

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOLCHILDREN'S LITERACY & NUMERACY AND SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) SKILLS IN DUK COUNTY, JONGLEI STATE, SOUTH SUDAN

TITLE

Terms of Reference for the Assessment of Schoolchildren's Literacy & Numeracy and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) Skills in Duk County, Jonglei State, South Sudan.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Christian Mission for Development (CMD) is implementing the South Sudan Multi-Year Resilience Programme (SS MYRP) for Phase 2 in Duk County, Jonglei State. This Project is supported with generous seed funding by **Education Cannot Wait (ECW)** and **Global Partnership for Education (GPE)**; and managed in South Sudan by the SS MYRP Consortium made up of **Save the Children International (SCI)**, **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** and **Finn Church (FCA)**. **SCI** is the lead agency, and the Consortium oversees implementation of the MYRP Project by INGOs and NNGOs across South Sudan. The Project seeks to support out-of-school children (OOSC) to go back to school again and stay on to complete their education.

Education Cannot Wait (ECW) is the first global multilateral fund dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted crises. It was launched by international humanitarian and development aid actors, along with public and private donors, to address the urgent education needs of 75 million children and youth in conflict and crisis settings. ECW's investments are designed to usher in a more collaborative approach among actors, ensuring relief and development stakeholders join forces to achieve quality education outcomes. Additional information is available at www.EducationCannotWait.org

The overall objective of the MYRP Phase 2 is to reach at least 135,000 crisis-affected children and youth – including refugees, returnees, and host-community children – with holistic education supports that improve access to school, ensure quality learning, enhance inclusivity for girls and children with disabilities, and build resilience to future shocks.



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JUSTIFICATION

Assessments of student learning in the primary grades, such as EGRA and EGMA, offer an opportunity to determine whether children are developing the foundational skills upon which all other literacy and mathematical skills build, and, if not, where efforts might be best directed. This is vital information for countries like South Sudan that are working to improve the quality of education in their schools. Indeed, further evidence of growing international concern for learning outcomes, as opposed to attendance or completion rates, is the fact that EGRA and EGMA have been adapted and used around the world, including EGRA implementations in more than 45 countries.

Teaching young children to read is the cornerstone of improving educational outcomes and has far-reaching implications. Unless they learn to read at an early age, children cannot absorb more advanced skills and content that rely on reading. Children who do not learn to read in the early grades risk falling further and further behind in later ones, as they cannot absorb printed information, follow written instructions, or communicate well in writing.

These challenges, rooted in poor reading skills, lead to disappointing results and often early dropout from the education system. In the aggregate, reading and learning achievement are central to economic productivity and growth. Recent research reveals that it is *learning* rather than *years of schooling* that contributes to a country's economic growth: a 10 percent increase in the share of students reaching basic literacy translates into an annual growth rate that is 0.3 percentage points higher than it would otherwise be for that country (Hanushek & Woessman, 2009).

Research examining the relationship between social and emotional competencies and student outcomes has found that the better developed student social and emotional competencies are, the better students do in school and life. This holds for students from different economic backgrounds, races/ethnicities, and genders. However, while social and emotional competencies are universally relevant and needed, they are not always identical for all people in all places. Accordingly, it is important to reach clarity on what social and emotional competencies students should know and be able to demonstrate at different ages and in different contexts such as the one of Duk County, Jonglei State, South Sudan.

The Christian Mission for Development (CMD) would like, therefore, to enlist the services of literacy & numeracy and SEL specialist (s) to carry out an assessment of schoolchildren's basic literacy & numeracy and social & emotional learning (SEL) skills in Duk County, Jonglei State, South Sudan.





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INTRODUCTION

To shift the focus of education improvement from access to achievement, it is critical to determine how serious and widespread low learning levels are among a country's students. As a first step, measuring how well students read can make policy makers, educators, and donors more aware of how low reading levels are and what the implications are for future learning. Such awareness can lay the foundation for discussions of how to best address the problem.

