REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC USE OF NATIONAL LARGE-SCALE LEARNING ASSESSMENTS

Yaoundé, Hotel Mont Fébé, December 3-5, 2019

GENERAL REPORT

REPORT CONTENT

SECTION 1– Executive Summary

The TALENT regional capacity building workshop on the development and strategic use of national large-scale learning assessments was held in Yaoundé from 3 to 5 December 2019. Representatives from 12 sub-Saharan African countries at national director level and experts in charge of educational planning, learning assessments and curriculum took part in the workshop. Delegates from these countries (Lesotho, Zanzibar, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Congo, Gambia, Guinea, Zimbabwe) shared experiences, discussions and group activities to achieve better development and use of data from national large-scale learning assessments (NLSLA) as a mean to promote effective and relevant learning.

As an introduction to the workshop, a presentation made by the TALENT secretariat highlighted the activities of the Network, carried out in the last few months prior to this event. These include a mapping study of learning assessment systems in sub-Saharan Africa, currently under production. The objective of the study is to present trends in the region and identify possible prospects for future steps in improving these learning assessment systems.

Each country presented their NLSLA in the context of education systems in sub-Saharan Africa as well as good learning assessment practices in order to stimulate the debate and promote south-south cooperation.

A group of expert facilitated some technical sessions to clarify key concepts and present operational frameworks on specific topics such as large-scale learning assessments, analysis of national learning assessment systems (ANLAS), results of the analysis of the use of learning assessment data at the national level, good principles for learning assessment, large-scale assessments and equity, steering quality in education and the financing of national assessments.

Experts from UNESCO (including IIEP and UIS), UNICEF and ACER presented studies, initiatives, guidelines and tools that can be adopted to improve the development and use of national large-scale learning assessments, including their financing.

Participants had the opportunity to discuss national large-scale learning assessments (NLSLA) as a means of assessing education systems, as well as the need to regularly implement assessments and to develop and define standards for a better use of the results of these assessments. Each country team participated in a self-assessment exercise of their national large-scale assessment cycles and they identified four to five priority strategies for the improvement of the NLSLA cycle at national level. The need for a paradigm shift in assessing

learning in emergencies was also addressed. Participants and facilitators agreed on the need to prioritize the children most in need, and set up solutions, such as the introduction of a learning passport as a measure to provide and track learning for refugee-hosting countries.

National delegates also expressed the need to be supported in the development of policy instruments through capacity building.
In the view of the participants, the workshop was considered beneficial for developing skills and competencies on the topic and for learning about best practices in the countries of the region as well as the challenges encountered.

As a general recommendation resulting from the informal discussions and exchanges that took place during the workshop, a possible follow-up process could involve the TALENT network in designing a set of synergistic activities under a regional umbrella, in particular:

a) Obtaining political commitment for the conduct of national large-scale learning assessments at regular frequencies.
b) Strengthening the technical capacity of local teams to make effective use of learning assessment data through a platform for exchange with international experiences and best practices.

SECTION 2 – Sharing country experiences

This section highlights the experiences presented by the countries with an emphasis on the contexts of the national assessment systems, the challenges and opportunities and sometimes recommendations in order to encourage south-south cooperation but also to identify avenues of support for the countries.

Country presentations focused on the following points: the national education context; the structure in charge of assessment and its mission; the national assessment system; the types of assessment conducted and their frequency; the methodological framework for learning assessments; challenges; opportunities; and sometimes recommendations for improving the practice of national large-scale learning assessments.

Some common challenges faced by countries have been addressed in relation to:
- The availability of financial, human and technical resources;
- The clarification of processes and strategies for the development and effective use of the results of these assessments duly analysed in a systematic and rigorous manner;
- The frequency of assessments;
- The dissemination of results ;

- Consideration of assessment recommendations;
- National assessment framework not always aligned with learning needs.

A number of consistent findings emerged from these presentations:

Main points to be retained from the country presentations and the ensuing discussions:

- Existence of a national assessment system in all countries and of mechanisms or services in charge of assessment in most countries.

- Participation of most countries in international and regional large-scale assessments (PASEC, ROSETTA, SACMEQ, TIMSS) but few countries organize national assessments on their own initiative (except Kenya and Zanzibar);

- In some countries, there is significant support to learning assessments from national authorities and from some international organizations.

