



Inclusive education strategy

Championing the rights of children
and young people with disabilities
to an inclusive, quality education



Sightsavers



Grace, who has had a physical disability since birth and is a wheelchair user, raises her hand during a lesson in her primary school in Chinsali District, Zambia.

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Cover image

School children in Nkoteng, Cameroon.

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Acronyms

EMIS	Education management information systems
ICT	Information and communications technology
IEC	Information, education and communication
LMICs	Low or middle-income countries
NTDs	Neglected tropical diseases
OPDs	Organisations of people with disabilities
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UNCRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO-IIEP	UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning

Working in an open-air
classroom in a government
school in Gilgit, Pakistan.



Executive summary

All children and young people have the right to be included in good quality education from early childhood onwards. This right is enshrined in international agreements and increasingly embedded in national legislation. However, evidence shows children with disabilities in low and lower middle-income countries are disproportionately likely to be either out of school or to receive a sub-standard education. This not only leads to poor educational outcomes for these children but prevents broader social inclusion and promotes inequalities throughout their lives.

In order to promote educational access and quality for children and young people with disabilities, Sightsavers and its partners adopt a holistic systems-strengthening approach. This involves working at all three levels of education systems (local, organisational and institutional) in order to achieve:

- 1.** Increased capacity of schools and communities to provide inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities.
- 2.** Increased capacity of ministries of education and other agencies to support schools and communities to deliver disability-inclusive education.
- 3.** Strengthened policy frameworks, education sector plans and donor commitments that promote disability inclusive education.

The promotion of gender equitable education, the integration of climate action and the appropriate use of technology have been established as cross-cutting objectives for all three goals.

A systems-strengthening approach enables Sightsavers and partners to identify the various elements in education systems that need to be more disability inclusive. We aim to work across sectors – for instance, strengthening the links between education services and health and social services.

Our approach is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)¹ and we collaborate with ministries of education, other key ministries and stakeholders. These include organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs), families and communities to promote approaches that meet the specific needs of these children.

We will continue to strengthen the links between our work in education and our work in eye health and unaddressed refractive error, neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), economic empowerment and social inclusion - creating synergies within our programme portfolio and promoting joined-up service provision across ministries and agencies.



Rose and her daughter Maggie, who has a disability, sitting in front of the goats' kraal provided by Sightsavers at their home in Ntcheu District, Malawi.



Active participation of learners with disabilities in an inclusive primary classroom, Sirajganj sub district, Bangladesh.

Context

This document outlines Sightsavers' strategic direction in inclusive education and updates our previous thematic strategy completed in 2021. It sets out our goals and objectives in accordance with Sightsavers' mission and international agreements and identifies ways in which Sightsavers can promote inclusive education for children with disabilities. Our focus is in low and middle-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Globally, nearly 240 million children live with a disability - approximately one in ten of all children worldwide - with the majority living in low or middle-income countries (LMICs)². Children with disabilities are 49 per cent more likely to never have attended school than children without disabilities³ and are also substantially less likely to complete primary or secondary education or possess basic literacy skills⁴. UNESCO's **Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report** for 2020 confirms that children with disabilities remain one of the most marginalised groups of children in the world⁵.

The United Nations Transforming Education Summit 2022 identified a triple crisis in education:

- 'a crisis of equity and inclusion, as millions are out of school,
- a crisis of quality, as many of those who are in school are not even learning the basics,
- a crisis of relevance, as many educational systems are not equipping the new generations with the values, knowledge and skills they need to thrive in today's complex world.⁶

The summit reaffirmed that all children have the right to an inclusive education of good quality and that this results in improved academic achievement, social and emotional development, and self-esteem. For children and young people with disabilities an education based on fairness, justice and equity is a pre-requisite and should confront stigma, stereotyping, discrimination and alienation⁷. This crisis is exacerbated by the current funding landscape in development. There are indications that multi-lateral donors are limiting their financial support to education with the danger that inclusive education will become a lower priority within a challenging environment.

The UNCRPD⁸, ratified by 193 nations, provides the general principles and obligations of states in their duty to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by people with disabilities. It also guarantees the right of all people with disabilities to education, without discrimination. This includes the right of all children with disabilities to a full course of free primary education and secondary education of good quality 'within the general education system'. When required, children with disabilities should be able to access 'reasonable accommodation' (modifications that ensure they enjoy equal opportunities and work in an inclusive environment); 'effective individualised support measures'; 'alternative modes, means and formats of communication'; and 'peer support and mentoring'.

Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development mandates all signatory member states to ensure all children and young people with disabilities access 'inclusive, equitable and quality education' by 2030. This education should be a continuum, starting with 'early childhood development, care and pre-primary education' (target 4.2) and progressing to

primary and secondary education (target 4.1). The right of adults with disabilities to vocational and tertiary education (target 4.3) is also recognised.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025 acknowledges that progress is off track in achieving its aims in education. Enrolment and completion rates have improved since 2015. There are modest improvements in literacy, but inequalities persist due to gender, disability, wealth and geography. Mitigations suggested include:

- Prioritising inclusive policies and financing that address access, learning and equity.
- Improving quality early childhood education.
- Aiming to close infrastructure and digital gaps.

Gender inequalities remain a concern and we consider this in our strategy⁹.

Sightsavers contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 in a way that leaves no one behind, through our work to ensure children with disabilities can access inclusive quality education. We remain sensitive to the shifting landscape in international development - being aware of economic, geopolitical and other changes whilst remaining responsive to local and individual needs. We aim to produce scalable, sustainable solutions that are in line with national and international legislation.

