

# Assessment systems in Southern Africa - Challenges for improving learning

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Gaining educational equity throughout the world  
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## Outline

- **Contextualising education quality**
- **Assessment: an SSA perspective**
- **Assessment in South Africa**
- **Centre for Education Quality Improvement**
  - **Projects**
- **Conclusion**

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## Education Quality - 1

### Quality and EFA:

- is at the heart of teaching and learning. The EFA mention excellence in learning. Yet there is no target or much clarification.
- As NERs increase, quality becomes important
- Quality also has a crucial effect on enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion

## Education Quality - 2

- Multiple and contested meanings: about 100 differing meanings of the word quality
- **UNICEF – CFS**, quality founded on the rights of the whole child, emphasising 5 dimensions: learners, environment, content, processes and outcomes
- **De Lors**: learning – the treasure within, learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be
- Quality as absolute vs Quality as relative
- Quality and equity: Is there a trade off?
- Two faces of quality – learning to achieve (cognitive development) and learning to live (values, attitudes, citizenship)

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## Monitoring quality

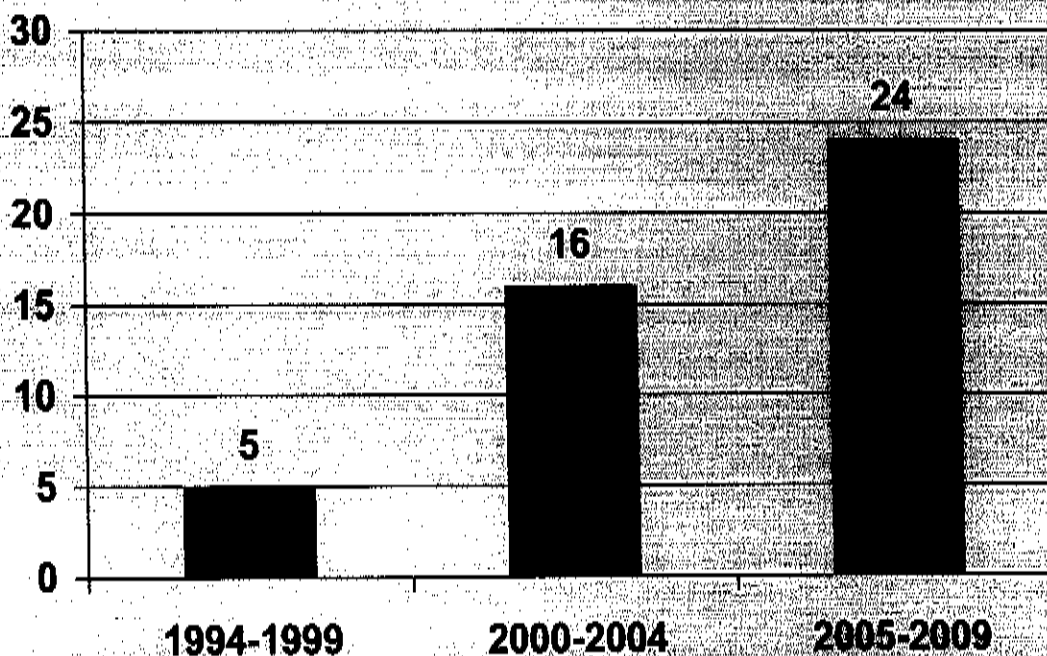
- Attempts to measure quality focuses on three aspects - inputs, process and outcomes
- **Inputs** – resources and facilities
  - While NB – it is not about learning
- **Process** - the neglected dimension
  - Very few measures. Commonly use proxies includes PTR, RR,
- **Outcome** – exclusive focus on achievement scores
- Require more comprehensive definition and measures

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## Assessment and Quality

- Increasing emphasis on assessment due to concern with declining quality
  - “a national priority that requires involvement and engagement throughout all levels of our society” - SA Minister of Education, August 2005.
- Emphasis translates to focus on achievement scores, in “core subjects”
- The discourse of quality redolent with the technology of testing mania –
  - In SA, National, provincial & District assessments, TIMSS, PIRLS, SACMEQ, project evaluations, exams
- However, testing indicates areas in need of intervention but not what is required
- Assessment and testing does not equal quality
- You don't fatten the chicken by weighing it

