



Inclusive Futures

Promoting disability inclusion



Learning from Disability Inclusive Development Inclusive Futures (DIDIF) Education Innovation Portfolio Projects

Author: Anisha Saggu

Introduction	2
Methodology	2
The Socio-Ecological Model (SEM)	2
Overview of each project and activities	4
SMILE Nigeria	4
ECDE Kenya	5
Summary of recommendations	7
What worked well	9
Developing strong and meaningful partnerships	9
Prioritising training, skills development and continuous mentoring for key stakeholders	11
Sensitising and engaging the community on inclusive education	14
Additional promising practices	16



Introduction

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) requested the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk to collate and synthesise findings from across the DIDIF projects within the Innovation Education portfolio. The DIDIF programme is developing several knowledge products for identified themes including health, social protection, **education** and **disability inclusive practices** in 2024-25. These will be developed to help DIDIF's audience use the research, evidence and learning both during and after the programme's completion, as outlined in the programme's Joint Dissemination Strategy. This report summarises the findings from the review, with a focus on the programme's innovation education projects Support Mainstreaming Inclusion to all to Learn Equally (SMILE) in Nigeria and the Promoting Inclusive Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) in Kenya.

Methodology

This research was conducted between September 2024 and January 2025. To meet the objectives of synthesising key findings and learnings from across the DIDIF programme on education, the researchers developed a coding matrix, using key areas of focus as headings to help extract key evidence from the documentation. These included project design, findings against the socio-ecological model (SEM) (described below), education themes such as enrolment, attendance, retention/completion, and attainment, as well as general enablers, barriers, lessons, and recommendations. The coding matrix also examined themes of interest to the FCDO, including political economy, scalability, value for money, and sustainability. Findings that did not align with these headings but provided relevant evidence were also recorded.

The research team reviewed approximately 20 documents, including endline data and evidence, provided by Sightsavers from the programme's two Innovation projects i) the **SMILE project in Nigeria** (2019 to 2023) and ii) the ECDE **project in Kenya** (2020 to 2023). To enhance the findings further, five Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with staff who played a significant role in one or both projects. A validation workshop was held at the end of January 2025 when the first draft had been shared. This workshop involved the researchers, key personnel from Sightsavers—including dissemination coordinators and the Inclusive Education Group—as well as the FCDO team, including the Education Adviser and research partners. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss and validate findings and gather additional feedback.

The Socio-Ecological Model (SEM)

The SEM is a framework used to understand how different levels of influence impact human behaviour and social outcomes. It highlights the interaction between individuals and their environments across multiple levels. In the **education sector**, the model is based on the

idea that the development and well-being of children and adolescents depend on the interaction of biological and environmental factors, including influences from family, community, culture, economy, politics, and legal systems, as well as the services and structures that shape their experiences throughout life, as shown in Figure 1. These perspectives highlight that children, adolescents, and families possess their own strengths, skills, and resources to navigate challenges.