Reading literacy is understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society (OECD, 2014, p. 61). The early grade reading assessment (EGRA) is one tool used to measure students' progress toward learning to read. It is a test that is administered orally, one student at a time. In about 15 minutes, it examines a student's ability to perform fundamental prereading and reading skills. Its sisterly tool, the Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA), serves a similar purpose as a one-on-one oral assessment designed to measure a student's foundation skills in numeracy and mathematics in the early grades. The instrument was first developed by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International through funding provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (RTI International, 2014c).

As the field of SEL is working to integrate evidence-based SEL programming more systematically into teaching and learning, progress in SEL assessment is accelerating to support these efforts. CMD and the MYRP Consortium sees this formative assessment as an opportunity to better integrate SEL assessment into the policy and practice context so that it supports teaching and learning of SEL in 25 target schools supported by Education Cannot Wait (ECW) through the Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP).

Research shows that students can develop the social and emotional skills and attitudes they need to effectively navigate their multicultural world and contribute actively and meaningfully to their schools, families, careers, and communities. SEL can promote social and emotional competence and foster cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills, and prevent/reduce problem behaviors. This includes the long-term development of academic achievement, problem-solving skills, ethical decision-making, health-promoting behaviors, prosocial attitudes about self, others, and work, and positive contributions to community and society (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017).



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The Christian Mission for Development (CMD) and the MYRP Consortium seek to deploy these comprehensive and effective assessment tools (EGRA & EGMA and SEL) in establishing systems to measure student learning status and teaching effectiveness in 25 target schools of Duk County, Jonglei State. The data that will be collected will assist local educational authorities (LEAs) at the state and county levels in their efforts to improve the reading and math skills of students, which are the foundational skills needed to help prepare individuals to be active, productive members of society and the workforce.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this assessment is two-fold: to obtain more relevant and specific data on student outcomes and measure their competency levels in core literacy and numeracy areas; and to develop a SEL representation that illustrates the conditions in which SEL assessment stands to yield the greatest benefit to teaching and learning practices and student outcomes for out-of-schoolchildren (OOSC) currently enrolled in 25 target schools under the Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) which is funded by Education Cannot Wait (ECW). The specific objectives are as follows:

1. Help local education authorities in Duk County to begin the process of measuring, in a systematic way, how well children in the early grades of primary school are acquiring reading & mathematical skills and thereby spur more effective efforts to improve performance in these core learning skills in 25 target schools in Duk County.
2. Identify and develop strategies for improving reading and mathematics in primary schools through providing support and training to teachers in 25 schools of Duk County.
3. Provide data on student performance to inform state & national governments and other stakeholders about system needs for improving instruction in basic literacy & numeracy.
4. Describe the state of Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) for schoolchildren of Duk County and measure the SEL competencies students should know and be able to demonstrate at different ages.
5. Develop clear standards and guidance on social and emotional competencies in ways that tangibly benefit SEL teaching & learning for out-of-schoolchildren (OOSC) currently enrolled in 25 schools in Duk County.
6. Inform how best professional learning can be provided to support educators' understanding of SEL frameworks, standards, instruction, and assessment.





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EXPECTED RESULTS

The expected outcome of the assessment (in terms of literacy & numeracy) is a definitive statement about the levels of student achievement in basic literacy and numeracy skills and identification of which skills need reinforcement; and use of that information to directly inform teaching and learning and support 280 teachers to improve their practice and monitor student progress towards achieving literacy & numeracy goals and standards in 25 target schools of MYRP in Duk County, Jonglei State. In terms of Social & Emotional Learning (SEL), the expected outcome is a clear understanding of how SEL competencies manifest in schoolchildren in Duk County and a roadmap of how best SEL can be taught and all students can benefit from SEL; and a set of standards or guidelines describing the social and emotional competencies students should know and be able to demonstrate at different grades for the purposes of training educators to promote SEL instruction and program at 25 target schools in Duk County.

SCOPE

The scope of this assessment must represent basic literacy and numeracy skills that the South Sudan's school curriculum has determined should be acquired in early grades of primary education. It should also reflect those literacy and numeracy skills that are most predictive of future performance, according to available research and scientific advice and represent a progression of skills that lead toward proficiency in reading mathematics as well as those skills and tasks that can be improved through instruction.

