Scoping Study on a Vetting Function and Virtual Fund for Learning Assessments

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#25YearsOfDataInsights

Background

The *UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)* is responsible for tracking progress on **SDG 4.1.1[1]**, but challenges exist in data comparability across countries – lack of data and lack of criteria/procedures for international comparisons.

UIS has developed a variety of instruments and strategies to address this issue, including:
(1) Assessment for Minimum Proficiency Levels (AMPL) tool to ensure comparability and monitoring learning outcomes, plus several international discussions, including several blogs.
(2) Assembled a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to establish evaluation procedures and standards for cross-country performance comparisons, but

There is still a need to establish a vetting mechanism for validating learning assessments and a **virtual fund** to support standardized evaluations in LMICs that may be reported as part of SDG 4.1.1.

[1]SDG 4.1.1: "Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex."

About this report

Goal: to propose an institutional design to deal with two issues: (1) vetting of countries or agencies' submissions of assessments to be considered as reportable for SDG 4.1.1. and (2) funding and funding coordination.

Methodology:

- **Stakeholder Interviews:** Experts from academia, testing agencies, governments, and multilateral organizations were consulted.
- **Preliminary presentation of the issues, followed by discussion**: organized by UIS in September 2024.
- **Review of studies addressing main issues, current work of selected testing programs and international initiatives that had similar goals:** we seek to ensure diverse perspectives by including voices from all developing regions, with a strong focus on LMICs.

Key Issues in Cross-Country Comparisons and expansion of assessments

- **Vetting challenges:** Assessing the validity of a testing program and its alignment with MPL could be a relatively straightforward task. Comparing performance standards across testing programs is much more challenging.

- **Stakeholder Disagreement:** differences between the "pragmatic" and the "rigorous" stakeholders for comparing performance standards.

- **Technical & Political Barriers:** funding and political issues, as well issues involved in "buying assessments" should not result in an international testing program implemented in a country with little consideration to local context, goals and local uses of results.

Overachieving principle: *education as a human right includes the development of skills*

- **Beyond access:** Contemporary education must ensure that children acquire foundational skills which are key for learning other subjects at school and lifelong learning.

- **Inclusion:** Marginalized groups (children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, refugees, displaced children) must increasingly be considered in assessments, requiring adapted instruments and additional resources.

- **Excluded populations**: evaluations should always include the number and percent of children not at school, and increasingly prepare assessments for drop-outs, refugee children and other groups out of formal schooling
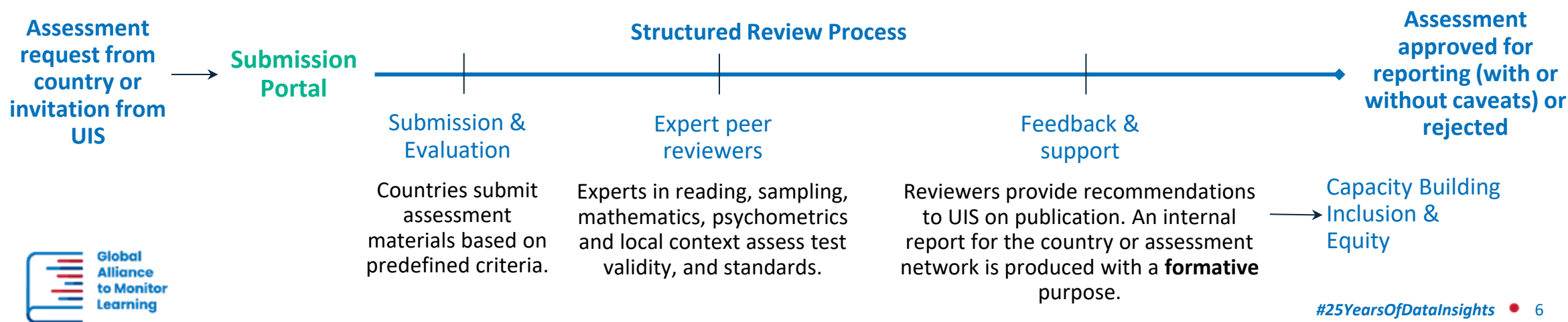
Expanding learning assessments in LICs and among vulnerable populations is crucial to addressing systemic challenges and improving education quality for all.

