Background

Measuring student learning outcomes is increasingly recognized as necessary not only for monitoring, but also for improving, education quality. Student achievement information can be used to inform a variety of education policies and practices, ranging from the design and implementation of programs to improve teaching and learning in classrooms to ensuring that low-performing teachers and schools receive adequate assistance and training and thus guarantee that all students have an equal opportunity to learn.

Agreed in October 2008, the Russia Education Aid for Development (READ) program is a collaboration of the Government of Russia and the World Bank, with a focus on improving education quality in developing countries. The READ Trust Fund (hereafter referred to as READ) is a part of this program. Its purpose is to help countries improve their student learning outcomes through the design, implementation, and use of robust systems for student assessment. Such systems may include:

- Tests designed to measure overall learning levels in the system, e.g., sample-based surveys of student achievement levels;
- Tests designed to make decisions about individual students, e.g., graduation or university entrance examinations;
- Daily classroom assessment activities;
- Provision of information on learning outcomes to stakeholders;
- Analysis of assessment results toward improving curriculum, instruction, and training policies and practices;
- Teacher professional development materials on appropriate uses of assessments and their results.

A key aim of READ is to help countries strengthen the capacity of institutions that are responsible for measuring student learning outcomes or for using information from those assessments to improve teaching and learning. READ will support analytical work and technical assistance to help countries (a) establish systems or institutions — or strengthen existing ones — that formulate learning goals and carry out assessments of student learning; (b) improve existing or develop new instruments to measure student learning outcomes; and (c) strengthen existing or develop new mechanisms (policies) to use learning outcomes data to improve teaching and learning.

READ proposes a systematic approach to these tasks in each country, entailing the steps outlined below, which together make for a comprehensive framework of activities aimed at developing a sound system for assessment as a basis for efforts to raise education quality and student learning:

- Carrying out a Self-Diagnosis to determine country capacity and needs in the area of student assessment and its use to improve teaching and learning;
- Developing an Action Plan, based on the findings of the Self-Diagnosis, to strengthen systems for student assessment and their use;
• Implementing the Action Plan, including utilization of assessment information for improving teaching and learning in classrooms; and
• Summarizing Lessons Learned to inform future policies and activities.

These TORs are designed to assist READ countries with their Self-Diagnosis.

**Purpose of Self-Diagnosis**

At the end of the self-diagnostic exercise, a country should have better clarity on the adequacy of its overall policy environment, structures, and available resources for student assessment activity; the degree of alignment between current assessment activities and the overall goals and activities of the education system; the technical quality of current assessment instruments; and some ideas for possible next steps which could be translated into a proposal for READ funding.

**Main Outputs of Self-Diagnosis**

The main outputs of this exercise will be:

I. Technical Report

- On the country’s capacity and needs in the area of student assessment, which includes
  - Key issues/findings
  - Options for next steps based on country priorities and international best practice, with a focus on institutional strengthening strategies
- And which can be used as a basis for dialogue with government/other stakeholders, and for the design of the Action Plan under READ.

II. Workshop for Stakeholders

- To discuss draft of the above report
- To brainstorm/agree on next steps

**Key Tasks in Self-Diagnosis**

The self-diagnostic exercise comprises the following eight tasks:

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**Task 1. Assemble Country Team**

Each country should put together a team to conduct its Self-Diagnosis. Ideally, the team should include individuals (4-6) with a combination of technical/policy expertise and experience in the areas of:

- Large-scale assessment surveys
- High-stakes testing/examinations (e.g., graduation or university entrance exams)
- Curriculum and instruction
- School inspection
- Teacher training/professional development
- System monitoring and evaluation

*Product:* Country Team for Self-Diagnosis
**Task 2. Finalize TORs for Self-Diagnosis**

The Country Team should review these TORs for the Self-Diagnosis and make any necessary adjustments to better fit their country context. Adjustments should be reviewed by the World Bank’s Education Task Team Leader in the country as well as by the country-designated READ focal point.

*Product:* Finalized TORs for Self-Diagnosis along with explanations for any adjustments

**Task 3. Collect Basic Information on Country’s Education System**

The Country Team should collect the following information on the country’s education system (pre-primary through tertiary):

- Duration and phases of schooling;
- Organization of school year and day;
- Number of schools, classrooms, students and teachers (qualified/non-qualified);
- Student enrollment rate by type, level and location of school;
- Distribution of functions across institutions that develop and implement education policies;
- Recent/planned education policy reforms and other major initiatives;
- Investment in education – government/other funding for education;
- Teacher/head teacher policies (training, certification, deployment, compensation).

