

Innovation in inclusive education



Leonard Cheshire's ground-breaking inclusive education project in Kenya, funded by the UK Department for International Development's 'Girls' Education Challenge', was launched in 2014. Since then it has been improving access to mainstream primary schools, improving retention and learning outcomes for 2,180 girls with disabilities across 50 primary schools in the lake region of Kenya. This is a catalytic initiative in a country where more than 400,000 children with disabilities are out of school (according to a study of the Kenyan Institute of Education 2017). In 2017 the project moved into a new phase, working with 2,250 girls and 250 boys with disabilities to ensure children have a smooth transition from primary to secondary school, or in some instances to vocational training. The project is now working with 50 primary schools, 25 secondary schools and 8 vocational training institutes.

Why inclusive education?

All children have the fundamental right and ability to learn, irrespective of their individual differences and needs: this is the core principle and assumption underpinning inclusive education. We know children with disabilities are very often left behind. Leonard Cheshire's primary focus is to ensure that effective practices are in place to enable children with disabilities to access quality education in a mainstream school close to their home and their families.

Inclusive education is

'...a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education.'
UNESCO

Globally the number of children with disabilities that go to and stay in school is low. **Sustainable Development Goal 4**, which is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", sets several targets to be reached by 2030. The following are particularly important:

- Substantially increasing the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- Eliminating gender disparities in education
- Ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including people with disabilities and children in vulnerable situations

Leonard Cheshire, together with the Department for International Development (DFID) and other major donors such as Comic Relief, Dubai Cares and the European Commission, helps contribute to the realisation of the vision of Sustainable Development Goal 4 through our inclusive education programme.

Why focus on girls?

Because of common social norms and cultural biases around gender and disability, girls with disabilities are among the world's most marginalised groups in society. As a result, girls with disabilities have limited educational opportunities. Where girls are enrolled in school, there is a greater risk of them dropping out compared to boys, due to gender-related challenges.¹

'Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all.'

**World Education Forum:
Incheon Declaration 2015**

'Another barrier is some of our cultural attitudes towards disability and the girl child, to an extent that it is possible in a family to find a boy child given a priority to go to school and not the girl child. Even those without disabilities, and now that the girl child has disability she is more vulnerable. She is prone to be left out more because if she was not disabled she could also try to come out and fight for herself.'

**Education Assessment and Resource
Centre, Migori (intervention)**



1 UNGEI and Leonard Cheshire (2017). Still left behind: pathways to inclusive education for girls with disabilities

Our innovative inclusive model



Core elements of our model

1. Identification and assessment

Early identification and assessment is a cornerstone of understanding and responding to the support needs of children in inclusive education. It is an area within our model that we are continuing to learn about and develop, especially on how to involve teachers more centrally in the process. It takes place at different points in the project cycle, and in a number of ways for different outcomes.

Our identification and assessment of children with disabilities takes a holistic approach:

- Initially children are screened, and then referred for further medical and education assessments to **identify** their disability and support needs. In Kenya this is done at the government-run Education Assessment and Resource Centres.
- To support the school enrolment process, children who require appropriate assistive devices or medical intervention are **referred for an assessment**.

c. Children are enrolled in school where additional education **assessment for learning** takes place. This will determine the strengths and needs of the learner and inform and guide teaching to support learners with diverse strengths, needs and learning styles. This might include assessing:

- a. communication, learning, behaviour and social competence
- b. classroom and school environment
- c. family and home environment
- d. how to adapt and differentiate teaching methodologies, strategies, classroom organisation and psychosocial support

d. **Learning outcomes are assessed** in terms of what has been achieved. This may be linked to summative assessment that evaluates a student's learning, generally at the end of a course or a year of study (IBE-UNESCO, 2017).²

Exploring and understanding the best way to assess learning for children with disabilities is a big area of learning and innovation for us. Many children with disabilities are disadvantaged by the rigidity of instruction and assessment and lack of accommodations in tests, examinations and promotions.

Within the Girls' Education Challenge Transition project we are exploring both using a standard assessment such as Early Grade Reading Assessment and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGRA and EGMA) and the implementation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

An IEP is a teaching and learning plan to support children with learning difficulties and disabilities to get the most out of education. Building on the curriculum, the IEP sets out a strategy and realistic targets and actions to meet the child's individual needs. We will be using this within the adaptive pathway for children with intellectual disabilities.

'They (EARC officers) help us in retaining these children in school in a number of ways, by constantly visiting us and giving us advice on how to deal with new challenges. Any new child will come with new challenges; the EARC officer is always there to give us advice.'

