



Inclusive Education

Where we are currently

Education is a right for all children. It is essential to their social, emotional and intellectual development. Great progress has been made to give all children an education, yet 90% of children with disabilities in low income countries still do not receive an education.¹ In order to rectify this, governments, international institutions and civil society organisations across the world are increasingly adopting inclusive education approaches to ensure that **no child is left behind**.

The right to an inclusive education is enshrined in several international agreements: Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC - 1989); the Salamanca Statement on special needs education (1994)²; and Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD - 2006) all commit the global community³ to ensure that: **'persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live'**.⁴ This includes making accessibility adaptations to school buildings and teaching methods that consider the needs of children with a range of needs.

The most recent milestone for disability rights is their inclusion in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For the first time, people with disabilities have been included in the global goals (after being excluded from the Millennium Development Goals⁵), with SDG 4 specifically outlining the right of all children to a quality education, with specific targets and indicators for governments to deliver on and report on progress.⁶ It has been a long process to get this far, but children with disabilities now have international frameworks enshrining their right to an education.

East and Southern Africa

Children with disabilities in East and Southern Africa⁷ are some of the most systematically excluded, with the majority unable to access any form of education. Over the last 2 decades, the governments of this region have made significant progress in providing Universal Primary Education for the majority of children, a key objective of the Millennium Development Goals. Following on from this success, many East African governments for example have developed strong policies, curricula and legislation that supports children with disabilities' right to education. Nonetheless, today across the

¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Inclusion of children with disabilities: the early childhood imperative*, policy brief on early childhood, No. 46, 2009.

² Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education, 1994. Full text available at: UNESCO digital library <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427>

³ United Nations' Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), status of ratification interactive dashboard available at: <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

⁴ United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), Available at: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/convtexte.htm>

⁵ International Disability and Development Consortium, 2012, *The Forgotten Children of the Millennium Development Goals*, Available at: https://www.iddcconsortium.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2012-IDDC-MyRight-The-Forgotten-Children-of-the-Millennium-Developmet-Goals_The-right-to-an-education-for-children-with-disabilities.pdf

⁶ UN SDG4 Framework for Action <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00000245656>

⁷ Countries in East Africa and Southern Africa being referred to are Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia – where Able Child Africa works alongside local child-disability-focused NGOs

globe, there is **'no certainty that any country... is on track to ensure access to quality inclusive education for all children with disabilities by 2030.'**⁸ The problem lies in the gap between international rights and national implementation.

Tanzania is illustrative of this transformational journey. In the 1990's and 2000's, Tanzania progressed from special education to integrated education.⁹ By 2009, inclusive education was formally embedded as a commitment in the Tanzanian education system within the Education Sector Development Programme (2008 - 2017) and the first National Strategy on Inclusive Education (2009 - 2017). However, the government does not have the resources to fully implement the National Strategy on Inclusive Education. Financing is a key barrier in turning international rights into local reality for children with disabilities and a challenge we witness across the countries where we work.

Big steps have been taken in the right direction, but we rarely see a fully inclusive teaching environment. Instead mainstreaming¹⁰ or special needs education is prioritised. The route to achieving SDG 4 goes right through the nations of East Africa, but it will only be possible if the global community can direct resources to provide fully inclusive education systems at a national level. Robust delivery plans and accountability mechanisms are needed in order to ensure that governments and institutions deliver on these legally binding commitments.

Able Child Africa's definition:

Inclusive education is when all children are learning and playing together in the same school, in the same classroom and in the same playground. Inclusive education provides all children and young people with disabilities with equal **access** to learning, ensures **equity**¹¹ within school, and ensures they receive the same **quality** of education as their peers. Inclusive education guarantees this holistic support for children with disabilities and ensures it is fully resourced across the whole learning experience helping children develop skills for life. Inclusive education goes beyond "integrating" children with disabilities into mainstream schools and addresses the barriers that excluded them in the first place.

