XALAPA 2017
Poder Para la Gente

INFORMATION BRIEF: SUB-THEME 2

Exploring The Use Of Citizen-Generated Data To Monitor Progress Towards Achieving The SDGs

PAL NETWORK
People's Action for Learning

MEDICIÓN INDEPENDIENTE de Aprendizajes

Executive Summary

Over 80 participants from 19+ Global South countries attended PAL Network's 5th Annual meeting in Xalapa, Mexico to explore citizen participation in household-based learning assessments, under the meeting theme 'Power to the People'. Over the past 11 years, PAL Network member countries have recruited and trained more than half a million volunteers to conduct simple learning assessments in their communities. Every year, more than 68,000 citizens volunteer to traverse some of the most difficult and remote terrain in their countries, walking from house to house to find out if children are learning.

Citizen-led assessments were first tried in India in 2005 against the backdrop of Millennium Development Goal 4 promising Universal Primary Education (UPE) to all children. Citizen-led assessments have since spread to 14 countries globally and provide important information on the acquisition of foundational skills for children who may or may not be in school. As the new post-2015 goals were being shaped, citizen-led assessment countries strongly advocated for the inclusion of an early learning indicator as a measure of progress by 2030.

It was agreed by participants that it is important for citizen-led assessment data to be used to monitor progress towards achieving SDG4. Participants agreed on four key steps to be taken by the PAL Network over the coming year to ensure that PAL Network continues to be recognized globally as providing important data on children that are left out of school-based assessments.

Firstly, PAL Network needs to create network-wide data quality standards that country members are then held accountable for adhering to. The suggestion was to create three 'tiers' of quality standards: basic minimum standards; intermediate and advanced. The second step would involve mapping the current data that is collected by PAL Network member countries to the SDG indicators to obtain an understanding of where that may align with the global goals.

Lastly, participants agreed that PAL Network should improve on comparability of data collected across the network, and pilot some shared test items to make direct comparisons of children's ability across the PAL Network countries.

Introduction

The 5th Annual PAL Network meeting was held in Xalapa, Mexico from 13th to 16th March 2017. The meeting was jointly hosted by Medición Independiente de Aprendizajes (MIA) and the PAL Network. The meeting provided structured opportunities for deep exploration of this year' theme: 'Power to the People'. The theme was critically explored by over 80 participants from more than 19 Global South countries in four different sub-theme groups. Each sub-theme focused on a different aspect of citizen participation in conducting household-based learning assessments with a focus on value, potential and next steps.

Power To The People

The power of this movement lies in the fact that it is led by citizens themselves. Every year, more than 68,000 citizens volunteer to traverse some of the most difficult and remote terrain in their countries, walking from house to house to find out if children are learning. Citizen-led assessments are "owned" by ordinary people, local leaders, local NGOs and other partner organizations at local and national level.

The PAL Network philosophy is simple. You cannot begin to find a solution without first understanding the problem. Finding solutions is not just the responsibility of policymakers, government leaders, head teachers and others, but includes parents and local citizens. The citizen-led assessment model allows hundreds of thousands of citizens to experience and understand the problem first hand in their own communities.

Citizen-Led Assessments And The Global Goals: What Are The Facts?

Prior to 2015, the global goal for education (MDG 2) focused exclusively on achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE)

As more children began to attend school than ever before, there seemed to be a problem emerging: children were attending school, but they were not learning

Citizen-led assessments were first tried in India in 2005 when a group of concerned citizens decided that they wanted to find out the prevalence of this problem

Over the past 11 years, the citizen-led assessment model has spread to many other countries who wanted to know the same

Citizen-led assessments are conducted in the household, capturing many more children than can be found in a school-based assessment

Throughout the global processes focused on shaping the new post-2015 goals, citizen-led assessments countries strongly advocated for the inclusion of an early learning indicator in reading and maths as a measure of progress by 2030

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 sets a bold and ambitious new challenge that goes beyond the previous focus on access to measuring learning progress. SDG4 aims to achieve 'inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all' by 2030. There are two central pillars for the education goals: monitoring and improving learning outcomes, and leaving no child behind. SDG4 is made up of ten targets, five of which focus on achieving learning outcomes. In order to be able to effectively monitor progress towards achieving these goals, more and better learning data is needed.

Citizen-led assessments provide data that make the invisible problem of poor foundational learning visible. Unlike school-based assessments, citizen-led

SDG 4: Quality Education

assessment data can provide an emphasis on equity, ensuring data is available to track the learning outcomes of those children most likely to be out of school or attending irregularly. These are the children most at risk of being left behind.