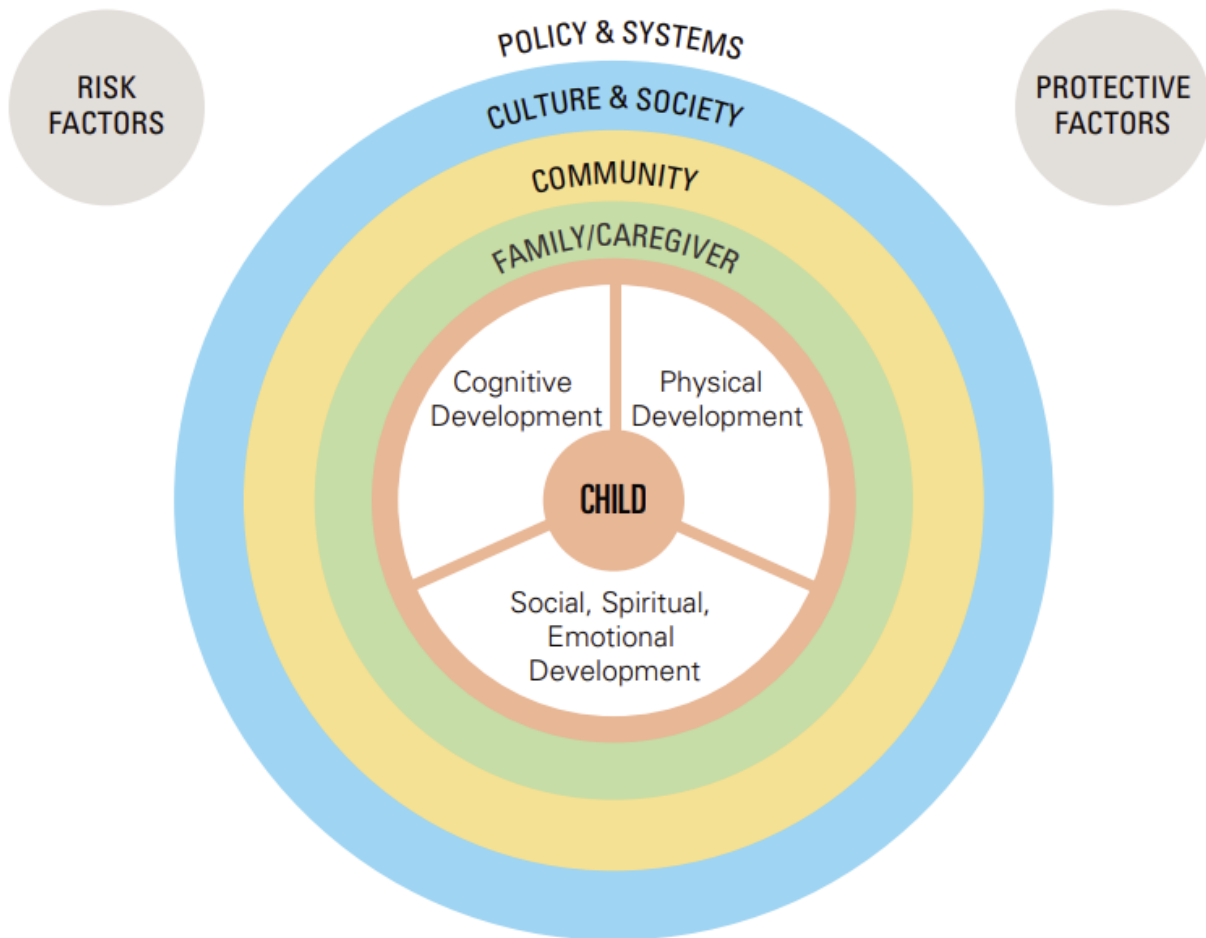


Figure 1: Socio-ecological model (UNICEF)

Overview of each project and activities

SMILE Nigeria

Project timeline: January 2021 – September 2023

Project budget: £799,918

Project location: Jema'a Lower Governmental Area (LGA), Kaduna, Nigeria

The objectives of the project were to create a locally driven sustainable, scalable model of disability-inclusive education through testing of innovation to create evidence of what new Inclusive Education approaches work in Kaduna's public schools and providing evidence for scale-up by government and donors in future education programmes. The project was implemented in eight schools, with the goal of enhancing access to quality education and increasing the involvement of children with disabilities in mainstream Nigerian schools. The overarching focus of the project was **on individuals and communities, systems and facilities, and governance and policy**. While there was a large variety of activities on this project, the overarching activities included:

- **Awareness creation:** Provided information sessions, education and school clubs for children, parents, teachers, and communities on disability rights, child rights, equality, inclusion and empathy, targeted to increase enrolment and retention rates for children with disabilities.
- **Resource and manual development:** Created a variety of manuals and resources on inclusive education, resource mobilisation, school improvement, and child wellbeing to support educators, parents, school-based management committees (SBMCs).
- **Environmental Adjustments:** Conducted accessibility assessments and implemented micro-renovations to improve school inclusivity, for example provision of ramps.
- **Training and skills development:** Trained Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), government partners, teachers, and school committees on inclusive education, resource management, and disability assessment tools, such as the Washington Group Questionnaire (WGQ) Child Functional Module (CFM) to assess unique age-appropriate difficulties of children, providing a first step in identifying disabilities.
- **Safeguarding:** Provided safeguarding training for teachers, head teachers and SBMCs, equipping them with knowledge on developing safeguarding approaches, upholding high safeguarding standards, and managing bullying of children with disabilities.
- **Advocacy:** Engaged in advocacy activities that advanced inclusive education, such as reviewing the National Policy on Inclusive Education to highlight any gaps and areas of improvement, drafting and dissemination of the Kaduna State Disability Law

Implementation Plan, and the integration of inclusive education courses into the Nigerian Colleges of Education curriculum for future educator training.

