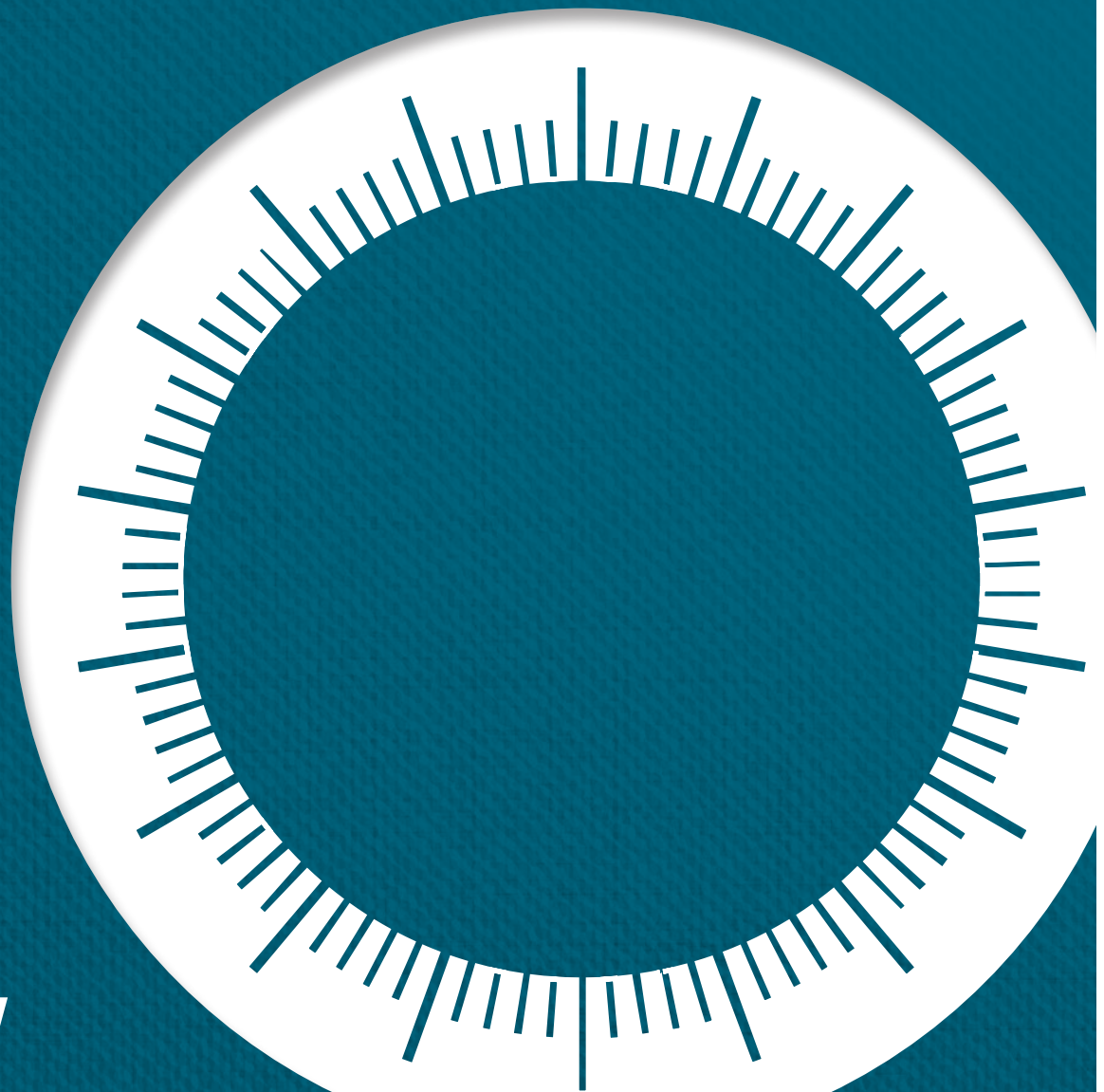




# LEARNING ASSESSMENT *and* INCLUSIVITY

Global challenges  
and recommendations



Summary

# About us

## **The Fostering Resilience Initiative:**

Our interdisciplinary team works to ensure positive outcomes for children and youth facing adversity.

By measuring and addressing risks and assets at the child-level, as well as within homes, schools, and communities, we promote a holistic approach to child and youth development. Our goal is to create environments that not only fulfill children's and youth's basic needs, but also promote nurturing relationships, socio-emotional skills, and civic engagement.