Theory of change

Working towards the realisation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: “Inclusive and equitable quality education and...lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

Children and young people with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in good quality, mainstream education through strengthened systems, resulting in improved learning outcomes and broader social inclusion.

Education service providers and communities, including learners

Increased capacity of education service providers and communities to provide inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities.

Education service providers have increased inclusive education capacity and continuums of education provision are established.

Community stakeholders – including adults, young people, and children with disabilities – actively participate in inclusive education programmes.

Systems and services

Increased capacity of ministries of education and other agencies to support education service providers and communities to deliver disability-inclusive education.

Government agencies and institutions in LMICs collaborate more effectively and have increased technical capacity to implement inclusive policies.

Government agencies and institutions in LMICs have increased capacity to collect and utilise disability data.

Governance and policy

Strengthened policy frameworks and donor commitments at local, national and international level promote disability-inclusive education.

Policies and legislative frameworks promote inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities, and address their needs.

Education sector plans and budgets promote inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities.

High quality data and evidence inform educational analysis and decision-making.

Adults, children and young people with disabilities actively contribute to policy-making and implementation at all levels of education systems.

Education plans, policies and programmes are gender equitable, address issues of climate change and consider the appropriate use of technology.

Underlying principles: Leave no-one behind. Coherence. Sustainability. System strengthening. Quality. Evidence-based. Partnership and participation. Alliances. Safeguarding.

Our theory of change is aligned with SDG 4 and seeks to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Our ambition is that children with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in good quality, inclusive mainstream education through strengthened systems, resulting in improved learning outcomes and broader social inclusion.

We work in collaboration with stakeholders in education systems to support the development of skills, knowledge acquisition, attitudinal change, organisational and institutional capacity to deliver inclusive services and systemic oversight and coordination. We support stakeholders, including policymakers and implementers, to identify the various inter-related factors in an education system that are preventing young people and children with disabilities from accessing good quality inclusive education. In light of collaborative analysis, these actors can adopt joined-up approaches that not only strengthen the individual elements of education systems but also strengthen the links between these elements, promoting disability-inclusive education.

Whether an intervention is small and localised (i.e. in an individual school or district) or national in scope, the goal is a stronger, more sustainable system where 'strengthening' is positive, oriented to the common good and accountable.

We identify three intervention levels:

**4. School and community
Education service providers and communities, including learners:**

The direct providers and facilitators of educational provision for young people and children with disabilities. The communities and learners who have a right to access a quality education.

**5. Organisational
Systems and services:**

The agencies and institutions, spanning the government and non-government sectors, that support schools and other centres of learning. This includes both duty bearers and others who provide education services.

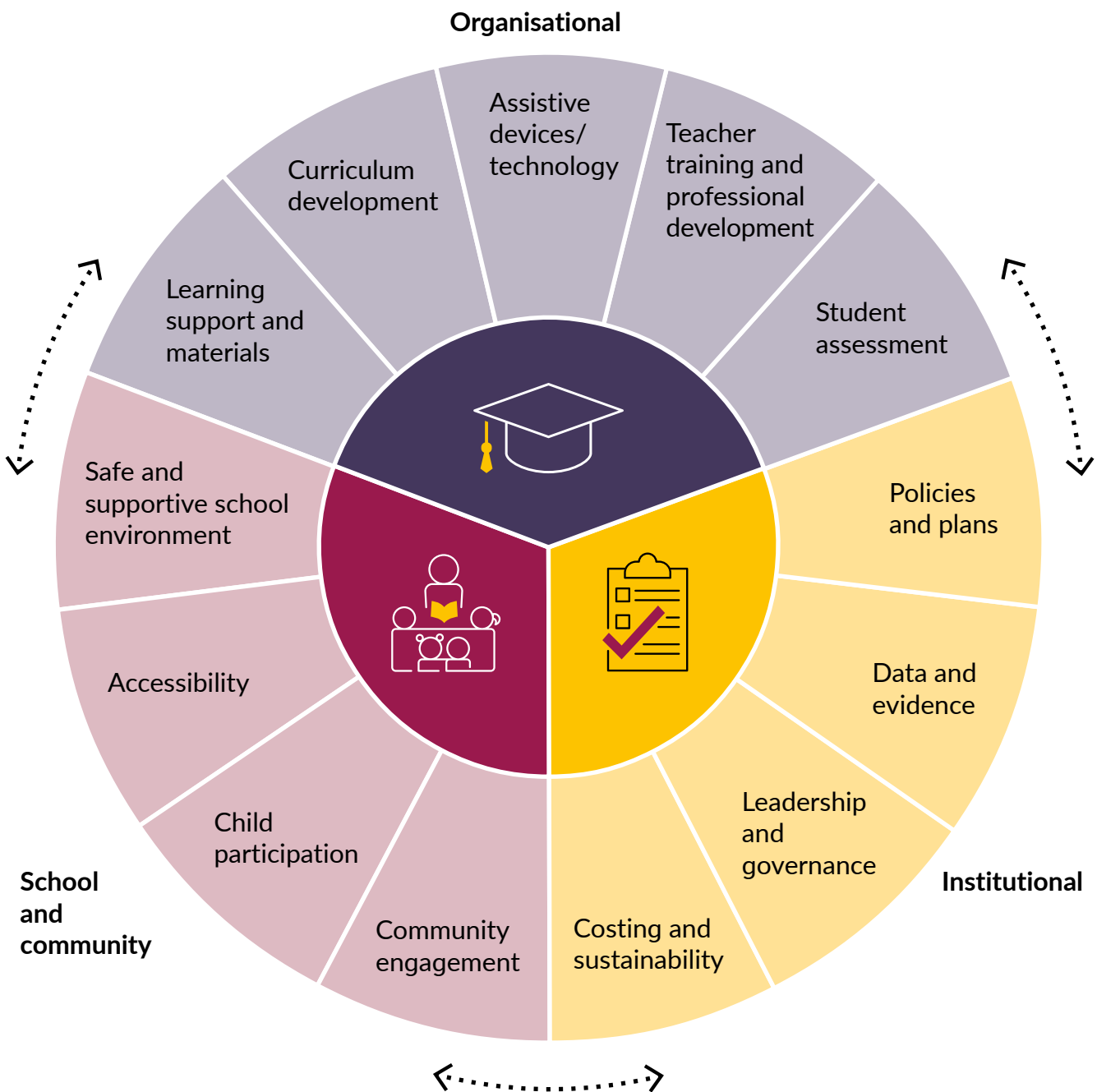
**6. Institutional
Governance and policy:**