Head teacher, Kisumu East (intervention)

2. Creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment

A welcoming, enabling and accessible physical and psychosocial learning environment is essential for children with disabilities to access and participate in school. Currently, the fact that the majority of school buildings and classrooms are not accessible is a barrier for all children with disabilities. Lack of accessible and/or separate toilets and washing facilities place a particular burden on girls with disabilities, who may need assistance with toileting and menstruation management. Lack of provisions that may help girls with (and without) disabilities to manage their periods in a safe way may reinforce stereotypical and negative attitudes about girls' inability to function as students (UNGEI and Leonard Cheshire 2017).

'An inclusive culture at schools provides an accessible and supportive environment which encourages working through collaboration, interaction and problem-solving.'

UNCHR, General Comment 4, 2016.

'...the attitude of teachers as well as parents has greatly changed. Initially they regarded those children as people who cannot learn with others but now they accept them. And in fact with that change of attitude it has brought a change even in performance in this school and performance has even gone up..!'

**Head teacher,
Siaya (intervention)**

Leonard Cheshire's inclusive model includes adaptations to school buildings such as toilets, and providing sanitary wear to girls with disabilities. This significantly reduces the likelihood that girls miss a number of school days every month.

'...They gave us sanitary towels, bed sheets, bags, mosquitoes nets, cemented the class floors, school uniform, shoes.'

**Girls with disabilities
enrolled in school Kuria
East (intervention)**

Distance to school is often a common barrier for girls with disabilities. Those who live further away from school feel more vulnerable and at risk, and have higher levels of anxiety. The project is providing a bus for girls in Kisumu, but we are also considering additional activities to support girls who travel long distances to and from school. Community, peer and teacher support can make a significant difference in creating accessible learning environments.

3. Supporting children with disabilities in the classroom by improving teaching quality

What happens on a day to day basis in the classroom and how the teacher facilitates learning and reasonable accommodation is the heart and soul of inclusive education. Teachers often don't have the training, skills or time to differentiate their instruction and adapt their lessons and materials for children with disabilities. This is compounded by large class sizes that could have a teacher-child ratio of 1:100, thus limiting the time and opportunity for teachers to support and individualise instruction for children with disabilities.

In the first phase of the programme we:

Trained 672

teachers and head teachers

**Built the capacity
of 100 teachers**

**on the development of accessible learning
materials (tactile, auditory, visual)**

Trained 75

education managers

'In a whole person approach recognition is given to the capacity of every person to learn, and high expectations are established for all learners, including learners with disabilities. It commits to ending segregation within educational settings by ensuring inclusive classroom teaching in accessible learning environments with appropriate supports.'

**UNCHR, General Comment 4,
2016**

Leonard Cheshire is currently piloting a new teacher training manual and approach to support teachers to deliver inclusive education. Using a training of trainers and modular approach, a number of key education staff, including head teachers, teacher training college lecturers and government officials, are trained as trainers. They then roll out the programme to a much wider cohort of teachers in the project schools. This training is delivered in modules so the teachers have time back in the classroom to apply their learning before continuing with the consecutive training modules of the programme.

**We have trained
30 additional
teacher-mentors**

'Since Leonard Cheshire came and shed the light to us, at least we now know how to handle girls with disabilities and the importance of them being in society. We've seen them working well and scoring good marks in class.'

**Teachers Intervention,
Kuria East (intervention)**

'Initially it was only the Special Needs Education teachers who understood how to handle children with disability. But after the Inclusive Education training, now the rest of the teachers who were trained know how to handle the children with disability.'

**Director of Education Migori
(intervention)**

We learnt through the first phase of the programme that teachers need on-going support. Therefore the second phase we have introduced a 'teacher mentorship' programme. We have identified 5 teacher-mentors for each of the project sub-counties. These are special education teachers that have been trained in inclusive education. Throughout this phase of the programme they will provide regular support and practical inclusive solutions to school teachers. Leonard Cheshire is working with the Teacher Service Commission at county level to allow teachers time to participate in the mentorship programme. This will ensure skill retention and more teachers gaining inclusive education pedagogical skills. The project will also continue to advocate for a teacher training curriculum that will address components of inclusive education for all teachers.

Accessible learning materials: Teachers are also taught to make use of cheap and easily available material, e.g. using bottle caps to introduce Braille, producing a simplified abacus, or using bags of sugar or flour as additional paper resources. But provision of accessible and affordable assistive technology is also being introduced, especially in the schools that have been equipped through the Kenyan drive to introduce tablets and connectivity in schools.

Adaptive pathway: Leonard Cheshire recognises that girls and boys with intellectual and profound disabilities continue to be marginalised. This is due to a lack of policy clarity on how to provide education for children with more severe disabilities, and the gaps in resources and teacher capacities to support these children.