This is also an assessment of schoolchildren's SEL strengths and needs which can be used to make decisions about what to teach to whom at what point. Its scope should define the relationship between SEL assessment and teaching and learning practices and guide choice of SEL instruction for schoolchildren in Duk County, Jonglei State. It is, therefore, formative (initially exploring how to assess and address SEL competencies among the target group; consequential (there should be evidence that the SEL competencies matter); teachable (there should be evidence that the competencies can be taught); and measurable (it should be possible to gather data that reflects a student's level of mastery of the competence).

STUDY DESIGN & DATA ANALYSIS

It is necessary to adapt EGRA & EGMA tools before each administration to ensure that they reflect the needs of the local context in Duk County of Jonglei State, South Sudan. The adaptation process should generally include deciding the range of subtests to be piloted and implemented; making sure that the items in EGRA and EGMA are aligned with South Sudan's curriculum for the grades being assessed; and making sure the language used in the instruments is appropriate to the context (RTI International, 2014c).



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In addition to instrument adaptation, any potential literacy and numeracy specialist (s) need to construct the sampling frame to fit the specific purpose, populations of interest, local conditions (such as distribution of students across schools and regions), and the desired level of confidence in estimates for a particular study. Sample sizes are likely to be constrained by limited funding time. However, the specialist (s) must root for statistical significance (accurate or narrow confidence intervals) ensured by adequate sample size; and careful randomization that assures representativeness. Because EGMA is designed for the early grades, which is when children are just beginning to learn how to read, the oral administration is considered to be important to avoid confounding a child's ability to do mathematics with a child's ability to read or write (RTI International, 2014c).

if SEL competencies of interest involve attitudes, beliefs, or growth mindsets, respondents could be students reporting on their own SEL competencies. If the SEL competencies are behaviors, respondents should be individuals who know the students well enough to assess their SEL competencies. If the SEL competencies are knowledge or mental processes, responses should involve students demonstrating those SEL competencies through a direct assessment or performance task. In other words, different assessment formats have strengths and limitations that should be balanced with factors such as time, cost, in-depth assessment of narrow areas, and less in-depth assessment of broad areas. The assessment may require compromises, so it is helpful for the SEL Specialist (s) to think about these early in the process.

STUDY AREA & POPULATION

This assessment will cover about 5 schools in Padiet, Duk County of Jonglei State, South Sudan. The assessment should be designed for out-of-schoolchildren (OOSC) currently enrolled in 5 schools in Padiet and 10 schools in Poktap and should develop a representative sample for valid interpretation of scores.

Considerations about the target population should include school type (primary); genders, ages or grades of students; and student demographics, particularly in regard to IDPs, Refugees & Hosts, and students with disabilities. The Literacy & Numeracy and SEL Specialist (s) should identify the intended population for the assessment and clearly articulate if there are any inclusion or exclusion criteria.



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LITERATURE REVIEW

The Literacy & Numeracy and SEL Specialist (s) should outline the areas of literature that he/she wishes to review for this assessment. He/she should review existing literature on assessment approaches in English and other languages and draw lessons from these assessment approaches and tools and the available research evidence to develop a flexible protocol that could be adapted to the requirements of rural South Sudan. He/she should review existing literature on the empirical evidence on the correlation of SEL with learner achievement and wellbeing. Of a particular note will be the literature about South Sudan in this regard.

STUDY TIMEFRAME & TEAM RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The timeframe for this study is 15 days. This timespan will cater for development of study tools, data collection and analysis and report write-up. In terms of team resource management, during the study, the consultant must be very tactical to avoid time wastage as this will increase the time spent in the field collecting data.

Table No. 1: Suggested Work Plan

Activity	Duration	Start Date	Outputs
Contract signing	-	-	Signed contract
Desk review & inception report	2 days	-	Inception report with tools
Data collection & stakeholder consultations	8 days	-	Collected data
Analysis & reporting	3 days	-	Draft report
Finalization of report	2 days	-	Final report
Total number of days	15 days		



