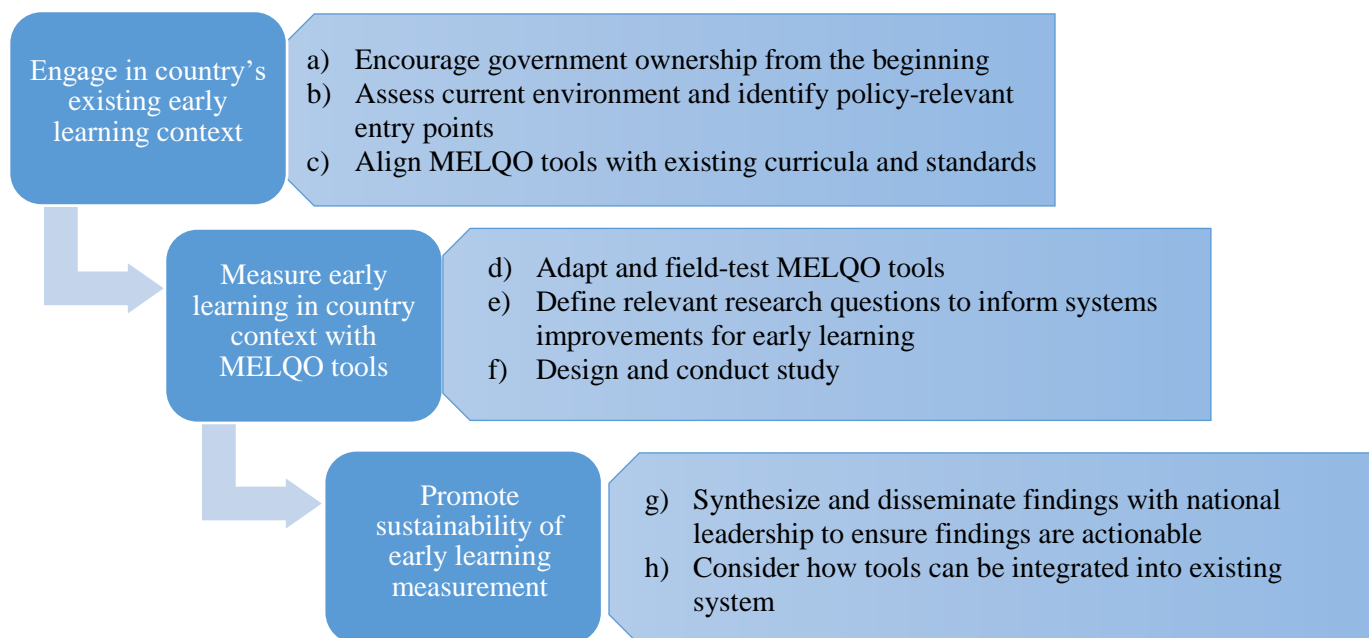# Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes
Country Consultation Process
Guidance Note

As the new global SDGs call on the need for quality early childhood experiences and countries begin to place greater emphasis on improved early learning, information on what and how children are learning will be more useful than ever for governments. In many developing countries, governments collect limited information on early learning outcomes and quality. The Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes (MELQO) tools and process are designed to help countries gather information to inform policy decisions. It is critical that governments are involved in the effort from the very beginning to help define the goals of the measurement, guide the process of adaptation to reflect a particular country context and provide policy-relevant information for that context, and decide on end uses of the data.

MELQO provides global tools based on internationally-recognized evidence on optimal learning and development for young children. The global tools were created to meet each country's needs by providing a backbone for reliable and feasible national measurement. The exact process for using, adapting, and integrating MELQO in a country will depend on the particular country's existing capacity and priorities and long-term goals for early learning measurement. There are different uses for MELQO in the short-, medium-, and long-term, and accordingly it is important to encourage national government's leadership and engagement with local stakeholders to ensure that plans for early learning measurement align with the national context. The figure below summarizes the recommended process on how to organize the country consultation process, with each step summarized on the following pages.

