HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE UNICEF AND IIEP TECHNICAL ROUND TABLES
ON DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SECTOR PLANNING

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

International Institute for Educational Planning

unicef

On the road to inclusion

What is inclusive education?

Why is inclusive education important?

Which path to follow?

ABOUT THE TECHNICAL ROUND TABLES

In 2018 and 2019, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) joined forces to host two technical round tables on planning for disability-inclusive education as part of a three-year partnership. The events brought together technical staff from 16 national ministries of education and disabled people's organizations from different geographic regions to address the challenges and advances in planning for more equitable and inclusive systems. The events provided key insights for a forthcoming online training course for staff from ministries of education that will be launched in 2020.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report aims to highlight the key findings and positive outcomes from IIEP's research and round table events, co-organized with UNICEF, while pointing to the challenges and bottlenecks that can create barriers to progress. By identifying the lessons learned, remaining gaps, and next steps, this resource intends to help governments strengthen their capacity to plan for inclusive education and develop their education sector planning in order to better serve all types of learners.

PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, Viet Nam

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRPD
United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

DPO
Disabled people's organization

EMIS
Educational management information system

ESP
Education sector plan

GPE
Global Partnership for Education

IIEP
UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning

NGO
Non-governmental organization

SDG
Sustainable Development Goal

UNESCO
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF
United Nations Children's Fund

CREDITS

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↑ A group of students with visual impairments taking a walk, Ethiopia (© GPE Kelley Lynch)

Introduction

Access to education is a human right acknowledged by numerous international conventions. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) aims to protect the rights of people with disabilities, including the right to education. Moreover, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education is the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) set by the United Nations as part of its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Yet for children living with disabilities, attending school is not always a reality. A 2011 report by the World Health Organization and the World Bank estimates that there are between 93 million and 150 million children living with a disability,[1] and in low-income and middle-income countries, as many as 33 million[2] children with disabilities are not in school.

Children and young people face multiple barriers to accessing education, including school infrastructure, learning materials that are not adapted to those with disabilities, and poor leadership and management by governments. A lack of data monitoring and the social stigma surrounding people with disabilities can further hinder access. In addition to being a key factor in ensuring school attendance, promoting education sector planning that is inclusive of children with disabilities also provides equitable participation in quality education by directing policy attention to the learning processes and outcomes taking place in the classroom.

2019 was an important year for inclusive education. Not only did several events highlight a global agenda to address disability-inclusive education, but they also served to reconfirm the broader definition of inclusive education and the need for a systems approach to the issue. In July 2018, the inaugural Global Disability Summit (GDS18) took place in London, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In September 2019, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Colombian Ministry of Education and Science co-organized the International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education in Cali, Colombia, to take stock of legislation, policies, and actions that effectively tackle barriers to progress. The forum was organized on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain, where the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education[3] was drawn up to define the fundamental principles of inclusion in education.

"I lost my sight when I was 16 years old. At that time, the awareness was quite low, so I had to drop out of school. The school I was in at that moment was not prepared to take on board a learner with [a] disability... Many head teachers of regular schools do not believe that children with [a] disability can go to a regular school. They believe that children with [a] disability should be sent to special schools."

FREDRICK HAGA
Acting Director, Special Needs Education, Ministry of Education, Kenya

The UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has responded to this global call to action as part of UNESCO's agenda to mainstream disability into education sector planning and ensure that education systems become inclusive. In partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), IIEP has organized several events around inclusive education in recent years. In July 2018, representatives from ministries of education and disabled people's organizations (DPOs) from eight English-speaking countries in Africa and Asia – Cambodia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, South Africa, and Viet Nam – took part in a technical round table to discuss the challenges involved in disability-inclusive education planning, while a similar round table was conducted for eight French-speaking countries – Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo – in July 2019.

To complement the round tables, IIEP also led two Data Dive webinars in July 2018 and June 2019 with Dr Daniel Mont, a disability data specialist, to find the missing link in making schools more inclusive for children with disabilities.

Furthermore, IIEP and UNICEF have drafted a framework for disability-inclusive education, which serves as a tool for determining an environment's ability to enable inclusive education as well as its capacity to deliver services based on supply, quality, and demand. The use of such resources, coupled with the combined efforts of multiple stakeholders, can help to identify the bottlenecks in terms of moving towards more inclusive education systems and providing solutions for problems.

1. www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf
2. https://report.educationcommission.org/download/891
3. www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF

What is inclusive education?

