIVITIES AND MODALITIES OF SUPPORT

The support that A4L would offer would entail activities at national, regional and global levels, as illustrated below:

Figure 2: Overview of A4L Activities



This support would fall into several specific modalities, to be detailed in the pages that follow:

1. Country Level

- 1.1. **Learning Assessment Strategy Development Grant** and corresponding technical assistance to national assessment systems for diagnostics and strategy development regarding system strengthening
- 1.2. **Learning Assessment Strategy Implementation Grant** and corresponding technical assistance to national assessment systems for strategy implementation, including administering assessments, strengthening system capacity, and analyzing and disseminating results

2. Global and Regional Levels

- 2.1. **Grants for regional or global-level activities advancing learning assessment**, to support the comparability of regional and international measures, research on learning assessment, and the development of new assessment tools
- 2.2. **Global-level convening and coordination support**, bringing together key actors and ensuring complementarity and synergy among global efforts
- 2.3. **Promotion of knowledge-sharing**, including cross-national exchanges, and the facilitation of the sharing of relevant resources and tools which would be available for the use of countries, regional assessment surveys, and civil society and academia to support national learning assessment

4.1. Country Level

Country support is the heart of A4L. Two types of grants would be made directly to countries, with technical assistance provided as follows, to support their learning assessment systems. A4L would support the strengthening of not only the assessments themselves, but all of the other elements involved in an assessment system used by a country, including the institutions involved in its operation.

4.1.1. **Learning Assessment Strategy Development Grant**

This grant, of up to \$200,000 over 1 year, would support a national diagnostic of existing assessment systems and needs, including analysis of the assessments themselves, assessment priorities for the purposes of policy use, and the subsequent development of a strategy for strengthening national learning assessment systems. All developing countries would be eligible to apply to this grant.

The **diagnostic** would cover all of the three main types of assessment: it would focus on **large-scale, system-level assessments**, but would also assess the alignment and cohesion of these with **examinations** and **classroom assessments**, and aim at ensuring a robust feedback loop among them. Formative and summative assessments can support and reinforce one another, as each provides teachers with a complementary perspective on student learning, gaps, and equity issues. In addition, it would assess the capacity of the learning assessment system as well as its cohesion and alignment with other components of the educational system, from curricula and textbooks to policy and pedagogy.

The diagnostics supported by A4L would draw from existing diagnostic frameworks from key partners, including the SABER Student Assessment framework, which looks at all three types of

assessment, as well as enabling context, system alignment, and assessment quality.⁹ It would also draw from resources available from other partners, such as the NLAMP framework for assessment of learning domain coverage developed by the EPDC, and research reports on assessment systems available from ACER.

This diagnostic would lead to the development of a robust **strategy** for strengthening the learning assessment system. This strategy would be a practical roadmap, and must include an action plan. It would address the key challenges identified by the diagnostic, and must be sound, relevant, coherent, and sustainable.¹⁰ It would also guide countries in collecting data that would be optimally useful: learning data should be accurate, comprehensive, broad in scope, and paired with contextual data. Countries would be encouraged to consider the seven domains of learning outlined by the Learning Metrics Task Force (and represented in Figure 4) in the formulation of their strategy, although they would ultimately be free to select the domains and levels most pertinent to their needs, as informed by the diagnostic, from this framework or any other they find suitable. They would be required, however, to include measures not only of learning alone, but also of key factors potentially impacting learning, such as teacher training, language of instruction, and so forth, so as to aid in the translation of data to policy.¹¹ This must include the disaggregation of locally relevant social categories, including gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and/or religion, so as to enable equity issues to be analyzed and addressed. A4L would provide the technical and financial support necessary to build national capacity for this work.

