

LESSONS from the field

Girls'
Education
Challenge



SEPTEMBER 2019

Disability inclusion: A year of action and adaptation with GEC-Transition projects

One year on from the first [Global Disability Summit](#) (GDS18) which was hosted by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in collaboration with the government of Kenya and the International Disability Alliance, the visibility of disability as a key development concern continues to increase. Inclusion in education was a key theme of the Summit and governments in most countries where Girls' Education Challenge Transition (GEC-T) projects are operating made specific pledges around education for disabled people which are now being implemented.



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For example, in **Kenya**, the commitments made by the government around supporting improved facilities for disabled children helped stimulate wider reviews resulting in a new sector policy for trainers and disabled learners in 2018. The Federal Government of **Somalia** have been holding a series of consultations with organisations of and for disabled people as part of a constitutional review process. The Government of **Rwanda** approved a new Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy and Strategic Plan in early 2019 and are now working with a range of development partners to ensure this gets implemented. In **Uganda**, the Ministry of Education and Sports is reviving its Educational Assessment Resource Services for disabled children with Viva-CRANE (leading on a GEC project in Uganda), providing some technical support.

DEVELOPMENTS IN 2019

- Launch of the first [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#). This system-wide policy, action plan and accountability framework commits to ensuring disability inclusion across the UN system and aims to have a significant impact on improving the inclusiveness of development programmes.
- DFID published a new [Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) at the end of 2018 and played a key role in establishing a new [Inclusive Education Initiative](#).
- The World Bank published its [Disability Inclusion and Accountability Framework](#).
- DFID supported the launch of a [Global Disability Data Portal](#) which makes robust and comparable disability statistics freely available, including a section on inclusive education.

This briefing note documents the GEC approach, activity and lessons learned about disability inclusion within education projects after two years of GEC-T implementation. The first year of this journey was captured in [Lessons from the field - Disability inclusion in](#)

the GEC: The story so far, published in September 2018. The first paper focused on the results from baseline evaluations, and how projects were responding to these initial findings. This update captures the next year of progress, sharing how the debate has evolved beyond baseline data analysis and initial response to more nuanced challenges of implementing a disability inclusive approach in 27 education projects working in 15 countries.

The lessons learned around disability inclusion within the GEC are of interest to the wider sector. They capture how mainstream organisations who are targeting educationally marginalised girls, but who may not have a specific disability agenda or expertise, have been able to rise to the challenge of collecting disability prevalence data and responding to the findings within already approved budget envelopes.

TERMINOLOGY

The use of 'people/persons with disabilities' is a term used internationally, reflecting 'people first' language, whereas in the UK, the preferred term is 'disabled people' reflecting that people are disabled by society. In this report, we use these terms interchangeably to reflect these variations.

Increasing the visibility of girls with disabilities in education

The GEC takes a rights-based approach to disability; girls with disabilities have the right to participate as active members of their communities in all activities, some of which may need to be adapted to ensure girls with disabilities are able to access them on an equal basis with their peers. Whilst disability inclusion was not a stated requirement of the original GEC-T proposals, nevertheless projects have become increasingly aware of the need to understand the barriers faced by girls with disabilities and to work on context-based strategies to mitigate them. A significant barrier to progress on disability inclusive education is the relative invisibility of disabled students within the education systems of countries in low- and middle-income countries.¹ The GEC is using the [Washington Group](#) set of questions² from baseline through to endline when collecting evaluation data, to establish a reliable and consistent measure of disability prevalence amongst project beneficiaries.

The impact of requiring disability disaggregated data from all projects has been significant. Initial analysis of GEC-T baseline data shows that girls with disabilities in school show lower levels of numeracy and literacy than their non-disabled peers. Disabled girls score just over four points less than their peers in both literacy and numeracy tests in a random effects model across the portfolio at baseline. Further analysis on this data is now underway. There are also some interesting results emerging around the interplay between self-esteem, learning and life skills for girls with disabilities which the GEC is also exploring. Our initial analysis will be published in early 2020 and we are hoping to continue following the girls through mid and endline evaluations to gain important longitudinal data around learning trends.

