

Final reflections

Achievements and lessons learned

Expanding inclusive education strategies for girls with disabilities in the Lake Region of Kenya (GEC-Transition), Leonard Cheshire

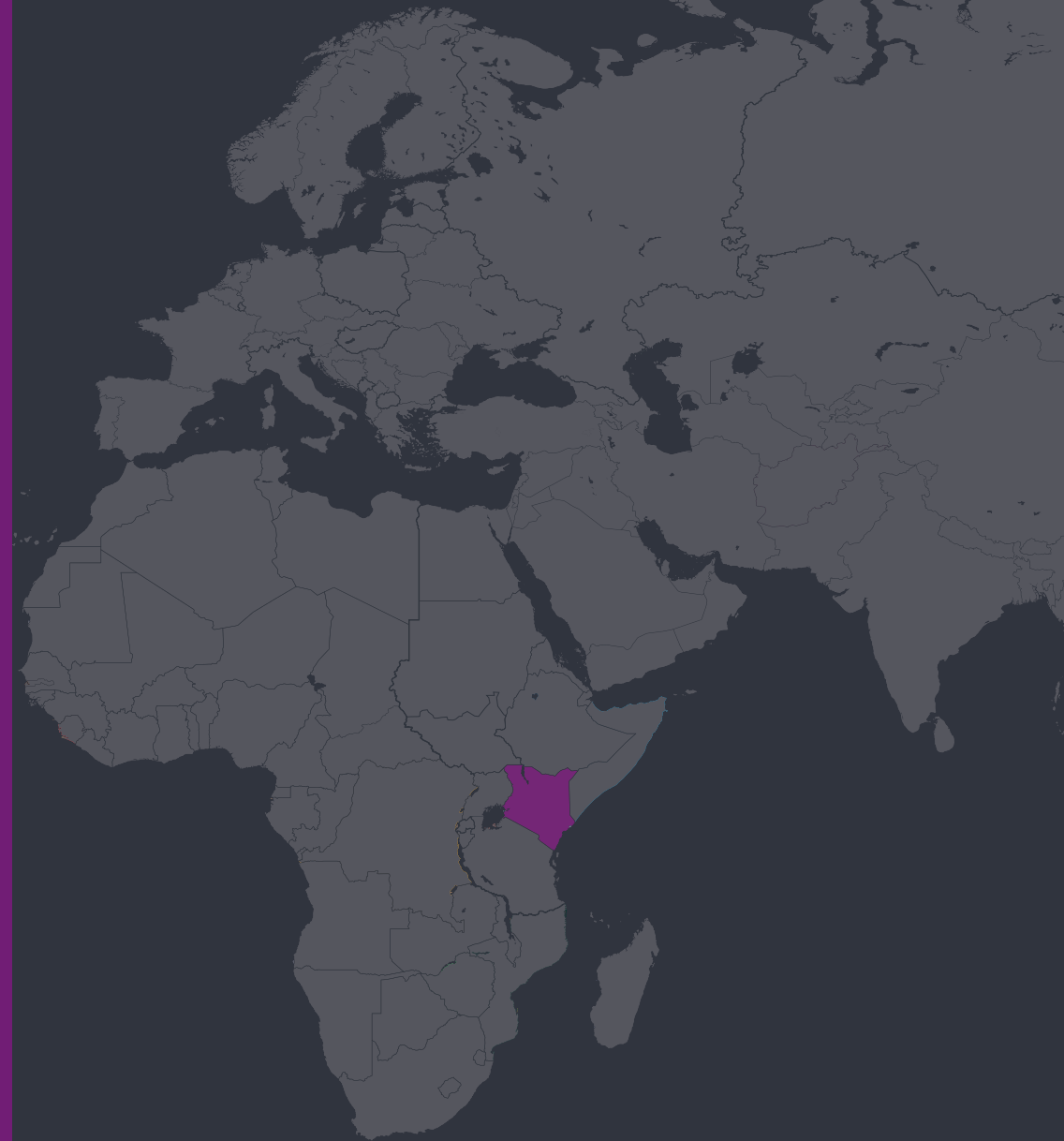
KENYA

APRIL 2017 – MARCH 2022



“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 devices brought by the government should be designed in a way that can fit the learners with disability too.”

Risper, teacher



● Kenya

What did the Leonard Cheshire project do?