4.1.2. Learning Assessment Strategy Implementation Grant

This grant, up to \$5,000,000 over 3 to 5 years, would be dedicated to support the implementation of a national learning assessment strategy.¹² This could include the development and administration of a national learning assessment, and the analysis, dissemination, and policy use of its results, as well as building linkages to classroom-level learning through teacher training. It could also promote alignment and cohesion with other components of the educational system as described above, including national exams or

⁹ World Bank. (January 2014). "SABER in Action: Student Assessment." Washington, DC: The World Bank. Retrieved from

wbfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/in_actions/SABER_Student_inAction0117.pdf

¹⁰ See J.M. Bernard and T. de Chaisemartin. (2015). "Education Sector Planning in Developing Countries: An Analysis of 42 Education Plans." Paper presented at the 13th UKFIET Conference on Education and Development, Oxford, UK.

¹¹ Seamus Hegarty, former chair of the IEA, noted in a recent GPE blog post that "indicators alone won't lead to concerted action or effective policymaking. To drive reform, indicators must be embedded in contextual information in order to diagnose problems or shortcomings in an education system." (Hegarty, S. (2014, Nov. 27). We Need More than Just a League Table on Learning (Web log post). Retrieved from <http://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/we-need-more-just-league-table-learning>) Moreover, education quality is not about learning alone, but also about happiness and well-being, and we would do well to include considerations of these in our efforts to assess and improve the quality of education for all students.

¹² A portion of the funding, up to 30%, should be based on results that could for example be the implementation of an assessment or the creation of an assessment unit, depending on the national strategy objectives.

classroom-level assessments. Because national exams often drive teaching, in practice, attention to the content of exams is an important part of meaningful system-level change.

This grant would only be made available to developing countries that already have a sound learning assessment strategy based on a diagnostic (whether supported by A4L or not) of their existing learning assessment system and needs. This must include specific plans for the use of the results in shaping their education policies.

The amount of these grants would naturally vary according to the size and needs of the country in question. Emphasis would be put on building capacity for the long term at the national level, which means the creation and/or strengthening of national institutions, and on disseminating and communicating assessment results. As such, A4L's national capacity-building would go beyond the training of individuals to encompass the strengthening of the institutional environment more broadly. Applications would be evaluated based on the quality of their adherence to the above criteria. This grant could also include, upon countries' requests, support for the mapping of national results to international metrics. If, to that end, a country would like to participate in a regional or international learning assessment, funds from this grant may be used to cover up to 50% of the associated costs to the country. A4L could also provide assistance with regard to finding expertise and building partnerships to implement the mapping. In addition, if a country would like to employ a new assessment tool for which adaptation to their national context would be required, grant funds could be used for that as well.

While A4L's target recipient would normally be national Ministries of Education, the platform would allow for context-dependent flexibility regarding financing citizen-led assessments as well if a solid case can be made that doing so would contribute to improving learning and develop or complement the national learning assessment system.

Each Learning Assessment Strategy Implementation Grant would include a monitoring and evaluation budget to assess the impact of the grant.

Photo: GPE / Stephan Bachenheimer



4.2. Global and Regional Levels

4.2.1. Grants for regional or global-level activities advancing learning assessment

- **Regional Grant:** This grant would be awarded to regional learning assessment programs to support the development of national learning assessment systems in specific countries and/or regional capacity-building activities. It could also support the introduction of new domains of learning assessment and linkages with other metrics. These activities must be additional to the program’s normal course of work.
- **Research Grant:** Modest grants would be available to individual researchers or research institutions for conducting, analyzing, and publishing research on topics pertinent to A4L’s core areas of focus: specifically, learning outcomes measurement (especially in newer areas), national learning assessment systems, capacity-building, use of data to inform policy, linkages to classroom learning, dissemination to the public, and other aspects of the process by which learning assessments can improve learning outcomes.
- **Tool Development Grant:** This grant would be available to organizations or networks for the development of new assessment tools, particularly in learning domains beyond literacy and numeracy, and for the development of common metrics or other tools to promote the international comparability of national assessments. These initiatives would have to follow a partnership approach and involve key stakeholders working in assessment to ensure synergy and avoid duplication of efforts.