The case for inclusive education

Inclusive education has widely been recognised as the best way to educate children with disabilities. It empowers children to learn side-by-side with the other children from their communities, helping challenge stigma around disability from an early age.¹² This approach is essential to the social, emotional and functional development of children with disabilities. An inclusive education is a necessary precondition for a life of social acceptance, independence and a quality livelihood – **people with disabilities cannot continue to be denied these opportunities.**

Inclusive education also benefits children without disabilities. Evidence from a range of different countries and educational environments found that there is **'clear and consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings can confer substantial short and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities.'**¹³ Children without disabilities benefit socially, emotionally and academically from an inclusive learning environment, whilst also tackling stigma and discrimination that arises from exclusion.

Thirdly, inclusive education is not vastly different from an individualised teaching approach. Teachers are already expected to take an individualised approach to teaching by adapting lesson plans and teaching methods in order to meet diverse learners' needs, including children without disabilities.

Last but not least, inclusive education is cost effective to implement. Changes to school buildings, teaching methods or provision of assistive technology are all ways to make education more inclusive. Governments predict these changes with

⁸ International Disability Alliance (2019), *Inclusive education: IDA consensus paper on SDG 4 and Article 24 UNCRPD compliance*, available at: <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog/inclusive-education-ida-produces-consensus-paper-how-achieve-sdg-4-compliance-crpd-article-24>

⁹ For an explanation of the different stages of inclusion see page 3 of https://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf

¹⁰ 'Mainstreaming, in the context of education, is the practice of placing students with special education services in a general education classroom during specific time periods based on their skills', see here for more information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mainstreaming_\(education\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mainstreaming_(education))

¹¹ UNESCO defines equality as "the state of being equal in terms of quantity, rank, status, value or degree", while equity "considers the social justice ramifications of education in relation to the fairness, justness and impartiality of its distribution at all levels or educational sub-sectors" – definition found in: UNESCO, 2018, *Handbook on Measuring Equity in Education*, available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/handbook-measuring-equity-education-2018-en.pdf>

¹² <https://afri-can.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Inclusive-Education-in-Uganda-examples-of-best-practice-March-2017..pdf>

¹³ Alana (2016), *A summary of the evidence on inclusive education*, Abt Associates, available at: https://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf

be costly. However, evidence from a range of countries¹⁴ shows that changes to schools to make them inclusive costs a fraction in comparison with developing segregated or special needs schools.

Effective approaches to inclusive education

Some form of inclusive education has been practiced for many years in many different parts of the world. Over this time a range of effective methodologies have been developed. Able Child Africa adopts the **social model of disability**, which means we believe that disability arises when an individual's impairment is compounded by environmental, institutional and attitudinal barriers in society. These barriers can interact in any combination to prevent them from participating equitably in everyday activities. This is why Able Child Africa and our partners adopt a holistic model of inclusive education that addresses multiple barriers to inclusion. Elements of our holistic approach are:

- **The Child-to-Child approach** for inclusive education has proven to be one of the most effective approaches to ensuring children with disabilities access and stay in school. This approach encourages children to mentor, guide and teach one another and encourages children themselves to generate solutions to exclusion. The approach takes an individualised, child-centred approach that empowers children with disabilities to be agents of their own change.
- **Mentoring** has been found to be an effective way of integrating children and young people into school. This would involve either an adult or youth with disabilities being paired with a younger child in order to help them overcome different barriers and stay in school.
- **Community Based-Rehabilitation (CBR)** is a way to improve access to education through rehabilitation, equalisation of opportunities, poverty reduction and social inclusion of all people with disabilities.¹⁵ CBR is implemented collaboratively between children with disabilities, their families, communities and schools, ensuring an effective transition to education.
- **Inclusive sport and play** are effective ways of integrating children with disabilities into the wider learning environment. It helps children with and without disabilities to build skills such as confidence, sharing and teamwork. This combination of skills helps all children transition to an inclusive classroom.
- **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) knowledge and skills** are key to ensuring girls are able to access education. Girls with disabilities have specific healthcare needs and are particularly vulnerable to abuse while using school WASH facilities. This often leads to them feeling more vulnerable and less likely to attend school or dropping out once in school. Training girls with disabilities in WASH skills empowers them in their lives, while also increasing the likelihood they will enrol and stay in school.

Looking ahead

We are coming closer to making education a right for **all children**, but we are not there yet. To ensure this becomes a reality, a **twin track approach** is key to success. Twin track approaches balance longer-term systemic change (such as changes to national education policies or societal attitudes) with more immediate and specific support for children with disabilities (such as teacher training on special needs education and provision of assistive technologies).

