

# ENSURING ALL STUDENTS ARE LEARNING

*Inclusive Education White Paper*

Sakil Malik, Farah Mahesri, Craig Geddes, and Angie Quintela



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# Ensuring All Students Are Learning

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The global education community works to increase access to quality education for all children around the world. Education is one of the greatest equalizers—children of all backgrounds, skill levels, and religious beliefs can learn the fundamentals of reading and writing—the core skills of communication. Education empowers all learners to become productive members of society and to thrive in their individual lives. Unfortunately, education systems across both the developed and developing worlds do not currently adequately support children of all learning abilities, or those from certain ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Instruction is primarily aimed at ‘able’ learners, leaving children of different cognitive or physical abilities at a severe disadvantage.

Even as the idea of [inclusion garners support](#), the global community struggles to move beyond buzzwords to concrete recommendations for action. To further this discussion, DAI hosted a panel on inclusive education in 2019 to ask two fundamental questions: What are the key policy recommendations we need to be making to support inclusive education? And, what are the key aspects we need to think about during project design and implementation to achieve inclusive education?

This paper captures key points from that discussion and develops them further through additional research, consolidated here into concrete recommendations for policy makers and implementers. DAI acknowledges with special thanks the contributions and insights of these experts and supporters:

- Candace Debnam of [School to School International](#),
- Deborah Backus of [All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development](#),
- Jerry Mindes of [Leonard Cheshire](#),
- Josh Josa of the [U.S. Agency for International Development](#),
- Lisa Wadors Verne of [Benetech](#),
- Sue Swenson of [Inclusion International](#), and
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# Those Left Behind

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*Over the past three decades, since discussions began around the [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#), the global community has jointly agreed that education is the right of every child. No longer do we envision a world in which only a select few learn to read and write, but one where all, regardless of socio-economic status, religion, ability, culture, or geography should be educated.*

At the same time, the community has acknowledged that it is harder to provide access to educational services for some children than it is for others. This is true for two large groups in particular: those with one or more disabilities and those who face social exclusion. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reports that [258 million children](#) are still out of school and not regularly accessing education, with 30 of them being children with disabilities; underlining the belief that major work still needs to be done to ensure learning becomes a reality for the world's most marginalized. To ensure marginalization is reduced, the international community has built off the MDGs, taking the call and commitment even further, through the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), focusing not only on input drivers to provide quality education for all, but also ensuring that the quality education is improved and that access is inclusive and equitable (specifically addressed through SDG4).

## **SDG4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.**

Disability inclusive education is a [systemwide approach](#) to instruction that accommodates all learners and considers the limitations of those with disabilities—cognitive, developmental, physical, or sensory.

Beyond disability, inclusive education is also targeted at children who face a level of social exclusion or other type of systemic oppression or injustice that requires specific considerations to be taken to ensure equitable access to education.

*These social exclusions include:*



Individuals who are displaced from their homes due to natural disasters, climate change, conflict, or economic migration.



Individuals who belong to historically marginalized groups based on race/ethnicity, religion, language, or a particular role in society (such as historical caste segmentations).



Girls, marginalized due to their gender and status within community.



Individuals who face discrimination or stigma associated with their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.



Individuals in communities with high rates of latent or structural violence, such as gang or drug-related violence.



Individuals in lower socio-economic groups.

Because this list covers a broad range of groups that differ by country and by context, this paper will acknowledge them collectively as students who face social exclusion. It is worth noting that students with disabilities also often face social exclusion because of stigma related to their disability. Some disabled children do not attend school because educational systems are not in place to serve them, while others are marginalized by societal or familial expectations, stigma, or even taboo.

The discussion here may at times seem limited due to the scale of the populations being discussed, but recommendations for these groups specifically take into consideration the exclusions and special considerations required to address systemic inequities. For example, these recommendations do not address every girl around the world, but rather those girls who are living under the threat of sexual violence, societal pressure to drop out, cultural beliefs, or government policies.

The number of socially excluded children is, in many ways, difficult to capture. [Reports show](#) that there are still “58 million children between the ages of 6 and 11 and 63 million adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15” who do not have access to education—and many of them come from communities that are marginalized, are refugees, or are internally displaced from their homes. It is also important to note that many countries in conflict and crisis fail to report education data—including information on out-of-school children—to the UNESCO Institute on Statistics. In the most recent year for which global data is available, 2017, data from 25 nations is still unavailable, including many that are in crisis or conflict, such as Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, and Syria. These gaps in data, specifically in countries where we predict child refugee and at-risk population numbers may be the highest, contribute to a disproportionately low population estimate, and end up falsely representing the true scale of the inclusion and equity problem.

As practitioners work to close the learning gap, this data shows how, when compared to the MDGs and SDGs, we are not keeping our promises. But there are some key data sets that we do know:

1. Children with disabilities are among the least likely to be enrolled in schools—and they are the only group where we see a decline in reading scores, and
2. there are now more children displaced from their homes due to a rise of nationalism and fundamentalism that marginalizes minority groups.

In considering both groups, intersectionality must also be considered, where a person’s [overlapping identities](#) impact the way they experience discrimination and disadvantage. These categories of disability and social exclusion often overlap—such as where children who have fled conflict often emerge with a newfound disability. This makes quantifying these groups difficult as children may face multiple, compounded, identity-based marginalization. Regardless of the reason that a child may not have equitable access to education—whether it is a disability, displacement, marginalization; or a combination of factors—there are common solutions that can help address these inequalities when applied in a context-

specific manner. But how to operationalize these solutions remains an unresolved question. This paper offers clear recommendations to that question, with the following two assumptions:

- First, [the definition of inclusive education](#) used is in line with the UN definition: “inclusive education can be viewed as education in which the barriers to participation and learning are eliminated from classrooms and schools.”
- Second, the recommendations are made within a rights-based model for promoting inclusive education building on the belief that education as a universal right for all children is accepted, regardless of any other set of circumstances, beliefs, or barriers. [The rights-based model](#) focuses on the belief that it is environmental and discriminatory attitudes that create barriers, not the disability or the reason for social exclusion itself.



