

**CONSOLIDATING LEARNING ON  
INDICATORS FOR MEASURING AND MONITORING  
QUALITY OF PROGRAMMES (QLE and QoS)**

**2014**

Since Core Process Harmonization (CPH) of 2010, various initiatives have been undertaken within Save the Children to define standards, tools and systems to measure and monitor quality in our programmes. The following paper summarises the learning and findings from two of the global indicators - QLE (Quality of Learning Environment) and QoS (Quality of Child Protection Services), which were rolled out in the last few years. The country offices implementing the QLE and QoS considered them a successful programming approach that has helped to monitor, define and improve the quality of education and child protection interventions, particularly when working through partners. Partners, themselves, have found the QLE and QoS to be an accountability and programme improvement mechanism between them and the end users, as well as other partners, like Save the Children. The knowledge documented in this paper aims to feed into the agency's way forward and provide specific recommendations to other initiatives who may be planning to design and implement similar approaches to monitoring and improving quality...

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## ACRONYMS

CO	Country Office
CPI	Child Protection Initiative
DFID	Department for International Development
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EGI	Education Global Initiative
GI	Global Initiative
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
QLE	Quality of Learning Environment
QoS	Quality of Child Protection Services
SCI	Save the Children International
SCN	Save the Children Norway
SCS	Save the Children Sweden
SCUK	Save the Children United Kingdom
TA	Technical Assistance
TLG	Thematic Leadership Group

## COVER NOTE

Whether it is possible to measure and promote evidence based approaches to improve programme quality is an on-going debate in various sectors, especially around areas where measuring change has traditionally been challenging. This includes measuring the extent to which learning environments are of quality and directly or indirectly result in better learning outcomes, and measuring the extent to which child protection services are of quality and contribute towards improved child protection outcomes.

In the last few years, Save the Children has rolled out two approaches to measuring, monitoring and improving quality in child protection and education programmes - the Quality of Learning Environment (QLE) and Quality of Child Protection Services (QoS). The approaches have proven to be useful for our country offices, and have generated increased interest among like-minded agencies and donors, who are eager to find solutions to the above mentioned challenges for their own programmes.

In 2013, CPI presented the QoS approach at the International Society for Child Indicators conference in Korea (Seoul), focusing on child wellbeing indicators, and was received by a wide range of audience as an innovative solution and a good bridge between the interests of academia and practitioners. A little over a year later the paper presented at the conference has been used in developing the [Make the Promise True: a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Measuring Quality in Child Protection Service Delivery in Zimbabwe](#)<sup>1</sup> as one of the resources. In August 2014, Save the Children UK, through their Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA) review received positive feedback from Department for International Development (DFID): "Overall, Save the Children (SC) have made good progress against their targets and should be credited for the improvements they have made to measuring their definition of a Quality Learning Environment (QLE). This is exciting work that embraces a focus on access as well as learning", DFID, 2014. These and many other examples can be quoted to demonstrate that there is need for such approaches/tools/systems in various sectors, and Save the Children's work in this area is being noticed and widely welcomed.

Based on the experience of the last few years, and discussions held with like minded organizations, government and donor institutions, we believe that QLE and QoS are an innovation in the two sectors of education and child protection. Save the Children is well positioned to lead in providing tools and guidance on how quality can be measured, monitored and improved in learning environments and service provision for education and child protection interventions.

For this to be accomplished however, senior leadership within this agency needs to:

- a) invest adequate financial and human resources in integrating the QLE/QoS in all relevant programmes,
- b) identify common approaches (with an eye to enhancing data collection efficiency and reducing financial and labor costs) to measuring quality in all sectors, and
- c) and increase internal commitment for generating and using evidence in this area for programmatic improvement.

With these asks in mind, and given we are at a critical juncture of strategic development in both sectors, the following paper summarizes the main lessons and recommendations learned over the past 3 years to inform the ongoing discussions around monitoring approaches and using the findings to improve programme quality.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12187-014-9267-1>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2010, when unifying its international programs, Save the Children designed and implemented a new

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**Quality learning environment (QLE):** % of ECCD and Basic Education learning sites, supported by Save the Children, which achieved four Guiding Principles for creating quality learning environments.

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**Quality of Child Protection Services (QoS):** % of prevention & response services/service providers supported by Save the Children which meet quality

programmes has been that solely improving the access of beneficiaries to our child protection services or educational opportunities may not benefit children and families unless they are of a minimum quality (defined internationally or internally). Further, while measuring the learning outcomes with which children emerge from early learning or primary learning opportunities is critical, understanding how and why children are (or are not) learning is also important. Similarly, measuring the quality of child protection services can help identify the contributors, as well as the risks, which might prevent the full achievement of child protection outcomes: this is important, particularly for designing our prevention deliverables. Although they were initially developed as indicators, **due to the comprehensive scope of QLE and QoS, they were quickly integrated as approaches/system/mechanisms for monitoring and improving programme quality.** Therefore, throughout this document they will be referred to as such.