As much as possible, the Country Team should draw on existing data sources (e.g., the country’s Education Sector Plan, World Bank or ministry databases or reports) and verify/update with the assistance of country counterparts or the World Bank. Data should be the most recent available and, as much as possible, drawn from the same sources as the country’s Education Sector Plan. If trend data are available for a particular indicator, please report for the last 10 years.

*Materials to use:* Education Sector Plan, World Bank/ministry and other relevant databases and documents, interviews with key individuals

*Materials to collect:* Education Sector Plan and any other key data and documents (or source-location information)

*Product:* Database containing relevant information along with short summary report

**Task 4. Collect and Analyze Information on Policy Environment, Structures and Resources for Student Assessment/Examinations**

The Country Team should gather and analyze information on the country’s overall policy environment, structures and available resources for student assessment/examinations:

- **Legislative/policy frameworks**
  - Key legislation/policies regarding assessment/examination activities
- **Structures**
  - Agencies, units or organizations responsible for assessment/examination at different levels of the system along with information on:
    - Responsibilities/mandates and management structures
    - Relationships to each other and to other government/non-government structures
    - History and stability
    - Reporting/accountability requirements; transparency
• Human resources
  – For each assessment/examination agency/unit collect information on:
    ▪ Number of staff, their qualifications, background and training
    ▪ Staff briefs and their capacity to perform these tasks
    ▪ Typical salaries (difference between these and those for other ministry staff/similar organizations) and turnover
    ▪ Approaches to staff training and capacity building
  – Extent of reliance on external groups/experts for carrying out assessment/examination work

• Fiscal resources
  – Funding sources and amounts
    ▪ Annual amounts/sources of funding (for each assessment/examination agency and activity)
    ▪ Stability of funding sources and amounts
    ▪ Costs of assessment/examination activities (as % of total education costs/government budget, and also broken down by costs for test design, administration, scoring/analysis, dissemination, etc.)

Materials to use: Ministry and other relevant databases, official/non-official documents and reports, interviews with key individuals

Materials to collect: Key documents/reports or source-location information

Product: Database containing relevant information along with short summary report

Task 5. Collect and Analyze Information on System Learning Goals and Assessment/Examination Activities

The Country Team should gather and analyze the following types of information on system learning goals and student assessment/examination activities:

• General vision for “quality education”
  – Government expectations for what “quality education” should look like
    ▪ Components of quality
    ▪ Necessary inputs and processes
    ▪ Outcomes of a “quality education” at individual, social, economic levels

• Learning goals
  – Specific expectations for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level or stage of schooling
    ▪ Existence of official standards or curricula in various subjects (plus date of most recent/planned revisions)
    ▪ Degree of alignment between intended, implemented, attained curriculum
    ▪ Degree of alignment between official standards or curricula and public/labor market demands and expectations

• Student assessments/examinations
  – Assessment/examination activities used to determine whether students have acquired desired knowledge and skills/competencies
    ▪ List all formal activities — e.g., sub-national/national surveys, public examinations, etc.
For each assessment/examination activity, provide details (as appropriate) on:
• years administered/schedule, purpose, design/item format, content/skills assessed, target grades/students, scale of implementation/census or sample design, student groups excluded from testing, implementing agency, quality assurance mechanisms
• types of information gathered on learner characteristics or enabling inputs (e.g., learning time, teaching materials, facilities)
• key findings of most recent test administration, overall and by student groups and content/skill areas; include any trend data
• types of reports and expected audiences; time frames and formats for delivering results; dissemination/levels of the system that receive results; public release/availability of test items or data
• Highlight key differences among assessments/examinations in terms of underlying curricula, accountability of different stakeholders, results. Identify possibilities for avoiding duplication and exploiting synergies.