Engage in country's existing early learning context
a) Encourage government ownership from the beginning
b) Assess current environment and identify policy-relevant entry points
c) Align MELQO tools with existing curricula and standards

Measure early learning in country context with MELQO tools
d) Adapt and field-test MELQO tools
e) Define relevant research questions to inform systems improvements for early learning
f) Design and conduct study

Promote sustainability of early learning measurement
g) Synthesize and disseminate findings with national leadership to ensure findings are actionable
h) Consider how tools can be integrated into existing system

Recommendations: the country consultation process

a) Encourage government ownership from the beginning

To ensure national ownership and sustainability, launching MELQO in a country should be a government-driven process. Seeking endorsement from a minister, permanent secretary, commissioner, or other high-level leader can help bring necessary attention to the importance of measuring child development and learning, which in many countries might be relatively new concept. Governments may convene a wide group of stakeholders (policymakers, policy planners, academics, civil society, parents, teachers, etc.) to discuss the needs of the country's pre-primary system and consider how MELQO data can be used to address some of those needs. A multi-stakeholder and participatory process helps the government lead in building national buy-in to prioritize early learning and development within its education system, ensure alignment with national standards and curricula, guarantee that results will be relevant to the country and useful for decision-making.

In addition, while high-level government endorsement will be critical for initial momentum, having a strong team or focal point to carry work forward is as essential. An officially appointed government task force, working group, or focal point will ensure the government is looped in throughout the process. Throughout MELQO preparation and implementation, this group or person can help ensure national needs are considered and that government procedures and systems are appropriately navigated. A technical lead or leads will be invaluable for a wide scope of activities, including obtaining the necessary background data for sampling, convening the right group of stakeholders, leading decisions on tool adaptation, facilitating access to classrooms, teachers, and students, assisting in ethical and research clearances, and synthesizing and disseminating findings to the people who need them.

b) Assess current environment and identify policy-relevant entry points

The exact strategy for initiating the MELQO process in a country will depend on the specific pre-primary landscape and political environment. It is important to understand a government's existing institutional arrangements and capacity, as well as ongoing or planned policies and programs for the pre-primary sector. Due to the multi-sectoral nature of early childhood and the fact the modalities for service delivery, governance, and quality assurance vary widely by country, an institutional analysis can help identify the exact entry-point for a particular country. Analyzing a country's existing pre-primary policy and planning landscape and existing system for M&E and quality assurance (including presence of standards, curricula, and teacher training programs) can help identify specific strengths to be leveraged and gaps to be addressed by MELQO. SABER-ECD, SABER Student Assessment, and the Capacity Needs Analysis methodology within PISA for Development may serve as useful tools during this process. **Annex A** includes a set of guiding questions that can be used to conduct a rapid situational analysis to help identify policy-relevant entry points. In addition, **Annex B** and **Annex C** outline specific questions that can be posed to national-level and local-level stakeholders to understand national priorities for early learning and gauge opinions on the opportunities and challenges in measuring early learning in a country.

c) Align MELQO tools with existing curricula and standards

Specific expectations for how and what children should be learning and how and what ECCE professions should be teaching vary in each country. Mapping the constructs measured by MELQO's Child Development and Learning (CDL) tools and Quality tools with existing national learning standards, service delivery standards, and curricula can help international MELQO researchers and national stakeholders understand how MELQO responds to the government's specific expectations for early learning outcomes and environments.

d) Adapt and field-test MELQO tools

Recognizing the profound influence of culture and context on young children, the tools for measuring both children's development and learning and quality environments are designed to be further adapted and aligned with curricula, national goals for learning, and cultural contexts. The translation and back-translation, adaptation, and field-testing process should involve national research firm(s), national ECCE researchers, curriculum developers, teachers, and other stakeholders who are familiar with the intricacies of the particular country's pre-primary learners and classrooms.

While it could take less time for one organization to develop a tool, collect the data, and analyze the results, the process of multiple levels of feedback from multiple stakeholders at both the national and international level is key to cultivating buy-in and making sure that the tools are based on the best available research, as well as relevant to policy, system and data needs in the specific national context. Coordination and technical support roles at every level are critical to facilitate this iterative process, and need to be factored into MELQO planning processes.

e) Define relevant research questions to inform systems improvements for early learning

Working with national stakeholders from the outset to understand the specific policy priorities and gaps in the country's pre-primary system will also help outline key research questions. Discussing which key questions the government wants to answer can ensure an early learning measurement study can provide relevant information that will inform future decision-making. Asking the right questions can reveal important trends in the pre-primary sector and lead to policy and programmatic improvements in the long-term. Box 1 below provides examples how MELQO instruments can answer specific questions about early learning.