We work with non-governmental organizations, policy makers, communities and other stakeholders in seven countries: Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, India, Kenya, Tanzania, and Peru. Our initiative focuses on three key areas:

### **1. Learning and Development**

Improving learning and development of children and youth, both at school and outside of school.

### **2. Risk Measurement**

Developing, validating and piloting measurement tools to assess risks, assets, and outcomes across several countries.

### **3. Global Network for Resilience**

Building a global network of actors who foster systemic resilience.



Neil Boothby  
Director, Fostering Resilience Initiative

# Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, governments, international agencies and donors alike have increasingly embraced national, regional and global learning assessment systems (Benavot & Tanner, 2008; Kamens & McNeely, 2009) to ensure quality education for all.

Photo by Neil Boothby



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The ability of learning assessments to ensure quality education for all depends on monitoring all children, especially the most vulnerable.

”

Findings from learning assessments are used to evaluate progress, allocate resources and compare achievement levels across and within countries. Although learning assessments have significantly improved education policies and performance, they also have serious limitations, namely the exclusion of children and youth facing adversities.

*Imagine a setting...* where refugee children cannot enroll in public school due to overcrowding, legal status, or lack of documentation. This is the reality for many refugee children who may end up studying in non-formal schools or leave school altogether.

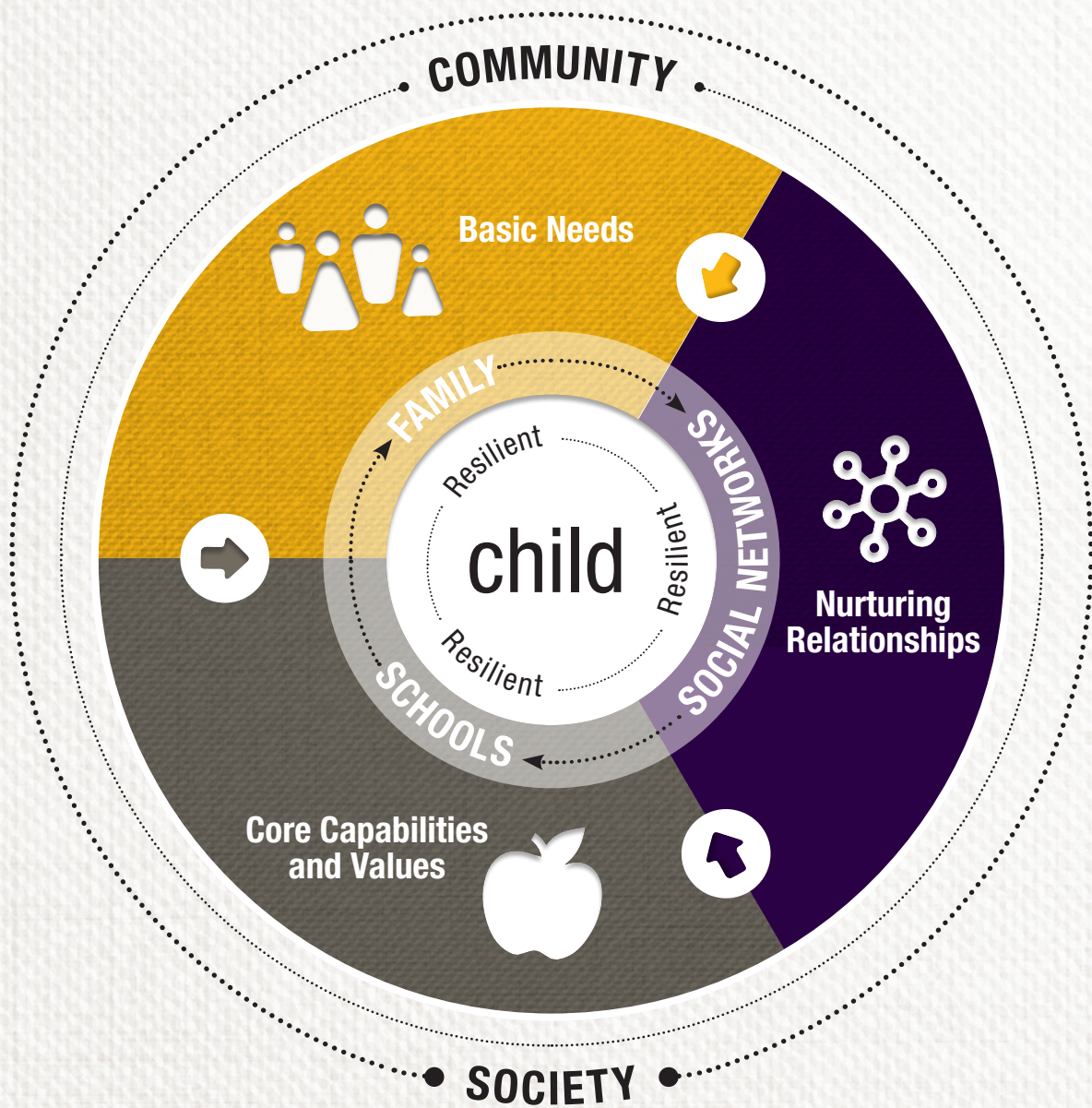
If national learning assessments are done through formal schools, refugee children are unlikely to be assessed. Their learning and development will not be monitored as closely as children who are included.