The national and international regulatory frameworks (laws, policies, plans, guidelines, budgets, etc) that govern education systems.

Effective systems strengthening relies on the relationship between these levels and we recognise the interdependency between those operating at policy level and those whose role it is to implement them. We collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders (both government and non-government actors) who work within education systems. People with disabilities and organisations of people with disabilities are critical to our approach in the conceptualisation, design, implementation and management of all interventions.

Our systems strengthening approach articulates the 'what' (what is being strengthened?), the 'how' (how the activity will progress and how success will be measured) and the 'who' (who is engaged?). The diagram on the next page represents Sightsavers' key focus areas at each level.

Our systems approach to disability inclusive education



1.

School and community level

The direct providers and facilitators of educational services for children with disabilities.



2.

Organisational level

The various agencies and institutions, spanning the government and non-government sectors, that are responsible for providing schools and other centres of learning with the necessary support.



3.

Institutional level

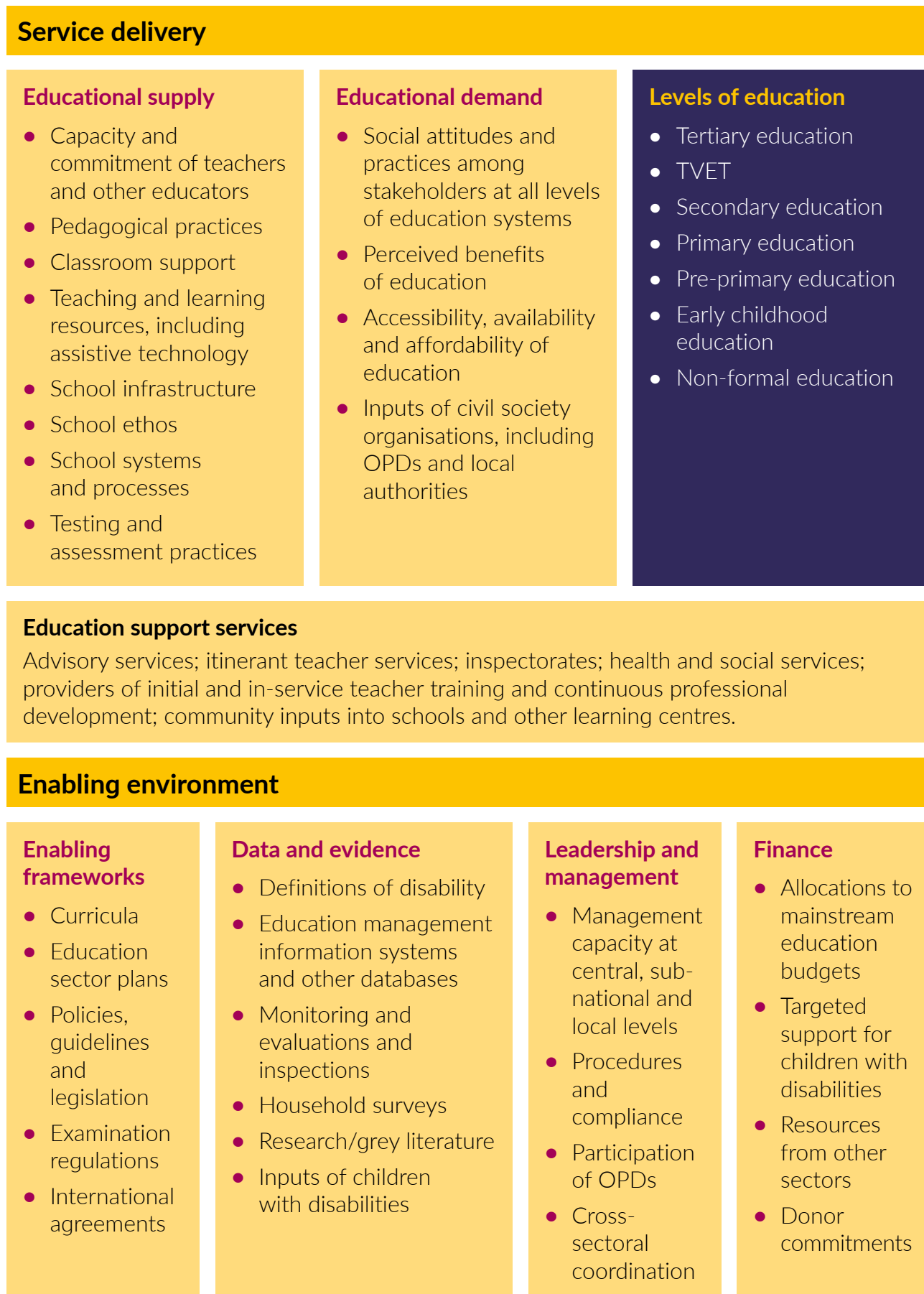
The regulatory frameworks (laws, policies, plans, guidelines, budgets and so on) that govern education systems.

