“The Russia Education Aid for Development (READ) program offers a good example of this fresh approach [to engage new development partners in shaping the global aid architecture]. Its goal – to improve the measurement of education quality and learning outcomes – is pertinent to developed and developing countries alike. Improved learning leads to better jobs, greater productivity, and higher incomes in every society.”

– Alexei Kudrin, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister of Russia
– Robert B. Zoellick, President of the World Bank Group

February 15, 2010
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Message from READ Council, Russia

“We declare our agreement to cooperate with our partners in developing countries and with other stakeholders to ensure high quality of basic education, literacy and gender equality in line with the education-related UN Millennium Development Goals and objectives of the Education For All Program.”

– Statement from the G-8 Summit Chairman 2006, St. Petersburg

Education quality improvement is one of the key priorities of international development confirmed by the Millennium Development and Education for All Goals. Massive efforts, which are put forth by the international community to promote education in developing countries, are aimed at raising school enrollment. Considerable financial resources are being allocated to create essential educational infrastructure: school buildings are being constructed, training equipment is being purchased, and learning materials are being published. But we realize that it is insufficient to only ensure children’s attendance at schools. It is important to organize an effective learning process and to understand what kinds of learning outcomes have been achieved by our schoolchildren.

The Russia Education Aid for Development (READ) program, a collaborative program of the Government of Russia and the World Bank, is an example of an initiative aimed at improving basic education quality. This program, started in October 2008, will help low-income countries to improve their student learning outcomes through the design, implementation, and utilization of national systems for student assessment.

A key aim of the READ program is to help build national human and institutional capacity in education quality evaluation and use assessment data to develop education policies aimed at improving teaching and learning. The READ program will help educators from developing countries to address the key questions of national educational policy—Which learning achievements should we focus on? What toolkits can be used for assessing those achievements? How should we analyze and interpret the results of the assessment in the best possible way? What political decisions can be made on the basis of the received data?

We express confidence that our collaboration with the World Bank will allow Russia to assist READ countries in basic education quality improvement efforts and provide new possibilities for the younger generation.

Andrei Bokarev
Head of the Department for International Financial Affairs,
Ministry of Finance, Russian Federation

Vladimir Mau
Rector, Academy of National Economy
under the Government of the Russian Federation

Andrei Volkov
Dean, Moscow School of Management «Skolkovo»
Message from READ Council, World Bank

“There is greater recognition [today] that how much a child learns has a larger effect on productivity and earnings than how many years a child spends in school. At the macro level, one estimate suggests that a one standard deviation increase in student scores on international assessments of reading and mathematics is associated with a 2% increase in annual growth rates of GDP per capita. More countries are now participating in international tests and benchmarking themselves against other countries. Still, few developing countries measure student learning on a regular basis or in a systematic manner—and those that do tend not to use the results to inform education policies.”

— Concept Note for Education Sector Strategy 2020, World Bank

Improving student learning is of critical importance: that is the simple message from the World Bank, about the complex agenda that is at the heart of READ.

We commend Russia for its significant contribution to an initiative that has the power to lift poor children and poor nations out of poverty and help all children and nations reach their potential.

We strongly urge developing countries to see READ as an opportunity to achieve excellence—a chance to lead, not merely in assessing learning, but more fundamentally in improving learning outcomes. We encourage countries to develop a vision for their assessment systems and take full advantage of the assistance that READ has to offer to set that vision in motion. They can also count on the World Bank to be a full partner throughout this journey.

Our message to our donor and other external partners is one of cooperation and collaboration, at the technical and financial levels. READ financial resources will be most effectively used when they are complemented by domestic funds and supported by IDA and other sources of financing, all integrated into a country’s own plan for improving learning.

Robin S. Horn

Education Sector Manager, World Bank
The Russia Education Aid for Development (READ) Trust Fund offers low-income countries everywhere a solid chance to improve student learning. The pages of this first year’s Annual Report will show that Year 1 was devoted to:

- moving from concept and vision to work program and implementation
- building up and ensuring coherence among teams with varying roles and responsibilities
- promoting READ “ownership” in READ countries
- keeping on top the principle of sharing technical excellence and international best practice
- structuring the trust fund in line with the Bank’s fiduciary policies, to ensure effective use of funds

Understanding the complexities of READ will help readers better appreciate the year’s results. Managing READ has required attention to some key challenges, presented here to contextualize READ’s Year 1 achievements:

- seeking a certain uniformity of READ outcomes and outputs that would mark the “READ brand”, while striving to ensure that the program is country-driven
- balancing the need for adequate quality assurance with the risks of losing momentum in the face of delay
- funding some but not all costs incurred in building up an assessment system with the expectation that government or other donor funding would cover the gaps—which may not always be the case
- managing timelines of expected milestones and outputs in the face of turnover in education ministries

The results laid out in this Report ultimately attest to the importance of the READ agenda. READ countries’ completion of “Self-Diagnosis” reports within a year’s timeframe and their high-energy participation in the First READ Global Conference speak to the degree to which they have begun to embrace the READ agenda. It is indeed this awareness, that getting learning right can transform a child’s future or a nation’s course, which will in the end provide the impetus to sustain the momentum of Year 1, through the life of READ.

Manorama Gotur
READ Program Manager
READ Vision and Overview

The READ Trust Fund was established in October 2008 as a partnership between the Government of Russia and the World Bank to improve education quality and learning outcomes in low-income countries. The READ Trust Fund amounts to $32 million, to be executed by the Bank over a 5-year period. While the “READ” umbrella also covers a $9 million Fee-Based Services program entailing Bank support to strengthen Russia’s capacity in delivery of aid for education, this Annual Report relates only to READ Trust Fund activities, and all references to “READ” or “READ program” relate only to the Trust Fund.

Russia’s contributions reflect its aim to position itself as an important emerging donor in education. The support for improving education quality, learning, and learning measurement in developing countries, moreover, is well matched and reinforced by the high priority that Russia has given to these objectives in its own education system for the last several years (Box 1).

When Children Learn, Nations Prosper

READ goes to the heart of what matters in education: not just primary enrollment and completion rates, but the ultimate goal of student learning. It is proven that learning-focused education has the potential to reduce poverty and produce significant gains in economic growth. But simply attending school is not enough. Student achievement is critical for countries, and individuals, to realize the benefits of education. Only when students learn can countries build up the human capital needed to construct dynamic, successful societies.

Box 1. Russia: Using In-depth Analysis of Survey Results to Improve Learning Outcomes

Commitment to improve student learning. Russia has for several years participated in international surveys that measure student achievement. This participation reflects a strong commitment by the government to know how well Russian students are learning, and to use that information to identify what changes may be needed to the curriculum and to reform teaching-learning practices, to improve learning outcomes.

Analysis is key. Reforms in Russia’s primary education system helped steadily improve performance in “PIRLS” scores: in 2006, Russia’s Grade 4 students outperformed all the other 40 participating countries in PIRLS and scored the highest results in reading literacy. But the 2006 “PISA” scores, which measure Grade 8 students’ achievement levels in reading, were disappointing. As a result, Russia is now using the wealth of information available from PIRLS to tease out the factors that have the greatest impact on student performance and find ways to improve Grade 8 levels of student achievement. Preliminary results have shown that, in addition to family, other factors having a positive impact are high-quality textbooks and more interactive, student-centered teaching practices.
**Assessment is Key to Improving Learning**

READ focuses its support in the area of student assessment. All too often, learning is not occurring; and in many countries there is not even an awareness of whether learning is actually taking place—because there is no measurement of learning.

Student assessment is increasingly seen as necessary for improving education quality. Student achievement data can be used to inform a wide variety of education policies and practices. For example, they can help in designing and implementing policies and programs to improve classroom instruction; identifying lagging students so they can get the support they need; and ensuring that low-performing teachers and schools receive adequate technical assistance and training, thus guaranteeing that all students have an equal opportunity to learn.

Without measurement, there is no roadmap for analyzing where the problems lie or how to address them. The purpose of READ is to help fill this critical gap: to help countries put in place a system to regularly measure learning outcomes and use the results to improve learning outcomes.

**READ: Helping to strengthen countries’ assessment systems**

READ’s focus is institutional strengthening. Key thrusts are the policies, instruments, and institutions that make up a country’s assessment system. The main aim is to help countries strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of institutions with responsibility for formulating and aligning education goals, measuring and assessing student learning in relation to the goals, and acting on the basis of information from assessments, to improve teaching and learning. These elements constitute the core of the READ vision, captured in Figure 1. (See also Annex 1, READ Vision Note.)

READ provides support at the global and country levels:

- **At the global level**, the focus is on generating and sharing knowledge, in the form of instruments and tools, research, and analytical and advisory activities, including the sharing of good practices and lessons learned.

- **At the country level**, country stakeholders and World Bank operational teams work together to determine the country’s particular needs and develop a country-specific program of READ assistance, including hands-on technical assistance as well as training and analytical/advisory activities.

![Figure 1. The READ “AAA” Vision: Align, Assess, Act](image-url)

**ALIGN**
The country’s agreed learning goals are aligned with the country’s overall development goals, and curriculum and teaching are aligned with the learning goals.

**ASSESS**
The country has the necessary assessment instruments, policies, institutions and human/financial resources needed to measure and assess student achievement in relation to agreed learning goals.

**ACT**
The country has the necessary instruments, policies, institutions, and human/financial resources needed to report, analyze and interpret assessment results and reform policies and classroom teaching.
Seven countries have been selected by the Government of Russia for READ assistance at this time: Angola, Ethiopia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mozambique, Tajikistan, Vietnam and Zambia. The READ Vision encompasses the following set of activities at the country level: a **Self-Diagnosis** to identify gaps in a country’s assessment system, an **Action Plan** to address the gaps, a **pilot** activity from which to learn lessons, and **monitoring and evaluation** activities.

**Key expected outcomes of READ**

The overarching expected outcome of READ is the strengthened institutional capacity of low-income countries to develop, carry out, and use data from student assessments to raise student learning outcomes in a sustained manner. At the global level, READ will generate and share knowledge on assessments. At the country level, key outcomes would be the actions that countries take toward strengthening student assessment systems and their use, including:

- agreement on learning goals
- completion of Self-Diagnosis
- preparation of Action Plans
- implementation and evaluation of pilots
- training of country staff in areas related to student assessment

---

**Figure 2. READ Structure and Organization**

**LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES**  
**with a vision to develop strong, sustainable assessment systems**

**The 7 READ countries**

**Global level assistance**
- Knowledge generation
- Knowledge sharing
- Country capacity development
- Partnership

**Country level assistance**
- Analytical and advisory work
- Technical assistance

---

**Key Roles and Responsibilities**

**READ Council (Russia, WB)**
Guidance on overall strategic direction, priorities, and rules of engagement for the READ Trust Fund and regular monitoring of READ program performance

**READ Program Management Team (WB)**
Program management and administration, including strategic planning, formulation and implementation of work program, allocation of funds, overall program coordination, quality assurance, and monitoring

**READ Technical Group (International, WB, Russian Experts)**
Support for development of global level knowledge products and direct technical assistance (through the World Bank Task Team Leaders) at the country level, bringing worldwide good practices to bear in helping countries design and use student assessments to raise education quality

**World Bank Country Task Team Leaders (TTLs)**
Focal point for all READ assistance in READ countries, working closely with country government counterparts and other stakeholders to design and implement a package of READ assistance that responds effectively to country needs
READ Organization and Structure

Figure 2 highlights the roles and responsibilities of the key actors supporting the READ Trust Fund in its aim to deliver global- and country-level assistance to countries that wish to realize their vision of building a strong and sustainable assessment system.