← Children in their classroom at government primary school, Uttar Pradesh, India (© UNICEF Dhiraj Singh)

INCLUSION [is] a transformative process that ensures full participation and access to quality learning opportunities for all children, young people and adults, respecting and valuing diversity, and eliminating all forms of discrimination in and through education. The term inclusion represents a commitment to making preschools, schools, and other education settings, places in which everyone is valued and belongs, and diversity is seen as enriching. *UNESCO, 2019. 'Cali commitment to equity and inclusion in education'. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370910*

WHAT IS DISABILITY?
According to the CRPD, people with disabilities are those with long-term impairments that create barriers to equal, active participation in society. This includes – but is not limited to – physical disabilities, learning disabilities, chronic health problems, sensory impairments, speech and communication disorders, psychosocial impairments, and behavioural and emotional disorders.

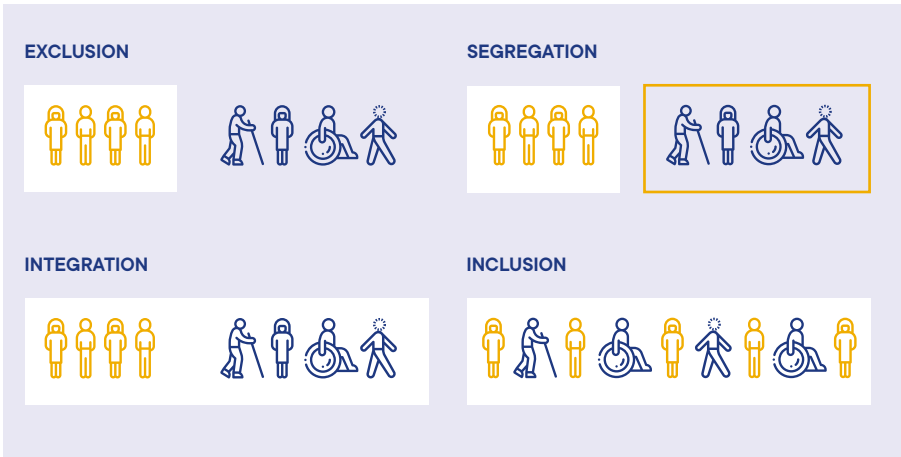
Inclusive education means that all learners can benefit from the same education systems and the same schools. Learning methods and educational materials that address the needs of all students are mainstreamed into the system so that barriers that potentially limit participation are removed. Disability is just one cause of exclusion, among other social, physical, and institutional limitations.

In order for inclusive education to become a reality, governments must think holistically, improving education sector planning and taking a systems approach to create cultural change.

Importantly, inclusive education differs from the following approaches to placement and practices:
Integration: Students are placed in schools or educational settings with peers of a similar age but students are required to adjust to the mainstream – no adjustments are made to meet their individual needs. This limits their ability to fully access or participate in learning. Integration is not necessarily a step towards inclusion.
Segregation: Students learn in separate environments, designed or used to respond to their particular needs or impairment, in isolation from other students.
Exclusion: Students are unable to access any form of education.

In contrast, inclusive education can be defined as follows: All students can access and fully participate in learning, supported by reasonable accommodation and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs. The concept of inclusion is part of all aspects of school life and supported by culture and policies.

APPROACHES TO PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



Why is inclusive education important?

↑ Student with special educational needs doing a puzzle, Ethiopia (© GPE Kelley Lynch)

Inclusive education is essential for ensuring that all people have access to a quality, equal education. It also has societal benefits, creating communities that are built on tolerance and inclusion. For persons with disabilities, inclusive education prevents isolation and exclusion from society and gives them greater independence, not only within an educational setting, but also later in life when they are looking to contribute to the economic vitality of their communities. The 2013 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights thematic study on the right of persons with disabilities to education showed that inclusive education has the unique power to offer both a quality education and social development for persons with disabilities.[4]

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND EDUCATION 2030

In 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during a historic United Nations summit. It outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to provide a better and more sustainable future for all people, addressing challenges related to poverty, climate, peace, and inequality. The Agenda aims to achieve each goal and target by 2030. For the first time, disability is explicitly included in global education targets.

SDG 4

'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'

TARGETS RELATED TO DISABILITY

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.A Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

"Integration is when the system doesn't adapt to persons with impairments. Inclusion is when the system changes to adapt to children with disabilities."

DR ABEBE MALLE
Director, Help for Persons with Disabilities Organization (HPDO), Ethiopia

4. www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A-HRC-25-29_en.doc

A framework for disability-inclusive education

↑ Ayanda Ntukwana (deaf) is teaching deaf children in Sign Language, South Africa (© Sign Language Education and Development – SLED)

The Framework for Disability-Inclusive Education, a resource developed by IIEP and UNICEF, was used to structure and organize the recent round tables and will serve as a guide to future training on inclusive education. Using several indicators, it details the elements needed to analyse education systems and plan for a system that caters to learners' diverse needs.

First, the term 'enabling environment' refers to the existing laws and policies, data and evidence, leadership and management, and finance surrounding disability-inclusive education. Next, the 'service delivery' section examines what is needed in order to support the implementation of disability-inclusive education: this means infrastructure, teachers, and learning materials that include all learners on the supply side; curriculum differentiation, learning support, and student assessment in order to deliver quality education; and the relevant costs, attitudes, risks, and benefits, which address the demand within the system.