Leonard Cheshire has been working to address educational barriers for children with disabilities since 2014. The project's first phase focused on promoting the region's enrolment, attendance and learning of girls with disabilities.

This report focuses on the second phase, which supported girls with disabilities to transition through relevant pathways from primary school to secondary school and vocational training and worked to improve their learning outcomes. In the second phase, the project also secured its sustainability through support to the Government of Kenya and local authorities and by developing structures to ensure that its achievements in inclusive education would continue beyond the project's lifespan.

From 2017 to 2022, Leonard Cheshire supported 2,100 girls and 677 boys with disabilities in the lake region of Kenya. The project worked in 83 educational institutions, including 50 primary schools, 25 secondary schools and eight vocational institutions across five sub-counties of the lake region: Kisumu East, Siaya, Homabay, Migori and Kuria East.

The success of this programme was driven by:

1. Supporting **attendance** levels of girls with disabilities
2. Promoting **the adoption of inclusive education practices** by teachers in schools
3. Improving the **self-esteem of girls with disabilities** through individualised support in and out of school (for example, through menstrual hygiene support, mentoring and scholarships, provision of accessible learning materials and school uniforms)
4. Promoting improved **attitudes and practices at the community level** towards children with disabilities
5. Supporting changes in the inclusive education **policy environment** by enhancing the implementation of the National Education Sector Plan for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities (2018) and the realisation of the goals of The National Disability Amendment Bill (2020)

Leonard Cheshire's holistic model aims to ensure the delivery of various interventions to address the barriers that result in educational marginalisation. It takes a systems approach, working to create accessible, inclusive and sustainable change at an individual, community, school and policy level.

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

Rosemary



At the school level, the project trained headteachers and teachers on inclusive pedagogy and practices and school management boards on inclusive education, governance and resource mobilisation to support girls with disabilities, including encouraging schools to establish school-based inclusion teams (SBITs). Every school established Child-to-Child Clubs to improve social inclusion and life skills training for children with and without disabilities. Schools conducted accessibility audits and prioritised school adaptations to increase accessibility for children with disabilities.

In the community, the project established parent support groups to improve peer support and raise awareness of disability issues. Furthermore, group income generation activities were developed for parents to support their children with a disability to go to and stay in school. This was enhanced by training male mentors (fathers of girls with disabilities) to advocate for girls' education at the community level.

At the county level, the project advocated through four County Working Groups (CWGs), which supported the passing of several local disability bills and acts. The project facilitated heightened quality standards for Education Assessment Resource Centres (EARCs) and worked closely with the Children's Department to ensure improved inclusive child protection support for children with disabilities.

On a national level, the project supported passing the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities. Implementing this policy is challenging, and children with disabilities continue to be excluded from mainstream schools on the basis and severity of their disability. However, the project has demonstrated how these exclusionary practices can be successfully overturned through the introduction of differentiated instructional practices.

// BOKE'S STORY



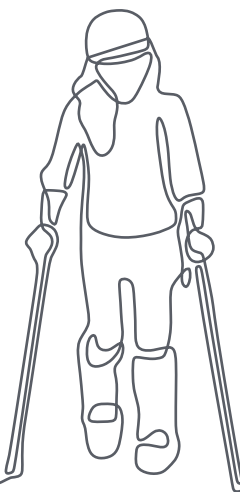
At the age of 17, Boke was considering dropping out of school forever. Not only did she face barriers and stigma in her community because of her visual impairment, but she was also pregnant. Her community had shunned her, calling the pregnancy a curse – a punishment to the family for allowing a girl 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 project supported her to continue learning at home, providing learning materials, reading glasses and regular home visits for psychosocial support. When Boke was vulnerable to leaving the education system forever, the project played an important role in helping her back into school while raising a young child. After consulting the project team, Boke's mother reported the matter to the area chief and the Department of Children's Services. The project team facilitated counselling and psychosocial support for Boke throughout her pregnancy and following the birth of her son. 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 project team also worked with the community to challenge the stigma 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. Boke believes that neither being a learner 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.”

Please click [here](#) for more stories of change.



How did the Leonard Cheshire project adapt during COVID-19?

