SHARING LESSONS
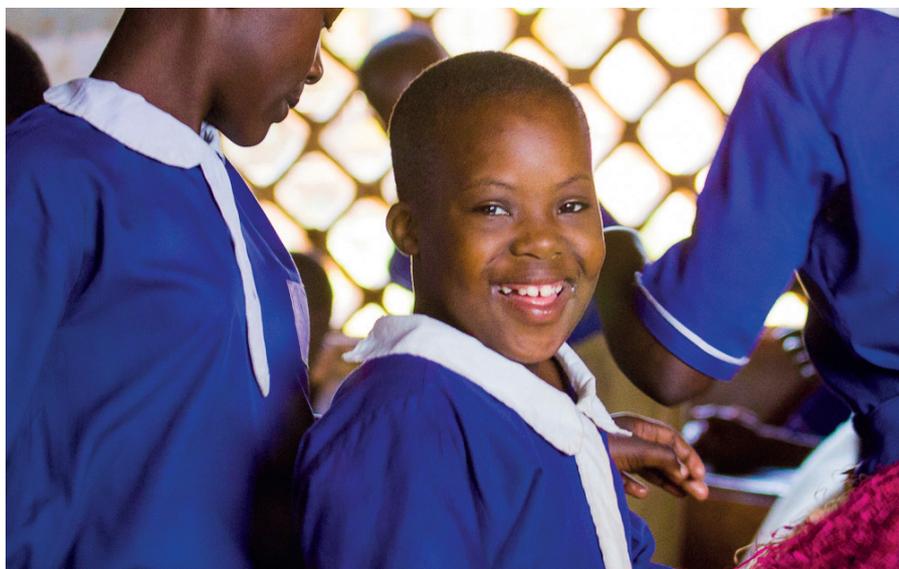## from the field

Educating girls with disability

This quarter's newsletter has a special focus on the education of girls with disabilities.

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KEY LESSONS

- There can be multiple barriers/additional 'layers' of marginalisation for children with disabilities

- A package of interventions is needed to address these: to identify children with disabilities, get them to school, keep them there and support their individual needs

- Attitudes are key: children, parents (especially fathers), schools and governments all need to believe that children with disabilities can and should be included in mainstream education

- All girls' education projects require the knowledge and tools developed by the projects directly tackling this issue – sharing is essential

- There are implications and on-going challenges for programming: Should more programmes integrate support for girls with disabilities into their work? How do we define disability in this context? Is there enough evidence of a gender bias among all children with disabilities to justify a focus on girls with disabilities and not boys?

This conversation will continue on the GEC Forum: (www.educationinnovations.org/initiative/gec). Some valuable tools, highlighted at the end of this paper, are also available. Your engagement in this important issue is valuable and encouraged.

Girls with disabilities are less likely than girls without disabilities to access education. Indeed, during baseline surveys, some GEC projects found that many of these girls were 'invisible'. Globally children with disabilities remain disproportionally out of school. Their exclusion is often directly linked to their disability. Of the 72 million primary aged children worldwide that are out of school, one third have disabilities[1] which makes children with disabilities the largest group of out of school children. Research indicates that having a disability significantly increases the chances of never enrolling in school in some countries, limiting their chances of participating in community and social life and future income generating activities.

Many programmes, including those supported by DFID, are making this a clear priority. The GEC is testing and demonstrating interventions in the community and in schools which aim to increase the possibilities for girls with disabilities to attend school and learn.

Two GEC projects, led by Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU) and Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD), are exclusively focused on addressing this issue, advocating and supporting the inclusive education of children with disability in mainstream local government schools. Additionally, a number of other projects are supporting girls with disability through their interventions. This work has highlighted successful interventions, led to some adaptation, and identified on-going challenges and lessons for the programme as a whole. CSU and LCD have already been working closely with other GEC organisations to discuss some of the major challenges and offer advice, support and practical tools.

[1] DFID – Guidance Note on Educating Children with Disability, 2013

The barriers to education for girls with disability

Through the baseline surveys a number of fundamental barriers, stopping girls with disability getting into school and learning, were identified by GEC projects. These include:

Social stigma and silence: In many societies there is a social stigma associated with disability. Parents were often secretive and did not disclose and present their children with disability which made it extremely hard for projects to identify them and include them in the project.