A4L could support tool development in less commonly studied domains of learning, such as social and emotional skills, which are essential, and provide the foundation for the acquisition and use of other skills. It may also, for example, support the development of ways to assess early childhood development, or a country’s ability to provide its students with learning opportunities across the LMTF’s 7 domains of learning, often referred to as tools measuring the Breadth of Learning Opportunities. Any tool developed with A4L financing would be placed in the public domain. The items themselves would not necessarily be made public, however, in order to safeguard reliability, though, depending on the nature of the assessment, the general constructs perhaps could be available. Alternatively, the “public domain” could be a restricted public domain, applying to government or assessment agencies.

Depending of the kind of tools considered, development costs are extremely variable and thus flexibility is important.

Table 1: Purposes, Estimated Budgets, and Eligibility Criteria for A4L Grants

Grant title	Purpose of the grant	Eligible entities	Amount (USD)	Time scale
Learning Assessment Strategy Development Grant	Support a diagnostic of national learning assessment systems leading to a capacity-building strategy	All developing countries	Up to \$200,000	1 year
Learning Assessment Strategy Implementation Grant	Support the development of a national learning assessment system, including the dissemination of learning assessment results	Developing countries with a sound learning assessment strategy based on a diagnostic	Up to \$5,000,000	3-5 years
Regional Grant	Support to regional assessment programs	Regional learning assessment programs	Up to \$2,000,000 per entity	3 years
Research Grant	Support for research related to A4L's areas of focus	Individuals and research institutions	Up to \$20,000 per grantee	1-2 years
Tool Development Grant	Support the development of new assessment tools including those beyond literacy and numeracy, and new metrics-alignment efforts	Institutions, partnerships, and other organizations	Up to \$3,000,000	1-2 years

4.2.2. Global-level convening and coordination support

At the regional and global levels, and as a complement to the national level, A4L would:

- Convene key global actors in the area of learning assessment, including planning, hosting, and facilitation of meetings.
- Support coordinating efforts among global education donors, experts, implementing organizations, and countries in order to help to map, coordinate, and connect needs and resources in this area. This would include supporting partners in carrying out capacity-building activities, as well as helping to organize and guide a common vision, set of standards, and strategic plan in the field of learning assessments.
- Play a convening role between regional and international programs (e.g. IEA, PISA, LLECE, PASEC, SACMEQ, EGRA, et al.), and promote their improvement and comparability.

4.2.3. Promotion of knowledge-sharing

In order to advance global and cross-national sharing of tools, knowledge, and lessons learned regarding national learning assessment, A4L would:

- Facilitate the sharing of tools collected by partners, such as test items, methods, protocols, questionnaires, and other tools to help the development of learning assessments at the system level.
- Facilitate learning and South-South knowledge-sharing through an online community of practice forum as well as through in-person meetings and workshops. A4L could host an annual conference for country representatives to share questions and lessons learned as well as success stories, and receive further training and resources.

5. GOVERNANCE

5.1. Overview

It is suggested that A4L would comprise an Operational Team, Steering Committee and Scientific Committee, as follows. It is expected that the A4L Operational Team would be based in an existing public and multilateral organization (to be determined), thereby avoiding the burden and cost of creating a new administrative entity. In essence, the day-to-day coordination of the A4L platform would be executed by this small Operational Team, in consultation with its Steering and Scientific Committees, and it would mobilize a partnership approach to accomplish the majority of its country- and global-level work. In addition, A4L Governance should build on the experience of the Learning Metrics Task Force to ensure that it maintains a spirit of openness and consultation on its work.