- National assessments as a means of identifying learner gaps and constituting policy reforms in few countries.

- Failure to capitalize on the results of national assessments for analysis.

- The need for each country to understand its capacity and adapt the frequency of its national assessments to the capacity to analyse and use the data

- Equity rarely ensured in assessments. Certain categories of learners with special needs, such as the hearing-impaired and the visually impaired, as well as certain education providers such as Koranic schools and schools in the private and non-formal sectors, are generally excluded. In some countries, the assessments have revealed an equity problem linked to the lack of access of children from certain social categories to pre-school education, which is mainly exploited by the private sector at high cost.

- Teachers who are not trained or recruited in sufficient numbers are one of the main causes of school failure in addition to the unavailability of textbooks.

- Poor understanding of the concept of large-scale learning assessment by some of the stakeholders leading to a weak culture of use and dissemination of data on learning achievement by national actors.

- Need to include a line in the State budget for large-scale learning assessments and for capacity building of national actors in order to solve the problem of financing these assessments.

SECTION 3 – Shared conceptual and factual elements for common understanding

This section highlights principles and determinants of strategic use of NLSLAs with participants during the expert presentations in order to achieve a common understanding of the issues that need to be worked on in the hands-on sessions.

Regarding the **purpose**, *it can be retained that:*

- NLSLAs are widely accepted as key instruments to support equity and quality learning.
- A better understanding of concerns related to the development and uses of large-scale assessments can help to ensure that they contribute more effectively to improving the quality and equity of learning.

Regarding the **function,** the following numerous uses of assessment data were discussed:

- Obtain data on learning outcomes
- Monitoring the achievement of equitable education outcomes
- Policy monitoring and evaluation
- Inform evidence-based policy-making and reform processes and improve teaching and learning practices
- Raising awareness and stimulating debate around quality education
- Identification of inequalities
- Explore the links between outcomes and the contexts in which learning takes place, and quantify differences between sub-populations
- Purpose of accountability

With regard to limitations, some were highlighted:
- NLSLAs focus on a limited number of learning dimensions and address a limited number of the multiple goals of education.
- Data on learning are essential for assessing the quality of education, but can limit what we recognize as the quality of education.
- Despite their potential to advance the equity agenda, national large-scale assessments do not sufficiently take into account diversity and disadvantage.
- Under-use of national learning assessment data can lead to policy inaction or be perceived as a waste of resources, or even distort policy priorities and promote inappropriate reforms.
- Excessive focus, attention, or credibility to evaluation results can have a misleading effect on the behaviour of a wide range of stakeholders.

Challenges persist despite efforts

Many efforts are being made at the national and international level to promote the expansion of LSLAs, which have been very successful thanks to the growing number of global, regional and national initiatives supporting the measurement of learning outcomes and the use of data. However, in the context of improving learning, a challenge common to many countries remains the issue of unqualified teachers who are sometimes unable to answer questions to be asked to students. Countries are often unable to act effectively in this type of situation, either because of the absence of a specific strategy or because of the inefficiency of the strategies used. Providing teachers with physical aids to facilitate their on-the-job self-training by projecting the use of ICT could be a solution. Shortcomings linked to the absence of simulations in the implementation of education policies and measures resulting from the assessment were noted. These simulations should take into account the realities of the context.

