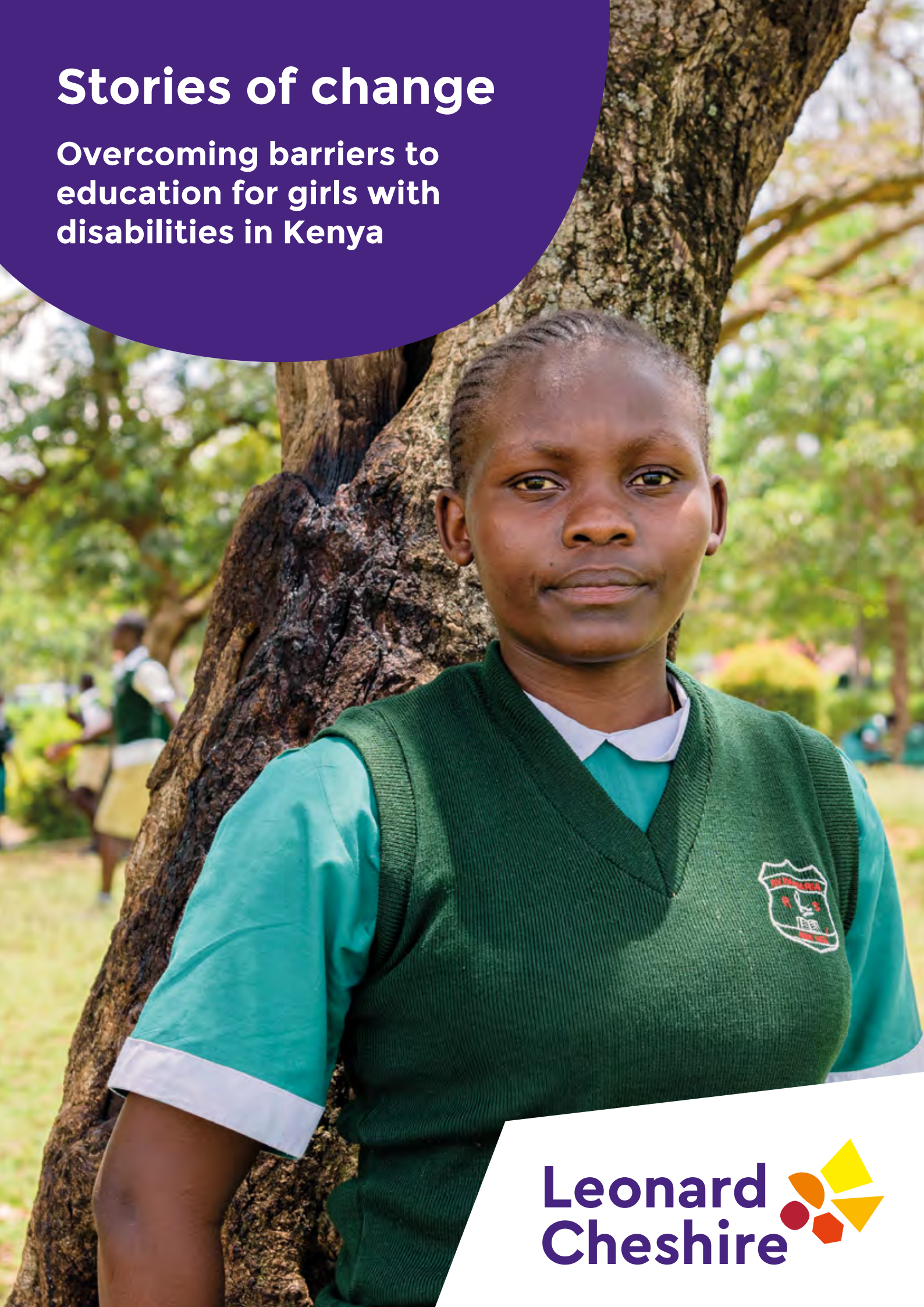


Stories of change

Overcoming barriers to
education for girls with
disabilities in Kenya



Leonard
Cheshire



Acknowledgements

This booklet has been designed to help build an understanding of how the Girls' Education Challenge Transition (GEC-T) project in Kenya has supported girls with disabilities to transition into secondary education and vocational institutes, and improve their learning outcomes. The information presented in this booklet is the result of joint teamwork and input from various people, most importantly the subjects referenced in the stories. Collective effort and time has also been contributed from the following Leonard Cheshire and the Girls' Education Challenge Fund Management team members:

Mercy Muthui	Interim Kenya Country Representative
Lucy Bentley	Writer and Editor
Erin O'Reilly	Communications Manager
Rachel Gondwe	Learning Impact and Quality Manager
Sam Buckley	Communications Officer
Alicia Mills	Girls' Education Challenge Fund Management team
Nicola McRae	Girls' Education Challenge Fund Management team
Emma Sarton	Girls' Education Challenge Fund Management team
Edgar Makona	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager
Hedaya Chungu	National Safeguarding Manager
Samuel Katembo	GEC-T Programme Manager
Phelix Ondenyi	GEC-T Programme Coordinator
Kevin Odhier	GEC-T Monitoring and Evaluation Officer
Basil Wandago	Community resource person – Migori
Josephine Robi	Community resource person – Kuria
Simeon Onyango	Community resource person – Mbita
Peter Nyakinda	Community resource person – Mbita
Alphonse Were	Community resource person – Siaya
Felix Omondi	Community resource person – Kisumu

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Introduction

All children have an equal right to receive an education. However, there are at least 33 million children with disabilities out of school worldwide, and the majority of these are girls.¹ Girls with disabilities are less likely to enrol in education – and those who do go to school have lower attendance rates and are less likely to complete their education. This inequality has widened with the Covid-19 pandemic, as many girls with disabilities who were previously going to school have been unable to access remote learning and are now likely to drop out of education entirely.

This lack of educational opportunity affects girls with disabilities throughout their lives – making them less likely to find employment and more likely to experience poverty, while continuing to experience additional barriers such as discrimination, stigma and gender-based violence.

However, this booklet tells a different story. It tells the stories of girls with disabilities from Kenya who, against the odds, have successfully overcome the barriers that have put their education at risk, such as negative attitudes, stigma and discrimination, lack of suitable learning materials or assistive technology, inaccessible school buildings, or gender-based violence. It also tells the stories of the teachers, community leaders and family members who have supported them along the way.

All of this has been made possible through Leonard Cheshire's Girls' Education Challenge Transition project (GEC-T). This five-year project, which draws to a close in March, seeks to improve learning outcomes for girls with disabilities and support their transition into secondary education and vocational institutes.

This project has had a huge impact for thousands of girls with disabilities in Kenya.

Through the project, learning environments have been made inclusive, teachers have been trained, community attitudes have been transformed, families have been supported, peer support mechanisms have been put in place – and 2,777 children with disabilities in the Lake Region of Kenya have been given the support they need to access a quality education and fulfil their potential.

This project has had a huge impact for thousands of girls with disabilities in Kenya. But there is still much more that needs to be done. World leaders, UN agencies and donor countries, as well as national and local governments, have a duty to ensure every girl with disabilities gets an education by the 2030 deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and to prioritise them in post-Covid education and gender policies. As the world prepares for the second Global Disability Summit in February 2022, just after this booklet is published, it is vital that policy makers send a strong signal that they are committed to ensuring that every girl, including those with disabilities, will have her right to education fulfilled.