Viva/CRANE found that neglect and discrimination by some parents, or being ashamed of their child with a disability was the main barrier to children with disability accessing and succeeding in education.

Negative misconceptions: In many societies, there is a misconception that if you are disabled you do not require education and would not be able to make use of an education in the future. Therefore parents do not enrol their children into government schools and many teachers are not supportive of their attendance. This is borne out in many schools targeted by GEC projects, where very few children with disability attend.

CSU found that the majority of the qualitative interviews revealed the community members expressing sympathy (drawing pity) rather than empathy (positively looking at the potential of the girls with disability).

Poverty: Disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and many children with disability are raised in female-headed households, which tend to be poorer. Poor households with a disabled family member are less likely to have the financial resources to cover the costs associated with sending children to school and the additional costs related to accessible transport and rehabilitation which can be needed for children with disabilities.

Resistance to concept of inclusive education: Often linked to negative attitudes towards children with disabilities and low expectations of what they will be able to achieve, many teachers believe that educating children with disability is better done through segregation.

Lack of trained staff: Many schools do not have special needs education teachers or staff trained and skilled to work with children with more severe types of physical and intellectual impairments.

Absence of infrastructure: There is often no infrastructure like ramps or transport services to support children with restricted mobility, or equipment to support the learning needs of children with hearing or visual impairments. The lack of water and adapted toilets further impedes girls with disabilities from going to school.

Increased risk of violence: The increased vulnerability of girls with disabilities means they are more likely than other girls to experience violence and abuse, including sexual violence, at home, in school and in public spaces. This can negatively impact on their lives in many ways, including on their self-esteem and education through reduced attendance, retention and learning.

No structures to support transition: Non-completion of primary school and a lack of efforts to meet the needs of girls with disabilities leads to an absence of girls with disabilities in secondary and tertiary education.

What works?

The overall lesson from the work of LCD, CSU and other projects is programming is more successful when it addresses a combination of barriers and a 'package' of interventions is used that tackles enrolment, attendance and learning, and also builds in sustainability and the mainstreaming of support activities. The list below summarises the main types of interventions that are being used, in combination, to get girls with disability into school, learning and building their confidence and aspirations.

Enrolment

• Develop approaches to identify girls with disabilities and work with them and their families to assess their needs

• Work with community leaders and community members to understand local perceptions of disability

• Break the myths and negative stereotypes related to disability

• Provide counselling for parents and create parent support groups, including working with fathers and male care-givers

• Provide role models to children with disabilities and their families

• Help to implement school disability-inclusive policies and practices

• Where needed, support rehabilitation and medical needs of children with disabilities, including the provision of devices such as wheelchairs

• Make adjustments to ensure the physical environment is accessible both inside and outside the school

In a recent project survey by Plan International, data indicated that children with disabilities experienced increased inclusion and had greater motivation to learn than at the beginning of the project – this is attributed to the in-school support and the community-wide advocacy carried out by partners Plan and Handicap International.

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Attendance

- Provide school transport services
- Work with the schools to create a welcoming and inclusive school environment
- Address reproductive health issues, which children with disabilities can often be excluded from
- Provide assistive devices, such as hearing aids
- Track attendance and follow up
- Ensure girls with disabilities are involved in school extra-curricula activities and peer to peer mentoring

Plan International have specifically contacted parents of children with disabilities as part of their GEC project in Sierra Leone, offering practical help so that the children can attend school and learn. They often encounter surprise when they do this: "When the community volunteer came and told me my child could go to school, I did not believe him." (father of John , age 10)

Learning

- Improve teachers' attitudes, skills and knowledge on inclusive education and disability
- Develop individual education plans (IEP) for children with disability
- Provide peer learning support
- Create inclusive classroom environments through seating and engagement arrangements amongst students
- Increase communication skills in sign language and braille within the school
- Maintain regular discussions with teachers on girls performance
- Provide accessible teaching and learning materials

VSO Nepal's 'Big Sisters' model is particularly suited to the needs of children with disabilities as the interaction is intensive and personalised to the individual child.