We understand the importance of governments strengthening educational demand as well as educational supply. For instance, families and communities should be supported to understand the rights of all children to attend school, the impact of stigma and discrimination, and how this can be addressed. Parents may be unable and/or unwilling to send children with disabilities to school due to the associated costs of education. They may also be concerned that their children will experience various types of abuse if they go to school or struggle to keep up with the other children.

If transport systems are inadequate, their children may be physically unable to attend school. Governments need to address these challenges through collaborating with other key stakeholders and ministries such as health, gender and social protection.

We base our approach to education systems strengthening on the Framework for Disability-Inclusive Education, a tool developed for ministries of education by UNESCO-IIEP (Institute for Educational Planning) and UNICEF¹⁰. We have adapted this to inform our strategic approach (see diagram on the next page). The framework promotes a holistic approach to systems strengthening by providing an overview of the different aspects of an education system that need to be addressed to enable the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Diagram 1: Multi-level factors impacting on educational access and quality for children with disabilities



Goals and objectives

Sightsavers will contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 4: “Inclusive and equitable quality education and...lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

We will seek to ensure “Children and young people with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in good quality mainstream education through strengthened systems, resulting in improved learning outcomes and broader social inclusion.”

Goal 1: Increased capacity of education service providers and communities to provide inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities

Objective 1.1: Schools and other education service providers have increased inclusive education capacity and continuums of education provision are established.

Objective 1.2: Community stakeholders – including adults, young people, and children with disabilities – actively participate in inclusive education programmes.

Goal 2: Increased capacity of ministries of education and other agencies to support education service providers and communities to deliver disability-inclusive education

Objective 2.1: Government agencies and institutions in LMICs have increased technical capacity to implement inclusive education policies.

Objective 2.2: Government agencies and institutions in LMICs have increased capacity to collect and utilise disability data.

Goal 3: Strengthened policy frameworks and donor commitments promote disability-inclusive education

Objective 3.1: Policies and legislative frameworks promote inclusive education for young people and children with disabilities and address their needs.

Objective 3.2: Education sector plans and budgets promote inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities.

Three cross-cutting objectives apply to all three goals:

Objective A.1: High-quality data and evidence informs educational analysis and decision-making.

Objective A.2: Adults, children and young people with disabilities actively contribute to policymaking and implementation at all levels of education systems.

Objective A.3: Education plans, policies and programmes are gender equitable and climate responsive. The use of appropriate technology is considered in all projects.



Yesaya picking a letter card from the floor in Ntcheu District, Malawi.

How we achieve our goals

Goal 1: Increased capacity of education service providers and communities to provide inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities.

At school and community level, we pilot approaches that can be scaled up by governments and other providers of educational services. Some examples of our approaches are listed below.

Objective 1.1: Schools and other education service providers have increased inclusive education capacity and continuums of education provision are established.

- Strengthen the links between special schools and mainstream schools to promote sharing of skills and knowledge. For example, braille, sign language, and in supporting children and young people with complex disabilities.
- Assist schools to develop and implement school action plans that are learner-centred and address the diverse needs of children with disabilities.
- Assist headteachers and their staff to design and deliver disability-inclusive, continuous professional development programmes.
- Pilot the innovative use of technology¹¹ in schools and other centres of learning, including ICT (information and communications technology) where contextually appropriate.
- Assist schools with making school clubs and societies more accessible.
- Assist schools with making their environments more physically accessible for children with disabilities through no cost/low-cost adaptations.
- Assist schools with meeting the specific needs of children with complex needs, girls with disabilities and other groups of children with disabilities.
- Ensure that interventions include the whole school community. For example, learning support assistants, ancillary staff and children and young people without disabilities.

Objective 1.2: Community stakeholders - including adults, young people and children with disabilities - actively participate in inclusive education programmes.

- Assist community structures, particularly local organisations of people with disabilities, to promote disability-inclusive education through working with schools and local education authorities.
- Use social behaviour change approaches to break down stigma and discrimination and increase demand for, and the use of, inclusive education.
- In association with school stakeholders, promote disability-inclusive, gender-sensitive teaching and learning approaches.
- In association with school stakeholders, develop IEC (information, education and communication) materials that describe how children with disabilities - girls and boys - can be included in a full range of curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- Assist parents with providing home and community-based educational support for children with disabilities. Support parents of children with disabilities to increase their understanding of their, and their children's, rights to education.
- Promote the representation of parents of children with disabilities in governance structures (school management committees, parent-teacher associations and other decision-making bodies).
- Support children with disabilities to play a leading role in their own education - for example, through participation in school parliaments.
- Seek opportunities to enable children and young people with disabilities to have greater involvement in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Support the transition of children and young people with disabilities through the phases of education. This includes early childhood education to primary school, primary school to secondary school, secondary education to technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and tertiary/higher education.
- Support the transition of young people with disabilities from education to employment.

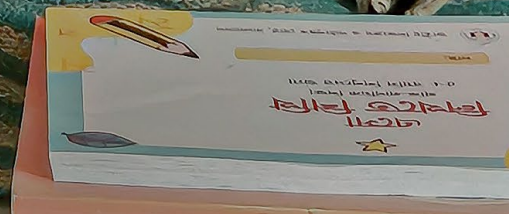


The Education for All project in Mali encourages children living with disabilities to attend school by improving access to inclusive education adapted to the specific needs of pupils.