Leonard Cheshire will in the near future pilot an Adaptive Pathway to support the inclusion of this specific group of children and improve their basic learning skills such as reading, writing, mathematics and basic accounting. The pathway will encourage their progress against personalised goals within the mainstream curriculum. It will also give teachers the capacity to present learning content at reduced depth and breadth within a framework of high expectation, and to develop children's independence and vocational competencies.

4. Working with local government and civil society

Sustainable inclusive education should be seen as part of inclusive development. No non-governmental organisation (NGO) initiatives should be done outside the framework of government policies and strategies. The project has learnt that sustainable change cannot take place without the engagement of national and local structures. Leonard Cheshire collaborated with the national coalition Action for Children with Disabilities (ACD) to advise government on the special education policy review and inclusion of inclusive education in the pre-service teacher training curriculum.

'States parties should implement the following core right with immediate effect:

Reasonable accommodations to ensure non-exclusion from education for persons with disabilities. Failure to provide reasonable accommodation constitutes discrimination on disability grounds.'

UNHRC, General Comment 4, 2016

Leonard Cheshire successfully lobbied the National Examination Board to abolish the mean score as a way of comparing schools' performance. This was previously a barrier for children with disabilities. Head teachers would refuse to enrol children with disabilities in their schools out of fear that their mean score, and therefore school performance rating, would go down. Now, greater emphasis is placed on adaptation of teaching and classroom practice to support inclusion.

The Education Management Information System agreed to add five disability-level indicators and provide training to sub-county data officers on the new system. This paved the way to increasing the availability of statistical data on children with disabilities in education.

'We did not have data about the number of children with disabilities in the county. Now we do, so we can plan for them.'

**Director of Education,
Kisumu East (intervention)**

At a local level Leonard Cheshire formed County Working Groups (CWGs) consisting of representatives from various ministries, NGOs, civil society organisations and disabled people's organisations (DPOs). These Working Groups were successful in pushing for and establishing disability policies (e.g. the Early Childhood Development Act) that will guarantee funding for children with disabilities to attend early childhood education and youth polytechnics.

The most powerful advocates for changing attitudes towards disability and promoting social and educational inclusion are people with disabilities themselves. Leonard Cheshire therefore collaborates closely with local and national DPOs to drive its advocacy programmes. Disabled community advocates are trained to communicate the messages of inclusion in villages and also to serve as a catalyst for change with local, regional and national government. In Kenya Leonard Cheshire, in collaboration with the National Council for Persons with Disabilities and other DPOs, has enabled the project to leverage support to provide assistive devices for girls with disabilities and identify and link them to master trainers and other livelihoods opportunities.

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5. Parent, family and community awareness

From our project evaluations we have found that parental support and positive community attitudes strengthen the resilience of girls with disabilities and encourage them to go to school.

Many parents and caregivers of girls with disabilities often face high degrees of stigma and discrimination from the community. This may cause them to keep their children hidden away. The project works across communities, with schools and parents to raise awareness of disability issues. We have established Parent Support Groups for parents of children with disabilities, that provide information, peer support and psycho-social support. Poverty of families with children with disabilities is also another intersecting factor, influencing parents' ability to send their children to school. To address this, the project also provides the Parent Support Groups with entrepreneurship and livelihoods opportunities to reduce the effects of poverty on educational access and learning.

This project uniquely works with male heads of households and trains them as male mentors. Our aim is to increase their knowledge and awareness of disability issues to be more supportive of inclusive education (especially for the girl child), and to be influential in their communities by encouraging other men to do the same. The project addresses deep-rooted attitudes in a patriarchal society, where the male head of the household makes most of the household decisions, and where boys are more likely to be encouraged to go to school over girls – especially girls with disabilities.

Although primary education is free in Kenya, parents and caregivers are expected to cover costs associated with schooling, including costs for textbooks and uniforms. The project also provides Parent Support Groups with training on table banking and livelihoods skills. The groups are linked to the national empowerment grants such as UWEZO for funding. Economically empowered parents are enabled to pay for local transport and other educational expenditure for their disabled boys and girls, thus increasing the sustainability of the programme beyond the project support.

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'Persons with disabilities can experience intersectional discrimination based on disability, gender, religion, legal status, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation or language. Additionally, parents, siblings, and other relatives can also experience discrimination on grounds of disability. The measures needed to address all forms of discrimination include identifying and removing social, financial and attitudinal barriers within the community.'

UNHRC, General Comment 4, 2016

'...during the training we were taught how we can set up small income-generating activities that can help us to earn income and you can also do long term business like sugarcane farming. You can sell that and use that income to use it to pay for some of these (schooling) expenses.'