Both QLE and QoS are composed of a set of principles/standards; achievement of these principles/standards is measured by scoring between 5-15 items (which are called indicators in the QLE/QoS handbooks) within each principle/standard. The scoring of the items within each standard/principle is informed by evidence collected through a thorough assessment of the child protection service provider, the school or the ECCD center, involving review of existing procedures, policies and assessing the technical strength of the practice and considering the feedback of the users.

The principles and standards, as well as the items within each standard/principle of the QLE and QoS were developed and agreed after an extensive consultation with COs representing all regions, various technical working groups and a review of extant literature on factors underpinning quality in education and child protection services for children. Literature of other disciplines was also used to inform this process from within and outside Save the Children.

system aiming to monitor its programmes through a set of global indicators. A number of global indicators were developed, piloted and rolled out since then, among which are the Quality of Learning Environment (QLE) and Quality of Child Protection Services (QoS) indicators. These two indicators were designed to help the Country Offices (COs) measure and monitor the extent to which quality standards in the two sectors (child protection and education) were being achieved by child protection service providers, basic education and early childhood care establishments. To date, both of the indicators focused on the development context although efforts to adapt and pilot test the QLE and QoS systems in emergency contexts are underway. The rationale for measuring quality in our child protection and education

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*"The Quality of Services handbook and the tools give us an opportunity and resources to establish a common understanding on what good child protection intervention should look like, with our partners, our regional office and HQs"*  
(Zimbabwe, 2013)

*"The assessment process itself was a unique capacity building and experience sharing exercise through productive dialogues and debates"* several COs, 2013

While there are certain similarities and differences in the content and implementation of the two indicators, described in much more detail in Annex 1, a number of key common lessons were learned in the last three years that can effectively feed into various discussions in the agency around measuring, monitoring and improving programme quality. The experience documented in this paper will be valuable for initiatives that aim to design and implement approaches to measuring and supporting quality in our programmes covering a wide range of sectors. This paper also hopes to raise knowledge on the importance of QLE/QoS approaches, and clarify the extent of needed agency commitment in light of the new strategy development (as mentioned in the cover note) . This paper, therefore, can be of interest for TLG (Thematic Leadership Group), GI (Global Initiative) Steering and technical groups, thematic managers, as well as all MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning) personnel.

*Overall, Save the Children (SC) have made good progress against their targets and should be credited for the improvements they have made to measuring their definition of a Quality Learning Environment (QLE). This is exciting work that embraces a focus on access as well as learning", DFID, 2014*

## 2. LESSONS OF 2013

COs Piloting the QLE and QoS		
Year	QLE	QoS
2010-2011	Afghanistan Bhutan Cambodia Central Asia Indonesia Laos Nepal Sri Lanka Vietnam	Nepal The Philippines
2012	Global Roll Out	Albania Liberia Senegal Tanzania Zimbabwe
2013	Global Roll Out	Peru Equador

### 2.1. Piloting

#### Piloting the QLE and QoS

#### approaches in all regions ensured

#### their relevance in a variety of contexts

#### and cultures.

Before the global roll out, the QLE and QoS approaches were piloted in almost all the regions (see table). The feedback received through the piloting phase was used to improve the principles/standards and measurement items (called indicators), as well as the methodology and databases of QLE and QoS for collecting, storing and reporting data. Several concepts were simplified and others broadened to ensure their clarity and relevance in various geographic contexts. The data management process and the tools were also standardized and improved.

Through piloting, various uses of the QLE and QoS were also identified. For example the QLE monitoring system can

be used in both urban and rural contexts, for both formal and nonformal settings in basic education programs, and center-based, work-based and community-based settings in early childhood care and development programs, and is now being pilot tested in humanitarian settings (Iraq, South Sudan). Similarly, learning from the pilot phase, some countries initiated strengthening the various uses of the QoS, including

*"Planning ahead allowed us to integrate the costs and data collection processes into our M&E budgets and reduced the costs", Sri Lanka, 2013.*

*"Whether a new indicator will be liked and used by country offices or not depends on the extent to which the materials on those indicators is accessible to them. And translation plays a huge role in this. Even specific terminology, let alone the broad concepts, can cause confusion and affect data quality" LAC, 2013*

development of the child-friendly QoS, which can be applied across contexts, for monitoring various types of service providers, as well as improving the accountability aspect of programme quality. (more about uses of QoS and QLE discussed below). Piloting was an important step in the development of the QLE and QoS, which helped to make them more user-friendly and meaningful, and helped to simplify data analysis and interpretation. The improvement of the glitches in data entry systems has certainly minimize errors in data recording management.

