In-Country Dissemination of Inclusive International Common Assessment for Numeracy (ICAN) Guidelines

January 18, 2024 - Islamabad

A collaboration between SightSavers, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) and the People’s Action for Learning (PAL) Network
Introduction & Background:

Given the challenges of ‘inclusion’ of children and people with disabilities in our society, there is an urgency to address this systematically in Pakistan. Many institutions and departments are working on this front including the Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Development (MoFE&PT). The MoFE&PT recently passed the **Dyslexia Special Measures Act 2022** and set up the first Dyslexia demonstration and training laboratory at the **National Book Foundation (NBF)**, an affiliate institution of the MoFE&PT. NBF publishes school/college textbooks for ICT/Federal Areas jurisdiction institutions, books of interest for all ages and also books in braille for the visually impaired. Given the scale of persons/children with disabilities in Pakistan, challenges of low awareness, negative attitudes, equal opportunities for learning and assessments together with low/no support for teachers, there is an urgency for action with inclusive tools and skills. This work is a systematic contribution towards meeting these challenges proactively in Pakistan through collaborative partnerships. ITA and SightSavers are both well-known organizations for their work in democratizing learning assessments and solutions inclusively.

To put the challenges and scale in perspective see figure 1 below.

![Figure 1](image)

**Collaboration for Inclusive Foundational Learning and Assessments:**

Addressing the needs of children and people with disabilities requires extraordinary collaboration across key stakeholders from the government, private sector, CSOs and development partners. It is in this spirit of collaboration that Sightsavers and ITA joined
hands in 2022 to adapt the Inclusive International Common Assessment for Numeracy (ICAN) Guidelines for foundational learning. ICAN has been developed by the People’s Action for Learning (PAL Network). ICAN has recently won the WISE Award 2023.

ITA is a founding member of the PAL Network and Sightsavers is a ‘friend’ of the network.

ICAN is an open-source tool to measure the numeracy skills of children:

- It is currently available in 11 languages, 17 countries.
- Aligned UNESCO Global Proficiency Framework (GPF) finalized by the UIS
- Is feasible for use in household-based assessments as well as in school settings.
- Is suitable for a broad age group of learners, in order to identify gaps in numeracy.
- Has an average administration time of 15 minutes per child.
- Can be implemented on large scale in low resource settings.

ICAN covers several domains and tasks for numeracy at lower primary level mapped to the GPF and to the National Curriculum of Pakistan (2022-24)

The 18 months collaboration of SS and ITA was intensive working with both children in school and children out of school with two impairments.

- **Children with visual impairment**: children who are blind & children with low vision
- **Children with hearing impairment**: children with profound, severe, moderate, and mild hearing loss
The task would not have been accomplished without the support of participating partner schools. Their collaboration is acknowledged, and it was reassuring to have two of the partner schools, their teachers and students present at the Dissemination in Islamabad viz. Baseerat High School for Blind and the Bahria College of Special Education.


- Deaf Reach /FESF Karachi
- Idarieu School and College, Karachi,
- National Institute for Deaf, Gujranwala
- Baseerat High School for Blind, Wah
- Bahria College of Special Education, Islamabad

The adaptation of ICAN guidelines for disability inclusive assessments went through 9 specific stages focusing on four core elements.

1. Children with disabilities can actually take the assessments
2. These children are provided with meaningful opportunities to demonstrate their skills and knowledge
3. Necessary data, including disability disaggregated data, are collected and analysed
4. Learnings are effectively disseminated to promote improved service provision


Globally there is a common understanding that we lack specific data on the educational performance of children with disabilities because standardized testing methods in low- and middle-income countries are usually not accessible for students with disabilities. Hence, SightSavers and ITA had conducted a carefully co-created pilot project with all stakeholders especially end users or Children with Disabilities. The key objective and outcomes planned for the pilot are shared below.
Key Objective:

The findings will contribute to the development of disability-inclusive assessment systems and assist policymakers and implementers to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all with a particular focus on SDG 4.1.1 a: proficiency in reading and mathematics for lower primary education (grades 2/3).

The main outcomes were;

**Outcome 1:** ICAN can be made inclusive for girls and boys with sensory impairments through the application of Universal Design for Learning principles, and guidelines and materials are available in the public domain.

**Outcome 2:** Inclusive ICAN guidelines and recommendations to be shared in Pakistan and at the international level for endorsement of the inclusive ICAN guidelines in Pakistan promoted through engagement with provincial and federal ministries of education.