Due to the high numbers of children with disabilities still not receiving an education, **enrolment** of these children must still be a priority. Without schooling, the systematic marginalisation of children with disabilities will continue.

For those children with disabilities that are in school, **retainment** and the **quality** of the education they receive can vary greatly. A growing number of countries around the world are implementing a model of inclusive education that is not truly inclusive for children with some disabilities.¹⁶ In order to make sure no child is left behind it is imperative that the quality of inclusive education programmes are monitored and evaluated.

Some key areas where there are still gaps in inclusive education knowledge and practice include:

¹⁴ The International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC), *Costing equity: The case for disability-responsive education financing*, Available at: https://www.light-for-the-world.org/sites/ldfw_org/files/download_files/iddc-report-short_16-10-17.pdf

¹⁵ IDDC, 2012, *Community Based Rehabilitation and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Available at: https://www.light-for-the-world.org/sites/ldfw_org/files/download_files/cbr_guidance_eng.pdf

¹⁶ 'Position Paper on Inclusive Education', World Federation of the Deaf. 2018 <https://wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/WFD-Position-Paper-on-Inclusive-Education-5-June-2018-FINAL-without-IS.pdf>. Originally found in: Snoddon, K. and K. Underwood. 2014. "Toward a social relational model of Deaf childhood." *Disability & Society*, 29(4), 530-542. doi: 10.1080/09687599.2013.823081

- **Early childhood screening** will be key to transforming the situations of children with disabilities. Many children are not identified, screened or assessed early enough to ascertain if they are at risk of having a disability. This causes delays in the provision of healthcare or other developmental support, which prevent children with disabilities from reaching their potential. How you do screening at a community level with little investment is key.
- **Secondary school** completion rates must also be improved for children with disabilities. The priority so far has been to achieve universal primary education (UPE), but children and young people's educational needs do not stop there. Secondary school and adolescence is the period of self-actualisation for children and young people.¹⁷ It is a period where young people deepen their understanding of the world, build many of their lifelong friendships and discover what they want to do with their lives. Without a quality secondary education, children and young people with disabilities will continue to be denied the opportunity to flourish.
- **Disaggregated data** is key to understanding the number of children with disabilities in a school area and their needs. Without disaggregated data, teachers and educational management systems cannot effectively plan programmes, curriculums or support mechanisms. Integration of the Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability into data collection efforts would help schools, governments and other organisations to effectively plan for the numbers and the need.
- **Financing** for inclusive education and other disability services is critically low. Despite people with disabilities making up the largest minority in the world¹⁸ less than 1% of humanitarian financing supports people with disabilities.¹⁹ Funding needs to be increased and ringfenced by governments, international institutions and philanthropic actors in order to scale up interventions to meet the existing need.

A guiding principle across all interventions must be **nothing about us, without us**.²⁰ This unifying phrase has been a strong force in the disability movement and emphasises the right to inclusion of people with disabilities. Central to turning rhetoric into reality is building the capacity of Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), financing them properly and ceding power in decision-making processes. On an individual-level, children and young people must be empowered to influence the design of education systems and services – whether this be at school, community or national level, **their voice must be heard**.

Able Child Africa's role:

Change is needed across society, not within the individual. In the coming years, Able Child Africa seeks to build on the work done in the last decade on inclusive education, supporting the approaches we know work and deepening the quality of the teaching being received, to ensure that all children with disabilities realise their right to an education.

We also want to go beyond inclusive education provision to tackle more complex areas of delivery. For example, working with children who have multiple or complex disabilities, or improving our understanding of the intersectionality of discrimination and other compounding barriers to inclusion. This work will be led by where the most need is and where we can have the most meaningful impact on the lives of children with disabilities.

Together, we can ensure all children with disabilities receive an inclusive education, so they are able to fulfil their potential.

¹⁷ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/education-self-actualization-andrew-johnson/>

¹⁸ UN Enable (2015), Fact Sheet on Persons with Disabilities, Available at: <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/toolaction/pwdfs.pdf>

¹⁹ http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/handicapinternational/pages/313/attachments/original/1369934025/Humanitarian_financing_report_2012_-_HelpAge_and_Handicap_International.pdf?1369934025

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_About_Us_Without_Us