**Translating the resources on the QLE and QoS during the pilot phase could have helped to test the relevance of key concepts and help maintain linguistic accuracy of the key terms as early as the pilot phase.** Due to lack of funding, the translation of the QLE and QoS resources was delayed until the end of the first year's roll out, as changes were expected to occur to the guidance, Management Information Systems (MIS) and indicators, once the COs had had a chance to use them. Hence, the decision was made to conserve limited resources and translate the “final product.” However, many non-Anglophone country programs decided to translate the QLE and QoS tools in advance of the formal release of translated versions – resulting in little quality or version control and conflicting translations of key technical terms and phrases. Further, the QLE and QoS principles/standards and indicators contain a number of broad words, such as "adequate", "complete", which were translated in different ways, hence changing the intention of several of the indicators. Some COs then needed to redo their translations and conduct again many discussions around how to translate both technical and broader terms to ensure consistency across translations. Not having the translated guidelines from the initial phase of the testing was, in a sense, a delayed opportunity to ensure alignment of the terminology and key concepts across the languages. **Many COs, although bilingual, can engage more effectively and actively once the materials are available in languages which they are comfortable to work in. Further, a key lesson that has emerged from these experiences, is the importance of ensuring translation quality and integrity, including provision of guidance on translation and back translation for the entire Save the Children teams and country offices to follow.**

**Pilot phase is an important part of roll out of such approaches (QLE/QoS), and the pilot COs need to be selected based on their willingness and interest, as well as their ability to champion and demonstrate the usefulness of the tools, and help solve various challenges which could be due to the context of their particular region or the theme of programming.** After the first year of global roll out, many COs indicated that while it is always helpful to have guidelines and resources, hearing and learning from their programmatic and regional peers made them more enthusiastic about the newly introduced approaches (QLE and QoS), and provided them with hands on solutions to force major situations that occur during implementation. As such, a lesson emerging from this experience is that selecting countries in the same region offers more opportunities for shared learning during the pilot phase. Staff indicated that they learned more and felt more inspired and enthusiastic through peer-to-peer exchanges as compared to the guidance and resources. Indeed this has been confirmed through many regional workshops during the past 4 years.

*"It helped to have the surge funds at the beginning, as we had already allocated all of our budgets and there was not a single spare penny left. The most expensive part for us was the training, and we cut those costs by building on another training that was conducted a few weeks ago.... we basically enrolled the already trained staff to do the data collection." Albania, 2012*

Adding new requirements for data collection, analysis, reporting and use against QLE and QoS into existing MEAL plans incurs costs, funding for which is often not available in the programme's current budget. Therefore, many COs who agreed to pilot the QLE/QoS approaches for the first time appreciated the availability of funding to cover operational costs of training, translation, collecting, managing and reporting data. Some COs said, they would have been unable to implement QLE/QoS without the supplementary funding. While the COs were willing to contribute staff time towards testing the QLE and QoS approaches using it as a learning opportunity, covering the operational costs of implementing data collection, analysis, reporting was the most quoted bottleneck. With support from the Members, the GIs were able to offer a small sum to cover travel, printing, capacity building, and other types of operational costs, which enabled a

successful data management. An important lesson was that **the funding for piloting of approaches to monitor and improve programme quality (e.g. QLE/QoS) should be provided to the participating COs with a condition that those indicators get incorporated into next year's MEAL budget and plan by the end of pilot phase. It should be made clear that a follow-up investment will not be available for the coming years.** Further, guidance on how to integrate global indicators such as QLE and QoS into existing grants and proposals for future programs should be provided to Members (both thematic teams and resource development teams) and to Country Offices.

## 2.2. Roll Out

The QLE and QoS approaches were rolled out following two different strategies. While each of the roll out strategies had different strengths and weaknesses, there were several common experiences.

Introducing QLE and QoS as mandatory global indicators required COs to integrate them into their current MEAL frameworks, which, often, was not successful due to funding and donor restrictions. Members provided mixed levels of support in ensuring QLE/QoS were written into proposals for new programs and advocating with their home donors on their utility and value, as well as the usefulness of the resultant data. Having a Member champion, such as SC Norway for QLE, was critical to its mainstreaming into CO MEAL systems.