Designing a vetting mechanism: portal to facilitate working with reviewers

Purpose:

- Ensure learning assessments meet validity criteria (TAG), and comparability standards for SDG 4.1.1 reporting.
- Develop a structured, standardized review process to evaluate assessments submitted by countries, networks or organizations.
- Provide feedback for future evaluations, particularly for comparable international standard-setting, especially in LMICs.

So, how would It work?

Assessment request from country or invitation from UIS → **Submission Portal**

Structured Review Process

Submission & Evaluation
Countries submit assessment materials based on predefined criteria.

Expert peer reviewers
Experts in reading, sampling, mathematics, psychometrics and local context assess test validity, and standards.

Feedback & support
Reviewers provide recommendations to UIS on publication. An internal report for the country or assessment network is produced with a **formative** purpose.

Assessment approved for reporting (with or without caveats) or rejected

Capacity Building Inclusion & Equity

Designing a vetting mechanism: *the institution supporting it*

- The vetting mechanism needs a host institution (leading or connected with an international network) to implement the process, ensuring independence and credibility.

- A **governance committee** should provide *strategic oversight* for the vetting mechanism and virtual fund and approve *general procedures* and guidelines for transparency and efficiency.
  - **Composition:** Representatives from major regions and evaluation networks but not testing agencies. Members would also act as institutional ambassadors, strengthening regional outreach.
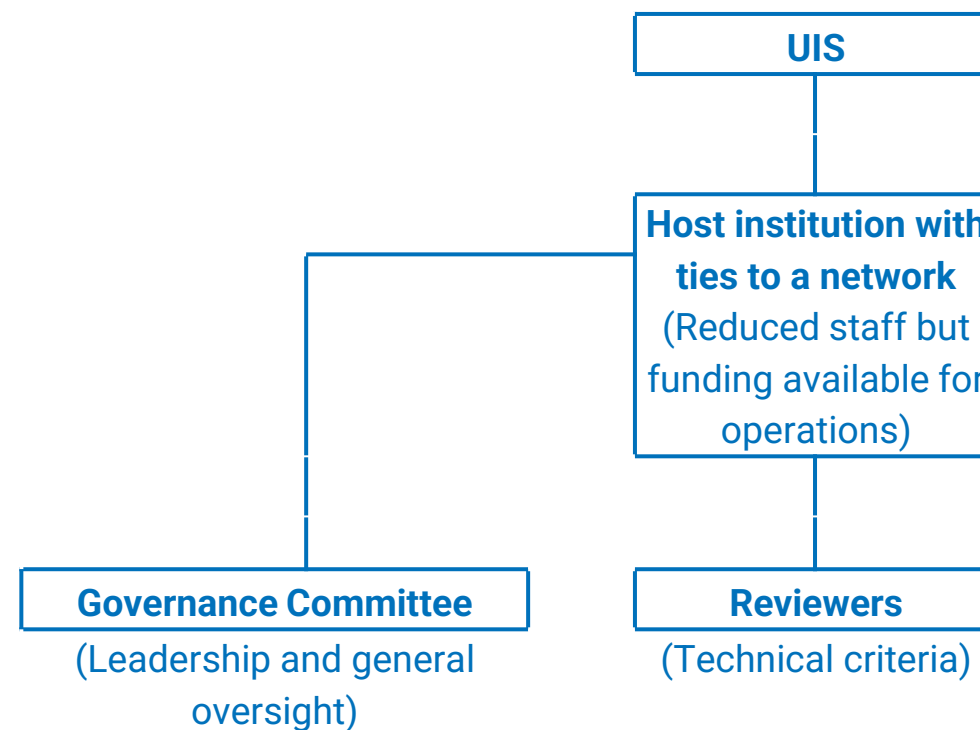 - **Meeting Frequency:** Twice a year to review progress and define strategies.

