REPORT 2020
Executive Summary

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Let's break silos now! Achieving disability-inclusive education in a post-COVID world

Disability-inclusive education – an urgent call for renewed action

A world where inclusive education can flourish is also a world that can nurture inclusive societies. Inclusive learning environments consider diversity an asset and, accordingly, they cater for the different needs of all learners, so that they learn, grow and thrive together. Working towards this vision is critical for reducing the vast levels of inequality and discrimination currently faced by millions of persons across the globe. This is especially so for the millions of children with disabilities, many of whom struggle to receive even the most basic of educations.

The exclusion of learners with disabilities from education is due to many reasons, including inaccessible school facilities, a lack of assistive technologies, poor health, prejudice,

discrimination and stigma. The interconnected and complex nature of achieving inclusive, quality education for all therefore requires stakeholders to break with siloed approaches and to work collaboratively across economic, social, cultural and protection sectors and domains.

Global progress in building inclusive education systems is now threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely disrupted the educations of most children, and has seen funds diverted away from the education sector. Despite this setback, governments and the global community are now in a unique position to learn from the pandemic and to renew efforts to improve education.

Children with disabilities are still denied their rights

Everyone has a fundamental right to education. The right to quality, inclusive education is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination

Against Women (UNCEDAW), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and targeted by

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Yet, worldwide, education systems are still failing children, especially those with disabilities, and even more so for girls with disabilities. Some 50% of children with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries are excluded from education.[1] Only 42% of girls with disabilities completed primary school, compared to 51% of boys with disabilities.[2]

Renewed national commitment and actions alongside sustained support from the international community are now vital if we are to fulfil our education obligations and targets for children.

Inclusive education systems ensure that every child can access quality education and thrive

We cannot afford to leave another generation of children behind. The exclusion of many children from quality, inclusive education impacts negatively on their lives and their futures, as well as on national socio-economic development. Inclusive education has been shown to be cost-effective and to improve the quality of teaching and learning for **all children**, not just those with disabilities. Inclusive education is the **only strategy** which can reimagine currently inadequate education systems, and ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, can access quality education and thrive in an inclusive environment, free from segregation and discrimination.

Inclusive education system reform must be accelerated to reach Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals

Immediate and additional efforts need to be made to accelerate and sustain more rapid global progress towards achieving inclusive education for all, as set out by the SDG 4 targets. Where progress has been made in legal and policy reform, this is not always matched by national programming and implementation. The uneven progress achieved so far has experienced additional setbacks as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This urgently requires stakeholders at all levels to galvanise their commitment and political will towards fulfilling all children's rights, including those with disabilities, and to immediately prioritise more funds, resources and strategies which target inclusive, quality education.

1. Education Commission, (2015). "Learning Generation."

2. UNICEF, (2013). "The State of the World's Children: Children with Disabilities".

Tresor has a visual impairment and attends a mainstream school in Togo, via an inclusive education project run by HI. He learns Braille with the support of a mobile teacher. Mobile teachers are trained to develop disability-specific teaching skills and support children across different schools, visiting the students once a week and working alongside the mainstream teachers. © Régic Binard/HI.

COVID-19: Opportunity in crisis - let's improve education systems

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already significant challenges for many children with and without disabilities in accessing quality, inclusive education. Systemic inequalities in education have been highlighted and magnified by the pandemic, and children with disabilities have experienced increased exclusion, marginalisation, poverty and vulnerability as a result. Children with disabilities are also at the greatest risk of dropping out of school as a result of the pandemic.

However, the pandemic also represents an important opportunity to address weak and exclusionary education systems, with a focus on strengthening education frameworks and capacities by using inclusive, multi-sectoral strategies. Strategies should not only address the impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic on schools and learners, but also build resilience to future disease outbreaks and other shocks.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides impetus for multi-sectoral, inclusive education strategies

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals of 2030 Agenda are more than just a set of development targets; they are a blueprint for action based around multi-sectoral strategies and partnerships.