Critical to the success of READ, in any country, is its ownership of READ-funded activities and their integration with the country’s ongoing activities and strategy in the education sector. In other words, results are likely to be strongest when countries drive the READ agenda, with donors collaborating around the country’s vision—and possibly funding complementary investments.

In terms of structure, the READ Trust Fund has been set up with eight “windows”—one for global level work and seven for each of the READ countries, as shown in Figure 3 on page 10. Funds are allocated on the basis of grant funding requests, which are governed by the Bank’s policies and rules for trust funds. The Bank manages a large number of trust funds, reflecting donors’ strong confidence in the Bank’s fiduciary management (Box 2).

Box 2. Trust Funds at the World Bank

The Bank manages a large, and growing, number of trust funds. Trust funds are financial and administrative arrangements between external partners and the Bank, which provide grant funds to address diverse development needs. They play a key role in complementing the Bank’s own resources in pursuit of its overarching mission, to help countries fight poverty.

Of the total portfolio of 31 trust fund programs managed by the World Bank Human Development Network, READ is the second largest among single-donor, Bank-executed trust funds. In addition, the READ Trust Fund is the only one that provides dedicated support for education quality, and in particular, for student learning assessment aimed at improving learning outcomes.
Program Highlights

Set-up activities

- **Meeting of READ Council:** The Council, made up of high-ranking Russian officials and World Bank management, met in Moscow in January to launch the READ Trust Fund program and endorse the year’s work program.

- **Establishment of READ TG:** Top World Bank, international, and Russian experts in the area of learning assessment and education quality were brought together to form the READ Technical Group (TG), a body supporting READ at the global and country levels.

- **Launch of READ with Bank TTLS:** Task Team Leaders (TTLS) of the Bank’s education teams in each of the 7 READ countries were empowered to act as the sole focal point for dialogue with country governments and for the READ Trust Fund overall, at the country level.

- **Set-up of Trust Fund Structure:** Internal set-up was completed, toward ensuring sound trust fund management in line with Bank trust fund policies, with processes also setup for quality assurance of funding proposals.

Planning and coordination

- **1st READ TG Retreat:** A first retreat of the TG was held in Washington, DC in April to internalize and endorse the READ Vision, meet with READ TTLS, and brainstorm on READ global products.

- **2nd READ TG Retreat:** A second meeting in St. Petersburg in September helped to prepare, jointly with Russian colleagues, for the First READ Global Conference.

- **Partnership Meeting:** READ Trust Fund, READ Fee-Based Services and Russia’s Center for International Cooperation in Education Development met in Paris to strengthen partnership and collaboration across the three programs.

Global level activities

- **READ Vision Note:** A first articulation of the READ Trust Fund’s aims and modus operandi emphasized the critical importance of learning and assessment, and set out the READ “brand”—a common set of READ activities comprising a country’s Self-Diagnosis of its assessment system, followed by an Action Plan and a possible pilot and evaluation of lessons learned.

- **Self-Diagnosis Tool:** A first global product developed by the TG for use at the country level was a template to help countries determine the needs of their student assessment system, as a first step to mapping out an action plan to be funded by READ and other sources.

- **First READ Global Conference:** This event marked an important milestone for READ, bringing together, for the first time, the 7 READ countries’ education policymakers and practitioners, high-level Russian officials, international education experts, and World Bank staff for a 3-day conference in Moscow under the theme of “Developing a Vision for Assessment Systems.”

- **Collaboration with PISA:** A proposal for “international options” under PISA to benefit lower-performing countries was presented to and supported by the PISA Governing Board, for development and roll-out under PISA 2012.

Country level activities

- **READ Program Launch:** World Bank TTLS for each of the READ countries introduced the READ program to government counterparts, whose “ownership” of the READ agenda is paramount for the success of the program at the country level.

- **Grant Funding Requests:** Each of the 7 TTLS sought and received a first round of READ funding, amounting in total to $2 million, to help countries carry out a Self-Diagnosis.

- **Self-Diagnosis Report:** The Self-Diagnosis is complete, or nearly so, in most of the 7 READ countries, with the preparation process and related workshops having played a significant role in building institutional capacity as well as stakeholder awareness of the importance and challenges of learning and assessments.

- **Action Plans:** In follow-up to the Self-Diagnosis, several of the READ countries have begun to develop Action Plans and proposals for a second set of Grant Funding Requests.
Financial Highlights

As seen in Figure 3, the READ Trust Fund has been set up with eight funding “windows”—one for the global knowledge work and seven for each of the READ countries. This structure is expected to facilitate country level monitoring of funds use while also allowing flexibility to respond effectively to country needs. Of the $32 million, $13 million has been received to date, in two tranches of $5 million (December 2008) and $8 million (June 2009).

Table 1 presents the financial highlights for the READ Trust Fund in Year 1. Grant allocations reflect a first round of grant funding, aimed primarily at financing the preparation of the countries’ Self-Diagnosis report, with additional or accompanying activities. In all but one case, the Self-Diagnosis report has been completed, with remaining work related to obtaining the final official endorsement and finalizing the report for purposes of publication. Additional activities comprise preparation of an Action Plan based on the recommendations of the Self-Diagnosis, as well as workshops throughout the first grant period—initially to introduce the READ program and help country actors begin to internalize its vision and adapt country work plans to include this agenda, and later to comment on the draft report and build consensus around its recommendations.

For most of the countries, disbursements have been modest to date but remaining balances are expected to be used by mid-year 2010. Around that time, a second, larger round of funding is anticipated, covering the needs of the full Action Plans and work programs developed by countries as informed by the Self-Diagnosis. It is worth noting that for Bank Task Team Leaders (TTLs), who are the principal architects of the READ program in countries, Year 1 has been one of exploring and identifying opportunities to adapt READ assistance to the context of ongoing work or
plans in formulation, rather than a year of simply carrying out clearly defined, well-costed tasks.

A good part of the spending at the global level related to early consultations, brainstorming, and consensus-building among the READ TG, on the READ program and what it could deliver. Roughly one third of the amount disbursed at the global level was for the global conference; getting this first-time public event right was of critical importance. Going forward, it is expected that a greater part of these funds will be used to develop and disseminate knowledge products.

Table 1. READ Financial Highlights for 2009 (in thousands of dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grant amount allocated</th>
<th>Grant amount disbursed</th>
<th>Available balance (less outstanding commitment) as of 2/17/10</th>
<th>Key Outputs</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Global Knowledge and Program Coordination</td>
<td>2,000*</td>
<td>935</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>• Vision Note</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>• Self-Diagnosis Template</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Global Conference</td>
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<td>• Other TG Contributions</td>
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<td>• Refer to Looking Ahead**</td>
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<td>Angola</td>
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<td>226</td>
<td>• Self-Diagnosis</td>
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<td>• Workshops</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Study Tours**</td>
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* Additional amounts added in December 2009 (Global – $1 million; Tajikistan – $30,000)

** Expected to be completed in 2010

(Please see Global Summary and Country Summaries sections for further information)
In 2009, READ activities at the global level were aimed at:

- developing and disseminating the Self-Diagnosis Tool
- sharing information pertaining to learning assessment systems, predominantly through the First READ Global Conference
- partnering with other global contributors on the assessment agenda

These activities are described below, followed by a discussion of the READ Technical Group (tG)—the primary vehicle for infusing the content of the READ program with world-class knowledge and international best practice.

The READ Technical Group

Formation of the READ tG was a critical prerequisite for developing READ’s work at the global level. TG members play multiple roles: conceiving of and advising on global knowledge products that will best serve program objectives; preparing these global products; working alongside Bank TTLs to bring their technical expertise to bear on in-country work; and providing quality assurance for products at country as well as global levels.

To date, the TG has comprised 8 members, including 3 World Bank experts (two at headquarters and one in the Russia country office), 3 international experts, and 2 Russian experts selected by Russia. The intent has been for all TG members to contribute at both the global level and country level (in a lead or support role); in practice, the nature and extent of contributions have been a function of time available to TG members in relation to other pre-READ commitments and ongoing work programs. Going forward, as the pipeline of global products expands, adjustment to the TG model may be needed to recognize that expecting each TG member to play multiple roles may be unrealistic.

A key challenge in Year 1 was to bring together, for the first time, geographically dispersed experts with diverse backgrounds and build a cohesive, productive group with a shared READ vision, in a relatively short timeframe. Two retreats of the TG helped to meet this challenge. A first retreat in April helped the TG to develop a common vision of READ and collectively brainstorm on possible READ global products. The second retreat in August helped advance preparations for the October Global Conference.

Developing and Disseminating the Self-Diagnosis Tool

Early on, a systematic approach to READ support at the country level was agreed, entailing a comprehensive framework of activities that would help countries develop a sound system of assessment:

- 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
- implementing the Action Plan, including utilization of assessment information for improving classroom instruction
- summarizing lessons learned to inform future policies and activities
To start off, a Self-Diagnosis Tool (Box 3, see Annex 2) was developed by the TG and made available to countries, to facilitate the diagnostic effort and serve as a uniform guide across the 7 READ countries. The tool is aimed at helping countries obtain better clarity on:

- **enabling environment:** the overall policy environment, structures, and available resources for student assessment activity
- **alignment with education system:** the degree of alignment between current assessment activities and the overall goals and activities of the education system
- **technical aspects:** the technical quality of their assessment instruments
- **possible next steps** and a proposal for READ funding

As envisioned, the main expected outputs of the Self-Diagnosis are (i) a *technical report* on the country’s capacity and needs, setting out key issues and findings to be used as a basis for dialogue with the respective government and other stakeholders, and (ii) a *workshop* for stakeholders to discuss the draft report and brainstorm and agree on next steps. The 2009 Country Summaries section of this report offers a closer look at the findings from the Self-Diagnosis, in each of the READ countries.

The Self-Diagnosis Tool has played a critical role in sensitizing countries to the READ agenda. As one would hope, the tool has been adapted and used variably in the READ countries; it is indeed appropriate that no two Self-Diagnosis reports look exactly the same. Also to be desired, the process has resulted in substantial capacity development for those individuals participating in report preparation as well as in workshops around the Self-Diagnosis.

### Sharing Information on Assessment

It was agreed early on that an annual READ global conference would be highly desirable, to share knowledge on “what works” and on other countries’ experiences, to showcase READ countries’ commitment and progress on the READ agenda, to promote networking in the area of assessment, and to share information globally on the aims and achievements of the READ program. The First READ Global Conference was held in Moscow, Russia during September 30 – October 2, 2009. The conference marked an important milestone for READ, as a first-time occasion for the 7 READ countries to come together and interact—with each other, with the donor, with international experts, and with READ counterparts.