A significant result of the GEC-T baseline findings was to show that disabled girls are present in most project cohorts (all but one project identified girls with disabilities during baseline analysis). For example the data indicated up to 10% of beneficiary girls with some or mild impairments – this headline finding is being used to promote broad inclusive approaches that support all children to learn, without 'labelling' of individual girls. Whilst the overall numbers remain low and clearly more work needs to be done on getting disabled girls into school,



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the process has nevertheless raised the profile of disability as an aspect of educational marginalisation.

Many projects' initial response to girls with disabilities was to take a more traditional, medical-based approach, for example, organising screening and supporting families and students to acquire assistive devices. But there has also been much innovative thinking around access and participation in learning and agency in transition. The rights-based approach to disability, focusing on barriers to participation – such as inaccessible environments, teaching methods and materials, and negative attitudes or discrimination from staff, peers and communities – requires ongoing discussion, which is where technical support and awareness raising are critical. Through webinars, individual discussions and networking opportunities, the GEC has encouraged projects to seek support as they develop their disability inclusion work beyond their initial responses.

To read more about the GEC approach, the definitions we use and the use and results of the Washington Group questions at baseline, please see our earlier report [Lessons from the field - Disability inclusion in the GEC: The story so far](#), published in September 2018.³



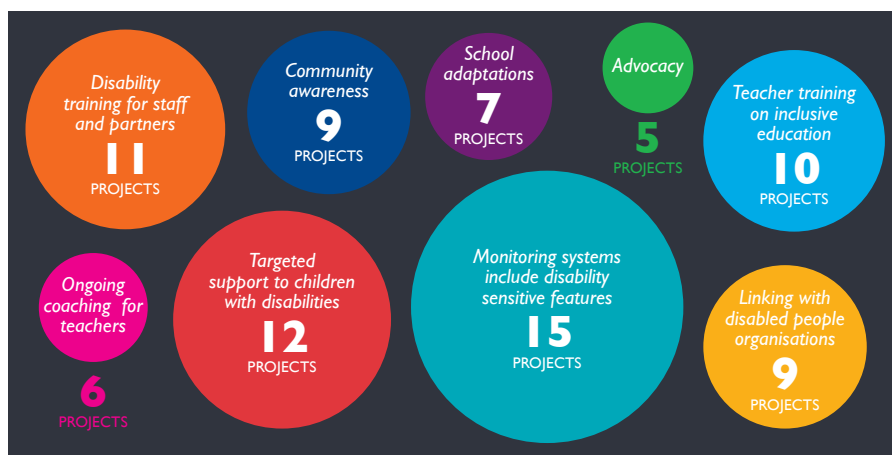
Activity and adaptations in Year 2

GEC-T project activities focused on disability inclusion have evolved significantly in the year since the last paper, with many projects taking action to improve accessibility to learning for disabled girls, even where there are low prevalence rates. We anticipate that as a result of projects embedding the various activities highlighted below, the next evaluation reports submitted by the GEC-T projects will capture significant changes for girls with disabilities.

This section outlines the activities that have taken place in the last year (see Figure 1, below) and provides some analysis of the learning and information that influenced their implementation.

- 1 Kuper, H., Saran A., White H., (2018) *Rapid evidence assessment (REA) of what works to improve educational outcomes for people with disabilities in low-and middle-income countries*. International Centre for Evidence in Disability, UK
- 2 The WG short set was used for all GEC-T projects. LNGB projects will be using the child functioning set of WG questions.
- 3 https://dfid-gec-api.s3.amazonaws.com/linked-resources/GEC_quarterly_newsletter_Sept-18_final.pdf

Figure 1: Activities completed by projects in year 2.