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Home-based education supporting preparation for primary school enrolment, Sirajganj sub district, Bangladesh.



Goal 2: Increased capacity of ministries of education and other agencies to support education service providers and communities to deliver disability-inclusive education.

At organisational level, we support key departments and agencies to develop the capacity to provide schools and other education service providers with the necessary support to ensure satisfactory learning outcomes for all children and young people. Through strengthening systems, we aim to ensure sustainability, scale and impact. Our activities take various forms. Some examples of our approaches are listed below.

Objective 2.1: Government agencies and institutions in LMICs have increased technical capacity to implement inclusive policies.

- Strengthen the links between ministries, directorates and agencies at national and sub-national levels to promote joined-up services for children and young people with disabilities and their families.
- Assist relevant ministries with incorporating disability inclusion perspectives in initial teacher training and continuous professional development.
- Strengthen the capacity of teacher trainers, inspectors, itinerant teachers and other education personnel to promote disability-inclusive education.
- Advocate for the participation, training and recruitment of people with disabilities as educators.
- Assist relevant ministries to strengthen their child safeguarding systems so they meet the specific needs of children and young people with disabilities.
- Assist relevant ministries to produce school textbooks and other teaching and learning materials that are disability-inclusive and gender-sensitive.

- Strengthen the capacity of tertiary and higher education providers to address the needs of young people and adults with disabilities.
- Assist local education authorities and other actors with supporting the transition of children and young people with disabilities from one phase of education to another, and from education to employment.
- Work with hospitals, clinics and other health service providers to provide children and young people with disabilities with clinical and functional assessments and follow-up services.

Objective 2.2: Government agencies and institutions in LMICs have increased capacity to collect and utilise disability data.

Assist relevant ministries with:

- Developing the capacity of education management information systems to collect and utilise data disaggregated by sex and disability.
- Collaborating with other data collection systems, such as national statistical bureaus, to build their capacity to collect and utilise sex and disability disaggregated children's data for SDG 4 reporting.
- Carrying out costing studies that will enable them to establish the costs of scaling up inclusive education both district-wide and nationally.

Goal 3: Strengthened policy frameworks and donor commitments promote disability-inclusive education.

At institutional level, we work with governments to help ensure policies and plans address the needs of children with disabilities and that our work achieves sustainability, scale and impact. Through policy change, we can seek to influence ministries of education, ensuring they are accountable for providing children and young people with disabilities with increased access to good quality, inclusive education – both now and in the future.

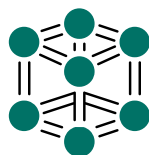
Some examples of our approaches are listed below.

Objective 3.1: Policies and legislative frameworks promote inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities, and address their needs.

- Advocate with governments for the signing, ratification and implementation of regional and international agreements - including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Marrakesh Treaty.
- Advocate with governments at national and sub-national levels for disability-inclusive laws, policies, regulations and guidelines that are aligned with the UNCPRD and the SDGs.
- Advocate for, and support, governments at national and sub-national levels to develop inclusive education policies, with the aim of strengthening their systems.
- Focus on ensuring policies are effectively disseminated and implemented, that accountability mechanisms are in place, and that the rights of children with disabilities are embedded in mainstream education planning and delivery.
- Encourage ministries of education and other education service providers to adopt stringent safeguarding procedures. Share our own guidance documents and support the provision of training in this area.
- Support ministries of education to monitor the implementation of plans, policies and programmes.
- Influence and partner with international development actors to ensure that inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities is prioritised and mainstreamed in national, regional and global frameworks.
- Integrate advocacy objectives into the design of all our projects.
- Contribute to the development of curricula that promotes learner-centred education and addresses the specific needs of children and young people with disabilities.
- Support the inclusion of OPDs, including organisations of women with disabilities, in policy development and implementation processes.
- Participate in education coalitions to promote disability inclusion in education debates and draw on the vitality and creativity of civil society - especially of organisations of people with disabilities.

Objective 3.2: Education sector plans and budgets promote inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities.

- Contribute to the development of disability-inclusive national education sector plans and associated budgets.
- Influence donors for the adoption of inclusive approaches in mainstream education and targeted disability inclusive investments in education systems.
- Identify and support governance systems and working groups that influence budget allocations for inclusive education.



Strengthened policy frameworks and donor commitments promote **disability-inclusive education.**

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Teacher Nora helping Glory learn to count using fingers at school in Ntcheu District, Malawi.

Cross-cutting priorities

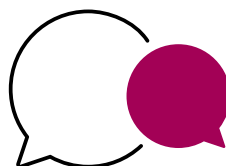
Objective A1: High quality data and evidence inform educational analysis and decision-making.

We monitor and assess progress and generate evidence for decision-making through the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative project data, applied research assessments, and interactions with the communities we serve. Our approach to research, evidence and uptake is defined in the following strategy: **Research-evidence-uptake-and-learning strategy**. Through asking and answering specific learning questions we deepen our understanding of inclusive education issues and fill gaps in knowledge that strengthen the way we implement our strategy. Within our education work, we also strengthen the collection and use of disaggregated data - including by disability, sex, age and geography. We use a range of methods to understand how different groups of children with disabilities, including out of school children, experience education and the particular challenges they face by considering individual characteristics such as gender, age, family socio-economic status, location and type and severity of impairment.

This focus on diversity enables us to understand which groups are at risk of being excluded from education. We work with Sightsavers' country offices and other teams to align our approaches with national Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), and to generate evidence on how to ensure these systems are disability-inclusive. We contribute to the development, validation and promotion of disability-inclusive tools, which are

appropriate to the local context, where valid and reliable measures related to disability are lacking. We use a range of tools and methods to assess inclusive education interventions and explore intersections between health and education sectors.