The importance of analysing national learning assessment systems

The Analysis of National Learning Assessment Systems (ANLAS) was presented as a resource provided by the GPE and developed by ACER to **systematically collect and analyse information** on the national learning assessment system to **guide the development and implementation of improvement strategies** as part of the broader education sector planning process. It thus provides a means of examining the relevance and effectiveness of the assessment systems that countries are putting in place and of ensuring that they contain all the elements they are supposed to have in order to collect evidence.
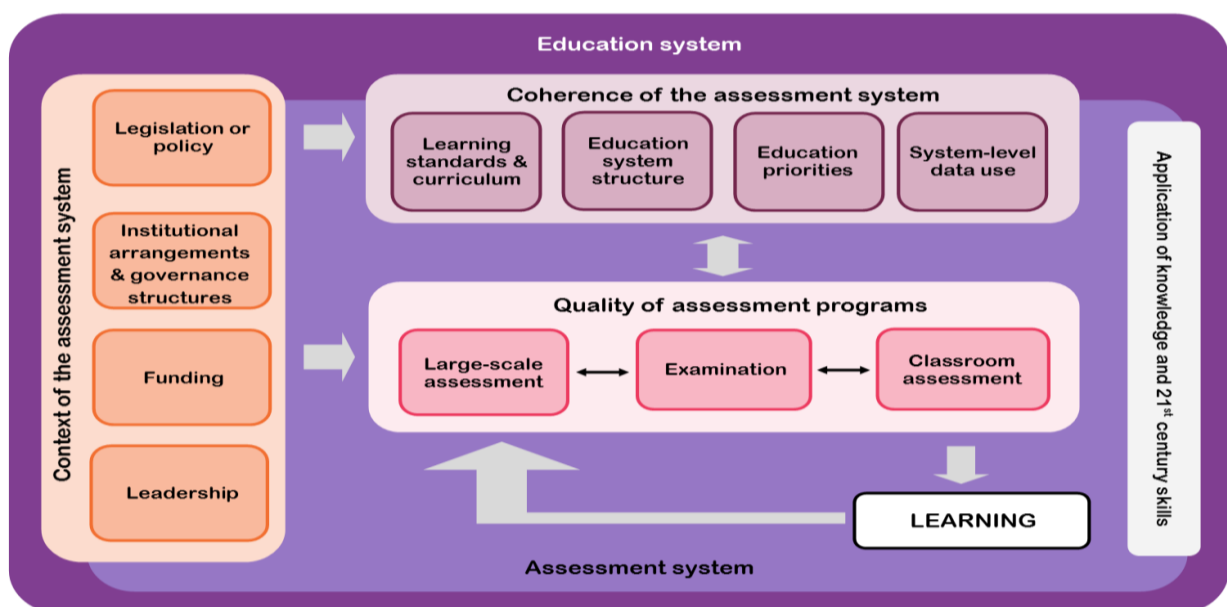
The ANLAS model, ACER 2019

Using assessment data in the education planning cycle

On the **use of learning assessment data** in the **education planning cycle**, it has been shown that there are often weak links between the analysis of learning outcomes and specific policy strategies. Key points highlighted are:

- Lack of a regulatory framework for assessment systems - a weak foundation for the effective use of learning data
- Insufficient analysis to provide policy-relevant information
- The different national responses to external pressure to develop assessment activities
- The dynamics of national actors as a key to understanding the use of learning data

Key quality concepts

Six key quality concepts of learning assessment were presented, along with 14 key areas of a strong assessment program:

1. Clarity and consistency of purpose
2. Fitness for purpose
3. Objectivity and independence
4. Transparency and accountability
5. Technical rigour
6. Ethicality and fairness