ECDE Kenya

- Project timeline: January 2021 – December 2023
- Project budget: £1.3 million
- Project location: Homa Bay County and Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

The objectives of the project were to assess the impact of the ECDE provision on learning, educational and developmental outcomes of pre-school children accessing ECDE services in selected schools and surrounding communities in Kenya. The project aimed to evaluate the process of delivery of the inclusive ECDE services perceived by different stakeholders, to generate evidence into the use of ECDE services by children with disabilities in Kenya, and to understand the needs and perceptions of children, their families, teachers, OPDs and others to determine what could work in ECDE services. The project was implemented in 18 pre-primary schools, with nine schools being piloted and nine being controlled. Out of the piloted schools, three schools were in rural parts of Homa Bay County, three in peri-urban Homa Bay County, and three in and around the Kakuma refugee camp in Turkana County. The project also worked with children with complex disabilities, providing them with home-based education with the goal to transition to mainstream schooling. The overarching project activities were:

- **Learner support and home-based education:** Provided training for learner support assistants, who are now well equipped to support children with complex disabilities through home-based education, with the aim of supporting them to transition into school-based education.
- **Training parents and caregivers on positive parenting strategies:** Developed a manual to enhance parenting skills and confidence in supporting children with disabilities. Established support groups for psychosocial support, transport, financial literacy, and referrals. Encouraged education, assessments, and assistive device access, linking families to Kenya's social protection systems for sustainability.
- **Teacher training and professional guidance:** Trained teachers in inclusive Early Childhood Education, developed training manuals for the Teachers Training Institute, and established support groups for ongoing guidance. Quarterly meetings addressed challenges and reviewed school action plans. School-Based Inclusion Teams (SBITs) were formed to advocate for children with disabilities, boost school participation, and improve accessibility.
- **Stakeholder engagement, advocacy and systems strengthening:** Engaged OPDs, government departments, parents, and teachers to promote disability inclusion. OPDs raised awareness and influenced policy through advocacy training. Kenya's

decentralised governance enabled sustainable change, with local governments committing funding to inclusive education. In collaboration with the government, OPDs and education officials were trained on disability advocacy, aligning efforts with national and global priorities. The project partnered with the Ministry of Education to scale up ECDE by integrating it into existing government systems through the Country Integrated Development Plans.

- **Research:** Conducted quantitative research on the educational outcomes of children with disabilities using an adapted IDELA tool developed by Save the Children but adapted to suit children with disabilities, assessing motor development, socio-emotional development, emergent literacy, and emergent numeracy. Conducted qualitative research with children, parents, and teachers on their experiences with inclusive education. Peer researchers with disabilities facilitated focus group discussions.
- **Working in humanitarian setting:** Addressed complex challenges faced in the refugee setting, including tracking children with population mobility, language barriers, and parental reluctance/suspicious to identify children’s disabilities. School feeding programmes were introduced to improve retention, incentivising attendance and engagement.

Summary of recommendations

This analysis of the primary and secondary research on the SMILE and ECDE projects has highlighted a range of key recommendations for future inclusive education projects or the potential scale-up of these two projects within Nigeria and Kenya. To summarise the learnings and recommendations:

