



Knowledge hub - Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

SABER SCHOOL FINANCE

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Angola, Armenia, Ethiopia, Kyrgyz Republic, Mozambique, Tajikistan, Vietnam, and Zambia among others

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

World Bank

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

School finance, education systems, government institutions, education policy, teachers, learning outcomes, education inputs, school autonomy and accountability, student assessments, early childhood development

6. What makes it a best practice? *

SABER offers education leaders and stakeholders an opportunity to see inside the black box between education inputs and outcomes, so that they can use evidence to strengthen education systems and outcomes. It also provides an extensive dataset on learning assessments / outcomes that are not only comparable cross-sectionally but are an indication of the quality of a particular nation's education system.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

Launched in 2011, SABER is an initiative to produce comparative data and knowledge on education policies and institutions, with the aim of helping countries systematically strengthen their education systems and the ultimate objective of promoting Learning for All. SABER consists of three main domains, namely, education cycles which encompasses the ECD, workforce development and tertiary education sub-domains, resources & system support with the sub-domains of student assessment, ICT, teachers, and school health & school feeding, and lastly, governance & finance which has the sub-domains of school finance, school autonomy and accountability, EMIS, and engaging the private sector. All these domains are geared towards ensuring education resilience, equity and inclusion to achieve the overall goal of 'Learning for All'.

The rationale for SABER is that it allows countries to conduct a thorough inventory of their education policies and institutions based on evidence-based global standards and best practices, as well as provides decision makers and stakeholders at all levels with tools for structured and effective policy dialogue. It does this by providing insights on the 'results chain for learning' by linking education inputs to learning outcomes/outputs through a focus on three key areas of quality of policies and institutions, quality of policy implementation, and quality & quantity of education delivered (service delivery). More generally, SABER provides a knowledge base for analytical sector work, policy dialogue, and design of operations through providing and structuring of data and analysis within each policy domain, in a manner that makes it easily comparable across countries. It also makes possible targeted cross-country learning. SABER's policy database and analyses serve as a vehicle for cross-country learning of all types, including South-South, by providing comparable information about what has been done in other countries and how it has worked. It provides a more comprehensive and systematic evidence base for identifying countries for more in-depth South-South engagement, especially through case studies.

SABER has been applied in Angola, Armenia, Ethiopia, Kyrgyz Republic, Mozambique, Tajikistan, Vietnam, and Zambia by the World Bank. The objective of this technical assistance was to support the mentioned countries to identify strengths and weaknesses of their student assessment systems, to launch new assessment centres, to train assessment staff, to implement national and international large-scale assessments, and to develop materials for classroom assessments, among others.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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SABER has been implemented in different countries along the various domains it encompasses, depending on country specific needs. Most recently though, i.e., from 2019 – 2020, SABER was implemented by the WBG in The Global Comparability of Learning Outcomes (GCLO) initiative. GCLO is an initiative that involves the collection of harmonized learning - assessment datasets at the student and country level. It is the most comprehensive exercise to date linking existing international, regional, and national learning assessments to harmonize learning data covering 183 countries with data from 2000 to 2020 on levels of student learning in reading, mathematics, science, and problem solving from international, regional, and national learning assessments to make these data from different assessments comparable across countries.

The purpose of this exercise was to strengthen the global comparability of existing data. In doing so, the WBG supported the Global Learning Assessment Database (GLAD) harmonization from 2019 - 2020, from which Country Learning Outcome (CLO) indicators have been derived, as well as the comparable learning indicators such as the Harmonized Learning Outcome (HLO) and Learning Poverty (LP). The WBG has been working with development partners and UIS on Policy Linking Pilots, to facilitate countries' reporting on global education targets using a version of the Angoff standard-setting methodology that aligns existing national large-scale learning assessment results with global reading and mathematics learning standards, as expressed in the Global Proficiency Framework (GPF).

Activities:

- Access and Storage of Microdata and Indicators: The EduAnalytics team worked with internal and external partners to expand the collection of learning assessments used in this process, including both cross-national and national learning assessments (NLAs).
- Production of Harmonized Microdata (GLAD) and Indicators (CLO, HLO): After data processing and production, the EduAnalytics team mapped out its data flows and adopted specific standards, such as the use of GitHub, to ensure the documentation and full reproducibility of the WBG's numbers as well as the modularization of the institution's processes. The first step in this process was GLAD's pilot for grades 4, 5, and 6 and a standardized way to derive country-level indicators. This modularization of the WBG's processes with the creation of the GLADs and CLOs has facilitated repurposing the WBG's data infrastructure and systems to produce the LP indicator, ensuring consistency and comparability across different measures (such as the HLO and LP) and significant economies of scope.
- Dissemination of Microdata and Indicators (DDH, APIs): The WBG made both the HLO and LP indicators available through the WBG API, it has deposited the LP database in the Development Data Hub, and it has created country briefs for the LP, in which both the HCI and the LAYS are presented.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

The following are the outputs of the GCLO initiative where SABER was used.