As elaborated in detail in the Conference Highlights section of this Annual Report (see Annex 3), the three-day agenda was designed to (i) highlight the fundamental message of the importance of learning, going beyond access and completion; (ii) share the assessment experience of other countries including Russia, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, Malawi, and Kenya, as well as countries in Latin America (see “Assessment Lessons Learned” on page 50); and (iii) hear from the READ countries as to their aims, plans, and challenges on the road to improved learning outcomes.

The conference was widely seen to be successful and achieved all of its objectives, including the aims of strengthening READ countries’ understanding of READ’s assessment agenda, spurring their desire for more knowledge and interaction with each other and with experts, generating ideas for new READ global products, creating visibility for Russia as an important donor in education, putting the READ program on the map of global players in the area of assessment, and reinforcing the World Bank’s goal to advance the assessment agenda in developing countries.

While substantial effort was devoted to preparation of the conference, other knowledge sharing efforts were

### Box 3. Key Tasks in Self-Diagnosis

1. Assemble a country team to conduct the Self-Diagnosis
2. Finalize Terms of Reference for the Self-Diagnosis
3. Collect basic information on the country’s education system
4. Collect/analyze information on policies, structures, and resources for student assessment
5. Collect/analyze information on the alignment between system learning goals and assessment activities
6. Evaluate the technical quality of key assessment activities
7. Write a report based on the findings
also commenced—which will gather momentum in 2010. These activities include development of the READ website, translation of selected important materials into Portuguese and Russian, and participation of READ TG members in international fora to disseminate key READ messages.

**Partnering with Global Actors in Assessment**

The assessment agenda, like all others in development, is complex—and obtaining results requires the engagement of multiple actors. At the country level, working in tandem with the local donor group or local education group is a priority. At the global level, a few first steps were taken in 2009 to strengthen partnership with key players in the area of assessment.

An important collaboration was agreed in late 2009, between the Bank and the Governing Board of the OECD’s PISA, to find ways to adapt the PISA test so that low-income countries could better benefit from it. At present, many poorer countries do not participate in this test for 15-year olds because they feel that their students’ performance—and indirectly their education systems—will be unfavorably represented, and in a way that provides them with little information on how to improve. One proposal under consideration relates to improving the information value of PISA at the lower end of the achievement distribution via a new reading component skills assessment, which would be an international option for PISA 2012. The test would be built around three key measures of component skills – i.e., vocabulary, sentence processing, and passage comprehension. Countries would have the option of deciding whether or not their results from this test were published in the main PISA report or simply used for their own internal decision-making. Other possible PISA-related activities include preparing studies/data collection focused on particular student subgroups (e.g., language minorities), and special background modules.

In another kind of partnership, the Bank has begun to collaborate with Center for International Cooperation in Education Development (CICED), an emerging Russian institute that aims to develop expertise in delivery of education aid to developing countries. Plans are under way to work synergistically particularly in the Russian-speaking READ countries (for example, making available CICED training programs in Russian to practitioners in those countries). Cooperation in the preparation of global conferences is also envisaged.

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**First READ Global Conference**

Developing a Vision for Assessment Systems

September 30–October 2, 2009
Moscow, Russia

See Annex 3, First READ Global Conference, for additional information.
In Year 1, READ programs were initiated in all 7 countries—Angola, Ethiopia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mozambique, Tajikistan, Vietnam and Zambia. Over the course of the year, World Bank READ TTLs for each of these countries worked closely with government counterparts to help carry out a Self-Diagnosis of their current assessment system and prepare an Action Plan for future work.

The country summaries that follow provide a snapshot of each country’s education system through the lens of assessment. They provide information on:

- assessment history
- assessment institutions
- learning outcomes
- assessment goals
- Self-Diagnosis findings, organized by enabling environment, alignment with education system, and technical aspects
- key recommendations of the Self-Diagnosis

Taken together, the country summaries show a diverse set of countries that are at different points on the continuum of assessment systems. Starting points—in terms of READ assistance—vary, as do capacity levels, institutional arrangements, system size, and existing information on learning outcomes. At the same time, all these countries face the common challenge of setting out their vision, from whichever point they are, and identifying what is needed to get there. All READ countries have shown an admirable willingness, first to learn what the gaps in their system are (through the Self-Diagnosis), and then to commit to address them (through the Action Plans). READ assistance is aimed at supporting their efforts, while factoring in, a variety of implementation challenges along the way, which are summarized at the end of the individual country summaries.
Assessment History

In recent years, with the help of international donors, Angola conducted two assessment exercises on student achievement in Portuguese, Math and Learning about the Surrounding Environment for Grades 2 and 4 in 2005, and Grade 2 only in 2006. Both of these assessments were done as once-off exercises, linked to an ongoing teacher training program, and no connections were made between the tests. Additionally, the results of these assessments were not widely disseminated.

Efforts to measure student learning at the school level are tasked to teachers and school administrators. While assessment by teachers is envisaged as a part of the new national curriculum, little is known about what is actually taking place in the classroom in terms of the frequency and types of assessments to monitor student learning. Many teachers in Angola have little or no professional training and training in assessment practices is limited.

Assessment Institutions

The Ministry of Education (MED) has the basic oversight of primary and secondary education in Angola. MED neither has full-time assessment staff nor a national examinations office, but several departments under MED have assessment functions. These include:

- The National Institute for Research and Education Development (INIDE)—includes a department in charge of assessment who worked with donors to carry out the two assessment exercises of student achievement.
- Directorate for Human Resources—responsible for teacher recruitment, training, and monitoring/assessment.
- National Directorate for General Education (DINEG)—oversees education strategy, policy and monitoring, and conducts school inspection visits through province and district offices.

MED has personnel with interest in and some relevant skills for undertaking assessments, but there is a clear need to build up capacity.

Learning Outcomes

So far, there is no baseline data on learning achievement in Reading and Mathematics. The results from the 2005 and 2006 assessment exercises are not nationally representative.

Assessment Goals

The recent massive expansion of education in Angola is a huge accomplishment. To monitor and ensure the quality of this expanding education system, Angola aims to develop a National System of Assessments of Learning Outcomes. It is intended that results from assessments will then be used to inform decision-making within the context of an ongoing
education reform, and to support more appropriate teacher training programs. Angolan officials have made a strong political commitment to focus on measuring learning outcomes. As a result, Angola has a clear plan of how it intends to use READ funds to build its capacity to conduct national assessment activities.

**Self-Diagnosis**

The first grant of $300,000 was awarded in June 2009. In Angola, READ activities are aimed at supporting Angola’s MED, through INIDE, in developing a national assessment system to measure learning outcomes. Ultimately, the goal is to build and strengthen INIDE’s capacity to lead assessment exercises in Angola and report results in a way that will promote dialogue and influence education reforms. This first phase of funds was intended to support two main activities—a self-diagnosis of the assessment system and mapping out of an action plan. In addition, the grant is supporting an EGRA, planned for September 2010.

Angola has completed its Self-Diagnosis report and prepared an Action Plan for moving forward. During July, a two-day workshop was held to discuss the current situation in Angola, experiences from other countries, and ways to improve and expand educational assessment in Angola. During the workshop, which was attended by the three Vice-Ministers for Education, the Self-Diagnosis and the draft Action Plan were endorsed by MED senior management.

**Enabling Environment**

Senior MED officials have shown a high-level of commitment towards creating an assessment system where information is used to improve quality. One of four main objectives of an ongoing education reform is to “improve the efficiency of the system.” More specifically, this includes monitoring and assessing learning outcomes and improving the generation and exchange of information. Angola receives much less external aid than some of its African neighbors and its overall spending in education is still relatively low. However, it has been increasing in recent years, and is expected to continue to increase.

**Alignment with Education System**

The implementation of the new curriculum has been incremental—currently, it is unclear how many teachers are using the new curriculum versus the old one. By 2011, it is planned that the new curriculum will be generalized to all grades and schools. While there are clearly outlined learning objectives in the new curriculum, the Self-Diagnosis highlights some concerns about the applicability and quality of these goals.

**Technical Aspects**

The 2005-06 assessment exercises reveal sampling errors, questionable data, and an absence of basic information on social, family, school and other factors which influence student achievement. Further training of MED personnel on test design, sampling, database management, and data analysis is essential to enhance the quality of future assessments.

**Key Recommendations of the Self-Diagnosis**

- Provide institutional support to advise MED on ways to organize assessment activities and develop a sustainable system that monitors learning achievement and provides information about performance to all stakeholders, while promoting change towards increasing quality.
- Build the capacity of MED personnel and provide training in technical areas of assessment.
- Support efforts to create a culture of assessment in the various levels of the education system (i.e., central, provincial, school) and improve the flow of information from the national level down to the school level.
- Support pilot activities, like EGRA, to deepen assessment work and help improve the use of assessment information.

“A National Assessment System is fundamental to ensure quality primary education to all Angolan children. Primary education is the key educational level, as it sets the foundations for a good life and future education. Thus it demands increased responsibility from involved stakeholders.”

– Angolan Vice Minister for Education Reform
Assessment History

Ethiopia’s Ministry of Education (MoE) monitors the performance of its education system through national assessments and exams. A national learning assessment (NLA) has been implemented every three to four years since 1999/2000. Its purpose is to obtain information about overall levels of learning and to identify factors associated with academic performance. These national assessments measure learning at the end of the two cycles of primary education, Grades 4 and 8, in Math, Science and English. Students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 also take national exams. Depending on the grade level, examination results are used for graduation, promotion or admission decisions—passing the Grade 8 exam serves as a primary completion certificate; Grade 10 exams are used to determine whether a student will be placed in the university or vocational track; and for students in the university track, the Grade 12 exam is used for university entrance.

Assessment Institutions

The entire public sector in Ethiopia recently underwent a Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR) exercise. In the education sector, the exercise identified several “core processes” to be carried out by the MOE. Instead of departments, various units are now identified by their processes and referred to as such.

Previously, the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) was charged with implementing all national learning assessments and exams. Under the BPR, these duties were reassigned to the unit now known as the Education and Training Quality Assurance Core Process (ETQACP). Along with its duties of national learning assessments and exams, ETQACP staff is also responsible for creating a system for school inspection and supervision.

School inspection is a new area of responsibility specifically assigned to this core process. Since there are no existing policies or procedures for this work, the staff will need capacity building and additional support in order to effectively carry out their duties.

Learning Outcomes

The 2007 NLA conducted in Grades 4 and 8 shows that overall student performance has not improved over the previous 7 years. The composite score for learning achievement in Grade 4 indicates a reduction from 48% in 2000 to 41% in 2007. Similarly, the composite score in Grade 8 shows a decrease from 43% in 2000 to 40% in 2007.
Assessment Goals

In Ethiopia, education is seen as a means to enhance overall nation-building and contribute to the national goal of eradicating poverty and becoming a middle income country in the next 20-30 years. This can only occur if the education system actually delivers a quality educational experience that promotes learning achievement. A key component of Ethiopia’s General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) is the continued monitoring of national levels of learning achievement.

