

# SHARING LESSONS

## from the field

Girls' Education Challenge



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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## Disability inclusion in the Girls' Education Challenge: The story so far

### Context

Disabled girls have the right to access quality education at a time and place that is appropriate for them on an equal basis with their peers.<sup>1</sup> Inclusive education is also a key component of Agenda 2030, with Sustainable Development Goal 4 focused specifically on '...(ensuring) inclusive and equitable quality education.' Inclusion in education is a key priority for girls with disabilities, helping to improve life chances and reduce poverty, and there is increasing recognition from the development sector that more needs to be done to promote their access to learning and transition.

Around 5% of those aged 0-14 years living in low and middle-income countries have a moderate to severe disability, although in Africa this could be as high as 6.4%.<sup>2</sup> Considerable evidence now shows that exclusion from education is a major issue for children with disabilities in low-income countries, with more than 50% of disabled children not in school.<sup>3</sup> But even those in school face barriers to learning and transition, ranging from inaccessible environments, teaching methods and materials to negative attitudes and discrimination from staff, peers and communities. The situation is compounded for girls with disabilities.<sup>4</sup> Whilst there is still a significant lack of reliable data on the education status of disabled people, what evidence does exist indicates a considerable gap in outcomes ranging from lower levels of school enrolment and higher dropout rates, to increased likelihood of experiencing violence.<sup>5</sup> Disabled girls are especially disadvantaged on average accessing one year less education compared with disabled boys and considerably lower literacy rates.



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In July 2018, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), in collaboration with the government of Kenya and the International Disability Alliance, launched the first [Global Disability Summit](#) bringing together high level representatives from governments, donors, civil society, private sector and academic institutions to commit to improving access to development for all disabled people. Inclusion in education was a key theme of the summit and many stakeholders made direct commitments around improving inclusive education for children with disabilities.

In relation to the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC), all project countries with the exception of Ethiopia signed the Global Charter for Change which includes a commitment to: *'progress and support actions that advance inclusive quality education for people with disabilities, with the necessary resources to put plans into practice: every child has the right to learn from birth'* (Charter for Change, Commitment 4). In fact, most governments in countries with GEC projects have made specific pledges around education for disabled people<sup>7</sup>. Whilst these vary in detail, commonly they focus on improving teacher effectiveness through training in inclusive

education; improving access by ensuring schools are built using Universal Design principles; providing better access to assistive technology to support learning; improving implementation of inclusive education policies and better linking budgets to inclusive plans. Many GEC projects complement these activities, thereby offering considerable opportunities for the GEC to contribute towards national commitments on disability inclusion in education.

This paper sets out the approach that the GEC has taken in its new phase and the requirements that projects have been asked to meet. It outlines the findings that emerged from the projects' recent baseline studies and the ways that some projects have adapted to, sometimes surprising, data sets. Finally, it summarises the main lessons that have emerged through these early processes and how they are influencing the way forward for the GEC.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations. (1945). Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<sup>2</sup> WHO & World Bank, 2011 p30

<sup>3</sup> The Education Commission. (2017). The learning Generation. Investing in Education for a changing world.

<sup>4</sup> DFID Global Disability Summit: Inclusion in Education, 2018

<sup>5</sup> Kuper, Saran & White. (2018) Rapid Evidence Assessment of What works to improve educational outcomes for people with disabilities in low and middle income countries

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO (2018). Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/ip49-education-disability-2018-en.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> The exceptions to this so far are: Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe

## The GEC approach

The GEC takes a rights-based approach to disability, acknowledging 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 for accessibility and inclusion. This implies that projects take responsibility for understanding what barriers may exist for girls with disabilities and initiate steps to mitigate them. The emphasis for inclusion in education therefore is placed on reducing barriers and promoting opportunities for participation and learning.

Many GEC organisations are new to disability inclusive education and have had to be pragmatic and realistic in taking on their responsibilities towards disabled girls in their constituent target groups. With the support of DFID and the Fund Manager, organisations are taking steps towards improving access for girls with disabilities, responding to the challenges creatively, opening up significant learning opportunities for GEC beneficiaries as well as for DFID and the sector as a whole.

Two areas in particular have been identified as important in stimulating projects towards greater inclusion and are now mandatory requirements for GEC projects:

1. The collection and reporting of disability disaggregated data through the external evaluation process
2. Ensuring compliance with DFID's accessibility standards for all education related construction (whether new or undergoing renovation).