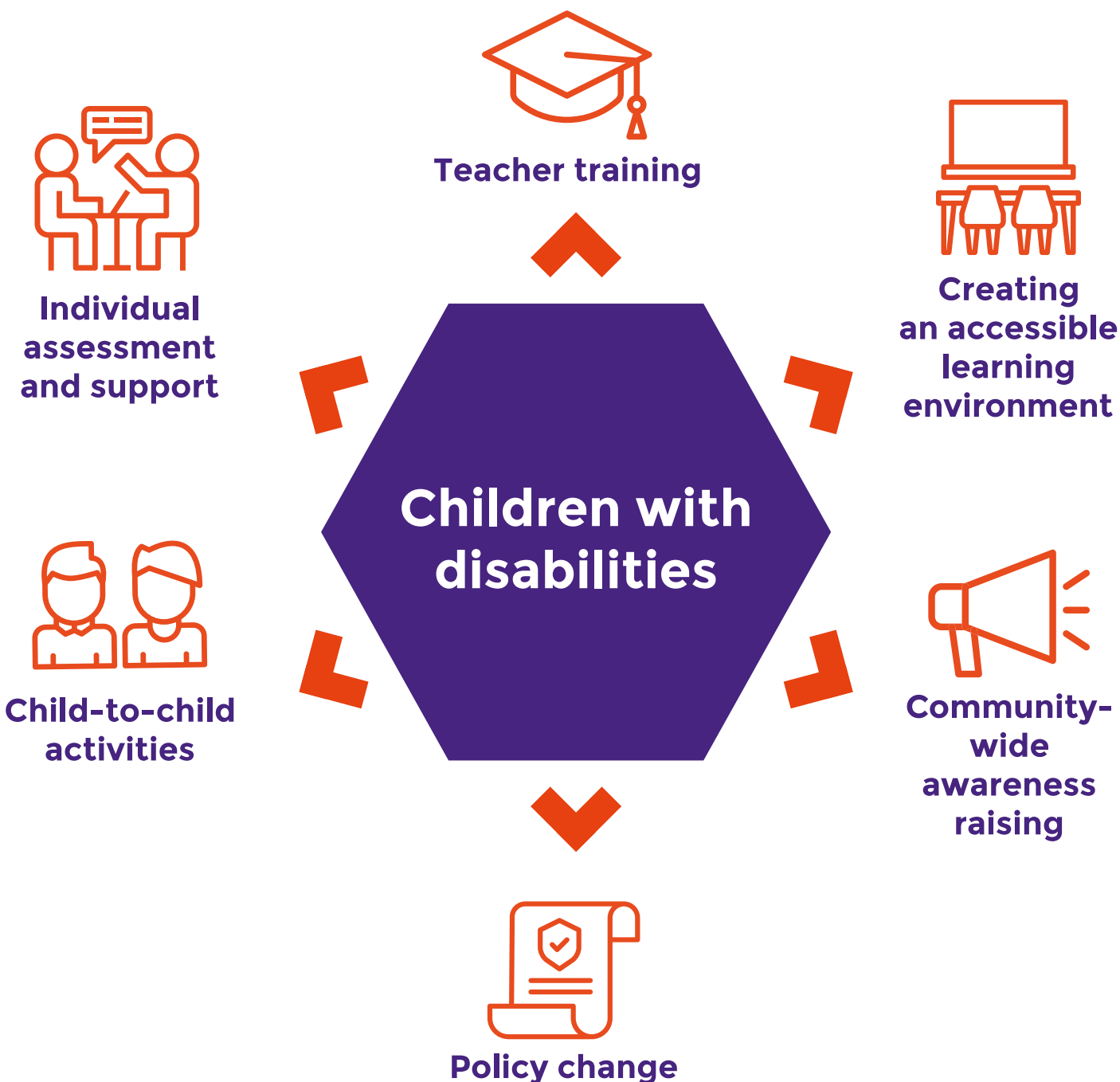
At the end of this booklet you will hear from the girls themselves, and those who have supported them, about what they think needs to change in the future. We hope their words will inspire others to do everything they can to ensure that girls with disabilities are no longer left behind.

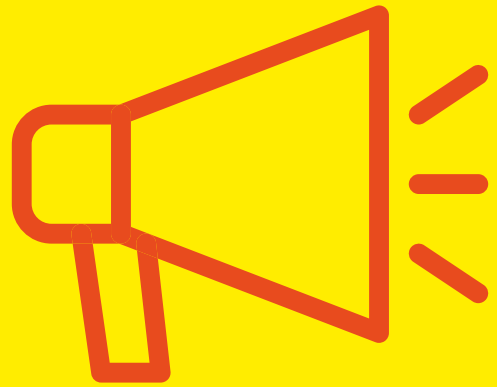
¹ International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (2016). The Learning Generation – Investing in education for a changing world.

Our inclusive education model

Leonard Cheshire's inclusive education programme supports children with disabilities to attend mainstream schools alongside children without disabilities. Since 2008, we have supported nearly 50,000 children with disabilities to get an education in Africa and Asia.

We have developed a holistic, community-based inclusive education model to ensure that every child we support reaches their full potential. Every project we run includes the same six core elements:





Individual assessment and support

We work with communities, schools and families to identify children with disabilities, including those already at school and those who are out of school. Once children are registered with the project, they receive an individual assessment to establish exactly what they need so they can get the most out of their education. In Kenya, this is done in collaboration with and/or through Education Assessment and Resource Centres.

Some children may need assistive devices such as a wheelchair, glasses or a hearing aid. Others might need specific support from teachers such as a differentiated curriculum and learning resources. Some children might need transport to get to school, or families may need financial support for school fees, uniform or other educational materials.

We work with teachers to ensure they are aware of the different needs of children with disabilities. This helps them to be able to identify and assess children that may need additional support, and provide tailored and specific assistance through an individual education plan. This might include providing more time to complete work during lessons, re-organising seating arrangements, providing assistive technology or more participatory

teaching approaches where children can help one another.

In March 2020, schools were closed across Kenya as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The changing context required us to rapidly adapt the support provided by the project. We reached out to girls with disabilities via radio and SMS messaging, providing dignity kits for girls to access essential items such as sanitary wear, conducting home visits, providing materials and resources for learning at home, and establishing community-based learning programmes. With schools reopening in October 2020, the GEC-T project team has been working hard to ensure girls with disabilities have the individualised support they need to return to school safely.

Through the GEC-T project:

2,777

2,777 children with disabilities have been given the support they need to access a quality education and fulfil their potential.

343

343 children have been provided with assistive devices such as a wheelchair glasses or a hearing aid, to enable them to attend school.



Boke

“Girls and boys should both be taken to school. My fellow girls, I would like to advise you to study and continue with your lives.”

Boke became pregnant during the Covid-19 school closures, and was at risk of dropping out of the school forever. Combined support from her family, teachers, the GEC-T team and community leaders played a vital role in convincing Boke to remain in school. Now a young mother, she is successfully balancing her education with looking after her one-year-old son.