The COVID-19 pandemic caused schools in Kenya to close from 15 March 2020 for 37 weeks and reopen on 4 January 2021. This had a negative effect on the learning of children with disabilities as it disrupted the pattern of school attendance and resulted in children spending a significant amount of time at home. Furthermore, the pandemic added economic strain on households and increased chore burdens on girls. Although the government provided some support for part of this period, many learners with disabilities could not access government provisions and lost contact with their peers and teachers.

The project rapidly reviewed how to maintain this contact and continued to gather data from key stakeholders such as teachers, parents and children with disabilities. Mobile phones were used to collect data, so the project quickly developed new data collection tools and trained staff to gather the information through telephone interviews. The interviews of 357 children with disabilities, 357 parents of children with disabilities and 79 teachers proved invaluable in developing the COVID-19 response strategy.

The rapid stakeholder review revealed that many learners with disabilities living in remote areas did not have access to online classes or radio and TV lessons. Many also did not have textbooks at home and could not continue their education during school closures. This came as a wake-up call to the project and the government to take special measures to ensure infrastructure was in place in rural areas to ensure participation for all.

The project made several adaptations and organised additional activities to support children with disabilities to continue learning during school closures. In addition, Leonard Cheshire was successful in improving

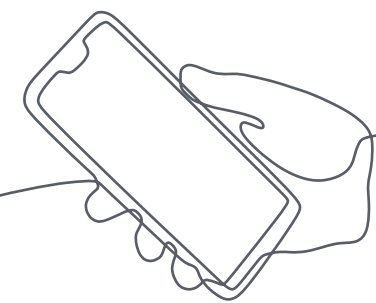
the knowledge and awareness of learners and families about how to look after themselves during the pandemic. This was done by sending SMS messages, maintaining weekly phone calls, distributing information packs, running radio programmes in local languages, and providing PPE equipment. The project also supported the government in disbursing cash grants to vulnerable households and, at the same time, distributing dignity, and hygiene packs to every girl enrolled in the project.

The project also supported home learning by providing accessible learning materials such as large print, tactile materials, pictures, and diagrams to meet the different support needs of the learners; they also provided solar radio sets to children with visual impairments and vulnerable households to enable children to access radio lessons, which had a light attached to provide better lighting at home. The children were given instructions on how to use the radios and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development programme guide to inform them of when lessons would be aired on the radio. The project also established a community-based learning programme supporting teachers to hold short teaching sessions for children with disabilities in safe local venues.

The project delivered inclusive education teacher training online, using google classrooms and weekly WhatsApp sessions for follow-up and support to teachers. In partnership with Ekitabu, the project successfully rolled out online training for teachers in Braille. In addition, it used refreshable Braille devices such as the Orbit Reader for a small cohort of learners with visual impairments. During the lockdown, the project continued to safeguard girls by providing a toll-free helpline to report cases of abuse, providing help desks at distribution points for the dignity kits and working with the Children's Department to ensure they were disability-inclusive.

“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.”

Boke



What did the Leonard Cheshire project achieve?

Disability is a complex, socially interdependent construct, and children – especially girls – with disabilities experience many social, financial, environmental and systemic barriers to education compared to their peers without impairments. The Leonard Cheshire inclusive education model is designed with multiple interrelated interventions to address these barriers. This project and the final evaluation prove that the model is effective. Despite the interruption of learning and school closures due to COVID-19, the project has significantly reduced the barriers to education for girls with disabilities. Furthermore, it has improved their learning outcomes and supported their transition to further education, thus increasing their life chances for the future.

A multi-pronged approach has positively impacted attendance and self-esteem

At the endline, evidence showed that project interventions have positively impacted attendance, improving school attendance for girls with disabilities from 87.5% at baseline to 93.5% at the endline. This was achieved through awareness-raising that included school management and governance training, resulting in more welcoming, accessible schools and more inclusive school improvement plans. The Endline Evaluation shows that school environments have become increasingly accessible and teaching methods more relevant and appropriate for children with a range of disabilities. This social inclusion and the capacity-building and interaction of the Child-to-Child Clubs positively impacted the girls' feelings of security, self-esteem and confidence, which resulted in an increased likelihood that they would attend and perform well in school. The Endline Evaluation also demonstrated that by the end of the project, girls with disabilities were equally likely to attend school as girls with no disabilities. Furthermore, attendance was supported by providing bursaries, educational materials and sanitary ware, and ensuring the children were assessed for their educational support needs, such as

providing assistive devices. In addition, the project provided an accessible school bus to support girls' travel to school in one location.

