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GLOBAL
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LEARNING



Global Alliance
to Monitor Learning

WG/GAML/13

GAML TASKFORCE 4.6

PROGRESS REPORT 2020

Introduction

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) has launched the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML) in 2017, to provide a platform for discussion among different stakeholders, including UN and NGO partners, experts, and civil society, on how to fulfil UIS's mandate for producing globally-comparable data on learning indicators of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.

Taskforce 4.6, co-chaired by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in close cooperation with UIS, as the GAML Secretariat, is responsible for providing advice on measures for monitoring progress towards SDG Target 4.6, in particular SDG Indicator 4.6.1.

In 2019, building on the work carried out in the first phase, and to further advance on the measurement and monitoring strategy for SDG indicator 4.6.1, UIL and OECD renewed the work of the Taskforce 4.6 and revised its work plan.

Taskforce 4.6 is currently composed of 22 members:

Title	Name	Organization
Ms	Juliette Mendelovits	Australian Council for Educational Research
Mr	Tao Xin	Beijing Normal University
Ms	Yanli Li	China, Ministry of Education
Ms	Melissa Chiappetta	Gates Foundation
Ms	Giovanna Modé	Latin American Campaign for the right to education
Mr	Alpha Bah	Ministry of Basic and secondary education, The Gambia
Mr	Mohammad Yasin Samim	Ministry of Education, Afghanistan
Mr	Oumar Ali Moustapha	Ministry of Education, Chad
Mr	Miguel Angel Ferrer Lopez	Ministry of Education, Cuba
Ms	Phillipa Livingston	Ministry of Education, Jamaica
Ms	Janet Chepkmoi Rotich	Ministry of Education, Kenya
Mr	Hrushikesh Senapaty	National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), India
Mr	William Thorn - Co-chair -	OECD
Mr	Ketan Verma	PAL Network
Mr	Joshua Maina	Qatar Foundation
Ms	Rakhat Zholdoshalieva - Co-chair -	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning
Mr	Nicolas Jonas	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning
Mr	Adolfo Gustavo	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
Mr	Manuel Cardoso	UNICEF
Mr	Christopher Ying	USAID
Mr	Aroob Iqbal Syedah	World Bank
Ms	Marguerite Clarke	World Bank
Observers		
Mr	Nathanael Reinertsen	Australian Council for Educational Research
Ms	Katherine McGill	Australian Council for Educational Research

Title	Name	Organization
Mr	Maurice Walker	Australian Council for Educational Research
Mr	David Tout	Australian Council for Educational Research
Mr	Ali Mohamed Hassan	Qatar Foundation
Ms	Annapurna Ayyappan	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning
Ms	Kim Deslandes	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
Mr	Benjamin Sylla	USAID
Ms	Rebecca Pagel	USAID

In the framework of the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML), three meetings were organized by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in close collaboration with the OECD. The main points discussed during the meetings are presented below.

Date	Agenda
3 December 2019	<p>Outputs of the GAML plenary meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Presentation and reactions -Online consultation <p>Working paper on the mapping of curricula</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Presentation of the first draft -Discussion and options for improvement <p>Revised Work plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Preparation of the ToR for a working paper on the possibilities for alignment with Indicator 4.1.1(c) -Discussion on the development of a self-declarative questionnaire
21 April 2020	<p>New developments regarding SDG indicator 4.6.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow up of the workshop held in January, Washington DC, by the WB/UIS - Presentation of mini-LAMP - Discussion <p>Revised work plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation of possible interventions and fields of work - Proposals for the next publication - Discussion

Date	Agenda
2 September 2020	<p>Update on activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research paper (OECD) - Policy paper 1 (Direct assessments) - Policy paper 2 (Numeracy assessments) <p>Workshop on self-declarative questionnaire for reporting on SDG indicator 4.6.1 as an interim strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation of the workshop concept note - Identification of experts and preparation of background papers <p>GAML plenary meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Update by UIS - Outline of the TF progress report

The discussions and the work were framed by the programme of work of the taskforce that was agreed during the two first meetings organized in early 2019. It focuses specifically on how to address the gap in data coverage on adult skills and how to support countries in their effort in producing and collecting accurate data for global reporting on indicator 4.6.1.