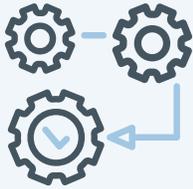
**Up until April 2020, countries such as Sierra Leone and Tanzania had both official and unofficial policies and practices banning pregnant girls from attending school, leaving a large percentage of the population excluded.**

*To ensure strategic and holistic change in education at the system, societal, and school levels, we must take comprehensive steps in how we engage policymakers, practitioners, and people living with disabilities. The recommendations below show how stepping forward at each level to engage key stakeholders, review systems, and improve support will help ensure sustainability, system buy-in, and scale up.*





# 01 | Apply Systems Thinking



*Systems thinking—the understanding of how interrelated these issues and their systems are, necessitating a cross-sectoral, cross-pollination approach to building systems for inclusive education.*

## Systems Thinking is Key to Scale and Success

When we discuss the conditions necessary for all children to access learning, we have to take a comprehensive view of both learning and living environments to ensure support is in place for children’s wellbeing in all areas of potential need. We must take steps to ensure that our classrooms are ready to teach all students; considering health and psycho-social interventions that help identify students who need additional support; encouraging nutrition interventions that when introduced early in life can actually help reduce cognitive and developmental delays; and identifying governance and economic growth programs that protect and grow domestic revenue to support education for all.

In education, application of systems thinking requires an in-depth review of the local education structure, including review of:

- Instructional curriculum, both content and pedagogy
- Supportive teaching and learning materials
- Access to, and effective use of, appropriate assistive devices
- School-linked medical and health diagnosis tools
- Education-supportive social services

Policy and implementation should take a systems-thinking approach to inclusive education. While national policy and systems are critical for full reform, application of systems thinking at the local school level also allows for direct change for individuals—teachers, students, and families. No one approach will serve as the single solution to remove systematic, institutional, and cultural barriers. To create sustained change, engage ministries and government offices in each relevant sector to improve comprehensive service provision. Systems thinking for inclusive education could come through an active, engaged national working group focusing on service provision; national advocacy bodies actively involved in sector plans; and data-driven ‘surge support’ in key geographic or technical areas to bring equal service provision to all.

## 02 | Do No Harm



*Understand the context of policy and intervention decisions to maximize positive and minimize negative impacts.*

### **We Have an Overarching Obligation to Do No Harm**

Whenever development programs begin, we, as practitioners, researchers, donors, and government partners, risk introducing activities and programs that—while positive in intention—can be detrimental to communities, unless clear, careful, and considerate planning is taken. Programs can have a negative effect if careful planning isn't taken to review local economies, understand cultural barriers and taboos, engage all local stakeholders, and investigate the impact the project activities will have now and in the future. To maximize positive impact and reduce negative effects, a commitment to Do No Harm is paramount.

We must make a considerable effort to ensure all programming affects communities positively and that each potential negative knock-on effect is mitigated or reduced. In our development assistance, local government, community, religious, and traditional leadership must be involved in the design and implementation of our programs. The best way to do this is through a human-centered design process where stakeholders from all cohorts are engaged.

### **Do No Harm Examples:** *Ensuring that...*

- if your project is encouraging reporting of child abuse in community, that there are mechanisms to protect reportees and victims.
- if your program is importing food to distribute through school-feeding or sell in local markets as part of nutrition or economic empowerment programming, that adequate studies have been conducted to ensure minimal market disruption.
- if your program is empowering women with financial independence, that there is also outreach to spouses on beliefs and behaviors to reduce intimate partner violence that can be associated with women increasing their independence.

## 03 | Accommodate a Twin-Track Approach



*Commit fully to mainstreaming inclusive education, but provide disability-specific programming to individual students who require specific supports and while these inclusive education systems are developed.*

### **Development Done Right is Better Than Development Done Now**

Identifying disparity in services can often result in an immediate plan of action to rectify gaps and respond to populations' needs. While ensuring equity is vital to giving all people the proper ground for success, timing, quality, and government support are all critical. Introducing new activities or concepts for community buy-in, without government engagement or without properly embedding the process into existing structures isn't sustainable and often can be detrimental. Our work with marginalized populations requires thoughtful, appropriate, and system-supported interventions to achieve sustainability. Disability-focused programming has many barriers to overcome. Immediate intervention is unlikely to be most successful and will most often not reflect the desired purity of program intervention. Since a systems approach to inclusive education requires a significant amount of education and buy-in at the home, school, community, and government levels, applying a twin-track approach is wisest.

Twin tracking allows for temporary solutions to immediate needs, as well as planning for permanent change in the system. A twin tracking approach done right will underpin all activities with a commitment to eventual mainstreaming and full inclusion, while immediately focusing activities on intervention for individual students who require assistance now. Twin-track plans are most successful when incorporated into proposals and program strategies as phased approaches to commitment and support. A phased approach responds to immediate needs with temporary, but, urgent solutions then focuses on slower, more sustainable, tiered inclusion strategies through surge support that eventually phases down the temporary interventions meant to meet urgent needs. This approach gives donors, new partners, government ministries, and communities time to identify successes and highlight areas where intervention will be permanently needed to ensure equality for all.

### **Begin with Policy**

Policymakers within government and bilateral and multilateral donor organizations play critical roles in the education ecosystem, including setting vision and goals and organizing resources. As citizen engagement has become more vibrant and communities are seeing more active advocacy from ordinary citizenry, both national and community bodies have become vital stakeholders in the policy process. Engaging national advocacy groups and ensuring citizen engagement in the process is critical for success. Below, we discuss recommendations for how policy makers and their partners can advance inclusive education and better set the stage for meaningful change.

## 04 | Focus On the How



*Trust the evidence base that exists around inclusive education and moving forward, focus building evidence on how to implement inclusive education.*

### How We Do This Is What Matters

In 1994, at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education, the global community declared that all children deserve the right to education. On the surface this is an obvious statement, but, the community had to explicitly make this declaration as [previous global proclamations](#) had not included the assurance that children with different levels of cognitive, developmental, physical or sensory ability deserved to be accommodated. Similarly, the [right of all refugee children](#) to access education was first articulated as far back as the 1951 Refugee Convention, and has been reiterated in a number of conventions and goals. Despite these policy proclamations, refugee children, internally displaced children, and children who face other types of social exclusion continue to struggle to access and complete their education. Other international conventions—from the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women reiterate that the [right to education](#) cannot be limited. There is obvious overwhelming consensus on why systems should be inclusive, but the political will, policy preferences, and program models contributing to HOW is where we continually fall behind.

As this debate has continued, the growing consensus is that employing inclusive education practices is the most efficacious way to reach all children. Inclusive education practices not only benefit children with disabilities, but also bring all students forward in their learning. The activities and models that support inclusive education are ones that also engage all children with new strategies for learning as well. For example, in 2019, the Alana Institute (with Abt Associates) published a report that looked at more than 285 studies in more than 25 countries. The [ultimate finding](#) was that, “There is clear and consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings can confer substantial short- and long-term benefits” for all students. The data aligns with the right-based view of education and with inclusive education for all. Yet, despite the existing evidence and the growing consensus around inclusive education, policy makers—both in government and donor agencies—continue to ask for [further proof](#) and additional evidence that inclusive education is the way to move forward.