- **The A4L Operational Team** would be a team of 5-8 staff who specialize in the development and analysis of student assessments, the development of learning assessment systems, and project development and management. They would also be well equipped to support the translation of assessment results to policymaking. The team would develop proposed work plans and would ensure their implementation. They should possess substantial experience in developing country contexts and should be able to develop and maintain links with A4L's main expected partners.
- **The A4L Steering Committee** would represent A4L's main stakeholders (donors and beneficiaries) through a rotating membership. It would provide oversight of the orientation of the work of A4L and its budget, and would also contribute to advocacy

and resource mobilization. The Steering Committee would not include commercial assessment providers.

- **The A4L Scientific Committee** would be constituted of high-level experts in the field of learning assessments and would ensure the quality of A4L’s technical work and provide advice and recommendations to the Operational Team and the Steering Committee.

Figure 3: A4L Governance Structure



A4L’s activities would be monitored and evaluated according to the results framework that it would develop, and it would obtain an external evaluation after three to four years of operation. It would strive to gather and implement lessons learned into its operations on a regular basis.

5.2. Operational Team Activities and Structure

The Operational Team would be primarily responsible for the support modalities outlined above, including grant-making, technical assistance, coordination, convening, and the facilitation of knowledge-sharing, including maintaining a clearinghouse of expertise. In addition, prior to grant implementation, it is expected that the Operational Team would coordinate with partners on guidelines to support the diagnostic of national learning assessment systems and needs (including the use or expansion of existing guidelines, such as the SABER-Student Assessment framework), and the process for developing a capacity-building strategy from this diagnostic.

Given the expected workload, and in order to ensure sufficient support to individual requests, the minimum staff required would be one lead, three full-time senior professional staff, two mid-level professional staff, one junior professional staff member, and one administrative staff member. This would enable the team to limit the number of countries or initiatives being supported concurrently by a given staff member. The size of the team would naturally depend

on the existing human resources of the host organization as well as on the scope of A4L’s coverage, and the team would also make use of external consultants.

In addition to its grant-making budget, the core administrative costs of A4L would be in the ballpark of the following:

Table 2: Core Administrative Costs of A4L

Item	Cost per year (USD)	Total cost over 5 years (USD)
Technical support to countries: office costs, mission travel, publications, knowledge-sharing website, community of practice, etc.	400,000	2,000,000
Regional and global-level: financial and coordination support for knowledge-sharing conferences, workshops, and meetings ¹³	350,000	1,750,000
Total country- and global-level technical support		3,750,000
Operational team salaries, benefits, and HR costs, total¹⁴	1,718,400	8,592,000
A4L external evaluation	N/A	800,000
Total		13,142,000

¹³ This would cover one large knowledge-sharing conference for 100 people, two regional workshops for 40 people, and a few small committee meetings each year.

¹⁴ This assumes that the Operational Team will have one lead staff, three senior staff, two mid-level staff, one junior professional staff, and one administrative assistant, and includes benefits, pension contributions, and other HR costs.

6. PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTNER RESOURCES

6.1. Main Partnerships

In line with the principle of ensuring complementarity and mutual reinforcement with other initiatives, A4L would work closely with other initiatives in the following ways:

- **UIS:** A4L would work in close cooperation with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). A4L would support the use of international learning metrics to assist countries that wish to relate national findings to international results, and would also require that data gathered by grantees be reported to the UIS. Thus, it would support UNESCO in its capacity to report on the Sustainable Development Goals, and particularly on Target 4.1. Furthermore, it would support the UIS in its convening role, helping existing efforts to coordinate learning assessment work.
- **Regional assessment initiatives:** The work of A4L would reinforce regionally relevant responses to the learning challenge through support to regional assessment initiatives for the development of additional country-level assessments and national or regional capacity-building programs. A4L would also work with these regional programs to facilitate, as per country requests, linkages between national and regional metrics or with international metrics.
- **World Bank:** Two initiatives at the World Bank are particularly of common purpose with A4L: the READ (Russia Education Aid for Development) Trust Fund, and the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) initiative which it has helped to finance. The diagnostic frameworks for national education systems, as well as other very helpful tools, that they have produced are discussed in the section below. A4L, as a complementary initiative, would build on these tools, reinforce the work of these important partners, and avoid duplication.
- **Other initiatives:** A number of initiatives (e.g. EGRA and EGMA, civil-society-led assessments such as ASER, Uwezo, Jangandoo and Beekunko, and related household surveys, such as MICS or DHS) seek to enhance existing knowledge regarding quality learning and/or provide support to countries in order to improve the quality of education. A4L would seek synergy, rather than duplication, with these initiatives, helping to link national authorities with them to move from assessing learning to improving learning.

