



CONCEPT NOTE

Third READ Global Conference and Sixth World Bank ECA Education Conference:

“Using Student Assessment Results for Education Quality and Systems Strengthening”

*Eschborn, Germany
October 23-26, 2011*

(Sponsored and organized by the Russia Education Aid for Development Program (READ), the World Bank Europe and Central Asia Region Education Unit (ECA), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ))

I. Background/Rationale

The World Bank, Germany and Russia’s Emphasis on Education Quality and Systems Strengthening

Countries around the world are increasingly recognizing the need for not only greater access to education but also strengthening overall education systems to improve its quality. Simply attending school is not enough. The economic growth, poverty reduction, and development individuals and societies gain from an education are only attainable when students actually learn as a result of school attendance. Hence, improving education quality is imperative. Newly drafted education strategies for organizations like the World Bank and Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) are directly addressing education quality by stressing the need for “Learning for All” and holistic education systems strengthening; the Russian government placed a strong emphasis on improving education quality in developing countries by establishing a large trust fund dedicated solely for this purpose. This increasing focus on quality and learning outcomes by donors, developed and developing countries alike is enabling countries and donors to ensure educational investments have the greatest impact.

The quality of an education system is influenced by several policy domains – teachers, school management and financing, learning standards, student assessment, etc. One measure to improve quality is to establish regular monitoring systems that assess student learning outcomes. This information can empower policymakers and educators to make decisions on how to improve the learning process and allocate resources based on concrete evidence. By paying greater attention to what students learn, countries can ensure that students are learning the necessary, basic concepts that will lift them out of poverty and lead to more successful outcomes in their work and personal lives.

Donors like the World Bank, Germany, and Russia each recognize the importance of a systemic approach to strengthen education systems and improve education quality. Student assessment, one of the policy domains in this systemic approach, is being seen as a useful tool in these common efforts to help build strong education systems across the developing world.

Annual Russia Education Aid for Development (READ) Global Conferences

Established in October 2008, the Russia Education Aid for Development (READ) Program is a collaboration of the Government of the Russian Federation and the World Bank that focuses on improving education quality in low-income countries. The amount of \$32 million under the READ Trust Fund is wholly dedicated to supporting the improvement of student learning outcomes through the design, implementation, and use of robust student assessment systems. In addition to funding knowledge products on student assessment at the global level, READ directly supports the creation and strengthening of several countries' education assessment systems (Angola, Armenia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Vietnam, and Zambia).

It was agreed early on by the READ Council, comprised of World Bank and Russian officials, that the READ program would hold an annual conference to provide a forum where all READ-supported countries and those working directly on the READ program come together to share other countries' experiences and best practices in assessment, showcase READ countries' commitment and progress on the READ agenda, promote networking in the areas of assessment, share information globally on the aims and achievements of the READ Program, highlight Russia's role as an emerging donor and provide Russia as the donor an opportunity to interact with READ-country beneficiaries. For READ, the conferences have served as important milestones for the program—the first two conferences were very successful and greatly valued, in particular by READ-country recipients and Russia.

World Bank's Europe and Central Asia (ECA) Education Conferences

The World Bank's ECA Education Conferences, the first one being held back in 2004, have been the World Bank's flagship education event in the region. It has served as a forum for continued policy dialogue between the World Bank and its client countries in ECA and between the ECA countries themselves. At these conferences, countries have shared their recent developments in education on a variety of topics and have learned from each other through interactive discussions and specific case studies of successful practices, with potential to be used among other education colleagues in the region. Previous conferences have focused on a variety of topics ranging from specific challenges at a particular level of education to implementing effective policies in countries.

Combining the Third READ Global Conference and the Sixth ECA Education Conference

During early preparations of both conferences and discussing potential themes, it was discovered that both conferences were going to be centered on the same principal theme—using assessment results to improve the quality of education. Several READ countries are in the process of designing and implementing their first assessment activities. In some of the ECA countries where national assessments of one type or the other have been designed and implemented, still few monitor learning outcomes systematically—either through conducting their own assessments of student achievements or through participating in regional or international assessments. In spite of important advances in establishing these assessments of educational outcomes, the results are largely unknown by relevant stakeholders and there exists limited understanding on how results can impact education system processes, performance and outcomes. (See agenda outline.)