- **Utilise existing systems to support local ownership and sustainability.** Conduct a thorough intersectional contextual analysis and engage with a wide range of stakeholders to develop a comprehensive understanding of the environment before designing activities. Leverage existing relationships and structures wherever possible.
- **Develop strong and meaningful partnerships** with diverse stakeholders who have an interest or role in the education system. Ensure all partners have an equal opportunity to contribute, and that their expertise is drawn upon in a collaborative, non-extractive way. Review this document to ensure meaningful engagement with OPDs.
- **Engage and collaborate with OPDs throughout the project cycle**, utilising their expertise in delivering training, advocating for children with disabilities, and amplifying their voices with government officials and policymakers.
- **Prioritise training and continuous mentoring for key stakeholders** to ensure the sustainability and long-term impact of inclusive education initiatives. Training should extend to teachers, head teachers, SBMCs, SBITs, government partners, parents, communities, and OPDs. Assign clear roles and responsibilities, such as SBITs or SBMCs leading accessibility audits and action plans, and OPDs spearheading community sensitisation activities.
- **Provide comprehensive training and support for teachers, head teachers, and administrators** in using WGQ CFM. This will not only enhance enrolment but also boost teachers' confidence in delivering inclusive education and developing tailored teaching plans. Ensure they are properly incentivised and understand the importance of collecting high-quality data through CFM.
- **Establish a steering committee (if not already in place) comprising a diverse range of stakeholders** from the education sector. Provide them with an accessible platform to share concerns, make key decisions, and advocate for change post-project. Equip them with the necessary capacity-building support to mobilise resources effectively. A diverse committee will ensure well-rounded decision-making.
- **Support parents in developing positive parenting techniques** to improve communication and interaction with their children. This will enhance their understanding of how to support their child's needs and encourage school attendance and achievement. Parents of children with disabilities can also play a key role in supporting other parents if equipped with the right skills and knowledge.

- **Address community-level barriers through targeted sensitisation activities.** These interventions are most effective when led by OPDs, community leaders, or religious leaders, making their involvement crucial.
- **Allocate a dedicated budget for initial accessibility modifications and investment in securing government buy-in,** either across multiple schools or through a ‘model’ approach, as demonstrated in the ECDE project. Use project investment to secure government buy-in to complete future or additional renovations or match a project’s investment.
- **Review and adapt policy frameworks to strengthen support for inclusive education,** such as integrating inclusive education principles into the National Teacher Training Curriculum. To ensure sustainability, securing buy-in from policymakers and government officials is essential.

What worked well

The following section discusses key learning and what worked well across the projects. It provides more detail on the above-mentioned recommendations. The aim is to inform practitioners of the key activities that have led to significant or impactful changes within the inclusive education space.

Developing strong and meaningful partnerships

Engaging with multiple stakeholders in a participatory way from the offset.

- **Build strong and meaningful partnerships in the design stage.** Both projects were designed to be participatory, with SMILE undergoing a 12-month participatory planning process. This process involved numerous interviews with different stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of the education system and the level of interest in the planned activities. During this period, key stakeholders were engaged to form a steering committee, comprising of federal and state staff, OPDs, government officials, school heads, and community members. This steering committee became the project's governing body, where decisions on project activities were discussed and made, playing a pivotal role in driving implementation efforts.
- **Establish a steering committee (if not already in place) comprising a diverse range of stakeholders.** A steering committee was established and chaired by an OPD. While challenges were noted regarding the OPD's capacity, the project implementation team worked closely to build the organisation's capabilities, ultimately leading to the successful chairing of the committee. Within the steering committee, different technical working groups were set up to focus specifically on a technical aspect, such as the development of the Inclusive Education Plan and the establishment of an Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) technical group to oversee the project's progress. This model proved effective in ensuring that key skills and expertise were utilised while still engaging a broad range of stakeholders essential to inclusive education in early childhood settings.
- **Work with existing systems to support local ownership and sustainability:** Project implementers also engaged with government parastatals involved in the education system, policymakers, the Local Government Educational Authority, and the Teachers' Institute. By working with a diverse range of stakeholders operating within the Nigerian education system, the project team gained a deeper understanding of the context in which they were working and could adapt activities to fit within the existing system rather than 'reinvent the wheel'. The SMILE project was built on a foundation where inclusive education initiatives in Kaduna already existed. Although these initiatives had not been formalised or legalised, there was momentum and understanding on inclusive education among various stakeholders to advance them through the SMILE project,

which allowed them take full ownership of project activities, ensuring their continuation and sustainability at project-end.