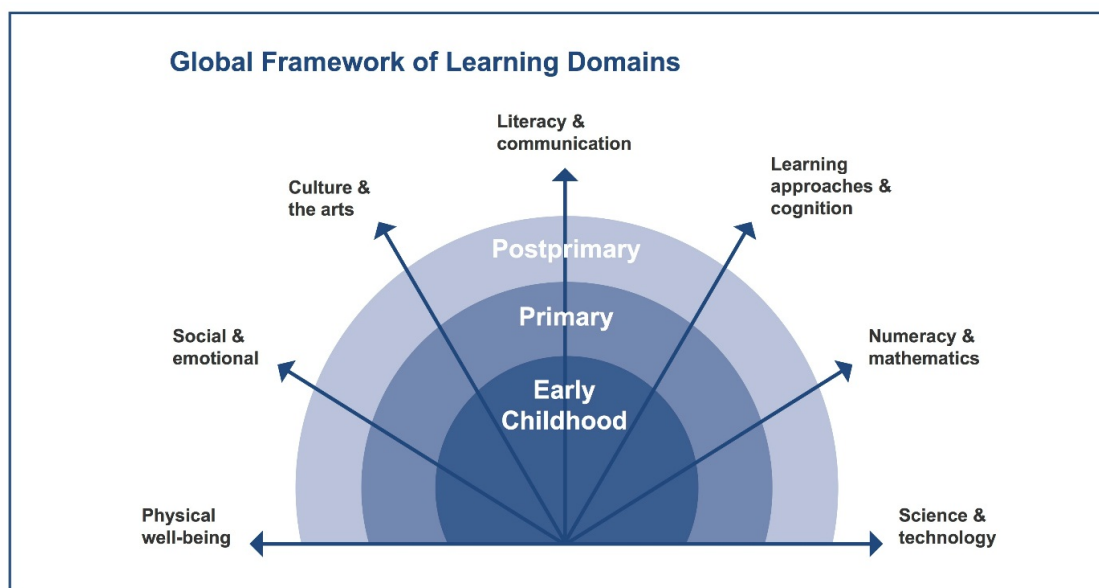
6.2. Partner Tools, Frameworks, and Resources

As part of its role supporting coordination of efforts and resources, there are a number of tools developed by partner organizations and programs that A4L could collect, draw from, and help

to disseminate. Among these are metrics, indicators, frameworks, tools, and training materials related to the assessment of learning.

For example, after extensive consultations, the Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF)¹⁵ has delineated the following seven learning domains:

Figure 4: LMTF Learning Domains



The development of competencies in these domains has been recommended by LMTF for early childhood through lower secondary education. A4L would not require countries to cover all seven domains in their assessments, but would promote awareness of them and welcome countries to engage with them on a demand-driven basis. It would also be open to supporting measures that countries may want to pursue outside of this framework.