14 KEY AREAS OF A ROBUST ASSESSMENT PROGRAM
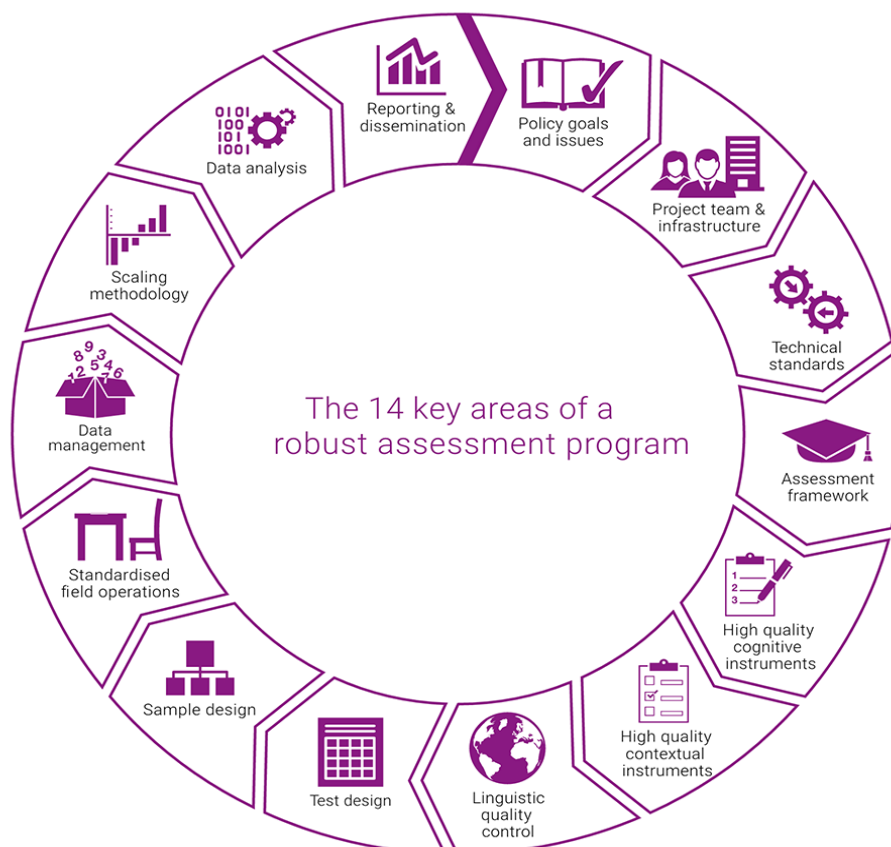
Source : UNESCO-UIS/ACER

Four levels of monitoring education targets

In the **global reporting of SDG 4 and GAML**, four levels of monitoring of education targets (see graph below) have been specified as well as the five targets of SDG 4 that focus on learning outcomes with thematic indicators.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016.
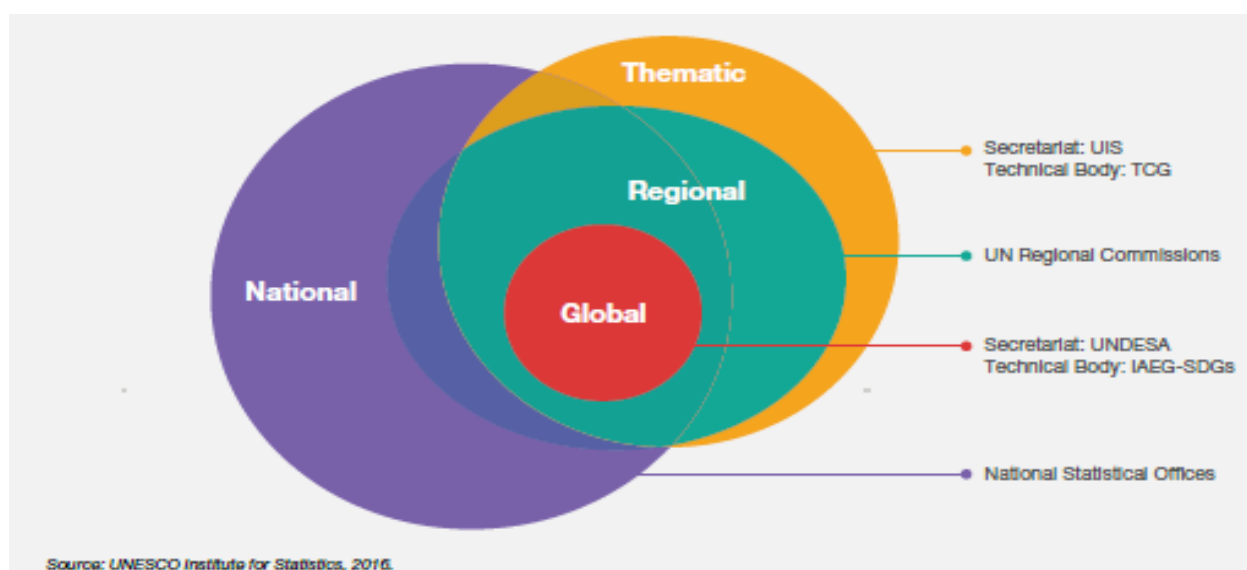
Large-scale assessments and equity

On **large-scale assessment and equity**, data were presented to participants to encourage more effective assessment of learning at the national level with a focus on children who remain out of reach (e.g. children out of school, children with special needs, in emergencies or participating in non-formal education programmes), low levels of learning among the poorest among others. It was noted that :

- The quality of education and the achievement of learning outcomes are equity issues.

- National large-scale assessments reveal inequalities, allowing us to make the case for better resource allocation and strategies to meet the needs of the poorest.

- To fulfil this role, national large-scale assessments must be as universal, inclusive and equitable as possible.