Although approximate budgets, amounts and type of costs were shared in the QLE/QoS handbooks, **many COs felt that the second year of reporting should be more effective, since they were better able to fund and plan for the assessments,**

QoS Pilot Budget in 2013:  
1,200 - 900 Euros per CO,  
from regional budgets (5 COs)

QLE Pilot Budget 2013: 4,000  
USD for all pilot COs with SCN  
funding (37 COs)

Championing on the indicators		
	QOS	QLE
Championing Members	SCS, SCUK and SCF (for Child-friendly QoS)	SC Norway
Members who have TAs trained in QLE/ QoS methodology (intensive training)	SCS, SCUK, SCF, SCUS and SCI regional team	SC Norway, SCUS, SCUK, SCC, SCA and the SCI regional team
Members who support programmes with QLE/QOS indicators	SCS, SCUK, SCF, SCUS, SC South Africa, SCN, SCC	SC Norway, SCUS, SCUK, SCC, SCA

using their own tested questionnaires and workplans.

Most COs mentioned that they **treat the first year of reporting as a learning opportunity**. The first year of the implementation of the QLE and QoS was an important phase since it helped the COs determine the required effort and costs, develop context-specific questionnaires and data collection tools, and put "the infrastructure"<sup>2</sup> for those indicators in their programmatic context. The COs felt **that it took at least one year of practice of the QLE and QoS to understand the indicator cycle, its management processes and effectively build them into proposals**. This may mean that an **effective baseline on QLE and QoS should not be built in the first year of reporting, but should be planned for only after successful pilot testing**.

**One of the biggest success factors at the roll out of the QLE and QoS was having a Member Champion among the Save the Children family, with an invested technical and fundraising interest.** Throughout the last three years the QLE and QoS have been gradually integrated into the SCN (Save the Children Norway), SCS (Save the Children Sweden) and SCUUK (Save the Children United Kingdom) supported proposals, as well as head office monitoring frameworks. Save the Children Finland (SCF) has recently initiated the development of the child-friendly QoS through the West and Central Africa regional projects. This has raised the profile of the indicators internally and helped the Members develop capacity among their technical advisors, who are now well positioned to provide support to the implementing countries and collate data for their donor reports. As training workshops progressed, several Country Office champions emerged for both QLE (e.g. Malawi, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia) and QoS (emergency COs in MEE region, Albania, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and others), serving as regional resources for their counterparts in other Country Offices and whose tools served as templates globally.

While trainings and webinars on QLE and QoS standards, methodology and reporting had varied results, **country-level targeted coaching and monitoring, as well as hands-on support throughout the whole process of managing QLE/QoS has been very effective**. Both during pilot and roll out phases some of the GI MEAL and thematic (in the case of CPI) advisors were in a regular contact with several country programmes, helping to develop workplans, reviewing tools, data management procedures advising on sampling, trouble shooting on the reporting templates, etc. **This GI support was absolutely critical in the absence of consistent Member technical assistance (TA) support**. The reports from those COs were of better quality and certainly more comprehensive, and were submitted within the deadline, than those who did not receive such support. **The demand on technical support continues to grow with the implementation of the QLE and QoS approaches, and building strong Member TA available to meet the demand for capacity building and support country programmes is essential for effective global roll out given some GIs have fewer resources to provide this type of support. A key question to consider in the next strategy period is how Global Initiatives can better leverage Member TA capacities to provide needed support to COs, and encourage CO to CO support through**

*"It takes nearly one year to build the infrastructure for those indicators... the first year of reporting was our learning and practicing phase... The first year's data will have lots of gaps... Several COs of the 2013 cycle*

*It is really important to introduce these indicators openly, explaining the intentions behind it. We felt that when we clarified the mutual benefits, the partner were more open to the assessment: Senegal, 2013*

<sup>2</sup> By infrastructure the COs meant having a plan for the assessments, preparing the partners, coordinating data collection on QLE and QoS with other MEAL activities, etc. Another term used to describe this process was "operationalizing".

study visits, short term TA, online Communities of Practice, and other fora.

With support from GIs and Members, many of the 2013 proposals already had the QLE and QoS in their MEAL plans. The experience showed that **through building QLE and QoS in proposals and fundraising opportunities creates an interest among the funding donors, and, if implemented well, will help us establish good rapport in terms of our ability to monitor and improve programme quality** especially in the sectors that are traditionally considered hard to measure. In 2015, the Global Initiatives should pull together, from Members that have successfully lobbied with their home donors on QLE and QoS, standardized write-ups about these approaches to use with other donors, to which all COs have access.