Boke's story

At the age of 17, Boke was considering dropping out of school forever. Not only did she face barriers and stigma in her community because of her visual impairment, but she was also pregnant. Her community was shunning her, calling the pregnancy a curse – a punishment to the family for allowing a girl with a disability to attend school.

Boke's mother says: "People verbally abused us, some would even tell me to abort my daughter's pregnancy. I refused. If a child gets pregnant she should be allowed to go to school to study, to get a job and get her own money."

At the time, Boke's education had already been disrupted by the Covid-19 school closures. The GEC-T project was providing vital support for her to continue learning at home, including learning materials, reading glasses, and regular home visits for psycho-social support. Now, at a time when Boke was very vulnerable to leaving the education system forever, the project would play an important role in helping her back into school while raising a young child.

"I saw sense in going back to school and not putting my life on hold."




After consulting with the GEC-T team, Boke's mother reported the matter to the area chief and the Department of Children's Services. The project team facilitated counselling and psycho-social support for Boke throughout her pregnancy and following the birth of her son. And, after they had helped Boke manage these massive changes, Boke was convinced that she had to return to school.

"It was very hard to face my fellow learners," Boke said. "But after getting support, I saw sense in going back to school and not putting my life on hold."

The GEC-T team also worked with the community to challenge stigmas and misconceptions around disability. Their treatment of Boke soon transformed and they are now very supportive of girls' education.

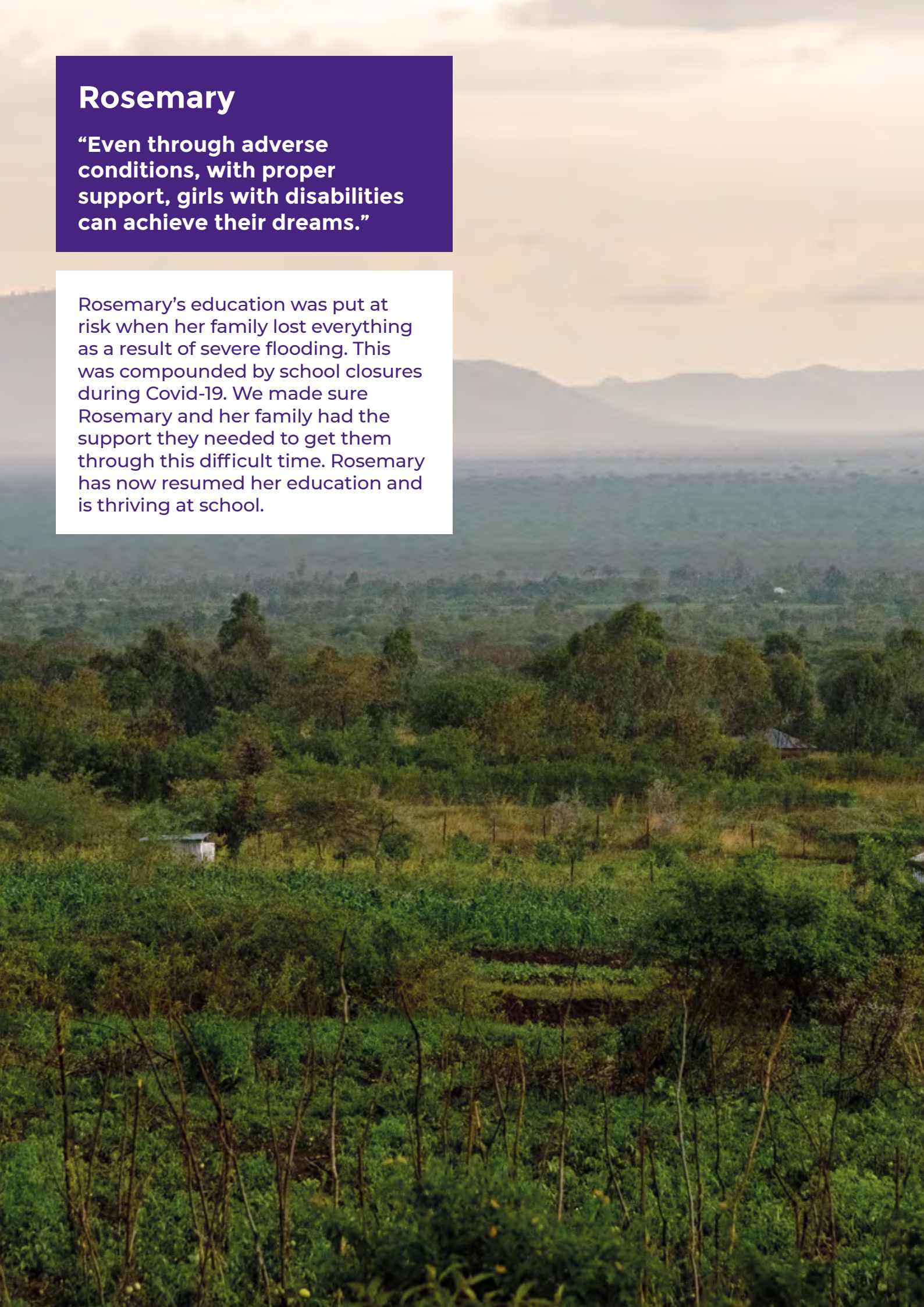
Now, Boke is back in school and keeping her dreams alive. She shares parenting duties with her mother, and the school has given her permission to go back home at lunch and break time to breastfeed her son. And she believes that neither being a child with a disability nor a young mother should prevent anyone from accessing an education: "Girls and boys should both be taken to school. My fellow girls, I would like to advise you to study and continue with your lives."

Themes:	
	Individual assessment and support
	Community-wide awareness raising

Rosemary

“Even through adverse conditions, with proper support, girls with disabilities can achieve their dreams.”

Rosemary’s education was put at risk when her family lost everything as a result of severe flooding. This was compounded by school closures during Covid-19. We made sure Rosemary and her family had the support they needed to get them through this difficult time. Rosemary has now resumed her education and is thriving at school.



Rosemary's story

Rosemary is a very hardworking 13-year-old who is determined to make her dreams come true through education. Her mother left the family when she was just eight months old, and sadly her father passed away in 2019. She now lives with her aunt and grandmother.

Rosemary has had a hearing impairment since birth, which has deteriorated as she has got older. Financial difficulties made it hard for the family to afford the right medical care for Rosemary.

One day when Rosemary's aunt was taking her to school, they met a GEC-T project officer. The officer explained how the project could support them, and soon afterwards Rosemary was taken for an individual assessment. She received a hearing aid, which greatly improved her participation and learning at school – making a big difference to her interactions with her teachers and classmates.

Things were going well until severe flooding hit the area where Rosemary and her family were living. Flooding is becoming a more frequent problem for many families in the region due to climate change, and can be particularly challenging for families of children with disabilities as they may face additional risks. For example, Rosemary's hearing impairment can make it harder for her to detect the rains and the rising waters: "You can be sound asleep not knowing that the water levels have already reached your beddings," she explained. "This makes me not to have good sleep, which affects my day at home and in school."