Topic	Purpose
One or two advocacy and policy papers	Publishing one or two evidence-based, data-driven advocacy and policy papers highlighting the importance of youth and adult literacy for policy makers, proposing recommendations for collecting accurate data and advocating for funding the implementation of direct assessments.
Research paper	Investigating the links between proficiency indicators for students at the end of lower secondary in reading comprehension and mathematics and proficiency indicators for young adults in functional literacy and numeracy.
Self-reported questionnaires	Developing a set of self-reported module to be implemented in national surveys, based on the benchmarks agreed for indicator 4.6.1, for assessing the proficiency level of adult population in functional literacy and numeracy. A background paper may be drafted previously for guiding the discussions.
Report on mapping national curricula of adult basic education in GAL countries	Publishing a report on comparing the national curriculum frameworks of youth and adult basic non- formal education from a selected number of GAL countries to nurture the discussions on the establishment of Minimum Proficiency Levels (MPLs) for functional numeracy and literacy, for global use in monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goal in Education, SDG 4.6.

Topic	Purpose
Database on surveys and instruments of direct assessments of skills	Based on the work done by the TF during the first phase, make publicly available a webpage referencing all the relevant documentation on current direct assessments of adult skills (conceptual framework, design and results).
Technical guidelines for supporting countries	Preparing a series of guidelines covering the key aspects to be taken into consideration by countries to develop and implement a national assessment of youth and adult skills.

The first four items of the programme of work were initiated in 2020. This report presents the progress made until the end of this year within the framework of this Taskforce.

Main outcomes

Making a case to national policymakers about collecting relevant data on SDG indicator 4.6.1

Indicator 4.6.1 implies a need for accurate data and separate measures of literacy and numeracy; however, insufficient data on adult skills in general, and on numeracy in particular, is a challenge (Gal, 2016). Recent efforts to improve literacy and numeracy data by basing it on direct measures instead of proxy indicators underpin the 2030 vision of literacy. By establishing new global benchmarks for functional literacy and numeracy levels for indicator 4.6.1, SDG 4 has given a further impetus to this effort.

Nevertheless, according to a report by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), data on literacy and numeracy based on direct measurements are still insufficient, with only 13 per cent of countries having available data for indicator 4.6.1 (Subosa and West, 2018). In contrast, 33 per cent of countries had data on literacy levels for primary and secondary school-aged children (indicator 4.1.1).

Considering specifically adult numeracy data, the situation is even more concerning. There are critical gaps in numeracy data coverage that must be filled so that we can successfully monitor the SDG Target 4.6 and ensure it is implemented for youth and adults. The reasons for this are varied; among them is the fact that national surveys, even those aimed at gathering information on skills proficiency, rarely include questions related to numeracy skills.¹

The implementation of the SDG4 calls for strengthening global data collection practices, such as on adult functional literacy and numeracy, and designing and implementing more elaborate survey instruments to cover the full range of proficiency levels. Accurate data on literacy and numeracy is vital both for donors to guide their policies and programmes and to monitor progress towards international and national targets and for countries to use the data to better understand their national situation. Direct measures of literacy and numeracy are therefore needed to determine relative needs and to track progress.

Ensuing from the above context and in line with its work plan for 2019/20, the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning Taskforce 4.6 commissioned two policy briefs. They aimed at

¹ Some stand-alone national adult skills surveys developed in high-income countries, such as France's IVQ (Information et vie quotidienne) survey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's Skills for Life Survey, and the German survey LEO (Level-One Study) are among the exceptions.

- identifying the main policy recommendations for supporting the development and implementation of direct assessment of adult skills at national level. Based on the definitions of literacy² and numeracy³ agreed by Taskforce 4.6, the goal of the policy brief is to synthesize and analyse key messages advocating an inclusion in policies the need for increase in the investment direct assessments of adult skills in a format that is accessible to a non-specialist audience, notably policy-makers and donors.
- identifying the main policy recommendations for supporting the development and implementation of direct assessment of adult numeracy at national level. Based on the definition of numeracy agreed by Taskforce 4.6, the goal of the policy brief is to synthesize and analyse key messages advocating an inclusion in policies the need for increase in investment in direct assessments of adult numeracy skills in a format that is accessible to a non-specialist audience, notably policy-makers and donors.

Both documents, reviewed by the taskforce, and funded by UIL, will be published in the UIL's Policy Brief collection in November 2020. Subsequently, these briefs will be available in the UNESDOC library in all UN languages. The taskforce members will contribute to the wider dissemination of these two policy briefs.