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DELIVERABLES

1. An assessment Design:

- a. that clearly defines benchmarks for specific skill areas of mathematics and reading.
- b. Uses EGRA and EGMA to improve the quality of instruction in reading and mathematics, establish baseline literacy & numeracy skills and monitor change.
- c. provides data that could be translated into an evidence base to inform policy decisions and interventions.
- d. that clearly identifies and defines which SEL competencies the assessment measures. SEL competencies of interest could be more general (e.g., intrapersonal, or interpersonal skills) or more specific (e.g., growth mindset, self- efficacy, collaborative problem solving).
- e. includes a local review of assessment items/tasks and scoring protocols to determine if those items sufficiently and appropriately address the competencies and outcomes for the school SEL program.
- f. provides evidence that the administration and scoring protocol will lead to consistent decisions across different raters/observers (interrater reliability) and avoid or mitigate potential biased ratings.
- g. provides empirical evidence that items/tasks used to measure each competency are more highly related to each other than to items that measure other competencies (internal structure).

2. An Assessment Report:

- a. that clearly states the intended interpretation and uses for the assessment score(s) and highlights evidence that justifies using the assessment for those interpretations and uses.
- b. determines if scores provided will guide intended uses or assist in reaching conclusions about students' achievement of literacy & numeracy and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies.
- c. clearly states recommendations and limitations for reporting and interpreting those scores.

LIMITATIONS & DELIMITATIONS

There are bound to be practical or theoretical limits placed on every single assessment just as much as there are areas the consultant may wish to exclude for some reasons. An important caveat to insert is the Literacy & Numeracy and SEL Specialist (s)'s view of the limitations and delimitations for this assessment.



ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Literacy & Numeracy and SEL Specialist (s) will initiate and sustain respondent consent throughout the process and retain raw data with an eye on confidentiality and protection of personal information from corruption, compromise, or loss.

The assessment should be culturally relevant. Cultural considerations include whether an assessment performs the same way for members of different groups, what social and emotional competencies are most important to different groups, and who gets to decide. Such considerations raise the concern that EGRA & EGMA assessment data could be used to stigmatize some students and reinforce or reproduce social inequities. EGRA in any given application needs to reflect the specific rules of a language, correspond with local curricula, and assess students on locally and culturally appropriate words, texts, and concepts. The need for and focus of adaptation varies by subtask. For instance, the structure of stories for the oral reading fluency subtask is essentially the same across languages. Stories should, however, use names and subjects typical in the local context.

A particular concern in the use of SEL assessment is the suitability of the assessment score for inferences and decisions educators plan to make based on those scores. It is important that developers and users of SEL assessments pay particular mind to what evidence supports the inferences and decisions users will make based on student assessment results. As with all forms of assessment, this is important because consequential decisions about what to teach and how to teach, for example, should be based on information that is appropriate for making such decisions.

The Specialist (s) should equally protect copyrighted materials by not allowing reproduction or re-creation of assessment materials in paper or electronic form without consent of the copyright holder. If results are viewed as consequential, have a plan for securing assessment materials as well as protecting the integrity of scores from fraud or deceit on the part of the respondent or assessment user.



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QUALIFICATIONS/REQUIREMENTS:

Individual consultants are strongly encouraged to bid for this exercise. Any interested Literacy & Numeracy and SEL Specialist (s) should meet the following requirements to qualify:

1. Expression of interest (EoI) outlining how the Literacy & Numeracy and SEL Specialist (s) meet (s) the selection criteria and their understanding of the ToR.
2. A summarized description of the scope of work and the intended methodology to be used as well as a tentative work plan including activities and time frames.
3. Names and contacts of three recent professional referees (previous clients) for whom similar work has been conducted.
4. An example of similar pieces of work completed recently.
5. Curriculum vitae (CV) outlining relevant qualifications and experience.
6. Itemized financial proposal.
7. Gender Integration: As per CMD's emphasis on gender-sensitivity, the consultant is expected to have in consideration the gender perspective.
8. Child safeguarding policy: As CMD works with vulnerable children, the engaged expert will have to follow CMD Child Safeguarding Policy that will become part of the contract.

APPLICATION

Please respond with your Expression of Interest to education@cmd.org and copy info@cmd.org, pc@cmd.org and meal@cmd.org by close of business on **Tuesday 26th March 2024**. Contractual obligations will be defined through a standard consultancy agreement, outlining deliverables, timelines, payments, and stating that the resulting intellectual property will belong to CMD.

Thank you!