This tool helps governments to look at their education systems in a comprehensive way so that they can undertake change on a structural level with a view to meeting the needs of all learners and allowing them to reach their full potential. Specifically, it serves to assess the status of inclusive education, launch discussions on reform, and monitor progress.

"Every single person in the school community has a role to play to support education for learners with disabilities."

FREDRICK HAGA
Acting Director, Special Needs Education, Ministry of Education, Kenya

FRAMEWORK FOR DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

SERVICE DELIVERY

SUPPLY

Teachers
- Initial and in-service training
- Pedagogical support
- Classroom support

Infrastructure
- Classrooms and playgrounds
- Toilets and washing facilities
- Transport to and from school

Learning Materials
- Braille and audiobooks
- Sign language resources
- Easy read versions

QUALITY

Curriculum
- Relevance
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Exam accommodations

Student assessment
- Screening
- Referrals
- Continuous learning assessment

Learning support
- Assistive products
- Individual learning plans
- Individual support

DEMAND

Attitudes
- Teachers and administrators
- Parents and communities
- Peers and other students

Costs
- Direct and hidden costs
- Additional support costs
- Opportunity costs

Benefits
- Opportunities for progression
- Social inclusion and citizenship
- Economic empowerment

Tertiary edu.

TVET

Secondary edu.

Primary edu.

Pre-primary edu.

Early childhood education

Non-formal education

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Laws & Policies
- Constitutional provisions
- International conventions
- Rules and regulations
- National strategies

Data & Evidence
- Definitions of disability
- EMIS and other databases
- Household Surveys
- Research studies
- M&E and inspection

Leadership & Mgmt
- Management capacity at central, sub-national, and school levels
- Procedures and compliance
- Cross-sectoral coordination
- Partnerships including DPOs

Finance
- Allocation to mainstream system
- Allocation to targeted support
- Resources from other sectors

Working document created by UNICEF and IIEP for reference during the Technical Round Tables on Disability-Inclusive Education Sector Planning (2018 & 2019).

"We must move on to planning for inclusive education at the ministry level and with all the elements that we have."

NDÈYE DAGUÉ GUEYE
Communication Service, Grand Yoff General Hospital, Senegal

← Boy in wheelchair in class, Tanzania (© GPE Kelley Lynch)

Key takeaways from the round tables on disability-inclusive education sector planning

↑ School-based vision screening, Cambodia (© Natasha Graham)

Governments are increasingly recognizing the importance of planning in the move towards more inclusive education systems. Transforming mainstream education environments to ensure they address the needs of all children is more cost-effective than opening special schools, and ensuring that all learners benefit from quality education promotes social cohesion and diversity. In addition, inclusive education allows vulnerable people to fully participate in society and contribute to their communities economically.

The challenge for most countries has been transforming vision and commitment into concrete plans and implementation. There is a need to reassess the planning cycle – from education sector analysis[5] and the definition of strategies to the cost and financing framework. Still, the round tables and global initiatives have shown that governments are committed to initiating discussions, raising awareness, and developing strategies to address disability-inclusive education in education sector planning. Furthermore, the majority of participating countries in the round tables have adopted laws and policies to ensure that people with disabilities have access to education.

The Framework for Disability-Inclusive Education has been an important tool for gauging how well governments are responding to the challenges of making their systems more inclusive, which include having an environment that enables inclusive education and delivering services based on supply and demand.

Overall, the discussions that took place during the two round tables and at the International Forum on Inclusion and Equity show that this change will require a review of current approaches to education sector planning, which also extends to data collection and analysis.

5. UNICEF, IIEP-Pôle de Dakar, GPE (Global Partnership for Education), World Bank, Education sector analysis methodological guidelines, Vol. 3. Forthcoming.

While approaches and strategies vary significantly, both French-speaking and English-speaking participating countries reported having national laws and policies in place that address inclusive education, as well as, to a lesser extent, data collection methods and dedicated financing. French-speaking representatives gave fewer examples of national coordination and leadership on disability issues, while more examples were given during the English-speaking round table.
In terms of service delivery, several participating countries noted the presence of curriculum differentiation, learning materials, and resource centres to respect and address diverse learning needs. There has also been an improvement in terms of raising awareness and dealing with discrimination and stigma surrounding persons with disabilities.

CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE TECHNICAL ROUND TABLES

Discussions ahead of the English-speaking round table revealed that seven of the eight participating countries had adopted laws or policies to promote inclusive education. Ghana has a robust policy and framework in place, while in 2013 Kenya passed the Basic Education Act to meet the needs of children with disabilities and in 2018 introduced a sector policy for learners and trainees with disabilities that provides a clear framework for inclusive education and training. In Fiji, disability is seen as a top policy issue, and Cambodia passed its Policy on Education for Children with Disabilities in 2018.

