



Knowledge hub - Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Gender and inclusive education participatory research in West Africa

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Sierra Leone, Senegal, Cameroon

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

Sightsavers Senegal, Anthrologica UK, Sightsavers Sierra Leone, Sightsavers Cameroon

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

Gender, children with disabilities, inclusive education, West Africa, community-based participatory research

6. What makes it a best practice? *

Sightsavers research contributes knowledge and evidence on disability inclusion in education to refine a contextually appropriate and gender-responsive approaches to supporting education for girls and boys with disabilities.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

i) Which population was affected?

ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?

iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *Girls and boys with disabilities in West and Central Africa (WCA) have the same rights to quality inclusive education as all children, enabling them to actively participate in learning and society. However, children with disabilities are largely excluded from education and those who do attend school face large 'disability gaps' in learning outcomes and attainment due to systemic inequalities, poor quality teaching and governance. Understanding the different barriers to inclusive education and how they are experienced by girls and boys with disabilities is critical to developing an effective response. Inadequate inclusive education policies, plans and budgets, inappropriate teaching methods and teaching materials, negative attitudes of education professionals and communities, lack of accessible infrastructure and equipment, as well as household poverty are key barriers to education for children with disabilities. This is particularly important for girls with disabilities, who often face exclusion and marginalization in education due to social norms and cultural bias around gender and disability. The GEM 2020 Gender Report confirms that efforts to reduce gender disparities have resulted in significant increases in school attendance, but girls with disabilities continue to be left behind. Girls with disabilities often struggle to get to schools that are far from their homes. At school, girls often face a lack of accessible toilets and hygiene assistance, while special devices and services are often given to boys first.

This research looks at three projects addressing this: 1) Inclusive Education in Cameroon (Irish Aid) 2) Inclusive Education in Senegal (Irish Aid); and 3) Education for All in Sierra Leone (Education Commission), where the overall goal was to demonstrate a cost-effective way of educating children with disabilities, which could then be implemented on a national scale. Community-based participatory research (CPBR) has been built into each of the three project designs, with a gender lens used in the data analysis. There are three phases to the CBPR research:

2017/8: in time for children, parents and teachers to inform the intervention design

2018/9: once interventions are in place within the schools

2020/21: towards the end of the education projects

Co-led by Sightsavers research team, community researchers and academic partners the research seeks to understand the experiences of boys and girls with disabilities in accessing and remaining in education, understand the experiences and perspectives of teachers and of parents/carers of children with disabilities relating to inclusive education and explore the implications of these experiences and perceptions on boys' and girls' participation and quality of learning. The main research questions: 1) How do children with disabilities, their parents and teachers experience disability in schools partnering with us in Sierra Leone, Senegal and Cameroon? and 2) How can their voices help to shape interventions to increase participation and quality of learning of boys and girls with disabilities?

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

*

Sightsavers country offices in Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Senegal worked with partner schools and community actors as part of the existing Inclusive Education programmes. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) methods were used to record the experiences of girls and boys with disabilities aged between 7-15 years, their teachers and guardians. Approximately 300 participants across the 3 countries were involved including 30 trained community researchers - teachers and parents of children with disabilities – who collected data through 48 Focus Group Discussions in 16 schools. They were also involved in designing research questions, analysing data and agreeing findings. Community researchers were and remain central to the process of disseminating the findings with those involved. Three phases of research spanned in line with their respective projects: Phase 1: Before details of interventions are in place; Phase 2: Once project work is established; Phase 3: Towards the end of the project. Currently Sierra Leone phases are complete whilst Cameroon and Senegal were delayed by Covid-19. Children with disabilities, parents and teachers were asked their experiences on what their daily life looks like, barriers to participation, success and challenges, their ideas for change and how they were experiencing the project interventions.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

The research highlighted several interesting observations. Gender findings differed across the 3 countries, for example in Senegal girls with disabilities experienced more psychological challenges with their disability than boys, whereas in Cameroon girls seemed to be more at ease, confident and valued. In Sierra Leone, teachers consistently identified girls being more vulnerable than boys to sexual harassment and exploitation but also more academically capable. Several contrasting findings from discussions were raised within the same schools and countries, highlighting the complexities within the same context, or where gender and types of disability intersect. The findings indicate important considerations for gender transformative education programming, policy and planning. Gender and disability intersect in a complex way and the impact of both needs to be recognised at all stages of an education process, i.e. sector planning, teacher training, curriculum development, supervision. We need to stay present to complexity - avoid homogeneity (such as complexity of gender and type of disability). Both disability and gender also intersect with social and cultural context - it is critical not to make assumptions about their impact on education; collecting context specific evidence is important. There are factors that disadvantage both boys and girls with disabilities and need to be addressed e.g. access to assistive devices, need for family support, transport to school, community stigma. Gender plays an important role in determining children's engagement with education and needs to be considered in developing school curricula and school environment eg. resilience and confidence is important for both boys and girls but may be manifested differently.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

Although the research was conducted across three countries, within each country the study sizes were relatively small, therefore generalisations cannot be drawn. Further research is needed about perception of disability, self-stigma and behavioural difficulties, as evidence is not consistent across settings. Further research is needed to support an evidence-informed approaches to inclusive education for girls.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

This research illustrates the important value the lived experiences of boys and girls with disabilities, their parents and teachers at the schools can have to shape inclusive education interventions. This research has empowered community members to contribute and share expertise, decision-making and ownership, and enabled key education staff (teachers, directors, inspectors) to meaningfully participate and develop disability and gender action plans. Overall to build inclusive education systems across the 3 countries, it will be important to address the challenges at multiple levels by working on the ground with local schools and communities to tackle harmful social norms and cultural bias towards gender and disability, whilst also supporting the ongoing inclusive education policy development and advocating for ways to strengthen the education system’s approach to inclusion and gender equality.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

Inclusive primary education in West Africa through a gender lens

<https://research.sightsavers.org/project/inclusive-primary-education-in-west-africa-through-a-gender-lens/>

Policy brief: Promoting inclusive education for girls and boys with disabilities in West and Central Africa <https://research.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2021/01/Policy-Brief-EN-Inclusive-Education-in-West-and-Central-Africa.pdf>

Policy brief summary <https://research.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2021/01/Policy-Brief-Summary-EN-Inclusive-Education-in-West-and-Central-Africa.pdf>

Inclusive Education for Girls with disabilities: Two-part learning series

<https://www.ungei.org/event/webinar-series-gender-disability-education>