Engage and collaborate with OPDs throughout the project cycle

- **Partner with a diverse range of OPDs and ensure they have a leadership role and equal voice in decision-making and designing.** SMILE strategically collaborated with a large variety of OPDs and individuals with disabilities from inception through to implementation. This collaboration significantly contributed to creating an enabling environment for the project's success and aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) principle of critically and meaningfully engaging people with disabilities. OPDs were actively involved in decision-making processes, participated in quarterly steering meetings, reviewed and developed materials, provided insights into diversity in content and accessible resources, offered advocacy support by working with communities to promote inclusive education and ensure children with disabilities were enrolled in school, and provided communication guidance throughout the programme. The partnership with OPDs strengthened the project by adding legitimacy and credibility, empowering people with disabilities in a participatory and informed manner. This collaboration ensured that interventions were contextualised and addressed the genuine concerns and challenges faced by people with disabilities while enhancing the project's ability to mainstream disability inclusion within the Nigerian context.
- **Ensure OPDs are actively and directly involved in project activities.** OPDs played a central role throughout the project cycle, including during the inception, launch, and quarterly steering committee workshops. They were actively involved in mobilising children for school enrolment, planning sensitisation sessions for parents, teachers, and pupils, raising disability awareness, training ECDE teachers, training School-Based Inclusion Teams, and recruiting and training OPD members in qualitative research methods to conduct Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Homa Bay County. The involvement of OPDs was crucial, as it allowed children with disabilities and their parents to connect with the project and assert their right to education. OPDs also played a key advocacy role, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of children with disabilities were heard and taken into account. Key informants from the ECDE project unanimously agreed that OPD engagement was vital to the project's success, as disability-inclusive programming is only effective when people with disabilities feel their voices and perspectives are actively sought, respected, and valued as equal partners.
- **Ensure OPDs are engaged with any policy reviews and revisions.** The SMILE project conducted a policy review, which significantly impacted the training landscape for Nigerian teachers. It was one of the few education projects in Nigeria to achieve policy reforms at the state level, leading to a review and amendment of the Kaduna Education Policy. This was made possible through OPD engagement and their influence on local and national decision-making.

Partnerships with government departments

- **Work in partnership with government departments to review and revise policies and teaching curriculums to be more inclusive.** Positive impacts were made on SMILE through reviewing the National Policy on Inclusive Education to align it with contemporary practices. This review identified key gaps and areas for improvement, ensuring the policy remained relevant in promoting inclusive education. Additionally, the project drafted and disseminated the Kaduna State Disability Law Implementation Plan, involving multiple stakeholders and government agencies in demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity and the wellbeing of people with disabilities. A key informant highlighted the integration of inclusive education courses into Nigerian Colleges of Education as a key project impact. This initiative equipped future educators with the essential skills and knowledge needed to foster inclusion and diversity within school environments. The strong partnership with the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) supported a systems approach to promote sustainability, given its critical role in the Nigerian education system. The project and the NTI co-developed a module that was subsequently published and made available for use in other states. This significant milestone underscores the importance of establishing strong and meaningful partnerships with key stakeholders to create positive and sustainable outcomes in inclusive education projects.

Ensuring a lasting impact of partnerships

- **Develop strong and meaningful partnerships with a range of stakeholders to have lasting positive effects on project outcomes.** The end of project report highlighted that the partnerships formed with County and National Governments in the ECDE project will endure beyond the project's lifespan due to the strong working relationships established and the goodwill demonstrated by both governments in their support of the initiative. In Kenya, the innovation education project influenced the county governments of Kakuma and Homa Bay to commit over £1.8m to build 250 inclusive ECDE centres and provide specialised staff and learning materials over the period of 2023 – 2027.

Prioritising training, skills development and continuous mentoring for key stakeholders

Across both projects, training and skills development for key stakeholders was a major activity that created significant positive impacts. The SMILE project undertook extensive training initiatives, targeting key stakeholders such as OPDs, government partners, SBMCs, teachers, and head teachers throughout the project cycle. These activities encompassed a diverse range of training initiatives aimed at enhancing participants' skills and knowledge.