Box 1: Examples of research questions with MELQO
• What is the overall skill level of children entering primary school?
• What is the overall level of quality in pre-primary education?
• Do children's scores on the CDL at the start of primary school predict primary achievement (grade 1 attendance, EGRA/EGMA assessment scores, etc.)
• Which items in the CDL and Quality measures predict children's achievement in school in early primary grades?
• At what ages do children typically gain specific competencies?
• Do children who attend pre-primary have different CDL scores than children who do not?
• Does higher quality lead to more gains in learning in pre-primary?
• How do children do over time? Do MELQO CDL or Quality Scores predict success in later school and life?
• How do quality and learning outcomes differ by setting (public vs. private, traditional pre-primary classrooms vs. satellite, urban vs. rural) or by teacher background/experience?

f) Design and conduct study

The specific study methodology should be developed based on the specific questions a country wants to answer. The timeline, budget, and existing capacity will also dictate the particular study design. Box 2 below provides some questions to consider when designing a research study with MELQO,

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Box 2: Some considerations for MELQO study design

- What sampling approach is possible, based on availability of data?
- What study design is feasible from a cost and logistics standpoint?
- Is the aim to be nationally representative?
- Does the country prefer to focus on specific regions, programs, sub-groups (differences between urban vs. rural, private vs. public, specific language groups, specific programs, etc)?
- What are dynamics between local researchers and government?
- Do you want to focus only on kids enrolled in school? Or all school-aged children?
- Who can collect the information? Could teachers be the enumerators? Or district education officers? Or university students?
- What are the ethical considerations for assessing young children in the country?
- What clearance process is needed to access children and schools?

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g) Synthesize and disseminate findings with national leadership to ensure findings are actionable

A strong communication and dissemination strategy will ensure a wide scope of stakeholders can understand the status of quality and outcomes and use this information to improve pre-primary. In countries with MELQO experience, stakeholders have highlighted the risk to strictly conducting research without effectively synthesizing and communicating the findings to decision-makers. It will be essential to share the results of early learning research to identify areas in which specific actions, such as curriculum improvements, enhanced teacher training programs, or strengthened service delivery standards, are needed. Results should not only be communicated at the national level, but also at the community level so that schools understand how teachers and children are doing. As outlined in Box 3, targeted communication of MELQO study results should cater to specific audiences.

Box 3: Target groups for communication of MELQO results

- Policymakers and Ministry of Finance who are not familiar with early learning
- National education leaders:
  - Policy planners
  - Curriculum developers
  - Inspectorate
- CSOs implementing ECCE programs and advocacy programs
- Regional and district education leaders
- Education donor partners active in country
- Teachers
- Parents
- Media

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h) Consider how tools and findings can inform or be integrated into existing system.

In planning for future integration of early learning measurement, a country will need to consider how it prioritizes the various uses of MELQO, from providing data to inform planning, to serving as tools for service providers and those directly supporting service providers (inspectors, head teachers, local education leaders, etc.), to framing a general approach to quality early learning and teaching. The set of questions outlined in Annex B and Annex C can serve as a resource to identify which direction to take early learning measurement in a particular country.

The exact means for ensuring sustainability and integration of early learning measurement may vary significantly by country. In some countries, the MELQO approach may simply help stakeholders understand common definition and expectation of "good quality." In others, MELQO may serve as tools for periodic longitudinal population-based research or for local program-specific research studies. In other contexts, the tools could be used to develop complementary resources and tools to be integrated into an existing system. Box 4 provides some examples of complementary tools and materials for various stakeholder groups to monitor and/or measure early learning outcomes and quality.