The most common activity across the portfolio has been to seek more detailed data and information than was collected at baseline. Many projects used the baseline data as a starting point from which they created a more detailed assessment of the education situation for girls with disabilities. This has included individual impairment-based reviews (and in some cases medical referrals) but, in the main, projects have been looking more deeply at barriers to learning as well as how to better track learning and transition outcomes of disabled girls in regular monitoring processes.

Developing organisational capacity and working with partners

Many projects were initially quite surprised by the levels of disability amongst their beneficiaries as revealed by the baseline evaluations. For some, this has challenged staff and partners to develop their own expertise about how disabled girls experience education and how to support disability inclusive activities. A number of projects have been exploring ways to improve the skills and knowledge base of staff and partners around disability inclusion.

- **The STAGES** project in Afghanistan sought technical support from

the international disability focused organisation Humanity and Inclusion who provided training to project staff.

- **Health Poverty Action's REAP** project in Rwanda hired a social inclusion officer who provides the project with detailed assessments of the learning conditions facing girls with disabilities and is helping to create specific monitoring tools to gather more data on girls with disabilities both in school and in the surrounding communities.
- **Plan International's Girls' Access to Education** project in Sierra Leone has used their continuous professional development activity to train

field staff and other stakeholders (including Head Teachers) in both disability and gender-responsive approaches to girls' inclusion and accessing learning effectively.

- **Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU)**, as well as **Leonard Cheshire** and **I Choose Life – Africa's Jielimishe GEC** projects in Kenya have all made direct links with Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) as part of their programming work and Leonard Cheshire have hired an inclusion advisor to support in staff and community capacity development..

Case study: Jielimishe GEC, I Choose Life – Africa, Kenya

The Jielimishe project is a five-year programme designed to improve the life chances of marginalised girls in 60 primary and secondary schools across three counties; Laikipia, Meru and Mombasa. The project's activities focus on improving the quality of teaching; increasing attendance and the motivation to transition; raising community awareness, responsiveness and support; and supporting improved school management and accountability.

Originally, girls with disabilities were not specifically targeted as a vulnerable group and the lack of differentiation meant the barriers they faced were not being addressed in project interventions. In effect the original programme design had been Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Absent in relation to girls with disabilities (GEC use this terminology to describe where activities fall in a continuum ranging from GESI Absent to GESI transformative). However, baseline data collected using the Washington Group short set questions suggested that 3.8% of their beneficiaries could have a disability.

The initial response from the project was to gather more information before deciding on what the most appropriate interventions might be. The project made connections initially via the Ministry of Education's Director of Special Needs who put them in touch with the Education Assessment and Referral Centres (EARCs). These centres, based locally, are responsible for identifying and supporting children with disabilities in education. This proved to be a very important link because, whilst the project had good relationships with County Directors of Education, they had not previously engaged with the EARC system. In Mombasa, for example, the EARC put the project in touch with a school that is experienced in teaching disabled children, which helped provide them with ideas and information on designing appropriate activities and interventions. The project also spent time with another GEC partner – Leonard Cheshire – who were able to provide them with a detailed picture of what more impairment-based programming looks like.

Having now become much more confident in understanding disability from a rights-based perspective, they are exploring ways to implement more inclusive activities across their programme. This case study shows how a mainstream organisation has been able to use the data gathered at baseline to adapt their existing project design to be much more disability inclusive.

Disability inclusion awareness-raising activities

Awareness-raising activities within schools and communities has also proved to be an important approach. Most contexts in which GEC-T projects operate have high levels of discrimination and stigma against people with disabilities which is made worse by the intersection of other vulnerabilities such as gender, ethnicity, culture and/or poverty.

- **Leonard Cheshire** in Kenya have started a series of radio broadcasts to sensitise communities around child protection and the management of disability at household level, so the project is now able to influence a much wider audience.
- As part of their School Inclusion policy, **PEAS' GEARR** project in Uganda has been providing inclusion messaging and communications support to schools which are helping promote inclusive school cultures and to increase student awareness of inclusion. They identified very negative attitudes towards disabled children from both parents and teachers who tended to rely on false assumptions rather than up-to-date information about disability.
- **Cheshire Services Uganda** have reported a growing appreciation of disability inclusion from all levels (community, family and system) as a result of ongoing awareness-raising efforts by the project. Engagement with different groups has led to increased enrolment of children with disabilities; improved access to social protection by parents of children with disabilities; and the formation of parent support groups by parents of children with disabilities spearheaded by community leaders.