## Accept and Use Evidence Base We Have, Instead of Asking for Additional Proof

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Although this first recommendation sounds short and simple, it is perhaps the most difficult to accept due to ever-evolving demands on government resources, resulting in the need for continued advocacy for inclusive education. The recommendation requires acknowledging that the existing evidence base is both significant and sufficient, instead of continuing to retest ideas in the absence of materially new data or conditions. It requires us to conclude that even if we have not tested an idea within all specific and individualized education ecosystems, that there have been enough tests resulting in substantial proof points to allow for data-driven acceptance of the impact of inclusive education for all learners.

This recommendation specifically calls on us to:

- **Research *how* not *what*.** The main reason we recommend that policy makers use the evidence base that exists is because of the level of cost and human capital required for expenditure in research of this magnitude. Children have a right to education, whether our evidence says they benefit or not, or whether the models we use are optimal or perfect in implementation. As we move away from funding research on the value of inclusive education, we free time and resources to focus on answering the more pressing question: **“How do we operationalize inclusive education?”** Research into this second question will help us to test different methods, posit new technical additions, and learn what levers we need to move to make the most cost-effective decisions. For example, research is still needed on which teacher training methods are most effective at enabling teachers to use inclusive practices in the classroom; and at the macro-level, what are critical elements of an inclusive teacher training module.
- **Focus on shift in mindset.** If we accept that inclusive education models **are** the best way forward, we can then focus attention on shifting mindsets to orientation around inclusive education in practice. To do this, we need to shift away from asking how to teach groups of students differently, because of their abilities, and instead focus on how we can best help all children learn. Of fundamental importance, the [evidence indicates](#) that if this question can be answered for students with disabilities or students facing social exclusion, then their peers will also benefit. This is important to help policy makers avoid creating or accepting false dichotomies—the question is not a yes-or-no question about supporting inclusive education; or a choice between inclusive education or segregated education. The question is: how can we best support all learners?

# 05 | Secure Better Questions, Better Data, Better Decisions



*Ask better questions to gather better data around who is included and excluded in current education systems; and then use this better data for better decision-making.*

## Ask Better Data Questions

The collection of data should never be the end result of an activity, but should always be one of the critical parts of the process in decision making on policies, programs, and practices. ‘Dead’ data, insufficient data, or ‘noisy’ data all contribute to confusion, apathy, or a tendency to replace priorities with easier and quicker program wins. When government resources can’t meet all proposed priorities, the system reforms most at risk are those that don’t have consistent, verifiable means of quantifying real-time impact. With inclusive education becoming a global priority, research studies and supporting data sets are more available. But more data doesn’t mean better data, and often doesn’t translate into better decisions.

While there is a compelling evidence base that inclusive education is the goal, there is not enough data to help suggest and outline the most strategic and sustainable ways to operationalize it. At the same time, it must be recognized that exclusion is fundamentally caused by barriers that prevent students from participating fully, not from any learning disability itself. This [important distinction](#) changes the way we think about what data we have to collect, how to analyze results, and where to link research with program recommendations.

Data need to help answer critical questions such as those that follow:

- What are the current barriers and societal issues that are preventing all students from participating fully in the education system?
- Do students in some regions or locations need more resources, services, or accommodations than others?
- How many teachers have been trained using inclusive education principles such as universal design for learning techniques? What additional support staff might need to be available to ensure implementation of universal design for learning is successful? What, if any, specialized teacher training is necessary?
- What are the main stakeholder groups and where are they?
- What are the current tests scores for students with disabilities and for those who are socially excluded?

- What are the number of students with disabilities and/or are socially excluded in schools? How many students who are disabled and/or socially excluded are out of school?
- Does the national education system have laws and policies that ensure and advance inclusive education?

Without the answer to these and similar questions, policy makers are making decisions without strategic evidence, leaving inclusive education vulnerable to financial and operational cuts. As policy makers grapple with rising populations, increasing sectoral needs, constricting economies and higher fiscal demands, decisions around programming strategies and budget allocations require even greater levels of supportive evidence.

## The Right Questions Will Generate the Right Data

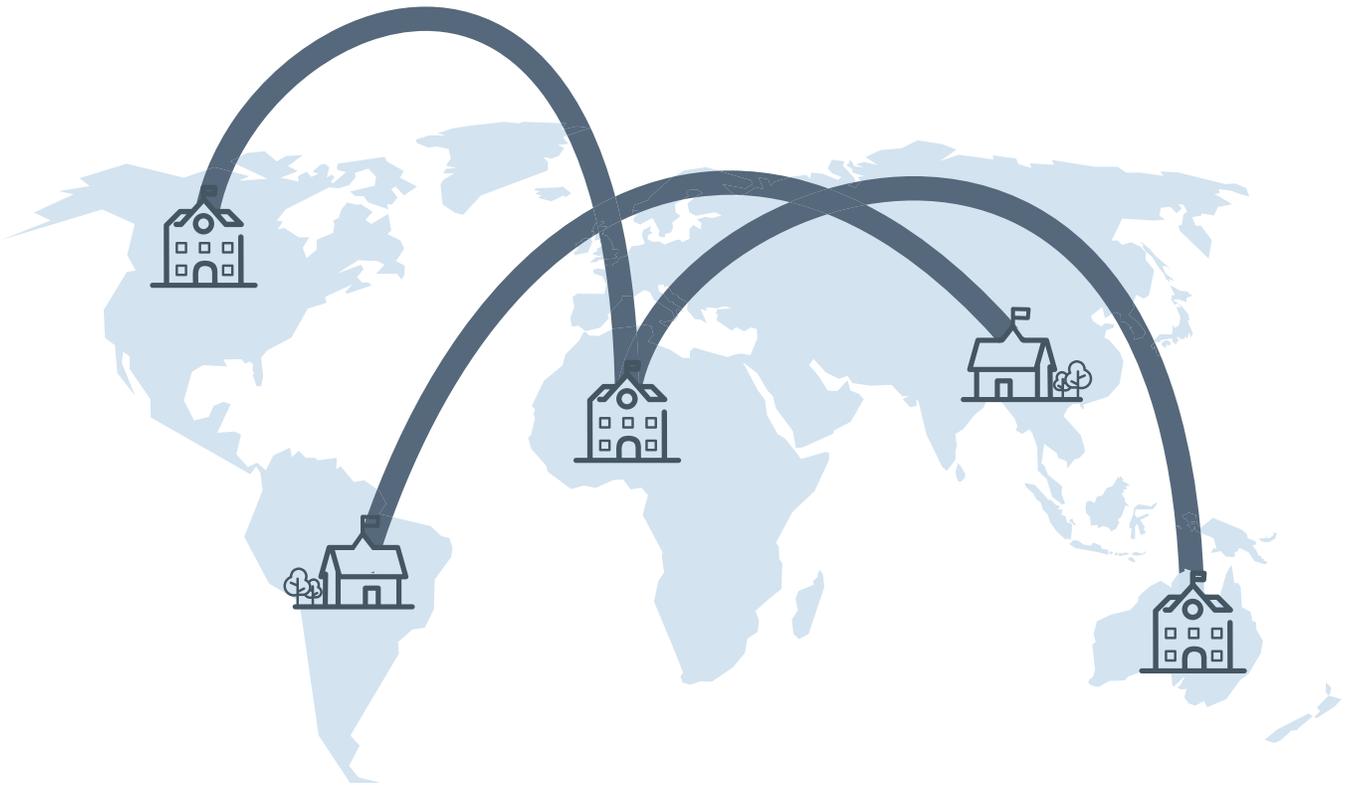
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It needs to be kept in mind that data is a tool that supports the work towards inclusive education. Gathering data is not the end goal itself, it helps ensure that the work is on the right track, whether setting and updating national policies, or designing donor-funded projects. To make the most of data, keep the following in mind:

