

2023

Report on Aflatoun Partners' Work with Children with Functional Disabilities



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Executive Summary

This report presents the key findings from a survey conducted among Aflatoun partners on their work with children with functional disabilities. The survey was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of Aflatoun's materials, identify areas for improvement, and assess the demand for additional support from Aflatoun to ensure inclusive programs for these children. The report highlights the key findings and provides insights into the challenges and opportunities in this area.

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted using an online web-based questionnaire. It was sent out in August 2023 to 101 aflatoun partners that had previously reported that they were including children with functional disabilities in their programmes. 56 organizations from 38 countries completed the survey.

Key Findings

Characteristics of Education Programmes for Children with Functional Disabilities

1. Types of Functional Disabilities children have that participate in the different programmesⁱ

Children and youth with functional disabilities in the different programmes experience difficulties in various aspects of basic functioning, including walking, seeing, hearing, communicating, cognition, and emotions. More detailed descriptions of the different categories are shown in the endnote. The majority of organizations are focussing on children with physical disabilities (38/68%). The entire spectrum of functional disabilities among children is included.

Functional Disability	# Partners	Percentage
Physical disabilities	38	68%
Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities	27	48%
Communication disorders	21	38%
Hearing Impairments	19	34%
Cognitive Disabilities	15	27%
Visual impairments	15	27%
Autism Spectrum Disorders	12	21%
Multiple Disabilities	22	39%

2. Age Groups Targeted

The majority of programs catering to children with disabilities focus on primary and secondary school-age children. More than half of the programmes also include young people who have reached the age of 18.

Age Groups	# Partners	Percentage
0-3 years	12	21%
3-6 years	20	36%
6-12 years	45	80%
13-17 years	47	84%
18+ years	34	61%

3. Types of Interventions

The majority of 56 organizations reach children with disabilities through mainstream education (40 - 71%). Twenty-one organizations (38%) through non-formal education. A third of the organizations offer both mainstream education and non-formal education. Eight organizations (14%) reach the children through special schools. Five of them are residential schools (9%).

Type of intervention	# Partners	Percentage
Targeted support in general classrooms by teacher	40	71%
Special classes for children with functional disabilities in regular school	9	16%
Education in special day-school(s) for children with disabilities	4	7%
Education in special residential-school(s) for children with disabilities	5	9%
Home-based education	8	14%
Non-Formal Education	21	38%
Other	7	13%

4. Type of specific support provided

Half the organizations organize peer support (54%). About half of the organizations also ensure physical accessibility and adapted Aflatoun tools to make them more accessible for the children (52%). Extra time is also frequently ensured (39%). Other tools and methods in their interventions, including sign language, assistive technology, a quiet place to work, memory aids, transport and Braille.

Type of support provided in the interventions	# Partners	Percentage
Peer support	30	54%
Ensure physical accessibility	29	52%
Other education materials in formats that are accessible for children	29	52%
Extra time	22	39%
Sign language	15	27%
Assistive technology	11	20%
Quiet place to work	10	18%
Memory aids	9	16%
Transport	9	16%
Braille	8	14%
Read aloud technology	4	7%

5. Main Challenges

The majority report multiple challenges in implementing their programmes for children with disabilities. The key challenges include: Lack of funding (80%); Lack of technical capacity of staff (73%); Lack of access to formal education facilities for children with disabilities (66%); and Lack of disability inclusive educational content (66%).

Main challenges	# Partners	Percentage
Lack of funding	45	80%
Lack of technical capacity of staff	41	73%
Lack of access to formal education facilities for children with disabilities	37	66%
Lack of disability inclusive educational content	37	66%
Lack of number of staff	24	43%
Stigma & discrimination towards the children	17	30%
Lack of appreciation by formal education system	15	27%

6. Teacher Preparedness

Only 48% of the organizations report that their teachers are trained to teach social and financial education including for children with functional disabilities. Only a third of the organizations offered special training programs either by themselves or through other organizations (32%). The majority of organizations (63%) reported that their teachers were trained on inclusive education/how to teach children with functional disabilities during general pre-service or general in-service training. Six organizations indicated that their teachers are not trained at all on inclusive education.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the most common support identified for teachers that organizations need to further improve teaching & learning social and financial education including for children with functional disabilities is training. 73% of the organizations ask for training/capacity building; 9% ask for funding to train; and 5% ask for equipment.

7. Parental Involvement

A majority of the organizations (32/57%) reported that parents are actively involved in the education of their children with functional disabilities. The large majority of parents involvement consisted of Parent Teacher Discussions (25/32). Half of the parents provide 'Support at Home' (17/32 of Parents reinforce learning at home). Other support included: 'Advocacy activities' (14/32 of Parents are involved in advocacy for their child's educational rights with local authorities); 'Training' (10/32 of Parents participate in trainings helping them gain knowledge and skills to better support their child's education); 'Support Groups' (10/32 are connecting with other parents of children with similar disabilities can provide emotional support, exchange information, and share experiences); and

‘Review meetings’ (9 report that parents participate in meetings to review progress on Individualized Education Plans of child).

