



PISA FOR DEVELOPMENT

Executive Summary

The Education 2030 agenda that is set within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN in September 2015 emphasises the quality, equity and measurement of learning outcomes for young children through to working adults. This report serves to inform Education 2030 discussions through an analysis of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as it has been experienced in middle-income countries.

PISA is a triennial internationally comparable assessment of 15-year-olds in school. It measures student performance in reading, mathematics and science, and collects contextual data through school and student questionnaires. A random sample of at least 5 000 students are tested in each country.

The OECD is seeking to enhance PISA to make it more relevant to a wider range of countries. The PISA for Development initiative has been designed to enable greater PISA participation by low- and middle-income countries. This report presents evidence from the experience of the 4 low-income and 40 middle-income countries, including 3 OECD member countries that have already participated in one or more cycles of PISA.

The report presents evidence that:

- **More countries are participating in all forms of assessments**, including international large-scale assessments such as PISA. Approximately two-thirds of all countries with populations greater than 30 000 have participated in one or more international or regional large-scale assessments.
- **Participation in PISA, specifically, has also increased, but wealthier countries have participated more often than less wealthy countries.** All OECD countries participate in PISA, many upper-middle-income countries participate in PISA, but very few low-income and lower-middle-income countries have participated in PISA.
- **Middle-income countries, particularly lower-middle-income countries, encounter financial, technical and contextual challenges when participating in PISA.** Financial challenges are the most pressing, with the main financial challenge being adequate and sustained financing for the units or agencies responsible for the assessment. Technical challenges involve some specific PISA tasks, particularly for translation, sampling, survey administration and coding of responses. Contextual challenges involve the political, regulatory and cultural environment of the countries, which can affect ease of assessment implementation and use.
- **PISA participation has built on prior assessment experience.** To date, most countries that have participated in PISA have had significant prior experience with other international large-scale assessments or with national assessments, allowing PISA implementation to build on this experience and related expertise.
- **PISA assumes that participating countries have substantial assessment capacity.** Most capacity development has focused on specific technical quality aspects of the assessment and is closely embedded in twice-yearly meetings of the country participants.

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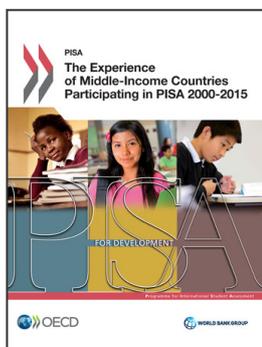
- **PISA results have informed some education policy in middle-income countries.** Media coverage of PISA results is less extensive in middle-income countries than in OECD countries, but PISA results are used by donors in country dialogue with middle-income countries. The main reported effects have been related to agenda setting and the expression of intentions to reform curricula, standards and teacher professional development.
- **PISA results underscore differences between high-income and middle-income countries in education quality and equity, and their correlates.** Analyses of PISA 2012 for the 18 middle-income countries participating in this cycle provide evidence regarding the overall quality of and equity within education systems, as well as evidence regarding systemic differences among the countries.

The report draws five conclusions:

1. PISA will need substantial enhancements to achieve the OECD's aim of making it more relevant to a wider range of countries.
2. PISA participation challenges are greater for lower-middle-income countries than for upper-middle-income and high-income countries.
3. Much remains to be learned about the impact of PISA participation on assessment capacity development in middle-income countries.
4. Private dialogue between government officials and development partners regarding the results of PISA has been useful in helping shape investment priorities and policies in middle-income countries.
5. PISA provides valuable information about the level and distribution of quality and equity within a country's education system.

The report also makes six recommendations for countries, the OECD and other development partners:

1. Countries should continue to work towards the establishment of an assessment culture that seeks to learn from international large-scale assessments, such as PISA and others, by fully funding and sustaining the costs associated with participation in international large-scale assessments and encouraging greater discussion and reporting of the results.
2. The OECD should acknowledge the differences between the countries currently participating in PISA and the low- and middle-income countries that are not currently participating by revising cognitive instruments, background questionnaires and school questionnaires.
3. The OECD should help reduce the technical challenges to PISA participation for lower-middle-income countries by extending and enhancing the training related to PISA implementation.
4. The OECD should evaluate the impact of PISA participation on assessment capacity development in middle-income countries by sponsoring a rigorous impact evaluation.
5. The World Bank and other development partners should help reduce the financial challenges to PISA participation for lower-middle-income countries by supporting countries through grants and loans.
6. The World Bank and other development partners should sponsor fellowships and grants for research and development that could lead to analyses of PISA data that is more attuned to the policy needs of individual participating countries.



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