We collaborate with a range of stakeholders to provide a sound evidence base to support scalable and cost-effective programmes and related advocacy, and to draw on relevant, peer-reviewed research from external sources. This includes developing standardised methodologies for assessing costs and cost-effectiveness of inclusive education practices across different settings. We support research that generates new evidence and addresses key knowledge gaps.



Through asking and answering **specific learning questions** we deepen our understanding of inclusive education issues



15-year-old Humair wearing his new glasses at school in Multan, Pakistan.

Objective A2: Adults, children and young people with disabilities actively contribute to policymaking and implementation at all levels of education.

We are accountable to the people and communities we serve by ensuring that local stakeholders, including people with disabilities, actively contribute to the design, implementation and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education projects. We create opportunities for stakeholders to feedback and inform the future design and implementation of programmes and projects.

Where possible, we integrate participatory and peer research approaches in all of our studies to ensure the meaningful engagement of children and young people with disabilities in research design, implementation and evidence uptake.

Objective A3: Education plans, policies and programmes are gender equitable and climate responsive and address the specific needs of all children and young people with disabilities. The use of appropriate technology is considered in all projects.

In all our education programmes we address issues of gender and climate, as well as the appropriate use of technology.



Babiryte with her teacher Dorcus during a classroom session at their school in Nakaseke District, Uganda, which has benefitted from the Inclusive Continuous Professional Development project.

Gender

Sightsavers recognises the multiple discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities which significantly reduce their access to health, education, employment and decision-making spaces. Our work is aligned with, and supports, global conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In low and middle-income countries, 40 per cent of children with disabilities are out of primary school and 55 per cent are out of lower secondary school¹². However, only 41.7 per cent of girls with disabilities have completed primary school, compared with 50.6 per cent of boys with disabilities

and 52.9 per cent of girls without disabilities¹³. Girls with disabilities face multiple intersecting barriers - including societal stigma and discrimination, poverty, inaccessible school infrastructure, lack of teacher training, forced displacement and the added vulnerability of girls to gender-based violence and early marriage.

Boys with disabilities also face specific gender-based challenges, including societal pressure to conform to masculine ideals like strength and independence, which can conflict with their disabilities and lead to stigma, social marginalisation and exclusion from school, as well as pressure to contribute economically to their communities.

In line with **Sightsavers' approach to gender**, we take a gender mainstreaming approach to inclusive education. This is recognition that women and girls would otherwise be left behind in the work we do due to their gender roles, gendered expectations and the power relations which influence their social, economic and political outcomes. By considering gender as a cross-cutting, human-rights issue, Sightsavers can address the different needs, priorities and experiences of women and girls, and men and boys, ensuring that both girls and boys with disabilities have equitable access to quality education. Gender is embedded into programme objectives, strategy, success measurement and impact assessment. Some examples of how we do this are as follows:

Gender analysis

We conduct a gender analysis during the design phase and/or at the start of projects to understand the contextually specific barriers faced by girls and boys with disabilities and how these will be addressed through the project.

Data disaggregation

We collect and use sex and disability-disaggregated project data to inform project and programme planning, implementation and monitoring when appropriate.

Empowerment and participation

Girls with disabilities are encouraged to participate in decision-making about their education and many projects include girls' clubs, mentoring schemes, working with local mothers' associations and OPDs to build confidence and agency.

Boys and men as allies

We are developing approaches to ensure that boys and men are included in participatory activities around gender.

Community engagement

In partnership with OPDs, we work with families, communities, mothers' associations and local leaders to shift attitudes and promote the value of educating girls - and boys - with disabilities.

Teacher training

We train teachers, and support our ministry partners, to use gender-sensitive and inclusive teaching methods. This includes promoting positive classroom environments where both girls and boys with disabilities can participate and progress equally.

Curriculum development

We support the analysis of local and national curricula to highlight the appropriate representation of girls and women.

Collaboration and learning

We collaborate with local partners, governments and global networks to share learning and improve gender-responsive and transformative practices in inclusive education.

Policy and advocacy

We influence policy and practice at local, national, regional and global levels - ensuring relevant policies relating to education are gender equitable, gender responsive and gender transformative.

A woman walking to the river to wash clothes in Banfora, Burkina Faso.



Climate action

Climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable groups - including women, girls, and people with disabilities. Our environmental policy commits us to monitoring and reducing our environmental impact and focuses on mitigation, adaptation and climate justice. We have developed a strategy for addressing climate issues as part of all education projects.

Sightsavers recognises that education can unlock transformative behavioural and systems change. To be effective, education systems must prepare for various climate scenarios by ensuring resilient school infrastructure, developing inclusive alternative education options and creating proactive plans for climate events, whilst also nurturing inclusive content and pedagogy that prepare young people to effectively participate in a green economy.

By leveraging our extensive experience working with governments, OPDs and communities, we promote scalable, community-owned solutions. These solutions are designed to mitigate the effects of climate shocks on learning and are aligned with key global frameworks, including the Global Partnership for Education's Climate Resilient Education Framework, the relevant frameworks of the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), and of the United Nations.¹⁴

We believe that education is a powerful tool for building climate resilience, especially for vulnerable communities. Our approach is built on three core concepts:

Adaptation education

We help educational institutions become 'learning and demonstration centres' for climate action. This involves:

- Mainstreaming climate education - integrating climate issues into policies, lesson content and teaching materials.
- Advocating for climate resilient schools - promoting inclusive infrastructure that can better withstand climate shocks.
- Community engagement - collaborating with local communities, indigenous groups and OPDs to create sustainable, community-owned solutions to climate change.