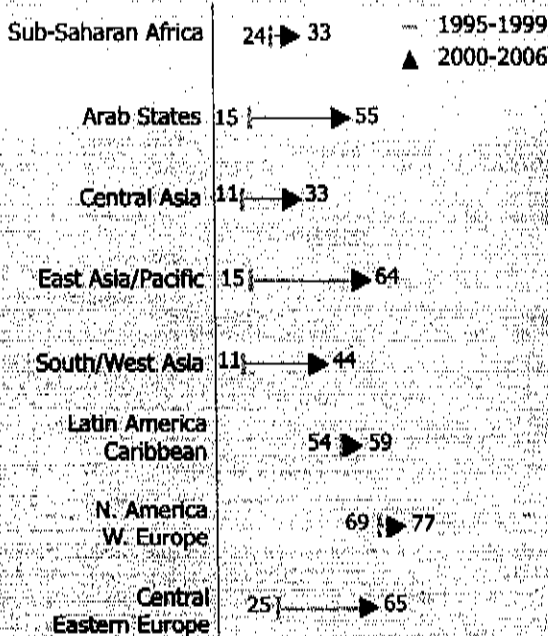
## LSAS in SA: 1994 - 2009



## Assessment in EFA

- Since the world EFA conferences in Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000) there has been a significant increase in the number of countries, mostly developing nations

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More and more governments are carrying out national learning assessments and participating in international and regional ones

% of countries that have carried out at least one national assessment between 1995-99 and 2000-06

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## Assessment in SSA 2

- In SSA, for example, most countries have participated in regional studies facilitated by UNESCO/UNICEF including the MLA, SACMEQ and PASEC. To date 47 countries have participated in MLA I and II studies, 15 in SACMEQ studies and 12 in PASEC studies
- A growing number of countries, however, have begun conducting their own national assessment studies including Botswana, Eritrea, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia

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## Overview of NA in SSA

No systematic national data collection on student learning	Use of national examinations or other proxy indicators	Regional or international agency testing project	National monitoring program
Angola; Burkino Faso; Burundi; Cameroon; Cape Verde; Central African Republic; Chad; Ethiopia; Equatorial Guinea; Gabon; Ghana; Guinea Bissau; Ivory Coast; Liberia; Mali; Mauritania; Rwanda; Sao Tome and Principe; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Somalia; Swaziland; Togo	Botswana; Cape Verde; Comoros Islands; Eritrea; Gambia; Guinea; Mauritius; Togo; Tanzania (Zanzibar); Zimbabwe	Kenya; Mali; Malawi; Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; Nigeria; Seychelles; South Africa; Swaziland; Tanzania; Uganda; Zambia; Zanzibar; Zimbabwe	Benin*; Congo*; Democratic Republic of Congo*; Gambia; Lesotho; Madagascar*; South Africa; Uganda Zambia

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## LSAS in South Africa

- Majority of studies
  - designed to provide information to policy makers,
  - to evaluate specific intervention programs,
  - to obtain baseline information.
- Few studies designed to providing information to teachers to enhance learning in the classroom.
- Reporting
  - mainly aggregated by national, provincial or district level
  - group variables such as gender, language and geographical location (urban, rural);
  - learning area (e.g. mathematics) as well as the sub-domains assessed (e.g. by learning outcomes or content areas).
- Limited application of advanced methods of analysis - path analysis or multi-level modelling to identify factors affecting learner performance

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## Continuous assessment in SSA

In the last decade, there has been a growing recognition of the value of assessment in improving the quality of education, in particular the use of continuous assessment (CA) for improving the teaching and learning process.

This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of countries developing policies and systems for conducting and using continuous assessment.

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## Continuous assessment in SSA - 2

CA for improving learning and teaching is a result of significant policy shifts - including Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland.