### 2.3. Assessing against a standard

**The way the QLE/QoS are introduced often determined the success, the tone and the use of the data generated from the assessments.** Assessing a service provider/school or a partner may be a threatening experience, especially as the assessment concludes with a pass and fail score and determines the extent to which the service provider is capable of providing the service. Therefore, many of the COs, who had positive experiences of the QLE/QoS, recommend that **such quality assessments should be carried out in the spirit of true partnership, where at the very beginning of the process the interests of both parties are clearly outlined, together with the ground rules during the assessment periods and how the data of the assessment will be used.**

**No one likes to fail an assessment.** The data collection methodology of the quality indicators requires an assessment against the quality standards, which, conclude with the service provider/school "meeting the quality standards" or "not meeting the quality standards". During the pilot phase this was found culturally inappropriate for building partnerships around quality programming and very discouraging for partners as they felt that failing the standard undermined their efforts and ability to improve quality in their interventions. Therefore, certain adjustments were made to the QLE and QoS analysis methodology, which now allows us to present the findings in a less discouraging way. Both **QLE and QoS use color codes to help differentiate among service providers that were not fully failing, but yet not fully meeting the quality standards through a Red/Amber/Green classification approach<sup>3</sup>.** This not only allowed us to identify the services providers that "meet" the quality standards (those that are in the green category), but also to identify the extent to which the standard is not met by those in the amber or red category. This is also a useful piece of information when planning/prioritizing capacity building for partners.

While QLE and QoS assessments arrive at final scores differently, as shown in the table below, both indicators aim to use the data for helping the service providers and schools understand where improvements are needed and monitor their progress towards achieving higher quality.

*"In the first year, 2012, when we shared the results of the assessment, our partners were quite discouraged by seeing that they "did not pass" the standard. In 2013 we said "you are in the Amber group", and they felt more encouraged, since it meant they did well on some areas, and not so well in others"...  
Tanzania, 2013*

<sup>3</sup> For more details on the QoS Methodology please refer to the QoS handbook

Categories	QLE		QoS	
	Score of the principle	Score of the school/ECCD site	Score of the standard =the average rating of the indicators for that specific standard is between	Score of the service provider = the average score of all indicators across all standards is between
Red	At least 25% of the indicators within the standard were met	less than 25% of schools/ECCD sites achieved each guiding principle;	1.0 and 1.9	
Amber	At least 50% of the indicators within the standard were met	between 26-50% of schools/ECCD sites achieved each guiding principle;	2.0 and 2.9	
Green	At least 75% of the indicators within the standard were met	greater than 75% of schools/ECCD sites achieved each guiding principle	3.0 and above	
Exceptional	All indicators were met	All principles were met	Grouped together in the green category	

Both of those approaches are still being tested and will, most likely, conclude with one suitable approach for both indicators, perhaps in the new strategic period of 2016 - 2018.

## 2.4. Sampling

One of the most difficult methodological decisions for the QLE/QoS indicators was the sampling. As mentioned above, collection of data against the QLE/QoS requires an assessment. Each assessment interview may take on average 1 day to complete (2 person days as it is done in pairs) – including time to complete the assessment form and enter the data into the information system. In certain cases the people completing the assessment may also need to do a desk review (e.g. of attendance records, enrollment data in the case of QLE; existing child protection/safeguarding procedures, records of service delivery and use in case of QoS). This is quite an intensive data collection process. Therefore, the number of services or learning environments that a country office can assess each year (the sample) has significant implications for the time, people and financial investment needed.

After the first year of roll out, it became clear that many COs, limited by the financial and human resources, were unable to maintain a statistically representative sample of their overall education and child protection portfolios, and generate comparable data year to year. Therefore, the CPI and EdGI M&E working groups have started to explore a more robust approach to sampling that could be tailored to the country context, and, in particular, the size of the programme, while minimising burden on country offices. It was determined that whatever approach, the sampling needed to ensure that **the data generated through the assessments is:**

*"We do want to generate scientific data, however there may be years when we might not be able to conduct many assessments, and may want to target certain partners for QLE/QoS assessments... and we want to have the freedom to do so based on our country-based needs"* several COs, 2013

- statistically significant,
- meaningful at the country office and agency levels,
- telling and analyzable,
- affordable and doable.

**We must also ensure that such data allows year to year comparisons and tracking of progress at the CO and global levels.**

Several possible options for selecting a sample for the QoS indicator were discussed, including (1) doing a census by assessing all service providers, (2) selecting a sample size for robust global reporting, (3) selecting a sample size for robust country office-level reporting and (4) combination approach (a mix of 2 and 3).

There are a number of pros and cons with each of the approaches, as outlined in the Sampling options paper. These approaches are being currently discussed and debated among the CPI and EdGI technical staff.