Among French-speaking countries, the existence of laws and policies does not always translate into an ability to bring about real change in education systems. Still, Burundi adopted a law in 2013 that includes a clause specific to inclusive education, and sector-wide education plans are in progress there and in Cameroon to create a national policy on inclusive education. In Niger, inclusive education has been part of the country's national strategy since 2013, while Senegal possesses a national policy on inclusive education, a 2010 law that protects persons with disabilities, and a plan on inclusive education that spans the education sector and extends to 2030.

National leadership responsible for managing inclusive education policy remains patchy globally and there is an overall view that more political will and commitment is needed to support the implementation of inclusive education. Nonetheless, several countries participating in the round tables reported progress in this area. Kenya and Ghana both have national structures that coordinate on disability issues across sectors, and South Africa and Nepal boast strong collaboration with civil society organizations that deal with disability issues.

In Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi, and Togo, specific ministers or designated units within the national ministries of education have been tasked with addressing inclusive education. Niger's national education system has relied heavily on international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) talking about and acting upon inclusive education.

Government financing is an important component for ensuring that laws and policies on inclusive education are brought to fruition. Overall, more government financing – and less reliance on outside NGOs, especially in French-speaking Africa – is necessary to effectively mainstream disability into education sector plans (ESPs).

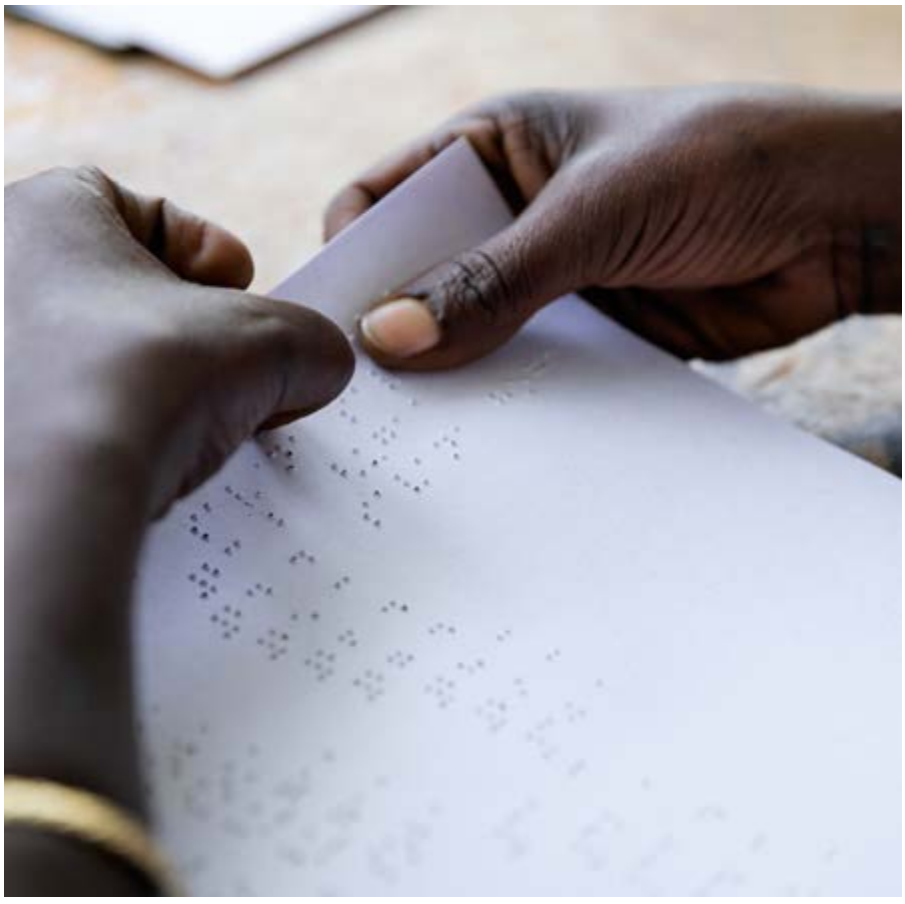
During the English-speaking round table, there was agreement that financing inclusive education must be a cross-sectoral effort. Kenya mentioned capitation grants for learners with disabilities and Ethiopia dedicates some federal finance to educating persons with disabilities, while Fiji and Cambodia have a dedicated budget allocation for grants and other resources related to inclusive education.

Participants in French-speaking Africa noted an overall lack of funding dedicated to inclusive education, where much of the financing has come from outside sources, such as international NGOs. However, Cameroon's government has created a budget dedicated to inclusive education as part of the country's Ministry of Basic Education, while Niger has put in place a joint-sector fund that contributes to financing inclusive education.

Meanwhile, Burkina Faso subsidizes private educational settings, which can lead to supporting children with disabilities, but this does not extend to the mainstream school setting.