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                                    │     UIS     │
                                    └──────┬──────┘
                                           │
                              ┌────────────┴────────────┐
                              │  Host institution with  │
                              │    ties to a network    │
                              │   (Reduced staff but     │
                              │  funding available for   │
                              │       operations)        │
                              └────────────┬────────────┘
           ┌──────────────────────┐        │
           │ Governance Committee │        │
           │ (Leadership and      │   ┌────┴─────┐
           │  general oversight)  │   │ Reviewers│
           └──────────────────────┘   │(Technical│
                                       │ criteria)│
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Figure 1. Vetting mechanism

Designing a virtual fund

Purpose:
- General: Address inequalities in learning assessments, particularly in LICs.
- Help finance standardized evaluations aligned with Minimum Proficiency Levels (MPL).
- Support technically and monitor the implementation of high-quality assessments that also respond to local goals and contexts.
- Coordinate efforts among countries and different types of agencies.

Principal Components:
- **Identify** countries lacking SDG 4.1.1-aligned assessments, with an interest to evaluate students (case by case analysis)
- **Prioritize** countries with no prior assessments and those with the largest learning gaps.

Funding Mobilization based on:
- a database of donors willing to finance assessments.
- establishing partnerships with technical agencies and universities willing to work WITH countries.
- *A partnership model:* Requires a commitment of some sort from national governments, leading eventually to local autonomy.

Designing a virtual fund: *the institution supporting it*

Country officers
(MoE or evaluation agency)

**Virtual fund
institution in
coordination
with UIS**
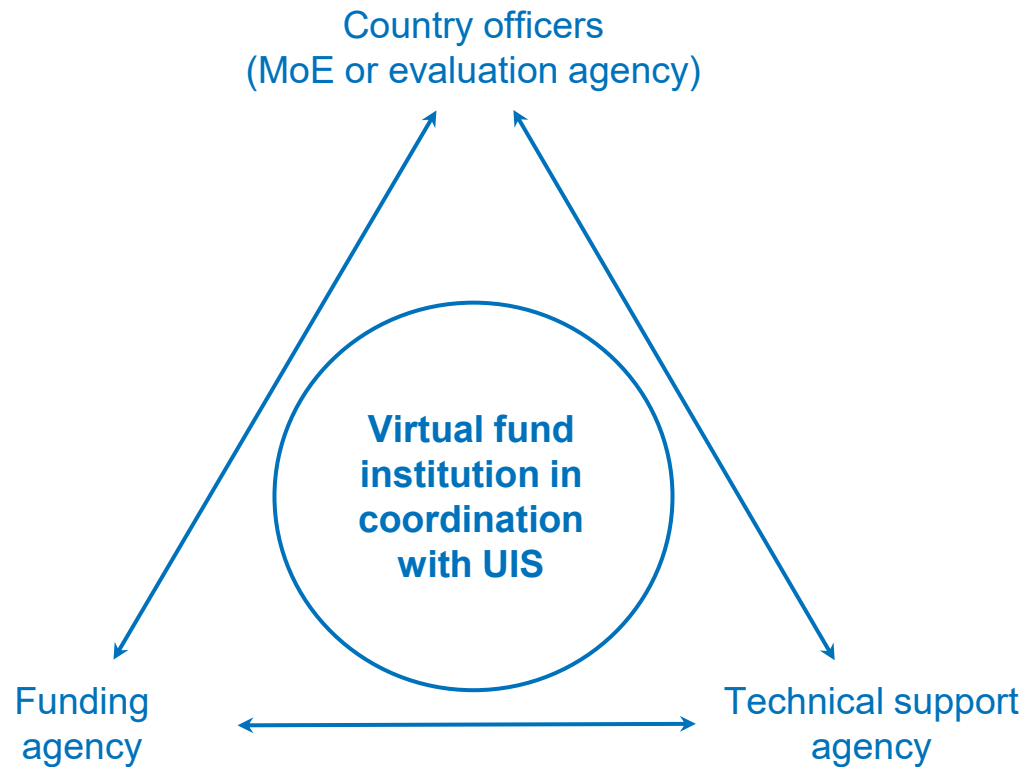
Funding
agency

Technical support
agency

Figure 2. Main stakeholders in virtual fund

- **Management:** A non-profit institution should administer the fund, in coordination with UIS.

- **Monitoring & Transparency:** Develop digital tools to track programs, funding agencies, supporting institutions, and assessment implementation.

- **Capacity building at the local level.**

- Contribute to the development of a **medium-term local plan for evaluations, but also for uses of results.**

- **Long-term Sustainability:** countries should commit to the agreed plan, offering local resources (e.g. create and give local resources to a specialized office).

