



Conférence des ministres de l'Éducation des
États et gouvernements de la Francophonie

ANALYSIS OF ASSESSMENT MECHANISMS AND THEIR USE IN THE GOVERNANCE OF TWELVE CONFEMEN MEMBER COUNTRIES' EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

SUMMARY

CONFEMEN reflects on the role, relevance, articulation and future of the various assessment mechanisms in use in Francophone sub-Saharan Africa. The issue is to determine to what extent these mechanisms produce adequate, regular and quality information and if the results thus achieved and analyzed allow ensuring a sufficient link with the steering of educational systems faced with serious problems of equity and quality, as well as the development of new policies. The quality and relevance of assessment information have several impacts on the development of education systems overall. PASEC wishes to highlight the stakes and opportunities of a better production and use of assessments to develop more effective measures for quality and equity improvement.

Following this, PASEC has launched a study in twelve CONFEMEN countries (Benin, Burkina, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Chad and Togo) to analyze and compare the various assessment mechanisms, including PASEC national mechanisms, and their use in the steering of educational systems.

The study was conducted in two phases:

- ✓ As a first step, a remote survey was carried out among 12 countries, the results of which gave rise to an interim report (part 2.1) and a technical exchange meeting held in Abidjan in January 2014 with the 12 countries.
- ✓ Then, a more comprehensive survey was conducted in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, and resulted in a summary of the key issues (part 1), within the continuity of the works of the first phase, as well as three other countries (part 2.2).

INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS - An emerging and institutionally scattered assessment function

All countries can observe the emergence of a new group of converging injunctions from partners, contributing to the growing importance of assessments in the educational landscape: the GPE's new framework of results, the various wishes expressed for the direction of sector-based plans towards a results-based management, the more frequent funding of assessment tests operations and the capacity building of bodies responsible for them, the required emphasis on the improvement of learning outcomes in sectoral planning, etc.

Following these surveys, assessment appears as a rather emerging function within the 12 surveyed ministries, regardless of the choices made by ministerial authorities to establish their assessment mechanisms. Its role as an information provider for the steering of the overall education system, the planning and guidance of policies, is still little or not identified, and therefore poorly organized.

However, some countries have established sustainable bodies with regular work habits. Indeed, in the three countries surveyed more closely, the institutional landscape evolves in two ways, with, on the one hand, the establishment of new bodies and, on the other, an effort to fight against functional scattering and promote joint assessment activities in some steering bodies. However, even in this case, some institutional uncertainty remains and none of these bodies is clearly steering and coordinating all assessment operations conducted in the educational system.

Overall, the decision-making centres are still scattered and the flow of results poorly handled. During the Abidjan workshop, many participants rightly pointed out that these institutional weaknesses do not facilitate access by assessment teams to recurrent budget resources.

Given these observations, the encountered teams urged for common efforts towards the establishment of a single body, or the a priori attractive proposal to entrust the standardized steering of an assessment mechanism to a body above the "administrative fray". However, attempts to set up national assessment mechanisms at the beginning of the Decade in Burkina Faso and Senegal¹ did not generate the expected results.

Each country's educational authorities need to assess, within the context of their own "machinery", history and administrative characteristics, which mechanism is more likely to work and ensure a real dynamic for combining the efforts by reviewing issues relating to:

- ✓ institutional positioning, so that teams are able to carry out their mandate and gain necessary cooperation from the departments directly responsible for assessments;
- ✓ precise definition of mandates, to avoid the duplications or at least overlaps;
- ✓ precise operational definition and execution of mandates; the identification of decision-making services and persons responsible for the follow-up of decisions and the implementation of communication as well as information dissemination routines are two key prerequisites for a proper functioning of a mechanism;
- ✓ body dimensioning and necessary provision with human and financial resources.

¹ In partnership with OIF. These NAMs aim specifically at promoting common assessment efforts.