One of the most important lessons learned regarding the sampling was that it is also important Global Initiatives and SCI to **plan for "back up" financial resources because there are likely to be countries in the selected sample pool (in the "basket") who may be unable to conduct the minimal number of assessments due to funding gaps. Strengthening Country Office and Member commitment and capacity to include costs associated with monitoring QLE and QoS in grant budgets must be an agency priority moving forward.** Additionally, **to understand whether a sampling approach is effective (i.e. it meets the criteria outlined above) and provides robust data at both national and agency levels, it is important to continue with it for a certain length of time (e.g. a strategic period), in order to generate enough data for meaningful analysis and draw conclusions.**

## 2.5. Reporting and inter-sectoral coordination

Following the roll out of the QLE/QoS indicators, the CPI and EdGI were approached by a number of countries seeking guidance on the selection of the most appropriate indicator for cases where child protection and education programmes were integrated (e.g. a programme that focuses to eliminate physical and humiliating punishment in the school). Additionally, the COs that had used both tools often noted there are a set of core principles and standards across the tools that are rather similar and the scores could, most probably be transferred from one tool onto another if the same service provider was to be assessed against both (e.g. a service provider was a partner within our child protection and education programmes, providing both child protection and education services). Based on this and similar feedback received, the CPI and EdGI clarified in the QLE and QoS handbooks that **there is overlap between QLE and QoS since both tools are guided by a child rights framework and built on Save the Children's agency values; the core quality standards for service provision, however, are not identical due to sector-specific differences.** Therefore, each of the cases, where the sectors are integrated, must be treated individually. It is important to note, that **although the QoS and QLE will remain separate, both EDGI and CPI are committed to identifying common approaches and solutions to the management of the two quality monitoring frameworks,** such as common sampling approach, common database, common data management and analysis methodologies, as appropriate.

It is very likely that if similar indicators are developed for other sectors, like health, livelihoods, WASH, etc., with a focus on measuring the extent to which quality standards are achieved in service provision, they may also have a set of similar standards as in QLE and QoS. Since similar discussions with other thematic areas are already happening within the agency, it may be useful to have an inter-sectoral discussion on how to mainstream common quality standards in programmes, so that the thematic quality measurement tools are not redundant or duplicative, but are efficient and mutually beneficial.

## 2.6. Use and Purpose of the Quality Monitoring and Improvement Approaches Indicators

In this paper the use of QLE/QoS approaches are discussed from two perspectives: from the perspective of the COs and partners, and from the global perspective.

### 2.6.1. Use of the Quality Monitoring and Improvement Approaches by the COs and Partners

The COs who reported against the QLE and QoS, mentioned that they were able to **use the data for various purposes:**

**(a) defining quality in specific terms:** the term quality is rather broad and can be understood in many different ways. The QLE/QoS has equipped our COs and partners with a specific framework of defining quality, and clarifying the expectations of what needs to be in place for services/learning environment to be of quality.

**(b) capacity strengthening and partnership building:** the data of the QLE/QoS has provided useful evidence on the areas where capacity strengthening is needed, and has helped to prioritise and plan for specific support for the partners. Arriving on mutual priorities for capacity strengthening has helped establish strong partnerships and strengthen ownership of both Save the Children and the partner to improve results.

**(c) monitoring:** continued assessments of certain standards generated data for tracking progress or lack of improvement on the quality standards and indicators. This has been useful particular in environment where staff turnover has been high, since it created institutional memory for our programmes and partners. In regards with monitoring, **the importance of documenting and signing off the acquired data should not be underestimated.**

**(d) improving child participation:** a recent initiative in the WCA has been kicked off with support from SCF, to develop and implement a child-friendly version of the QoS, which may be used by children themselves. Several other COs expressed interest and need to expand the participation of children in QLE/QoS processes, which will remain a priority in the roll out of the QLE/QoS, and GIs will involve the COs and use their knowledge and resources offered in this area. There is space for collaboration and

*We have made specific improvements thanks to this tool- we have offered to perform in-house training for them [the partner] on CSF and help them establish lacking internal procedures. Second major gap is lack of knowledge on case management where we are thinking of finding additional resources to organize capacity building on this" NWB 2013*

*" We are planning to start using the QoS Indicator for a project implemented by a working children and youth movement (MAEJT), and we are considering to develop a version that easier can be used by the children themselves" WCA, 2013*

engagement across the Save the Children family on these pilot initiatives (e.g. the Child Participation Working Group).

**(e) evaluating programmes:** several of the COs have expressed interest in using the QLE/QoS as an evaluation tool to determine the extent to which standards are achieved by our service providers, having the "passing mark" as the desired achievement. This, triangulated with the responses received from the beneficiaries, can help strengthen and present evidence where the programme may have achieved positive/negative impact.

**(f) advocacy:** several COs, who were able to maintain a representative sample of assessments in their programme area, used the data to approach government officials with specific improvement recommendations using the scores against the indicators and standards as evidence to articulate the need for improvement.