1. Updated and expanded version of the HLO indicator.

The WBG included PISA-D and PILNA countries in the database and completed the GLAD of 481 learning assessments (LLECE, PASEC, PIRLS, SACMEQ, TIMSS) with data from 120 countries from 2000 to 2016. The WBG also released PISA 2018, which provides more recent data for 80 countries and economies and the addition of two new countries, Belarus, and Brunei Darussalam. The 2020 HCI update included 20 new countries (8 come from EGRAs, 8 from PILNA, 3 from PISA and PISA-D, and 1 from TIMSS-equivalent assessment) and more recent data points for 95 countries. The Learning Poverty database has also been updated, especially with the inclusion in December 2020 of data from the SEA-PLM 2019, TIMSS 2019, and PASEC 2019. In September 2020, the new HCI was launched. The HLO database has been recently used to produce learning loss estimates due to COVID-19. The harmonized databases are also a critical input to the dashboards produced to help teams have a strategic conversation on how they can accelerate learning.

2. Improved awareness and use of data among government officials.

The WBG released a public GitHub repository of data and code with the full harmonization code used to construct the GLAD. The Bank has held further discussions with donors about revisiting the indicators to support large-scale learning assessments, with important linkages to skills and jobs. The expectation is that the activities outlined above would contribute towards the following deliverables:

3. Implementation of Policy Linking Toolkit in two pilot countries.

The team conducted discussions with select WBG country teams (Ghana, Nigeria, and The Gambia) on implementing policy linking pilots. Existing assessments have been requested from the governments of Ghana and The Gambia to conduct the test content alignment review against the GPF to assess the feasibility of policy linking. Moreover, technical inputs have been provided to the Policy Linking Toolkit and the updated GPF, developed under the leadership of UIS and USAID.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

The following are some of the key lessons learnt:

1. Up to date, the WBG has curated and harmonized over 3,500 learning assessments covering multiple countries, years, grades, and subjects. It is imperative to work towards the standardization of different elements of this process, in order to ensure both economies of scale and scope to strengthen the sustainability of this effort and the usage of all this data.

2. Also, learning assessment data, especially NLAs, are incredibly underutilized and poorly documented. Development partners could work more systematically in helping countries to better document and use NLAs.

Some of the lessons learnt were in the form of challenges encountered in the process and these were:

- Uncertainty about the ability to measure learning in the near future using international and regional assessments, given that it is not clear how the calendar and future dates of the international and regional learning assessments will be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. International/regional assessments are typically administered to students at school.
- Another challenge identified is financial sustainability of the GLO initiative. Seed funding has been used to start up the documentation and reorganization process. However, data curation and documentation are costly. The WBG is mitigating this risk by combining the use of new technologies such as GitHub, which significantly reduce the cost of documentation with an active strategy to diversify the number of products that can be derived from the same platform (for example, using the same workflow to produce both the HLO and the Learning Poverty measures). Costs can be shared as multiple products are developed using the same platform.
- Another substantial risk has been the lack of access to the microdata, especially in the context of NLAs. This is critical given the WBG's interest in going beyond a simple average, as the institution unpacks this indicator across other domains such as gender, urban-rural, socioeconomic status, and geography. The WBG's strategy is for the Learning Assessment Platform (LeAP),¹² the EduAnalytics team, and other related teams to work closely with the country Task Team Leaders (TTLs) to educate them and the WBG's counterparts about the importance of disseminating the microdata of NLAs.
- Coordination with other development partners, especially UIS, to ensure alignment of country numbers and priorities in the measurement agenda, constitutes another challenge. The WBG has two strategies in place to manage this: The first strategy is full methodological transparency on how the WBG's numbers are being calculated using tools such as GitHub, where both the code and data are made available to anyone. The second strategy has been the design of a MoU between the WBG and UIS, where Education Data Generation and Exchange is one of the main pillars. This MoU aims to contribute towards an authorizing environment under which both the WBG and UIS can work together on this agenda.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

SABER offers education leaders and stakeholders an opportunity to see inside the black box between education inputs and outcomes, so that they can use evidence to strengthen education systems and outcomes. The Global Comparability of Learning Outcomes (GCLO) initiative may be benchmarked as a best practice because it provides an extensive dataset on learning assessments / outcomes that are not only comparable cross-sectionally but are an indication of the quality of a particular nation’s education system. Countries hence stand to work with an internationally comparable data/framework in analysing their education system or any other system to inform institutional and or policy reforms in a bid to realise better education outcomes. Needless to say, the GCLO initiative among other SABER informed initiatives such as the Global Education Policy Dashboard (GEPD) and The Education Policy Design Labs (EPDLs) has proven to be effective in producing data that can be used by different facets of government in policy making. An important recommendation to other users looking to apply SABER would be that; instead of simply adopting the approach and experience of SABER from other countries and initiatives, it may serve best to contextualise the processes involved in SABER to best suit the unique circumstances of that implementing country as there may be considerable cross-sectional heterogeneity in the variables been assessed such that ‘one size may not fit all’.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

World Bank, 2013, The What, Why and How of SABER

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/867151468180272110/pdf/799010WP0SABER0B0x0379795B00PUBLIC0.pdf>

World Bank, 2020, Transforming Education Systems: SABER Annual Report 2020

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/810711624283378763/pdf/SABER-Annual-Report-2020-Retrospective-Review-Transforming-Education-Systems-Accelerating-Foundational-Learning-for-Everyone.pdf>

SABER, 2013, What Matters most for School Finance

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/927631468147581902/pdf/799220WP0Frame0B0x0379795B00PUBLIC0.pdf>

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/systems-approach-for-better-education-results-saber>