

Policy brief summary

Promoting inclusive education for girls and boys with disabilities in West and Central Africa - 2020

Background

Children with disabilities in West and Central Africa have the same rights as all children to quality inclusive education. This should enable them to participate actively and meaningfully in learning and society. However, at present, these children are largely excluded from education and learning.

Worldwide, it's estimated there are 93-150 million children with disabilities. Although accurate data is not available, one reputable recent study found that approximately 40 per cent of children with disabilities in low and middle income countries are out of school at primary level, and 55 per cent at lower secondary level. Another study of 15 low and middle income countries found that disability reduces the probability of school attendance by a median 30.9 percentage points. In West and Central Africa, children with disabilities are kept out of school by poor policy and political commitment and action, inadequate data, inaccessible facilities and services including protection and prevention of gender based violence, poor governance, conflict and crises.

Those children with disabilities who do attend school face large 'disability gaps' in learning outcomes and attainment due to systemic inequalities, social stigma and discrimination, and poor quality teaching and governance. The current global COVID-19 pandemic is compounding inequalities, exclusion and marginalisation as children with disabilities face major hurdles to home learning and to returning to schools as they reopen. Education systems are coming under immense pressure, with negative consequences for equity. Changes

to education systems and social inclusion are urgently needed. Such changes must prevent children with disabilities falling through these gaps and empower them to reach their full potential – for themselves and society – throughout their lives. Inclusive education offers a tremendous opportunity to lay the foundations for inclusive societies to which all citizens, even the most vulnerable, can contribute.

All countries in West and Central Africa (WCA), with the exception of Equatorial Guinea, have committed to end the exclusion of children with disabilities from education by signing and/or ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. All UN member states have signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Right of the Child. The African Union (AU) has developed a Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, on the Rights of People with Disabilities in Africa. This proposes an action plan for people with disabilities that recognises the need for inclusion and empowerment. However, there is a discrepancy between discourse and concrete commitment in many WCA countries. Most governments have yet to effectively implement the conventions and laws they have ratified on the rights of persons with disabilities.



Access measures allow Ariane Marie to learn independently in an inclusive classroom.

Recommendations

In order to remove obstacles and ensure that every disabled girl and boy in WCA has access to quality education, this policy briefing recommends all stakeholders (governments and ministries, technical and financial partners, civil society, private sector, schools, teachers, communities and students) work together to reform education systems for inclusion in WCA. These recommendations identify some ways of promoting inclusive education for children with disabilities that can be used throughout the region.

Political and institutional

- **Donors must support inclusive education:** International and multilateral donors and development partners should support disability and gender sensitive approaches and define clear criteria and indicators on inclusion for beneficiaries. Donors should consider increasing targeted funding so that States fill the gaps in the supply of inclusive education services in their sector plans. Donors should support the twin-track approach by providing resources to strengthen inclusive education systems as a whole, at national level, while also supporting strategies which address the specific barriers faced by children with disabilities, and other learners with specific needs, at an individual level. Accountability mechanisms should be implemented to ensure aid supports specific learning needs and gaps. The use of disability markers (for example, the OECD-DAC marker on the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities) to track financing is recommended. NGOs, for their part, should strengthen technical assistance to ministries of education on inclusive education for girls and boys with disabilities.
- **States must be clear about total resources needed** to implement inclusive education policy and education sector plans, and where these resources will come from. Domestic and external financing must work together more effectively, addressing not just the volume of domestic financing but efficiency and accountability of education spending.

- **Inclusive education policy and financing should be cross-cutting:** States must adopt a comprehensive approach to combating exclusion from education and a cross-cutting inclusive education policy with concrete actions and budgets. In particular, the specific needs of girls with disabilities must be reflected in education sector strategies and plans. The plans must take into account the multiple layers of discrimination based on disability type and severity, sex, ethnic or socioeconomic origin, refugee or displaced status, and so on.
- **Organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) should play a key role in decision making,** including local education groups and education sector review processes.

Data

- **Establish harmonised data collection:** Set up monitoring and evaluation systems to measure progress made in disability and gender equality inclusion in education, using appropriate gender and disability disaggregated indicators and data collection at national level. Tools such as the Washington Group Short Set of Questions or a contextualised version of the Child Functioning Module (UNICEF/Washington Group), should make it possible to include information on disability, learning outcomes for students with disabilities, school accessibility and teachers' skills in inclusive education in Education Management Information Systems.

Social barriers: stigma and discrimination

- **Governments must tackle attitudinal and behavioural change** to improve social inclusion. This approach should involve partnering with and consulting

OPDs on public education campaigns, alongside local level interventions around school development planning, school management committees and parent-teacher associations.

Access

- **Provide free primary education and assistive devices and learning resources** to facilitate access to education for all. Cash transfers in the form of subsidies, grants and scholarships for children with disabilities who have special educational needs and from very disadvantaged families should be provided, in coordination with the relevant ministries (education, health, social action and so on).
- Use Universal design standards: Build accessible schools and classrooms suitable for all, that respect of universal access standards and meet the needs of both girls and boys with disabilities.
- Reform the role of special schools and support them to become resource centres, helping mainstream schools to be better equipped to support girls and boys with disabilities.
- Quality: learning and teaching, completion, transition
- Improve school leadership and governance for inclusion by providing head teachers and other education personnel, such as the inspectorate, with inclusion training and ongoing mentoring and support.
- Improve teacher training for inclusion and build capacity of national, regional, district and local level inclusive education advisers.
- Reform teaching materials and the school curriculum. Review and adjust to reflect more inclusive societies.

- Support transition of learners with disabilities between grades, levels and types of education (early childhood through to tertiary and non-formal education). Focus on the transition between primary and secondary levels, adapt exams so they are accessible for children with disabilities, and set up inclusive referral mechanisms.
- Develop an education-training continuum strategy to maximise equal opportunities for academic achievement for young people with disabilities throughout their learning journey, with a particular focus on girls with disabilities.
- Ensure the participation of children or adults with disabilities, particularly girls and women, in decision-making inside the classroom, in schools, local government, parliaments and international bodies.

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A girl with disabilities participates in an inclusive classroom.

Crises and conflict

- Strengthen collaboration between humanitarian and development institutions and organisations to improve access to inclusive and equitable education for all children and young people with disabilities affected by crisis or conflict. Enhanced stakeholder coordination at the onset of a crisis fosters a more inclusive and sustainable response.
- Ensure inclusive financing and technical expertise is made available to conduct resilience and preparedness planning for crises to build back better and ensure no one is left behind.

1. UIS (2017) Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries; Mizunoya et al (2015). Towards Inclusive Education—The impact of disability on school attendance; UNGEI & Leonard Cheshire (2017). Still left behind: Pathways to inclusive education for girls. www.ungei.org/Still_Left_Behind_Full_Report.PDF
2. Mizunoya, S., Mitra, S., & Yamasaki, I., (2018) Disability and school attendance in 15 low- and middle-income countries World Development, Volume 104, April. doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.12.001, p.388