*Note: The Report/Guidelines were shared in Nairobi, Kenya during the international meeting of all PAL Network Partners and Friends in November 2023 by SS and ITA*

The dissemination achieved the following outcomes
- Sharing outcomes of the adaptation and the key documents (report and guidelines)
- A panel discussion by distinguished speakers to highlight the importance of inclusive learning and assessment challenges, solutions and practices: followed by Q&A and comments

High Level recommendations by the Chief Guest from the MoE&PT, Government of Pakistan- Special Secretary Mr. Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani

*Report and Guidelines can be downloaded through the QR Code*
Chief Guest & Participants

The Chief Guest was Mr. Mohyuddin A. Wani, Special Secretary MoFE&PT

There were 60 participants including 8 panellists (annex 1) who actively participated in the discussion and suggestions around key topics.

Panel Reflections/Discussion Topics:

- How to strengthen the application of existing action frameworks to guide the inclusion of assessments of children with disabilities in Pakistan based on priorities and challenges identified during this Project.
- Existing gaps, priorities and next steps to: improve accessibility; availability of disability data and statistics and build capacity within the education sector using recommendations of this project.
- Share existing knowledge and good practices, as appropriate, as a contribution to highlighting specific policy interventions on disability mainstreaming within Pakistan's education sector in order to scale-up this Project.

1. Dr. Shahid Soroya, DG PIE
2. Abia Akram, CEO National Forum for Women with Disabilities
3. Zainab Iqbal, Education Advisor FCDO
4. Izza Farrakh, Senior Education Specialist World Bank
5. Greta Rollo, Disability, Inclusion and Assessment Expert ACER
6. Sam Willson, PD Pakistan FL Hub
7. Noreen Hasan, Education Specialist UNICEF
8. Itfaq Khaliq Khan, Senior Program Manager Sightsavers

Moderator:

Baela Raza Jamil, CEO Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi
Key Findings and Recommendations:

These are presented from the report and the dissemination event:

- ICAN adapted for sensory impairment shows positive results; the report indicates the effectiveness of the ICAN assessment, and it should be implemented at a broader level in Pakistan and Global South countries.

- Lack of available data on the number of sensory impaired children (5-16 years) is a hindrance to the implementation at a larger scale. The data that exists within the governmental and private entities for the desired age group is very outdated.

- Guidelines should be included for identifying sensory impaired out-of-school children.

- Children with little to no sign language skills and numeracy skills find the assessment frustrating; ICAN is an easily implementable tool for assessments.

- Strategies should be developed upon expansion for data collection, storage, access and analysis.

- Standardization in administration of the assessment should be maintained.

- Assessment should be conducted after completing at least six months of the academic year (grades 2/3 and can be extended to grades 3-5).

- Promotion of inclusive educational practices within the private sector for adoption of accessible tools and should make the process centrally focused and appropriately resourced.

- Support training programs for teachers to enhance their skills in teaching children with sensory impairments, ensuring a supportive learning environment.

- Develop and implement policies that mandate the inclusion of accessible educational materials in schools as the study suggested that profound blind children did better than students with low vision.

- Lack of hearing aid devices and sign language skills have hindered the outcomes of deaf students; thus equipping students with the sign language skills and resourcing them with the amplification devices can be helpful in getting better results.

- Engage with international organizations and collaborations to share best practices and resources for inclusive education, leveraging global expertise.

- Allocate financial resources to facilitate the widespread adoption of adapted assessments and accessible educational tools in schools across the country.

- The assessment and adaptation highlighted that the in-school children used a range of assistive materials to help calculate the sums using styluses and slates while the
out-of-school children relied on mental calculations; Though both students found the advance questions difficult but in comparison a higher proportion of OOSC were unable to make the more advanced calculations

- Establish comprehensive teacher training programs to equip educators with the necessary skills to teach children with sensory impairments effectively. Out-of-school children for both visual and hearing impairment had a very little understanding of signing language and that led to lower performance on the ICAN tool

- Advocate for the incorporation of Universal Design for Assessment principles in educational policies, ensuring inclusivity for children with diverse impairments

- Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system to assess the effectiveness of inclusive education policies and make data-driven adjustments as needed

- A comprehensive study should be conducted to understand the barriers to numeracy for sensory impaired children

Recommendations by the Chief Guest, Panelists, Participants and Partners:

**Mr. Mohyuddin Wani, Chief Guest and the Special Secretary Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training (MoFE&PT),** emphasized the need for all government institutions, including education, special education, Pakistan Foundational Learning Hub; EdTech Hub, and Education Reform units to collaborate as a unified platform for inclusive education and learning. He suggested to collectively develop, test, and implement the recommendations and solutions of the ICAN assessment exercise. Furthermore, he recommended that “instead of having National Dialogues, we find compelling evidence that ICAN should be rolled out immediately at scale in ICT. This requires a proposal budgeted for the 2024-25 fiscal year for the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and its schools under the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE). A PC-1/project should be developed and implemented immediately with PIE and partners”.