The 2030 Agenda addresses a multiplicity of key structural inequalities including gender, age and disability, which prevent many people from realising their rights. Eliminating structural

inequalities requires the development of coordinated strategies which take into account their interdependency, and work across the different economic, social and environmental sectors.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 is the bedrock of actions to improve education for all. Disability is specifically included in SDG target 4.5, which requires equal access to education for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. Target 4.A requires education to be disability-sensitive and for learning environments to be safe, non-violent, and inclusive for all. A number of interdependencies exist between SDG 4 and other SDGs, which can either impact negatively, or enable, inclusive education. Indeed, working with the education sector is a critical factor in most other SDGs meeting their own targets.

Strengthening multi-sectoral education frameworks - a universal priority

Stakeholders across several sectors have essential roles to play in achieving quality, inclusive education for all.
Transformation towards disability-inclusive education systems should be led by an empowered ministry of education that is systematically collaborating with other ministerial departments and other sectors at different levels. Multi-sectoral education approaches of this nature should be further prioritised, and require additional and sustained support to render them fully effective in ensuring the rights of all children to quality education.

Building multi-sectoral, disability-inclusive education systems: key considerations

Putting children at the centre. The needs and meaningful participation of the child should be the starting point when developing inclusive education approaches.

Twin-track. This two-pronged strategy ensures that the mainstream education systems (and other sectors supporting education) become more inclusive, while children with disabilities are empowered to succeed by being provided with any additional necessary and specific supports related to their individual needs. Twin-track education strategies are designed to leave no child behind while education systems take steps to become fully inclusive.

Collaboration with civil society and non-governmental organisations. Strong collaboration with this sector is crucial. Organisations of persons with disabilities, as well as parents and other stakeholders, have been at the forefront of advocacy for better education.

Organisations are also key service providers for persons with disabilities, helping fill the gaps in public service provision.

Enhancing cooperation and coordination between central and local authorities.
Many countries have moved to decentralise education decision-making and spending to sub-national levels. Effective, well-coordinated decentralisation strategies have the potential to improve the quality of education services and to use education resources more efficiently.

Connected, interagency service delivery for maximised returns. When services are available as part of a comprehensive and integrated package and can be easily accessed through a single service point, they are more likely to be taken up. This has significant benefit for children with complex needs, including those with disabilities. Services offered in this way are also more cost-effective.

Collecting more, and better, data on disability. Improving data is a priority for effective disability-inclusive education strategies and frameworks. The "Washington Group Short Set of Questions" and the "Child Functioning Module" are robust and valuable tools which should be used to collect disability-disaggregated data.

Exploring strategies to include the youngest children. Truly inclusive education systems also need to include younger children, aged 0-8 years old. Currently, young children with disabilities are often excluded from early childhood development policy and programmes.

Priorities for action: recommendations for inclusive education in low- and middle-income countries

Allocate and track more resources for inclusive education

Governments should:

- **Mobilise** an increased share of domestic resources for free, quality and inclusive national education. National education budgets should represent between 4% to 6% of national Gross Domestic Product and 20% of total budgets.[3]

- **Direct** specific streams of finances and resources to the most vulnerable and excluded children.

Donors should:

- **Prioritise** and increase financial and technical support, bilaterally and multilaterally, to low- and middle-income countries for inclusive education system reform. There is a US$148 billion annual financing gap in low- and lower-middle-income countries to achieve SDG 4 from now until 2030. Additional costs due to COVID-19 related school closures risk increasing this financing gap by up to one-third.[4]

- **Earmark** funding for disability-inclusive education, using disability tags such as the "OECD-DAC Marker" to track funding for inclusion and report against equity indicators.

- **Contribute** to the regular replenishments of multi-lateral funds, as the Global Partnership for Education funding campaign for the cycle 2021-2025.