School-based inclusion teams and teacher support have improved teaching quality

Teaching quality has improved access to quality education in mainstream schools and for girls with disabilities. This has been achieved through teacher training on inclusive education pedagogy, practical classroom management skills and the effective integration of assistive technology. The Endline Evaluation observed that trained teachers had considerably improved their lesson planning and inclusive practices. This was confirmed by girls with disabilities who reported that their learning needs were more supported by their teachers, increasing from 68.9% at baseline to 90.3% at endline. Support for teachers was provided in myriad ways, contributing to learners with disabilities improving their numeracy and literacy skills. This was achieved by:

1. Establishing school-based inclusion teams to provide ongoing support to teachers by creating a culture of team problem-solving. These teams support teaching and learning processes by assessing learners' support needs, drawing up support programmes for teachers and parents as needed, providing training for teachers and monitoring the provision of support such as teaching and learning materials, assistive technology, infrastructure adaptations and teacher training.
2. Supporting teachers through the Teacher Mentorship Programme facilitated by teachers who are Heads of Department at their schools and professionals with vast experience in inclusive education.
3. Engaging the Education Assessment Resource Centres officer who played a supportive role in training teachers to understand how to adapt the curriculum to fit the individual needs of the learners with disabilities.

“My message to the parents with children with disabilities is that they should work on the 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.”

Robert, parent support group

Learning outcomes

The project impacted positively on the learning outcomes of girls with disabilities. The Endline Evaluation found statistically significant differences in aggregate English literacy scores, which improved by 10% between baseline and midline and a further 7% between midline and endline. The study also found statistically significant differences in aggregate numeracy scores, which improved by 16% from baseline to midline and 8% from the midline to endline.

Providing clear transition pathways has increased transition rates

The Endline Evaluation found that girls with and without disabilities were equally as likely to transition through school pathways successfully. This is a significant achievement, considering the high dropout rates of children with disabilities before the project. The project intentionally promoted vocational training as an alternative pathway for girls with disabilities – especially girls with intellectual disabilities – with outstanding results. Leonard Cheshire worked closely with the government to change the negative attitudes associated with vocational training and partnered with the institutes to increase knowledge and skills around disability inclusion and adaptation of the environment to ensure it was more accessible. The Endline Evaluation demonstrated that girls with disabilities were more likely, at statistically significant levels, to transition to vocational training than girls without disabilities.

Working with parents has improved community attitudes and engagement toward girls' education and safety

One of the most significant impacts of the project has been changing community attitudes towards disability. This was embedded throughout many aspects of the project, but two mechanisms specifically drove the achievements of girls with disabilities.

1. Parent support groups (PSGs) were used as a mechanism of peer support, awareness-raising on disability inclusion and training on children's rights, child protection and safeguarding, and reporting and referral pathways. This led to increased reporting by the parents directly to the government authorities and within the project reporting structures in a timely fashion, which enabled immediate and appropriate survivor support. At the endline, the parents of girls with disabilities who were members of PSGs had taken at least two positive actions to ensure that they stayed in school compared to girls with disabilities whose parents were not members of PSGs. In addition, the peer supports that parents of girls with disabilities offered to one another formed a solid social safety net, enhancing community acceptance for girls with disabilities.

2. The [male mentorship programme](#) was closely linked with school attendance, as the evaluation demonstrated families that a male mentor had spoken to were more likely to experience higher attendance improvements between midline and endline at statistically significant levels compared to those who did not have a mentor. These interventions have contributed to the community being more inclusive of children with disabilities in community activities and reducing the incidents of abuse.

Facilitated dialogue and progress around inclusive education have improved the policy environment

At the national level, Leonard Cheshire has influenced several policy interventions, including the Sector Policy on the Provision of Education and Training for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities. Leonard Cheshire has also been able to make recommendations to the quality standards for the Education Assessment Resource Centres and to several sub-county level disability policies. The project also introduced school-based inclusion teams as a mechanism to ensure the sustainability of inclusive education within schools. The primary purpose of these teams is to champion issues of inclusive education at the school level and provide contextually relevant classroom and whole school change strategies. The curriculum support officers strengthen the teams at the sub-county level to ensure continuity and continuation beyond the project timeframe. The Ministry of Education are interested in adopting this approach nationally, and Leonard Cheshire has shared a briefing paper on school-based inclusion teams to guide further rollout and scaling.