Beyond these mandatory requirements a number of further expectations have been communicated to projects, accompanied by the offer of additional technical support. It is anticipated that projects will work towards ensuring all project staff and implementing partners are familiar with the rights-based approach to disability and will facilitate disability awareness training and opportunities for staff to engage with local disability focused agencies and expertise.

Projects have also been encouraged to use the data they have collected on disability prevalence to dig deeper into the barriers that might be experienced by disabled girls and to plan project activities with access and inclusion in mind. Where projects find they have a disability prevalence rate of 5% or more they are expected to reappraise their approach to ensure

**“Projects have also been encouraged to use the data they have collected on disability prevalence to dig deeper into the barriers that might be experienced by disabled girls and to plan project activities with access and inclusion in mind.”**

they are doing everything they can to implement activities which disabled girls can participate in and benefit from. In practice however, many projects with lower prevalence rates have been keen to look at what they can do to improve accessibility now that the issue of disability has become more visible. Projects have made really good use of the GEC technical advisors with specific requests and questions around appropriate activities and interventions, including via online webinars which have helped to plug the gaps in knowledge around disability rights, barrier analysis and programming inclusively. These have been especially useful as forums in which projects can share ideas, challenges and solutions.

## Washington Group questions<sup>8</sup>

Since it is important to make sure the GEC is able to capture reliable and consistent data on disability, all projects are required to use the **Washington Group set of questions** when collecting disaggregated data on disability. The Washington Group set of questions simply asks whether a person experiences any difficulties in several different domains, on a scale from *no difficulty* to *cannot do at all*. The results produce a continuum along which everyone can be placed. To record disability prevalence within

the population using this tool we followed the Washington Group recommendations and set our cut-off point at **all those with difficulty in at least one domain recorded at a lot of difficulty or cannot do at all**. This widely used cut off point provides the most accurate representation of the population that has an impairment which is significant enough to cause some level of activity limitation (in other words, a disability).

Using the Washington Group questions fits with DFID's requirements on disability disaggregation but more importantly enables data to be sensitively collected within a human rights framework. The key to making it so successful is that the survey tool avoids using the word *disability*. This is important because in many contexts disability is associated with considerable levels of stigma which discourages people from disclosing they have an impairment. Parents can also feel the need to conceal the disability status of their child which in some cases may lead to them being hidden away.

With so little reliable data available on disability and education outcomes, the GEC has a unique opportunity to contribute to global learning. By standardising data collection across our programmes it will be possible to analyse prevalence rates, learning and transition outcomes for girls with disabilities and match that with qualitative experiences collected through interviews and case studies. Whilst this level of analysis is difficult to do at an individual project level where actual numbers are very small, using data from across the whole portfolio will provide a large enough sample to investigate the impact of disability on education in exciting new ways.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com>

## DEFINING DISABILITY

In the GEC, we follow the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and DFID in promoting a human rights approach to disability. So we define individuals with disabilities as:

*‘...those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.’ (Article 1, CRPD)*

This concept of disability moves away from the traditional individual, medical-based perspective characterised by a focus on physical deficits (impairments), to one that encompasses the attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that limit or exclude people with impairments from participation. In this way, disability is best understood in terms of: **Impairment + Barriers = Disability**

## Results and findings from baseline data collection

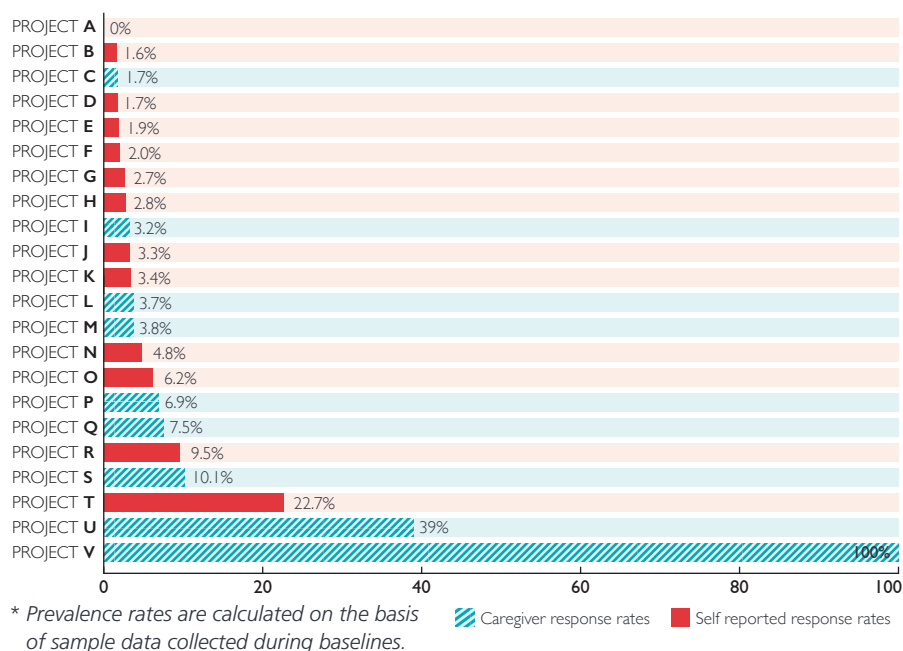
In terms of what is known, data from baselines show an overall average prevalence rate of **5%** amongst projects which do not have disability as their main target, which doubles to **10.8%** for the GECT portfolio with the inclusion of disability specific projects (see *Figure 1*). This demonstrates that where projects target girls with disabilities more systematically it improves the likelihood of them being included, whereas relying on targeting marginalisation generally results in lower rates of inclusion. Or where data was collected at school level only, a significant amount of exclusion of girls with disability may have already occurred.

