International Large Scale Assessments and the SDG 4 – Education 2030 Agenda

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ILSAs in the global education agenda

- International Large Scale assessments are currently at the heart of the political economy of the education development agenda

- Global agenda calls to ensure by 2030, that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

- Translated into requirements for regular monitoring of proficiency levels at 3 points in the education cycle: Grade 2/3, last grade of primary education and last grade of lower secondary education.

→ Strong focus on a mean towards an end (improved learning)

ILSAs in the global education agenda

- Changing paradigm of the data - scientific inquiry nexus
  - Research question -> data collection -> analysis/response

  - Global initiative/summative assessment -> data collection -> research question -> proxy data -> second best analysis/response

  → Due to their versatility ILSAs are promoted as key tools to respond to an increasing number of needs from the education community

Are they fit for purpose? Are they effective?

ILSAs in the global education agenda

Flagship numbers/Lead indicators

XX Million children are not learning

Global Monitoring of SDG 4

Current	Intermediate
Non adjusted,	Economist way: Coefficient adjustment

'Final'

Psychometrician way: Content and difficulty based linking
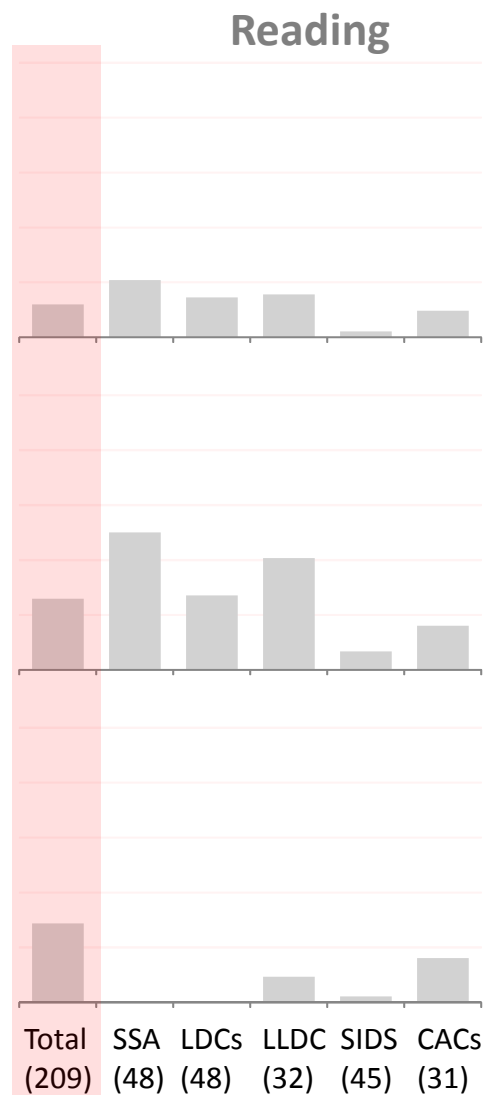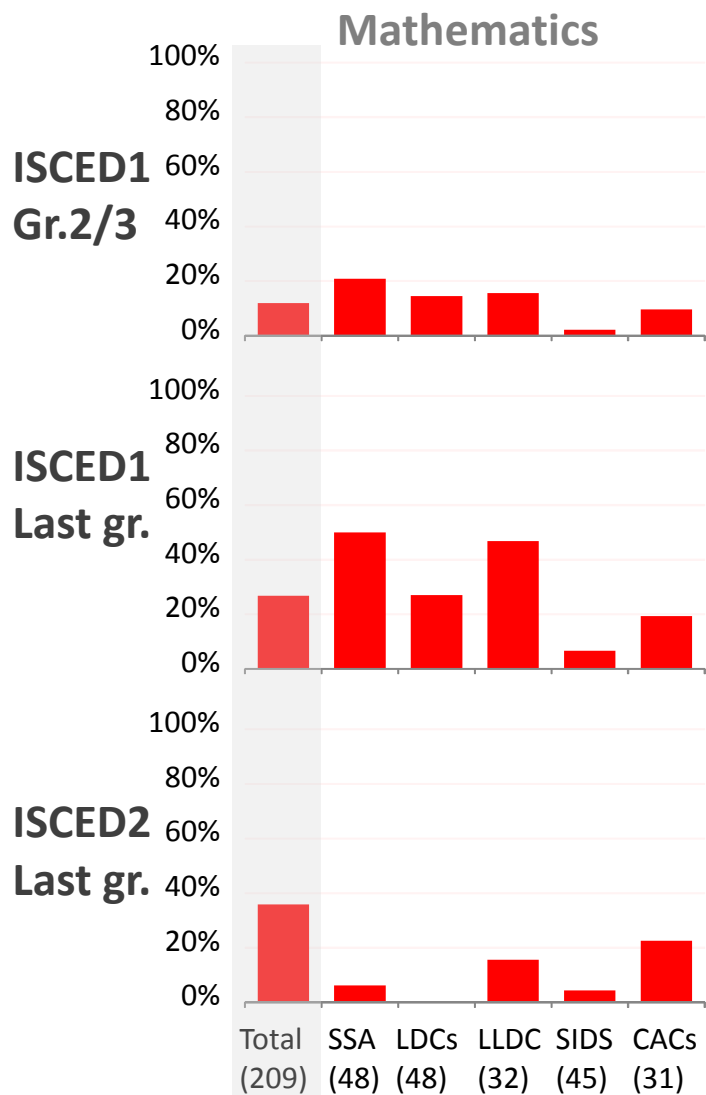
ILSAs