Training and mentoring to SBMCs

- **Equip SBMCs with the skills and insights to foster inclusive learning environments.** They were trained to identify and overcome barriers to inclusion, envisioning a school where every learner could actively participate and thrive. SBMCs also received training in resource mobilisation, advocacy, and bookkeeping, enabling them to secure funding to undertake school renovations such as repairing floors, desks, ramps, and water storage containers, thereby creating a more accessible environment. This exemplifies how building the capacity of key stakeholders—who have ownership of creating inclusive environments—can empower them with the skills to advocate for continuous and sustainable improvements.
- **Train and provide ongoing support to steering committee members on advocacy.** For the ECDE project, 21 steering committee members, including individuals with disabilities, received advocacy training. Additionally, OPDs benefited from various capacity-building activities and ongoing support, guidance and mentoring, including training on inclusive education and related topics. This equipped them with evidence-based arguments and strategies to influence educational policies and practices at both local and national levels. OPDs effectively utilised this training in policy advocacy, steering committee decisions, SBITs, and other advocacy programmes. While some OPDs had prior knowledge of inclusive education principles and practices, the training helped address knowledge gaps and establish a common understanding within the project. Strengthening OPDs' capacity for community awareness-raising on inclusive education will continue to have ripple effects in the project areas after the project activities end. Enhancing collaboration with OPDs and building their capacity on inclusive education will generate further positive impacts on similar projects.

Training of Education Officials

- **Train education officials on inclusive education to ensure inclusion is embedded across all education-related areas.** Education officials in Kenya also received training, which was essential to equipping them with the knowledge and skills to apply its principles effectively across all inclusive education-related areas. This training enables officials to embed inclusive education practices seamlessly into their responsibilities, enhancing the overall quality of education and ensuring that every student receives the necessary support for their success.

Provide comprehensive and ongoing training, mentoring and support to teachers and school staff

- **Provide continuous training and support for professional development for teachers.** In both projects, teachers participated in capacity-building activities, including teacher training, achieving significant milestones. Capacity-building initiatives for teachers included continuous professional development, the enhancement of skills and knowledge on inclusive education, and training on how to provide high-quality, comprehensive support to learners with disabilities. This enabled teachers to feel more

confident in delivering inclusive education and supporting children with disabilities, as well as developing and monitoring individualised education plans.

- **Ensure there are support networks and initiatives in place for peer learning and continuous support for teachers.** The Homa Bay County Government recognised the importance and impact of this training and has committed to continuing capacity-building efforts post-project by enabling trained teachers to train others, thereby ensuring the sustainability of this initiative. Capacity-building in the ECDE project has resulted in teachers providing increased assistance to children with disabilities, leading to a more coordinated and effective project. Teachers became more confident in planning and delivering inclusive education and creating Individualised Education Plans (IEPs). However, some teachers were still concerned that they lacked skills and resources to include children with more complex impairments effectively.

Training on using the WGQ CFM and safeguarding

- **Train teachers on how to use the WGQ CFM to screen for functional impairments.** Both projects provided capacity-building training for key stakeholders, including teachers and head teachers, on the use of WGQ CFM to screen learners with functional impairments and encourage caregivers to connect to social protection services for further assessment and enrol them in school. CFM enabled educators to collect information across different functional domains—such as vision, hearing, mobility, self-care, communication, and learning—helping to identify indications or the presence of a disability. The use of CFM not only facilitated child enrolment but also enabled appropriate referrals to essential services. In the SMILE project, 166 children with disabilities were identified in intervention schools using CFM, and 94 of these children were subsequently enrolled. The process of learning and applying CFM also reinforced teachers' understanding of inclusive education and strengthened their commitment to teaching children with disabilities.
- **Ensure there are robust safeguarding measures in place and teachers are effectively and continually engaging with them.** Teachers, head teachers, and SBMCs underwent safeguarding training to equip them with the knowledge and resources needed to develop safeguarding approaches, uphold safeguarding standards, and address issues such as the bullying of children with disabilities. These activities further highlight the critical role of teacher training and capacity-building in fostering inclusive classroom environments, ensuring teachers are more confident and appropriately skilled. As a result of these training initiatives, school environments have become more welcoming and accessible to learners with disabilities.