Assessment in emergency situations

In the same vein, the **assessment of learning in emergencies** has been approached with the different solutions proposed below for different emergencies, particularly for refugee-crisis:

- In emergencies, a rigorous assessment may be difficult or even impossible, but in protracted situations it eventually becomes a necessity.

- In protracted situations where there are cultural and linguistic similarities between displaced and host communities, and where displaced learners are likely to remain for a prolonged period, a learning assessment for all aligned with the host country curriculum is recommended.

- In situations of great uncertainty, refugee learners should be provided with a curriculum that prepares them for a wide range of possible destinations.

Steering the quality of education

With regard to **steering the quality of education**, quantitative findings require more qualitative analyses to understand the mechanisms in action. It is therefore recommended to :

- Plan a contextual questionnaire targeting key variables of interest to users/actors.

- Provide for additional analyses beyond the figure produced (qualitative, thematic)

- Disseminate results after the restitution stage to decision-makers

- Adopt a budget for the assessment that integrates all steps

NLSLA Funding

Regarding the question of financing national large-scale learning assessments, mobilizing funds is a real challenge for countries, which has an impact on frequency and sustainability

of NLSLA. The establishment of a line in the national budget to cover the assessment of learning outcomes could help in this regard. Funding for NLSLA usually comes from the government's own funds, but also as a donor contribution (necessary in many cases), and from the private sector. Countries are encouraged to take into account all stages of the learning assessment cycle in the budgetary exercise and to look for alternative funding, while ensuring sustainability of their NLSLA.

SECTION 4 – Workshop takeaways and exchanges

Planning ahead: what countries can do as next steps

A group work session enabled participants to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their national large-scale learning assessment systems.

In terms of **strengths**, the following were highlighted: the existence of methodological frameworks for assessment, technical standards, language quality control, standardized test design and data analysis (Zanzibar), policy development and dissemination of results (Lesotho).

With regard to **weaknesses**, issues related to the lack of an assessment policy, high quality contextual and cognitive tools, reporting and dissemination were identified.

Main points to be retained from the workshop :

- Assessment is a necessary but insufficient tool for reporting on the quality of the education system. It does not take into account all aspects of quality.

- The results of the assessment are not effectively taken into account in several countries. The under-, non- or misuse of assessment data for steering quality in education systems is a challenge that needs to be tackled.

- There is a problem of equity and inclusion in these assessments, as some categories are excluded.

- There is a lack of discussion on the political uses of the learning assessments data.

- Sharing the experience of other countries is beneficial

- The need to broaden the mandate of national assessment systems beyond surveys to include the generation of knowledge on quality improvement, e.g. through the analysis of examination results.

- Challenges in ensuring regular frequency of assessments

- Need to ensure inclusion to facilitate disaggregation across a wide range of dimensions

- Need to create a virtual platform for exchanges between countries

- With regard to the dissemination of assessment results, there is a need for broad sharing in order to reach a common understanding of findings and issues.

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to assess their national large-scale learning assessments in relation to the 14 dimensions examined in the framework of good practices in learning assessment. Participants were then asked to select four strategic priorities that can be improved in a practical and feasible way, identifying ways in which these dimensions can be improved. Some participants filled in these elements according to needs and priorities. Country delegates were advised to complete the practical actions identified and to integrate them into their reports and to propose them to their hierarchy back in their respective countries, with a view to improving practices related to the design and use of the results of national large-scale assessments.

The results of this self-assessment exercise will also allow TALENT to identify avenues of support for the future.

SECTION 5 – Suggestions for follow-up

The following recommendations and messages emerged from the country presentations, expert presentations, and discussions among the participants:

- **National large-scale learning assessments** are **critical to ensure quality education**. While there are challenges, efforts must be made to put in place high quality NSLA standards.

- **Involve all actors in education** at both strategic and operational levels in both **quantitative and qualitative assessments** to facilitate their understanding of the situation and their adherence to the implementation of any recommendations that may emerge.

- **Adjust the strategies and tools** used at the international level to **the realities of countries**, ensuring that all categories of the target population are taken into account in an inclusive approach.

- Ensuring **timely reporting and dissemination of assessment results to all stakeholders, particularly communities and teachers**.

- **Promote the use of data on learning in the monitoring of education policies** to ensure better management of education, by providing mechanisms that will allow the translation of assessment results into decisions and recommendations.

