KEY MESSAGES

1. Education policies need to ensure they also target children – and specifically girls - with disabilities, and be effectively monitored and enforced

2. There needs to be more consideration of how inclusive education will be financed

3. Social protection mechanisms need to be expanded to account for the intersection of poverty, gender and disability

4. Effective models of inclusion need to be scaled up

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The research sought to better understand the complex range and interplay of issues around barriers and opportunities for girls with disabilities in the Lake region that result in the exclusion of these girls from school, leading to reduced life chances. This research forms part of a UK Aid-funded Girls’ Education Challenge (GEC) project that began in 2013, and has enrolled over 2,050 girls with disabilities in 50 mainstream schools across five sub-counties: Kisumu East, Siaya, Mbita, Migori and Kuria East.

The overall aim of the project was to increase the numbers of girls with disabilities accessing primary education, retain the ones already in school and ensure that girls with disabilities are better able to transition to secondary school, reducing their chances of dropping out due to avoidable reasons – such as early marriage and pregnancy – thereby supporting them be productive members of society and improving access health, economic, and social opportunities. The research has found that while the LCD inclusive education project has been successful on a number of levels, and could be replicated at scale across the country, a number of systemic challenges remain. This briefing note outlines these challenges and highlights some key recommendations to overcome these challenges.
1) THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The right to education for all citizens is guaranteed under the Kenya Constitution (2010), and Kenya is a signatory to international conventions that also cover the right to education. In addition to the introduction of free primary education, there are policies designed to increase inclusion and retention of girls in school, and to improve education outcomes. However, mechanisms to track progress toward implementation need to be strengthened, and there is a lack of recourse if policies are infringed.

The lack of specific focus on children – specifically girls – with disabilities means that they have not benefitted from these policies. Girls in the Lake region continue to experience significant challenges within the education system, including lower enrolment rates and higher dropout rates. Exact figures are hard to establish, as it has been difficult to find accurate data about children with disabilities. The Education Management Information System has recently been revised (with input from LCD) to include data on children with disabilities disaggregated by age, sex and type of disability. This is progress, but it will take time for data to be interpreted and translated into policy action. The research findings indicate:

- When the education curriculum is launched, there is a need to ensure there is an implementation plan, monitoring systems, and enforcement mechanisms in place.
- There is inadequate disability disaggregated data, meaning that there is not currently an effective way to track progress towards the attainment of targets, indicators or goals.
- Ministry of Education should be responsible for matters relating to children with disabilities’ education.

2) FINANCING OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Current financing mechanisms predominantly focus on special education and special schools. Additional government funding to support children with disabilities is either paid directly to special schools; or in the form of capitation (top-up) grants to mainstream schools who have applied for status as having ‘special units’ with students with disabilities (even if these students are in mainstream class). If a school has not applied for this status, it does not receive the additional funding. Funds are based on the total number of children with disabilities in the school, rather than their specific needs. This raises the question of how children are identified and assessed. In Kenya, children with special education needs should be assessed and given an individual education plan, which identifies the type and level of support and resources they need to access education. However, as the funds go to the school rather than the child, it is difficult to ensure each child gets the identified support (including required outside of school support, such as transport to and from school), which raises the question as to whether the capitation grant is adequate to cater for their learning needs, and in turn, lessen the burden on parents and caregivers.

To improve financing structures, it is recommended that the capitation grant should:
- Be based on learner’s needs as different disabilities require different kinds of support
- Be directed to the individual child where it would yield higher returns
- Be monitored by relevant institutions and that this information be made public
When the IE policy and education curriculum is launched, there is a need to ensure there is an implementation plan and strong monitoring systems for budget dispersal. Persons with disabilities and their organisations should be involved and consulted with in budget discussions and resources allocation.

Inadequate identification or assessment of children with disabilities means many children are unable to access school or are enrolled without adequate support, and schools may not be able to access the funds the children are entitled to.

3) THE INTERSECTION OF POLICY, GENDER AND DISABILITY

The research has clearly shown that while poverty is the biggest factor inhibiting all children accessing quality education, it is mediated by a range of factors, including gender. Social protection systems must reach the most in need, particularly girls with disabilities and their families. To be effective, the system needs to link with other sectors, including education, to ensure at-risk children remain in school. These children include those that stay at home to care for younger siblings or other relatives; contribute financially to the household; or have another sibling in school who is given priority for education.

There are also gender implications in the household – for example, we found a higher number of out of school girls in households with a majority of female adults. Such households may need additional support to ensure girls with disabilities enrol and remain in school. We make the following recommendations:

- Programmes need to be aware of differentials such as household composition to identify at-risk girls, and targeting these households for specific support
- There needs to be better coordination across sectors, such as education, and health and social protection, to ensure earlier identification and assessment, as well as inclusion in social protection mechanisms
- Better systems are needed to track girls who are at risk of dropping out of school
- On-going initiatives – such as the policy to support young mothers back to school – need to ensure they specifically target and include girls with disabilities
- Parents and caregivers of children with disabilities need to be better targeted and informed of available opportunities, for example social protection funds.
- Men need to be more engaged in girls’ education – for example, training around mentorship
4) SCALING UP EFFECTIVE MODELS OF INCLUSION

The research has found that while the LCD inclusive education project has been successful on a number of levels, including the girls’ access, retention and transition through school, learning outcomes, teacher training and male attitudes – many of which could be replicated at scale across the country – a number of systemic challenges remain. In addition to the policy focused challenges, other areas that need review include the current child protection system. Mechanisms to enforce policies remain weak, as evidenced by the numbers of early marriages and teenage pregnancies across the country. Recent advances, such as the pilot Child Protection Information Management Systems, will be crucial in these transformations.

Recommendations for scaling up are:

- It is advisable to adopt a competency-based curriculum that is flexible to meet needs of various learners and reduces pressure on learners and teachers that a rigid, exam-based system can engender.
- A system should be devised to instigate more specific support for children with disabilities before they enter into Grade 3, as this is when the likelihood of dropping out increases.
- All teachers should be trained on the principles of inclusive education, and the training should include practical components, particularly around teaching children with multiple and severe disabilities.
- Inclusion needs to be properly costed and resourced – including, but not limited to, classroom assistants, teaching and learning materials, adapted washrooms, etc.
- Education Assessment Resource Centres are a valuable link in the chain, but need to be better supported for them to be more effective in the service of children with disabilities.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed quantitative and qualitative approaches:

- Secondary data analysis of baseline cohort to examine intersectionality
- Qualitative research with 87 out of school girls with disabilities
- Pre- and post-intervention survey of 130 teachers from 25 schools on their knowledge, attitudes and practices around disability and education of children with disabilities
- Semi-structured interviews with 82 girls with disabilities who took the KCPE in 2015 and transitioned from primary to secondary school
- Focus group discussions with over 100 male mentors in the five sub-counties
- Over 30 key informant interviews with county education officials, parents and other key stakeholders
- Analysis of policy impacts

RESEARCH TEAM

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