- **Support** twin-track approaches by providing resources to strengthen inclusive education systems while also supporting strategies which address the specific barriers faced by the most marginalised learners, including children with disabilities.

Accelerate action to radically transform education systems

Donors and governments should:

- **Commit** to improve education systems by supporting and undertaking reviews and revisions of education systems and committing to inclusive education strategies and frameworks.

- **Build** COVID-19 and disease outbreak mitigation and resilience strategies into revised education frameworks.

3. Incheon Declaration, (2015). "Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action."

4. UNESCO, (2020). "Act now: Reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the cost of achieving SDG 4."

Governments should:

- **Galvanise** political commitment and efforts to fulfil obligations and commitments under the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Donors should:

- **Increase** technical and financial support to low- and middle-income countries in their efforts to transition towards inclusive education systems, and prioritise investments supporting public, free, and quality education that is inclusive for all learners.

Non-governmental organisations and civil society should:

- **Hold** duty-bearers accountable on commitments to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- **Support** government decision-makers and authorities to develop and implement inclusive education frameworks and strategies by providing expertise and insight.

Move towards multi-sectoral frameworks for inclusive education

Government, civil society and non-governmental organisations should:

- **Work** in partnership and across sectors to ensure that children with disabilities benefit.

Governments should:

- **Establish** mechanisms and initiatives for cross-sectoral dialogue, coordination, and partnerships.

- **Ensure** that Education Sector Plans aim to transition to inclusive education and include children with disabilities, with a consistent budget allocated, by coordinating across the relevant sectors.

Non-governmental organisations and civil society should:

- **Advocate** for a multi-sectoral approach to inclusive education.

- **Promote and implement** a multi-sectoral approach in projects and programmes on inclusive education, aiming at improving access to both mainstream and disability-specific services (in education, health, livelihood, protection and social welfare).

Plan for fully connected service delivery

Governments should:

- **Develop** strategies where a number of linked services (i.e. rehabilitation, health, social protection, social support, nutrition...) for children with disabilities can be provided at a single site, or at least sign-posted, for instance in schools.

- **Establish** and prioritise effective coordination mechanisms with and between local authorities and allocate adequate resources and support. This is a priority in countries where government is decentralised.

A boy and a girl who are deaf are working together to play a literacy game, using a group of dice with Nepali letters on them. They use sign language to communicate together. They attend a school in Mugu, a rural part of Nepal. © Julia McGeown/Handicap International.

Expand and strengthen the collection of disaggregated data on disability

All stakeholders should:

- **Use** the "Washington Group Short Set of Questions" and the "Child Functioning Model" to collect data.

- **Disaggregate data**, in particular by disability, gender and age.

Governments should:

- **Use** disability data, including within Educational Management Information Systems, to monitor progress and to better inform and adapt policies and actions, towards the realisation of SDG 4.

Ensure meaningful participation of children, adults and families with disabilities

Governments and donors should:

- **Actively involve** and consult persons with disabilities, parents, learners and educators, as well the organisations which represent them.

- **Develop** or strengthen participatory approaches and mechanisms for policy and programming in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

- **Support** non-governmental organisations and civil society to advocate and deliver services around disability and inclusive education.

Non-governmental organisations and civil society agencies should:

- **Play** a strong role in enabling the participation of persons with disabilities – as well as parents, learners and educators – in national and other level planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education policies and programmes.

Humanity & Inclusion

Humanity & Inclusion (HI) is an independent and impartial aid organisation working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster. Humanity & Inclusion works alongside persons with disabilities and vulnerable populations; taking action and bearing witness in order to respond to their essential needs, improve their living conditions and promote respect for their dignity and fundamental rights.

On 24 January 2018, the global Handicap International network became Humanity & Inclusion. This network is composed of a Federation which implements our programmes in around sixty countries and of eight national associations. These programmes, or national associations, are known as "Handicap International" or "Humanity & Inclusion" depending on the country.