The Leonard Cheshire project in numbers



Children with disabilities supported in education

2,777



Number of teachers trained in inclusive education

670

+ Vocational Training Institute instructors trained: **68**

Number of children provided with the assistive devices needed to attend school, such as wheelchairs, glasses or a hearing aid

343



Worked with **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.

Number of parents engaged across 50 Parent Support Groups (PSGs): **1,797**

Number of men who received male mentor training to become role models and advocate for inclusive education in their communities: **150**

Number of households were reached by male mentors: **448**

75 Child-to-Child Clubs were established and **1,425** children enrolled.

50 School-based inclusion teams established with **613** members

Number of children who received assessments from Education Assessment Resource Centres: **2,456**



“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.”

Juliet

To what extent the Leonard Cheshire project deliver value for money?

The results at endline indicate that the project used the available resources well to achieve the three intended outcomes revealing that significant progress was made in ensuring sustainable change due to project activities.

Leonard Cheshire's inclusive education model provides a holistic and multi-faceted approach which targets individual girls, their families, communities and the whole school with a collaborative approach toward influencing national government systems. The project was found to offer a good level of value for money in a recent study ([VfM and disability spotlight #3](#), February 2022) conducted by the GEC fund manager.

Specific activities on four levels drove value for money:

- 1. Individual approach** – Crucial to girls with disabilities' success is the individual approach that ensures girls with disabilities are identified and assessed and receive the support they need to go to school (e.g., providing assistive devices, dignity kits, educational materials and transport). This individual approach taken by the project had a higher financial cost but had a significant positive impact on girls with disabilities inclusion, attendance and learning outcomes.
- 2. Community focus** – Community activities were deemed value for money. The project's specific interventions working with parent support groups, male mentorship and community awareness events reduced disability discrimination and stigma and increased social inclusion for girls with disabilities. The Endline Evaluation reported that girls with disabilities, who felt respected by family members, or their community had higher literacy scores at the end of the project. In addition, girls with disabilities who felt included in community activities were more likely to experience successful transition into further education or employment (89% of girls with disabilities who feel respected by their communities successfully transitioned compared to 83.5% of girls who do not feel respected by their community).
- 3. Accessible school environments** – Making school infrastructure more accessible, in-service teacher training on inclusion, training of boards of management, establishing school-based inclusion teams and Child-to-Child Clubs have meant that schools have a greater understanding and ownership of inclusion and willingness to drive change. Teachers now offer a greater range of teaching strategies, and girls with disabilities have increased self-esteem, sense of belonging, improved attendance and learning outcomes. This was substantiated in the [GEC value for money report](#), highlighting Leonard Cheshire's teaching training approach as cost-effective at an annual cost of £89 per beneficiary (teacher training and strengthening costs combined). As the project has completed its activities, it has worked with the government to institutionalise both Child-to-Child clubs and school-based inclusion teams to sustain inclusion in the future.
- 4. Good relationships with government institutions** – These relationships were developed through a thorough context analysis that the project conducted, ensuring that all its interventions were conducted within the existing government policies. A key aspect of providing value for money was how the project leveraged existing government structures to ensure sustainability and to keep costs down. In particular, working with the Association for the Physically Disabled of Kenya to provide assistive devices, working with the children's department to embed disability inclusion in their services and linking the parent support groups with government financial services and benefits. In addition, the project established four county working groups collaborating with government and other non-government education stakeholders and civil society to review and adopt disability policies and Acts. Leonard Cheshire also provided technical insight into the sector policy on education and training for learners and trainees with disabilities. "This project has spent £79 per person annually on system-strengthening activities, which is deemed cost-effective, given the results, it has delivered." ([VfM spotlight #3](#) report).

“A project with a well-designed twin-track approach, towards supporting girls with disabilities to actively participate in mainstream education is more likely to be effective and deliver value for money.”

GEC Fund Manager

What did the Leonard Cheshire project learn?

Implementing Child-to-Child Clubs and peer mentorship has myriad and far-reaching impacts on girls, schools and inclusive education.