The government has recently expanded the NLA for Grades 4 and 8 to also include Grades 10 and 12. A short-term goal is to raise composite scores for learning achievement in core subjects to at least 50%.

The BPR added an additional component to monitoring school quality—school inspection. Based on established school standards, schools will perform self-evaluations and be subject to an inspection performed by an external inspection team. A fundamental part of this effort will be to establish quality care units comprising parents, students, school management and the wider community. Like the NLAs, school inspection ensures monitoring and supervision of the education system and accountability that it is functioning as intended.

Self-Diagnosis

Ethiopia is fully committed to improving its quality of education and student learning outcomes. Support from READ can help by strengthening existing institutions and systems for measuring and assessing student achievement. The first grant for $250,000, awarded in April 2009, was to finance an initial set of activities aimed at helping Ethiopia review its needs (short- and longer-term) with respect to its student learning assessment and examination system and determine where the gaps are and how best to use resources provided under READ as well as from other sources over the next few years. This review process, and in particular the findings of the formal Self-Diagnosis for Ethiopia, will contribute to the development of an Action Plan consisting of a series of strategic and targeted follow-up implementation activities.

A consulting firm has been identified to assist in conducting the Self-Diagnosis and will begin work in early 2010. It is expected that the content of their report will include information on the current enabling environment, alignment of assessments with the broader education system and a review of the technical quality of tests and exams already in place. A series of key recommendations, based on these findings, will be the impetus for the future work to be carried out under GEQIP, in part supported through READ.

“Education is a critical instrument to realize the social, economic and political empowerment of people. In spite of challenges faced along the way, we have made significant progress.”

— Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi
Assessment History

Recently, the Kyrgyz Republic’s focus on monitoring student achievement has grown exponentially. With international donor assistance, its assessment activities now encompass international and national surveys, national exams, and even formative, classroom-based assessments.

The first national surveys took place in 2000 and 2005 and measured student achievement in Math, Literacy and Life Skills for Grades 4 and 8. Additional national surveys, by then known as National Sample-Based Assessments (NSBA) were conducted in 2007 and 2009. These also tested Grades 4 and 8 but in Math, Literacy and Natural Sciences. Additionally, the Kyrgyz Republic participated in PISA in 2006 and 2009.

For promotion and school leaving certificates, students in Grades 9 and 11 are required to take and pass final exams.

A number of international projects have begun piloting classroom-based assessment activities such as training teachers in learner-centered assessment practices and initiating programs that encourage regular student monitoring.

Assessment Institutions

In the Kyrgyz Republic, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) oversees education and monitors its quality. Several government and non-government agencies play various roles in measuring learning outcomes.

The Kyrgyz Academy of Education’s (KAE) main responsibility is to determine the content of the education system. Their assessment-related activities include preparing content for the Grade 9 and 11 exams, working with donors to prepare test items, and training teachers in new assessment practices.

As an alternative to the standard final exams for Grades 9, 10, and 11, the National Testing Center (NTC) offers its own set of exams on a voluntary basis. Students have the option of using these results as replacements for the oral portion of locally administered final exams.

The Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods (CEATM) is a local NGO paid primarily through contracts with international donors. Their contributions have been substantial, being responsible for overseeing international (PISA 2006, 2009) and national surveys (NSBA, 2007 and 2009) in addition to a university entrance exam.

The Student Assessment unit operates as part of the World Bank’s Rural Education Project, with the intention that its staff will eventually join the Kyrgyz Academy of Education as an Assessment Unit/Department. One of their key tasks includes developing a new model of student assessments that aligns with the new curriculum.

Learning Outcomes

Out of the 57 countries which participated in the 2006 PISA, the Kyrgyz Republic ranked last; the 2007 NSBA found that more than 60% of Grade 4 students failed to reach even...
baseline levels in Math, Literacy, and Science. Test scores like these demonstrate that a majority of Kyrgyz students fail to acquire essential numeracy and literacy skills.

**Assessment Goals**

One of the Kyrgyz Republic’s main goals is to transform its transmission-centered education system into a more modern, learner-centered one which encourages inquiry, application of knowledge, and understanding. These reforms require a change in its assessment practices as well. The government aims to adopt a more comprehensive assessment system by taking actions such as conducting regular Grades 4 and 8 national assessments and training teachers in new formative assessment practices.

**Self-Diagnosis**

READ support is very timely and relevant for the Kyrgyz Republic. Grappling with ongoing reforms, the MOES is seeking assistance to establish a unified, coherent assessment system which will effectively monitor education quality. READ complements other donor assistance by providing targeted technical assistance to develop an overall assessment framework, strengthen assessment institutions and capacity, and improve assessment instruments.

A first grant of $250,000 was awarded in June 2009. These funds supported a self-diagnosis of the assessment system to identify short- and medium-term needs, and determine where gaps exist and how best to use resources provided under READ and other sources over the next few years.

The Kyrgyz Republic has made significant progress in diagnosing the gaps in its current assessment system. A roundtable with all key stakeholders to discuss the report’s findings and possible future activities will take place in early 2010. There also are plans for a Study Tour to a select group of countries that exemplify good practice in the key priority areas identified under the Self-Diagnostic exercise, the findings from which will inform the Kyrgyz Republic’s Action Plan for future work in this area under READ.

**Enabling Environment**

There is firm high-level political support to establish a comprehensive assessment system to monitor education quality in the Kyrgyz Republic. Recent work by international donors has established a strong base on which to build, and ample opportunities exist to partner with these institutions. Yet, government budgets for assessment activities are still very limited and a comprehensive framework for student assessment has yet to be established.

**Alignment with Education System**

Traditional assessment practices focused on measuring students’ abilities to absorb information and memorize facts. Transitioning to a new learning framework has meant learning how to produce students who can interpret knowledge and translate theory into action; it also requires new assessment methods that align with these educational goals. Curriculum reform and training programs in congruent assessment activities are underway.

**Technical Aspects**

Continuous progress is being made in the area of the technical quality of assessment activities. At the same time, much work remains to be done under READ in order to improve instrument design, data analysis techniques, and mechanisms for reporting and using assessment information.

**Key Recommendations of the Self-Diagnosis**

- Introduce new formative and summative student assessment techniques and provide pre-service and in-service teacher training on these assessment techniques
- Conduct analysis of international and national assessment data to inform policy decisions and improve curricula and teaching practices
- Continue to build capacity in areas like test design, sampling, and item analysis
- Continue to implement periodic international and national assessments

“Results received [through] national research and PISA allowed [us] to see [the] weakness of Kyrgyzstan’s system and to [identify] the problem of education as the most important for the country; educational issues are discussed at the highest level of President, Government, Parliament, and Security Council.”

– Dr. Inna Valkova, Director, Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods
Assessment History

Mozambique conducts a number of assessment activities in the form of national and international surveys and national exams. National exams for Grades 2, 5, 7, and 10 are given annually to determine grade promotion and in Grade 12 to receive a school leaving certificate.

The first national assessment, which measured student achievement in Portuguese and Math (Grades 3 and 4) and Natural Sciences (Grades 4 and 5), was conducted in 2000; in 2006, another assessment aimed to measure the impact of bilingual education and test levels of achievement in Math, Portuguese and seven Mozambican languages in Grade 3; and most recently, Mozambique carried out an assessment to measure the impact of the new basic curriculum in Grades 3 and 6 for 2009.

Mozambique has participated in the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) that conducts regional assessments of Grade 6 student achievement in Reading and Math in 2000 and 2007 respectively.

Assessment Institutions

Mozambique’s Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) oversees the education system. Within MEC, the National Institute for Education Development (INDE) has been responsible for conducting periodic national assessments (2000, 2006, and 2009) and helping to carry out international studies on learning achievement. Under INDE’s leadership, a National Assessment Plan has been drafted and is currently under internal discussion at MEC.

As part of MEC, the National Council for Examinations and Certificates (CNECE) is responsible for implementing the annual national exams. These tests examine students’ academic achievement in different subjects in order to help determine promotion from one cycle to the next. These exams are administered locally and schools mark their own students’ exams, except for the Grade 12 exam which is done centrally.

INDE and CNECE have the most experience with learning assessment. However, formal training in assessment is largely limited to short courses and workshops. There is no systematic training program in place and little training has been extended to province and district personnel.

Learning Outcomes

The achievement of Mozambican students in Grade 6 for both Math and Reading was above the mean for all SACMEQ countries. In fact, the reading score was slightly more than a quarter of a standard deviation above the SACMEQ mean. Similarly, the mathematics score was almost a third of a standard deviation above the SACMEQ mean.
Assessment Goals

One of the main goals of the Strategic Plan of Education and Culture (SPEC) in Mozambique (2006-2011) is to not only expand access to education but to increase the quality of educational opportunities. Mozambique has been taking actions to measure learning outcomes. Whereas exams, national learning assessments and international surveys have all been conducted, they fail to interconnect and operate as a comprehensive assessment system.

Mozambique is currently discussing the possibility of creating a high-quality, holistic System of Education Quality Assessment (SAQEM). Its main purpose would be to establish a system for managing both the quantitative and qualitative information generated from assessments (at both the national and provincial levels) and communicate this information in ways that would have the greatest impact on the teaching-learning process.

Self-Diagnosis

The overall objective of READ activities in Mozambique is to strengthen the capacity of its institutions responsible for measuring student learning outcomes and promote the use of information from assessments to improve teaching and learning. For the first phase of READ funding, a grant of $300,000 was awarded in June 2009 to conduct a self-diagnosis of the current assessment environment and prepare an action plan for future work in Mozambique.

Mozambique completed its Self-Diagnosis toward the end of 2009. Discussions were held to review the content of the report and to agree on the main actions to be included as part of the Action Plan to be carried out during the next few years.

Enabling Environment

The diagnosis clearly shows that the current institutional enabling environment is inadequate and clear policy decisions are needed in support of assessment work in Mozambique. Rather than an assessment system per se, what exists is a series of assessment-related activities undertaken by different departments in MEC. However, On a positive note, past experience with conducting assessments has helped to create a core group of committed “technical staff”—which gives future training activities a base to build upon.

Alignment with Education System

Assessment activities in Mozambique are not tightly linked with larger MEC goals and planning. There is no clear evidence that assessment results are being used. Reports analyzing the results are not widely distributed—in some cases they are also not even published. The flow of information between schools and district and provincial offices and between national and provincial offices is very limited.

Technical Aspects

Given the limited training and support provided to INDE and CNEE, their ability to be innovative and acquire overall testing skills has been impressive. However, to continue to improve existing efforts and elevate the technical quality of education assessments in Mozambique, systematic formal training of assessment unit staff is required. Additional training is needed in areas such as test design, item analysis, sampling, and data analysis.