Box 4: Possible types of complementary resources stemming from MELQO	
Framework for curriculum, teacher training programs	The specific construct items of MELQO can inform a country's improvements to existing curricula and/or materials for teacher preparation or ongoing professional development.
Feedback tool for teachers or supervisors	At a classroom level, teachers need resources to understand how their quality affects children's learning at development. A classroom instrument could be used as a monitoring tool for head teachers or local education coordinators/supervisors, or as a tool for teachers to use a self-evaluation.
For inspectors or quality assurers	Local officers responsible for quality assurance for a national system or particular program could use elements of the MELQO Quality tool to not only inspect, but also give advice to teachers and heads of schools to improve the conditions of the pre-primary environment and pedagogical practices.
Resources for parents	Parents may need support to become more aware of their children's development and understand what they can do to promote better development. Adapted versions of the MELQO parental report of development and learning could be a useful resource to help parents foster their children's development. In addition, resources (handbooks, training workshops, etc.) could be developed to sensitize parents on what a good quality pre-primary classroom looks like, and how they can assess this.

Annex A: Data collection protocol for ECCE Situational Analysis[1]

I. Overview of Pre-Primary Policy and Planning Landscape

1. *Provide an overview of pre-primary sector:*
   a. *Describe ministerial roles*
   b. *Describe relevant stakeholders*
   c. *Describe existing government and non-government pre-primary programs*

2. *What is the main Education/ECD/ECE Policy?*

3. *What is Gov't currently doing? And what is currently planned?*

II. Pre-primary program data

1. *What types of programs exist?*

2. *Gather data on pre-primary students and classrooms (also list if for other sub-groups: urban/rural, etc.)*

	Government	*Non-Government*	*Total*
a. Gross enrollment rate for pre-primary			
b. Net enrollment rate for pre-primary			
c. Number of children enrolled			
d. Average group size- number of children per classroom			

   e. *Does Number of children per classroom vary systematically across these subgroups of classrooms?*

   f. *What sub-groups exist for enrollment data (population characteristics, geographic, ownership). What data are available?*

   g. *Specific characteristics on non-government-funded preschools?*

   h. *Additional relevant information on pre-primary students and classrooms*

3. *Gather data on teachers (for gov't and non-government)*

	Government	*Non-Government*
a. What is average student-teacher ratio?		
b. What is average teacher pay? What is range?		
c. What is average teacher capacity?		

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[1] Questions adapted from SABER-ECD policy instrument

III. Early Learning Standards and Curriculum

1. *Are early learning standards established for early childhood care and education?*
   a. *Year of introduction:*
   b. *Agency/body which sets standards:*

2. *What is included in standards?*

Age Ranges	Exist	Don't exist	Topics covered by standards (literacy, numeracy, motor skills, cognitive development, socio-psychological development)
0-23 months			
24-59 months			
60-83 months			

3. *Do ECE curricula exist?*

Age Ranges	Year of introduction	Name of curricula	Topics covered by curriculum

   Description of curricula (Play based? Based on theory? Evidence-based?)

4. *Are ECE curricula endorsed by official gov't entity? Which one?*

5. *How does gov't ensure coherence and continuum of curricula into primary education? (training in child development, alignment of curricula, etc.)*

6. *Are indicators of young children's development collected?*

Types of indicators	Yes	No	(If Yes) level of government collecting these data
Physical development			
Cognitive development			
Language development			
Social development			
Approaches to learning			
Other (please specify)			
Other (please specify)			

7. *Are there any teachers' helper roles? In which systems?*

8. *What are requirements to become early childhood educator, pre-primary teacher, para-professional/community volunteer?*

9. *Is in-service training required for pre-primary teachers?*

10. Who provides training?

11. Is it mandatory?

12. What entity is responsible for regulation of pre-service training?

13. What are the areas of training for pre-primary teachers in pre-service and/or in-service training?

14. How many ECCE caregivers/educators have received In-service training?

IV. Service Delivery Standards

1. Is there a required number of opening hours per day (and per week) for ECE institutions? Please specify age range if necessary.
   a. Fill in table:

	Early Childhood Care and Education (ages 0-23 months)	*Early Childhood Care and Education (ages 24-59 months)*	*Pre-Primary School (ages 60-83 months))*	*All ECCE (ages 0-83 months)*
Number of hours				
Number of days per week				

   b. Do standards on opening hours apply to all ECE centers or only public?