The family lost everything in the floods, including her grandmother's house. They had to be housed in a camp, and as subsistence farmers they also lost their livelihood. This was compounded by Covid-19 which put the family in greater danger living in the camp where it was hard to maintain social distancing. The education that had begun to make such a difference for Rosemary was now at risk.

"The state of affairs made it impossible for Rosemary to continue going to school," explained her aunt.

We followed up on Rosemary during the lockdown and identified that the family urgently needed additional support. We arranged an immediate cash transfer so the family could buy food and Rosemary could resume with her health check-ups. The unhygienic conditions at the camp had also resulted in Rosemary contracting severe malaria along with bouts of diarrhoea, and we arranged for her to receive the medical treatment she needed. We also provided face masks, soap and hand sanitiser, and set up a community-based learning programme enabling teachers to visit Rosemary at home while schools were closed.

These kinds of activities ensured that learners like Rosemary were supported and able to continue with their education despite inaccessible schools or existing distant learning that was not disability inclusive. Additional relief came for the family when a local government County Assembly arranged for a new home to be built for them. Now that schools have reopened, Rosemary has returned to class and is doing well both at home and at school. She said: "Even through adverse conditions, with proper support, girls with disabilities can achieve their dreams."

Themes:	
	Individual assessment and support
	Creating an accessible learning environment

Sheryl

“I hope to become a police officer in the future so that I can be in a position to help sensitise the community and children in a similar situation.”

Sheryl's community used to think she wouldn't be able to achieve anything because of her disability. However, with support from the GEC-T project she has graduated from secondary school and now hopes to become a police officer. Her community is now actively promoting the importance of education for girls with disabilities.



Sheryl's story

Early in her childhood, Sheryl fell while playing her friends and hurt her right shoulder. It seemed like a minor incident at the time. However, her injuries did not heal properly, and her family was unable to afford proper medical care. She began to experience frequent pain in her shoulder, which was often so severe she could not make it to school, and she was considering dropping out.

Sheryl also experienced discrimination within her community – she recalls the days she used to spend crying at night due to insults: “One of my uncles told my mother in my presence that rather than wasting money on my education they should start planning for my funeral.”

But with the arrival of the GEC-T project at her primary school, Sheryl's journey towards transforming her life began. The support she received from the project's child-to-child club encouraged her not to give up on her education, and she was able to successfully enroll in secondary school in 2017.

However, her secondary education was frequently disrupted as Sheryl continued to experience severe pain. This was an extremely anxious time for her family, with Sheryl's mum saying: “I had lost hope that Sheryl would ever recover and complete her education.”




The family had already sold land to pay for two surgeries for Sheryl, but Sheryl's pain did not improve and they were unable to afford further treatment. At this point the project stepped in and facilitated and paid for a third – and successful – surgery. Sheryl's pain was finally relieved, and she was able to start going to school regularly again.

Throughout this time, the team also provided Sheryl with moral and psycho-social support to encourage her not to drop out of school. The family were thrilled when Sheryl successfully sat for the Kenya Certificate for Secondary Education in 2021.

Community attitudes have really transformed now that they have seen what someone with a disability can achieve. Sensitisation sessions from the project team have made a big difference too. Before, Sheryl's mum felt that the community's attitudes towards Sheryl were more disabling than Sheryl's impairment itself. However, the community now sees it as their duty to ensure that girls with disabilities receive an education along with the same care and dignity as all other children.

Sheryl is keen to give back to the community, and has her eyes set on joining the police force: “I hope to become a police officer in the future so that I can be in a position to help sensitise the community and children in a similar situation.”



Themes:	
	Individual assessment and support
	Community-wide awareness raising
	Child-to-child activities



Sheila

“I used to feel sad and cry every time my peers made fun of me and called me names because of my disability. But now they know better not to mess with me. I report any harassment to the teachers as I can speak for myself and go to the teachers on my own.”

Sheila hated being left behind when her brothers and all her peers went to school. And she hated even more being insulted and harassed by her community because one of her legs had been amputated. But within a few months of registering with the GEC-T project, Sheila was thriving at school, had learned how to walk with her new prosthetic leg and was busy making new friends.

Sheila's story

Sheila is a happy and determined 10-year-old who loves nothing more than chasing after her five brothers. She is full of hopes and dreams for her future. When she leaves school she would like to be either a teacher or a doctor, so she can help other children like her.

However, life has not always been this promising for Sheila. At the age of two her leg had to be amputated following a broken ankle which was not treated properly at the time. She spent most of her childhood sitting in the same spot, only able to move if she crawled on the ground or was carried.

When all her peers started school, she was left behind as her father could not afford the daily transport needed to get her there. She would have loved to go to school along with her brothers, but instead was frequently subjected to discrimination and abuse from her community: "They insulted me that I was 'a child with one leg' and I really felt so bad," Sheila says.

The arrival of the GEC-T project at Sheila's local primary school brought a renewal of the family's hopes. The project team quickly identified that her lack of mobility was one of the first things that needed to be addressed. She was provided with a prosthetic leg to help her move around more easily. Within a few months, Sheila had started school, learned how to walk with her new prosthetic leg and was quickly making new friends. She says: "I feel so good while going to school. I really love reading and I am able to study with my classmates."

Awareness raising within the community has gone a long way towards reducing the stigma associated with disability. Changes in attitude take time, and Sheila still occasionally experiences discrimination. But, thanks to the project, Sheila can now deal with this very differently: "I used to feel sad and cry every time my peers made fun of me and

called me names because of my disability. But now they know better not to mess with me. I report any harassment to the teachers as I can speak for myself and go to the teachers on my own."

Having witnessed first-hand the advantages of the changes within the school and community, Sheila's father is determined to be a role model in his community and help sensitise them on the importance of education for girls with disabilities. He says: "It is good for girls with disabilities to be taken to school. If Sheila can study and finish her education, and later get employed, it will be a very good thing."



Themes:



Individual assessment and support



Community-wide awareness raising



Community-wide awareness raising and training

One of the greatest barriers that prevents children with disabilities – especially girls – from getting an education is stigma, which can lead to social isolation and discrimination.

We train small groups of community members on disability rights, gender and inclusive education. By raising awareness of both disability and gender issues amongst caregivers and the wider community, deeply rooted stereotypes and practices around girls with disabilities, including the suggestion that they cannot learn as capably as others, can be effectively challenged.

In our GEC-T project in Kenya, fathers have been trained as male mentors who sensitise other men on the rights and needs of girls with disabilities. Thanks to the scheme, traditional roles and gender inequalities are being challenged and fathers are taking on more responsibility for the education of their children with disabilities.

Another important aspect of our community awareness raising is the formation of parent support groups. These groups provide a forum for parents of children with disabilities to share their experiences and support each other. Parents are also given support to manage their finances and set up their own business, so they are in a better position to be able to support their families.

Our work within communities has led to community attitudes being dramatically transformed – with many people who previously neglected or even harassed girls with disabilities becoming strong advocates for their education and inclusion.