"In Fiji, having the numbers and the evidence has helped to increase the support [for] people with disabilities."

SETAREKI MACANAWAI
CEO, Pacific Disability Forum, Fiji



↓ Braille paper close up, Ethiopia
(© GPE Kelley Lynch)

↑ Vision screening with letters, Cambodia (© Natasha Graham)

Senegal has developed a budget line dedicated to inclusive education, while Togo finances inclusive education in a general sense, but has not developed a specific budget to this effect.

Finally, there is overall agreement among governments across regions that without sufficient data monitoring and collection methods, effective implementation of inclusive education is not possible. Unfortunately, the accuracy and reliability of data on children with disabilities is a continuing challenge. Still, Nepal, Fiji, Cambodia, and Ethiopia report data on persons with disabilities through their educational management information systems (EMISs), while Ghana has been able to collect data through its education sector analysis pilot on inclusive education.

DELIVERING ON SERVICE: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE TECHNICAL ROUND TABLES

An enabling environment – one that supports, instructs, and allocates resources to inclusive education – is just one factor in the Framework for Disability-Inclusive Education. Responding to the supply of and demand for inclusive education is vital for implementing an inclusive education system, along with providing quality services.

As education structures as a whole work towards adapting to and integrating students with disabilities through systemic change, teachers play a central role in putting in place inclusive education initiatives. Providing teachers with sufficient in-service training, as well as pedagogical and classroom support, allows classrooms to function in a way that supports students with disabilities, rather than holding them back. This includes creating differentiated curricula and assessments, such as the Universal Design for Learning, which aims to design curricula that meet the needs of all learners. Equally important is following through on concrete measures that can make the difference between students attending and not attending school by providing appropriate infrastructure like accessible classrooms, playgrounds, toilets, and school transportation.

Globally, governments are moving towards a greater focus on capacity development in order to improve their service delivery, but this remains a barrier for most countries. Still, Ethiopia has made several advances, including the establishment of resource centres with learning materials and the assignment of teachers with experience of working with students with disabilities to mainstream schools. Elsewhere, South Africa has created a curriculum that adapts to the needs of children with severe disabilities. In Viet Nam, considerable progress has recently been made in the area of curriculum design, while Nepal and Cambodia have made steps towards teacher-training curriculum reform.

In French-speaking Africa, Côte d'Ivoire has a teacher training structure in place, focusing on disability, inclusive education, and sign language and Braille. Senegal, Togo, and Niger have all recognized the need for more teacher training on inclusive education. However, the majority of French-speaking countries participating in the round table mentioned a lack of teaching material and curriculum content dedicated to inclusive education.

"We need more information among the upper levels, and especially for high-ranking authorities. They need to be informed and sensitized."

NDÈYE DAGUÉ GUEYE
Communication Service, Grand Yoff General Hospital, Senegal

Several countries, including Ethiopia, have created schools or resource centres for students with special needs. These do not address the issue of adapting mainstream schools to the needs of students, instead expecting students to conform to the existing environment.

Part of responding to the demands of students with disabilities is addressing attitudes among teachers, peers, and communities. In the English-speaking round table, attitudes were listed as the number one enabler (and constraint) for including persons with disabilities in mainstream education systems. This means that national plans for enhancing inclusive education should be accompanied by a strong communication plan in order to be effective. Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, and Cameroon have made advances in this area, where strong communication campaigns to raise awareness of disability and address the surrounding stigma have been put in place.