- **Measure learning, not just inclusion.** Within inclusive education, our objective in gathering and analyzing data is to “determine how the student is smart, rather than how smart the student is, and to understand barriers keeping a student from their own success, rather than what limits the student has. [This approach establishes](#) a personal learning profile, revealing what the student has and has not yet learned.” In this process, changing the [phrasing of a question](#) can help make a dramatic difference. This type of analysis can lead to use of effective tools, such as Individualized Education Programs, that help reduce barriers. The goal is not to only measure the level of inclusion in schools, but also to measure a student’s learning outcomes and ensure that every student—regardless of ability or identity—is receiving equitable access and quality of education.
- **Geographic and demographic data.** Inclusive education systems will vary by location. Sameness comparisons can help national and local governments review pilots, assess activities, identify barriers, and share lessons learned. Accessing data from communities and sub-groups in other parts of the world to analyze impact and help encourage policy and program changes is an effective way to save both money and resources. In an increasingly globalized world, governments and practitioners can leverage that information. They can look to lessons learned from other systems that operate like them, serve the same type of populations, and cater to the same intersectional issues, instead of solely referencing the experiences of neighboring communities. Access to this information requires data to be interlaid with geographic and demographic information to ask smarter questions.

## Connecting Communities with Similar Challenges

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- **Knowledge generation and sharing.** Data is only useful when it's in the hands of stakeholders as they are making decisions. Decisions on who the research audience is must be decided at inception, forcing the design of research and the flow of data to be responsive to the needs of policyholders and program operators. As we think about how education data is used and the decisions and discussions that result from data reports, policy makers may have a variety of important reasons to collect and share data, including the following:

*a. Data collected to measure against national and international commitments that countries have made.* For example, if the Ministry of Education has an established inclusive education policy, then all the education actors should be collecting data that measures progress against this policy.

*b. Data that helps make the “business case” for inclusive education.* While we recommend accepting the existing evidence base for inclusive education and focusing on funding implementation, effective pre-identification of data needs can still support continued and strategic collection. When governments and donors

are strengthening policy and building budgets, education stakeholders should be asked to justify investments in the system. To be prepared to advocate for financial allocation, policy makers should consider what data they need to build this business case ahead of time, so it is incorporated into data collection efforts up front. Of particular interest to government and donors is the sustained impact of programming on students' quality of life over the long term. Showing the impact that education activities have on certain subsets of the population can greatly improve support for their rollout. Activities may include tracking students after they graduate from school, so data such as employability rates and income potential can be measured and measuring the impact on the family (economic and social participation) when a child with a disability enrolls in school.

*c. Data around “soft” returns beyond the pure business case.* Education stakeholders often discuss positive, [non-economic benefits](#) that students gain from inclusive education. For example, educators will speak about seeing an increase in confidence among students; the impact that inclusive education has on a parent's life and livelihood; how learning inclusive teaching principles help teachers be overall better teachers; and how inclusive education helps to build empathy, trust, and respect across communities. We know that stakeholders want to share and hear these stories, and the evidence behind them, as they make the case for improved policy. Policy makers should encourage and require that the type of data that measures these “soft” indicators are also regularly collected and shared.

*d. Data that supports and ensures the do no harm mandate.* A critical element for policy makers to keep in mind is to mandate that anyone collecting and sharing data employs [do no harm principles](#) that avoid labeling students (either as having a disability or labeling them as an outsider or with a particular identity group) and that the data collection and sharing process does not expose students to additional stigma or societal censure through that labeling process.

*e. Data to empower and inform.* Information gathered about specific students can also have a positive effect. In many settings, mothers are often “blamed” for a child's condition or learning barrier. Data and science can dispel these cultural myths and inform families and communities that the experiences of their children are in fact experiences shared by the global community and not the “fault” of a parent or caregiver. Data can also empower families to seek resources to make schools more accessible. In most countries, inclusive education takes form only with the leadership of organic and authentic advocacy movements. This said, there is work to be done in reconciling the benefits of this and the principle of do no harm in labelling a student as these approaches raise competing issues.

We also strongly endorse [the resources and tools](#) shared by the Washington Group on Disability.

## 06 | Consider Financing



*Discuss budgets and funding from the beginning to create sustainable change.*

### **To Reform Education Systems Sustainably and Systemwide, Financing Must be Addressed**

Historically, governments and donors have largely funded demonstration or pilot projects to build the evidence base for inclusive education. As of publication of this paper, only a small number of countries have committed the necessary financial resources to begin work on building inclusive systems.

There are a number of models that countries currently use to fund inclusive education. In some, funding is tied to a specific student, an arrangement that allows for accountability—practitioners can ensure that money is spent on specific children to support specific accommodations. At the same time, it means that some support services become cost prohibitive. For example, if a student needs a speech therapist, a trauma counselor, or second-language support—the cost to hire a specialist for just one student is too high. If the school district was able to hire resources to support multiple students through pooled budgeting, they would be able to expand the accommodations they could offer to students. These [pooled resources](#) also would help to avoid stigmatizing children by labeling specific students as needing additional support. Pooled funding, however, does decrease student-level accountability. For example, how do we know that a child's accommodation needs are being prioritized appropriately? How do we prevent school districts from funding the least expensive services or services going to the student who requires the easiest support, instead of to the student who has the greatest need? How do we ensure that the student from a marginalized community is being treated equitably and that other students from other communities are not being prioritized?