Key Recommendations of the Self-Diagnosis

- Institutionalize the assessment system in Mozambique by helping MEC better define its assessment vision as well as identify mechanisms that will ensure the use of assessment information on a regular basis
- Provide technical assistance to help MEC better define the overarching assessment needs and activities
- Continue to build capacity in the technical areas of assessment work
- Use existing information and coordinate with all key stakeholders to establish goals and expectations for learning outcomes
- Support efforts to train staff at the provincial and district levels and to improve the flow of information across different levels

“The Government’s vision puts quality and equity in basic education at the centre of its education policy. Improvement in access cannot happen without a substantial improvement in quality.”

– Mozambique’s Strategic Plan of Education and Culture
Assessment History

Education assessment in Tajikistan has historically been the domain of the classroom teachers. Overall, Tajikistan’s experience in administering large-scale standardized tests and other forms of national educational assessment has been extremely limited. To date, there have been no national or international surveys of student achievement. UNICEF conducted a Monitoring of Learning Achievements (MLA) and Non–Attendance and Drop-Outs (NADO) study in 2002 and 2005. Some assessments are supported within different donor projects (e.g., Aga Khan Foundation) but they are not conducted at a national level, being designed instead to evaluate the project interventions.

However, Tajikistan is beginning to focus on national assessments. With the assistance of an IDA-supported project, the Education Modernization Project, a Grade 4 assessment was piloted in 2008. Promising results encouraged further development of the survey with plans to ultimately implement it on a larger scale.

Typically, the tests that students take to determine their grades are administered by individual classroom teachers. For those students desiring to participate in higher education, they must sit for multiple exams created, administered and marked internally by individual higher education institutions. The public perception is that this process is flawed due to unequal access and an overall lack of transparency.

Assessment Institutions

There are no existing institutions in charge of conducting assessments in Tajikistan. The Student Assessment Department (SAD), which operates under the direction of Tajikistan’s Ministry of Education, administered the recent Grade 4 pilot assessment. Outside assistance and training enabled them to acquire valuable skills in test development. Their expertise in both curriculum and assessment is seen as highly valuable as the country expands its assessment activities.

The creation of an assessment institution is underway. A National Testing Center (NTC) has been established with a mandate to administer transparent nationwide university entrance exams and grade level assessments. The SAD staff have been transferred to the NTC. However, more full-time staff will be needed to carry out national goals for assessment since the current SAD team is only a small team of professionals.

Learning Outcomes

Due to the fact that there is neither systematic assessments nor evaluation of education performance, no reliable information exists on student learning outcomes in Tajikistan.
Assessment Goals

The Government of Tajikistan made clear its goal to ramp up efforts to monitor the “health” of its education system by establishing the NTC in 2009. While affiliated with the Ministry of Education, the center will be semi-autonomous so it can develop credibility as an impartial, secure and transparent institution. Assessment activities will include national assessments in various grade levels, beginning with Grades 4 and 9 to measure Mother Tongue and Math skills; a Unified University Entrance Exam used for selection to universities; and preparation for eventual participation in international surveys.

Establishment of the NTC represents the first step in creating and developing an assessment culture in Tajikistan. This effort goes hand in hand with the goal to build capacity at all levels of the education system and is a high priority, to ensure that reliable and valid data can be generated and then used to improve learning outcomes in Tajikistan.

Self-Diagnosis

For Tajikistan, READ comes at a very opportune time as the new testing center will need a significant amount of support as it endeavors to build its overall capacity to conduct national assessment activities.

The first grant of $250,000, awarded June 1, 2009, was targeted to finance a self-diagnosis of the assessment climate in Tajikistan and the development of an action plan for future assessment-related activities. The Self-Diagnosis provided information on short and medium-term needs with respect to Tajikistan’s student learning assessment and examination system and will help to determine how best to support the NTC.

Enabling Environment

Tajikistan lacks an assessment culture—learning outcomes are not monitored and decisions made about the education system are not based on evidence. Initiating the practice of regular assessments will require a huge cultural shift and serious institutional strengthening. In addition, current capacity is particularly weak. On the other hand, the government is committed to investing the necessary resources to build capacity and develop a high-quality assessment institution. Positive feedback from the pilot assessment indicated that teachers, parents, and students were enthusiastic about testing, which is also promising.

Alignment with Education System

Tajikistan has been working with international donors to transform its transmission-centered curriculum to a more modern one, less focused on memorizing facts and more focused on higher-order thinking skills. Development of the grade level assessments will be done with a strict adherence to this new national curriculum.

Technical Aspects

Time and expertise are required to conceptualize and develop valid and reliable tests. SAD received training from external consultants to assist them in designing the Grade 4 pilot test in 2008. The multiple choice format used matched the need for reliable, efficient, and low-cost testing, as testing is a relatively new activity in Tajikistan. However, improvement in all areas including test design and item development is needed to ensure that tests created are of sound quality.

Key Recommendations of the Self-Diagnosis

- Further develop the newly established NTC and hire adequate staff to run the center
- Build capacity of the staff and provide further training in test design, item development, sampling, data management, etc.
- Begin development of the University Entrance Examinations
- Expand national assessments beyond pilot stage to larger scale implementation and include more grade levels
- Prepare students and teachers in test awareness, as testing is a relatively new activity, and emphasize the importance of preparation

"[The main goals of the Center] are to...conduct research on hot-button issues related to the assessment of students’ preparedness through testing."

– Charter of the State Enterprise National Testing Center
**Assessment History**

Vietnam conducts a wide range of assessment activities, from national exams and surveys to classroom assessments. Completion of Grade 9 requires students to take an exam to determine their eligibility for certain secondary schools. Grade 12 students take two national exams: one to receive a school leaving certificate and another one if they plan to attend a university.

With international donor assistance, Vietnam completed national assessments of Grade 5 student achievement in Vietnamese and Math in both 2001 and 2007. During 2009, two more national surveys of student learning were conducted in Grades 6 and 9.

Vietnam’s education system has a formalized process for classroom assessments. Formative and summative assessments made by teachers and school principals measure student achievement throughout the school year.

**Assessment Institutions**

Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has charged several institutions with different assessment activities. National and provincial exams for Grades 9 and 12 are divided among the Departments of Education and Training (DOET) at the provincial level and General Department of Testing and Accreditation (GDETA) at the national level. Grade 9 exams are the responsibility of each province’s DOET; Grade 12 national exams are tasked to GDETA.

The Vietnam National Institute for Education Sciences (VNIES), another MOET agency, has received funds from external sources such as the World Bank to work with other assessment agencies to conduct national assessments. The current Grades 6 and 9 national assessments have been tasked to VNIES. VNIES is known for its expertise in areas of test design, data processing and other technical matters.

MOET sets school policies for classroom assessment by regulating the number and timing of the tests. Each year, there are four tests in each subject. However, principals and teachers determine the format and content of these tests. Alongside the implementation of the new curriculum, teacher trainings in assessment were provided to support teachers in their key roles at the classroom level.

**Learning Outcomes**

The 2001 and 2007 national surveys showed a marked improvement in reading comprehension among Vietnamese 5th graders and math scores remained high with over 87% demonstrating mastery of basic math skills. Notably, ethnic minorities and students in half-day schools were shown to consistently perform lower.
Assessment Goals

The National Strategy for improving education in Vietnam articulates a strong desire for Vietnam to take its place among globally competitive, knowledge-based economies. To ensure that the necessary learning is taking place, the government plans to conduct national surveys of achievement every 3 years for Grades 5, 7, 9 and 11 in Math and Vietnamese and gradually expand to include other subjects. Additionally, evaluation standards have now been developed for all pre-tertiary education and schools will be evaluated against these at both local and national levels. Vietnam also plans to participate in pISA 2012.

Self-Diagnosis

Vietnam is on its way to having a firmly established assessment system. To help Vietnam continue to build capacity and improve the quality of its system, a first READ grant of $350,000 was awarded in June 2009.

READ’s support is intended to strengthen Vietnam’s capacity to conduct systematic assessment of learning outcomes and provide channels for feedback, policy analysis and recommendations for actions to improve student learning outcomes. This first phase of funds aims to support a self-diagnosis of the assessment system and map out an action plan for moving forward.

Vietnam has completed its Self-Diagnosis. A workshop was held in December 2009 with key stakeholders, to discuss the findings of the report. To develop the Action Plan, in-depth studies on current classroom assessment practices and an inventory of training programs on assessment are currently being carried out.

Enabling Environment

Vietnam places a high priority on assessments. GDEtA and DoEt are well-staffed and their budgets include targeted funds for carrying out assessments. In agencies like VNIES, there are teams of competent assessment specialists capable of conducting national surveys of student achievement. Policymakers in Vietnam give priority to assessment results and use them to improve education quality. When the 2007 national survey demonstrated that Non-Kinh students and students in half-day schools performed consistently lower than their peers, this led to planned actions to increase the number of full day schools and to allocate additional resources in these areas.

Alignment with Education System

Newly developed national standards and an updated curriculum clearly define the national goals in education. However, due to large numbers of students and some skills that are more difficult to assess, exams do not always cover all the subject matter.

Technical Aspects

The exams and surveys studied were found to be technically sound and avoided most common mistakes. However, many of the exams focused primarily on multiple choice items, and the use of more open-ended items, which demonstrate higher order thinking and problem solving skills, has been limited.

Key Recommendations of the Self-Diagnosis

• Conduct national assessments as regular events every 4-5 years, covering more subjects and a wider range of grade levels
• Disseminate exam and survey results more effectively and channel feedback to schools to improve education in the future
• Participate in international surveys, like pISA, as a capacity building exercise and see where Vietnam stands relative to other countries
• Build capacity of GDEtA, NIES, DOEtS and other education staff who develop public exams and provide additional training to improve teachers and principals’ ability to conduct formative and summative assessments in the classroom
• Conduct further analysis of national and provincial exams

“READ is extremely important for Vietnam to strengthen and improve its assessment system”

– A Senior Official from Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training
The Republic of Zambia places high emphasis on upgrading the knowledge and skills base of its population in order to compete in world markets and improve sustainable growth. Over the past decade it has undertaken reforms to attain universal primary education and to improve education quality. Enormous progress has been made in improving school access and Zambia is on track to achieve the 2015 UPE goal. However, there are serious concerns about education quality as demonstrated by low levels of performance in national and regional surveys and exams. The government is committed to addressing quality issues, including revision of the national curriculum and strengthening the national assessment system.

### Population: 13 million

**Primary Net Enrollment Rate:** 95%

**Primary Completion Rate:** 93%

**Education Share of Budget:** 17%

*Note: All data from 2008*

*Sources: EdStats, EFA-FTI 2009 Mid-Term Report*

### Assessment History

Zambia has a long history of public exams, dating back to the early 1920s. More recently, policies to measure education quality have expanded learning assessments beyond public exams—types of activities now also include national and international surveys and classroom assessments.

At the end of Grades 7, 9, and 12, all students take exams, covering all subjects, to determine selection into the next level and school certification.

National assessments of student achievement have been conducted nearly every two years since 1999. These assessments carried out in 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006, and 2008 measured Grade 5 student learning in English, Math, and Reading in one of four Zambian languages.


