Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Terms of Reference

SDG 4.1.1a Criteria Operational Implementation

January 16, 2024

Overview: The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute of Statistics (UIS) is convening a technical advisory group (TAG) to provide recommendations that will contribute to finalizing the eligibility criteria for reporting assessment-based data on minimum proficiency levels for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.1.1 with some emphasis on 4.1.1.a, given its recent downgrade from a Tier I to a Tier II indicator: *proportion of children and young people in grades 2/3 achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex.*

Background: The Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML) is the working group of the Technical Cooperation Group on SDG 4 Indicators (TCG) that focuses on learning data and aims at improving learning outcomes by supporting national strategies for learning assessments and developing internationally comparable indicators and methodological tools to measure progress towards key targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). An outcome of the fifth GAML meeting in Hamburg, Germany in 2018 was the notion of converging criteria around indicator 4.1.1a. It was proposed as a process of "social moderation" by MSI as contracted by UIS. The Consensus Building Meeting on Proficiency Levels in Paris in September 2018 confirmed the decisions and allowed the inclusion of the indicator in the framework based on it. Since that time, UIS has intellectually and financially supported it through external funding and the UNESCO Regular Program budget. Still, the 4.1.1.a community lacks consensus on a clear set of criteria (validity/alignment, item quality content and review, sampling, administration and data custody, and reliability) for reporting assessment-based data on minimum proficiency levels.

The need for these criteria is now critical. In December 2023, indicator 4.1.1a was downgraded from a Tier 1 to a Tier 2 indicator in the SDG framework as documented by the IAEG[1]. The Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) plans to eliminate all Tier 2 indicators in 2025. To maintain this significant indicator, it must be returned to Tier 1 status, and to do so, minimum reporting coverage must be achieved by 2025. Confirming the criteria is a critical and necessary step to make use of existing and forthcoming assessments conducted by the global education community to expand the coverage and reporting.

The recent GAML meeting 6-7 December 2023 showed a way to move the process forward[2]. UIS has articulated a series of next steps to fill this gap in an open and public process, where arguments will be made through written pieces with recommendations, sharing documentation/data/analysis, and consensus reached in an open room.

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[1] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-14/4a_Data_availability_review_tier_reclass_refinements.pdf
[2] https://tcg.uis.unesco.org/10th-meeting-of-the-tcg/

Task 1: Operational implementation process of current Eligibility Criteria resulting from GAML meeting and TCG decisions

Expected Output:

- Document 1 summarizing the state of the recommendations regarding reporting in a clear operational tables and decision tree.
    - UIS will produce a table ("Criteria for Eligibility") like the one used at the end of the GAML meeting, used in various presentations, with the five key criteria (validity/alignment, item quality content and review, sampling, administration and data custody, and reliability) and the description of all the needed documentation/data sharing that is a non-negotiable condition of reporting.

Task 1 will be executed as follows:

1. **Define a drafting group to prepare Document 1 (to be completed by 7 January 2024).** This small group of up to 4 experts will be coordinated by UIS will put a forward draft for consultation for the discussion based on past data and research inputs.
2. **Establish a technical advisory group (TAG) (to be completed by 31 January 2024).** The TAG will receive the draft of Document 1, the feedback from interested parties as stated below, and will elaborate a final set of recommendations later.
3. **Document 1 shared with interested parties for comment (to be completed by 15 February 2024).** This step implies the circulation of Document 1 as in point 1.a for a 2 weeks' period of analysis and comment. This will allow a final and public set of comments on the Criteria for Eligibility to be brought to UIS attention. Comments from the interested parties to be publicly posted in a platform to be shared by UIS.
4. **UIS convenes the TAG (to be completed by 28 February 2024).** This group will make a final set of recommendations based on analysis and looking at documentation on past data, research, and feedback. The TAG will have been provided with Document 1 and the comments received, and any extra documentation on the reasoning behind the recommendations in Document 1 as well as references to background and related documents.
5. **UIS will produce a document for Criteria for Eligibility to be consulted with TCG (to be completed by 15 March 2024).** UIS will collate recommendations from TAG and produce a final recommendation for accepting any assessment-based data on minimum proficiency levels.
6. **TCG is consulted and decision is communicated to the international community (to be completed by 15 April 2024).**

Task 2: Data plan for indicator 4.1.1.a for TCG and IAEG-SDG

Expected Output:

- Document 2 will provide a description of the feasible data coverage increase based on Document 1 and the agencies/assessment program documentation submission and the work of the TAG.

Task 2 will be executed as follows:

1. **UIS will share a template for the contents of data plans no later than 10 April 2024.**
2. **Submission of each assessment party's data plans to UIS (to be completed by 30 April 2024)**
    - Data plan for future and current coverage based on Document 1 definitions, with the accompanying supporting documentation and requirements, including a self-assessment tool filled out by the agency proposing a set of countries that would report according to any given assessment.
    - No submission will be considered unless there is all the documentation, the microdata is available in a public site and there is an explicit country agreement approving the data to be disseminated for SDG reporting.

Purpose of this Group: The purpose of the TAG during the period January – April 2024, is to serve in a policy advisory capacity in the UIS-led process articulated above.

Responsibilities:

> Task 1 – The TAG will review the draft UIS table ("Criteria for Eligibility", Document 1 in the text box above) with the five key criteria (validity/alignment, item quality content and review, sampling, administration and data custody, and reliability) plus an additional criterion on rigor of the method for linking to the Minimum Proficiency Levels (MPL) and Global Proficiency Framework (GPF) and the description of all the needed documentation/data sharing that is a non-negotiable condition of reporting.

> Task 2 – The TAG will review all comments from interested parties to UIS.

> Task 3 – The TAG will review any extra documentation on the reasoning behind the recommendations as well as references to background and related documents.

> Task 4 – The TAG will convene and provide a set of final recommendations based on items reviewed in Tasks 1-3.

Membership: The TAG is comprised of a small, regionally balanced group of subject matter and psychometric experts from a representative set of countries.

Conflicts of Interest: TAG members ought not to be associated in any financial or similar manner to providers of assessment or advisory services whose nature would be driven by the TAG's recommendations.