8. Negative Beliefs and Attitudes

Negative beliefs and attitudes about children with functional difficulties are encountered frequently, with "sometimes" being the most common response (32%). 45% of the organization report ‘often’ or ‘always’ to encounter negative beliefs and attitudes.

Frequency of encountering negative beliefs and attitudes about children with functioning difficulties?	Organizations reporting	% of all organizations
Always	10	18%
Often	15	27%
Sometimes	18	32%
Rarely	9	16%
Never	4	7%

Contributors to Negative Beliefs & Attitudes

The organizations report that the community members, other children and teachers and school management are the primary contributors to negative beliefs and attitudes about children with functional difficulties.

Actors are contributing to the negative beliefs and attitudes about children with functioning difficulties	Organizations reporting	% of all organizations
Community	42	75%
Other children	25	45%
Teachers	16	29%
School management	15	27%
Media	12	21%
Politicians	10	18%
Civil Society Organizations	9	16%
Community leaders	9	16%
Faith-based organizations	5	9%

Response: Stigma Reduction Activities

Over half of the organizations (34/61%) engage in special activities to reduce stigma and negative beliefs about children with functional disabilities.

These activities often target communities (55%) and community leaders (39%). As well as teachers (46%), school management (38%) and other children (36%).

Actors are contributing to the negative beliefs and attitudes about children with functioning difficulties	Number of organizations out of 34 with a response	% of all organizations
Community	31/34	55%
Teachers	26/34	46%
Community leaders	22/34	39%
School management	21/34	38%
Other children	20/34	36%
Civil Society Organizations	15/34	27%
Media	12/34	21%
Faith-based organizations	10/34	18%
Politicians	6/34	11%

9. Active Participation by Children with Functional Disabilities in program design and implementation

A high share of the organizations report that they actively involve children with disabilities in program design and implementation. The main ways that allow for active participation in the design and/or implementation of your interventions for children with functional disabilities include: *Focus Groups*

(83%), *Peer Support* (54%), *Student-Led Initiatives* (39%), *Reflection and Evaluation* (32%), *Advisory Councils* (23%), and *Co-Design Workshops* (19%).

10. Monitoring & Evaluation

Only a minority of organizations (14%/8) have assessed the effectiveness of their programs through surveys or qualitative studies. This is an area that requires attention.

11. Child Protection Measures

Most organizations have clear policies, a code of conduct, staff training, and confidential reporting mechanisms in place to protect children with disabilities. However, around 20% of organizations need urgent support to set-up these systems in place.

Child Protection Policies & Procedures in place	Percentage
Clear and comprehensive policies and procedures that explicitly address the protection of children with disabilities	71%
Code of conduct that outlines acceptable behavior and interactions with children	80%
Staff Training and Awareness - Including recognizing signs of abuse, appropriate behavior, and how to respond to disclosures or concerns	88%
Confidential reporting mechanism	80%

Aflatoun Social & Financial Education

Organizations use various Aflatoun curricula and tools, including Aflatot (6/56), Aflatoun Formal (32/56), Aflatoun NFE (11/56), Aflateen/Aflateen+ (30/56), and AflaYouth (10/56).

12. Adapting Aflatoun Tools

Organizations have made content and format adaptations for children with disabilities in several ways, including printing materials in accessible formats, contextualizing the curriculum, simplifying content in local languages, developing Braille curricula and creating user-friendly tools through teaching aids and specialized exercises tailored to specific disabilities.

13. Digital Innovations

A third of the organizations (18/32%) have implemented digital innovations to make the Aflatoun program more efficient for children with disabilities. These innovations included:

- (i) **Interactive and Multi-sensory Elements:** Incorporating interactive elements, such as touch-based interactions or gesture-based activities (12/56-21%);
- (ii) **The use of screen readers/convert text to speech,** enabling visually impaired users to access and navigate the content (11/56-20%);
- (iii) **Keyboard Navigation Support:** Ensuring that digital tools can be navigated using a keyboard which provides accessibility for children with motor disabilities (6/56-10%); and
- (iv) **Closed Captioning and Subtitling:** Providing closed captioning and subtitling options in videos and multimedia content benefits children with hearing impairments (3/56-5%).

14. Limitations of Aflatoun Material

The four most commonly reported limitations using the Aflatoun material: (i) Lack of appropriate material in general (46%); Lack of teaching techniques that engage multiple senses (e.g., visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) to enhance learning for children with functional disabilities (45%); Lack of funding (39%); and Lack of technical capacity of staff facilitating the Aflatoun programme (38%).