**(g) accountability:** the QLE/QoS assessments help to bring the voices of beneficiaries and other end users into monitoring and improving the programme quality, and increase the understanding around the expected results among Save the Children, its partners and end users. In the coming years more emphasis needs to be placed on enriching the methodology with participatory approaches (such as the child-friendly QoS), more and diverse methods of child participation during the assessments and follow ups, etc. This is an exciting area not only for the GIs but also the COs, and will be explored further in the coming years as the methodology improves.

### 2.6.2. Use of the Quality Monitoring and Improvement Approaches by Save the Children (agency perspective)

There are differences in the ways the data on QLE/QoS is used at the CO and agency levels, with a stronger emphasis on harmonization and understanding of the global trends for the latter. More specifically at the agency level the QLE/QoS have helped with:

**(h) demonstrating achievements, agency-wide trends and practices with regard to measuring and improving programme quality:** once a representative number of QLE/QoS assessments are available, Save the Children aims to routinely report and track progress against measurement and improvement on quality standards drawn from the QLE/QoS assessments. **Such analysis can be used to make decisions around key areas for capacity building and systems strengthening that would be relevant across all (or most) of our country programmes.** Additionally, **such evidence would position Save the Children globally to advocate for improved quality in services and improvement in learning environments in global and national fora.**

**(i) establishing a harmonized culture, system and practice of measuring and improving quality:** although QLE/QoS were rolled out as global indicators and are mandatory for all COs with relevant programmes to report against, the ownership displayed by COs has shown that both our COs and partners found these systems to be useful. **Having a consistent approach to monitoring programme quality has helped to establish and create opportunities for cross-country and cross-disciplinary learning, and has harmonized our systems for reporting and tracking progress.** In fact, in response to SCI's rollout of the MEAL approach, several country programs have noted their use of QLE items as quality benchmarks for education programs. From a global perspective, the results of such a harmonized approach can be sustained beyond our agency's need for creating a global picture, since they help to institutionalize a culture of evidence-based programme improvement. In other words, even if at some point QLE/QoS are not sustained as "mandatory global indicators," harmonizing and institutionalizing them across our country programmes will allow us to document and conduct comparisons on core quality components in the future.

With this aim in mind, the GIs remain deeply committed to support the COs to improve their capacity to monitor and improve quality beyond the reporting requirements.

This list of how the QLE/QoS resources can be used is not complete and will be expanded as the indicators are put in practice.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Measuring quality in programmes is a challenge for many organizations, and with the implementation of QLE and QoS indicators, Save the Children has made a significant contribution to the sectors where change is difficult to measure. The country offices find this approach to monitoring and improving quality both innovative and useful, and have started building their programme improvements based on evidence generated in the last two -three years.

This paper is only the first step to share some of the CPI and EdGI's experience, documents the most important lessons coming out of the QLE/QoS process and aims to fuel discussions in other sectors that are planning to develop similar measures. During the development of the indicators, several debates have been held as to whether the QLE/QoS are too complicated, too long, too difficult, and **when the COs were asked to review and discuss which items they wished to cut, the standards were not downsized, but were actually expanded.** This proves that while the standards and the indicators in QLE and QoS could benefit from simplification and further refinement, the current indicators are indeed useful and should not be removed in order to make the assessments faster - this can be a compromise in how we as an agency define the complex construct of quality.

Moving forward it is important to note that **there is a significant difference between operational and thematic standards, and QLE/QoS aim to measure both at this stage.** E.g. the QLE measures whether teachers are present in the classroom and also whether the content of the classes meets the learning needs of children. Similarly, QoS measures the child caregiver and child ratio, as well as whether services are meeting the needs of the children. **It is the tracking of both operational and thematic standards that makes these two indicators comprehensive.** The technical and country-based staff who have spent significant amounts of efforts on designing, managing, reporting and using data from the QLE and QoS recommend maintaining the current content of the indicators or suggested adding more areas for assessments (such as Inclusive Education for QLE, Integration of measuring monitoring capacity of the service provider in QoS, etc). They also requested that any changes to the tools need to be rolled out only after successful piloting.

As mentioned in the cover note above, Save the Children, through these two approaches, has already demonstrated significant leadership in education and child protection by offering tools and guidance to monitoring, measuring and improving quality in programmes. Various donors and like-minded academic and development agencies have found these methodologies to be innovative and are eager to learn from and with us.

For this however, the agency needs provide committed leadership in:

- a) investing adequate financial and human resources in integrating the QLE/QoS in all relevant programmes,

*"I would perhaps simplify some of the terminology, so that it is easily translated into various languages. But I would not take anything out. They are all important standards and indicators" Africa training, 2013*

- b) identifying common approaches to measuring quality in all sectors, and
- c) increasing internal commitment for generating and using evidence in this area for programmatic improvement.