Child-to-Child Clubs were formed where children with disabilities gained increased knowledge and awareness in life skills, developed their knowledge of children's rights through participation, and had club members engage duty bearers within the school and at the Children's Assembly level to raise child protection concerns, disability inclusion, and advocate for child rights on behalf of their peers. These were interlinked with sensitisation on child protection, reporting channels and disability inclusion awareness. This increased peer-to-peer disability awareness and knowledge amongst Child-to-Child Club members, patrons, schools, families and communities. The clubs are instrumental in supporting girls with disabilities to develop social skills and improve their self-esteem and contribute to their motivation to attend and participate in school. Furthermore, they have been a means of advocacy in support of inclusive education. At the school level, by ensuring school environments are more enabling for girls with disabilities by making infrastructures more accessible, in-service teacher training on inclusion, training of board of managers, the establishment of school-based inclusion teams and Child-to-Child Clubs has meant schools have greater understanding and ownership of inclusion and willingness to drive change.

The project learned many benefits (some additional to the original intention) of implementing Child-to-Child Clubs. Notably, Child-to-Child Clubs have:

- Supported the harmonisation of data of children with disabilities within the specific project schools as girls with disabilities provided contact information for other girls or children with disability who would have been missed through the normal processes

- Strengthened school-based child protection mechanisms through improved linkages between the clubs and the government authorities such as the Department of Children Services and the Kenya Police Service; and teacher capacity to prevent, identify, categorise, respond to, and refer child protection concerns
- Increased child participation in children's assemblies at various and respective county levels, with children with disabilities being considered in these policy influencing forums unlike in the past.

The success of the clubs is due to:

- The clubs' support from the school-based inclusion teams ensured their continuity through integration into other existing child participation fora in the schools.
- The membership of the clubs involved both children with and without disabilities, enhancing the dialogue on inclusion
- The clubs were provided with reference materials and an approved curriculum by Leonard Cheshire, which contributed to a deeper understanding of life skills
- The clubs also operated as a child feedback mechanism where the programme regularly received feedback on programming to ensure that children's best interests were considered and issues of concern that required survivor support.

The project has been working to maintain the impact of the Child-to-Child Clubs throughout the project's final phase. It has been working with the government to institutionalise both Child-to-Child Clubs and school-based inclusion teams to sustain inclusion in the future. In the schools, in the final implementation year of the project, the Child-to-Child Clubs were merged with other existing clubs to ensure sustainability and continued strengthening of protection systems within the schools.

“My message to the parents with children with disabilities is that they should work on the 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.”

Robert, Seline's father

Improving teachers' capacity to implement inclusive practices can only be fully realised within a broader enabling environment, within which structural barriers are addressed.

While working in the broader policy context was an ambition at the start of the project, Leonard Cheshire has seen the importance of this increase to ensure the impact is maximised and good practice sustained. Without working to reduce barriers such as high pupil/teacher ratios and performance reviews which do not examine differentiated teaching and assessments, gains are harder to sustain. Leonard Cheshire defines operational change as policy impact at policy formulation and implementation levels. One key learning about how to influence policy decision-making is the need to include information generated from evidence, research, and experience. By sharing evidence from the project's Inclusive Education model, Leonard Cheshire has demonstrated to the government the benefits of providing inclusive education environments for all children, including girls with disabilities.

It has been essential from the outset for Leonard Cheshire to work not only in alignment with the international provisions for inclusive education (as set out in General Comment 4 on Article 24 of the UNCPRD) but within the Kenyan education policy framework. Therefore, the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities is critical, and the Ministry of Education adopted its Implementation Guidelines in 2018. Among the provisions of this policy is recognising the value and importance of active participation and engagement of stakeholders. In working towards this, the Ministry commits to 'promote participation and involvement of learners and trainees with disabilities and their parents/guardians in decision-making in all institutions of learning and to 'establish, promote and coordinate partnerships and collaboration with other actors and stakeholders in the provision of education, training and support services for learners and trainees with disabilities.'

These stated policy commitments and the goal of ensuring the sustainability of inclusive education interventions are the foundations of the project's interventions. However, the project has observed that despite the country being a signatory to multiple conventions and treaties advocating for education for persons with disabilities and having very robust and well-defined policies, its implementation of these policies is limited, and the allocation of resources towards the same is minimal. The key lesson that the project takes away from this is that policy action needs to start from the onset of the project, with a clear direction and consensus on how the results should be defined. In addition, a key target needs to be allocating funds toward providing inclusive learning environments.