ChildHope have been working with teachers in Ethiopia and found that the majority had negative perceptions about children with disabilities they had taught. For example, 33% of teachers thought the children were either arrogant or lazy and 15% were superstitious about the children's disability. Their feedback on the training indicated that 50% had 'gained a lot from the information provided' in the training and 53% had developed 'very improved attitudes' towards helping children with disabilities.

Sustainability

- Create strong and supportive school-family links
- Engage with school, education and political authorities
- Identify the provisions and resources that are available locally – NGOs, government resources, charities and disability networks – and share and support connections between these agencies.

Mainstreaming disability

- Build institutional capacity on disability (policies, legislations, practices etc.)
- Incorporate inclusive education modules in all teacher training activities, including pre-service training
- Introduce tools to capture and analyse data on disability
- Adapt learning assessment tools so that progress on learning outcomes is measured for all children

Learning from Leonard Cheshire Disability

LCD is committed to ensuring that children with disability are included in mainstream school life. Its philosophy of inclusion stresses the importance of children with disabilities getting an opportunity to take part in the everyday life of the community or school and tackles social and physical barriers within the environment, including attitudes, policy issues and teacher capacities. A number of specific lessons have been identified through the implementation of their programme in Kenya.

"The provision of sanitary products for adolescent girls has been shown to have a positive impact on their attendance."

Engage men in the community

Male parents are key decision makers in the family and by involving them on education issues, it becomes easier to reduce or eliminate household barriers to education of girls with disabilities. When the project started, few male parents would attend school meetings and parent support groups. LCD has actively sought male participation and now more male parents attend education meetings and also participate in school committees. Male mentors are playing a key role in mentoring other fathers in the community about the benefits of taking their children with disabilities to school, being proactive in providing for their basic needs, ensuring their security and protection and taking keen interest in their growth and development.

Supplying sanitary wear can increase attendance

The provision of sanitary products for adolescent girls has been shown to have a positive impact on their attendance. Within the LCD project, teachers reported that initially, most girls with disability did not come to school when they were menstruating for fear of embarrassments by fellow peers and teachers. The situation was compounded by parents who could not afford or did not choose to buy them sanitary pads. The provision of sanitary pads by the project has improved attendance and retention of girls with disability.

Strengthen child protection

Strengthening child protection mechanisms has resulted in increased awareness and reporting of abuse cases. Since reported cases are being dealt with by the various judicial organs, the expectation is a decrease in child abuse cases leading to an increased level of retention for girls with disabilities. In addition, schools have become proactive in tackling issues of corporal punishment and pursuing alternative ways of discipline at school level.

Work with government

Working with other key government departments through education officials has resulted in greater ownership of the project activities by schools and communities. The project

schools no longer view the activities as 'belonging to' LCD but more of donor supported government activities. The head teachers and Board of Management teams have been very engaged and are actively working towards ensuring quality inclusive education. LCD also collaborated with the Kenya Institute of Special Education, organising the first National Conference on Inclusive Education to inform national policy.

Learning from Cheshire Services Uganda

Cheshire Services Uganda is working with girls with disabilities who face barriers related to physical access, lack of adapted teaching methods and discrimination in the school and community.

Create Parent Groups for support and sustainability

Parents Groups have given parents a valuable forum in which they strengthen each other through peer counselling and economic empowerment. CSU see this approach as one of the ways for retaining girls with disabilities in school beyond project funding since parents of children with disabilities now have a greater sense of empowered and strengthened income generation. With improved attitude towards their disabled daughters, parents are promising to continue supporting the girls to attend schools.

Involve children with disabilities in school extra-curricular activities

Participation in other school activities has encouraged girls with disabilities to remain in school. Through these activities, the girls have created friendships with their non-disabled counterparts. In most cases, children with disabilities will drop out or be too afraid to attend school due to bullying or exclusion by other children. However, through these activities, the girls have been fully welcomed and accepted in the school community, something that has helped to build their self-esteem and confidence to study with others.

On-going challenges

Projects have identified challenges that remain entrenched in the communities and systems within which they are working.

