



# A knowledge portal on learning assessments for South Asia

ACER in collaboration with Community Systems Foundation is building a knowledge portal on learning assessments for South Asia. **Sanjay Tripathi** reports.



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Sustainable Development Goal 4 'Quality Education' has re-emphasised that the ultimate goal of education systems is to improve the quality of learning rather than simply ensure access to schools. For developing countries, improvements in the quality of education can drive economic growth. Hanushek & Woessmann in 2007 pointed out that cognitive skills are a strong driver of economic growth, a correlation which is much more robust than the relationship between years of schooling and economic growth. Globally therefore, education programs in both developed and developing countries, are witnessing a strategic shift in focus from inputs to quality of outcomes.

One way to understand the quality of an education system is to measure the learning outcomes of students. Many countries use large-scale standardised international assessments to measure the learning levels of students and diagnose the health of their education systems. Such assessments are a part of the system level monitoring

process and evidence generated is used to address impediments to learning.

In South Asia, it is only recently that countries have shown interest in taking part in international assessments. Bhutan has participated in the new Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for middle and low-income countries, PISA-D, while India has agreed to participate in PISA 2021. Pakistan will participate in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2019. Nepal and Afghanistan are implementing an Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), and Sri Lanka and the Maldives are integrating some test items from PISA and TIMSS into their national assessments.

### **Learning assessment community**

The *World Development Report 2018* states that almost one-third of those who complete primary school in South Asia lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, hindering the region's growth potential and competitiveness. It points out that even when access to education has increased, improvement in learning levels remains a challenge. Moreover, countries need robust assessment systems that help them to monitor progress in learning and undertake evidence-based corrective measures. A number of countries in South Asia are yet to mainstream systematic monitoring and measurement of learning that enables them to evaluate the impact of their education policies and programs.

In view of these developments, there are strong reasons for establishing regional partnerships in learning assessment in South Asia. Among the key benefits of participating in a regional assessment intervention are regional capacity development, research and knowledge sharing, development of tools and procedures for national and/or cross-national assessments, and collaboration on cross-national assessments and research projects. It is

envisaged that developing a knowledge platform will play a key role in strengthening regional partnerships in the area of learning assessment.

ACER India has collaborated with Community Systems Foundation, USA, to establish a knowledge platform that will support and facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange relevant to developing and implementing learning assessments. The knowledge platform will address the role of assessment in improving teaching and learning in South Asia. Funded by UNICEF, the main purpose of the knowledge platform is to organise existing resources on assessment and foster a community around assessment. It will draw on lessons learnt from other regional initiatives related to learning assessments. The project is limited to aggregation of resources on learning assessments and does not include the development of any new resources and knowledge materials.

### **Key features**

- The platform will become a comprehensive repository of all recent research publications, policies and relevant reports pertaining to learning assessments in South Asia, as well as key international publications and policies.
- It will provide guidance, good practices, tools and resources for each of the phases and key areas of a learning assessment cycle, collating existing materials both from the region and internationally.
- The platform will include data and research findings from learning assessments in South Asia to better monitor the state of learning and quality of education in the region.
- It will include automated visualisation of the evidence through maps and graphs to facilitate different types of analysis, especially analysis related to education equity.
- The portal will organise all content according to a comprehensive taxonomy to enable efficient and powerful search options that

meet the specific needs of different users and target audiences.

- The project will also explore the potential of developing a regional repository of test items using the Testing Assisté par Ordinateur (TAO) platform.

This knowledge platform will be different from existing websites and repositories on assessment in the region as it will include comprehensive and diverse resources on assessment accrued from different sources and linked to specific assessment phases and activities. In addition to publications and reports, the portal will host other resources including assessment data, instruments and tools or software useful for conducting large-scale assessments.

More importantly, the website will include resources, publications and data around assessment specific to South Asia. There are scant resources on learning assessment practices in the region as implementation of national assessments is a relatively new phenomenon. It is expected that the knowledge platform will be able to answer learning assessment related questions for education stakeholders. The initiative will build a knowledge base and trigger dialogue around learning assessment with the final goal of improving the quality of education. ■

### **LINKS**

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<http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>