Large-scale, Household-based, Citizen-led Assessments:
A Forum for Inclusion, Social Capital & Social Accountability

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Abstract: The philosophy of the household based, citizen led model for conducting large scale learning assessments is based on inclusion; cognizant of the realities of out of school children, absenteeism and children with special needs. Creating and engaging with citizens’ networks for collecting evidence on learning strengthens the civic space to improve governance through individual and collective action. With presence across three continents and eight countries (Pakistan, India, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Senegal, Mali and Mexico), citizens are trained to rigorously collect data from children, households and schools, providing data on children’s learning levels juxtaposed against income inequalities, parental education and other factors. The first part of the paper will lay out the conceptual underpinnings of a model for learning assessment that focuses on inclusion and on the role of organized citizen groups in creating social capital for improved governance and accountability.

The second part of the paper will focus specifically on the potential and limitations for increasing social accountability in the education system. We use the theoretical perspective of social accountability in modern democracies. In this perspective, social accountability mechanisms strengthen social participation and help fight corruption. The method of analysis is qualitative and relational, including institutional ethnography and document analysis. The data were obtained from interviews with officials, volunteers, government partners and education NGOs of these countries. The results show that these exercises increase social accountability at the national level, but also at local levels, seeking to involve society in the development of education. The paper underscores the importance of international discussion given the potential of this approach as a concrete example of societal involvement in education in different national contexts.
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I. Introduction

With less than a year until the 2015 deadline for the Education for All goals, 57 million children were still out of school (2011). Girls make up 54% of the global population of children out of school. According to the Global Monitoring Report 2012, at least 250 million primary school aged children around the world are not being able to meet the minimum learning standards. An even larger proportion of children are excluded from the education surveys throughout the world due to the nature of school-based assessments. School surveys determine the level of learning of children enrolled in schools; thereby excluding the children who have dropped out and/or have never been enrolled in a school. Sample surveys of households help to provide information on the characteristics of out-of-school children (GMR, Policy Paper, 09)\(^1\).

Children attend school in order to learn, and learning assessments are intended to measure what children know and can do, and thus tell us whether learning objectives are being met. With the increase in school provisioning and enrollments across the world, the range of metrics and measures developed for the large-scale assessment of student learning achievement have also evolved (Banerji, 2013). In addition to national and regional assessments, a growing number of countries now participate in International Large-scale Assessments (ILAs) of student achievement: 65 countries participated in the 2012 round of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 63 countries participated in the latest round of TIMSS (2011) and 59 in PRILS (2011).

The 11th “Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/4: Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All” tracks the progress of Education for All goals along with underlining the importance of education for achieving development goals post 2015. Highlighting the progress on the 6th EFA goal “Quality of Education”, the report states that around 250 million children are not learning basic skills, even though half of them have spent at least four years in school\(^2\). The dilemma of children being enrolled in schools and yet not gaining the required level of learning was highlighted by ASER India\(^3\) in 2005 where the report measured the “Quality of Education” of children who are not only going to schools; but also gauging the learning abilities of children who have never been to school or have dropped out through a household based survey.

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1 Schooling for Millions of Children jeopardized by reductions in aid, GMR Policy Paper, 2013
2 unesco.nl/sites/default/files/dossier/gmr_2013-4.pdf?download=1
3 www.asercenter.org
If an equitable learning goal is to be attained globally, the framework must be supported by stronger accountability to children, caregivers, and communities. These stakeholders – including innovative civil society organizations with deep roots in local communities – are uniquely positioned to hold education providers to account and to bring about lasting change. Ensuring processes of accountability to families and communities will be critical to upholding the right to learn for every child. This must be central to the post-2015 framework (Save the Children: The Right to Learn, 2013).

This paper will highlight how citizen-led, household-based campaigns gathering hard core evidence which can influence governance at the community, provincial and national levels. It will explore how a community led approach to data gathering and analysis in context can bring about appropriate response from stakeholders, viz. local community, market forces and the government. The paper will also draw attention to the evolving relationship between the State and the citizen, where active collaboration of CSOs is providing innovative approaches to outcomes based service provision conceived earlier as the sole prerogative of the State.