Development and ongoing support of inclusive pedagogies

Ten GEC-T projects have created activities which specifically target teachers with training and support designed to increase awareness of barriers to full participation, reduce stigma and improve inclusive pedagogy. Several projects have been using Teacher Mentors or coaching sessions to improve inclusive classroom practice. Experience from projects has highlighted the need for continuous training and support to schools to give teachers time to develop their skills and confidence in inclusive techniques. In addition, teacher attrition levels are high – staff trained by projects being relocated to other schools with an influx of new teachers or management means there is a continuous need to sensitise staff to disability inclusion.

- **The SOMGEP** project in Somalia has been running coaching sessions with Community Education Committees based in 35 project schools where they introduce members to the concepts of inclusive education and then explore their roles and responsibilities in supporting children with disabilities.
- **The Educate Girls, End Poverty** project, also in Somalia, has trained an additional 11 coaches in learner-centred teaching and disability inclusion techniques so they can assist teachers to develop inclusive pedagogical practices. They make classroom visits to each teacher helping them to reflect and learn as they develop their new skills.
- **Leonard Cheshire** provided teacher training on inclusive curriculum delivery to teacher mentors who are now able to provide continuous one-to-one sessions with teachers to improve their delivery methodologies.
- **Camfed's Girls Learn, Succeed and Lead** project in Tanzania has been promoting a 'leave no one behind' culture in their project schools. Teacher Mentors are working directly with school leaders to identify students with on-going learning difficulties so they can be provided with more tailored support.
- **The Making Ghanaian Girls Great!** project in Ghana has adapted their teacher training modules to introduce inclusive lesson design to support a broad range of learner needs. They have been working specifically with a group of Master Teacher/Trainers (MTTs) and facilitators to focus on helping teachers identify students who may show characteristics of cognitive impairments and apply good practice to ensure they are able to learn effectively. After-school clubs have also been supported to develop more disability sensitive content.

Integrating disability data into monitoring systems

Several projects have continued to work on disaggregation of information by disability, developing their monitoring tools and conducting more detailed research on girls with disabilities. Systems with finer-tuned and more frequent data points allow the projects to have better insight into how they might support girls with disabilities better, or whether existing initiatives are working.

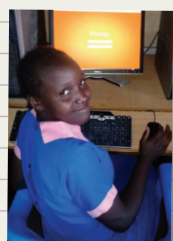
- **Childhope UK's Excelling Against the Odds** project in Ethiopia now has just over 300 disabled girls who have all been assessed for more individualised support with around 107 being provided with additional resources including braille material and glasses. However, Childhope are continuing to collect data and information because local estimates suggest there could be up to 1,000 disabled girls in project schools. A key activity is to work closely with teaching staff to help identify students who may have a disability and then to follow them up with the appropriate assessment and support. They have developed easy-to-use guidance sheets for teachers to help them keep a learning-conducive environment in lessons for those students with certain disabilities, and they include disability awareness in all formal and informal teacher development training.
- **World Vision's IGATE** project in Zimbabwe has been working to improve school profiling data used by the project and the Ministry to capture learners with disability across a range of domains of functioning and beyond impairments that are easily physically observed.
- Since their baseline results, **PEAS's** project in Uganda conducted a special education needs assessment to feed into an inclusion strategy. They are seeking support from a disability-focused organisation to help them implement more appropriate inclusive activities. A key part is to incorporate the monitoring of disabled students' outcomes within their existing tools.