Implementers should consider different options for funding education and take the following questions into consideration:

1. What percentage of the overall national budget is currently allocated for education? ([International benchmarks](#) recommend that at least 4 to 6 percent of budgets go toward education.)
2. How is education funded overall? What are the specific ways that education is funded in that country?
3. What is the level of devolution in the country you are working in?
4. How is the education budget developed? Which ministry has the responsibility for developing the budget? Which ministry approves the budget?
5. How are salary and non-salary costs budgeted for? Are salary and non-salary costs segregated into different streams?
6. Are funds allocated for inclusive education in the national budget disbursed in full to the appropriate departments?
7. What is the long-term cost vs. benefit analysis? How much is gained in terms of economic output and other decreased costs by investing in excluded children as students? What is the cost of exclusion over an individual's lifetime?
8. How do governments and education systems engender all-community support to increase resources for inclusive education, and how does the global education community help them make the case that inclusive education benefits all students?

Acknowledging that the approach that policymakers take will differ based on the answers to the questions above, some overall recommendations follow:

- **Embed solutions within existing systems.** Overall, solutions must be locally led and locally driven, making sense within the political context and the overall governance structures of each country. To do this, we need a broader spread of stakeholders engaged in the funding discussion. To enable more comprehensive and sustainable solutions, we need to critically engage education specialists in this discussion and plan for a governance and finance systems solution.
- **Support advocacy work around funding.** Policy makers should engage disabled persons organizations and advocacy and support groups—including parents of children with disabilities or those who are socially excluded, ensuring they are an active part of this funding conversation. Supporting local advocacy work may require training or toolkits for local organizations that don't have access to information on the complexity of government funding. Education and training are particularly critical as transparency and citizen engagement in budgeting has declined in the last 10 years, accordingly to the International Budget Partnership's [Open Budget Initiative](#). Research [finds](#) that “not a single country out of the 115 surveyed offered participation opportunities that are considered adequate (a score of 61 or higher). The average global score is just 12 out of 100, with 111 countries having weak scores (lower than 41). Without opportunities for citizens' active participation—particularly citizens from marginalized or vulnerable groups—budget systems may only serve the interests of powerful elites.”

- **More responsive budgeting options.** Many education systems currently budget on annual cycles, systems that work well for budgeting known and recurring costs, such as salaries, but are restrictive to funding changes. To address this issue, there are a number of options open to policy makers, including:



**Medium-term expenditure frameworks.** This is an [integrated model](#) of budgeting that pulls together policy, planning, and budgeting, focusing on a medium-term perspective involving budgeting activities for multiple years at once. A key feature of [this format](#) is that it involves both a top-down and bottom-up process that engages more stakeholders in the budgeting process and encourages more cross-sectoral and cross-agency collaborations.



**Performance or results-based budgeting.** As we come to agreement about existing evidence and prioritize data we want to collect moving forward, donors should pull back from funding particular approaches and focus on funding learning outcomes (and not just the percentage that achieve a certain grade level benchmark)—leaving stakeholders (such as local education systems) with a much larger opportunity to find the operational models that best serve their particular students. This, of course, requires coming to a broad consensus on what we mean by success, and how we plan to measure success in a way that does not punish students for low test scores. The only way to come up with these formulas is through broad stakeholder engagement.

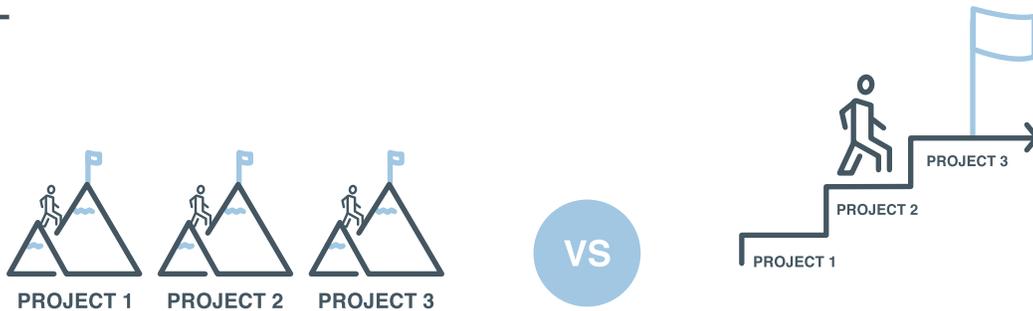


**Project or initiative funding.** At the same time, policy makers should consider special initiatives that must happen to achieve inclusive education—and fund those. Having a foundation of flexibility that allows for specially funded initiatives allows for vital projects such as capital improvement to expand access. For example, if schools need to build access ramps or if a community needs to build an additional school to accommodate an inflow of displaced persons, the money for that can be budgeted as a project budget. Special funding allocation could also assist in offering instruction in languages that are indigenous to specific regions or communities.

- **Fund beyond a project.** Policy makers and donors should also work together to think beyond “project” support, adjusting the two- to five-year timelines that we usually use for project-funded work. Instead, donors and implementers should work together to address issues of inequity within the context of a larger framework that looks at all education through the lens of inclusion. Changing the timeline and framework will mean better sequencing of activities so that each set of activities builds on top of the previous ones. It will also mean that we allow greater time for advocacy efforts to work and for changes in critical elements such as teacher training and curriculum reform to be implemented.

## Breaking the Project Cycle

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**Thinking long term.** Finally, as the Costing Equity Report, the [USAID Disability Inclusive Education How-to Note](#), and other documents have so clearly laid out, investing in education for students with disabilities, or those who are socially excluded from schools, has significant returns on investment in the long term. These long-term returns, such as increased future employability (of children with disabilities), increased capability for selfcare, reduction in stress on the school system for separated classrooms should be considered—and costed—when discussing funding for education.

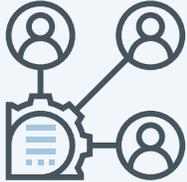
## Implementation That Sticks

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Setting policy correctly is only the first step. And in many contexts, we already have progressive, thoughtful policies on paper that remain just that—on paper, but not in practice. The next critical step is to implement recommendations through specific steps that include engaging stakeholders, sharing information, and working all the way to the classroom and community level. Below are recommendations for implementers working on the frontlines of education. These do not represent an exhaustive list—rather additional, critical issues for implementers to keep in mind as they design and implement education programming.