- **Use of assessment/examination results**
  - For each assessment/examination, gather evidence as to:
    • Their main uses and by whom
    • Whether these uses are resulting in improved quality and student learning? Any evidence that these uses are negatively affecting quality/learning?
  - Resources/support for using assessment/examination information:
    • Teachers/Instruction
      • Types of information provided to teachers and how they use it
      • Resources/training for understanding or using assessment/examination information or for developing their own assessments
    • Students/Learning
      • Types of information provided to students and how they use it
      • Resources/support for understanding and using assessment/examination information to improve their own learning
    • Schools/Planning
      • Types of information provided to schools and how they use it
      • Resources/training/support available to schools for using assessment/examination information to improve student learning outcomes
    • Policymaking/Program Design
      • Types of information provided to policymakers/planners
      • How this information is used to inform: e.g.,
        o Design/targeting of new reforms, programs, initiatives
        o Resource allocation decisions
      • (Others to explore as appropriate: parents, citizens, those responsible for training/evaluating/accrediting teachers, researchers, donors)

**Materials to use:** Ministry and other relevant databases, official/non-official documents and reports, interviews with key individuals, test materials

**Materials to collect:** Key documents/reports (e.g., copies of publications using/reporting assessment/examination results) or source-location information; all available test materials (e.g., frameworks, instruments, databases, reports)

**Product:** Database containing relevant information along with summary report
Task 6. Evaluate the Technical Quality of Key Assessment/Examination Activities

The Country Team should gather and analyze information on the technical quality of key assessment/examination activities. The team should choose a couple of assessments/examinations activities that are key to improving education quality and student learning, or around which there are issues or concerns.

For survey-type assessments, gather evidence on the following:

- Instrument development and validation, including appropriateness of test framework and item format for target population and uses
- Mechanisms used to monitor compliance with standardized conditions that should prevail during test application (e.g., quality of test administrators' training, quality controls during test administration, student motivation to take the tests, distribution logistics, safe return of test materials)
- Documentation of technical procedures followed in designing instruments, estimating the precision of measurements, designing samples and reporting response rates, applying the tests and controlling the quality of their administration, defining performance levels and cut-off scores, making the results comparable with previous assessments
- Appropriateness of analyses including units, comparisons, controls, inferences
- Reporting and dissemination of results, with evidence of appropriateness and timeliness for intended audiences
- Monitoring of impact and use, including evidence of extent to which data are used in intended ways

For high-stakes public examinations, gather evidence on the following:

- Instrument development and validation, including appropriateness of test framework/coverage and item format for target population and uses
- Student opportunity to learn the tested material, including provision of textbooks, materials, facilities, and teacher preparation
- Student opportunity (if unsuccessful) to retake the test using alternate forms
- Results are only one component used to certify student learning or make other high-stakes decisions
- Mechanisms used to monitor compliance with standardized conditions that should prevail during test application (e.g., quality of test administrators' training, quality controls during test administration, distribution logistics and security, safe keeping and return of test materials)
- Documentation of technical procedures followed in designing instruments, applying the tests and controlling the quality of their administration, defining performance levels and cut-off scores/pass score, making results comparable with previous assessments
- Monitoring of impact and use, including evidence of extent to which data are used and produce results in intended ways

Materials to use: Copies of assessment/examination frameworks, instruments, reports and related technical and other information (e.g., databases); interviews with key individuals

Materials to collect: Key documents/reports or source-location information; all available test materials

Product: Database containing relevant information along with short summary report for each assessment/examination activity reviewed.
**Task 7. Write a Report Based on the Findings**

The Country Team should use the materials/products from Tasks 3-6 to write a Technical Report. The report should be used as the basis for dialog with the government/other stakeholders, and for the design of the Action Plan under READ. The report should include an analysis of the country’s capacity and needs in the areas of student assessment/examination as well as options for next steps based on country priorities and international best practice (with a focus on institutional strengthening strategies). The report should be shared and discussed with—among others—key officials in the education ministry, staff working in areas related to learning assessment/examination, and members of the local education group including key donor and other partners.

*Materials to use:* Materials from Tasks 3-6  
*Materials to collect:* N/A  
*Product:* Technical Report

**Task 8. Hold Workshop to Discuss and Finalize the Report**

The Country Team should hold a workshop for key stakeholders based on the findings of the Technical Report. The team should facilitate discussion of the report among the workshop participants and use their feedback to finalize the report, placing emphasis on areas of agreement as to next steps.

*Materials to use:* Materials from Tasks 3-7  
*Materials to collect:* Feedback from meeting participants  
*Product:* Finalized Technical Report