Holding the Combined Education Conference in Germany

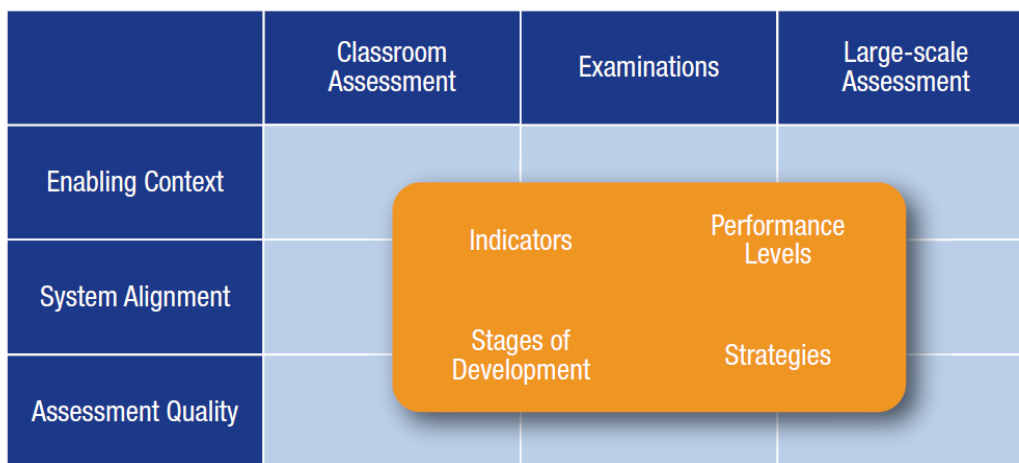
Given the strong focus of the READ program on assessment, potential lessons learned from the ECA region and the existing connection between Russia, the ECA region, and several READ-supported countries, it was decided to capitalize on the existing synergies, combine these two events, and hold the event in Germany. In addition to its ideal location, Germany has also made significant strides in using assessment results to strengthen the quality of their own assessment system. This will provide conference participants with several options for valuable site visits to schools, teacher training intuitions and assessment agencies to see the use of assessment results in action and learn from institutions that are part of Germany's education assessment system. Both the READ-supported countries and ECA countries will no doubt benefit from the greater interaction and gain valuable insights from one another's respective experiences. While the plenary speakers and main learning activities on best practices in using assessment results will be shared, in order to cater to the specific needs of each event, time will be set aside for separate READ and ECA sessions as well.

II. Theme: “Using Student Assessment Results for Education Quality and Systems Strengthening”

Each year, the theme of the READ Conference has aligned with various aspects of READ Program activities. The first year’s theme was “Developing a Vision for Assessment Systems” which provided an overview of READ and aimed to assist READ-countries in coming up with a set of assessment activities and an overall plan of action. After the first year, it was decided that each of the subsequent conferences would be centered on one of the primary quality drivers outlined in the SABER-Student Assessment Conceptual Framework (see figure 1). (This framework was developed for READ and has become part of the World Bank’s larger System Assessment and Benchmarking for Education Results (SABER) Student Assessment Program.) Since last year’s focus was on the enabling context, it has been proposed that this year’s theme highlight assessment quality.

For ECA countries, the theme of using assessments to strengthen education quality is timely as well. Many ECA countries have recently undergone severe reforms to their education system and greater attention is being paid to strengthening accountability for education outcomes. Hence, assessment activities are increasingly being seen as an important element of their education systems.

Figure 1. SABER-Student Assessment Conceptual Framework



The SABER-Student Assessment Conceptual Framework identifies three main quality drivers of assessment systems: the enabling context, system alignment and assessment quality. A key aspect of assessment quality and one of its leading indicators is ensuring the effective use of assessment results. Are results from the various assessment activities disseminated in meaningful ways to key stakeholders? Are these results used to promote and inform student learning? Assessment activities are only effective in improving education quality if they are actually used in ways that inform policymakers’ decisions, help teachers improve their teaching practices and empower parents with the knowledge of whether or not their children are actually learning. This year’s conference will focus on ways in which data from various assessment types (international and large-scale assessments, examinations, and classroom assessments) can be used most effectively to strengthen education system quality.

III. Objectives

A key objective of this conference is to help READ supported and ECA countries strengthen their ability to use assessment results in meaningful ways that will ultimately contribute to improvements in education quality. As a result of this conference, countries will better understand how to:

- use assessment results to improve education policy and practice at national/sub-national and school levels;

- support efforts to help teachers and other educators understand how to interpret assessment data; and
- involve students, parents, and public stakeholders in monitoring learning outcomes in their schools and communities.

IV. Target Audience/ Participants

Delegations of senior education officials and assessment experts from the READ-supported countries (Angola, Armenia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Vietnam, and Zambia) and the 30 countries from the ECA region are the primary target audience for the conference. For READ, it is intended that Country delegations will consist of assessment leaders and practitioners working on implementing the READ program of activities, led by a Head of Department or Director of a national agency or department in charge of assessments. These READ Country delegations will be accompanied by World Bank Task Team Leaders, READ Technical Group Members, and READ Global Team members working directly on the READ program. For ECA, all World Bank Education Staff from the ECA Region will be invited in addition to small delegations of Education officials and assessment practitioners from all ECA client countries. These participants will be joined by a cadre of international assessment experts, education and assessment experts from across Russia, Russian donor representatives, education experts from Germany as suggested by GIZ, and GIZ representatives working in ECA and READ supported countries. Participation will be limited and by invitation only.

V. Conference Organizers

The conference is being designed and planned with inputs from READ (READ-supported Country Education officials, READ Country Task Team Leaders, READ Technical Group Members, the SABER-Student Assessment Team, Russian Donors, READ Program Management Team, READ Fee-Based Services, and CICED), the World Bank's Education Unit in the ECA Region and GIZ.

The main organizing team comprises: Robin Horn (READ Council member, World Bank Education Sector Manager for the Human Development Network), Emily Gardner (World Bank Education Specialist, READ Management Team), Marguerite Clarke (World Bank Senior Education Specialist, READ Global Task Team Leader), Alberto Rodriguez (READ Council member, World Bank Education Sector Manager for ECA), Ivana Aleksic (World Bank Human Development Specialist in ECA), Nils Geissler (GIZ Head of Education) and Dorothea Coppard (GIZ Education Program Director).