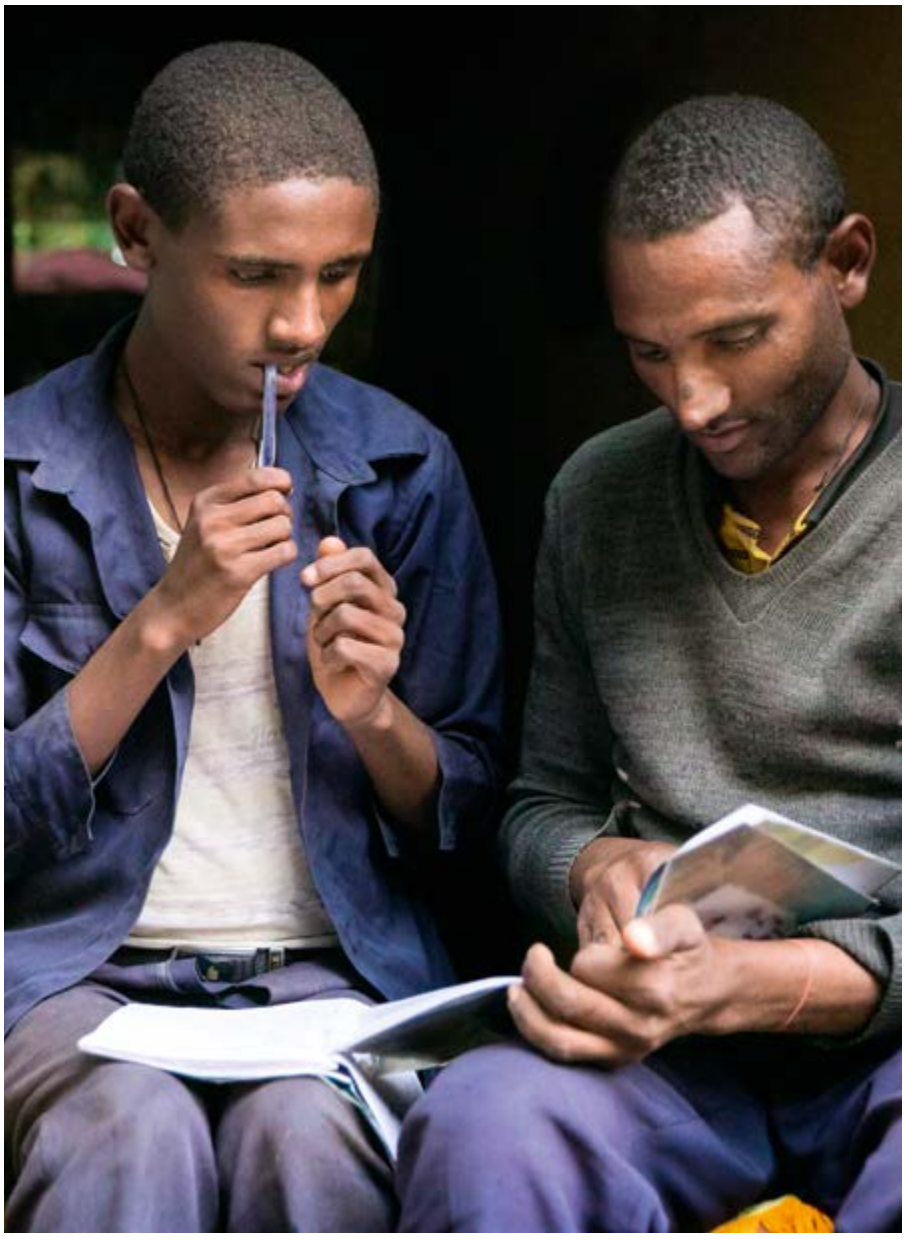
In terms of finance, governments are currently assessing how much specialized education costs compared to inclusive education, in addition to ensuring that inclusion policies and subsequent financing are not an afterthought resulting in additional costs. Both Fiji and Nepal have integrated inclusive education into their ESP costs, but several countries in French-speaking Africa, such as Burkina Faso and Burundi, reported that such costs are excessive.

While awareness campaigns can help to reduce the risks related to inclusive education, such as bullying, isolation, and unsafe environments, there are great rewards for systems that successfully integrate persons with disabilities. Niger recognized the economic benefits of integrating persons with disabilities into the education system, such as job creation and economic prosperity for individuals and society.

Ultimately, there was agreement across regions that a common understanding on a micro and macro level of the term 'inclusion' is a key prerequisite for undertaking inclusive education reform within education sector planning.

"When we have systems in place that allow families and groups that have common issues to come together to discuss how it's done in other countries, it helps to reduce the stigma. Once they hide the kids because of stigma, there's no way you can find them because they'll never appear on your data, so there's no way you can plan for them..."

ERNEST WESLEY-OTOO
Senior Development Planning Analyst, Ministry of Education, Ghana



→ Special needs student Chalachew Tesfane does homework with his father, Ethiopia (© GPE Kelley Lynch)

Challenges and opportunities

↑ Students thread beads in special needs class, Ethiopia (© GPE Kelley Lynch)

Judging from the recent round tables and international forums, there is considerable momentum in countries across regions for creating policies or leading awareness campaigns on inclusive education, as well as high levels of commitment. However, when it comes to capacity building and implementation, certain challenges and bottlenecks have hindered true progress.

Insufficient resources remain a significant barrier, both in terms of teacher training and incentives, as well as financing – either a lack thereof from governments or a reliance on outside sources. Creating a streamlined data-monitoring and data-collection system is a continuing challenge, as is reaching rural populations, where persons with disabilities can be left behind and awareness campaigns may be lacking.

BOTTLENECKS TO CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

In the majority of French-speaking countries in Africa participating in the round table, governments had developed policies or strategies to address inclusive education. However, participants noted limitations in the application of such laws and national directives, notably in Côte d'Ivoire. During the English-speaking round table, Ethiopia referred to several limitations, such as the local ownership of laws and policies and the lack of a specific law on children with disabilities. Cambodia also mentioned that government policies do not reflect CRPD commitments.