Supporting and mentoring parents on positive parenting techniques

- Provide parents with training in positive parenting techniques, equipping them with skills in communication and interaction with their children. Lead parent champions have played a crucial role in disseminating key messages. This training has helped parents gain a deeper understanding of inclusive education and has facilitated the transition of

their children into inclusive mainstream schools. Parents are now more actively engaged in parent-teacher meetings, focus groups, and further training sessions to support their children. The impact of this training underscores the importance of involving parents in inclusive education projects, as a supportive and encouraging learning environment at both school and home is essential for success. However, many parents in Kenya faced time constraints due to busy schedules, making it difficult for them to attend and fully engage in parenting training sessions, leading to inconsistent participation. The low literacy of parents can limit support to children at home, and projects have explored adaptations to empower parents to support their child's education, including parent support groups and pictorial curriculums. Poverty can limit parents' time due to the opportunity cost of not working and the high cost of transport in remote areas. There were far less male parents participating in the positive parenting sessions. When conducting training sessions on positive parenting, a strong, enabling environment that supports children with disabilities to learn is important. Projects are exploring ways to support families of children with disabilities, such as connecting families to social protection systems in Bangladesh.

Sensitising and engaging the community on inclusive education

Address community-level barriers through targeted sensitisation activities

- **Thoroughly understand the context which you are working in, including barriers and stigmas present.** In both Kenya and Nigeria, stigma and a lack of understanding around disability remain prevalent, often leading to the exclusion of children with disabilities from education. Limited community awareness about disability has created significant barriers for practitioners implementing inclusive education. These barriers range from families, communities, and schools being unreceptive to disability rights, to parents and teachers doubting whether mainstream schools can meet the needs of children with disabilities. Some parents of children without disabilities fear that their child's education may be negatively impacted by being taught alongside children with disabilities.
- **Address barriers through a range of community sensitisation activities.** Both projects were designed with these barriers in mind and placed a strong emphasis on community sensitisation and outreach activities to raise awareness and address misconceptions. Crucially, OPD representatives played a key role in facilitating community sensitisation activities, leading groups, and ensuring children were enrolled in school by bridging the gap between communities and education. Having a visible presence within the community, with parents and teachers, served as a form of role modelling through demonstrating that children with disabilities have potential to be employed and take leadership roles in important projects.

Hosting awareness-raising events and campaigns

- **Develop a calendar for awareness-raising events and campaigns.** In the ECDE project, 28 awareness-raising events were held to sensitise parents, children, and communities about inclusive education. These events took place through dedicated forums, community gatherings, international awareness days, and programme functions, including forums promoting the enrolment of learners with disabilities in 2022 and 2023, positive parenting training on ECDE disability awareness in 2023, and activities during International Deaf Awareness Week in 2023. As a result of these sensitisation efforts, more than 230 children with disabilities were enrolled across the three years of the project.
- **Engage SMBCs, OPDs and other key stakeholders with campaigns.** The SMILE project also carried out a range of sensitisation activities, with SBMCs playing a key role in specific campaigns encouraging parents to actively participate in the enrolment process for children with disabilities. These campaigns also educated parents on their responsibilities in providing accurate data to support CFM administration. Other sensitisation initiatives included advocacy campaigns in key locations such as mosques, churches, and community centres. These efforts contributed to an improvement in learning outcomes for children with disabilities, which increased from 58% to 63% over two years. Other contributing factors included teacher training, the provision of appropriate instructional materials, consistency in school attendance, and increased parental support following sensitisation efforts. Overall, seven awareness-raising events were conducted by OPDs and local government officials to inform parents and communities about children’s rights and inclusive education.

Looking at disability inclusion and gender intersectionally

- **Understand and incorporate gender-sensitivity within any sensitisation activity.** The SMILE project also incorporated gender-sensitive awareness sessions, specifically targeting parents—particularly mothers—to educate them on disability rights and inclusive education. These sessions highlighted the unique challenges faced by mothers in supporting children with disabilities and provided guidance on addressing their needs and concerns. The project empowered mothers to actively support their children’s educational goals, contributing to greater gender equality in education. Teachers were also trained in gender-sensitive strategies to ensure all students received equitable education in a more inclusive learning environment. By promoting gender-sensitive awareness, training teachers, and engaging with communities, the project worked to eliminate barriers and ensure equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of gender or disability. These efforts have not only improved the lives of children with disabilities but have also contributed to the development of more inclusive and gender-balanced communities. Furthermore, awareness campaigns have had a profound impact on behavioural changes within intervention communities, delivering long-term benefits and laying a strong foundation for the sustainability of inclusive education practices in Jema’a Lower Government Area.