- Governments should not rely solely on donor funding to carry out assessments. Efforts should be made **to include in the State budget the line for nationale large-scale learning assessments** in the operational component, covering all stages up to reporting and dissemination.

- Strengthen the capacities of national actors by ensuring **institutional capacity-building** in order to preserve training achievements in the event of staff turnover;

- **Take advantage** of the **potential** of the various learning assessments, including examinations, to conduct surveys that can inform the education system.

- Create a **virtual platform to continue exchanges and share knowledge and promising practices**.

- Data does not show everything, **qualitative analysis** is also needed.

ANNEX : List of participants

Country	Participants	Title	Institution
Cameroun	Madeleine MAAMAT DAIEFERLE	Inspecteur de Pédagogie et Chef du Programme Appui au Système Educatif Camerounais (PASEC)	Ministère de l'Education de Base
Cameroun	Madame MAZOU née AISSATOU BAH	Inspecteur Coordonnateur Général des Sciences du Tertiaire	Ministère des Enseignements Secondaire
Zanzibar	Dr. Rashid Abdulaziz Mukki	Chief Inspection of Education Zanzibar and Board Member (Chairperson of the Examination Committee)	Zanzibar Examinations Council
Mali	Hamidou NAPARE	Directeur Général Adjoint	Ministère de l'Education Nationale, Cellule de Planification et de Statistique
Mali	Mohamed MAÏGA	Directeur du Centre National des Examens et Concours de l'Education (CNECE)	Ministère de l'Education Nationale
Kenya	Dr Silvester Mulambe	Director Policy, Partnership and East African Community Affairs	Ministry of Education
Kenya	Dr. Asumpta Matei	Head of Learning Assessment Centre	Kenya National Examination Council
Congo	ITOUA Jean Paulin	point focal TALENT, Directeur des Etudes et de la Planification, ancien responsable de l'équipe nationale du Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la Confemen	
Congo	NDOUDI Patrice	statisticien/planificateur, chef de service de la planification à la direction des études et de la planification, membre de l'équipe nationale du PASEC, membre du programme national d'évaluations des acquis scolaires	

Lesotho	Mr. Phatsa Motsoane	Manager at the National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC), Senior Curriculum Specialist with wide experience in Curriculum Development, Assessment, Measurement and Evaluation both at the national and cross national levels	The Ministry of Education and Training
Guinea-Bissau	Senhor António João Lovim	Directeur des statistiques	Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de l'Enseignement Supérieur
Guinea-Bissau	Allende Samori Fernandes Quade	Directeur des services d'évaluation et de politique d'apprentissage	Institut national pour le développement de l'éducation (INDE)
The Gambia	Modou touray	Assessment Unit	Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education
The Gambia	Momodou Cham	Director Planning	Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education
Zimbabwe	Enock Chinyowa	Director Planning	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
Zimbabwe	Bona Gutu	Deputy Director Secondary Education	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
Chad	Souleyman Hamid Ali	Directeur de l'Analyse et de la Prospective	Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de la Promotion Civique
Chad	Aaron Patalé	Responsable de l'Equipe PASEC du Tchad	Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de la Promotion Civique
Côte d'Ivoire	Joseph Desiré Kauphy	Directeur de veille et de suivi des programmes (DVSP)	MENET FP
Côte d'Ivoire	Youssouf Coulibaly	Chef de service suivi des reformes et des programmes (DVSP)	MENET FP
Guinea	Souleymane Camara	Directeur du Bureau de la Stratégie et Développement	BSD - MENA
Guinea	Moussa Diakite	Directeur du Service National de Coordination de l'Evaluation du Système Éducatif	

UNESCO Dakar	Davide Ruscelli
UNESCO Dakar	Maty Gueye
UNESCO Paris	Maya Prince
UNESCO Yaoundé	Dzounesse Tayim
UNESCO Yaoundé	Oummoul Saïdou
UNESCO IIEP-Pôle de Dakar	Patrick Nkengne
UNESCO IIEP-Paris	Ieva Raudonyte
ACER	Andriy Dubovyk
ACER	Ursula Schwantner