II. Background

Over the past decade, the major focus of the global education community has been on increasing school enrollment. As a result of this global focus, 89% of primary-age children are now enrolled in schools (UNESCO, 2012) - this means more children (girls and boys) are attending schools than ever. However, post 2011 the progress on the goal slowed down. There could be various reasons – one of them “could” be the ignorance of the “quality of education” being imparted to the children enrolled. No parent would like to keep sending their child to school if he/she is not learning. Reports such as “Towards Universal Learning: Recommendations from LMTF” and “Making Education a Priority in the Post 2015 Development Agenda” have also proved that in the long run, if the goal of universal primary education has to be achieved and sustained – it has to be linked to LEARNING! If the children are not learning despite being enrolled in schools – we stand nowhere; children are most likely to drop out sooner than later or graduate with no learning leading to not being able to find a job in the market. While the EFA and MDGs have helped us come close to the goal of Universal Primary Education compared to any other education goal, it has been

http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2013/09/learning-metrics-task-force-universal-learning
realized that bringing children to schools is not our only task. We need to emphasize on what the children are learning or if they are learning?

a) Creating Social Capital by Civil Society Organization(s)

The concept of social capital gained popularity in the 1990s, but the term has been in use for almost a century while the ideas behind it go back further still. Much debate has been carried out on the methodology to conceptualize and measure social capital. A relatively modern political scientist, Robert Putnam\(^6\) emphasized on the relation between democracy and civil society while defining social capital. According to him,

“...social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital’ (Putnam 2000: 19)

Putnam’s main concern is ‘the importance of a strong and active civil society to the consolidation of democracy’. He says that the ‘quality of public life and the performance of social institutions are powerfully influenced by norms and networks of civic engagement’. Therefore, social capital consists of ‘features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit’.

With the emergence of the concepts such as social capital and social accountability, citizens are collectively strengthening their voices to further their demands to policy makers and service providers. In essence, the concept of social capital is incomplete without its link to the individual citizen. Therefore, researching in the context of a child (an individual) with respect to his/her education, family income and parental education are two determinates of child wellbeing rooted in a long tradition of sociological and economic research. These resources have been titled financial and human capital respectively. James Coleman (1988) suggested a third type of capital may have equally important effects on child wellbeing, specifically educational achievement. He introduced the concept of social capital defined as “a resource inhering in the relations between and among actors”.

Coleman argued that resources that facilitate the wellbeing and development of children are borne of these relationships. Researchers have long recognized the importance of the presence or absence

\(^6\) ksgfaculty.harvard.edu/Robert_Putnam
of parents in the household (family structure) as an indicator of wellbeing net of the loss of financial resources associated with the loss of a parent (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Duncan, 1965; Mare, 1980). Coleman (1988) suggested that connectedness between a child, her/his family, friends, community, and school could translate into higher academic achievement. This connectedness, a product of social relationships and social involvement, generates social capital.

The recent shifts towards government decentralization have also increased citizen participation and promoted formal and informal civil society activity. The basic idea is that a strong civil society in the face of supply side failures will organize itself to generate demand for a more democratically accountable, outcomes based and transparent state that will in turn lead to good governance. Today, CSOs are the biggest entity optimizing the concept of social capital. They encourage the culture of accountability and governance by becoming an alternative to state provision of basic services to most people. Because of their targeted approach that focuses on marginalized groups in the society, they are now being seen as agents of social change. Moreover, as they tend to work at the grass root level, they are better able to promote participatory development initiatives that in the long run will be crucial for sustainable development.