# Prioritize Stakeholder

## 07 | Engagement



*Better engage a broad range of stakeholders to build support for inclusive education.*

### Accepting “All Means All” as Policy is Only Half the Work

In some instances, because of how the current education systems around the world are set up, caregivers, educators, and often students themselves currently prefer segregated or integrated models for education. Their experience in integrated learning environments has often been negative. Due to the nature of the existing system, they are supportive of siloed learning approaches, based upon specifically identified disabilities. As we continue to expand the evidence base around the benefits for inclusive education, and policy makers work on policy-level change, implementers also need to work together with stakeholders and communities to operationalize “all means all” so that inclusive education moves from a policy talking point to practical reality for students. To truly operationalize an “all means all” philosophy of inclusive education, we must create broad-scale change that engages students, parents, caregivers, and communities. As we do this, we need to ensure that new, inclusive education models are just that—inclusive of all voices and built on understanding the requirements, challenges, and opportunities of the communities, as well as the students they are meant to serve.

To build a broad base support for inclusive education, we recommend the following actions:

- **Shift mindsets.** We need to focus on shifting mindsets, including through extensive social and behavior change campaigns. Having the full support of local stakeholders most pertinent to education is critical for grounding approaches, introducing new tools and realizing plans and research. Social behavior change communication campaigns are a critical tool in the arsenal of education and empowerment. In most target communities we serve, engrained belief systems often support negative practices that result in exclusion of certain groups due to entrenched theories, folklore, or religious beliefs. These beliefs often perpetuate isolation of girls, pregnant girls, children with disabilities, children of different castes, religions, or lower-serviced households. With beliefs so firmly entrenched in culture and common practice, extensive, multilayered forms of communication



## The Vapostori Apostolic Sects

In Zimbabwe, almost 35 percent of the population adhere to the practices of the Apostolic Church, colloquially called the Vapostori. These sects often restrict girls from attending school, do not allow mothers in labor to go to hospital, and often support forced fasting and genital mutilation. These cultural practices, while incredibly detrimental, are entrenched in society.

- Improving Girls Access through Transforming Education (IGATE)



**Ubuntu** is part of the Zulu phrase “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,” which literally means that a person is a person through other people.

**Ubuntu** has its roots in humanist African philosophy, where the idea of community is one of the building blocks of society. Utilizing the ubuntu belief of how all are intertwined to each other is a critical way to show local Zulu communities how practicing inclusion is inherent to their culture and history and how it builds on their own IKS.

and expression that target all levels of society are critical. Households of different socio-economic status, religion, literacy levels, or geographic location, as well as members within those households, all engage with media and messaging in different ways. Due to wholesale change being needed at all levels for inclusion to be truly embraced, messaging must be varied in mode of delivery and [consistent in content](#).

- In addition, a strategic communications campaign will not merely replace entrenched beliefs that are negative, but will investigate, identify, and highlight existing cultural beliefs that do support inclusion and promote equality in service to all. [Indigenous knowledge systems](#), when used positively, can truly transform cultural activity and can foster internal, local, and indigenous support for education, rather than a widespread feeling of an external injection of foreign practices, often seen as not sharing the same values of the host communities and country. Messaging must target and engage all levels of the community. For example, to introduce sign language to children who have a hearing disability, we must first work with parents and communities on understanding the importance of it as a form of communication. Another example involves full integration of a student with a specific cognitive disability in a standard classroom: through inclusive education methodologies such as peer to peer and group learning, a child who is a stronger reader can help a child who struggles with reading, giving both a chance to teach and learn, and a sense of belonging and confidence—at the same time the child with a reading disability receives additional in-class support, such as extra time for reading, use of alternatively leveled materials, and one-to-one teacher support. As we work to shift mindsets, it's [critical to communicate](#) the wide range of benefits that students will receive from inclusive education environments, including improved learning for all students, increased future potential earnings, stronger community ties, and an expanded culture of respect that goes far beyond the classroom.
- **Build a shared vocabulary.** Implementers should carry out activities to build a common vocabulary with their communities, instead of having an outside “expert” come in and tell a community what will happen, using jargon or words that are unfamiliar. Having a common vocabulary that is built up in a participatory manner ensures that everyone has a common understanding and helps give stakeholders the words they need to advocate for themselves and their children. This common understanding and shared language usage are

critically important in inclusive education, which is very broad and covers many students with different needs. Utilizing local language sources and building upon community beliefs or phrasing helps with immediate understanding and buy-in. African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American cultures all have such strong foundations in culture that give way to an ease in interpreting and promoting shared values and vocabulary. Examples of this tool include: having communities discuss how identity is approached and valued in their communities and what it means to “belong,” and leading communities in together defining what it means to be disabled, which results in [helping communities to arrive](#) at a social model definition of disability (focusing on the barriers that exist in society and how to reduce those barriers to ensure full and equitable participation). Developing a shared vocabulary helps people explore concepts around what inclusion means in local languages and allows for connotation and context to also be discussed.

- **Representation matters.** We cannot operationalize “all means all” without meaningfully involving people with disabilities and those who are socially excluded in the process. This must go beyond engaging people to collect information but must also create opportunities where they can contribute their knowledge and experiences through a beneficiary-centered design process. We need to engage with established disabled persons groups and networks, and identity-based groups that represent those who are socially excluded. We also need to reach beyond formalized visible actors to informal groups and networks that include those not be involved in formal organizations (marginalized minority language and ethnicity groups or students from a lower socio-economic ladder). All must truly mean all for a genuine, authentic, sustainable solution to be fully adopted.
- Current practice is often to convene a focus group with a widely recognized organization or hold interviews with socially excluded groups as part of the process. We need to shift this practice to one that ensures our work centers on not just engages these voices, not just engages them in preliminary or minimal ways. In development and implementation, we must co-convene meetings with the stakeholders who are most affected, and regularly assess their voices and viewpoints. Ensuring real representation exists at all levels, practitioners should employ a human-centered design approach in design and dissemination.

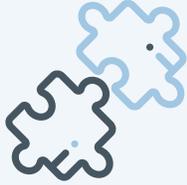
**Engaging with caregivers.** It’s a universal truth that parents and caregivers want what’s best for their children and can be their most powerful advocates. Parents also don’t want their children to be used as guinea pigs in a design that has not yet been fully tested. If we want sustainable change, we need to make the evidence base available to caregivers and listen to what they want for their children, adding their voices to the voices of students (not replacing them), since students and caregivers may have different opinions about the environments best for learning. To support full engagement, implementers must find avenues for parents and caregivers to be continually involved, including those who may have limited education themselves. Additionally, including caregivers and parents of students without disabilities or those who are socially excluded will also help ensure broad understanding and complete buy-in, [highlighting research and evidence](#) that shows that *all*

students benefit from learning in an inclusive environment. Support for an inclusive system must come from the whole community.

It is also important to connect caregivers with adults with disabilities. While parents want what is best for their children, many parents have their own biases about the experience of a person with a disability or may not fully understand what it means to have a disability. Adults with disabilities can serve as role models for children with disabilities while also providing tips and strategies for parents. Additionally, engaging with and expanding local social protection networks (religious centers in communities, local health clinics, community-level organizations) should be engaged as partners, not competitors, in the process.