Through the GEC-T project:

150

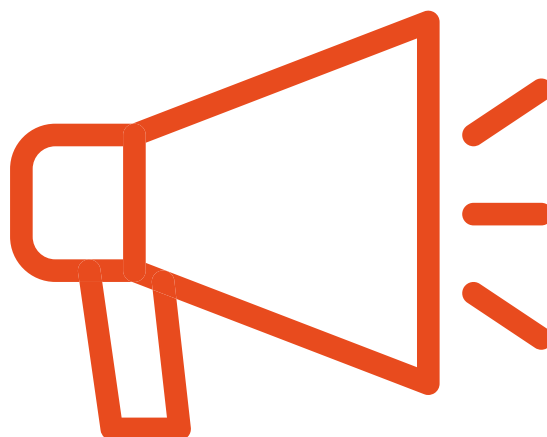
150 men have received male mentor training so that they can become role models and advocates for inclusive education within their communities.

50

We have set up 50 parent support groups for parents of children with disabilities.

1,797

We have supported 1,797 parents of children with disabilities to join parent support groups, giving them the opportunity to share experiences and support each other.



Francis and Seline

“Through the training sessions, we were shown that parenting and home responsibilities are not gender based. We all live in a symbiotic environment where we need each other.”

Through our male mentor scheme, Francis has taken on more responsibility for his daughter Seline – and has also become a strong advocate for the education of children with disabilities in his community.



Francis and Seline's story

When Francis started taking on more responsibility for caring for his daughter Seline, who has epilepsy, he faced criticism at first from others in the community: "I had people asking me why I am taking up the responsibilities of a female child which should be well taken care of by her mother," said Francis. "They even question if it is possible since men around my area are never close to their children." In the region where Francis and Seline live, it is very unusual for men to get involved in looking after their children and supporting with family life.

Francis has a disability himself, having lost a hand in a work accident, and believes strongly that fathers should be doing more day-to-day to support their children. This came about after Francis took part in the GEC-T project's male mentor scheme. Through the scheme, male parents and carers like Francis have learned how to respond to their children's needs, and have become role models for others in their communities.

"Through the training sessions, we were shown that parenting and home responsibilities are not gender based. We all live in a symbiotic environment where we need each other," Francis said.

Francis now takes a strong interest in Seline's education – supporting her with home-learning during Covid-19 and regularly liaising with her teachers to ensure she is getting the right support. He is very pleased with her progress at school since the project started: "Ever since Seline joined the child-to-child club at the school, she has created a lot of friends," Francis said. "The children and teachers are no longer scared of her fits thanks to training and support. Now Seline is more confident."

Not only is Francis taking on more responsibility for Seline, he is also now a keen advocate for the importance of education for children with disabilities. He is the coordinator of his local parent support group, which was set up by the project. Through the group, Francis and other members can discuss any concerns relating to home and school.

Francis wants to encourage other men to step up: "In our culture, men are rarely involved in the raising of their children. But after going through numerous trainings initiated by GEC-T, I saw the need for me to step in and take care of Seline. I would like to urge fellow men to step up and take charge of their families' responsibilities."



Themes:	
	Community-wide awareness raising
	Child-to-child activities



Jacob

“Through the trainings I have been empowered physically, mentally and spiritually. And this has also enhanced the practice of our roles as the local leaders.”

Senior Assistant Chief Jacob has been promoting the importance of inclusive education across villages in Mbita Sub-County. Previously, children with disabilities in his community were usually sent to special schools. Jacob has worked with community leaders, the project teams and parents to grow community awareness and encourage the enrolment of children with disabilities into mainstream schools.

Jacob's story

Jacob is Senior Assistant Chief for 13 villages in Mbita Sub-county. From the moment Jacob met with the GEC-T project team he was keen to get on board: “It really sounded sweet to my ears so I immediately supported the idea and this is how I got involved in the project,” he said.

Before the project started, cultural beliefs and misconceptions about disability in the region meant many children with disabilities were left out of school. Those that did go to school were often segregated and sent to special schools. Even some of the parents of children with disabilities felt their children could not contribute to society.

“Many parents associated disability with some bad omen or a curse along a family line that needed a divine intervention,” explained Assistant Chief Jacob.

So things needed to change. The project team met with Jacob to talk about how he could support the project and promote inclusion within the villages. He began working with village elders across the sub-county to share information and identify children who could be involved.

He and his team needed to convince parents and community members about the benefits of inclusive education. “It was not easy to convince our parents to take their children with disabilities to school. We had to intervene as the local administrators to make our people understand,” explained the Assistant Chief.

Training from the project team has given Assistant Chief Jacob and his team the tools they need to shift attitudes within the community and spread awareness: “Through the trainings I have been empowered physically, mentally and spiritually. And this has also enhanced the practice of our roles as the local leaders.”

The training also created a useful platform for Jacob to meet with others about child protection cases, including teachers, project team members, other chiefs and

assistant chiefs and, if necessary, police. Child protection and safeguarding is an area that Jacob has played a particularly key role in since the training. He said: “How we take actions when a protection case is reported to us has made it so easy for children with disabilities in my area to be free to reach out to my office whenever they feel that things are not ok with them.”

In his role he also offers assistance to parent support groups – encouraging them to meet regularly and going along to the groups to share his knowledge. “The members of those groups are real champions and ambassadors of disability in our community. And so they also help us in reaching out to other parents easily,” explained Assistant Chief Jacob.

Not only has Assistant Chief Jacob seen big changes in his community since the project started – he has seen big changes in himself: “Thanks to Leonard Cheshire for the good work they have done in transforming the mindset of these community members and to make them view disability differently including myself. I am now not just an Assistant Chief – but one who has knowledge about disability and can address people confidently about these issues.”

Themes:	
	Community-wide awareness raising
	Policy change



Nyakayiemba parent support group

“Without doubt, the project interventions really made it a success in our community. Thanks to Leonard Cheshire, for they opened our eyes at a time that we needed them most.”

The parent support group at Nyakayiemba primary school has made a big difference for parents of children with disabilities in the local community – and for their children. Not only has it provided them with a forum to share experiences and support one another, it has also provided them with opportunities to boost their incomes and set up their own businesses.

Nyakayiemba parent support group

Before the GEC-T project came to Nyakayiemba primary school in Mbita, the local community saw disability as a curse. Parents of children with disabilities were not well accepted by the community, as community groups felt they would bring bad omens associated with disability. “It was so sad and difficult to accept that a child with disability belongs to you and that is why many of us used to lock them up in certain rooms where no one or any visitor would see them,” said Cosmas, the chairperson of Nyakayiemba parent support group.

Many of the parents of children with disabilities were doubtful when the GEC-T project first got started. Some even thought they were planning to use the children for personal gain and rituals. But when they started to see the difference the project was making for their children and the wider community they quickly changed their minds.

One of the key ways the project team engaged with the community was setting up the Nyakayiemba parent support group, which now has 23 active members. The group provides a forum for parents to meet and share their different experiences about their children with disabilities, encourage one another and foster a sense of belonging.

Parents have also been offered training on financial management and entrepreneurship, and then financially supported with revolving loans. This has provided parents with opportunities to boost their income and save school fees for their children.

The group is now self-sufficient and has introduced its own income-generating activities including a fishpond and a hatchery. “We hatch the young chicks and sell to the people,” said the treasurer of the group. “We also welcome others who bring their eggs to our hatchery and we charge them some fee thereby making some profit for the group.”