A critical factor that may explain the increasing trend of CSO’s has been state weakening due to corruption and poor service delivery and/or failure in many developing countries. The external and internal pressures that led to economic crisis faced by the developing world in the 1980’s and 1990’s have left them incapacitated (Salamon, 1994). The huge cuts in public sector expenditures had adverse effects on the basic social service provision capacity of the states. Because of these policy changes the poor were hit hardest, with governments unable to provide adequate levels of health care and education. A vacuum was created as the states contracted under these policies and CSOs started to emerge as major service providers, critics, and organized groups capable of systematic and participatory evidence gathering on key social indicators, working at the grass roots levels and at sometimes at impressive scale.

b) Social Accountability for Improved Governance and Accountability

Participation and social accountability in the education sector are becoming increasingly important. Evidence shows that many children in developing countries are leaving school without learning to read, write or do basic arithmetic (GMR, 2012/3/4). United Nations Development Program7 (2010) defines social accountability as: “A form of accountability which emerges from actions by citizens and civil society organization (CSOs) aimed at holding the state to account, as well as efforts by government and other actors (media, private sector, donors) to support these actions.”

7 www.undp.org
Participation of citizens and civil society in policy-making and planning is crucial for improving access to quality education, especially in resource scarce environments. Formal and informal structures for policy dialogue and participation become increasingly important when pursuing educational reforms in complex environments. Many long-standing problems are emerging such as high dropout rates in rural areas, poor learning outcomes, and violence among children and youth. These problems require cooperation across policy, organizational and social boundaries.

Social accountability approaches operationalize and strengthen direct accountability relationships between citizens (the users of education services), policy-makers and service providers. They help overcome significant challenges such as weak citizen voice and oversight, and lead to better informed policy decisions, responsible management and leadership, and more efficient and responsive investment decisions. The MDG for education will succeed only if there is a change from the “business as usual strategy” and activities aimed at accomplishing the MDGs target issues such as the right to demand education, and the capacity and willingness to respond to such demands.

At the same time as strengthening civic engagement and amplifying ‘citizen voice’, social accountability initiatives aim to increase the transparency of governance in many arenas, ranging from local service delivery to national processes of development policy formulation. Information is central to this improved transparency. Social accountability initiatives frequently involve citizens in either seeking information from government in such areas as budgets, expenditures or compliance with international legal frameworks or in creating new information about access to and quality of services. They provide information to citizens about their rights and legal and institutional procedures. Building awareness of these issues is often a first step to fostering active and effective citizenship and encouraging citizens to engage (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010).

III. Importance of Large-scale Citizen-led Assessments

“Without the active engagement of parents and communities, the path towards learning for all will remain uneven and unfinished” – Save the Children, 2013

Since 2000, when the MDGs and the EFA goals were set, around 45 million children who previously did not have access to education have enrolled in primary school, and gender parity in primary education has improved significantly. Yet the work ahead is urgent and formidable. Around 40 percent children of all primary school age children in the world are either never enroll in school, fail to make it to the fourth year of their education, or if they do manage this, are not learning to read even basic sentences. In response to this crisis, international organizations, governments and other stakeholders all over the globe are analyzing the current measuring of assessing learning and turning their attention to the challenge of improving the quality of education. The focus of international advisory boards e.g. Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG-SDG), Global

Here is a brief grid showing the existing large scale learning and citizen-led assessments taking place internationally.