2. Is there a policy stating appropriate child-to-teacher ratio?
   a. Fill in table

	Early Childhood Care and Education (ages 0-23 months)	*Early Childhood Care and Education (ages 24-59 months)*	*Pre-Primary School (ages 60-83 months))*	*All ECCE (ages 0-83 months)*
Child-to-teacher ratio				

   b. Does child-to-teacher policy apply to all ECE centers or only public?

3. Is there a required amount of physical space per child for ECE institutions?
   a. Do standards on physical space apply to all ECE or only public, private,

4. What are requirements for the following:
   a. Functional hygienic facilities?
   b. Construction?
      i. Roof
      ii. Floor
      iii. Structural soundness

iv. *Windows*
v. *Building materials*
vi. *Connection to electricity*
vii. *Access to potable water*
viii. *Access to hygienic facilities*
ix. *Other aspects*

5. ***Do mechanisms exist to enforce requirements?***

6. ***How is quality improvement rewarded?***

V. Inspection and Compliance with Standards

1. ***How often are ECE institutions inspected for compliance with these requirements?***

2. ***Are inspection visits announced or unannounced?***

3. ***Which entity/agency carries out inspections?***

4. ***Describe the role of supervisors/inspectors/trainers. How many pre-primary classrooms are each on average responsible for in rural, urban, and peri-urban settings?***

5. ***What areas are monitored during inspection visits?***

6. ***If data are available, please provide following characteristics (specify age group- indicate multiple sets of data (urban/rural/ age group, etc.) if available)***

	State	*Non-State*	*Total*
Number of centers being inspected			
Number of opening hours per week			
Number of centers that meet construction standards			
Number of centers meeting learning standards			

Annex B: Guiding questions for national and regional stakeholders

1. *__National priorities for early learning:__ **Which outcomes for ECD/early learning are most important in your country (for Gov't, communities)?***
    a. *What is the goal of pre-primary education in the country? What does Government/your specific agency want it to accomplish?*
    b. *Which child outcomes does the Government/your specific agency care about most?*
    c. *What information is most critical for the Government/your specific agency to track at a national level?*
    d. *How important is global comparability for the Government/your specific agency?*

2. *__Perceptions of good quality:__ **What do you think a "good" preprimary classroom looks like?***
    Ask interviewee to describe what, in their opinion, a "good" quality classroom looks like. Once they do this, ask them whether they think this description would be the same if they had responded as a teacher or a parent. How would parents describe "good" quality?
    a. *What are the children doing? (prompt about structure, interactions, play-based activities, etc.)*
    b. *What is the teacher doing?*
    c. *What does the room look like?*
    d. *How are the parents engaged?*

3. *__Need for monitoring and uses of MELQO:__ **Do you think monitoring early learning outcomes and quality is needed in your country? How do you think MELQO findings could be best used in your country?***
    Open discussion about benefits. If prompts are needed, gather opinions about the following uses:
    a. *Monitoring tool for school heads*
    b. *Classroom improvement as feedback tool for teachers*
    c. *For parents to understand their children's' development*
    d. *For District, Regional, and National Gov't to understand how the pre-primary sub-sector is performing*
    e. *For equity and to allow targeting of children most in need*

4. *__Appetite for MELQO:__ **How much do you think the following stakeholder groups would support or oppose large-scale measurement of early learning quality and outcomes?***
    Mention each of the stakeholder groups. Discuss why or why not they would support and their thoughts on specific risks and/or opportunities to national adoption of MELQO. Interviewees can speak about past experience with 3Rs and/or ideas about perceptions of MELQO.
    a. *Policymakers*
    b. *Teachers unions*
    c. *Educators*
    d. *Students*
    e. *Parents*
    f. *Media*
    g. *Think-tanks, NGOs, etc.*
    h. *Teacher training colleges*

5. *Linkages to primary school: How and what do you need to align to the primary education system?*
   a. *What are the expectations of what children should know and be able to do upon Standard 1 entry and how does this influence the content and expectations for the pre-primary education programs?*
   b. *What does it mean to be ready for school in your country?*