Limitation Aflatoun material	Organizations reporting	% of all organizations
Lack of appropriate material in general for children with functional disabilities	26	46%
Lack of teaching techniques that engage multiple senses (e.g., visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) to enhance learning for children with functional disabilities	25	45%
Lack of funding	22	39%
Lack of technical capacity of staff facilitating the Aflatoun programme	21	38%
The curriculum does not address the specific challenges and goals that children with functional disabilities face in their daily lives	18	32%
Lack of appreciation by education authorities	11	20%
The social and financial concepts and terminology are too difficult for the children with functional disabilities	11	20%
The content does not help children with functional disabilities develop skills relevant to their future independence and employment	7	13%
Lack of appreciation by parents	6	11%
Curriculum is not flexible to allow for individualized instruction, providing different levels of support and accommodations to meet each child's specific requirements.	5	9%
The Aflatoun programme does not assess the progress and learning outcomes of children with functional disabilities throughout the financial education curriculum.	5	9%
The programme does not facilitate interaction between educators, families, and support professionals to reinforce financial concepts and skills.	4	7%
The programme does not facilitate interaction for children with functional disabilities to learn alongside their peers without disabilities	2	4%

15. Areas for improvement for Aflatoun Material

The organizations prioritized areas for improvement to make the curricula/tools more useful for programmes that include children with functional disabilities. These suggestions are provide practical direction for Aflatoun to improve its tools. It includes more visual aids, simplified language, more disability friendly experiential learning activities and more guidance on the use of assistive technologies.

Recommendations for Aflatoun to improve tools	Percentage
Provide more visual aids or graphics	52%
More disability friendly experiential learning activities	45%
Use more simple language	45%
Provide guidance on the use of assistive technologies	41%
Break down concepts into smaller, manageable parts	29%
Guidance on adapting materials to suit different learning styles and abilities	27%
Reinforce learning through more repetition and reinforcement activities	23%
Provide tools to assess the progress and learning outcomes of children with functional disabilities	18%

16. Prioritizing Technical Assistance from Aflatoun

The majority of organizations (82%/47) believe that Aflatoun can provide technical assistance to organizations working with children with learning difficulties. Organizations prioritize training of trainers/capacity building and

Identified Support by Aflatoun	Percentage
Training of trainers/Capacity Building	80%
Development of curricula and tools	64%
Sharing of best practices	64%
Convening partners working on programmes for children with functional disabilities	52%

the development of curricula and tools by Aflatoun. Organizations see a role for Aflatoun in facilitating the exchange of best practices and learning on programming for children with functional disabilities at various levels, including national, regional, and global.

17. Sub-Network/Working Group on programming for children with functional disabilities

Many organizations (50/89%) express an interest in being part of an Aflatoun Sub-Network/Working Group, particularly if it focuses on content/tool development, best practices/lessons learned, or regional/global advocacy.

Conclusion

The survey findings highlight the efforts and challenges faced by Aflatoun partners in working with children with functional disabilities. These organizations are committed to inclusive education and have implemented various strategies to support these children. Aflatoun should make the curricula/tools more useful for programmes that include children with functional disabilities. It should provide training for the organizations. Aflatoun can also play a more active role in providing technical assistance, sharing best practices, and facilitating collaboration among partners to further enhance inclusive education for children with functional disabilities.

ⁱ Children and youth with a functional disabilities are at greater risk than other children in experiencing difficulties in completing tasks or activities due to limitations in certain aspects of basic functioning such as walking, seeing, hearing, communicating, cognition and emotions. The functional disabilities are grouped as follows:

Physical Disabilities: This category includes children with conditions that affect their physical abilities, such as mobility impairments, orthopedic disabilities, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, or spina bifida.

Hearing impairments: This category encompasses children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Visual impairments (blind or low vision). It may also include those with combined hearing and visual impairments (deaf-blindness).

Cognitive Disabilities: Children with cognitive disabilities have intellectual impairments that affect their learning abilities and cognitive functioning. This category can include conditions like intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome, or specific learning disabilities.

Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities: This category includes children with emotional or behavioral disorders that significantly impact their ability to learn and socialize effectively. It can include conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), conduct disorder, or emotional disturbances.

Communication Disorders: Children with communication disorders have difficulties with expressive or receptive language skills. This category includes conditions such as speech impairments, language disorders, or stuttering.

Autism Spectrum Disorders: Children on the autism spectrum have challenges with social interaction, communication, and repetitive behaviors. This category includes conditions like autism, Asperger's syndrome, or pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS).

Multiple Disabilities: Some children may have multiple disabilities, meaning they have a combination of two or more disabilities mentioned above. For example, a child could have a physical disability along with a cognitive or sensory disability.