Supporting countries in their efforts for producing comparable data on adult skills

Currently, data based on direct assessments comes primarily from programmes coordinated by international organizations, such as the OECD, the World Bank and UNESCO. The OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) implemented in 41 countries is by far the most comprehensive one of these studies, and captures data on literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills in technology-rich environments (OECD, 2019). Another survey, the World Bank's STEP (Skills towards Employment and Productivity), shares the same conceptual framework and a common set of items with PIAAC. It focuses on adult literacy skills, not numeracy, and is currently administered in 17 countries. Furthermore, there is the UNESCO Institute for Statistics' (UIS) Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP), which was since discontinued but was implemented in 10 countries and 13 languages. Only four countries completed the main data collection, while six countries conducted a LAMP field test.

Aside from the countries that already participate in one of those international programmes, only 11 additional countries carried out national direct assessments on adult skills (UIL, 2019). The majority, however, measured literacy skills only. More well-developed cross-national or national direct assessments are costly, and the costs may be out of reach for many countries. It can be expected that due to lack of funding, complexity, and capacity, many countries, especially low- and middle-income

² The GAML Taskforce SDG 4.6 definition of literacy is aligned with UNESCO's definition (UIL, 2019) which is 'the ability to identify, understand, interpret, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. It involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community' (UNESCO, 2004).

³ The GAML Taskforce SDG 4.6 definition of numeracy correlates with the one used in the PIAAC framework (UIL, 2019), which is 'the ability to access, use, interpret and communicate mathematical information and ideas, in order to engage in and manage the mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life' (OECD, 2012).

countries, will not be able to implement such large-scale assessments in the short to medium or even the long-term.

Against this backdrop, self-reported literacy and numeracy assessments as well as simple direct assessments may offer an alternative interim strategy to determine the global state of literacy.

Despite their shortcomings, self-reported and simple direct assessments have the benefit that they could be easily incorporated and administered as a short module in a national household survey (such as national census, health surveys). Olson, Smyth, Wang and Pearson (2011) demonstrate that a mix of self-reported and simple direct assessment achieves reasonable reliability, validity, and predictive ability. Moreover, it can easily be included in existing surveys without requiring too much space, response time, or interviewer training.

As the paper, *Reporting options for indicator 4.6.1, Working Paper for GAML 5 Endorsement* (UIL, 2018b) states, even if the more extensive and well-developed direct assessments of literacy and numeracy are strongly preferred, short self-reported or simple direct assessments as part of a broader household survey could prove useful from a pragmatic perspective. For the time being such modules or assessments are comparatively less costly, can be used by various implementers in different settings without sophisticated equipment and complex methodology, and could easily be adaptable to different national contexts.

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), as the co-chair of the Taskforce 4.6 of the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML), in collaboration with other specialized agencies in the taskforce, plans to co-organize a technical workshop, to brainstorm, discuss, and propose a globally comparable self-reported questionnaire, which could be implemented in Member States as an interim strategy for monitoring and reporting on SDG indicator 4.6.1 until the necessary measures are taken to develop and carry out more direct assessments to produce comparative data.

Based on the workshop hosted by the World Bank and UIS on “Measuring learning through the lifecycle in multi-topic national household survey”, held in Washington in February 2020, this proposed workshop aims at promoting the harmonization of survey instruments for the assessment of adult skills across national and international survey programmes.

The main expected outcomes of the workshop, that will take place in early 2021, are as follows:

- Outcome 1: self-reported and/or simple direct assessment module of literacy and numeracy skills that can be used to report towards SDG indicator 4.6.1;
- Outcome 2: methodological guidelines on how to implement the proposed module in different (national) settings;
- Outcome 3: a strategy for validation of the proposed module, for instance by means of comparison with existing direct examples, field tests and trials in different national settings and languages, and finding adequate national partners to implement the assessment.

The Taskforce reviewed the initial draft of the concept note for the workshop and will be consulted for the finalization of the ToRs for the production of background papers.

Nurturing debates on the definitions and the options for global reporting

In its Terms of Reference (ToR), the GAML 4.6 Taskforce adopted a new approach based on the Incheon Declaration and Education 2030 Framework for Action document. In the Framework for Action, UNESCO Member States agreed that ‘by 2030, all young people and adults across the world should have achieved relevant and recognized proficiency levels in functional literacy and numeracy skills that are equivalent to levels achieved at the successful completion of basic education’ (UNESCO, 2016, p. 47). In line with this international agreement, the ‘fixed level of proficiency’ in functional literacy and numeracy for the population aged 15 years and older for reporting to indicator 4.6.1 can be interpreted as the proficiency levels equivalent to the end of lower secondary education.