**“Overall, girls with difficulties in remembering and concentrating and those with visual difficulties are the most prevalent.”**

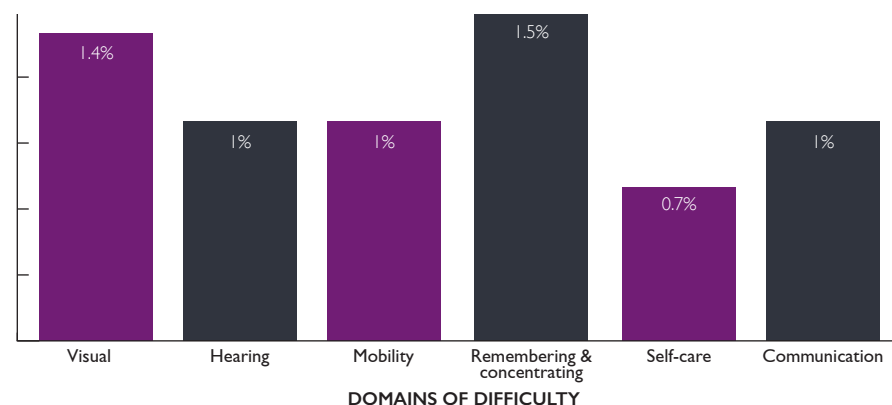
Individually, many projects recorded rates lower than the overall portfolio average of 5% prevalence; only 36.5% of projects have a prevalence rate of 5% or more, which includes those that have disabled girls as their main focus. Nevertheless, given that most projects did not actively plan for the inclusion of disabled girls it also provides good evidence for the fact that as a *universal characteristic*<sup>9</sup> disability will affect most population groups. In other words, anticipated or not there are likely to be disabled girls amongst all beneficiary groups in education programmes.

Another interesting finding from the GECT baseline data has been the relative distribution of different difficulties (see *Figure 2*). Overall, girls with difficulties in remembering and concentrating and those with visual difficulties are the most prevalent. Those reporting difficulties in self-care are the least prevalent. Given that globally there are no reliable and comparable statistics on disability in children and young people either in school or out of school we have to take these figures at face value.<sup>10</sup> Anecdotally, projects will sometimes report that schools find it more difficult to accommodate children with significant mobility, self-care, hearing and communication difficulties because they require more in the way of adaptations – to infrastructure and teaching. So these figures may represent those girls that are more readily integrated. That is, they are in class but there have been no changes effected by the school to accommodate girls with different learning needs.

**Figure 1** Disability prevalence rates\* from GECT baselines using the Washington Group questions



**Figure 2** Prevalence of different domains of difficulty



### Remembering and concentrating

The relatively higher levels of girls reporting difficulties with remembering and concentrating has generated some interesting discussions amongst some GEC projects. In contexts where girls experience high levels of personal trauma and insecurity, the prevalence rates for those reporting difficulties with remembering and concentrating can be extremely high. It can also be high in areas where food insecurity is significant and where girls are going to school having missed meals. At the moment projects with this situation are being advised to raise the cut-off point for recording disability in this domain to 'cannot do at all'. At the same time, projects need to recognise that whilst the reason for poor concentration and remembering may not be due to a disability, the effects of these difficulties can impact educational outcomes regardless of their cause.