A common problem for most countries across regions was a lack of accountability with regard to inclusive education, as well as the lack of a nationally recognized definition of inclusive education within education policy. Indeed, participants in the English-speaking round table expressed differing opinions on what inclusive education means or misunderstood the definition, indicating that a sound definition is a key factor for enabling meaningful analysis and developing appropriate strategies.

An equally important challenge has been ensuring that data collection methods not only exist, but are streamlined across education systems. Without proper data on the number of students with disabilities in a school or an assessment of the needs of communities, it is impossible to allocate appropriate funding and other resources to inclusive education.

"The question of education is fundamental because education is a fundamental right and where all other rights stem from."

MARC ANALENE
Point Person for Inclusive Education, Fédération Togolaise des Associations de Personnes Handicapées (FETAPH), Togo

English-speaking countries were keen to note weak data collection systems, the lack of a standard measurement of disabilities, inadequate monitoring, and a lack of screening capacity. Cambodia noted the lack of tracking of children with disabilities as they proceed through the education system, including their ability to be employed later on. And, while Cameroon has a data monitoring system in place, the collection of data remains limited due to the sprawling nature of the country.

The need for strong leadership and national management of inclusive education has been a challenge in both English-speaking and French-speaking countries. In Mali and Senegal, insufficient coordination between different sectors and an absence of multi-sector programmes have stalled the implementation of inclusive education strategies. Cambodia also noted weak coordination between the stakeholders involved in inclusive education. And in Nepal, where NGOs have taken the lead on inclusive education, reaching people in rural areas has proved difficult, since these groups work primarily in urban settings. Poverty has also been a barrier to reaching people with disabilities.

A reliance on NGOs and other outside funding sources has been a major barrier to bringing about systemic change in inclusive education for several countries, especially in French-speaking Africa, where the majority of financing comes from sources other than the national government. Most countries report an overall lack of financing, even those like Burkina Faso which receive outside funding. Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and Niger are a few examples of countries that do not have a specific budget dedicated to inclusive education.

In English-speaking countries, funding concerns were more nuanced; Ethiopia called for an earmarked budget at regional levels, while the subsidies in South Africa were seen as inadequate to cover the real costs. This translated into a reluctance to fund inclusive education. A related challenge is the negative attitude towards children with disabilities in mainstream schools due to the monetary incentives that teachers working in 'special schools' receive for working with children with disabilities, as is the case in Kenya. This ultimately deters planning approaches towards more inclusive systems, since teachers with specialized training migrate towards special schools in order to receive such incentives.

← Blind student with a special educational needs teacher, Ethiopia (© GPE Kelley Lynch)

"The major challenge with inclusive education is to allow all children from Côte d'Ivoire to get an education, and at the end, to make sure these children have the skills they need to succeed. Youth are the future, but they can't make progress unless they get an education, and more specifically, an education that includes everyone."

BOTTHY LAMBERT MOKE
Child psychologist, Department Head, Centre de Guidance Infantile, Côte d'Ivoire

BOTTLENECKS TO DELIVERING ON SERVICE

Even when an educational environment is lacking in resources for inclusive education, countries can still work to improve their ability to deliver services. However, lack of infrastructure, stigma around disability, and limited teacher training or curricula have put the brakes on systemic change.

Improving the infrastructure of mainstream schools to include persons with disabilities is a major factor in access to education. And, while countries may have education policies that encompass improvements to infrastructure, the implementation of minimum standards around this aim has been weak. Accessibility improvements like building ramps, toilets, and school transportation have been slow to come for countries like Ethiopia, Nepal, and Viet Nam, and almost none of the French-speaking countries had infrastructure adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities.

Providing teachers with specialized training and adapted materials on inclusive education is equally vital to its mainstreaming – children with disabilities sometimes need information in multiple formats in order to participate effectively in the classroom. However, Nepal, Viet Nam, Ethiopia, and nearly all of the French-speaking countries noted a lack of teacher training, materials, curricula, or support, apart from Braille materials. The lack of a national body to supervise disability screening was also noted as a challenge to be overcome in the English-speaking round table.

Attitude was judged to be one of the primary constraints in mainstreaming the inclusion of children with disabilities in the education system for both English-speaking and French-speaking participants. In some countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, educators must battle long-held stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities; people with disabilities are seen in some communities as being cursed, or the result of sin, demonic possession, or witchcraft. The stigma surrounding persons with disabilities results in lowered expectations around their ability to contribute to society and their capacity to attend and succeed in school.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

While it remains a challenge to implement inclusive education, countries can advance by taking some concrete measures.

Collecting data on children with disabilities will be an important first step to rendering them visible, both outside and within the education system. Data on the number of children with disabilities, including levels of individual functioning and severity of impairment, not only affect service delivery but also help to monitor equality of opportunity and progress towards the achievement of economic, social, political, and cultural rights. Importantly, disaggregation by the number of children with disabilities living at home or placed in institutions and in regular education or special education systems will provide policy-makers with the information needed to plan more holistically.