- **Data and technology to build community.** Community and a feeling of connection matters. Data can be used to leverage technology and link organizations working on similar issues, at similar stages of advocacy, in similar policy environments, helping organizations around the world realize that they are not alone in their work and identify resources from similar campaigns and initiatives.

## 08 | Apply Universal Design



*Use Universal Design for Learning principles across the board for implementing inclusive education—from teacher to training to classroom support.*

### **Classrooms Do Not Regularly Function in Inclusive Ways**

In many classrooms, the instructional approach is focused on the skills and behaviors of mainstream students. This creates a situation where there are limited boundaries for learning, limited approaches to teaching, and a small range of achievement that is considered acceptable. One concrete way to move from talking about inclusive education as a theory and putting it into action is to apply the principles of [universal design for learning](#), which can be summarized through the following key components:

1. Multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge
2. Multiple means of expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know
3. Multiple means of engagement to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn

The [central defining concept](#) of this approach is that we should treat all students as equal individuals. From there, we can design learning for every student in a way that maximizes their ability to learn and allows us to better support students with different barriers to learning. It also helps us design learning for students who have a different primary language, are affected by trauma, or are marginalized in other ways within their community. In addition, it allows for breadth of instructional approach which supports children with different learning strengths and preferences, critical to promote high levels of learning for all children.

One simple example of universal design for learning in practice is a lesson where students are given different options to present learned information, such as writing a paper or delivering a presentation in spoken or signed language, creating a diorama, or designing some other visual representation. This assignment allows a student to demonstrate mastery of a topic in a way that works best with their learning style. This approach focuses on what

was learned and demonstrated, instead of the student's ability to demonstrate it in a single way. By using this approach, teachers can assess a student's understanding of a topic or mastery of a standard, rather than their understanding of the assessment format.

As implementers incorporate this approach into programs, they should address and integrate this conceptual model into:

- **Pre-service teacher training.** Implementers should incorporate universal design for learning and its core principles into pre-service teacher training so that new teachers enter the workforce ready to incorporate these principles into day-to-day practice. We recommend implementers work with existing teacher training institutions and build buy-in around these principles, as well as working with local experts to create relevant curricula to teach universal design for learning principles to pre-service instructors, so they can pass that understanding onto their pre-service teacher candidates.
- **Model schools.** Implementers should work with local education systems to design and set-up model schools close to pre-service teacher training institutions where experienced teachers apply universal design for learning principles in lesson planning and instruction. This option has two advantages. First, it creates a space for new teachers to see and apply these principles in a school, before they begin their careers as teachers. Second, it creates a space with other education stakeholders—including organizations, local government officials, and caregivers—where they can see the principles in practice. This will help demystify universal design for learning and build buy-in, which in turn will help scale up understanding over time.
- **Classroom-level support.** The universal design for learning approach must be operationalized all the way down to the classroom level for it to be impactful and meaningful. As this is done, there are several realities that teachers will face, particularly during the transition from segregated or integrated classrooms to inclusive classrooms, and teachers need the support to address all of these. Some of these considerations include:



**Additional in-classroom support.** Implementers should consider para-educator or para-health workers to serve as classroom aides and support teachers in providing the type of individualized learning and attention that is a hallmark of the universal design for learning approach, and inclusive education more broadly. Implemented properly, this provides teachers with much needed support while still maintaining overall accountability with them. For identification and selection of these individuals, we recommend looking for placement in existing community-based organizations. We recognize that in many settings these skills do not exist and will need to be developed through investments in vocational training.



### **Ongoing mentoring in teacher knowledge, skills, and management.**

A universal design for learning approach may support more accessible learning for students but also represent a shift in how we need to teach and support teachers. For example, a teacher may have a student who has physical limitations one year; and then a student with a minor learning impediment the next year. As such, we recommend that implementers build ongoing support mechanisms—training, mentoring, and peer learning—that enable teachers to adapt to changing student needs, by asking for and receiving help on unique circumstances as they arise.



**Need for specialists.** In some years and in some cases, teachers and students will need access to specialists—for a potential range of services—from support for students experiencing profound trauma to support for teaching families how to use braille and sign language. As much as universal design for learning can serve as a universal framework to support learning for all children, it is not a panacea that replaces the need for the additional support a specialist can provide. As such, we need to ensure that approaches also include creating the space and option for specialists to continue to be engaged in a student’s learning journey.



**Supporting the environment that works best for students.** The goal of inclusive education is to best support a student’s learning outcomes and in special cases, the best way to achieve that is to continue to maintain separate activities or accommodations, while full integration is pending. For example, students who are deaf and hard of hearing will likely [continue to learn better](#) in schools that teach using the local sign language as the primary language of instruction rather than in a general education classroom. While exceptions may be necessary, it is important to view separate settings, activities, or accommodations as part of a whole education system that is working toward inclusion, and recognize that achieving full inclusion will take vision, time, and planning.

# 09 | Use Appropriate Technology



*Use appropriate technology in a transparent way to better support students.*

## Need for Appropriate—Not Just Latest and Greatest—Technology

Education technology—like technology in other fields—offers the potential to transform the way students learn and teachers teach. For example, assistive technology, such as script programs that change the color of text, can help students manage dyslexia, and distance and online programs can help students who have missed school because of social exclusion or conflict. As technology progresses, even more [exciting opportunities](#) are opening up. For example, personalized learning platforms can help students learn at their own pace; flipped classrooms can allow students to spend as much time as they need on content and give teachers greater opportunity to work with students during class time; and the use of technology can help ensure that socially excluded children have the opportunity to learn in languages they use and understand or use examples and stories that are the most relevant to them.

At the same time, technology has the potential to grow the divide between the haves and have-nots, thereby making exclusion worse. Expensive technological equipment can be cost-prohibitive for communities and individual households, particularly for those who are already socially excluded or have fewer economic resources. Families of children with disabilities are often already paying for medical care and devices and adding costs for learning technology can be an insurmountable barrier.

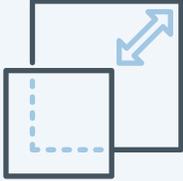
To fully leverage the benefits, and simultaneously mitigate the potential pitfalls of technology, consider the following:

- **Appropriate technology.** We recommend the use of appropriate technology for each student and in each context. In practice, this can mean using a low-tech instead of a high-tech solution and remembering that technology can mean something as simple as a pencil grip that allows a student to better hold a pencil, or a pair of eyeglasses for a student who cannot clearly see text. Each student's individual needs should be evaluated, and the appropriate technological

solution selected. It should be recognized that the most recent developments in technology might not be the only solution. However, in some cases, purchasing older technology is an upkeep risk, where a student may eventually have no access and will either go without (because replacing is not an option) or the school will have to buy it again (a situation the latest technology might have avoided).