**Dr. Shahid Soroya, Director General Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE),** suggested that there is a federal government data portal available to researchers and the public, there is every reason to believe that PIE can incorporate ICAN tools especially with the National Assessment Test (NAT) planned for 2025. The recommendations from the dissemination would be welcomed at PIE for its inclusive strategy.
Noreen Hasan, Education Specialist at UNICEF emphasized mainstreaming children with mild to moderate impairments and the need for regular screening for disabilities, especially for children from challenged backgrounds with training of teachers.

Sam Wilson, Program Director at the Pakistan Foundational Learning Hub, MoFE&PT discussed building on the existing program like the out-of-school challenge fund and government’s early childhood education programs to strengthen inclusion for the broader spectrum of disabilities.

Abia Akram, CEO National Forum for Women with Disabilities stressed on the lack of representation of people with disabilities in the formal employment sector due to education system shortcomings, and the need for specific pathways and systems specifically for girls with disabilities; She will be happy to participate in improving representation, voice and pathways for achieving learning milestones successfully.

Zainab Iqbal, Education Specialist at FCDO recommended collaboration with practitioners and international best practices, targeting a spectrum of disabilities and focusing on intersectionality.

Izza Farrakh, Senior Education Specialist at the World Bank emphasized the need for real behavior change in how people view disabilities before any institutional arrangements. Curriculum and textbooks should be inclusive, and proper training and deployment of tools are crucial.

Greta Rollo, Disability, Inclusion and Assessment Expert at ACER expressed openness to partnerships, acknowledging the importance of enumerators and the need to address functional needs based on international practices.

Dr. Raja Mazhar M.D National Book Foundation shared NBF’s commitment to the initiative through braille materials as required.

Mr. Qaisar Alam, Chairman Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) shared multiple initiatives taken by FBISE for enabling children with disabilities to access its services online and through other inclusive platforms and tools. He also highlighted that there is a search for one common assessment tool for foundational learning that this will be a major breakthrough.

Other Participants: A teacher from DEWA highlighted the importance of assessments to appreciate students and make them feel part of the environment. Participants stressed on the importance of reaching out to children with disabilities on a larger scale, not limiting support to special centers/schools. The focus should be on strengthening existing institutions and making education inclusive.

Participants suggested that given the lack of commitment from education departments there is a dire need to address this issue is the need of the hour. Dr. Naeem (member of the Board NCRC) mentioned that we need to reach parity for 4.5.1 for people with sensory impairments, emphasizing the importance of counseling new parents by involving those who have experience in this journey.
The UNICEF representative from KP shared that a study had been implemented on learning difficulties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the govt. would welcome to take ICAN guidelines to the KP government for adoption and learn from the findings for scaling up at the provincial level initiatives for mainstreaming inclusive education.

**Ms. Munnaza Gillani, Country Director Sightsavers**, shared that children with hearing impairment enrolled in education, who participated in the ICAN piloting, tended to achieve lower scores compared to their visually impaired peers. Their schools are facing challenges in addressing the specific needs of these children, not only in terms of teaching numeracy but also in teaching literacy and communication skills. She also requested that institutions working for people with disabilities should include individuals with disabilities or organizations working for people with disabilities in the planning phase.

**Baela Raza Jamil, CEO of ITA**, as a moderator highlighted that since 2014 under ASER Pakistan, ITA has been working on making assessment and action for learning inclusive, working closely with the REAL Centre Cambridge university and with the **Cambridge Network for Disability and Education Research (CaNDER)** is a research network committed to generating rigorous scholarship in the field of disability established by Dr. Nidhi Singhal. Deaf Reach has converted ASER/ICAN tools and children’s textbooks and story books into sign language. Sightsavers has transformed the tools into braille and tactile assessment tools.

At the end, **Mr. Itfaq Khaliq Khan, Senior Program Manager** at Sightsavers, emphasized the call to action by stating, "It’s high time we invest in inclusive assessment to evaluate whether the efforts we are putting in are effectively improving learning levels or not”.

Overall, the dissemination event highlighted a positive consensus towards a comprehensive approach for inclusive education, awareness, and support for people with disabilities; **there is an urgent need to collaborate for data-driven decisions and long-term sustainable plans.**
Media Coverage

The Nation


The News


Pak Observer


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Photo Gallery
Annex: Participants