In 2004, the government initiated a program for classroom-based assessments, although it is unclear how widely these practices have been implemented.

### Assessment Institutions

In Zambia, the Ministry of Education (MOE) oversees education and monitors its quality. Two organizations tasked with measuring learning outcomes include the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ) and the Technical Education Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA).

Responsible for public exams, national and regional surveys and programs for classroom-based assessment, ECZ plays a critical role in Zambia’s assessment system. Operational since the late 1980s, ECZ, with now a full-time staff of over 130, has over time strengthened its capacity to design, administer, and score exams. However, there is a need to train staff in additional skills required for conducting national surveys.

In 2005, the task of conducting exams and awarding certificates to vocational programs was transferred to TEVETA. In doing so, MOE recognized that specialized and focused attention was required to meet sub-sector objectives.

### Learning Outcomes

Despite extensive efforts to improve education quality, learning achievement in Zambia has remained low. The 2008 National Learning Assessment of Grade 5 found only 32% of learners met desired levels in literacy and only 45% in numeracy. On a recent regional survey, Zambia was one
Assessment Goals

One of the main priorities of Zambia’s MOE is to ensure learners master essential literacy and numeracy skills in lower and middle basic levels. To ensure that the necessary learning is taking place, the government plans to continue to conduct national assessments alongside programs for continuous assessment in the classroom. Increasing capacity to conduct assessments and effectively using results to improve education quality will be essential at all levels of the education system.

Self-Diagnosis

Zambia is continuing to look for ways to improve its current assessment system. While an impressive array of assessment activities is under way, there is room for improvement in both the technical quality of the assessments and communicating results in a way that will ultimately improve levels of learning. The first READ grant of $300,000 was approved in June 2009, to fund a self-diagnosis of the assessment system and preparation of an action plan.

Through the Self-Diagnosis, Zambia has made considerable progress in diagnosing the gaps in their current assessment system and an Action Plan is being finalized. A workshop involving all stakeholders was held in early January to discuss the report findings and plan for future activities.

Enabling Environment

While the government’s Fifth National Development Plan emphasizes the need for assessment practices as an important instrument for enhancing learning outcomes, limited resources are allocated for assessments. A majority of educators have a low perception of the value of assessment information and lack an understanding of how to use this information to improve learning. In addition, national assessment results are often not widely distributed nor used in decision-making.

Alignment with Education System

Zambia underwent numerous curriculum reforms since the 1980s but the changes have not been fully institutionalized. As a result, the curriculum is fragmented, making it difficult to know what the assessment activities are intended to measure. Efforts are underway to synchronize the curriculum and establish an outcome-based curriculum. Accordingly, the assessment system will need to be aligned in order to better reflect this outcome-based framework.

Technical Aspects

While the current assessment system creates a wealth of data, additional technical expertise is needed to analyze this data effectively. Overall, exams and national assessments are technically sound but some aspects need improvement. Capacity constraints with using advanced statistical software have created flaws and backlogs, indicating a need for additional training in these more technically advanced skills.

Key Recommendations of the Self-Diagnosis

- Continue to build capacity in test design, and more advanced technical areas like statistical modeling, psychometrics, and data analysis
- Improve dissemination and use of assessment results to inform policy and enhance the quality of the teaching-learning process
- Provide training to support teachers to incorporate assessment practices into their own teaching and to interpret and use data to improve learning
- Improve procedures for records management and storing results

“The READ program has come at a time when as a nation we have renewed vigor to revamp the quality of the education system.”

– Hon. Clement Sinyinda, Deputy Education Minister, Ministry of Education
Country Challenges

The preceding pages tell a story of effort and progress; they also unveil the diverse and often formidable challenges facing the READ countries. These challenges relate to implementation of the READ program as well as their overall education programs more generally. An understanding of these challenges and constraints helps to better appreciate why results can be slow to come and is a first step to identifying solutions for advancing more steadily toward countries’ goals for improving learning outcomes.

Following are some of the challenges with which READ countries and World Bank TTLs have been contending, and which they will be working together to address wherever possible:

- **Weak local capacity in assessment:** Where a certain base level of assessment capacity exists in a country, the task of building up a strong assessment unit entails a fairly dependable menu of training, study tours, and international (and local where available) technical assistance to enhance the skills of existing staff, and hiring trained or trainable individuals to ensure a minimum level of proficiency in performing the various required functions. Where such a base level of local capacity does not exist, however, building from the ground up is much harder, as the dependence on international inputs is greater and the prospects for sustainability correspondingly lower.

- **Nascent assessment culture:** A strong assessment culture takes time to build, requiring an internalization, on the part of multiple players, of the importance of learning and its measurement, and a willingness to have deficiencies at the classroom, school, and national level exposed—with implications for the performance of multiple stakeholders. Where the assessment culture is young, the agenda may face some resistance until its value is mainstreamed into national thinking.

- **Time availability of MOE staff:** It is essential to acknowledge that adding a new, important task to the work program of ministry staff who may already be overburdened, may translate into slow progress and limited attention to READ tasks, particularly where TTLs are not based in the country.

- **Changes in ministry staff:** In some countries, changes at the minister level or reorganization of the whole or parts of the education ministry have meant more than one round of “launching READ” to familiarize new teams with the READ program and ensure adequate ownership and internalization of READ-related activities on the part of the new teams, with implications also for the timeline of READ activities. It is noteworthy that in the READ countries where such changes have taken place, the READ program has nevertheless gone forward—reflecting the constructive effort on the part of both the countries and the respective TTLs.

- **Lack of other donors in assessment:** Where other donor presence is limited, two challenges arise. First, there is a lack of complementary funding available to support the costs entailed in building an assessment system that are not eligible under READ. Second, there is also less support for in-country program monitoring and supervision, in those cases where the Bank has no ongoing operation or presence in the country’s education sector.

- **Identifying assessment experts fluent in Portuguese and Russian:** For Angola and Mozambique as well as the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, the capacity building process is complicated by the need to find experts who have both the technical and language skills required.

- **Size and organization of education system:** In countries where the education system is large and there is a great deal of diversity, building an assessment system is likely to be more challenging than a similar undertaking in a small, relatively homogenous environment.
Looking Ahead

The immediate challenge for 2010 is to step up to the next level, from the building blocks put in place in the first year of READ. The program should—and should be seen to—keep up, if not accelerate, the momentum generated, at the country level by the work on the Self-Diagnosis and at the global level by the First READ Global Conference. Key priorities are shown below.

At the Country level, READ will help countries:

- design and begin to implement an Action Plan that sets clear priorities and maps out solid responses to the gaps identified in the Self-Diagnosis
- apply the READ “Roadmap” framework and draw lessons from the Self-Diagnosis Synthesis; both will be available by midyear 2010 and aim to help policymakers and other education stakeholders think through and build consensus around key assessment priorities and inputs
- put in place sound institutional arrangements, as a solid institutional base early on will likely strengthen the prospects for building up an effective assessment system
- find ways to meet their funding needs through flexible approaches recognizing varied contexts and needs
- integrate READ activities into the overall education system and Education Sector Plan, to ensure that the READ Align-Assess-Act agenda (see Figure 1) will go forward and be sustained even after the READ program ends

At the Global level, READ will aim to deliver:

- knowledge products and tools that respond to countries’ needs as they design and implement their Action Plans, including new research on what works and lessons learned, case studies and comparative information on other countries’ assessment systems, indicators for benchmarking, and communications tools essential for assessment (e.g., making a case for investment in assessment, communicating assessment results to policymakers or the public)
- a Second READ Global Conference that will take forward the momentum of the first one and go further, in terms of sharing research and good practices and building a global community of practice in assessments
- capacity development for all key stakeholders, ranging from assessment unit staff and heads to teachers, school administrators, and high-level policymakers with responsibility for education quality and assessment
- strategic partnerships with other global actors in assessment, to ensure greater efficiency and complementarity of effort and better division of labor
- efforts that look beyond primary and secondary education to include learning at higher levels and links between school learning and employability
- a READ Results Framework, with the benefit of a year’s experience, to help monitor progress for the remaining years of READ and determine whether the program’s objectives and desired outcomes are being achieved

Photo: Emily Gardner/World Bank (Thailand)
**List of Acronyms**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>CICED</td>
<td>Center for International Cooperation in Education Development</td>
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<td>ECA</td>
<td>East and Central Asia</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>EGRA</td>
<td>Early Grade Reading Assessment</td>
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<td>FTI</td>
<td>Fast Track Initiative</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>IALS</td>
<td>International Adult Literacy Survey</td>
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<td>IDA</td>
<td>International Development Association</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
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<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>PIRLS</td>
<td>Progress in International Literacy Study</td>
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<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
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<td>READ</td>
<td>Russia Education Aid for Development</td>
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<td>TF</td>
<td>Trust Fund</td>
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<td>TG</td>
<td>Technical Group</td>
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<td>TIMSS</td>
<td>Trends in International and Mathematics Study</td>
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<td>TOR</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
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<td>TTL</td>
<td>Task Team Leader</td>
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<td>UPE</td>
<td>Universal Primary Education</td>
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<td>World Bank</td>
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Glossary of Assessment Terms

**Classroom Assessment:** A variety of tools and procedures employed by teachers and students in the course of daily classroom activity to collect and interpret written, oral, and other forms of evidence on student learning or achievement (i.e., oral questioning and feedback, homework assignments, student presentations, diagnostic tests, end-of-unit quizzes); provides ‘real time’ information to support the teaching-learning process.

**Educational Assessment System:** A group of interconnected policies, structures, and practices for the generation and use of information on student learning or achievement.

**Formative Assessment:** Ongoing assessments, reviews, and observations in a classroom as part of the instructional process. Used to modify and validate instruction.

**National/International Assessments:** Also referred to as ‘large-scale assessments’ or ‘large-scale surveys’. Designed to provide data on the achievements of students in a curriculum area, aggregated to provide an estimate of achievement levels in the education system as a whole at a particular age or grade level. Involves the administration of achievement tests either to a sample or a population of students. Teachers and others may be asked to provide background information which, when related to student achievement, can provide insights on how achievement is related to factors such as household characteristics and levels of teacher training.

**Public’ or ‘External’ Examinations:** Tests that measure individual student achievement in relation to an official curriculum or other formal body of knowledge and skills. Results are used, alone or in combination with other information, to make highly-consequential decisions about individual examinees, such as promotion to the next grade or admission to higher education. Also referred to as ‘high-stakes’ tests.

**Standards:** Content standards are broadly stated expectations of what students should know and be able to do in particular subjects and grade levels. Student performance standards are explicit definitions of what students must do to demonstrate proficiency at a specific level on the content standards.

**Student Assessment:** The process of gathering and appraising information on what students know, understand, and can do in order to make an informed decision about what to do next in the educational process. Also referred to as ‘learning assessment,’ ‘educational assessment,’ or simply ‘assessment.’

**Summative Assessment:** Typically used to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs and services at the end of an academic year or other pre-determined time, or to make a judgment of student competency after an instructional phase is complete.
What is READ?