We hope that in the new strategic period, expanding our ability to monitor, measure and improve programme quality will be in the center of our strategic discussions and will receive much needed commitment to ensure advancement.

## ANNEX 1: SUMMARY OF CHARACTERISTICS QLE AND QoS

	Characteristics	QLE	QoS
Content	Thematic focus	Measures quality in education	Measures quality in child protection
	Who is measured	Basic Education (Formal and non-Formal programmes) <sup>4</sup> ECCD (Center-based, community-based and work-based programmes) <sup>5</sup>	Formal: Formal Service providers <sup>6</sup> Non-Formal: Community-Based mechanisms <sup>7</sup>
	Standards for formal providers	QLE for Basic Education contains 4 guiding principles, which are measured by 28 indicators	QoS for Formal Service providers contains 11 Standards, which are measured by 25 indicators
	Standards for informal providers	QLE for ECCD contains 4 guiding principles, which are measured by 23 indicators	QoS for Community Based Service providers contains 10 Standards which are measured by 23 indicators
Implementation	Pilot phase	All Asia COs in 2011 pilot test	2010 - 2011 - Nepal and the Philippines 2012 - Albania, Liberia, Senegal, Tanzania and Zimbabwe 2013 - Peru and Equator
	Roll out	Global Rollout from 2012 onwards	Global Rollout from 2013 onwards
Reporting	Data Management	Data recorded reported and analysed through a standardized Excel database	Data recorded, reported and analysed through excel tool
	Data volume	In 2013, 37 Country Offices reported on QLE for Basic Education in 2013, compared with 42 country offices in 2012. During 2013, we assessed 1,689/15% of our formal and non formal schools eligible for QLE monitoring (total N=10,997). For ECCD, 30 Country Offices reported on QLE for ECCD in 2013, compared with 32 country offices in 2012. During 2013, we assessed 1,258/18% of our early years education settings (community-, center- and work based) eligible for QLE monitoring (total N = 7020).	27 COs reported on QoS 410 services were assessed 188 Formal Service providers 222 Community Based mechanisms
	Baseline	Established in 2013	Established in 2013
	Statistical significance	Confidence intervals are calculated at 90% in the 2013 report	Not maintained for 2013, but planned for 2015 onwards in the new strategic period based on a mutually agreed sampling framework with QLE. The 2013 (and 2014) data is indicative of the results for only those service providers that were assessed

<sup>4</sup> EGI is working on an agency-wide definition

<sup>5</sup> EGI is working on an agency-wide definition

<sup>6</sup> Formal Child Protection Services are directly operated by the government, a UN agency, an NGO, an International NGO or a legally registered Community Based Organisation (CBO). For examples and more explanation please see QoS guidelines

<sup>7</sup> Community-Based mechanisms provide services which are operated by individual volunteers or community volunteer groups. For examples and more explanation please see QoS guidelines

Use	Programme design	The quality standards and principles of both indicators are used in the design of the new proposals to clarify and explain what we mean by quality, and how we are planning to implement, monitor and achieve it.
	Improvement of current programmes	The results of both indicators are being used by the COs to determine key areas in the current programmes that need improvement based on their scores. This is being integrated into current programme's strategy with an aim to increase the score in the coming assessment cycle.
	Building capacity	Several COs used the QLE and QoS indicators to determine the type and area of capacity building that they can provide to the partner/s or service/s we support, based on the scores achieved against the specific standards and indicators.
	Evaluation	In 2013 for QoS Peru and for QLE - Haiti (used a control group), the SCN "I'm Learning" pilot country programs (Zimbabwe, Uganda, Cambodia) have used the quality indicator standards, indicators and the monitoring/measuring methodology as an evaluation tool to assess the service providers against the sector-wide standards. The findings of those assessments will be used to evaluate the programme's achievements, as well as will be used to build upcoming programmes and leverage government support for improvements of the identified weakness areas.
	Advocacy	In certain cases the results of the QLE and QoS indicators were used to advocate for certain changes around provision of child protection and education services. Where the aggregate results demonstrated weakness around a standard, several COs raised it at relevant government levels with an aim to generate resources and technical support, as well as raise awareness for the needed improvements among duty bearers.
	Government level Policy Implementation	In many countries COs have successfully advocated with their national ministries to take part or all of QLE items into consideration in national monitoring efforts or school inspection standards – some examples include Bolivia, Colombia, Cambodia, Thailand.  In Zimbabwe, Albania and many other countries various state-based offices have expressed interest in integrating parts of QoS into existing monitoring frameworks.