- In Namibia, CA at the primary level was introduced as a direct result of the Ministry's Education For All policy with training and support targeted to teachers in both lower and upper primary phases.
- In Malawi, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology obtained assistance from international and local organisations to develop a model for CA in primary schools as well as train teachers and other schools staff in its effective implementation.
- In a number of SSA countries, the final grade on the national examinations comprise of scores from CA exercises as well as the final examination paper.
  - In South Africa, for example, the final Grade 12 exam grade is based on the examination score, which comprises 75% as well as the continuous assessment score
  - in Tanzania, the examination and continuous assessment score comprise 50% of the final grade).

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# Implementing CA in SSA

## Implementation of CA far from ideal

- In Kenya the intention of using more authentic continuous assessments exercise as part of the national certification were put on hold as teachers were abusing the system with some teachers colluding with parents in allowing them to buy articles they were required to make and present for grading, while other teachers often submitted inflated or cooked up scores.
- in Ghana, a review by the West African Examinations Board also found significant differences between CA scores assigned by teachers and examinations scores of learners.
- In Swaziland, CA introduced by the MoE in 1993. Ten years on teachers were still unable to develop their own tests, relying instead on the National Curriculum Center to provide end of term CA tests, while testing was still entirely paper-and-pencilled based with the assessment of psychomotor and affective domains excluded.

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## **Education policy in SA**

- **1994 – 1999**    ▪ **policy frameworks and documents**
- **2000 – 2004**    ▪ **policy implementation and systems development (delivery)**
- **2005 - 2009**    ▪ **Improving quality and understanding impact**

## **Education policy in SA - 2**

- **Multiple and potentially contradictory needs**
- **Discourse of needs to discourse of means**
- **Main directions of policy: equity, access, redress, quality, democracy, efficiency**
- **Strategy of transformation – gradualist, broad based, balancing change with the quest for stability**

## **Assessment in South Africa - History**

- **assessment practices and systems played a critical role in maintaining oppressive apartheid policies**
- **assessment was the most neglected aspect of the new governments' efforts to transform the apartheid based education system, even though assessment formed the basis of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) that underpinned the new education system**
- **there is limited information on the impact of assessment policies and practices, within the new education dispensation in South Africa.**