Even where refugee children may be superficially included, learning assessments may not adequately measure information relevant to their language, cultural and psychosocial needs. These limitations make it harder to hold governments accountable for refugee children's future.

*Learning Assessments and Inclusivity* draws attention to those children and youth who are routinely excluded from learning assessments. Refugees are one such group. Others include conflict-affected, displaced and stateless children as well as girls, children living in poverty and children living with disabilities. This paper highlights some of the inadequacies of existing learning assessments, and makes recommendations to ensure learning assessments better serve children facing adversity. It focuses on low- and middle-income countries where the scale of the problem is most apparent.

# Building blocks **for** children's resilience

**A holistic approach**—one that not only addresses children's basic needs, but also promotes nurturing relationships, socio-emotional skills and civic engagement—is the foundation to fostering resilience in children facing adversity.



# Learning assessments *and* inclusivity at-a-glance



What gets measured gets done!

Learning assessments *must address* the unique vulnerabilities of children in adversity by collecting data not only from schools, but also from the home, community, and beyond.



**Household wealth** is the most significant determinant of school attendance. **Children living in poverty cannot attend school because they must work.**



Photo by Wilfred Wachira



## Who's

## excluded?

Conflict-affected, displaced and stateless children and youth, girls, children living in poverty, children with disabilities, undocumented immigrants, refugees, urban slums, rural areas, racial and ethnic minorities, children in residential institutions and non-formal education programs.



**58 million** children of primary school age are out-of-school worldwide (UNESCO 2015).



**1/2** of all primary school-children who are out-of-school live in conflict-affected countries.



UNHCR estimates there are at least **3 million** stateless children globally (Pizzi, 2015).



Photo by Beth Rubenstein

The educational gender gap is highest in **West and Central Africa** where **31.2%** of primary school age **girls are out-of-school.**

# What are learning assessments and why do they matter?

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## Learning Assessment System

**“An exercise designed to describe the level of achievements, not of individual students, but of a whole education system, or a clearly defined part of it (e.g. fourth grade pupils or 11-year olds).”**

– Kellaghan & Greaney, 2001

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Learning assessments collect data from students, teachers, school administrators, parents, or households to make evidence-based decisions about educational processes. Sometimes, the data is used in a formative way, such as to help teachers improve their teaching in the classroom (Ravela, 2005). Other times, data is used in a summative way, such as for documenting reading competencies nationally.

### Why does it matter?

Learning assessments lead to reforms that can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of education. They are also economical, because they measure the impact of different activities, allowing policy makers to select the option with the greatest impact for the lowest cost.

