

1. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) has launched a new initiative to track student achievement and its measurement worldwide. The design proposal incorporates inputs from various constituencies. These inputs were obtained through informal consultations throughout 2010. The UIS will continue to seek feedback from practitioners, decision makers, and researchers. Ultimately, the execution of this new UIS initiative will rely extensively on partnerships with relevant institutions.
2. The UIS is the authoritative source for a wide range of internationally comparable statistics in education, science and technology, culture and communication. With this new initiative, the UIS will add indicators of student achievement to the existing education indicators already in its databases (e.g. enrolment, teachers, and finance).
3. The Observatory of Learning Outcomes (OLO) will be a contributor to the ongoing collective efforts by nations and the international development community to emphasize the importance of learning outcomes and place it at the heart of the Education for All (EFA) agenda. It should be noted that this Observatory will not organize a new international assessment.
4. While the design of the Observatory remains open to inputs by professionals in the field; it currently comprises two components:
 - a. A global database of internationally comparable indicators of learning outcomes. The source information for this dataset comes from existing and or new assessments – with a focus on reading, numeracy and writing skills at the end of the primary education. International comparability is a central attribute of the UIS mandate to monitor worldwide progress in education quality.
 - b. A catalogue of measures used by countries to depict the learning levels of their school children (i.e. from national assessments and examinations, and international sources) including selected attributes of the approaches countries choose to generate and report this information.
5. The execution of all the activities associated with these components will rely heavily on partnerships with relevant institutions, including multilateral and bilateral aid agencies, think tanks, assessment entities, universities and other UN organizations. Arrangements will be made to facilitate access by interested countries to expertise on the various features of the learning outcomes domain. For example, expertise on how specify high-quality national assessments and how to appraise assessments systems – with or without external assistance. To this end, the UIS will work with institutions that have comparative advantages in providing and financing such support, which is intended to be fully demand-driven.
6. The global database represents a step towards producing internationally comparable statistics on selected learning outcomes. This objective can be achieved by following diverse

strategies and the UIS does not preclude any of them. As a first step, the UIS is fostering the necessary agreements among regional assessment agencies to set the foundations for generating comparable information. Currently, there are regional assessments in Africa (SACMEQ¹ and PASEC²) and Latin America (LLECE³), and a first meeting of relevant parties is planned for late 2011.

7. The UIS proposes to commission a study to explore the feasibility of linking these assessments. The study would put forward preliminary elements of a framework that would allow implementation of the linkage. This framework will be shared with the three agencies, for their consideration.
8. Through this global database, the UIS also seeks to contribute to a debate on the desirability and feasibility of a global agreement on internationally comparable indicators of reading, writing and numeracy skills to be attained by the end of primary schooling.
9. The catalogue will draw results from assessments and examinations. Existing national and international sources will be included. The pilot of the catalogue is scheduled for mid-2011 and the first phase is planned for 2012. The pilot will cover approximately 10 to 20 countries. Partner institutions will work directly with governments to compile the information. The UIS will use a standard template for data collection in all pilot countries. There will be a gradual increase in the number of countries included in each execution phase.
10. The primary output of the catalogue will be country summaries. These will display, side by side, indicators from the various assessments in a given country. The most recent administration of a given assessment will be recorded regardless of how much time has passed since it was last administered (i.e. there will be no cut-off in the pilot). The side-by-side format is intended to highlight discrepancies and similarities. Different indicators may be the result of different perspectives, scopes, and methodological approaches. The expectation is that such discrepancies and similarities will trigger informed debates on assessment issues, including purpose, scope, standards, quality of measurements and more.
11. The periodicity of the publication of country summaries will be defined after the pilot. Country summaries will present indicators of learning outcomes in the format in which they are generated – whether by the countries themselves or by external assessment agencies. The UIS will only edit and format the information to facilitate the presentation when necessary. Summaries will not include appraisals of the testing quality beyond references to the available meta-data.
12. Existing indicators of learning outcomes from different sources, including national assessments, are not necessarily comparable. The country summaries are not intended to suggest comparability where different purposes, target populations, and approaches were followed. In some cases, there may not even be comparability among different instances of the same national assessments since those in charge of the assessment may have introduced significant design changes between two points in time.

¹ The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality, which has 15 ministries of education and is supported by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning.

² Le Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes éducatifs des États et gouvernements membres de la CONFEMEN (Conférence des ministres de l'Éducation des pays ayant le français en partage).

³ Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación coordinado por la Oficina Regional de Educación de la UNESCO.

13. The UIS is ready to contribute to the efforts of partners, such as the World Bank, to appraise and map countries' assessment approaches. The Observatory will monitor trends in learning outcomes and assessment approaches.
14. Once the country summaries are released, governments and partners will be able to rely on that information to conduct inform their own activities. These activities would include issues related to the need to allocate enough funding to conduct sound assessments.
15. Close cooperation, coordination and communication among institutions are mandatory to minimize undue duplication of activities and maximize success. It is also very important to mitigate the high level of demands on countries by international development entities. Moreover, the partnership feature of the Observatory reflects the magnitude of the challenge of tracking student achievement and its measurement.
16. The Observatory will organize a network of interested parties to:
 - a. share information on the progress in the execution of the Observatory (i.e. through a periodic newsletter);
 - b. keep an open channel for the UIS to continue to welcome inputs on the design of the Observatory; and
 - c. disseminate outcomes. Selected materials received through the network may be featured on the UIS website.
17. This UIS initiative will benefit from an international advisory board composed of 8-10 experts. The members will be reputable professionals with well-established careers in the field and their profiles will complement one another. They can cover policy- and program-level issues. All members have institutional affiliations, but their membership is personal. The first meeting of this panel is planned for the end of 2011.
18. The advisory board will provide both formal and informal advice on all features of design and execution. It will review the conclusions of progress reviews and make recommendations. It is also expected to help the UIS better define, articulate and communicate its niche in the field of learning outcomes.
19. As already mentioned the establishment of partnerships with agencies in the field of learning outcomes is essential to the success of the project. There already exists ongoing cooperation with the IIEP, the World Bank, PREAL, SACMEQ, LLECE, and PASEC, to cite a few. The inclusion of partners is a strategy that aims to capitalize on the comparative advantages these partners possess.
20. A key element of the UIS mandate is to uphold the quality of all the information it produces. Via the Observatory, the UIS proposes to join other actors to address the quality of assessments. A key partner in this initiative to support countries is likely to be the World Bank, as it is the case of regional consortia and practitioner's networks.
21. With the Observatory, the UIS aims to fill a critical gap; essentially, the non-existence of a repository of structured information on learning outcomes. Such a repository is necessary to monitor student achievement worldwide. The UIS will analyse the information and produce reports – as it already does with the existing indicators on education, science, culture and communication.
22. With this new initiative, the UIS takes a step toward increased participation in the ongoing movement by nations and the international community in supporting countries to address the

fact that, as some evidence suggest, millions of children are completing primary education without attaining basic reading, writing and numeracy skills.

23. Neither measuring nor monitoring student achievement inherently brings about learning. Rather, these activities produce evidence to inform policies and practices that can contribute to learning. The wealth of knowledge from decades of research and practices attests to the essential role that assessments of student achievement play in improving education quality. The Observatory of Learning Outcomes aims to add value to the global commitment to “learning for all” beyond 2015.

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