Governance tools

e.g. UNICEF, GPE Results Frameworks
WB Results-based funding

Other secondary analysis

Equity, drivers of low levels of learning, cross-countries research etc..

But…

… a number of countries are absent

Mathematics

Reading

ISCED1 Gr.2/3

ISCED1 Last gr.

ISCED2 Last gr.

Total (209), SSA (48), LDCs (48), LLDC (32), SIDS (45), CACs (31)

"The most vulnerable countries and, in particular, **African** countries, **least developed countries** [LDCs], **landlocked developing countries** [LLDCs] and **small island developing States** [SIDS], deserve special attention, as do countries in situations of **conflict and post-conflict countries.**"

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Development (UN, 2015)

Participation is associated with level of income

60% of low income countries don't participate in any regional or international assessment

Participate in at least one ILSA

Doesn't participate in any ILSA
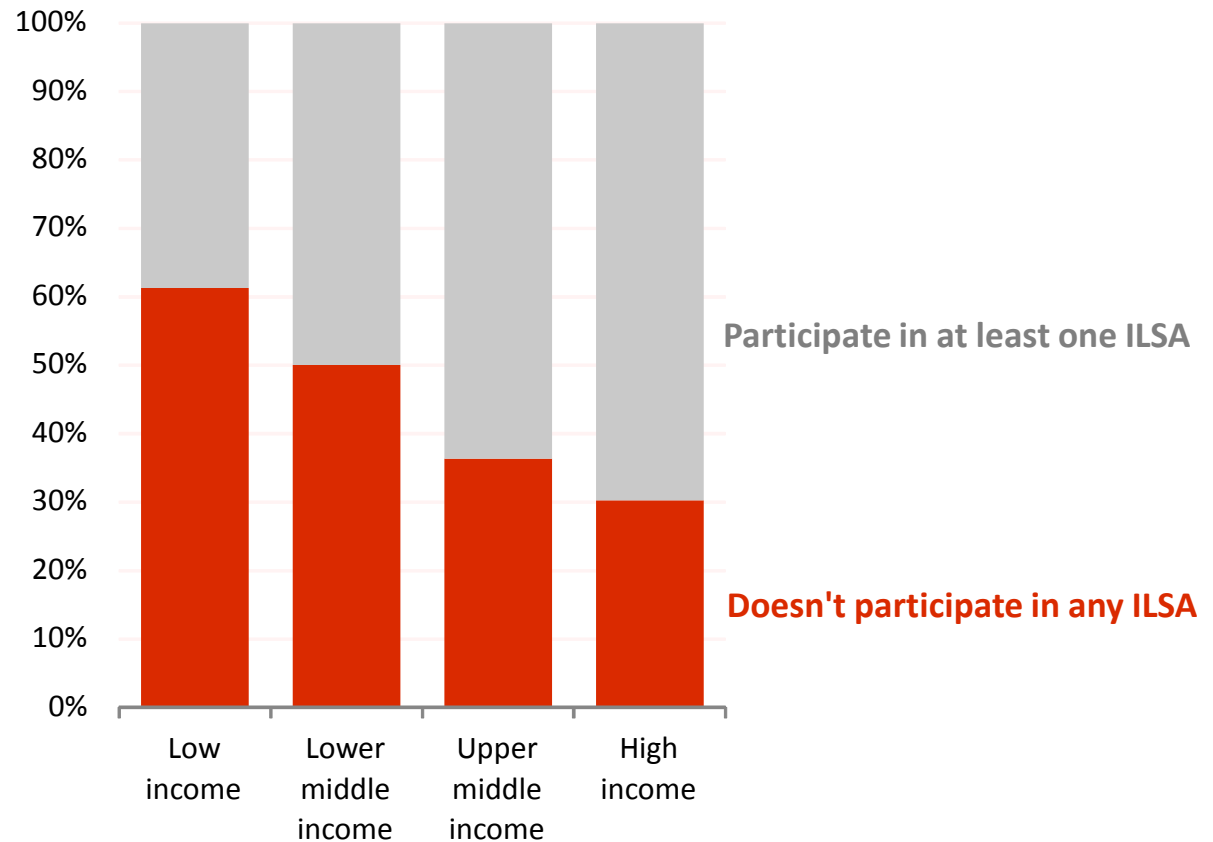
And…

… substantial portions of the population are not taken into account.

