DESIGNING EFFECTIVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS FOR EDUCATION 2030:
A GLOBAL SYNTHESIS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES

ABSTRACT

1. Background and contexts:

The Education 2030 Framework for Action places great emphasis on quality, inclusiveness and equity. While access to education remains a priority in the national agenda of many countries, these suggested goals for education in 2030 will require governments to maximize the use of existing policy levers for change.

Successful implementation of the Education 2030 Framework for Action will depend on functional and reliable Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems to enable participatory decision-making and enhance accountability.

The criticality of Monitoring and Evaluation to any human development process lies in its ability to measure achievements against targets set in precise and measurable terms in recognition of the dictum that anything that is measured gets done. Education being identified as the main driver of human development, this UNESCO report is timely because it is facilitating a better understanding of the changing demands on the role of monitoring and evaluation in the context of the new challenges progress in global education, with particular emphasis on quality, gender, adult literacy, youth and skills, early childhood care and education, inequality and governance, marginalized populations and armed conflicts.

This document is particularly useful for a better understanding of M&E systems and its measurements, which are so vital for evidence-based policy making, for good governance and for accountability. This UNESCO initiative would greatly contribute to a proper understanding of how the different nations have tried to monitor, measure and assess the performance of their education systems in order to address the major issues identified vis-à-vis the achievement of their education goals. The findings may facilitate the Education 2030 discussions on the subject. By providing a link to nations at the policy level, this review will provide a way forward to member states to further review, refine and re-design their M&E systems in order to properly address all their critical and emerging needs related to Education 2030 agenda.

With a focus on Education 2030 Framework for Action, the report uses an international comparative perspective to address, among others, the following questions:

1. Why and how have the M&E of education systems emerged and evolved?
2. What are the main current M&E models and their challenges?
3. What makes a M&E system relevant?
4. How can the efficiency and effectiveness of M&E systems be strengthened?
5. How can stakeholders’ capacity to participate in the M&E of education be reinforced?
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COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS: A SUMMARY REGIONAL REVIEW AND SELECTED COUNTRY CASE STUDIES
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Three significant shifts in the development of M&E systems have taken place. These shifts may be identified as coming from 1) a simple compliance-based to a more performance-based M&E; 2) a programme-level orientation to a more holistically-oriented level for M&E; and 3) a centralized focus to a more decentralized focus in the M&E system. These significant shifts have largely determined the way in which information systems have been developed, structured and implemented.

As countries have moved towards decentralization of their education systems, demand has grown for evidence on the performance of the systems. The M&E systems have tended to place more responsibilities in this regard on the regional, district, and school authorities. This shift towards more decentralized nature of M&E has not always been transformed smoothly but with several challenges. As many countries have transferred this responsibility away from the central government, “vertical” coordination remains one of the key challenges to them. This means that a fully functional monitoring at lower levels becomes a challenge with partial monitoring control still remaining with the top level, thus affecting coordination at all levels of the sector.

When a M&E system becomes holistic from a programme level monitoring perspective, the various components of a M&E system tends to be coordinated more effectively. The advantage of all the components functioning and inter-communicating well under the one umbrella of M&E is that it helps to introduce common standards and classification systems using uniform coding for better monitoring. This also reduces duplication of the process of collecting information and is more cost-effective. Moreover, the availability of a M&E framework as part of the national education sector plan helps to connect various components of M&E under a single framework, thus making the M&E system more efficient and effective.

Significant changes have taken place in the last few decades in the basic understanding of the purpose of education as well as in its monitoring. The growing demand for better provision of quality education and accountability has redefined the purpose of ‘M&E’, shifting it more towards outcomes and impact rather than access and inputs. However, such shift appears to be uneven among different countries depending on the availability of necessary resources, political commitment, infrastructure and the capacity among the personnel for implementing performance-based M&E.

Decision-makers have begun to attach increasing importance to the development of a coherent system for monitoring and evaluating educational achievement, especially student learning outcomes. Student assessments are gaining importance due to the demand for more information on student performance by various stakeholders. Many countries are interested in using the findings of assessments to maintain and improve the quality of their education systems. As a result, many countries have set up national institutes or dedicated separate units within the Ministry of Education, which are responsible for conducting regular national assessments.

A good M&E system is more than a mere statistical task or an external obligation. For the M&E system to be effective and efficient, it must be planned properly, managed efficiently and
provided with adequate resources, making it sustainable. Effective policy-making in education requires information on whether governments are doing things right and whether the desired results are being achieved. Strong M&E systems provide the means to compile and integrate all the necessary information into the policy cycle, thus providing the basis for enabling sound governance and accountability in education policies.

**Thanks to advanced technology, a large volume of data can be made available.** There has been a growing demand for data, comprehensive enough to meet the demands of users such as decision-makers, planners, and the community. Such data need to include details of disaggregation at various levels as well as reliable data on key indicators. Technological advancements have helped in the collection and production of disaggregated data at all levels.

**The success of the development of M&E systems depends on the ability of the system to utilize the tools by having well-trained personnel to handle it for M&E purposes.** Addressing the gaps in technical capacity of a M&E system requires an approach that would balance the development of individual skills by strengthening the organizational structure supportive of, and responsive to, the context in which M&E takes place. Newly trained staff must be supported by their organizations to translate their new skills effectively into sound practices in data collection and use.

**There is an undeniable need for high-level commitment and political will for making M&E systems work well and deliver up to expectation.** Such commitment would lead to the provision of sufficient resources needed for developing the necessary infrastructure and the human resources to develop efficient, effective and sustainable M&E systems. In order to achieve this, there is a need for governments to consider financial sustainability and have proper plans in place for developing sustainable M&E systems. Moreover, strong legal frameworks are essential to support the operationalization of effective M&E systems and to ensure better accountability and transparency with regard to the expenditure of funds allocated.