### Table 1: International Assessment Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Institutes</th>
<th>Scope</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Large Scale International Learning Assessments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PISA</strong> (Program for International Student Assessment)</td>
<td>15-year old students enrolled in schools at grade 7 or above</td>
<td>Every 3 years</td>
<td>74 Countries (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PIRLS</strong> (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study)</td>
<td>Students enrolled in schools at grade 4</td>
<td>Every 5 years</td>
<td>59 Countries (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIMSS</strong> (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study)</td>
<td>Students enrolled in schools at grades 4 and 8, and 11 or 12</td>
<td>Every 4 years</td>
<td>77 Countries (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SACMEQ</strong> (The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality)</td>
<td>Students enrolled in schools at grade 6</td>
<td>1995, 2000-4, 2006-11, and 2012-14</td>
<td>16 countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Large Scale Citizen-led Learning Assessments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EGRA</strong> (Early Grade Reading Assessment)</td>
<td>Students enrolled in schools at grades 1, 2, 3, or 4</td>
<td>Varies by Country</td>
<td>60 plus countries since 2006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EGMA</strong> (Early Grade Mathematics Assessment)</td>
<td>Students enrolled in schools at grades 1, 2, 3, or 4</td>
<td>Varies by Country</td>
<td>22 countries since 2009.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The predominant view for assessing student learning is that it should be done in schools. Children not attending school are not accounted in any of the above mentioned assessments (table 1). These children are part of our population but are not accounted in any of the assessments gauging their learning levels. They are “invisible” and often not considered in policy and decision-making. The lack of data and information on children who are the most excluded from education are making it even more difficult to reach these children (Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children, 2014). In order to get accurate representation of all children—those who are currently enrolled in school, those who were once enrolled in school but dropped out, those who never enrolled in school, those who go to small, informal private schools, those who are frequently absent from schools, etc.—you need a population-based measure of learning, gathered at the household-level.
The need such for a ‘household based, citizen-led, large-scale assessment’ was realized by an Indian NGO in 2005. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), pioneered by the Indian NGO Pratham, has turned into an increasingly popular testing method which is adopted by several other countries.

ASER is an oral assessment, which measures the learning of children at the household level. It is a “floor” level test, meaning the same test is given to children between the ages of 5 and 16, but younger children in grade 1 and 2 are not expected to be able to go beyond the first few tasks. ASER was conceptualized and designed as a large-scale rapid assessment to be carried out by local citizen (government teachers, graduate students, and any other community members). Therefore, the exercises are designed to be both simple and fast.

This unique nationwide large scale annual assessment gathered momentum across Asia and Africa in no time; making learning central to the debates on education, illustrating the power of informed citizenry to influence national and global agendas for education and learning. ASER or Impact (India 2005 & Pakistan 2008), Uwezo or Capability (East Africa 2009), Beekungo or are We Are In It Together (Mali 2012), Jangandoo or Learn Together (Senegal 2012) represent an organically growing movement for ‘the right to learn and to be’. Their simple, yet innovative approaches shine the spotlight on national levels of learning and school quality, using this knowledge to influence education policy and practice. In the process of spreading awareness of children’s learning levels among parents and communities, they increase the community sense of responsibility, elevate the importance of learning in education dialogues, and stimulate the momentum for widespread social change locally and internationally.

Transforming into a South-South Initiative, these assessments are providing annual credible measures of student learning in seven countries covering 45% of children in the developing world. They demonstrate that it is feasible to measure learning on scale in a way that is meaningful for policy and that it is possible to marry rigor with simplicity.

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8 [www.asercenter.org](http://www.asercenter.org)
Over the last nine years, citizen-based, large-scale learning assessments have taken root in India\(^9\), Pakistan\(^{10}\), Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda\(^{11}\), Mali and Senegal. From 2014 onwards, these assessments will also be taking place in Nigeria and Mexico. In contrast to many other well-known education assessments, this assessment approach emerged from the global South and provides large-scale data on learning levels that also helps to strengthen domestic accountability.

**Why household based assessments?**

Distinct from the numerous other school-based assessments, these assessments are conducted at the household for three reasons:

1. To ensure all children are included (never enrolled & dropped out);
2. To promote parent and citizen action to improve learning; and
3. To stimulate bottom-up pressure for policy and practice improvement.

Across the seven countries, over one million children are assessed each year. This scale generates richer information about learning levels across each country, regionally, and beyond that is useful for policymakers. In addition, because the assessment is conducted at the household level and the results are shared widely, millions of parents, teachers and members of local communities are now more aware of the levels of learning of children. With increasing visibility and legitimacy of these assessments globally and in each country, the assessments have also helped to put learning squarely on the agenda in national policy levels across the countries among leading development agencies and organizations.