### Opening up the conversation

One of the most encouraging aspects of having all projects collect disability data as part of the external evaluation has been the increased levels of awareness and willingness to talk about disability inclusion. For many projects, disability is a really new area and results from baselines showing higher than anticipated prevalence rates is giving projects new levels of motivation. **World Vision's IGATE** project in Zimbabwe, for example, found unexpectedly that 10% of their girls were reporting disabilities. This has generated a new focus on disability from the organisation and as a result they are planning staff training and developing an inclusion action plan. Their intention is to make project activities more inclusive and accessible, and work with all stakeholders to address harmful social norms and negative attitudes towards disability.

<sup>9</sup> See GEC1 paper on Marginalisation (part 1) for how the GEC is using universal and contextual factors to understand the intersecting characteristics of educationally marginalised girls. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/girls-education-challenge>  
<sup>10</sup> Thompson, S. 2017 *Disability prevalence and trends*. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies

## Case study: ChildHope and CHADET, Ethiopia

ChildHope and CHADET have been on a journey towards mainstreaming disability since the first phase of the GEC (2012- 2017). The organisations have been determined to reach disabled girls but had very little initial experience. During the first phase, they increased their own understanding of disability and used the Washington Group questions to get a better idea of the numbers involved (around 5%). They made links with a local disability partner, FANA who provided training and awareness raising for around 500 teachers. Another main response was focused around the provision of assistive devices to enable the girls to attend and participate in school.

For the next phase of the GEC ChildHope and CHADET aim to have more of an impact and a much more intentional approach to inclusion. This will include building further organisational capacity and identifying champions in schools and communities to link with on awareness raising. They're looking at ways in which to make existing project activities accessible and inclusive rather than trying to set up separate interventions and, importantly, working with the girls from the first phase of the GEC to support their ongoing progress.

In this respect having technical expertise available within the Fund Management team has proved quite valuable for project implementers, and has supported external evaluation teams to think through appropriate responses to disability inclusion. Recently for example both *Link Community Development* in Ethiopia and *I Choose Life (ICL)* in Kenya have requested support to think through their response to the results from the Washington Group Questions. Link are reviewing their interventions, talking with national and local Disabled People's Organisations, and undertaking internal training. They are taking a twin track approach, working on broad system and school-wide improvements, whilst providing specific support for learners with disabilities, using child-centred pedagogy. In ICL's original project design, girls with disabilities were not targeted with specific and appropriate interventions. From the

baseline findings, disability prevalence was at 3.8% and was found to impact on learning outcomes. ICL therefore sought to identify how to best target this subgroup to improve their learning.

### Changing attitudes

There can sometimes be a tendency for projects' first reaction to centre on the provision of impairment specific assistance, such as medical treatments or assistive technology. Whilst these types of interventions have value and remain important approaches for those working with disabled children and young people they can be difficult for mainstream organisations to implement, because of the time, costs and expertise involved in the individual assessment and follow up processes that are needed. Focus is therefore encouraged on tackling the attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers disabled girls face in education.

This means reviewing all of the interventions and activities and looking for ways to make them as accessible to their disabled girls as possible. Both *Varkey Foundation* in Ghana and *Health Poverty Action* in Rwanda are in the process of reviewing their interventions to look for sustainable ways to improve their accessibility to girls with disabilities rather than introducing impairment focused activities. Medical-based interventions may be a part of that response, but the advice to projects is to link up with local service providers, run by government or civil society so that girls can be referred if necessary, but to do that alongside making efforts to address broader barriers to access in education. One of the most powerful responses projects can adopt is to get involved in disability awareness raising, challenging negative stereotypes held in relation to disabled girls and education and providing plenty of opportunities for disabled and non-disabled girls to interact positively.

**Several projects have focused on awareness raising with government as a way to promote sustainable inclusion.**

### Case studies: Plan International, Sierra Leone

Plan International presented detailed disability data to the Sierra Leonean government which included showing that schools which they supported to undergo accessibility renovations enrolled more disabled children. This compelling evidence helped motivate the Ministry of Education into producing an action plan for increasing inclusion.

### Leonard Cheshire, Kenya

Leonard Cheshire (LC) has worked closely with the Kenyan Ministry of Education (MoE) on the development and implementation of the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities. The policy recognises the importance of inclusive education by emphasising the need for all learners to learn together in an inclusive environment. LC, working in collaboration with the MoE, has disseminated this policy to help address the low level of practical knowledge about disability, inclusion and monitoring. Local education managers have formed implementation committees with clear guidelines on how to support teachers to help mainstream schools adopt more inclusive practices. There are plans to work with the MoE to roll out the policy and implementation guidelines throughout the country.