- Attitudinal change among community members towards girls with disabilities is gradual. This extends

to the school, where some teachers believe having children with disability in their classes is extra work and think they should be compensated.

- The application of individualised teaching approaches which are recommended for learners with some types of impairments is compromised by crowded classes. In addition, the school system may not accept the use of learning assistants even when the classes are crowded.
- Assessing the learning progress of children with learning disabilities requires a dedicated approach, taking expertise and resource
- Meeting the needs of girls with severe physical and/ or intellectual impairments is still an on-going challenge.
- Despite the support provided by projects, lack of transport and extreme poverty continue to present challenges for beneficiary girls to get to school and stay there.

Programme-level lessons

A number of lessons identified through the implementation of interventions relate to broader programme design and will be shared with donors and policy-makers.

Defining disability

In the design of programmes and interventions, project teams, teachers and others in the system may not have a clear or shared understanding of disability. Catering for disability is often interpreted

"Participation in other school activities has encouraged girls with disabilities to remain in school."

through a focus on making school premises wheelchair-accessible and addressing the complex needs of children with severe impairments, and could benefit from a more nuanced approach. There is a balance to be struck between equipping schools to be ready for any and all types of disability, and enabling them to respond to the needs of children with the types of impairments they are already encountering. Children with learning difficulties are not always included in interventions for children with disabilities. Further consideration and articulation of how we define disability, the different kinds of physical and learning impairments and the specific needs of each, would be valuable.

What about the boys?

Focussing tangible provision for girls with disabilities has resulted in 'backlash' from communities about provision for boys with disabilities, particularly from parents with children with disabilities of both sexes. There is need for a holistic approach that involves boys with disabilities. Some of the boys who have not received the same benefits as the girls have reacted negatively. Generally the boys with disabilities are emotionally affected and this can in the long run contribute to self-withdrawal.

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What's already happening?

Mapping existing provision for children with disabilities is a logical starting point. However, not all projects comprehensively sought to identify and understand resources and services that already exist, either at a national or district level. This included services from government health, education and social care systems, and also from other NGOs and organisations. When projects do link with existing services, the benefits can be very positive. For example, existing health screening services in Kenya were used by LCD to identify the specific needs of children with disabilities, help inform schools how to support them and build the capacity and knowledge of existing services to be fully inclusive.

Build it in from the start

The cost of integrating accessibility for children with disabilities into new buildings and infrastructure can be negligible, amounting to less than 1% of the capital development cost. By contrast, adaptations to completed buildings can reach as much as 20% of the original cost. It therefore makes sense to integrate accessibility considerations into school construction projects at the early stages of the design process. Accessibility should also be a consideration when funding development projects .

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How do we measure success?

For girls with disabilities it is important that learning is measured, as for all children in education. However, it's also important to view 'success' as not simply based on cognitive achievement (academic) but also social (affective) or psychomotor (physical) progress. For LCD, enrolled girls with disabilities have shown a greater improvement in other non-cognitive areas of learning such as an improvement in social and physical skills. Some of the girls with disability have improved tremendously regarding acquisition and application of daily life skills and positive interaction with other children. There has been great improvement in their confidence and self-esteem. Some of the girls who were initially withdrawn and socially anxious are now participating actively in school activities such as sports.

The value of sharing

Sharing information, advice and practical support between projects has been invaluable. For example, a number of projects in Kenya, on starting implementation, came face-to-face with the real need on the ground, which necessitated immediate response. In most cases, they linked up with LCD to train their teams, especially the teachers on inclusive education, who would then train other project teams. Some projects have also been able to adapt interventions which did not actively target children with disability, such as peer to peer mentoring, to achieve some inclusion of these children.

> "It's important to view 'success' as not simply based on cognitive achievement (academic) but also social (affective) or psychomotor (physical) progress. "

Tools

GEC projects have developed a number of practical tools for identification, assessment and support that focus on disability. We hope you will find these resources useful. These include:

- Assessment tools
- Individual Education Plans (IEP)
- Information and guidance on the IEPs
- Teacher classroom observation checklist

To access these tools and further information, please contact the Fund Manager at girlseducationchallenge@uk.pwc.com.

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