**Why Citizen-led Assessments?**

As the name suggests, these assessments are citizen driven and provoke public accountability approach to social change. They enable policy makers as well as ordinary citizens – parents, students, local communities and the public at large – to become aware of actual levels of children’s literacy and numeracy, and build on that awareness to stimulate practical community and policy change. With more than 65,000 citizens on the move to assess their own children, the model of these assessments raises a great deal of accountability of government officials demanded by the local people (table 2).

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\(^9\) [www.asercenter.org](http://www.asercenter.org)

\(^{10}\) [www.aserpakistan.org](http://www.aserpakistan.org)

\(^{11}\) [http://uwezo.net/](http://uwezo.net/)
These assessments in South Asia have been taking place for almost a decade now. A tremendous amount has been achieved and lessons learned. However, so much more is still to be done. Where school enrollments are rising in countries across South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the critical question we are facing is: Are Children Learning? Citizen led household based assessments are catering to this question in several Asian and African countries. These assessments use basic arithmetic and reading skills to assess what the children are able to do/learn (Annex 1).

The ASER Ideology & Principles
These citizen-led assessments of basic learning have three primary objectives. First, to put children’s learning at the center of the debates and discussions on education in their own country. Second, to engage citizen everywhere in understanding their own situation and strengthening accountability. And third, to promote government, parent and citizen action to improve children’s learning. These assessment efforts thus aim to influence education policy and practice from the ground up.

A set of core principles guide the design and implementation of the model in all participating countries:

- Household-based rather than school-based sampling is used in order to make sure that all children are included: children who have never been to a school, those who have dropped out, and those who attend different kinds of schools (public, private, religious, and others).

- A test, usually at Grade 2 level, is used to assess basic abilities in reading and arithmetic for all children in the age group 5-16 years (in some cases 6-16 or 6-18 years). The same test is used for all the children. Each child is assessed one-on-one. In all participating countries, the attempt is to assess children using local and regional languages.

- The assessments use methods, measures, tools and procedures that are easy to use and simple to understand. This is done so many different kinds of people can engage and participate. Ordinary citizens volunteer to conduct the survey and disseminate the results.

- The measurement is annual and is conducted at scale. The sample is representative at national and sub-national levels.

- Results are made available quickly. Parents get instant feedback as they observe their children being asked to read or do arithmetic. Each year’s findings are aggregated and placed in the public domain within days or months after the assessment is conducted.

Source: Citizen-Led Basic Learning Assessments For Children: An Innovative Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Children Assessed (5-18 years)</th>
<th>Volunteers Mobilized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. India</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>600,000 +</td>
<td>30,000 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pakistan</td>
<td>87,044</td>
<td>263,900</td>
<td>10,000 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Kenya</td>
<td>90,820</td>
<td>153,900</td>
<td>9,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tanzania</td>
<td>55,101</td>
<td>104,568</td>
<td>7,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Uganda</td>
<td>34,667</td>
<td>81,650</td>
<td>4,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mali (pilot)</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>23,149</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Senegal (pilot)</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ASER Methodology

These assessments use rigorous sampling methodologies and generate representative samples at national and sub-national levels. The tools are designed to be simple so that parents, teachers, schools, communities, and ordinary people can conduct the assessment on their own and understand the findings. This is a household based assessment which implies that ALL the children of the mentioned age groups are surveyed (which is not the case in school-based assessments as they cover the learning abilities of children going to schools only). These assessments take into account the learning levels of children who are currently enrolled in schools, who have either dropped out of school for some reason or the other, and children who have never been enrolled in a school.

Taking a representative sample of the entire population, the ASER methodology is twofold. In the first phase, 30 villages are selected from each district according to the latest population census. The second stage of the sampling requires 20 households to be selected from each village. In order to maintain a rotating panel and ensure that the results are comparable over the years, 10 new villages are selected every year whereas 20 old villages are retained. Alongside the household assessment, in order to link the learning of the children to their schooling, volunteers have to survey one government school and one private school in the same village. Detailed sampling and methodology with reference to local context of each of these assessments can be found on their websites.