Additional promising practices

Both projects had a wide variety of activities which also contributed to their successes. These are additional activities inclusive education projects should consider enhancing success and ensure that all children with disabilities are able to access education equally and safely:

Improving accessibility in schools

- **Allocate a dedicated budget for initial accessibility modifications and investment in securing government buy-in.** Both projects undertook limited physical accessibility improvements, as the primary objective was to train key stakeholders to sustainably conduct accessibility audits, implement action plans based on these audits, and mobilise resources for accessibility modifications. However, in the initial research carried out by the Institute of Development Studies, inaccessible Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities came up as an issue within schools and something to be considered. One school in Kakuma was selected for intervention, where accessibility modifications were implemented to enhance the participation of children with disabilities. This was designed to serve as a model accessible ECDE centre, allowing the Ministry of Education, the Turkana County Government, and other stakeholders to visit and learn from it when planning future modifications or constructing new ECDE centres. A key informant highlighted the need for greater efforts to enhance accessibility, suggesting that setting aside 5% of project funds could serve as a starting point for accessibility improvements, or to secure government buy-in to complete future or additional renovations or match a project's investment.

Collaboration with key services

- **Actively engaged key stakeholders within the education sector in a positive, sustainable, and meaningful way.** On both projects, this collaboration has strengthened between different services essential for children with disabilities, including physiotherapists in hospitals, therapy providers, and referral services. The projects also supported parents in understanding how to help their children access the appropriate services. Findings from both projects highlight the importance of working within existing referral mechanisms and fostering partnerships among service providers to improve referral rates and better meet children's needs. The Support Service Guide developed on SMILE outlined key services available for children with disabilities, proving invaluable in helping parents navigate specialised services.
- **Ensure different services are aware and engaged with referrals, and that they are handled appropriately.** A key lesson from both projects is that continued use of screening tools such as CFM can facilitate referrals to essential services and increase school enrolment rates. Additionally, a significant learning from the SMILE project revealed that when children with multiple disabilities were identified and referred for further medical assessments, often at subsidised or not cost by the government.

However, many of these children were ultimately turned away or had to pay for the assessments themselves. This issue arose because these medical assessments fell under the Ministry of Social Health rather than the Ministry of Education, which the project primarily engaged with. Projects should ensure they have properly mapped the referral pathways correctly, so children with disabilities and those identified with a disability can be referred to the right place efficiently and effectively. Practitioners must collaborate with multiple government ministries, rather than focusing solely on the Ministry of Education, to ensure children receive comprehensive support across different sectors.

Challenges highlighted within the projects

There were various challenges noted by the key informants, which have been highlighted below:

- At the beginning of the ECDE project, they found there was an over-expectation from community members on what the intervening project would do. Community members, families and children with disabilities initially thought the project would solve specific issues in the communities, benefit financially from the project and that they would be building lots of classrooms. While this made it difficult to start, the project managed expectations and reaffirmed that the work would provide long-lasting impacts through capacity building and ownership of activities.
- With certain stakeholders, particularly politicians, there was a large focus on tangible results rather than the long-term benefits gained through capacity building. This occasionally made it difficult to generate buy-in from government members.
- Both projects were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning there were many delays and initial trainings had to be delivered remotely. While there were project staff delivering the training in one room, it was the least preferred way of delivering.
- Both projects were designed as inclusive education initiatives, but they did not address certain barriers to education for children with disabilities, such as poverty reduction and economic empowerment. During a KII, it was recommended that future inclusive education programmes adopt a holistic approach by addressing both education and economic empowerment. This approach recognises the intrinsic link between barriers to education for children with disabilities and the financial instability or poverty experienced by their families.
- In terms of cost efficiency on projects similar to this, it is important to note that half of the costs spent were during the start-up and piloting activities, such as creating training manuals and organisational costs. However, if ministries, practitioners and others seeking to scale this project and were conducting a budget impact analysis, it would be clear that these initial costs would be much less, given the production of these has already occurred.



ADD International | BBC Media Action | BRAC | Humanity & Inclusion
The Institute of Development Studies | International Disability Alliance
Light for the World | Sense International | Sightsavers | Social Development Direct

www.inclusivefutures.org