Agreed in October 2008, the Russia Education Aid for Development (READ) program is a collaboration of the Government of Russia and the World Bank aimed at advancing Russia’s role as an emerging donor in education, with a focus on improving education quality in low-income countries. The READ Trust Fund (hereafter referred to as READ) is a part of this program. It is an untied, World Bank-executed trust fund in the amount of $32 million to be used over a 5-year period.

READ will help low-income countries improve their student learning outcomes through the design, implementation, and utilization of national systems for student assessment. Such systems may include:

- tests designed to measure overall learning levels in the system, e.g., sample-based surveys of national 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

READ’s support may be expected to cover diverse assessment-related activities including national surveys (“how well are our students performing in relation to our national learning goals?”), international assessments (“how well are our students performing in comparison with other countries?”), and public examinations (“which students should be selected to proceed to the next level of the education system?”).

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.

Seven countries have been selected by Russia for READ assistance at this time: Angola, Ethiopia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mozambique, Tajikistan, Vietnam, and Zambia. These countries will benefit from hands-on technical assistance and knowledge and analytical services as needed, designed in collaboration with the country and based on the country’s interests. Many more countries will benefit from the development and sharing of generalized guidance informed by this country level support.

READ envisages support in particular to countries that participate in the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative (FTI). FTI is a global partnership aimed at helping low-income countries accelerate progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary completion by 2015 (MDG2). READ will help FTI countries formulate and implement coherent, results-focused education sector plans.

“International assessments highlight large achievement gaps between students in rich and poor countries. Within countries too, inequality exists between regions, communities, schools, and classrooms. These disparities have important implications not just in education but for the wider distribution of opportunities in society.”

– Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009
This, in turn, will reinforce efforts to measure learning outcomes and to use the results to improve education quality. READ complements existing external funding sources available to FTI countries by its singular dedication to improving learning outcomes through the use of student assessments and a focus on institutional capacity strengthening and cross-country knowledge sharing.

**Why READ?**

Many low-income countries have made progress and are well placed to achieve MDG2. While this progress is important, enrollment in school is only a first step. Unless students are **learning** the skills they need to continue their education and access good jobs, improvements in enrollment and completion rates throughout the developing world will not lead to the desired effects on individual lives, poverty reduction, and economic growth.

**Learning matters: higher skills produce higher incomes.** There is a considerable body of evidence showing that education drives economic returns. More than years of schooling, it is learning, that is, the acquisition of cognitive skills, which produces gains in individual productivity and income. Several studies show a strong correlation between higher test scores and higher wages. For example, in one study, a one standard deviation increase in test scores in the International Adult literacy Survey (IALS) was associated with 15-20 percent higher earnings.

**Learning matters especially for the poor.** There is evidence that, while skills have positive returns for people at all income levels, they have particularly strong returns for low-income individuals, especially those in the lowest 25 percent of the economic spectrum.

**Investment in learning-focused education helps countries reduce poverty and promote economic growth.** As more poor people acquire cognitive skills, become more productive, earn more, and rise out of poverty, countries benefit, realizing gains in economic growth and equity. Research shows that:

- differences in cognitive skills lead to economically significant differences in economic growth, and school policy can, if effective in raising cognitive skills, be an important force in economic development
- a one standard deviation increase in scores on international assessments of literacy and mathematics competencies is associated with a 2 percent increase in annual growth rates of GDP per capita

**Despite the importance of learning, few low-income countries even measure learning outcomes.** Some have experimented with national assessments of student learning (Figure 1), but often these have been ad-hoc experiences that are not part of an education strategy and are not sustained over time. A comparatively small number of developing countries have participated in international assessments of student learning such as TIMSS, PIRLS, and PISA, which enable countries to measure how their education systems perform relative to those of other countries in their region and in the rest of the world. These developing countries have consistently performed in the bottom of the distribution. In a recent Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality assessment in Sub-Saharan Africa, fewer than 25 percent of Grade 6 pupils reached the desired level of reading in four of the participating countries. 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 wide variety of decisions.
of education policies, ranging from the design and implementation of policies and programs to improve teaching and learning in classrooms, to identifying lagging students so they can get the support they need, to ensuring that low-performing teachers and schools receive adequate technical assistance and training and thus guarantee that all students have an equal opportunity to learn.

The low scores seen in countries where learning is measured highlight education quality as a critical challenge for developing countries. The international community, including the World Bank, seeks increasingly to extend its support beyond raising school enrollments to ensure that all children have access to an education of high quality.

**In summary**, the benefits of education accrue to society only when learning occurs and when children and youth acquire cognitive skills. But too often, learning is not occurring, and in a number of countries there is not even any knowledge of whether learning is taking place, because there is no measurement of learning. Without measurement, there is no roadmap for analyzing where the problems lie or how to address them. The purpose of READ is to help fill this critical gap: to help countries put in place a system to regularly measure learning outcomes and use the results to improve learning outcomes, as a key driver of economic growth and poverty reduction.

**The READ Vision**

LOCAL assessment agency and education quality experts

+ INTERNATIONAL experts/Technical Group

= COUNTRY-SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS informed by international best practice, to support the design and use of student learning assessments as a basis to improve education quality and learning outcomes

**How will READ work?**

For the selected countries, READ will rely on World Bank operational teams to engage country stakeholders in developing a country-specific program of READ assistance, with the benefit of advice from international experts in the form of the Technical Group (TG). The READ assistance program, executed by the Bank, will help strengthen local institutional capacity to design and administer student assessments as well as to use student learning outcomes information to improve learning.
teaching and learning in classrooms. The TG, comprising World Bank, Russian, and world-renowned experts, will play a pivotal role in bringing worldwide good practices to bear in helping countries design and use student assessments to raise education quality.

The TG will be responsible for two major strands of READ work: (i) developing global products to both inform local interventions and generate lessons from country-specific activities; and (ii) providing technical assistance and support to country teams in the implementation of READ activities (Figure 2).

i. Global products

One of the expected contributions of READ is a series of global products on the design and use of student assessment systems to raise education quality in low-income settings. These products may include toolkits for carrying out learning assessments, research-based policy papers, reports, and workshops.

ii Country-specific activities: the READ “Brand”

Countries engage in a variety of assessment activities and with varying frequency. Sustained attention to measuring student achievement is crucial, however, to steadily improving learning outcomes in a cycle of measuring, analyzing, and using data to influence the relevant policies and practices (Figure 3). READ proposes a systematic approach to putting in place this cycle, entailing the steps outlined below, which together make for a comprehensive framework of activities—rather than piecemeal and incoherent ones—aimed at developing a sound national system for student assessment as a basis for efforts to raise education quality:

- carrying out a Self-Diagnosis based on a READ-designed template exploring questions related to student learning assessments and their use to improve teaching and learning, with the Self-Diagnosis followed by an international review of the findings and recommendations
- developing an Action Plan to strengthen national systems for student assessment and their use, accompanied by an evaluation strategy
- implementing Pilot Assessment(s), including utilization of assessment information for improving teaching and learning in classrooms
- summarizing lessons learned from READ activities, including an evaluation of pilot assessments, to inform future policies and activities

These steps, embodied in the READ “Brand”, are envisaged to underpin all READ assistance at the country level, applied flexibly and adapted to each coun-

Figure 3. Concept underlying READ

- Agree/Confirm learning goals
  Align with Education Sector Plan
- Reform policies and practices to improve teaching and learning
- Disseminate assessment data
  Analyze data to determine how to improve quality
  Pilot activities to improve teaching and learning based on the assessment data
- Measure progress toward goals through student learning assessments

Principles
- Country-driven design
- Actively engaging local actors
- Building on ongoing work
- Utilizing existing capacity
- Strengthening institutional capacity
- Informed by international best practices
try’s specific context. Flexibility is critical, and it is important to underscore that countries will drive the design of READ assistance, in line with the FII principle of country ownership. Each of these steps will benefit from support from the TG, aimed at bringing international knowledge to bear in each country. The TG will support countries in these activities by:

- providing a template with technical guidelines for the initial diagnostic, informed by international best practices
- reviewing and providing technical feedback on the diagnostic as well as recommendations for the Action Plan (including use of global products developed under READ), informed by international best practices
- reviewing and providing technical feedback on the Action Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy developed by the country team
- providing regular technical assistance to build capacity in country
- providing guidelines and technical support in the preparation of lessons learned

Expected outcomes of READ

The main expected outcome of READ is the strengthened institutional capacity of low-income countries to develop, carry out, and use student assessment information to raise student learning outcomes in a sustained manner. Because changes in teaching and learning take time to be reflected in student learning outcomes, the indicators that would be expected to measure READ’s progress toward achieving its objectives include, at the global level, development of knowledge products and their dissemination, and at the country level, the actions that countries take toward strengthening student assessment systems and their use. These include:

- agreement on learning goals
- completion of Self-Diagnosis (and international review)
- preparation of Action Plans
- implementation of pilot assessment(s) and its evaluation
- training of country staff in areas related to student assessment
- preparation of recommendations for policy changes based on the assessment results

References


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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:

**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.,
        - Design/targeting of new reforms, programs, initiatives
        - 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
ANNEX 3

First READ Global Conference Summary
Developing a Vision for Assessment Systems

September 30–October 2, 2009
Moscow, Russia
The First READ Global Conference took place September 30-October 2, 2009 in Moscow, Russia. This event brought together nearly 130 participants comprising delegations and World Bank education task teams from all 7 READ member countries (Angola, Ethiopia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mozambique, Tajikistan, Vietnam, and Zambia), education assessment experts from the international community including Russia, and other education experts from across Russia.

**Objectives**

The three-day agenda was designed to:

- Highlight the fundamental message that access to and even completion of primary school are not enough, it is learning which is important
- Share the assessment experience of other countries
- Hear from READ countries as to their aims, plans, and challenges on the road to improved learning outcomes
- Draw attention to Russia’s role as an important emerging donor in education

**Key Messages**

The theme for the conference was “Developing a Vision for Assessment Systems”. The key messages were:

- **When children learn, nations prosper**—countries cannot afford to postpone national priority for learning
- **Evidence**—obtained through regular assessments of student learning—*and use of that evidence, is vital*
- **Developing a system of assessment is important**, i.e., creating an enabling environment for assessment, ensuring alignment between assessment and other components of the education system, and paying attention to the technical quality of the instruments used to measure student learning

**Structure**

READ Country delegates were the primary target audience for the conference. Country delegations, World Bank education task teams and international assessment experts were seated at roundtables to encourage active participation and interaction among participants. The materials were presented in English, Russian and Portuguese, and slides were projected in English and Russian. Each presentation was followed by ample time for discussion and the first two days concluded with table exercises aimed to engage country delegates in identifying key takeaway messages for their countries. Then, on the final day, each country delegation delivered a presentation which highlighted their country’s goals for assessments, followed by a panel discussion.