Cosmas, the chairperson of the group, says that his involvement has really improved life for his family and others in the group. Many of them are now able to set up their

own individual businesses. “When I was to install my maize mill, I took part of the money from the group as a loan. It assisted me so well and I paid it back,” said Cosmas.

Mary, one of the group members, said: “Being part of this team has enabled me to borrow money to start up my kiosk which is doing so well as we speak. My children are nowadays eating a balanced diet since I do not struggle putting food on the table like before. I am able to buy books and school uniform for my daughter which was a great challenge before.”

The group does still have some challenges. Some previous group members have failed to repay their loans, and the group is concerned that when the project finishes loan recovery may become more challenging.

However, the group is hopeful that they will do even better in future if they continue practicing the skills learned from the trainings. “Without doubt, the project interventions really made it a success in our community. Thanks to Leonard Cheshire, for they opened our eyes at a time that we needed them most,” concluded Cosmas. Learning outcomes have improved for the children too, with absence rates for children with disabilities at the school greatly reducing since parents have been supporting them to access education.

Themes:



Community-wide awareness raising



Child-to-child activities

Developing and running child-to-child activities for children with and without disabilities to take part in together, such as peer support and after-school clubs, is a key aspect of our inclusive education model. This helps promote inclusion and socialisation and reduce stigma between all children.

Child-to-child clubs are set up at our project schools, which offer a support mechanism for children with disabilities while also providing opportunities for children with and without disabilities to learn, play and take part in activities together. This helps children to build new friendships and encourages them to better understand and support each other. The clubs also increase knowledge on rights, self-confidence, and the importance of inclusion, as well as reducing stigma and discrimination.

Through the GEC-T project:

75

Child-to-child clubs have been set up in 75 project schools, giving children with and without disabilities opportunities to learn, play and take part in activities together.

1,425

1,425 children have joined child-to-child clubs.





Juliet

“At my new school they advocate for disability inclusion and there is a zero-tolerance policy on bullying and harassment. Things are very different, the attitude of the teachers was very positive and they are very supportive.”

Attending an inclusive school in Kisumu changed 15-year-old Juliet's life. Having been bullied at a different school about her disability, she had completely lost her confidence. But thanks to supportive teachers and an inclusive learning environment, she is now top of her class and hoping to become a neurosurgeon.

Juliet's story

In 2007, when she was two, Juliet had an accident while crossing a railway line. Both of her legs had to be amputated above the knee.

Three years later, Juliet was enrolled at a low-cost private school, but experienced challenges because of inaccessibility and misconceptions about disability. For one, getting to and from school was difficult.

"I would go to school while being carried on a bicycle," explained Juliet. "Sometimes it would rain, making it difficult to manoeuvre the terrains. The bicycle was also not in a good condition and would break down on our way to school."

Sometimes Juliet would have to miss school and she would get behind in class. Another big challenge was how other students treated her: "It was very difficult for me to make friends," she said. "The pupils there were very abusive and would often make fun of my condition."

But then a close friend of Juliet's family told them about the GEC-T project. Not long after, the team came to the house to talk about enrolling Juliet in a school with a more supportive environment.

So, Juliet began attending one of our project schools. The project team arranged for her to have a wheelchair and crutches, and she has now been fitted with two prosthetic legs. This has greatly helped with her mobility both at home and at school. She goes to school on the school bus provided by the project – a much easier and safer way for her to get to school.

The teachers at her new school had undergone inclusive education training, so they could better support Juliet in class. It also meant they could teach other students about the importance of disability inclusion.




"At my new school they advocate for disability inclusion and there is a zero-tolerance policy on bullying and

harassment. Things were very different, the attitude of the teachers was very positive and they are very supportive," Juliet said.

Child-to-child clubs were also introduced at the school, helping to challenge negative misconceptions about disability and encourage children with and without disabilities to learn and play together. This was great for Juliet's confidence. She joined the club and especially enjoys playing football and taking part in drama.

Juliet's performance at school is really exceptional and she is now top of her class. She will shortly be transitioning to secondary school, and hopes to continue with her studies and become a neurosurgeon. Juliet also wants to advocate for a fairer world where everyone has equal opportunities.



Themes:	
	Child-to-child activities
	Individual assessment and support
	Teacher training



Patience

“I started making new friends who I enjoyed playing with. I learned about life skills which really boosted my self-esteem.”

13-year-old Patience was falling behind at school. Her teachers did not know how to support her and the school environment was not supportive. But when she was enrolled on the GEC-T project, everything changed. Now, Patience enjoys school so much more and wants to train to become a teacher.

Patience's story

When Patience was three years old, she was diagnosed with epilepsy. Shortly after her diagnosis, she sadly lost her father in a road accident, leaving her family devastated.

“My husband died at a very difficult moment in our lives. I had no means to provide for my three children,” Patience’s mother Janet recalled. “We lived through handouts until I managed to get a job as a house help.”

All of this meant there was a delay in Patience starting school. Her mother finally enrolled her in a low-cost private school, but her teachers were not sure how to support her. This meant she fell behind in class. And other students would sometimes make fun of her. So when Janet found out about the GEC-T project, she knew she had to enrol Patience.

Patience transferred to one of our project schools, and the project team’s assessment meant that we could establish exactly what she needed to support her to remain in education. We made sure she had the right medication to manage her epilepsy and provided her with a school uniform and dignity kits, which include essential items like sanitary towels. We also provided her with transport to school, which was a big relief for her mother as it gave her a sense of security.

Other children with disabilities were already enrolled at Patience’s new school, which made her feel comfortable and welcome from the start. And the inclusive education training that her teachers had received meant teachers could properly support her in class.




Patience also joined the child-to-child club at the school, which she really benefited from: “I started making new friends who I enjoyed playing with. I learned about life skills which really boosted my self-esteem.” The peer-to-peer support she received at the club helped her to feel like a valuable team member among her classmates. The club



also helped educate other children about disability and the importance of inclusion.

And she’s excelling in class too. “When Patience arrived her performance was poor but now she has really improved, and she actively participates in the child-to-child club,” explained Madam Abigail, her teacher.

The project came at just the right time for Patience and it has brought hope to her family: “Since Patience joined the project life has really improved for our whole family. Now all my worries are gone thanks to the project,” says her mother. Patience is able to look forward to a bright future, and hopes to go to college and train to be a teacher.

Themes:	
	Child-to-child activities
	Individual assessment and support
	Teacher training

Rael

“People thought people like me were useless. But now I am confident and have made friends. The team made me realise that I can now do what I want to do.”

Rael's community used to view her disability as a curse, and she experienced discrimination and bullying at school. But Rael gained new-found confidence through the child-to-child club set up by the GEC-T project at her school. This did not just change things for Rael, it completely transformed the attitudes of her community too.



Rael's story

Rael had been completely excluded by her community. They viewed her disability as a curse, and parents even told their children not to go near Rael for fear of 'catching' her disability. Her schoolmates used to laugh at the way she walked.

But Rael's life changed when the GEC-T project came to her school. And the change did not just happen for Rael. Her newfound confidence changed the attitudes of her community, too.