Case studies

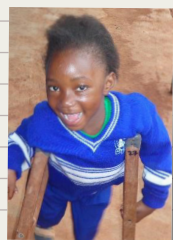
These two projects have been fine tuning their teacher training programmes to be more effective by designing more targeted content for inclusive teacher training in terms of age levels and subject content.

iMlango, Avanti Communications Group and partners, Kenya



iMlango have been keen to focus more specifically on teaching approaches that directly impact the teaching of literacy and maths. They have been using their Maths-Whizz approach with both mainstream and 'special needs' primary level students but in some instances, students with disabilities are gaining significant benefit. During the first term of 2019, for example, deaf students in one special unit recorded the highest usage and numeracy progression throughout their school.

Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU)



CSU have been trialling different approaches to teacher training, so teachers are better prepared to tailor inclusion activities to their students. They recognised that in the early phase of their work they tended to bundle all teachers together in generic training sessions which was producing limited results. Having re-thought the approach they now provide training to teachers grouped by class and subject. This has worked out well, with teachers planning much more appropriately for children with different impairments, with more attention being paid to the learning outcomes of children with disabilities. The project team is continuing to be creative in exploring different approaches.

Intersectionality – Gender and disability

One key challenge that has emerged within the GEC which we will further explore is the way in which gender and disability intersect to create a unique set of barriers to learning and transition. We hope to collate lessons on this with the aim of creating a practical tool/ guidance for projects in 2020, so they become better able to engage and support girls with disabilities within their populations.

REFLECTIONS ON INTERSECTIONALITY FROM WEST AFRICA



Michelle Lewis Sandall, GEC's Portfolio Manager in West Africa, describes the challenges facing projects in needing to address both gender and disability issues in education.

“Children or youth with disabilities are not a homogenous group but girls, boys, young men and women with disabilities are often treated as though they are all the same, which undervalues their differences, including how they experience disability as well as being female or male. Disability can affect or exacerbate traditional gender roles and dynamics. For example, disabled girls may be seen as less ‘feminine’ whilst disabled boys may be regarded as ‘less masculine’. An example of this happened on a recent school visit where I was told that boys with disabilities are less likely to want to play football and more likely to want ‘to just be with girls’.

“Young women with disabilities are also discriminated against in sexual and reproductive health services and are often excluded from formal sexual health education on the basis that it’s not relevant to them. Yet, girls with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence and abuse than others. Girls with communication or cognitive impairments may be especially susceptible, which has significant safeguarding implications. From my experience, children with disabilities are much less likely to report abuses or receive the protection and support they need when they have been abused.

“Girls with disabilities do not exist in isolation. Where they live (rural or urban), their family set up, levels of poverty, their communities all combine together to intensify their barriers to education. However, in the case of disabled students the barriers are often assumed to be the students’ own challenges (i.e. their impairments) rather than a result of the interplay between social norms, stigma, and inadequacies of the education systems. All staff and partners working for GEC should take time to examine their own subconscious thoughts and biases towards disability and gender.

“In my experience, it is helpful to conduct a context-by-context analysis of barriers, expanding our understanding of the intersection of disability and gender. Disability – sex- and age-disaggregated data is not enough without a thorough analysis of vulnerabilities, needs and barriers to participation and learning.”



Raising expectations on provision of assistive technology

Pressure from schools, parents and communities can put projects in difficult situations in relation to the provision of assistive technology. With sustainability in mind, this has prompted some projects to link with local referral systems or disability focused projects in order to help facilitate this type of assistance.

Setting the same learning tests for children with and without disabilities

Now that projects are approaching midline, issues around how to ensure testing is equitable are also being raised. In many countries where GEC operates, inclusive education policies and strategies have not yet got to grips with how to implement accessible high stakes testing (national examinations that results in students gaining recognised qualifications) so there are few precedents for projects to use alongside a lack of benchmarks for students with a range of different impairments. In terms of tests, changes can be made to the way they are presented to students with disabilities to reduce or eliminate the barriers they face. GEC is currently encouraging projects to try out adaptations locally and to share results and experiences.