Climate change education

Our inclusive education climate action framework is based on four key pillars that empower all learners to act:

- 1. Learning to know:** Understanding the science and impacts of climate change.
- 2. Learning to do:** Gaining the practical skills needed for climate action.
- 3. Learning to live together:** Fostering collaboration and interdependence.
- 4. Learning to be:** Developing personal responsibility and leadership.

Climate justice

Our work is guided by the principle of climate justice, which focuses on addressing the systemic inequities that make certain communities more vulnerable to climate change. We work to dismantle the root causes of marginalisation and empower historically excluded groups, including those living with disabilities, by shifting power and leadership to them.



Njeleweta Village in Petauke, Eastern Zambia

Our climate change approach at different system levels

Schools, communities and learners

- Ensure learning continuity during climate shocks, focusing on accessibility to learning for girls and children with disabilities.
- Empower students by creating school-community platforms that enable the participation of all students in environmental decision-making.
- Combat stigma through social campaigns that raise awareness about the disproportionate impact of climate change on children with disabilities.
- Provide trauma support by offering disability-inclusive psychosocial services during and after severe weather events.
- Enhance school safety by developing inclusive disaster management plans and ensuring infrastructure is climate-resilient and inclusive. Also that emergency procedures are shared with all students and teachers in an accessible format.

Systems and services

- Create accessible learning materials relating to climate action in partnership with ministries and environmental organisations.
- Strengthen organisational capacity to address the needs of young people and adults with disabilities in the context of climate education.
- Integrate disability inclusion and climate change knowledge into school curricula.

Governance and policy

- Advocate for inclusive climate action policies and plans relating to education at the national and district levels.
- Promote evidence-based decision-making by producing and disseminating research and policy briefs on the intersection of climate change, disability and education.

The use of technology

Article 4 of UNCRPD affirms the right of people with disabilities to ‘new technologies, including information and communications technologies, mobility aids, devices, and assistive technologies, suitable for people with disabilities, giving priority to technologies at an affordable cost’.¹⁵ SDG 4 says that youths and adults should acquire relevant technical skills (target 4.4) and be able to access the internet (target 4a). Goal 1 (relating to poverty) recognises the importance of universal access to ‘appropriate new technology’ and Goal 5 (gender) recognises that ‘enabling technology, (especially) information and communications technology’ can ‘promote the empowerment of women’.¹⁶

We use the term educational technology as a broad term to describe the wide range of devices and products that enable children and young people to participate in formal and non-formal education and to achieve learning goals. This is outlined in the document ‘**Educational Technology for Learners with Disabilities: Sightsavers Guidance Document**’. There is not one agreed definition of technology and technologies include ‘high-tech’ devices and products such as mobile phones and computers, as well as relatively ‘low tech’ devices and products such as pencils, pencil grips, exercise books, walking frames and spectacles.

We recognise that children and young people with disabilities in LMICs are often unable to access even the most basic educational technology. When they can, they may not be able to use it effectively due to lack of support services, limited internet access, unreliable electricity supply and other factors.¹⁷

Some examples of our approaches to the use of technology are as follows:

- Consider individual needs of children and young people and the purpose of the technology.
- Seek opportunities to incorporate technology into new and existing projects, while always being aware that our goal is to increase the participation of children and young people with disabilities in accessing a quality education and that technology is not a solution in itself.
- Encourage the skills development of children and young people, parents and teachers in using technology.
- Keep abreast of new developments in this area - for example, considering innovations such as the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and how these can be used to improve learning for children and young people with disabilities, their teachers and their families.
- Acknowledge the challenges that exist in many LMICs - for example, poor infrastructure, the cost of access to the internet and the storage and maintenance of devices. Seek innovative, sustainable solutions that result in quality learning for children and young people with disabilities.
- Ensure that children and young people with disabilities are referred to the correct facility to receive assistive technology that meets their individual needs. This might be a white cane, a wheelchair, hearing aids or any device that helps them to access a quality education.
- Seek local provision of assistive devices and identify the organisations through which these can be procured and maintained in a sustainable manner.
- Advocate for the inclusion of budgets for technology in education allocations.



Godwin Mubanga and Idah Chita, chair and secretary of Chinsali Disability Advocacy Network, Muchinga Province, Zambia.

Other areas

Disability inclusion and OPD engagement

We work closely with organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) in all of our education projects - recognising the value of collaboration, from project conception and design through to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Most OPDs

are rooted in their local communities and function before and after any individual project might end. We are respectful of the specialist knowledge, local relationships, expertise and insights that OPD partners share with us.

We are cognisant of the fact that OPDs are not a homogenous group and we take time to understand the membership of different groups - whether based on disability category, size, who they represent and how they function. Whilst a national umbrella organisation is likely to have very different power relations to an unregistered community-based group, both have much to offer. We seek out diverse representation within local communities and challenge the under representation of women in management and leadership roles within organisations. We recognise the fact that OPDs should be remunerated for their work and that funding is a challenge for organisations that are largely volunteer-based.

We understand that our partnership with OPDs should be mutually beneficial. Whilst Sightsavers might be able to offer capacity development around financial management, inclusive education or advocacy, our role is to support organisations to amplify their voice and support their decision-making processes. In a strong partnership between ourselves and an OPD, credibility around messaging is enhanced for all partners at local and national level.