LMTF has also recommended the following list of seven learning indicators for global tracking:

¹⁵ Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF) (2013). *Toward Universal Learning: What Every Child Should Learn*, Report No. 1 of the Learning Metrics Task Force. Montreal and Washington, D.C.: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2013/02/learning-metrics>

Figure 5: LMTF Learning Indicators

Learning Indicators for Global Tracking	
Areas of Measurement	Description of Indicators
Learning for All	Combine measures of completion and learning (reading proficiency at the end of primary school) into one indicator.
Age and Education Matter for Learning	Measure timely entry, progression, and completion of schooling, and population-based indicators to capture those who do not enter or leave school early.
Reading	Measure foundational skills by Grade 3 and proficiency by the end of primary school.
Numeracy	Measure basic skills by end of primary and proficiency by lower secondary school.
Ready to Learn	Measure acceptable levels of early learning and development across a subset of domains by the time a child enters primary school.
Citizen of the World	Measure among youth the demonstration of values and skills necessary for success in their communities, countries and the world.
Breadth of Learning Opportunities	Track exposure to learning opportunities across all seven domains of learning.

Work is already underway on many of these indicators, but some still require development. A4L may be useful in supporting the lattermost through the Breadth of Learning Tool Development Project, for example, to ensure educational quality through diversity of learning opportunities,¹⁶ or the Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes Project (MELQO), and the tools it is developing for assessing child development and learning upon entering primary school and the quality of learning environments in early childhood education.¹⁷ In addition, it could draw from the Learning Standards developed by the World Bank’s SABER initiative.

A4L would have a wealth of other resources to draw from, mobilize, and contribute to as well. SABER has produced a high-quality results framework for national capacity-building in the area of learning assessment systems which could inform A4L’s activities – although A4L would shift the focus from policy analysis to measurement of concrete results. In terms of tools, the SABER Student Assessment Tools and testing instruments may be of use to A4L’s grantees, and the LMTF Learning Champions initiative, in which countries are working to develop “a set of validated, practical tools to adapt the LMTF recommendations to national or sub-national contexts.” USAID, the READ Trust Fund and the World Bank have developed formal training courses on assessment for teachers, school leaders, and education officials, which could

¹⁶ Seamus Hegarty, former chair of the IEA and chair of the Standards Working Group of the LMTF, has advocated for this indicator of breadth, cautioning, “While welcoming the development of new indicators on foundational skills such as reading and numeracy, we cannot lose sight of the larger picture of a comprehensive education. Consider the example of teachers who ‘teach for the test’ and end up neglecting other areas of learning. Now imagine the risks arising at the level of an entire education system if those aspects of learning that lend themselves to indicator construction are given disproportionate attention in schools.” (Hegarty, S. (2014, Nov. 27). We Need More than Just a League Table on Learning (Web log post). Retrieved from <http://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/we-need-more-just-league-table-learning>)

¹⁷ <http://www.brookings.edu/about/centers/universal-education/learning-metrics-task-force-2/melqo>

perhaps be implemented by interested countries. Furthermore, IIEP has recently released an online portal, Plan for Learning, to help planners and policymakers to understand issues surrounding learning assessment, through a high-quality collection of research on issues related to learning, balanced and digestible analyses produced by IIEP authors, information on current debates in the field, and an interactive glossary of terms. A4L could not only promote the use of this resource by planners and policymakers in participating countries, but also contribute resources in the form of data, best practices, and lessons learned.

7. ADDED VALUE

In achieving its objectives, A4L would furnish nine key added values toward the realization of SDG Goal 4 regarding Quality Learning:

- **Making learning assessments accessible:** As learning data is particularly lacking in poor countries, A4L would make learning assessments accessible through funding and technical support to developing countries and the provision of tools free of charge.
- **Building national systems:** A4L would not only support learning assessments, but would also support the diagnostics and building or reinforcement of national assessment systems focusing on learning improvement that would be sustained once A4L's work has concluded.
- **Supporting the use of data in policy:** A4L's capacity-building focus at the national level would include technical assistance and resources to help countries use assessment results to improve their educational policies, including teacher training, and thus feed back to classroom-level learning.
- **Bringing an equity focus:** Improving access and quality increasingly requires a special focus on marginalized populations. A4L would bring an equity focus to learning assessment systems to ensure that they assess and help to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged and marginalized populations.
- **Supporting international comparability:** A4L would bring national stakeholders together with international partners working on global metrics, thereby supporting international comparability and the availability of learning data at the global level.
- **Increasing the availability of learning data:** By supporting learning assessments in developing countries, A4L would fill the learning-data gap for the poorest countries.
- **Strengthening the evidence base and credibility of the education sector:** By providing key data on learning in the education sector, A4L would strengthen the evidence base, and thereby the level of credibility, of education on the international agenda.