- **Inclusive design from the start.** Plan for any inclusive technology for the classroom from the beginning and prioritize identifying technology that will be available to help all students learn better. Advanced planning helps to make sure that students who might already feel different in the classroom aren't further singled out because they have a big, bulky piece of equipment in front of them when their peers have books. Many regular software programs that we use every day—such as Microsoft Word—have accessibility tools built in that can be incredibly helpful for a student with a physical or cognitive disability or for a displaced child trying to learn to pronounce words in a new language.
- **Engage teachers and parents in training.** In many circumstances a teacher will have a technology solution given to them with no sensitization or training. They will understandably feel overwhelmed and push back against the use of the technology and be unable to help the student use it in appropriate ways. Similarly, parents may worry what exposure to a new technology might mean for their child, have questions about negative health or emotional consequences, or not understand the content that their children are being exposed to through digital means. These concerns can be alleviated by introducing technology itself in an inclusive way. Train everyone, including other students in the classroom, on any new technology. Let everyone have a chance to use the new technology, understand what it can and can't do, and to learn the benefits and pitfalls of using it. Appropriate training on technology demystifies its usage and allows for all to be involved, helping caregivers and stakeholders understand the technology and how to appropriately support its use.
- **Transparency to ensure sustainability.** To ensure sustainability and access for multiple users over time, implementers should be up front in disclosing cost considerations and replacement needs with communities so that they are able to appropriately plan for scheduled maintenance and replacement costs. This will help ensure that programs can be sustainable over the long run.

# 10 | Design for Scale



*Design programs for scale from the start through investing in long-term change and thinking about the entire ecosystem.*

As previously recommended, the evidence base for inclusive education should be built through funding and implementing demonstration, pilot programming, and research projects. These projects, with specific start and end dates, often explore critical research questions and have specific conditions that we create to test variables.

First, demonstration programs and programs designed for research require controlled environments and the opportunity to control one variable at a time. However, in full-scale implementation, we can't control the environment in the same way, and therefore results could be misaligned to actual operating environments.

Second, research and pilot programs are expensive, and we cannot understand or fully grasp the true cost of inclusive education by extrapolating costs from pilot programs alone.

Finally, test programs are usually funded by external donors or entities and managed by external stakeholders. Again, this limits our ability to see a systemwide inclusive education approach take hold.

Overall, these conditions mean that we are not truly designing inclusive education programs in a manner that can be scaled and ultimately sustained without external support. To help move these goals forward, we need to start operating these programs in more locally sustained ways. Strategies to achieve this include:

- **Long-term relationship building.** In designing for scale, it's critical to build sound foundations with all relevant stakeholders—particularly disabled persons organizations—at project inception and to intentionally continue to build those relationships and consensus over time. This approach also includes large-scale public information campaigns to engage all community members, even those who are not students or caregivers of students.

- **Invest in teacher training.** Teachers are critical for all work in education and are the true drivers of children’s learning. Pre-service training can be expensive and time-consuming, but effective and proactive inclusive training is critical for designing for scale.
- **Work along the education supply chain.** At every step, implementers should be ready to explore new avenues of work and investigate new supply chains. For example, as we promote teachers learning and teaching in braille, we are likely to discover that there are not many braille books available in most contexts. When we reach this type of check, instead of just moving forward and using sub-par materials, we should work with communities and stakeholders to develop new materials in braille, including working with publishers to publish and distribute those books in the full market. By strengthening the supply chain, sustainable solutions can be created for the long run.
- **Design in phases.** It is understood that shifting an entire education system might require decades. Programs need to be designed and implemented in phases that help move toward the goal of inclusive education, instead of requiring a program to achieve success for a limited number of students in a two- to five-year period. This is particularly true for reaching students who are socially excluded. Success will require using the [twin-track approach](#) that includes both mainstreaming disability throughout activities for development and disability-specific programming in cases where particular supports are required.

Although there is broad-based support for inclusive education, we’re still far from achieving it in most communities around the globe. To move toward these goals, this set of recommendations is presented to help guide how to move beyond the discussion to concrete steps to create inclusive environments for learning.

None of these recommendations (or others that fall outside this discussion) are stand-alone recommendations, but are integral pieces of a multilayered, interrelated system of decision-making, design, and implementation. For example, sustainable pre-service teacher training programs to teach universal design for learning principles cannot exist without discussions about budget and funding these efforts. Community awareness engagement cannot occur without data and evidence to share with those communities. Inclusive education requires addressing a broad range of issues, ideas, policies, and practices together; and none of these conversations can happen in isolation.

This discussion is a continuation of the global dialogue and work that has been ongoing around these issues; and brings together recommendations for the key next steps that will bring us closer to achieving our goal to provide access to quality education for all children.

## OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS



### 01 Apply systems thinking.

Systems thinking – the understanding of how interrelated these issues and their systems are, necessitating a cross-sectoral, cross pollination approach to building systems for inclusive education.



### 02 Do no harm.

Understand the context of policy and intervention decisions to maximize positive and minimize negative impacts.



### 03 Accommodate a twin track approach.

Commit fully to mainstreaming inclusive education, but provide disability-specific programming to individual students who require specific supports and while these inclusive education systems are developed.

## FOR POLICY MAKERS



### 04 Focus on the How.

Trust the evidence base that exists around inclusive education and moving forward, focus building evidence on how to implement inclusive education.



### 05 Secure better questions, better data, better decisions.

Ask better questions in order to gather better data around who is included and excluded in current education systems; and then use this better data for better decision making.



### 06 Consider financing.

Discuss budgets and funding from the beginning to create sustainable change

## FOR IMPLEMENTERS



### 07 Prioritize stakeholder engagement.

Better engage a broad range of stakeholders to build support for inclusive education.



**08 Apply Universal Design.** Use Universal Design for Learning principles across the board for implementing inclusive education - from teacher to training to classroom support. Use Universal Design principles to design accessible environments and products - from transport, school infrastructure to technology.



**09 Use appropriate Information Communication Technology for Education.** Use appropriate technology in a transparent way to better support students



**10 Design for scale.** Design programs for scale from the start through investing in long-term change and thinking about the entire ecosystem.

[Sakil Malik](#) is the Senior Global Practice Leader for Global Education at DAI; [Farah Mahesri](#) is an International Education and Inclusion Consultant; and [Craig Geddes](#) and [Angie Quintela](#) are Senior Global Practice Specialists for Global Education at DAI.

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