**Outcome**

The conference marked an important milestone for READ, as it was the first occasion for the seven READ countries to interact with each other, the donor, and international experts. The main objectives for the conference were achieved. It consolidated READ countries’ commitment to the assessment agenda, spurred their desire for more knowledge and interaction with each other and with international experts, created visibility for Russia as an important donor in education and for READ as a quality program supporting assessments, and positioned the World Bank and Russia as active if not leading players in the area of assessment. According to feedback from the READ countries and the Russian government, the conference was highly successful and made significant strides in moving the READ agenda forward.
Reflecting high-level attention from both the Russian government and the Bank, a number of high-ranking Russian and World Bank officials opened the event. Isaak Kalina, Russia’s Deputy Minister of Education and Science, and Dmitry Pankin, Russian’s Deputy Minister of Finance both stressed the importance to Russia of international education initiatives like READ. The World Bank’s Vice President for the ECA Region, Philippe Le Houerou, recognized the fact that Russia is on its way to becoming a major player in the field of development assistance and commended Russia for partnering with the World Bank to help developing countries improve their education systems.

To further set the stage, Andrei Volkov, Dean of the Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO, chairman of a G8 expert group in 2006 on Russia’s education initiatives, and member of the READ Council, explained Russia’s rationale for initiating the READ program, stressing the importance of measuring learning outcomes and Russia’s desire to assist developing countries in their efforts to improve education quality. Robin Horn, World Bank Education Manager and also a member of the READ Council, officially welcomed all participants and introduced each of the READ country delegations.

Two world-renowned researchers were the conference’s keynote speakers on Day 1. They were invited to deliver evidence-based messages on the importance of learning: that education has the power to transform societies, but ONLY when children learn; and that not investing in learning has significant costs to society, in terms of both economic growth and equity.

**Learning Matters**

The first keynote address by Eric Hanushek, Senior Fellow at Stanford University’s Hoover Institute, highlighted research showing that increasing the quantity of education does not directly correlate with higher economic growth. Ultimately, it is the degree to which schooling fosters cognitive skills that matters for economic development. Evidence shows that quality is the primary issue and the only way countries can know how well students are learning and the quality of their education system is to measure student performance.

Andreas Schleicher, Head of the Indicators and Analysis Division at OECD, reinforced the importance of education quality and improved learning outcomes. In the global economy, the demand for skills and higher-educated individuals is increasing, even as job prospects for those with limited skills are deteriorating. Hence, modern education systems require schools to deliver education programs that enhance learning outcomes in order for students—and countries—to be able to reap the economic rewards.

After animated question and answer sessions, conference participants were asked to reflect further on why learning for all matters. Lively discussions ensued at each table where participants discussed ways they might convince their nation’s own stakeholders of the critical importance of learning and of establishing an assessment system that supports that goal.
Day 2: Food for Thought from Around the World

Day 2 opened with a presentation by a member of the READ Technical Group, Anil Kanjee, who explained the “ABCs” of assessments. Mr. Kanjee explained that a comprehensive assessment system is complex, with various types and levels of assessments and a wide range of intended users of the gathered data. He underscored the importance of aligning an assessment system with the country’s learning goals as well as the crucial need to not only gather information about student learning but use this evidence to take relevant actions to improve education quality.

A key objective of the conference was to share with conference participants, and READ country delegates in particular, other countries’ assessment experiences and lessons learned that could be used in developing a vision for their own country’s assessment system. Speakers were invited from across the globe to discuss their assessment experiences, and participants listened with curiosity, and learned. The sessions were rich, and the table below gleans 3-5 lessons learned from these presentations on countries’ experience with assessment.

At the conclusion of Day 2, conference participants were asked again to reflect on what country experiences presented earlier had the most relevance for them and discuss how they might take similar actions or avoid common mistakes. Table discussions were again engaging and participants intently extrapolated key takeaway messages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Assessment Lessons Learned</th>
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| Russia (V.Bolotov, I.Valdman, P.Nezhnov, Y.Tumeneva) | • Participation in international surveys highlights education system strengths and weaknesses, shows progress over time, and encourages ongoing dialogue among policymakers and educators  
• In-depth analysis of test results is valuable in determining what factors have the greatest impact on learning outcomes  
• Alignment of assessment activities and the curriculum is essential |
| Poland (J.Wisniewski) | • High-level attention is important: Ongoing education reforms have increased the number of assessment activities in Poland  
• Various assessment activities should be linked and interconnected—school-based assessments, international surveys and external exams  
• A comprehensive assessment system and decisions on education reforms based on evidence have resulted in impressive improvement in learning outcomes; PISA scores from 2000 to 2006 showed remarkable progress and Poland is now above the OECD average |
| Singapore (Y.BanHar) | • All stakeholders must believe exams are reliable, valid and fair—high public confidence is critical  
• Exams should be school-based and focus on higher-order competencies  
• Strong MOE support for the exam system creates stability and use of results to inform policy  
• All key players must have a stake in exam results i.e., in Singapore, students’ have a stake through the use of results for school selection and scholarships; parents see link in performance to future economic opportunities; school performance is measured by exam results; and government uses exams to monitor national progress and state of education |
| Latin America (E.Velez) | • Effective in-service training and a “user-friendly” approach to assessment facilitates its use by teachers  
• Technical legitimacy of test methodology is crucial  
• Unit conducting assessments must be autonomous from political interests and committed to producing and disseminating reports that are useful for policy-makers, managers, and teachers  
• Detailed planning of actions and coherent implementation are important; an assessment strategy is critical, simply administering a test is not enough |
| South Africa (Y.Sayed) | • Assessment and testing does not equal quality—it only identifies areas in need of intervention  
• Teachers and schools need training in assessment, regular support, and tools to develop effective assessment practices  
• Viewing tests and exams as part of a continuous assessment process allows for a more dynamic assessment system |
| Malawi (B.Chulu) | • Integrating assessment into curriculum reforms forces a country to build assessment capacity  
• Using local Masters and professional development programs to build capacity for carrying out assessments is a sustainable approach  
• Continuous assessment is essential—end of cycle exams are inadequate to improve quality |
| Kenya (P.Wasanga) | • Using newsletters to report exam results has encouraged ongoing dialogue with policymakers and teachers on ways to improve teaching and learning  
• Effective reports are written in ways that make exam results and data analysis relevant and understandable to their perspective audience  
• Including a performance index and school rankings in reports increases interest |
The focus for the final day of the conference was to hear from READ countries. Robin Horn opened the day reiterating that rates of return to education require the acquisition of cognitive skills and that school attendance alone is not enough. He underscored again that a country’s education policies need to be aligned with the goal of raising learning outcomes, and highlighted the role of READ assistance in helping countries improve assessment policies, institutions, and instruments, build assessment capacity, and improve overall education quality.

**Roadmap for Success**

A member of the READ Technical Group, Marguerite Clarke, presented a ‘roadmap’ for evaluating and building more effective assessment systems. The roadmap, which underpins the Self-Diagnosis exercise undertaken by all READ countries, provides policymakers and other stakeholders in the education system with a framework for discussion and consensus-building around priorities and key inputs for their assessment system.

Armed with the findings of their Self-Diagnosis exercise (see Self-Diagnosis section of READ Country summaries), countries now have solid information on where they are (in terms of where their current assessment system is strong and where more work is needed) in their journey toward a more effective assessment system.

As a specific example of an assessment tool for measuring reading skills, another member of the READ Technical Group, Amber Gove, presented on how early oral reading assessments can be used. Assessments like the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) are beneficial because they provide instant results and immediate feedback, and allow teachers and policymakers to identify and address learning barriers and improve teaching-learning practices early on in the educational process.

**READ Country Spotlight**

READ Country presentations dominated Day 3. Prior to the conference, each READ country delegation prepared a presentation which outlined where they currently are, where they would like to be, challenges they face in getting there, and issues for broader discussion (see Country Report summaries). These presentations evidenced the commitment of READ countries to the learning agenda and their enthusiastic response to READ support, to help them overcome challenges on the path to success. Their active engagement and the lively discussions following the presentations also provided clear indication of their interest in each other’s plans and networking with each other.

At the conclusion of the conference, each READ country delegation was asked to identify two things for going forward. Their responses signaled motivation, dedication, and excitement for moving ahead in establishing their country assessment systems, with support from READ.
Learning matters and countries cannot afford to postpone national priority for learning:

• “When children learn, nations prosper”. Education has the power to transform societies—but ONLY when children learn.
• Access is essential but not enough: children must develop cognitive skills. More than years of schooling, it is the acquisition of cognitive skills—learning—which produces gains in individual productivity and income. Several studies show a strong correlation between higher test scores and higher wages.
• Research shows strong links between learning and economic growth, including costs to society of weak learning outcomes. A recent McKinsey study shows that U.S. GDP would have been 9-16% higher in 2008 if U.S. high school graduates were to have attained the average skills of their peers in Canada, Finland, or South Korea.
• Improving learning of under-privileged children yields especially strong gains. Research shows that raising the achievement of the unskilled and excluded would lead not only to individual payoffs, such as higher incomes, but also would generate big benefits for economies, such as higher productivity and greater GDP. It would also result in broad social gains.

Evidence on learning matters, measurement is a key to effectiveness of education:

• Evidence—obtained through regular assessments of student learning—is vital, for teachers, parents, and students to know what is actually being learned, how well it is being learned, and where greater efforts need to be made to increase learning results. Policymakers need assessment evidence to ascertain whether students are achieving in line with agreed national goals, how effective schools and teachers are in building cognitive competencies, whether all population groups are learning at the same rate, what proportion of students are achieving at each performance level, and what can be done to improve teaching and learning in the classroom.
• Without evidence, a country has no prospects to improve learning and no roadmap for knowing whether or in what areas or for what groups of children learning needs to be improved, or how.
• What gets measured and reported is more likely to get attention—ranging from learners and teachers to parents and policymakers—which is prerequisite for efforts to improve learning.

Developing a system of assessment is important:

• Once-off assessments are not enough; governments need to create a system of assessment. Developing such a system involves creating an enabling environment for assessment, ensuring alignment between assessment and other components of the education system, and paying attention to the technical quality of the instruments used to measure student learning.
• Governments need to keep in mind the assessment cycle: aligning learning goals with development priorities, assessing learner performance in relation to those goals, and acting on the results to improve policies and teaching methods.
• The effective use of assessment for improving learning is critical: countries need to disseminate assessment results to parents, teachers, schools and policymakers to help them better understand challenges in learning across different groups of children, geographical regions, teaching methods, etc.
• Effective structures and processes at the different levels of the education system need to be institutionalized, to ensure that all aspects of the assessment cycle receive continuous and sustained attention.

READ can play a key role in supporting countries’ efforts to improve learning:

• Through READ, which uniquely dedicates aid to the learning agenda, Russia has made a bold declaration of the priority it places on learning.
• READ confirms Russia’s recognition of countries’ need for not only finance but also technical assistance, capacity strengthening, and knowledge sharing—which are critical for success.
• READ countries are moving forward with the READ concept by starting with a self-diagnostic exercise to determine which key pieces of such an assessment system they already have in place and which they need to work on.
• READ is well placed to promote a donor-harmonized approach (within countries) to improving learning, with READ’s ‘soft’ assistance complementing other support for implementation from funders such as IDA or the FTI Catalytic Fund.