- **Coordinating efforts and promoting dialogue among key global education actors:** Through its role as a platform, A4L would aid in the coordination of efforts, needs, and resources among donors, implementing agencies, Ministries of Education, and other key actors, promoting dialogue and collaboration in global education.
- **Global public good:** A4L would introduce substantial and valuable economies of scale in the global effort to improve learning through strengthening national learning assessment systems, and would likewise create positive externalities among countries.

8. NEXT STEPS

The development of A4L would require a number of steps and documents, beyond this concept note. This includes outreach to potential donors, the development of the administrative framework, and a number of key guidelines and documents regarding the operation of the platform, such as terms of reference for the different committees and staff members, guidelines on the grant process, formal agreements with donors and partners, and so forth.

In addition, A4L would require a number of technical tools and resources, some of which would be gathered, and others produced by or for A4L. A number of these may be produced after the launch, as A4L moves forward, but others would need to be available up front.

Table 3: A4L Proposed Timeline

Phase	Activities
Phase 1 <i>(completed)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial discussions, presentations and concept development • Consultations • Communication materials around A4L (e.g. 2-pager, blog) • Concept note
Phase 2 By June 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of institutional host for A4L • Outreach to potential partners (for financial and technical cooperation) • Development of A4L Results Framework and M&E strategy
Phase 3 By December 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up of the administrative framework, recruitment of staff • Development of technical A4L documents and discussions with technical partners
Phase 4 January 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A4L launch • Start of the grant application process
Phase 5 March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A4L fully operational

ANNEX 1: LIST OF ACRONYMS

A4L	Assessment for Learning
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AFD	L'Agence Française de Développement
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
CONFEMEN	Conférence des ministres de l'Éducation des États et gouvernements de la Francophonie
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EI	Education International
EFA	Education For All
EGRA	Early-Grade Reading Assessment
EGMA	Early-Grade Math Assessment
EPDC	Education Policy Data Center
ETS	Educational Testing Service
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IIEP	UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning
IREDU	L'Institut de Recherche sur l'Éducation: Sociologie et Économie de l'Éducation
KICE	Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation
LLECE	Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education
LMTF	Learning Metrics Task Force
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NLAMP	National Learning Assessments Mapping Project
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PASEC	Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
READ	Russia Education Aid for Development
RTI	Research Triangle International
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality -
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WERK	Women Educational Researchers of Kenya

ANNEX 2: PARTIES CONSULTED

Individuals

Reference Group:

- Kate Anderson, Center for Universal Education, Brookings Institution
- Ed Barnett, DFID
- Penelope Bender, USAID
- Chris Berry, DFID
- Cornelius Chipoma, formerly of USAID and the Government of Zambia
- Marguerite Clarke, World Bank
- Vigdis Cristofoli, Norad
- Luis Crouch, RTI
- Amy Jo Dowd, Save the Children
- David Edwards, Education International
- Sue Grant Lewis, UNESCO-IIEP
- Seamus Hegarty, former Chair, IEA, Chair, LMTF Standards Working Group
- Joyce Kinyanjui, WERK Opportunity Schools
- Albert Motivans, UIS
- Joshua Muskin, Aga Khan Foundation
- Dzingai Mutumbuka, ADEA
- Patricia Scheid, Hewlett Foundation
- Christine Veverka, USAID

Assessment Institution Representatives:

- Moritz Bilagher, LLECE
- Dirk Hastedt, IEA
- Irwin Kirsch, ETS
- Jacques Malpel, PASEC
- Michael Ward, PISA
- Pablo Zoido, PISA