- **Motivate participation:** Procure financial support, technical assistance and other resources to encourage country participation in evaluations.

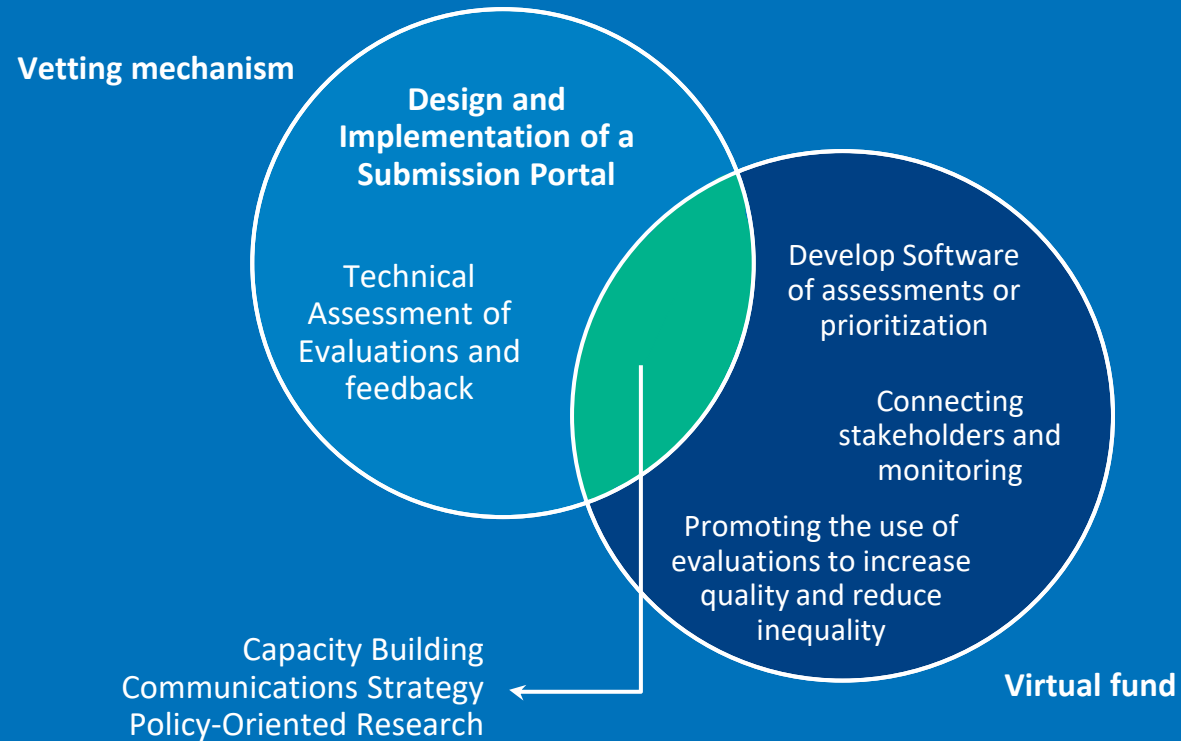# Proposal: a single international institution supporting both tasks, in close coordination with UIS

Figure 2. Institutional functions (in coordination with UIS)

Stages in the development of the vetting mechanism and virtual fund

first 6-12 months **next 2 years** following years

1. Setup

Vetting Mechanism – Establishing Procedures
- Define criteria for validation based on TAG recommendations.
- Develop an online submission portal for assessment applications.
- Identify and standardize a pool of expert reviewers.

Virtual Fund – Scoping Countries and Stakeholders
- Identify countries lacking evaluations aligned with SDG 4.1.1.
- Create a database of potential donors and technical, supporting agencies.
- Coordination: Develop a software tool to prioritize funding allocation and stakeholder connections.

Management – Planning and Governance
- Assemble the institutional team and develop a 2-year work plan.
- Establish the Governing Committee (GC) to oversee progress.
- Design and launch a communications strategy (ToC) to engage stakeholders.

2. Deployment, expansion and constant adjustment

Vetting Mechanism – Scaling and Strengthening

Virtual Fund – Implementation in prioritized countries

Management – Communication, monitoring and optimization

3. Revise, adjust and set new goals

THANK YOU

Questions, comments, suggestions?

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