ANNEX: AGENDA

Day 1 : NLSLA in the context of SSA education systems		
TIME	**ACTIVITY/SESSION**	**FACILITATORS**
9.00-10.00	**Participants registration and cultural show**	TALENT / UNESCO Yaoundé
10.00-11.00	**Welcoming remarks**	• Christian Ndombi, Representative of UNESCO Yaoundé • Ebone Paul Tiku, Secretary General of the Ministry of Basic Education of Cameroon • Inge Vervloesem, UNICEF Regional Office Representative
11.00-11.30	**Group photo and opening cocktail**	
11.30-12.15	**Introduction of participants and workshops' expectations**	Maty Gueye (TALENT Secretariat)
12.15-12.30	**Security briefing**	UNDSS/UN
12.30-1.00	**Introduction to TALENT and the Workshop**	Davide Ruscelli (TALENT Secretariat)
1.00-2.00	**Lunch break**	
2.00-3.45	**The promise of Large-scale learning assessment: presentation and activity**	Maya Prince (UNESCO)
3.45-4.00	**Coffee break**	
4.00-5.00	**Country presentations:** Overview of large-scale assessment programmes (3 countries)	Countries representatives • Samori Allende Fernandes Joseph (Guinea-Bissau) • François Désiré Kauphy (Côte d'Ivoire) • Madeleine Mamat Daiferle (Cameroon)
Day 2 : Principles and determinants for a strategic use of NLSLA		
TIME	**ACTIVITY/SESSION**	**FACILITATORS**
8.30-8.40	**Evaluation and recapitulation of Day 1**	Davide Ruscelli (Secrétariat TALENT)
8.40-9.00	**Country presentations:** Overview of large-scale assessment programmes (2 countries)	Countries representatives • Moussa Diakité (Guinee) • Rashid Mukki (Zanzibar)

9.00-10.00	**Presentation on the Analysis of National Learning Assessment Systems** (ANLAS)	Ursula Schwantner & Andriy Dubovyk (ACER)
10.00-10.45	**Evidence from the analysis of use of learning assessment data at national level**	Ieva Raudonyte (UNESCO IIEP) and Modou Cham (Gambia)
10.45-11.00	Coffee break	
11.00-12.15	**Good Principles in Learning Assessments & Policy goals for assessing and improving quality of education**	Ursula Schwantner & Andriy Dubovyk (ACER)
12.15-1.15	**SDG 4.1 reporting**	Georges Boade (UNESCO Institute of Statistics)
1.15-2.15	Lunch-break	
2.15 -2.55	**Equity and quality (pt.1):** how to effectively assess learning at national level	Manuel Cardoso (UNICEF))
2.55-3.40	**Equity and quality (pt.2):** National Assessments in fragile contexts	Manuel Cardoso (UNICEF)
3.40-4.00	Coffee- break	
4.00-4.45	**Steering quality in education: the role of national large-scale assessments**	Alain Patrick Nkengne (UNESCO-IIEP Pôle de Dakar)
Day 3 : Policy support for the development and effective strategic use of large-scale learning assessments		
TIME	**ACTIVITY/SESSION**	**FACILITATORS**
9.00-9.45	**Evaluation and recapitulation of Day 2**	Maty Gueye (Secrétariat TALENT)
9.45-10.45	**Country presentations and discussions:** Overview of large-scale assessment programmes (4 countries)	Countries representatives • Aaron Patalé (Chad) • Hamidou Naparé et Mohamed Maiga (Mali) • Asumpta Mulila (Kenya) • Jean Paulin Itoua (Congo)
10.45-11.45	**Funding of National Large-scale learning assessments**	Moderator: Patrick Nkengne Nkengne (UNESCO IIEP Pôle de Dakar) Speakers: Countries participants: Kenya (Asumpta Matei), Lesotho(Phatsa Motsoane), Côte d'Ivoire (François Désiré Kauphy), Cameroon (Madeleine Mamat Daiferle)
11.45-12.00	Coffee- break	

12.00-1.30	**Group work:** Identifying common goods, strategies and tools to support decision makers in the design and use of NLSLAs	Moderators: All facilitators
1.30-1.45	**Key messages from the workshop**	Participants
1.45-2.45	Lunch break	
2.45 - 3.15	**Closing ceremony and Delivery of certificates**	• Representative of UNESCO Yaoundé (Christian Ndombi)
3.15-3.30	Coffee- break	