Some of the salient features of the ASER methodology are as follows:

- Children tested on one-on-one basis
- Children tested orally (writing & analytical skills are not measured)
- Instant results & feedback
- Annual assessment results are available without any lags.
- Local people/citizen/community members are involved in doing the assessment
- Assess all children from the age of 5/6-16/18
- Assessment takes place in various local languages e.g. in Pakistan local language assessment is conducted in three languages – Urdu, Sindhi, and Pashto.

Together, these efforts provide large-scale, annual, easily understandable indicators of children’s ability to read simple text and do basic arithmetic operations. Unlike other large-scale learning assessments, this approach is led by citizen groups and has emerged from the global South. Interestingly, these initiatives are independent; there is no international coordinating body. They have evolved organically and the groups have come together voluntarily. The model was transplanted from one country to another and adopted to suit each country’s context.

ASER Outcomes & Impact

With such a huge and rich dataset available, it is impossible for local and international policymakers and development analysts to ignore the depleting learning levels of children throughout various
countries. Following is a table showing the scale, scope, languages in which the children were assessed and the sample size for each of the countries (table 3). ASER India being the pioneer has the largest scale in terms of the sample size (it is due to the size of population of the region as well). The sample size for each of the countries is increasing over the years\(^{13}\).

**Table 3: Size & Scope of Large Scale, Citizen-led, Household Based Assessments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age group of children assessed</td>
<td>5 – 16 years</td>
<td>5 – 16 years</td>
<td>6 – 16 years</td>
<td>6 – 16 years</td>
<td>6 – 14 years</td>
<td>6 – 18 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects assessed</td>
<td>Reading Math</td>
<td>Reading, Math English</td>
<td>Reading Math</td>
<td>Reading and comp Math</td>
<td>Reading and comp Math</td>
<td>Reading Math</td>
<td>Reading Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages assessed</td>
<td>15 Pashto, Sindhi &amp; Urdu</td>
<td>3 English, Kiswahili</td>
<td>2 English, Kiswahili</td>
<td>2 English, Kiswahili</td>
<td>1 English</td>
<td>4 French, Bamanankan Bomu, Fulfulde</td>
<td>3 French, Wolof, Pulaar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of children assessed</td>
<td>448,545</td>
<td>160,852</td>
<td>134,243</td>
<td>114,761</td>
<td>101,652</td>
<td>23,149</td>
<td>1,605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National assessment or state/provincial</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Regional (75 out of 703 Communes)</td>
<td>4 Regions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows the results of the large-scale household based citizen led assessments taking place in South Asia and Africa. Each of the seven columns represents results via cross tabulation. Such an analysis provides easy interpretation of results of specific regions as well as offers a comparison of what is happening within these countries – their scale, scope, and learning levels of children.

Each year, all the countries conducting household based assessments come together and discuss their methodology, constraints, opportunities and form synergies. The facts and figures produced in table 4 are as a result of these synergies that a comparable dataset of seven countries is provided in one card.

\(^{13}\) pratham.org/file/Citizen-led-Learning-Assessments-Nov28-2012.pdf
The large scale citizens' learning assessment card shows that while there are only 11.6% children enrolled in grade 2 in Pakistan who cannot read letters in their local language, there are 20.3% children in grade 2 in India who cannot do the same. Similarly, in case of arithmetic, 60.2% of students enrolled in grade 3 in Pakistan cannot do two-digit subtraction whereas in India the percentage of such students is 73.7. The tables below provides comparative results for learning levels of children enrolled in various grade levels across all countries conducting large scale citizens; learning assessments in South Asia and Africa.

The synergy created by these large scale citizens’ assessments has phenomenal impact. There are layers and layers of dissemination. The below chart is a pictorial representation of how these citizens’ assessments create social capital which leads to social accountability.
Creation of social capital begins with the goal of improving the learning levels of children and entails:

**Collect evidence of learning levels of children**: These assessments seek evidence-based engagement to transform conditions of exclusion and learning challenges at the household, community, school, and college level.