Lack of capacity to effectively implement disability inclusive education

Whilst very many projects are providing teachers with training and materials to support inclusion there remain considerable barriers such as large classes, poor infrastructure, lack of resources (including in-class support) and ongoing negative attitudes from wider communities. In some cases, real concerns are raised about whether or not it is in the girl's best interest to include her in a mainstream context where there is no possibility for her learning needs to be addressed at this time (for example where impairments are severe to profound).

GEC projects are now much more aware of the fact that the majority of disabled girls do not have profound impairments and that by addressing environmental, attitudinal and institutional barriers they learn just as effectively as their non-disabled peers. But concerns remain for the small number of girls whose impairments require more specialist educational interventions.

Emerging issues

In the early stages of disability inclusion for the GEC-T, concerns raised were impairment-focused and often related to data issues. Through 2019, we have started to see more nuanced challenges from projects that have begun to implement inclusive activities in contexts where there is limited experience and few support systems.

Common concerns identified in the 2018 review	Current emerging discussions in 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of Washington Group against other methodologies for identification. • Diagnosis of disabilities v. capturing prevalence data • Adapting existing activities v. designing additional disability-specific activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing expectations or signposting for parents to access assistive devices. • Setting learning benchmarks (and suitable testing methodologies) for children with disabilities and children without disabilities. • Thresholds and suitability of children with wide range and/or more severe impairments in mainstream schools. • Supporting children with disabilities in large school populations.

GEC is at the vanguard of disability inclusive education and we are confronting issues that are starting to emerge across the sector. Projects such as [CSU in Uganda](#) and [EDT in Kenya](#) are being transparent in communicating what they can offer for girls in mainstream classes whilst also offering specialist placements so that parents are starting to be able to make more of an informed choice on provision for their daughter. Projects like LCD in Kenya are also offering working examples of how more severely disabled girls can be successfully included in mainstream classes where there is appropriate educational support. As we work through these challenges, we encourage projects to [document and share their experiences](#) so that the GEC can capture and share our learning with the wider development sector.



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Forward look

In order to address these issues and make projects more disability inclusive, organisations are continuing to implement many of the previously mentioned activities such as awareness raising and ongoing teacher support and coaching. Midline evaluations are beginning to arrive and will generate useful evidence about how girls with disabilities are performing within GEC projects, and how the barriers they encounter are changing. This new data will inform project decisions and adaptations as they continue to become more inclusive.

The following are examples of other activities planned for 2019-2020.

Teacher training

- Develop inclusive teaching which also includes gender transformative approaches.
- Organise a special education needs training workshop for staff and local education officers with a focus on supporting children with cognitive impairments.

Feedback and safeguarding systems for children with disabilities

- Improve parental awareness around child protection and complaint response mechanisms.

- Focus on improving the process for government-led Quality Assurance process on Inclusive and Special Needs Education support.

Advocacy and influencing

- Advocacy with government to facilitate inclusive renovations to schools
- Influencing education ministries to deliver more inclusive education systems at local level through sharing data on disability prevalence in schools and developing better inclusive teacher training curriculums

Improved support by signposting to existing services

- Developing links to assessment centres for example Education and Assessment Resource Centres (EARCs in Kenya) and access to social welfare and other services.

More inclusive project processes

- Amend classroom observation tools to monitor teachers' developing disability inclusive practices.

Conclusions

The evidence created by using the Washington Group Questions has given projects concrete data from which they have been able to adapt and design practices. This visibility is a vital first step in disability inclusion. The experience of the GEC demonstrates how disability inclusion requires intentional and specialist input, but critically, how this can be done within structures and expectations of an existing education project. We believe the impact of the disability inclusion agenda will be far beyond just supporting girls with recorded impairments. The principles of disability inclusive education and programming, such as more child centred approaches, creative teaching techniques, and engaging practical community support will also inspire many more children to access and engage productively and joyfully with education and the opportunities this provides.

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