Rael joined the child-to-child club set up by the project at her school, which acts as a stepping stone for children with and without disabilities to make friends and learn together. There, she learned various life skills, including how to deal with the discrimination and bullying she faced from peers. She was also provided with crutches to support her mobility. During the Covid-19 school closures, the GEC-T team worked to ensure Rael had access to educational materials, and organised for a teacher to help her with her home-based learning.




And then, something remarkable began to happen. Rael's confidence began to grow. "I used to feel very bad, hearing how people talked about me," Rael said. "People thought people like me were useless. But now I am confident and have made friends."

Other parents of children with disabilities in the community began to take notice of Rael's newfound confidence, and her transformation after being considered a lost cause.

They realised that their children could go to school and make friends through the child-to-child club too.

Rael has become an example to the rest of her community, going from being treated as an outcast to becoming a popular, independent young student. The child-to-child club at her school has played a big part in Rael's transformation, giving her the confidence and support she needed to realise her dreams. She said: "The team made me realise that I can now do what I want to do – which is to become a teacher."



Themes:	
	Child-to-child activities
	Individual assessment and support
	Community-wide awareness raising



Teacher training

We provide training for teachers on inclusive education methods, practices and disability rights so that they can respond to the widest range of diversity in classrooms.

The training equips teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to deliver their lessons inclusively and support children with disabilities to fulfil their potential at school. Teachers learn about techniques such as more learner-focussed lessons that allow more time for discussion and interaction; how to adapt teaching and learning materials so they are more accessible; and how to identify and respond to different types of learning needs.

We also work with governments and teacher training institutions to provide examples of good practice. This can, in turn, influence the national education system. Examples include introducing assistive technology; training teachers on how to use technology to ensure learning is more accessible to children with disabilities; and providing tailored support and resource planning.

We have also established school-based inclusion teams which are a support structure in schools specifically designed to problem-solve solutions for the inclusion of children with disabilities in classrooms.

Through the GEC-T project:

670

We have trained 670 teachers on inclusive education methods, practices and disability rights.





Risper

“Children with disabilities have been seen joining secondary schools and even universities, something that no one thought would happen to them.”

Risper is a teacher at a primary school in Mbita Sub-county. Through the project, she has strengthened her inclusive education skills and helps run the child-to-child clubs at her school.

Risper's story

Risper is a teacher at a primary school in Mbita Sub-county. She has over a decade of experience in teaching and a diploma in special education.

Before the GEC-T project, teachers at the school, including Risper, would look at children with disabilities “as automatic life failures with no future hopes,” said Risper in her own words.

Communities, including teachers, had negative attitudes towards children with disabilities. There were many misconceptions about disability. Including the myth that it was caused by a family curse.

Understanding of disability amongst teachers, parents and students was also very poor. So children with disabilities were not getting the support they needed, and were often excluded from school. Many schools thought that allowing children with disabilities to attend would lower the school's overall exam rating.

But things changed when the school became part of the GEC-T project. Risper attended our teacher training, and it really made a difference. It gave Risper much-needed information about inclusive teaching methodologies, safeguarding and disability rights. And it helped her gain confidence in supporting children with disabilities in class: “The several trainings that I attended encouraged me and gave me confidence of teaching,” Risper said. “This equipped me with the right knowledge required for my role as inclusive education teacher.”

Risper also helps with the child-to-child clubs at the school. She provides psycho-social support to children with disabilities, especially to young mothers who are attending the school. And she encourages children with and without disabilities to learn and play together. This helped her realise the benefits of inclusive learning environments. “Personally I have seen

several changes because I today exercise a lot of self-control and humility, my attitude has changed,” Risper explained.

Now everyone at the school sees the benefits of inclusion. Children with disabilities are doing well in school, making new friends, gaining new skills and growing in confidence. “Children with disabilities have been seen joining secondary schools and even universities, something that no one thought would happen to them,” Risper said.



Themes:



Teacher training



Child-to-child activities

Anthony

“Initially I used to have it in mind that teaching learners with disability was difficult and time-consuming. But I learned that what they really need is understanding and a favourable learning environment.”

Anthony is a recently retired headteacher. He was inspired by the GEC-T project to transform his school into an inclusive learning environment for children with disabilities, and is a passionate advocate for inclusive education within his community.



Anthony's story

Anthony is a recently retired headteacher who has been in the teaching profession for almost forty years. He has always believed passionately that change is a good thing, and this has guided him throughout his teaching career. So when he was approached by the GEC-T team, he was immediately keen for his school to get involved in the project.

His school was chosen as one of the project schools. Anthony began by attending an intensive series of training and workshops, which helped him to realise a whole new way of approaching disability at his school.

“Initially I used to have it in mind that teaching learners with disability was difficult and time-consuming,” Anthony said. “But I learned that what they really need is understanding and a favourable learning environment.”

Anthony was completely energised by the training, and went straight to work to make his school more inclusive. Training was arranged for the school board and teaching staff to ensure they were equipped to better support learners with disabilities. Pupils at the school also attended sessions to raise their awareness of disability, which resulted in fewer reported cases of bullying and discrimination against children with disabilities. Anthony secured funding to build ramps at the entrance of various rooms, install rails, mark doors in yellow to enhance visibility, and overhaul classrooms and toilets to make them accessible.

From there, he became an ambassador and an advocate for inclusive education, and worked with the project team to engage with the community to raise awareness of the rights of children with disabilities, especially girls.

He worked hard to encourage parents to bring their children with disabilities to school: “Initially, parents of children with disabilities were not allowing their children to be seen outside let alone having friends,” he explained. “I liaised with the local administration and church leaders and a team from the project so as to sensitise the community members.

I noted that parents started bringing forward their children for admission and the number kept on increasing.”

Now, the school has been completely transformed. “With all this, the learning environment, both physical and mental, was very conducive to the learners with disability in school,” Anthony said. He is passionate about the inclusive approach being the standard one: “Disability should be part of the curriculum in teacher training colleges,” he stated. “So every teacher knows how to approach learners with disabilities.”



Themes:



Teacher training



Creating an accessible learning environment



Creating an inclusive learning environment

Creating an inclusive learning environment involves establishing a culture that will enable all children to reach their full potential, whatever their ability. All the other aspects of our inclusive education model, such as raising awareness of disability within the community, training teachers and providing children with the individualised support and assistive devices they need, contribute towards the creation of a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all.

It is also important that the learning environment is accessible for all children, and any physical barriers to their attendance are removed. We work with schools to make adaptations to school buildings such as constructing ramps and handrails, making toilet facilities accessible, widening windows and fitting translucent sheets to allow more light in classrooms.

We also work with schools to ensure that teaching and learning materials are accessible for learners with disabilities. This might mean adapting existing resources to be more user-friendly, or it could mean providing material in alternative formats or assistive technology such as braille readers.

Through the GEC-T project:

50 + 25 + 8

We have supported 50 primary schools, 25 secondary schools and 8 vocational training institutes to create more inclusive and accessible learning environments so that all children can reach their full potential.

