
[Assessing foundational learning for all children during and after the COVID-19 crisis](#)

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Citizen-led assessments

As the COVID-19 crisis has forced schools all over the world to close, more children are out-of-school than ever before. But even before the crisis, many children enrolled in school weren't learning well.

Learning assessment data from across the [PAL Network](#) shows that on average, [half of all children in Grade 5 were unable to read a simple Grade 2 level text](#). The results for numeracy follow a similar dismal pattern. Many low and middle-income countries were already seriously off-track to meet the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) by 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic now threatens to increase school dropouts and make learning outcomes even worse.

Collecting data on learning during and post pandemic

UNESCO predicts that [learning losses could be disproportionately larger in the first two or three years of primary school, compared to children in older grades](#). As nearly all types of learning assessments have been affected by school closures, obtaining reliable data on learning for all children (particularly the most marginalized) remains a major challenge.

The citizen-led assessment (CLA) model was born in India in 2005 with [Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report \(ASER\)](#). Traditionally, CLAs have been conducted in the household and not in schools, offering a method of assessing learning that is grounded in the realities of the Global South where not all children are enrolled in school or attend regularly. Over the past 15 years, this approach has been borrowed and adapted by several countries across the Global South, known as the People's Action for Learning Network ([PAL Network](#)).

However, the [CLA tools](#) have also been used all over the world in a variety of settings, including classrooms and accelerated learning intervention programs where teachers and instructors integrate the assessment tool into learning activities to help them understand children's progress and target instruction to the level of the child.

Suitability of citizen-led assessments during and after COVID

In many Global South countries, the hardest-to-reach children are often found in the hardest-to-reach areas and are unlikely to be in school. Before the COVID crisis, school-based assessments could not answer the question of whether all children were learning, and are even less likely to be able to do so now.

The following four features of CLAs demonstrate why it is the best approach to collect data on foundational learning for all children, both during and after the COVID crisis:

1. CLAs conducted in households reach all children

Once schools reopen, the most disadvantaged children are likely to drop out, and the number of out-of-school children is likely to rise. Unlike school-based assessments, CLAs conducted in households ensure representation of all children (regardless of their schooling status) and can monitor changes in enrollment patterns for the most marginalized children, once schools reopen.

2. CLAs assess foundational reading and numeracy

Measuring foundational learning both during and after the COVID crisis is critical to ensure that corrective measures can be taken early, ensuring that no child is left behind. CLAs focus on foundational reading and comprehension, and numeracy, rather than implementing the subject-wise, grade-level tests that assume children have already acquired foundational skills.

3. CLAs involve parents and the local community

While school systems are disrupted, engaging parents and local communities is critical for continued learning at home, particularly in low resource settings. CLAs are implemented by local organizations, using simple tools to engage parents and community members in discussions about learning. These discussions can spark home or community-based learning activities, playing an important role in regaining the lost instructional time.

4. When used in classrooms, CLAs allow targeted teaching to the level of the child

The instructional time lost due to school closures will have to be regained through accelerated learning programs. When schools reopen, teachers will need to understand learning loss among children in their classrooms, and target instruction to the level of the child to help them catch up. CLAs are simple, easy-to-use tools that produce easily understandable data that can be effectively translated into actions to improve learning.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was struggling with a learning crisis. With schools closed, most learning assessments have halted. In the absence of learning assessment data, countries will struggle to measure progress towards ensuring all children receive a quality education.

To further strengthen its offering and to fill the gap on comparable data, the PAL Network has recently developed and piloted a new comparable foundational numeracy assessment, known as “ICAN” (International Common Assessment of Numeracy). ICAN is an open-source, robust and easy-to-use [assessment tool](#), available in 11 languages, that offers international comparability of results aligned to SDG 4.1.1(a). In its first large-scale implementation round, ICAN covered one rural district each in 13 countries across Africa, America, and Asia to demonstrate the feasibility of using a

common set of tools across very different Global South contexts. The assessment was carried out in 779 rural communities, covering over 15,000 households and assessed over 20,000 children in the age group 5-16.

ICAN 2019 Report will be launched on Thursday, July 9th 2020 at 13:00 UCT.

Join PAL Network for the ICAN launch here: **bit.ly/ICANLaunchWebinar**

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