Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

   Accessible Digital Textbooks for All

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

   Nicaragua, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Paraguay and Colombia (currently piloting); Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

   ☐ Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools

   ☐ Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development

   ☐ Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

   ☑ Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation

   ☐ Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

MOE in each countries are leading the project in collaboration with publishers (Book Fusion in Jamaica, eKitabu in Kenya), local NGOs (Paraguay Educa), foundations (Fundacion Zamora Terah in Nicaragua) and Universities (UNAN Managua, National University in Colombia) and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities.

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

The Accessible Digital Textbooks for all project aims to address one of the key barriers to inclusive education resulting from the inaccessibility of core learning materials by using universal design for learning principles and accessible technology. This will improve learning outcomes for ALL children, including children with disabilities.

6. What makes it a best practice? *

Children with disabilities remain one of the most marginalized and excluded groups and face multiple barriers and challenges related to accessing quality education. Additionally, when considering the SDG 4 goal to leave no child behind in learning - and recognition that students learn differently - it is important to note that the "one-size-fits-all" approach to education fails to recognize the learning styles that benefit different learners. The lack of these essential components can result in students not enrolling in schools, dropping out or remaining in school but not achieving their full academic potential. Accessible digital textbooks (ADT) can help address the issue of accessible learning materials, which is one of many elements needed to promote an inclusive environment for students with disabilities. This project is about appreciating learners' diversity, valuing their well-being, respecting their inherent dignity and autonomy. It is also about recognizing individuals' needs and their ability to effectively participate, be included in and contribute to society.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)
   This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:
   i) Which population was affected?
   ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
   iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

   Children with disabilities remain one of the most marginalized and excluded groups and face multiple barriers and challenges related to accessing quality education. Additionally, when considering the SDG 4 goal to leave no child behind in learning - and recognition that students learn differently - it is important to note that the "one-size-fits-all" approach to education fails to recognize the learning styles that benefit different learners. The lack of these essential components can result in students not enrolling in schools, dropping out or remaining in school but not achieving their full academic potential. Accessible digital textbooks (ADT) can help address the issue of accessible learning materials, which is one of many elements needed to promote an inclusive environment for students with disabilities.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)
   Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:
   i) What are the main activities carried out?
   ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
   iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
   iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?
    *

   Accessible digital textbooks that are developed using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles support different learning styles hence can be used in inclusive education classrooms by learners with and without disabilities. Grounded on the UNCRPD and Marrakesh Treaty and with the aim to leave no child behind in learning (SDG4), the initiative was designed to enhance partnership between designers of curricula, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, teachers, publishers, and parents. developed ADTs by adapting the identified components of the primary school curriculum into accessible formats. The aim of this initiative is to:
   1. Enhance the enabling environment for the use of quality accessible digital textbooks to ensure and strengthen inclusive education and access to information by key stakeholders.
   2. Improve capacity of the education system and the textbook ecosystem to produce and procure accessible digital textbooks.
   Each countries received around $150,00US to pilot one textbook and conduct training activities, advocacy and communication activities, work on policies, and production of accessible content and technology : ELEVA foundation (UK Natcom) funded UNICEF with US1,800,000$ for a period of 3 years in LACRO; and UNPRPD funded UNICEF and UNESCO in ESARO (US750,000$ for 3 years).

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)
To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:
i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda developed ADTs by adapting the identified components of the primary school curriculum into accessible formats; Jamaica, Nicaragua and Paraguay are currently finalizing their first prototype. These ADTs were then loaded onto available devices – tablets, laptops and respective country "education clouds" for use by learners in classrooms. Teachers were also trained on the use of ADT/AT/UDL for effective pedagogy. Awareness raising, advocacy and capacity building on key global instruments particularly the UNCRPD and Marrakesh Treaty for ratification and domestication were also conducted. Guidance documents were also generated: on the use of sign language in ADT development; and on procurement of ICT equipment for Persons with Disabilities in Rwanda. This case study draws from country implementation experiences as well as stakeholders' experiences and lessons learned during the life of project.

Experiences in countries show that the ADT initiative has stimulated conversations and engagement towards inclusive education and supported actions in terms of capacity building, system strengthening and policy making. The ADT initiative seems to be very attractive to MOEs because they see in the innovation a concrete way to respond to the needs of learning of children with disabilities, especially after the sad realisation that this population has been largely excluded from remote learning during the pandemic.

A case study is currently being reviewed on the ESARO implementation and a new report on piloting results in Paraguay will be available shortly by Innocenti- Office of Research.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)
    To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:
    i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
    ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
    iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

    Lessons learned have highlighted the importance for policy makers to be informed and reached to buy into ADT as a strategy for "learning for all" and ensure sustainability through establishing targets and monitoring progress to ensure sustainability of ADT production in the country. Scalability is only possible if there is a deep analysis of the digital education supply chain to ensure usability and accessibility for all children inside and outside the classroom. It also emphasized the need to redouble our efforts to support teachers in incorporating the ADTs in their lessons to really foster inclusion and participation of all children. They have also accentuated the need for better evidence generation and data collection on learning outcomes of children with disabilities. Finally, because every country works on distinct platforms, using different publishing tools and formats, there is need to work with every country individually and address gaps in their technology using their local resources. Building local capacity and engaging with local partners and publishers as well as with the MOE seems to be the most sustainable and successful approach.

    Overall, the holistic approach of the ADT initiative has influenced the transition towards an education system inclusive to all children and efforts should be sustained. ADT project helped to ignite wider concept of assistive technologies in education and now there is growing appreciation of the need and relevance of ADT. Also, it presented relevant entry point for meaningful MoE & MoICT collaboration.

11. Conclusions (250 words)
    Please describe why may this intervention be considered a "best practice". What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented "best practice" or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

    Finally, not only has the ADT initiative stimulated the local publishing market, but it has participated in filling an important gap in the inclusive education ecosystem to achieve quality education for all, as presented in the infographic below. The funding has allowed UNICEF and UNESCO to work beyond the initial focus on learning materials available in accessible formats and the overarching component of inclusive education policies to include activities related to investment in teacher training on inclusion by including capacity building of teachers and stakeholders on Universal Design for Learning , Accessible Digital textbooks and disability rights, as well as procurement of assistive technology. Next steps require a focus on deepening and expanding technical capacity, partnerships and participation of communities and children with disabilities to really institutionalize the project within the inclusive education agenda of each ministry. Recommendations for different stakeholders vary from (i) ensuring the institutionalization of the ADT production following UDL principles within the ministry of education by including in the Education Sector Plan and promoting policies on procurement of curriculum-based textbooks requiring that all textbooks be produced following the ADT guidelines alongside printed versions, with the long-term goal to develop born-accessible textbooks to (ii) supporting trainings of in-service and pre-service technology developers to understand and apply UDL principles into technologies for technology developers, and (iii) Utilizing communication channels of teachers' union and district education management to advocate for stronger and continuous digital literacy trainings and capacity building to teach children of different abilities in inclusive settings.

12. Further reading
    Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the "best practice" for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

    www.accessibletextbooksforall.org