**Communicate findings**: By working with communities across the country who commit to rethinking their conditions, values and structures for change, reimagining for actions that can be measured and felt.

**Mobilize resources for improved learning**: Collaborating with partners (Government across finance and planning departments; coalitions, foundations, corporate Sector, and other civil service organizations) across networks regionally and globally to influence, demonstrate progress through synergistic actions.

**Community mobilization for social accountability**: Results help engage with inspiring leaders across the region, youth leaders and with teachers, both organized and informal workers as communicators of ideas, learning solutions, change, practice and accountability.

**VI. Conclusion**

A ‘weak’ positioning of student learning outcomes in education policy reforms has compromised capabilities of millions of children, youth and adults who remain unentitled by the ‘access first’ mantra. The policy and reform statements range from high level international documents viz.

The post 2015 development agenda is being crafted vigorously to define the education goal around learning and quality as a central piece. Since 2012 there have been multiple global, regional, national and institutional consultations for mobilizing consensus on the post 2015 goals (Brookings 2014). Several reports have been finalized in 2013 on the post-2015 process viz. the High-Level Panel Report, the UN Sustainable Development Solution’s Network Report, the UN Secretary-General’s report and the World We Want Global Education consultation report-that highlight the importance of access plus learning from ECD to lower secondary. There is a consensus to move from access plus learning⁴. The Centre for Universal Education (CUE) in collaboration with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) initiated the Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF). LMTF is a representative group of global stakeholders from the north and the south to engage in global and in-country consultations to broaden the learning framework for both developing and developed countries alike, from pre-primary to lower secondary as a continuum of learning metrics across seven domains¹⁵ (CUE Brookings 2013). Major multilateral and bi-lateral agencies have finalized their sector institutional documents underscoring the need for learning and quality (World Bank 2013; USAID 2012; DFID 2013; GMR 2013-14). The outcomes of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda is well captured in the report titled “Making Education a Priority in the Post 2015 Development Agenda” (2013).

A stronger commitment to good-quality education, with a focus on learning, can be construed as perhaps the most important priority for a post-2015 education agenda…. Good-quality education is equitable, relevant and responds to learners’ diverse needs. Future education goals should focus on measuring learning and include a wide range of indicators…. (UNICEF/UNESCO 2013- p. 21)

In order to have an effective citizen voice initiative that elicits a response from the state it is important that there be a substantial knowledge base at the grassroot level to gain legitimacy and to present policy makers with evidence of action that can be considered in future policy formulation. Action based research to test alternative solutions and options is the best approach to collect evidence of what works, which can then be shared with the government to design better interventions that have greater pro poor impact.

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¹⁵ LMTF Seven Domains are: Physical Well Being; Social & emotional; Culture and Arts; Literacy & Communication; Learning approaches and cognition; Numeracy and mathematics and Science and technology.
Citizen led large scale household based assessments are outstanding examples of how citizens can be engaged to act as monitors of public provision of education by collecting information in their own communities and villages. An outcome of this exercise is that the community becomes aware of the educational status of their children and can use the collected information to push for reforms in their respective communities. It also provides them with a base for future ventures such as the citizen led learning enhancement campaigns where the communities use the data to initiate programs that addresses learning problems of their children.

Social policy dictates that the role of the government is to secure for its citizens access to quality education, health care and social safety nets. In face of current economic challenges this is becoming exceedingly difficult for governments across developing countries. Fortunately, the global political systems have also changed where the traditional boundaries of the State, civil society and the private sector are becoming blurred. This opens up new opportunities to redefine roles and responsibilities. Governments can fulfill its obligations through creating and supporting a pluralist set up where all stakeholders can effectively come together and engages in the task of governance and policy formulations that lead to better interventions in service delivery.

(biblo to be added)