Parent of girl with a disability in school Kisumu East (intervention)

6. Child-to-child activities

The child-to-child clubs introduced in all schools participating in the Girls' Education Challenge Transition project have been one of the most powerful catalysts for change in attitudes of peers and the community towards children with disabilities. The groups encourage children without disabilities to meet informally and socially with children with disabilities on a regular basis, leading to enhanced camaraderie, acceptance and resilience. In all cases the clubs have become disability rights advocates in their local communities.

'In the child-to-child club we discuss and talk about issues we face and how to help. We exchange ideas when in the club, we learn about drama, we pray...'

Girl with a disability enrolled in school, Siaya (intervention)

Emerging innovation

Assistive technology

Leonard Cheshire is currently in a planning and consultation phase to strengthen the application of assistive technology to enhance the participation in learning for learners with disabilities. The plan will explore a number of information and communication technology (ICT) options that can facilitate and support participation of learners with disabilities in the school environment. The provision and appropriate use of ICT must support the goals of the individual education plan in the context of school environments that are generally under resourced in terms of connectivity, electrical supply and teacher competencies.

Leonard Cheshire is committed to embedding technology and technological innovation across all of its programmes. We are exploring opportunities for how accessibility and learning can be improved.

In Kenya, the programme is currently considering how to best utilise technology to improve learning outcomes for girls with disabilities.



Transition

Within Leonard Cheshire's Girls' Education Challenge Transition programme in Kenya the focus is on enabling the child with a disability, the family and the school to be ready and able to support girls with disabilities to make the smooth transition from primary to secondary school or in some cases onto vocational training. Transition from one phase to another is always more challenging for children with disabilities. It is critical that the necessary preparatory steps are taken. This process can be enhanced through early intervention, advocacy and preparation of receiving schools and teachers, as well as involvement of parents and caregivers. Transition to secondary school is being facilitated through provision of appropriate resources from Education Assessment Resource Centres (EARCs) and support from teacher mentors. The learning environment must also be made accessible prior to the arrival of learners with disabilities.

Leonard Cheshire believes that to get a true picture of the capabilities and needs of an individual, opportunities should be created to get to know the pupils/students better before they join the school. For example, meeting and talking to them and, as appropriate, to their parents, carers, teachers and other support staff who have worked with them – observing them in the 'feeder' setting before they join the new school.

We are collaborating with relevant Government departments, schools, the community and families to reduce the number of children with disabilities who leave school early. We also want to improve their chances of exiting school with credible qualifications and the skills necessary to find decent jobs and become economically independent.

2015

80 girls with disabilities transitioned to secondary school.

2016

112 girls with disabilities transitioned to secondary school.

2017

372 children with disabilities transitioned to secondary school and 71 children with disabilities to Vocational Training Institutions.



Innovation will be introduced to build the resilience and life skills of young adults who are on the point of leaving school to enter vocational training and master artisan apprenticeships. Workplace preparation will be done in collaboration with representatives from DPOs and supported employment models will be piloted.

Research evidence and learning

Despite growing commitment to gender and disability inclusive education by governments, donors and (inter)national development organisations, there is still very little in the way of documentation and robust evidence on research and programmes that address the intersectional marginalisation of girls with disabilities in education in low and middle income countries where resources are limited.

Greater attention must be given to robust monitoring processes including baseline studies, and impact of interventions on each of these groups – with the understanding of intersectionality. Evaluations, learning papers, reviews and research need to be made more widely available to build a much larger and more robust evidence base. This should lead to a better understanding, not only of what works and what does not work, but also why.

The Leonard Cheshire Research Centre at UCL has been supporting our inclusive programmes by conducting longitudinal analytical studies of several aspects of the implementation with a view to informing future practice.

The areas of research cover:

- Review of disability inclusion in African regional policies
- The impact of an inclusive education intervention on teacher preparedness to educate children with disabilities
- Out of school children with disability
- Intersectionality of disability and poverty
- Strengthening of child protection within policy implementation
- Closing the gap in education for girls with disabilities in Kenya
- The relationship between the male mentorship programme and girls learning outcomes and transition

For access to these papers please visit

<https://www.leonardcheshire.org/international/influencing>

<https://www.leonardcheshire.org/international/education/kenya>

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/iehc/research/epidemiology-public-health/research/leonard-cheshire-research>

'As a continuing process, inclusive education must be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that segregation or integration is not happening either formally or informally. Monitoring, according to article 33, should involve persons with disabilities, including children and persons with intensive support requirements.'

UNCHR, General Comment 4, 2016

'Leonard Cheshire supports governments to meet their obligations in terms of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by contributing to "the process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications" at all levels of the education system and social context and in line with the principle of full inclusion.'

UNCHR (2016) General Comment 4 on Article 24 of the CRPD