Most OPDs are rooted in their local communities and function before and after any individual project might end

Within a project we work with OPDs to identify impactful activities. These range from:

- Chairing a project steering committee.
- Engaging with local and national government to promote inclusive education through the community structures of which they are members.
- Supporting the identification of children and young people with disabilities in their local communities.
- Advocating for inclusive education in local community settings.
- Working in schools as members of governance structures and communicating with parents and caregivers.

Representation and participation is driven by OPD members.

12 years old Zain sitting on a stone wall outside his house in Gilgit, Pakistan.



Stigma, discrimination and social norms

Our aim is that social norms support the inclusion of people with disabilities and enable people in all their diversity to use the services and systems that Sightsavers supports.

Across our strategies we commit to:

- Recognise stigma, discrimination, and social and gender norms, as potential barriers within our work for inclusion, education and health.
- Systematically gather evidence and understand stigma, social and gender norms in the contexts we work, to inform decisions on activities we prioritise. This might be through using social and behaviour science to help define those priorities.
- Use Sightsavers social and behaviour change and stigma reduction guidance to test approaches to reduce stigma in a variety of settings. Also to influence, complement or challenge social and gender norms.
- Seek to strengthen the agency of vulnerable and marginalised communities, especially women and girls with disabilities, to:
 - have choice and equity to choose inclusive and healthy behaviours
 - equitably access health, education, economic and political services and systems.
- Engage not only our primary target audience, which includes people and children with disabilities in all their diversity, but also their families, communities and wider influencers who drive and reinforce social and gender norms.

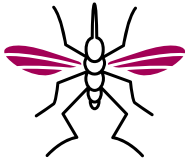
- Select and support diverse local partners, including women-led OPDs, to understand and address barriers from social and gender norms and stigma. Local partners and leaders can also reflect the social norms and stigma of that context.

To reduce negative social norms and stigma in inclusive education programmes we:

- Embed stigma reduction in our programme design, ensuring that it is not a side effect but included in our objectives. Measurable indicators for changes in attitudes and social norms are included in the logframe.
- Co-design and co-deliver our programmes with people with disabilities and their representative organisations (OPDs), ensuring that their lived experiences and insights are acknowledged and used for relevance and authenticity.
- Build capacity of teachers in fostering inclusive classrooms and challenge discriminatory attitudes.
- Include disability rights in the teacher training content, as well as targeted interventions for other community members such as peers, education officials, community and religious leaders, etc.
- Support in-country education systems to identify discriminatory attitudes towards children with disabilities and build systems to reduce them.

Thematic links

Through strengthening the links between our work in education and our work in eye health, NTDs, social inclusion and economic empowerment, Sightsavers will encourage the sharing of resources and the development of joined-up services across ministries and agencies.



Neglected tropical diseases

We will continue to draw upon the expertise of our neglected tropical diseases (NTD) colleagues to ensure that effective support for children with disabilities to access necessary water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities is integral in schools and other education centres. We will explore ways in which NTD platforms can be used to deliver inclusive education messages and, conversely, how education platforms can be used to deliver NTD messages. In addition, we will research ways in which NTD programmes could potentially be used to identify out-of-school children and support their enrolment in school. Recognising that infections and poor health lead to poor health and, consequently, poor learning, we will explore potential links between our NTD, education and school-based eye health programmes.



Economic empowerment

Young people with disabilities are more likely to be excluded from employment opportunities than their peers. As children and young people with disabilities continue on their lifelong journey in education, we will value collaboration with the economic empowerment team to strengthen the links between formal and non-formal education and the transition to technical and vocational education and employment.

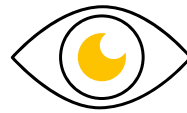
We will continue to work together to develop training materials for tutors and trainers. We will explore the synergies between our approaches to providing livelihoods support for the carers of children with disabilities. We will also continue to promote education-focused social protection to enable children and young people with disabilities, and those from households with disabilities, to access and remain in school.



Social inclusion

Working with Sightsavers' social inclusion team, we identify common issues affecting children with disabilities and their communities. Collaboration on social and behaviour change helps us to direct our interventions and enhance community engagement, identifying key issues and increasing the involvement of children with disabilities in schools and communities. Through strengthening links with our inclusive citizenship programmes, we can increase the participation of OPDs and parents of children with disabilities in relevant decision-making bodies - such as local council education commissions, school management committees and parent-teacher associations - ensuring their input is considered by decision-makers at national, district and local levels. This leads to improved education quality and access for children with disabilities.

Children with disabilities are to be considered active players in their education and encouraged to meaningfully participate in school governance and choices that affect their education. When provided with opportunities to revise curricula, we will ensure the civic education components of these curricula address disability issues and promote broader social inclusion. We will also explore potential focus areas such as collaboration on working around maternal health.



Vision and eye care

Unaddressed refractive errors in children can potentially restrict their active participation in learning activities. All children with visual impairments should have access to early vision screening, correction of refractive error, access to spectacles and assistive technology, and frequent follow-up to help them increase their participation in learning. Since schools are considered as effective platforms to reach children with unaddressed refractive errors, our education strategy recognises a need for close collaboration between health professionals and educators.

We will strengthen our collaboration with vision and eye care work using approaches such as School Health Integrated Programming (SHIP) in our programme countries to support children with visual impairment in schools through teachers' capacity building on inclusive education. We will also investigate ways to use the teacher training under our SHIP projects to orient them on inclusive education strategies for children with visual impairment. In addition, we will find out the ways to use our eye health work to identify out of school children with disabilities and refer them to schools. To ensure sustainability and impact, we will strengthen links between ministries of health and education through establishing mechanisms for common policy development and ownership, planning, resourcing, implementation and evaluation at national and local levels.

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We work with partners in low
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and promote equal opportunities
for people with disabilities

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