Another way to help persons with disabilities to access education more easily is to mainstream alternative learning formats. Disability-specific technology, such as Braille equipment, text/type-to-speech software, sign language videos, audiobooks, and personal assistive devices can help to reduce learning difficulties.

Reducing the stigma around disability and inclusive education will also go a long way towards making disability-inclusive education part of the mainstream system. One suggestion during the English-speaking round table was to make sure that children with disabilities are included in all aspects of education, from policy, planning, and programming to implementation, budgeting, and monitoring. Inclusive education needs to start with early education development, as early learning is critical to ensuring that children with disabilities succeed in their education journey. In addition, collaboration between teachers, school administrators, local communities, and family and friends is essential to show that each child has the right to equal education.

↑ Girl with special needs playing with legos, Zanzibar (© GPE Chantal Rigaud)

Of course, these opportunities for change also pose challenges to countries, especially those lacking the resources and financing for such advancements. Looking into how governments allocate funding to inclusive education and considering where outside organizations can intervene could lead to solutions for financing these suggestions. Relying more heavily on community resources and developing partnerships between schools, communities, families, and civil society are all ways to best utilize the available funding for inclusive education. Adopting universal design principles, from curriculum and training materials to school infrastructure, is an important cost-effective way to address disability-inclusive education. After all, if school settings are adapted to include all learners from the beginning, fewer additional costs will be incurred.

"If inclusion is successful in school, inclusion will be successful at the societal level, at the employment level, and at the health level."

MARC ANALENE
Point Person for Inclusive Education, Fédération Togolaise des Associations de Personnes Handicapées (FETAPH), Togo

A way forward

↑ Teenage girl with a limb disability, Benin (© GPE Chantal Rigaud)

While a handful of education systems around the world have seen measurable success in the area of inclusive education, strategies to integrate children with disabilities have been fragmented and largely led by non-state actors. Even if some challenges are specific to French-speaking or English-speaking communities, the majority of education systems around the world experience similar struggles to effectively adapt mainstream school settings in order to integrate children with disabilities.

An intersectoral approach that looks holistically at the issue – from administrative management to day-to-day school operations – can help to create effective change.

More can be done to boost policy implementation, financing, leadership, and data monitoring. Moreover, addressing specific regional challenges, including discrimination, stigma, lack of awareness, poverty, and gender, is an important factor in terms of laying the groundwork.

In order to successfully achieve SDG 4, participating governments have been tasked with broadly rethinking their education systems, as well as with monitoring, planning, and implementing policies and strategies. For those who succeed, the rewards are significant. Making education systems more inclusive will require a systems perspective on education sector planning, allowing all populations – including marginalized or vulnerable ones – to participate in the classroom. In addition, it will allow schools to respond to Article 24 of the CRPD – to ensure that people with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system – as well as the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of SDG 4, which works to create inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

As governments continue to work to strengthen their policies and the implementation of disability-inclusive education sector plans, IIEP has partnered with UNICEF and the Global Action on Disability network, among others, to increase its capacity development efforts, for example by developing regional training courses on inclusive education. This type of cross-sectoral approach, which examines how multiple actors can contribute to a fundamental change in education systems, can provide opportunities to bring education to all.

INCLUSION AND EQUITY in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. ... We therefore commit to making the necessary changes in education policies and focusing our efforts on the most disadvantaged, especially those with disabilities, to ensure that no one is left behind.
Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, Preamble: paragraph 7. 2016. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656

LANDMARK INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS: DISABILITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

	Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	National disability legislation	Definition of inclusive education in education sector plan
BURKINA FASO	X	X	X
BURUNDI	X		X
CAMBODIA	X	X	X
CAMEROON		X	X
CÔTE D'IVOIRE	X	X	X
ETHIOPIA	X	X	X
FIJI	X	X	X
GHANA	X	X	X
KENYA	X	X	X
MALI	X	X	X
NEPAL	X	X	X
NIGER	X	X	X
SENEGAL	X	X	X
SOUTH AFRICA	X	X	X
TOGO	X	X	X
VIET NAM	X	X	X

↓ Blind girl in higher secondary school, Nepal (© GPE NayanTara Gurung Kakshapati)

About us

The UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has a unique role within the United Nations, supporting educational policy, planning, and management. IIEP strengthens the educational capacity of countries to plan and manage their education systems through a wide range of training programmes, including face-to-face, blended, and distance training methods. It aims to provide evidence-based research to anticipate innovative solutions as well as technical assistance to ministries of education and other institutions to enhance educational planning and management capacities. Finally, IIEP works to share its knowledge and resources with all stakeholders in order to assist countries in overcoming their education challenges.

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International Institute
for Educational Planning

International Institute for Educational Planning

7–9 rue Eugène Delacroix
75016 Paris - France

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