Resources - Inadequate endowment for a sustainable establishment of the assessment function

The review of financial, material and human resources available to PASEC teams and other staff in charge of assessments at national level shows the fragile position of the assessment function in education ministries' missions. The permanence of this function and its inclusion in central and recurring administrative tasks are not secured, considering resources available to it. Uncertainties regarding financial and human resources may also reflect hesitations on teams' missions.

In some countries, the existence of stable bodies allows establishing regular access to material and financial resources, so that such issue is no longer the primary obstacle to assessment activities. Such situations are however rare.

It is clear that services in charge of assessment, are accommodated by CONFEMEN member countries' education ministries, which are faced with budgetary resources scarcity. However, these services can build on the increased importance given by technical and financial partners to results-based management in general and particularly in the education sector. In some cases, they can also rely on the commitment of their minister, **to present to financial affairs directorates well-crafted and well-founded files for the allocation of budget in line with their mandates.**

The stabilisation of teams also contributes to medium term sustainability of assessment mechanisms.

It covers several aspects:

- ✓ Recruitments should be done based on specific professional criteria, and recruitment services must have sufficient discretion to build teams composed of balanced profiles.
- ✓ A professional development of employees must be scheduled in the medium term, for teams to be able to adjust to the increasing complexity of statistical techniques used. Obviously, this capacity building has a primary technical objective: interpreting and analysing assessment results, by progressively reducing the dependence on external expertise. This analysis proficiency should gradually extend to the majority if not all the teams, to be able to meet (i) the growing expectations in terms of assessment and results-based management, (ii) user departments' requests, which are sometimes poorly equipped, particularly to make use of standardized assessment results and (iii) policies, by playing an advisory and proactive role.

TASK- Improving information and dissemination, difficulty to achieve results with operational proposal

A direct consequence of the level of resources dedicated to assessment is the generally intermittent frequency of the work carried out by PASEC teams or national assessment staff, the pace of studies is not yet recurrent and iterative². Besides, most of the assessments conducted outside PASEC focus on the same type of activities, with a large focus on French and mathematics. Studies falling outside this scope (i.e. during school time) are rare

² There are two countries that constitute an exception to this general model: Burkina Faso and Senegal

A second major finding relates to the dissemination of the work. It is too often restricted to central and administrative spheres, and barely reach other partners as well as most decentralized levels of education systems, which are yet the first actors in the improvement of school functioning and students' learning.

Finally, the two phases of the survey show that assessment missions rarely report findings sufficiently salient or likely to be translated into operational measures for learning improvement, for them to be used beyond simple information sharing.

It is indeed difficult to identify with certainty a policy measure directly derived from an assessment analysis, measures referred to by teams responding more often to a general desire to improve learning quality. This situation is denounced by stakeholders, with regrets systematically expressed regarding recommendations and follow-up of studies, even if a certain form of dissemination is performed. This issue is not specific to standardized assessments but applies to all study activities, examination results experience the same underutilization.

These three findings raise questions about the precise objectives of the various assessment exercises and their complementarity, with a view to identify best levers for an improved functioning of education systems and students' learning. On this point, this survey noted that no country has a national assessment policy.

Developing a national assessment policy document could help :

- ✓ **explicitly link the objectives of educational policies and their recent developments** (e.g. the introduction of competency-based approach in the curriculum reform, orientation observed in many CONFEMEN member countries) **with that of the different assessments** in order to give a common direction to the various stakeholders.
- ✓ Without seeking to replace a technical statistical analysis manual, **indicate (i) what kind of results are expected** from the different exercises to answer what kind of questions, **ii) how the results can be interpreted**, but also what information they cannot provide and **(iii) how results can be read and cross analyzed**, so that the various assessments meet and enrich each other, what is still not the case.
- ✓ Provide indications enabling to **link assessment results with what happens in classrooms**. This is a fundamental point, but constitutes a major challenge for all countries; how to take assessment results at most decentralized levels of the system (inspectors, educational advisors, school principals, teachers, school management committees) to improve classroom practices, and, in fine, students' results?
- ✓ **attribute to policy and strategic objectives** an operational character, describing precisely human and budgetary resources dedicated to the implementation of the national policy.