Using a human rights approach supports inclusive education

The project has been firmly based on a human rights approach and the right of every child with a disability to inclusive education. However, the paradigm shift from a charity and segregationist approach, as well as one based on 'ableism' (with the assumption that able-bodied children are 'normal') toward a rights-based approach needs to be reinforced at all levels, particularly in respect of teacher training, so that learners with disabilities are empowered and feel capable and affirmed for who they are.

Changing teachers' practice in respect of discipline and the use of corporal punishment needs to be reinforced through a variety of different platforms.

Although safeguarding was addressed as a key theme in teacher training, it is evident that more work needs to be done. For example, creating an ethos within which the rights of all learners are respected and zero-tolerance for bullying can be nurtured through school management and PTAs. Furthermore, recording discipline administered at school can contribute to ensuring accountability and compliance with existing regulations – gaining confidence to report.

However, monitoring data continued to reveal incidences of corporal punishment in schools. To combat this, the project increased engagement with teachers and carried out training with headteachers on child protection and alternative positive discipline methods. Additionally, the project discussed corporal punishment with the teachers' service commission and the Ministry of Education. They responded by contacting schools to reinforce the message of zero tolerance for corporal punishment. While the project has contributed to reducing cases, the final evaluation has evidenced that corporal punishment is still ongoing in some schools. This has been signposted to the Ministry of Education and the Department of Children Services for their follow-up and action.



One key area of learning is that safeguarding systems must be introduced right from the start and strengthened throughout the project. These systems will not be effective unless everyone collaborates to strengthen safeguarding systems for children with disabilities, including reporting and accessibility of reporting, to combat bullying and corporal punishment, and to support pregnant girls to remain in school and return to school after they have given birth. In addition, safeguarding, combatting bullying, mentoring and providing sexual and reproductive health information for girls with disabilities must be a substantial component of all development programmes.

A multi-pronged approach is needed to create a supportive environment where girls with disabilities can thrive in and transition through education.

While community awareness and advocacy have helped to create an environment supportive of the education of girls with disabilities, there is a need to include additional targeted support to reduce community stigma against girls with high levels of functional difficulty, specifically in the domains of communicating, seeing, concentrating, and mobility, as well as girls with epilepsy.

Advocacy in support of safeguarding children (especially girls) with disabilities to reduce the risk of sexual violence and teenage pregnancy needs to go beyond schools and target the wider community. At the same time, there is a need to strengthen sexual and reproductive health messaging for girls with disabilities to prevent early pregnancy and dropping out of school. Furthermore, there is a need for advocacy among parents and caregivers regarding the high chore burdens placed on girls with disabilities, as this limits their attendance at school. Although the project's focus has been on girls with disabilities at school, some girls were found to drop out when they fell pregnant and, as a result, gave up on their aspirations for further education. This points to the need to go beyond a focus on transitions (from primary to high school to tertiary opportunities) to engage with young people who have left the education system, encouraging them to continue their studies and realise their aspirations.

// 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 be involved in looking after their children and supporting family life. However, Francis has a disability, having lost a hand in a work accident, and believes strongly that fathers should be doing more daily to support their children.

This came about after Francis participated in the 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. Instead, 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 gets the right support. He has been 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, but 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 raising their children. But after going through numerous training initiated by the project, 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."

Girls'
Education
Challenge



Leonard
Cheshire 

Find out more: www.leonardcheshire.org/our-impact/our-international-work/education/education-kenya | www.girlseducationchallenge.org

The Girls' Education Challenge is a project funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ("FCDO"), formerly the Department for International Development ("DFID"), and is led and administered by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and Mott MacDonald (trading as Cambridge Education), working with organisations including Nathan Associates London Ltd. and Social Development Direct Ltd. This publication has been prepared for general guidance on matters of interest only and does not constitute professional advice. You should not act upon the information contained in this publication without obtaining specific professional advice. No representation or warranty (express or implied) is given as to the accuracy or completeness of the information contained in this publication, and, to the extent permitted by law, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and the other entities managing the Girls' Education Challenge (as listed above) do not accept or assume any liability, responsibility or duty of care for any consequences of you or anyone else acting, or refraining to act, in reliance on the information contained in this publication or for any decision based on it.

Photos: © Leonard Cheshire, Michael Goima