According to the results of the consultation on GAML 6 items for endorsement, the Technical Cooperation group agreed on following this approach. To the question : « Do you agree on defining the ‘fixed level of proficiency’ in functional literacy and numeracy for indicator 4.6.1 as the equivalent to proficiency levels found at the end of lower secondary education for young adults and investigate its implications and limitations for older adults? », the TCG responded « Yes » (UIS, 2019, page 4)⁴. This output have opened the opportunity of trying to adapt the descriptors used for reporting towards SDG indicator 4.1.1c (grade 8/9 students) to the adults in order to develop descriptors for minimum proficiency levels in functional literacy and numeracy.

Nevertheless, in the Sixth Meeting of the Technical Cooperation Group on the indicators for SDG 4 – Education 2030. Summary of decisions and TCG next steps, the TCG endorsed another decision that poses questions to the validity of the previously agreed definitions. The TCG decided that countries should make use of the PIAAC level 2 descriptor as a reference point for global reporting of indicator 4.6.1 (UIS, 2019, page 6)⁵. As a result, the Taskforce has to investigate the extent to which the PIAAC level 2 descriptors could be seen as equivalent to proficiency levels found at the end of lower secondary education.

The descriptors of global benchmarks for both indicators 4.1.1c and 4.6.1 highlight the obvious challenges in looking for links between levels of proficiency built on different conceptual definitions for different target age groups. Aligning an adult benchmark against school-based standards/levels is a major challenge, particularly in numeracy. There are indeed quite clear differences in what people conceive as numeracy for children at school and how it is viewed for adults. It should be acknowledged that aligning MPLs with school-based indicators could only make sense for young adults. A cut-off point that is pertinent for 15-year-old students in the context of indicator 4.1.1 (c) could also be appropriate for 15–24-year olds. On the contrary, a ‘standard’ set on the basis of expectations for today’s school students may not be very relevant for more senior adults who left the school system 30 years ago or more, or those who have had no schooling or who undertook primary level education only.

Based on these considerations, the GAML taskforce 4.6 commissioned a research paper investigating the links between indicators for 15 years old students in reading and mathematics and the indicators for young adults in functional literacy and numeracy.

⁴ <http://gaml.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/GAML-Consultation-Results-final.pdf>

⁵ <http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/11/Post-TCG6-Report-Final.pdf>

The ToR for the research paper was reviewed and approved by the taskforce. The research paper is currently being developed by the OECD, co-chair of the taskforce and a report on the progress of the paper was presented to the taskforce during the 5th meeting. The final version of the document will be available in English and in French.

Contributing to the development of the descriptors of the Minimum Proficiency levels in functional literacy and numeracy

The Taskforce implemented a new work plan with the aim to focus on the definition of options for establishing “a fixed level of proficiency” in functional literacy and in functional numeracy for youth and adults and on the proficiency levels descriptors that will be used as global benchmarks for reporting. Following the approaches used to establish the MPLs in reading and mathematics for indicators 4.1.1, the Task force seeks to initiate works to develop level descriptors and look for possible alignments with other SDG 4 indicators, including indicator 4.1.1c. This step implies in particular to scrutinize how countries that are facing challenges with literacy address educational needs of low-skilled youth and adults.

In this context, the taskforce commissioned a paper to produce a mapping of national curricula for non-formal adult basic education in selected countries of the Global Alliance for Literacy within the framework of Lifelong Learning (GAL). Based on the comparative analysis of national curricula for non-formal adult basic education of countries which are the members of the Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning (GAL), it proposes a tentative description of what youth and adults are supposed to reach in reading and in mathematics once they have successfully completed their non-formal basic education programmes.

This comparative analysis is on-going. The taskforce reviewed the first draft of the paper and provided feedback for improvement. The paper will be produced by the end of 2021.

Next steps

The next taskforce meetings will be dedicated to the finalization of the on-going tasks. These include the preparation of the concept notes and agenda of the virtual workshops, the publication of the research paper by OECD and the review of the curriculum mapping study. Moreover, the translations of the two policy briefs into six major UN languages will be done. The dissemination across the world with the support of the GAML Taskforce members will be carried out.

The task force will also have the opportunity to review the inception of the fifth item of the programme of work. This relates to the database of assessment instruments. For the time being, insufficiency of information data on adult skills in general, and on numeracy in particular, is seen as a major issue. One barrier for the development of more direct assessments is the lack of visibility of existing tools notably for national survey resulting in a lack of description of best practices in this field. Therefore, there is a pressing need to collect and categorize assessment tools across countries on an easily accessible platform. This item will aim at building a database on direct assessments of adult skills for easing the collection of information on such tools by countries.

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