School-based tests ignore out-of-school children and adolescents:
- 61M at the primary level
- 60M at the lower secondary level of which 43M in middle and high income countries

Most vulnerable can be victim of statistical trade-offs:
- Exclusion rules (school-level and students level in TIMSS and PISA for instance) usually lead to little if any representation of children with disabilities

Record high number of forcibly displaced persons (66M), around 37% are between 5 and 17, representing more than 15M IDPs and 8M refugees …none in ILSAs

"People who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the Agenda include all **children, youth, persons with disabilities** […], people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, **refugees and internally displaced persons** and migrants."

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Development (UN, 2015)

Teaching practices, the missing link

- Few if any questions on pedagogical practices in teacher questionnaires
- Not necessarily aligned with best pedagogical practices
- Missed opportunity to reach out to the classroom level. ILSAs influence what happens in the classroom through their weight in the policy debate not throught improving knowledge on what happens in the classroom

Over-emphasis on ILSAs, what do we risk?

- Weakened validity (Goodhart's and Campbell's law)
  - ILSAs might lose their usefulness as higher stakes are put on them; increasing the stakes behind the use of ILSAs can weakened the validity and reliability of measures derived from these data sources
- Assessments fatigue:
  - Proliferation of ILSAs: in 2018-2019 almost 30% of countries could undergo at least two assessments in which staff from ministries of education ought to be involved. And there are talks about yet another regional assessment in Africa…
- Disrupting effect on the development of National Assessments:
  - Divert available resources and funding towards ILSAs, undermining possible support to NLAs
- Skewed funding mechanisms:
  - Rise of Results Based Funding (RBF)
  - Results Framework: comparable data points or complete datasets

NLAs as an exit strategy for ILSAs?

- ILSAs have contributed to a momentum which also led to more countries carrying out their own National Learning Assessments

- As progress are made towards global tools to reconcile large scale learning assessments on a common and agreed upon metric, NLAs become a more cost-efficient investment as they would become actionable both at the local and global level.

- Conditional to robust and transparent quality assurance mechanisms

- Would still need to figure out how to integrate the most vulnerable in the picture

Figure 2: Number of national learning assessments, by region and year
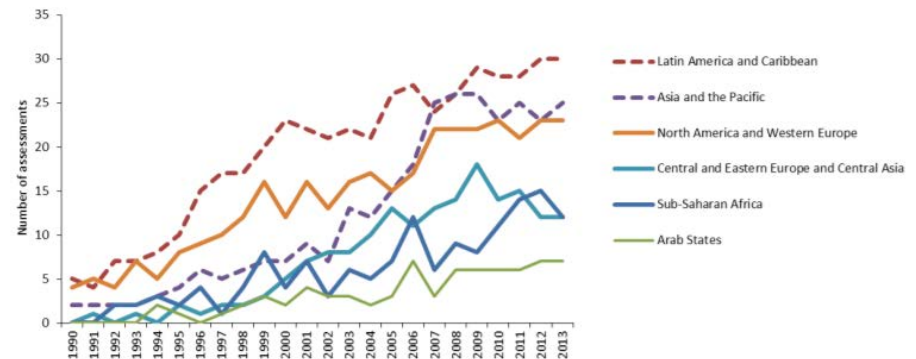
Source: UNESCO, 2015

Conclusions

- **ILSAs currently have the favor of the global education community as they talk to:**
  - the preference for the present
  - the risk-adverse side of us
  - the nerdy side of us
- **But they are a form of imperfect global public good and, as they are constantly being repurposed, their fitness-for-purpose changes as well**
  - In ther current form they don't enable to adequately tackle equity
  - In many forms they have now become a rethorical device more than anything else
  - They have also become what has been termed a « technology of expertise » that legitimates and articulates IOs mandate and action and empowers an influent epistemic community
- **Moving ahead**
  - Need to think about an exit strategy and to shift the balance of power towards countries and policy use
  - Reduce asymetry of information and transaction costs
  - Do we need a new model which would support both the development of national learning assessments and the capacity of countries to report at the global level but would put the emphasis on the former, not the latter?