Sharing Experiences Across The Network

A Summary Of Group Discussions

During the sub-theme session in Xalapa, Mexico, the first part of the session focused on updating participants on the current developments with regards to monitoring SDG4 at the global level. External experts updated network members on the status of activities and pinpointed opportunities for involvement and contribution of PAL Network countries. Network members were keen to learn more, both from the external participants and from each other. The following questions were explored:

1   What are the latest updates regarding tracking progress towards achieving SDG4 globally?

2   How do member countries understand and articulate the role of citizen-generated data in monitoring progress towards achieving the global goals?

3   What do member countries see as trade-offs between locally useful and internationally comparable indicators? How can we manage these trade-offs?

4   Are there existing member countries that already align, or plan to align, the data they collect with the SDGs?

5   How are member countries working on improving the overall quality of data collected and is there a role for the PAL Network?

Updates From The Unesco Institute For Statistics (UIS)

As the official source of internationally-comparable education data, the UIS has the mandate to produce global indicators to monitor progress towards achieving SDG4 by 2030. The UIS faces challenges in measurement for two reasons. Firstly, the multi-dimensionality of education and learning means it is impossible to establish narrow and unambiguous definitions of key education indicators. Secondly, it is not possible to implement a single global measurement with broad cross-national applicability. This is because concepts of learning and how it should be measured are dependent on local contexts, and countries make independent decisions national curriculum and national assessments.

However, this does not mean that international comparability of learning outcomes is out of reach, nor does it mean that there is no place for statements about how learning should be measured and reported. What it means is that international comparability must be achieved without the imposition of universal measurement processes. To work closely on these issues, the UIS established the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML) in 2016. The Alliance brings together a broad range of stakeholders including international education experts, cross-national learning assessment initiatives, donors, civil society organizations and national-level decision makers to work on developing statistical approaches and monitoring tools to better assess progress towards SDG4.

The technical work of the alliance is delegated to six Task Forces to identify innovations and methodological advances to inform the design and implementation of universal learning indicators. One of the six Task Forces is chaired by a PAL Network representative, with presence on two further Task Forces and a seat at the Strategic Advisory Planning Committee. The Terms of Reference for these Task Forces articulated the requirement for representatives specifically from citizen-led assessments.

Updates From The Australian Council For Educational Research (ACER)

As no single learning assessment can produce all of the data required to monitor SDG4, new coordination mechanisms are needed to help the international community define and implement a common measurement framework. The Global Education Monitoring Centre (GEM Centre) at the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) are working closely with UIS on developing a reporting scale to describe and quantify learning progression in reading and mathematics to support monitoring of indicator 4.1.1:
Proportion of children and young people:
(a) in grades 2/3;
(b) at the end of primary; and
(c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex.
The reporting scale is presented through a tool called the Learning Progression Explorer (LPE). In the sub-theme session, UIS and ACER appealed to the PAL Network test development experts and others to participate in the upcoming review of the LPE tool in order of further develop and improve it. PAL Network experts are invited to participate in a review webinar and online questionnaire in April 2017 to ensure the experiences and expertise of citizen-led assessments are included.

Discussion On Developing A Data Quality Assurance Framework

Once the reporting scales are finalized, particular locations on the scale will be established as benchmarks for what is considered to be 'minimum proficiency' for children at the end of Grade 2/3, at the end of primary and the end of lower secondary. Tools and methods will be developed to anchor different national, regional and cross-national assessments to this scale. One of these tools will be a Data Quality Assurance Framework (DQAF) to enable the quality and appropriateness of assessment data submitted for anchoring to be judged and assured. Ultimately, these tools will enable countries to measure and report on learning in ways that are appropriate for their different contexts, yet still facilitate fit-for-purpose international comparisons. If citizen-led assessment data is to be officially anchored to the UIS reporting scale, it will be assessed against the UIS DQAF.

Within the PAL Network, there are currently no universal minimum standards for ensuring data quality. The first PAL Network Data Quality workshop was held in January 2017 to bring together key data experts within the network to map existing efforts within countries to ensure robust data collection and monitoring. This was the first step towards drafting some minimum quality standards through a participatory process. A draft minimum standards document was produced, and it was agreed by participants that further work on this is still required, together with establishing a peer monitoring mechanism within the network to ensure good quality data and share best practice.