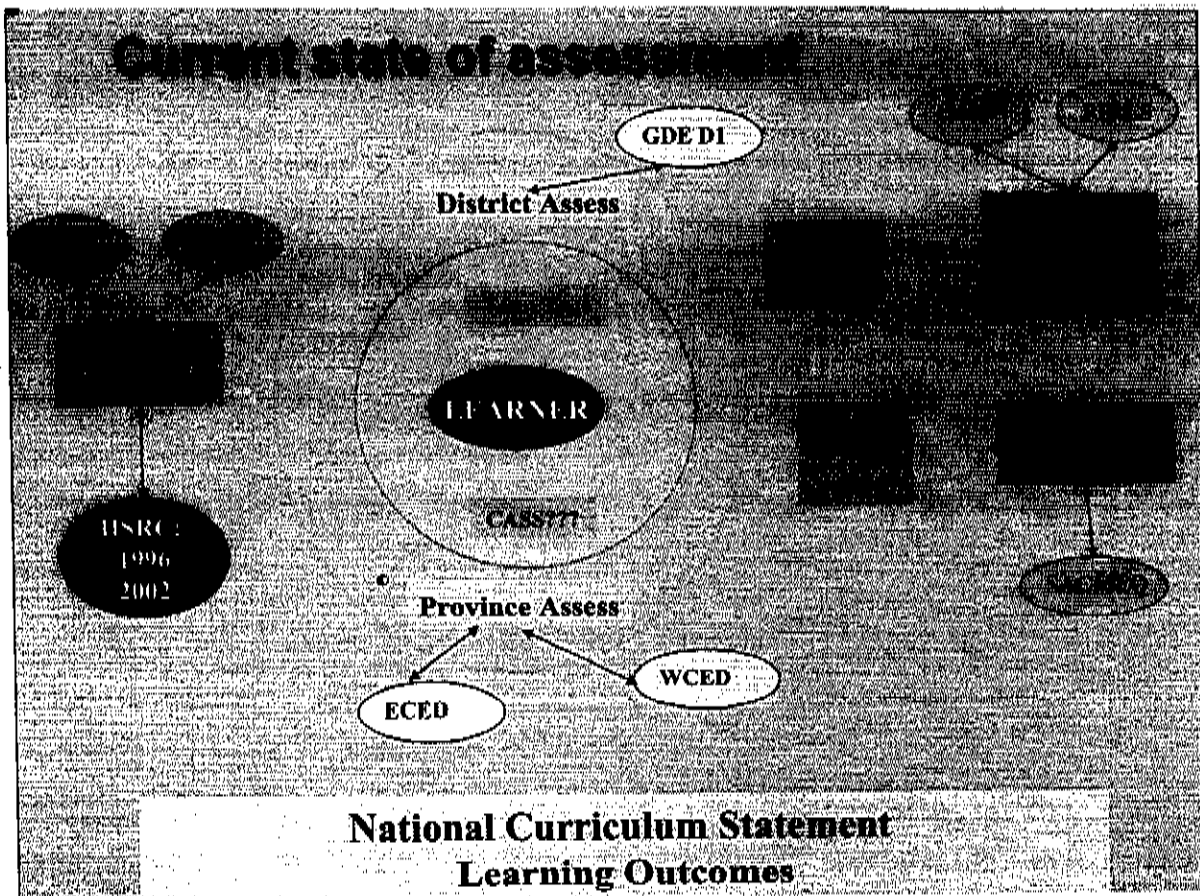
## **Assessment reforms in SA**

**Major government initiatives to reform assessment and align with curriculum:**

- **1998 – first national assessment policy promulgated**
  - **Introduced systemic evaluations (national assessments)**
  - **Common Task of Assessment (CTAs) – Grade 9 :**
  - **Grade 10, 11 & 12 assessments**
  - **Common district tests**
  - **National database of items – Grades 1 to 6**
  - **Systemic Evaluation Studies – Grade 3, 6, 9**
  - **Assessment Exemplars for teachers**
  - **Early Reading Assessment tools**
  - **Provincial assessment - CENSUS**
  - **Possibility – NATIONAL CENSUS TESTING - @ G 3, 6, 9?**

## Assessment reforms in SA - 2

- **Flagship assessment policy promulgated in 2007 which revised 1998 policy**
- **Key features:**
  - **Greater emphasis on classroom based assessment**
  - **Requires teachers and schools to apply a greater range of assessment methods beyond paper and pencil tests**
  - **More structured into frequency and type of assessments (how and what)**
  - **Provides a reporting and interpretation framework**
- **Disjuncture rhetoric and reality**
  - **Some efforts – enhance value of assessment for teachers**
  - **Greater emphasis on large-scale assessments**



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## Centre for Education Quality Improvement

- The Centre for Education Quality Improvement (CEQI) was established by the HSRC to support government and education key role-players (teachers, parents, learners, NGOs, donors) to enhance decision making processes for implementing relevant and effective strategies to improve education quality.
  - It is a high level cross-cutting initiative of the HSRC to contribute to eradicating poverty in South Africa through evidence-informed policy dialogue.
- **Based on partnerships**
- **Number of short or long term research fellowships available**

## CEQI Projects - to 2011

CEQI is currently involved in a number of research and development projects in collaboration with the National and Provincial Departments of Education:

**Enhancing teacher assessment skills:** Field trialing, pilot testing and determining impact and costs of classroom assessment resources to improve learning achievement

**Monitoring school performance:** developing and piloting a national indicator framework

**Grade 9 National Assessment Survey:** development and implementation of a model for Grade 9 National Assessment Survey

**Financing, equity and quality:** reviewing the impact of no-fee schools, costing assessment surveys developing alternative models for financial allocation to schools

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## Concluding remarks

- **Quality remains a key but elusive goal in education**
- **Assessment is important in improving quality but a means to an end, not an end in itself**
- **Focus on supporting teachers in SA to improve assessment practices in the classroom – the focus of CEQI**

# Contact details

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