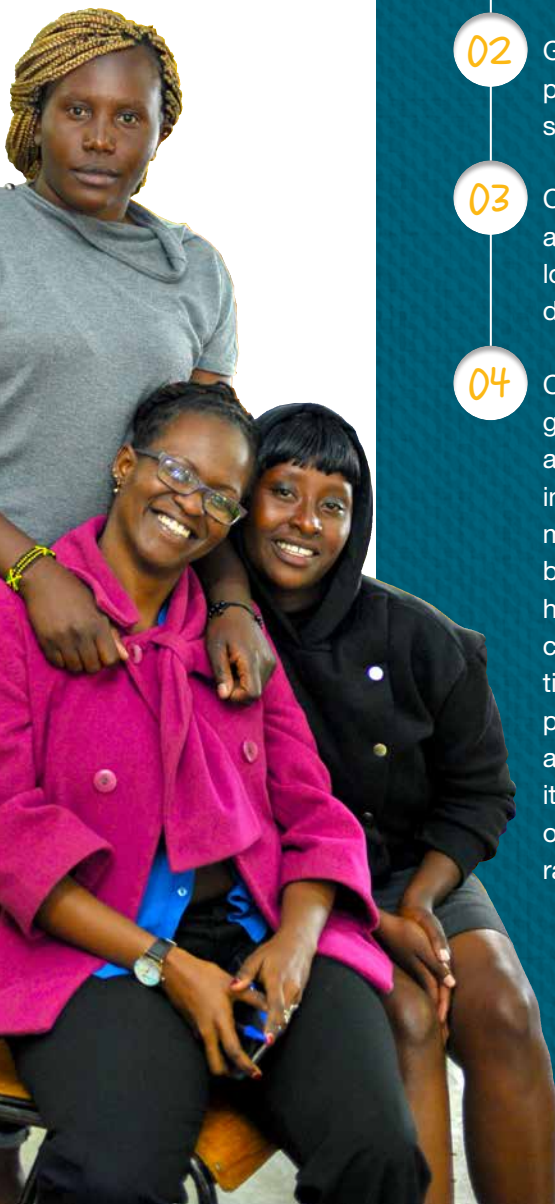
### “What gets measured gets done”

The content of learning assessments has far-reaching implications for educational priorities. Yet most focus only on specific subjects, such as literacy and numeracy. Social and emotional skills are rarely assessed, even though there is strong evidence linking them to adult outcomes in education, employment, and health (D. E. Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

While there is no single profile for the ideal learning assessment, population coverage is fundamental, keeping in mind that “[assessment] goes to the heart of what matters in education: not just enrollment and completion rates, but the ultimate goal of student learning” (World Bank, 2010).

Photo by Wilfred Wachira

# 8 key challenges

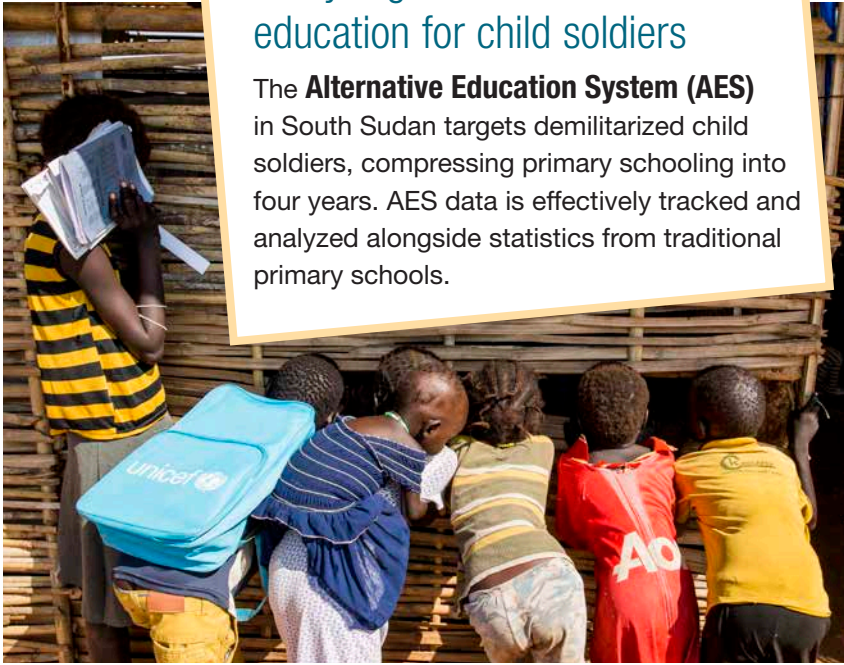
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- 01 Children who are not enrolled in schools or who attend informal schools (i.e. children affected by conflict, displacement, statelessness) are outside the government's radar and rarely included in learning assessments, leading to inappropriately targeted resources.
  - 02 Gender discrimination and poverty are key factors in school enrollment rates.
  - 03 Children who live in rural areas or in urban slums have low enrollment and high dropout rates.
  - 04 Children from marginalized groups, who are in school and assessed, overwhelmingly score lower than their more privileged counterparts because of factors related to household wealth, domestic conflict, the lack of educational resources and social protection systems, limited accommodations for disabilities, language, colonial and/or political bias in curricula, racism, and bullying.
  - 05 Most learning assessments are done with students in grades 4-6, compared with grades 1-3 and grades 7-9.
  - 06 Children's homes and communities exert the most influence on learning outcomes, including factors such as household wealth, health and nutrition, family dynamics, and distribution of power.
  - 07 Children internalize community norms (caste, gender) and adjust their intellectual performance according to the associated social expectations (Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016; Steele & Aronson, 1995).
  - 08 Curricula in conflict settings rarely prioritize socio-emotional competencies, such as coping skills and conflict resolution that help children process their experiences and prepare them for responsible citizenship (Pigozzi et al., 2014).