Figure 3 Project adaptations in response to disability data from monitoring and baseline reports



Analysis of programme responses to baselines shows quite a wide range of ideas coming forward (see Figure 3). So far, nine projects have decided to significantly review their plans as a result of baseline results. What is encouraging is that even projects with relatively low prevalence rates are nevertheless taking action to improve accessibility for disabled girls. These reviews have been focused on making interventions more inclusive and looking for ways to increase organisational capacity to respond to the needs of disabled girls. In addition projects have been looking at specific activities such as lobbying government, adapting teaching methodologies, providing assistive technology, adapting the learning environment and building the capacity of staff and partners. In each case projects have been working within their existing budgets although a project in Somalia has utilised funding opportunities from USAID to expand their support for disabled girls and have been looking at ways to provide inclusive education training for teachers through their other interventions.



## Lessons learned

One of the most significant findings from the recent GEC baselines has been to show that, in fact, there are disabled girls in most schools, whether projects planned for this or not. Whilst overall the numbers remain low and clearly more work needs to be done on getting disabled girls into school, it nevertheless highlights the invisibility of disability as an issue in learning and transition. One of the most exciting results so far has been to raise the profile of disabled girls who are already in the system and encourage projects to work with teachers, families and their cohorts of girls to remove stigma and start a process of reducing barriers to participation. Continuing to use the data collected around disability to understand how disabled girls experience education is going to contribute significantly to the global discourse on inclusion in education.

- Disability inclusion is relatively new for many mainstream organisations and the shift to adopting a rights-based approach needs plenty of on-going support.
- The stigma and taboos that surround disability remain very strong in many GEC project countries and there are few services and technical expertise available on which to rely. Moreover, in the area of education there has been a long history of segregation for disabled students resulting in mainstream teachers as well as parents and communities having little experience of inclusion.
- The GEC has demonstrated that, with early support, the Washington Group questions can be used to collect reliable and comparable prevalence data on disability from projects. Whilst the question sets themselves are well tested and validated, they have not been used systematically before with so many different projects.
- Becoming aware of disability as a factor in learning and transition outcomes has generated a lot of innovative thinking by GEC projects, but there can still be a tendency for the most immediate response to be the need to provide medical-based interventions. The rights-based approach to disability,



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focusing on barriers to participation, requires in-depth analysis, and in some cases support and advice from specialists. Projects are encouraged and expected to engage in awareness raising and working with relevant local stakeholders in order to avoid expensive individual based interventions that do nothing to address the root causes of exclusion. In particular, engaging with other civil society groups such as Disabled People's Organisations or NGOs working with disabled people can produce synergies which benefit everyone.

- One key challenge which is yet to be fully addressed is the way in which gender and disability intersect to create a unique set of barriers. Although enabling school access for disabled girls is a significant achievement given the multiple factors in their exclusion, disability often takes precedence (over gender) as the focus of the interventions in schools and communities. There is some work happening to improve girls' self-esteem and supporting them to tackle bullying and discrimination but actually understanding the unique interplay between being a girl and having a disability is an area which is still very much open for more investigation and work.

**“Disability is no longer a specialist issue but one that touches the sector as a whole”**

## The way forward

The response of projects to disability inclusion has been incredibly positive and it is clear that there is a lot of motivation for working on improving the learning and transition outcomes of disabled girls. Having raised awareness of the rights-based approach and increased the visibility of disabled girls through the collection of disability disaggregated data all projects have started to realise their responsibilities for increasing access and participation. Disability is no longer a specialist issue but one that touches the sector as a whole. The GEC is breaking new ground by raising expectations around inclusion through the proactive and determined approach of projects. There is still a way to go, but already projects are improving the visibility of disabled girls and increasing the likelihood that they will benefit from project activities alongside their non-disabled peers. The opportunities presented by the GEC for improving the lives and prospects of disabled girls and for documenting best practice are considerable so we will continue to monitor progress and look forward to being able to report more on disability inclusion over the life of the GEC.

The Girls' Education Challenge has a zero tolerance policy on misconduct, including mistreatment of individuals and misappropriation of funds. If you would like more information on the whistleblowing mechanism, or to report misconduct please email [gecpmo@uk.pwc.com](mailto:gecpmo@uk.pwc.com). The e-mail account is accessible only by a small number of individuals who have been trained on the requirement to keep the information confidential. We will follow up matters on an anonymous basis and are committed to investigate claims thoroughly and fairly.

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