Discussion On Developing Common Test Items For Comparability

Citizen-led assessments are purposely designed to respond to the specific needs and challenges of the country context in which they operate. Tests are based on national curriculum standards and are not directly comparable across the network. The original purpose of such assessments was never to create a universal learning indicator, but to provide large-scale, timely data on the learning outcomes of all children within a particular country. Participants discussed the potential value of anchoring citizen-led assessments to the UIS reporting scale, enabling PAL Network countries to measure and report on learning in their different contexts, whilst still allowing some comparability.

Participants also discussed the possibility and value of creating some shared test items to be piloted across the network to allow some direct comparisons to be made across countries. As PAL Network countries currently assess children in more than 40 languages, participants' discussed developing and piloting shared items in numeracy as this would be ease comparison across different contexts.

What Is The Role Of The PAL Network?

After participants had listened to the current updates on developing a global reporting scale, and had discussed the need for developing a Data Quality Assurance Framework as well as shared test items, the second part of the session focused on exploring what the role of the network might be in taking some of these suggestions forward. Some of the following questions were explored:

1	Is there something we can do at a network-level to learn more / share more about the potential of citizen-generated data to monitor progress towards achieving the SDGs?
2	How can the PAL Network engage more formally as a global civil society representative in these discussions, gaining a more permanent "seat at the table"?
3	How can we better align and package citizen-generated data with a strong equity focus to respond directly to the SDG discussions?
4	What is the role of the PAL Network in developing a Data Quality Assurance Framework for the network?
5	What is the role of the PAL Network in developing shared test items or tools for comparison across the network and what does this look like?

What Might The Future Look Like?

Next Steps For The PAL Network

After much discussion, participants agreed on four key steps to be taken by the PAL Network over the coming year, to ensure that we are strengthening our data standards through peer-led monitoring and sharing of best practice, whilst continuing to advocate globally for the inclusion of citizen-led assessment data in SDG4 monitoring and retaining a seat at the table to influence these discussions.

1. Development Of Pal Network Data Quality Standards Framework

As the PAL Network has evolved fairly organically over the last eleven years, member countries have developed contextually relevant assessments that are pegged to the national curriculum standards of that country. Monitoring mechanisms and quality assurance have been the responsibility of the member country to develop and execute. Since the formal establishment of the PAL Network in 2015, there is increasing pressure to say something about the quality of the data that we collect. PAL Network countries could benefit from developing a set of Data Quality Standards for the Network that are publicly available. Data Quality Standards could be drafted in three 'tiers' as follows:

TIER 1: Basic Minimum Standards
Adherence would be measured through a peer evaluation mechanism. Non-adherence would categorize member as 'Associate member' rather than 'Full Member'.

TIER 2: Intermediate Standards
Intermediate level Standards would build on the basic minimum standards within what is practical for citizen-led assessments. Non-adherence would have no formal repercussions but all members should be moving towards Tier 2 Data Quality Standards

TIER 3: Advanced Quality Standards
Depending on the capacity and resources of any member country, Tier 3 standards would be considered more 'aspirational'. Ideally, every member should achieve some elements of Tier 3 standards on data quality.

2. Mapping Existing Country Data To The Sdg Indicators

SDG4 comprises of ten targets and associated indicators. Across the PAL Network membership, countries are already collecting some of the data required by the indiciator framework to measure progress towards achieving SDG4. Some countries within the PAL Network (Pakistan, Nepal, Kenya, and Senegal) have already mapped the data that they collect against the indicator framework. However, this information has not been consolidated or published anywhere. Participants agreed that this mapping should be conducted by all countries as the first step towards understanding how our data collection is aligned with the global goals.

3. Improve Data Comparability Within The Network Countries

Citizen-led assessments are purposely designed to respond to the specific needs and challenges of the country context in which they operate. To date, all tests are developed by a group of experts in each country, drawn from curriculum development and subject specialists, representatives from the national assessment institute, trained teachers and others. Participnats agreed that whilst it is important to speak to the national curriculum standards of each country, there are certain foundational skills that every child must learn and there may be a way to improve comparability within the network. This would start with holding a workshop on test development across the network to explore possibilities.

4. Develop Shared Test Items For Comparability

Citizen-led assessments are purposely designed to respond to the specific needs and challenges of the country context in which they operate. To date, all tests are developed by a group of experts in each country, drawn from curriculum development and subject specialists, representatives from the national assessment institute, trained teachers and others. Participnats agreed that whilst it is important to speak to the national curriculum standards of each country, there are certain foundational skills that every child must learn and there may be a way to improve comparability within the network. This would start with holding a workshop on test development across the network to explore possibilities.