6. *Responsibilities for long-term integration: Which group do you think would be best fit to use the MELQO tools?*
   Mention each of the groups and gauge why/why not this group would be well-suited. Note more than one group could use the tools. What is the capacity of this group to implement large-scale data collection? What capacity do each of these groups already have and what are their weaknesses (i.e. identify specific capacity building needs)? To who is this group accountable?
   a. *NECTA (national exams council)*
   b. *Quality Assurance Unit/Inspectors*
   c. *Regional Education Officers*
   d. *District Education Officers*
   e. *Private Firm*
   f. *Head Teachers*
   g. *Teachers*
   h. *Specific programs (TZ 21, Fursa Kwa Watoto, NGO-led programs, etc.)*
   i. *Other groups?*

7. *Feasibility of data collection: What kind of measurement is feasible? How will tools be used and managed?*
   Discuss feasibility in terms of cost, logistics, and human resources.
   a. *Is a sampling approach best or does every child need to be tested?*
   b. *Who can collect the information? Could teachers be the enumerators or DEOs? Or University students?*
   c. *How/where can the information be aggregated? Would this feed into EMIS? NECTA?*
   d. *Would tools need to be designed to align with existing EMIS data collection efforts or inspection efforts? Or would a new system be created?*
   e. *What have been challenges with assessment/EMIS/inspection in the past? (for example- delays in administering, poor training/guidelines of test administrators/inspectors, weaknesses in assessment/inspection protocol design, errors in data processing, etc.)*

8. *Feasibility of documentation and dissemination: What would be the best way to technically document MELQO findings as well as disseminate findings to the public?*
   Ideas could include: technical report (publically or not publically available), online portal, school/district/region-specific reports, media briefings to discuss results, workshops/presentations for key stakeholders on results, etc.

9. *Overall challenges: What are the main risks or challenges to integrating MELQO?*
   If not already discussed, gather information on additional specific challenges for measuring pre-primary quality and outcomes. Can also link to risks/challenges of 3Rs:
   a. *What went well? What didn't go so well?*
   b. *How were results used by the Government, teachers, and communities?*

10. ***Considerations on study design:*** *We have limited amount of flexibility in what we can do in the upcoming national study. In your opinion, **what are the most important questions to answer? What type of data would be most valuable for your country?***
    a. *Difference between quality and child outcomes in:*
        - *Public vs private schools*
        - *Urban vs. rural*
        - *Girls vs. boys*
        - *High-performing vs. low-performing (PSLE pass rates)*
        - *Whether children in different regions are performing better than others*
    b. *How do Kiswahili speakers fare compared to children whose mother tongue is not Kiswahili?*
    c. *Relationship between child outcomes/quality*
    d. *Anything else?*

Annex C: Guiding questions for Community Focus Groups

These guiding questions are for proposed small-group discussions with parents and community members. Depending on how the discussion goes, some of the questions from the national stakeholder interviews could also be used.

1. ***Do you send your children to pre-primary school? Why or why not?***

2. ***Do you think preprimary school is important? Why or why not?***

3. ***In your opinion, what is the goal of pre-primary school?***

4. ***Describe what you think a "good" preprimary classroom looks like.***
   a. *What are the children doing? (prompt about structure, interactions, play-based activities, etc.)*
   b. *What is the teacher doing?*
   c. *What does the room look like?*
   d. *How are the parents engaged?*

5. ***Describe what you think a "bad" preprimary classroom looks like.***

6. ***Do you think most children in your country are ready for school when they start Standard I?***

7. ***How do you currently engage in your child's preprimary experience?*** *(meeting teachers/ school boards, parent committees, etc.)*

8. ***Are you interested in being more engaged in in your child's preprimary school experience? Why or why not?***

9. ***What kind of support do you, your child, or your family need to be more engaged?***

10. ***What is your opinion on the existing school inspection process?***

11. ***(If EGRA/EGMA have been conducted in country) Are you familiar with early primary grade assessment in your country? Did your older children take the assessment? If so:***
    a. *How was your child's experience and your experience?*
    b. *Did you engage with your child's school and/or teacher in preparation for the assessment or when the results were released?*
    c. *Are you in favor of the early primary grade assessment?*