We have been working hard to ensure that the changes made in schools through the GEC-T project are sustainable and continue beyond the life of the project. To support this, we have introduced School-Based Inclusion Teams (SBITs) within project schools, whose role is to identify and respond to barriers to learning for children with disabilities, and to work collectively in developing strategies to address these. Members of the SBITs include school leaders, teachers with specific expertise on areas such as guidance and counselling, teachers who have received inclusion training, and support staff. Input may also be sought from learners themselves, parents, local area administrators and community leaders. The SBITs have been integral in ensuring that inclusion is viewed as a collective responsibility across the schools. They are a key step towards ensuring the long-term sustainability of the project interventions.



Urianda primary school

“Our teachers are very friendly to our kids, they understand their needs better and all these are attributed to the interventions done by the project.”

Joshua, Urianda primary school committee member and parent of a child with a disability.

Urianda primary school has fully embraced the idea of creating an accessible learning environment since becoming one of our project schools. All teachers have been trained on inclusive education, the board of managers have been trained on disability awareness, school-based inclusion teams and child-to-child clubs have been established, buildings have been made accessible, and learning materials have been adapted.



Creating an inclusive environment at Urianda primary school

Before the GEC-T project came to Urianda primary school in Mbita, very few children with disabilities attended the school. Those who did were kept apart from other students as much as possible and left out of lessons. Teachers tended to see them as a nuisance that got in the way of their teaching, and some parents even thought that disability could spread to other children if they learned together.

But now it is a very different story for children with disabilities at the school. From the moment that the GEC-T project team knocked on the school door, the headteacher really encouraged everyone at the school to fully embrace the project and everything that it had to offer.




The project team organised several training sessions to build teachers' understanding of inclusive education. Now, every teacher is equipped with the tools they need to support learners with disabilities in the classroom. "Our teachers are very friendly to our kids, they understand their needs better and all these are attributed to the interventions done by the project," said Joshua, school committee member and father of a child with a disability.

Another core project activity was creating an accessible learning environment for children with disabilities. Translucent iron sheets were installed on the roofs; writing boards were painted; ramps were built to all classrooms; and adapted toilets were installed.

The school is now set to become a centre of good practice for inclusive education. Children with disabilities are no longer segregated from other children – instead they are actively encouraged to attend, well-supported and fully participating in class alongside children without disabilities.

A new headteacher, Mr. Odonga, has recently joined the school and has been extremely impressed with the impact of the project. "There was nothing like this in my previous school," he says. "The training I have attended really changed my perception towards disability. Learners who were not there during enrolment have also joined our school. This is a clear indication that what the project has done in our school has been appreciated by everyone in the community."

Mr. Odonga is determined to ensure that the spirit of the project continues long after it finishes, and wants to make sure that the right measures, such as government policies and refresher training for teachers, are put in place to ensure the project is sustainable. "The project should not leave without ensuring that the inclusive education policies and structures are put into place and are being implemented," concluded Mr. Odonga.

Themes:	
	Creating an accessible learning environment
	Teacher training
	Policy change

Types of families



Policy change: Looking to the future

Through our inclusive education projects, we make key decision-makers aware that implementing inclusive education is a legal and policy requirement. It is not just something they may choose to do or not – it is an obligation. We advocate for policy change at county, district, provincial, and national and international levels.

But rather than including the project's recommendations for change here, we finish with the people featured in this booklet talking about the future in their own words.

Some of these are individual dreams, requests and aspirations. Some of them are recommendations for what needs to happen next.

All of them are equally important, and we will continue working with children, schools, communities, local and national governments and many others to advocate for inclusive education to become a reality for children with disabilities in Kenya and across the globe.

Our first opportunity to do this on an international platform will be the Global Disability Summit in February 2022, which will take place just after this booklet is published. Leonard Cheshire will be urging governments from across the world to make concrete commitments to ensuring quality inclusive education for all.



Boke: Girls should be able to get the same jobs that boys get



“Later in life, I would like to be a seamstress and I would like for my child to study and finish university. Boys go and study and finish school and they get given jobs, but if girls study and finish they are told that they can’t go back to school, they should get married for [dowry] cows. But I would advise that girls should go to school so they can get these jobs that boys get.”

Rosemary: Girls with disabilities can achieve their dreams

“Even through adverse conditions, with proper support, girls with disabilities can achieve their dreams.”

Rael: My goal is to become a teacher



“People thought we are useless in the community but Leonard Cheshire has made me realise that I can now achieve my goal of becoming a teacher.”

Sheryl: I want to help people in a similar situation



“I hope to become a police officer in the future so that I can be in a position to help sensitise the community and children in a similar situation.”

Juliet: People with disabilities should have the same chances as everyone else



“I would like additional textbooks to help me to do more revision to improve more academically, so I can become a neurosurgeon. I would like my own family in the future and I also want to advocate for people with disabilities to have the same chances as everyone else.”

Janet, Patience’s mother: I want Leonard Cheshire to keep up their good work

“I want Leonard Cheshire to keep up with their good work which has really left a positive impact in our community.”

Silper, Sheila’s mother: Education gives girls a way to support themselves



“It is good when girls living with disability are educated. It is worse when they are left behind, there is nothing good in that. If she [Sheila] is disabled but educated then she has already found a way she will support herself in future. So, it becomes something very good.”

Francis, Seline’s father: Men should step up to their family responsibilities



“In our culture, men are rarely involved in the raising of their children. But after going through numerous trainings initiated by GEC-T, I saw the need for me to step in and take care of Seline’s responsibilities. I would like to urge fellow men to step up and take charge of their families’ responsibilities.”

Robert, parent support group: Form more parent support groups

“My message to the parents with children with disabilities is that they should work on a way to have such a group. Working in conjunction with the school in the community, they can form a parent support group which will in turn give them the much-needed boost to support their households.”

Jacob, Assistant Chief: Keep going till all schools are inclusive

“The project should not just fully stop what they have been doing if they want to see the fruit of their toil. With their help, the government can do a lot but if they leave now then they can be rest assured that it is not left at the proper stage of sustainability. They would rather continue until they ensure that the government has incorporated well the idea of inclusive education in all the public schools in the country.”

Risper, teacher: Train more teachers on disability

“We need teachers who can support learners with disabilities effectively. If enough teachers are trained, every child will learn in a school that is nearer to their home. The government teaching and learning resources should be changed to be disability friendly so that they can be fit for all learners. The digital gadgets brought by the government should be designed in a way that can fit the learners with disability too.”

Anthony, retired headteacher: Include disability in the teacher training curriculum

“For the future and continuity of the good work you have started, I wish you could have a way to influence the government education policy to have disability included as part of curriculum in teacher training colleges. This will prepare teachers in circumstances where one meets learners who have disabilities.”

Mr Odonga, Headteacher, Urianda primary school: Inclusive education policies and structures must be implemented

“The project should not leave without ensuring that the inclusive education policies and structures are put into place and are being implemented. The organisation should not get tired to continue with the good project that has really made recognisable changes in the society. Thanks to Leonard Cheshire and all the partners who have always been involved in the project.”





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For further information, please contact:

Leonard Cheshire

66 South Lambeth Road, London, SW8 1RL

+44 (0)20 3242 0200

info@leonardcheshire.org

Visit: leonardcheshire.org

Girls'
Education
Challenge



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