# Learning assessments that better serve children facing adversity

## Lessons from the field...

### Analyzing alternative education for child soldiers

The **Alternative Education System (AES)** in South Sudan targets demilitarized child soldiers, compressing primary schooling into four years. AES data is effectively tracked and analyzed alongside statistics from traditional primary schools.



United Nations Photo



Photo by Thomas Galvez

### Assessing learning barriers in the home

A study of fourth-graders in **rural China** found that better nutrition and health care significantly improved students' test scores (Luo et al., 2012).



Photo by khym54

### Mapping Kibera to improve education

The **Map Kibera Project in Kenya** engages regular citizens to gather local information about additional schools in the communities where they live with simple, open-source technology platforms and minimal training.



Photo by Samuel Mukundi



## Measuring social and emotional learning outside the school

Watching **Sesame Street** has been consistently linked to reduced stereotyping and improved cooperation in settings as varied as India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Tanzania and South Africa (Mares & Pan, 2013). Since 2016, Sesame Street has been testing content targeted at refugees in/ from Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria to help children in these settings to navigate the complex social and emotional effects of trauma and displacement.



U.S. Air Force photo by Louis Briscese/Released



### Testing customized curricula

**Schools in Colombia** are encouraged to adapt their own curricula and teaching practices to address the country's long and unique history of violence and armed insurgency and transition to a stable post-conflict state. Tests in fifth and ninth grade assess children's progress towards this goal (Patti & Espinosa, 2007).

Photo by Kymberly Janisch

## Measuring out of school influences

**Uruguay** administers a national assessment census involving all grade 6 students and their parents. Based on the findings, Uruguay has invested extra resources for schools in disadvantaged contexts, where the rate of improvement has far outpaced the rate in the most favorable contexts (Ravela, 2005).



Photo by Christian Ostrosky



# The way forward

Photo by Beth Rubenstein

**Education is a basic human right** (UN General Assembly, 1948), fundamental to reducing poverty and improving quality of life. Yet when tens of millions of children are left out of our learning assessment systems, governments and multilateral agencies cannot be held accountable for securing this right, and resources cannot be targeted appropriately.

Our learning assessments must recognize and measure the many different layers of vulnerability experienced by children and youth in adversity at home, at school, and in the community.

Learning assessments that embrace a holistic, ecological approach ultimately enable children to develop the skills they need to grow out of poverty.

“

Education without assessment is like “buying limousines for transport, without drawing any maps to show us which roads might lead us out of the morass.

(Stevenson & Stigler, 1992)

”

They also help ensure these skills are passed on to future generations, contributing to national development and conflict resolution for decades to come.

Although an ecological learning assessment may seem ambitious, the tools needed to generate inclusive data and improve learning outcomes already exist. The key is to collaborate with multiple sectors and coordinate across diverse data sources. The international community must bring these tools together to improve learning assessment and to ensure quality education for all.

## How to improve learning assessments and ensure quality education for all

**Map** and measure learning environments outside the traditional classroom.

**Pool** data from multiple sources, collaborate with different stakeholders, share data, and agree to common measurement standards.

**Strengthen** the collection and interpretation of school data to better understand vulnerable groups, such as girls or displaced populations.

**Adjust** language, curricula, and examinations to match different student experiences.

**Collect** data on students’ household and community background to understand out-of-school factors affecting achievement.

**Assess** and enhance social and emotional learning (not just academic) to help children process their trauma and become responsible citizens.



Photo by Beth Rubenstein

Leave no one behind.



fostering  
**RESILIENCE**  
initiative

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