Other Experts Consulted:

- Ray Adams, Centre for Global Education Monitoring, ACER; advisor to PISA
- Jean-Claude Balmes, formerly of AFD
- Aaron Benavot, EFA GMR
- Jean Bourdon, IREDU, Université de Bourgogne
- Jimin Cho, KICE
- Rebecca Winthrop, Center for Universal Education, Brookings Institution

Meetings

- **Learning Metrics Task Force Meeting**, Brussels, June 2014
 - Organizations represented: ActionAid International, Aga Khan Foundation, Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Agence Française de Développement (AFD), ACER Centre for Global Education Monitoring (ACER/GEM), Campaign for Female Education (Camfed) International, Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution, Dubai Cares/United Arab Emirates, Education International, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Global Partnership for Education, Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, International Education Funders Group (IEFG), USAID, UK Department for International Development (DFID), UNESCO, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)

- **Learning Metrics Task Force Forum**, Kigali, February 2015
 - Countries represented: Argentina, Botswana, Colombia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Pakistan, Palestine, Rwanda, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia
 - Organizations represented: ADEA, Brookings India, Campaign for Female Education (Camfed) International, Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution, COSYDEP (Coalition des Organisations en Synergie pour la Défense de l'Éducation Publique), Dubai Cares/United Arab Emirates, Educate!, FHI 360, Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) Youth Advocacy Group, Global Partnership for Education, Inter-American Development Bank, International Education Funders Group (IEFG), International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP), Jordan Education Initiative, Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation, Office of Julia Gillard, People for Education, Ontario Porticus, Pratham, Save the Children, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Secretariat (SEAMES), USAID, UK Department for International Development (DFID), UNESCO, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), UNICEF, University of Warwick, Wellspring/Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform (RENCP)

- **International Education Funders Group Meeting**, Lisbon, April 2015
 - Organizations represented: Aga Kahn Foundation, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Central Square Foundation, Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), Comic Relief, Credit Suisse, Dubai Cares, EdelGive Foundation, EMpower - The Emerging Market Foundation, FCSH – UNL, Fondation Les Pâquerettes, Fondazione Reggio Children - Centro Loris Malaguzzi, Frankel Family Foundation, Global Education Fund, The Global Fund for Children, Global Partnership for Education, The Hewlett Foundation, IDP Foundation, Inc., IEFG, India School Leadership Institute, LEGO Foundation, The MacArthur Foundation, Macau Tong Chai, Mango Tree, Michigan State University, Muktangan, Open Society Foundations, Open University, UK, Oxfam Netherlands, PaperSeed Foundation, The David & Elaine Potter Foundation,

Porticus, Sesame Workshop, STIR Education, University of Witwatersrand, Varkey Foundation, Vitol Foundation, Wellspring Advisors

- **GPE Strategy and Policy Committee Meeting**, London, April 2015
 - Countries represented: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal
 - Organizations represented: ActionAid, Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), UK Department for International Development (DFID), Education International-Belgium, Save the Children, Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), UNESCO-France, USAID, World Bank

- **GPE Pre-Board Constituency Meeting, African Constituencies**, Dakar, May 2015
 - Countries represented: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Somaliland, South Sudan, Tanzania (Zanzibar), Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
 - Organizations represented: GIZ

- **GPE Pre-Board Constituency Meeting, Rest of the World**, Dubai, May 2015
 - Countries represented: Cambodia, Georgia, Haiti, Honduras, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Vietnam

- **Learning Metrics Task Force Advisory Committee Meeting**, Washington, September 2015
 - Countries represented: Kenya, Palestine, Zambia
 - Organizations represented: Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution, UK Department for International Development (DFID), FHI 360, Global Partnership for Education, Research Triangle International (RTI), RESULTS Educational Fund, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), UNICEF, University of Warwick, World Bank