

# Inclusive Education Issue Paper

## Executive summary

To learn and thrive, children and young people with disabilities and eye conditions require accessible, quality education within their communities. Ninety million children with disabilities live in Africa. These children face significant barriers to accessing quality, equitable and inclusive education.

Light for the World provides technical support to development partners, government ministries and other stakeholders to embed disability inclusion within national education systems through a twin-track approach. By strengthening mainstream education capacities, we work to make inclusive, quality education a guaranteed right for every child.

In this issue paper, we outline our unique inclusive education approach. As part of our Strategy 2030, we share five priority areas and six targets we have set to ensure we deliver impact, at scale, sustainably.

## Why inclusive education is key

At Light for the World, we believe in a world where people with disabilities and eye conditions can fully exercise their rights to health, education, work – and protection in emergencies. To deliver this vision, children and young people with disabilities and eye conditions require accessible, quality and equitable inclusive education within their communities. Globally, one in six people (16 % of the world's population), live with a disability.<sup>1</sup> Among them, 240 million are children with disabilities,<sup>2</sup> and 90 million live in Africa.<sup>3</sup> These children face significant barriers to accessing quality, equitable and inclusive education. When they do gain access, it is often in segregated and ill-equipped settings. This systemic exclusion results in stark disparities: children with disabilities are 49% more likely to have never attended school compared to children without disabilities.<sup>4</sup> Over 65% of children who are deaf, blind, deafblind, or have learning difficulties are out of school at rates up to six times higher than their peers without disabilities.

Light for the World works to ensure high-quality inclusive educational outcomes through mainstream education systems in Africa. With increasing effects from the climate crisis and conflicts, we also have a track record working in humanitarian settings. Our goal is to ensure that inclusive education is embedded system-wide, rather than treated as a separate, supplementary initiative. Child protection and safeguarding are integrated in all our programmes. We work with a rights-based model, grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCPRD) and the African Disability Protocol and Agenda 2030 (Goal 4).<sup>5</sup> This approach enables us to deliver sustainable and scalable solutions for all children and youth.

## Our unique approach to inclusive education

Our unique twin-track approach addresses the individual needs of children with disabilities, through early identification and targeted support, and tackles systemic barriers to create system-wide reforms. This ensures all children have access to quality and equitable inclusive education.

As children may face multiple and intersecting barriers, we incorporate gender-responsive strategies into our interventions. We support the enrolment and retention of girls with disabilities, ensuring access to safe and accessible sanitation facilities and providing menstrual hygiene kits to promote dignity and school attendance.

Our added value in inclusive education is built on over 30 years of advancing the right to education for girls and boys with disabilities, beginning with community-led approaches that prioritise local empowerment and inclusion. We embrace inclusive education as a lifelong journey, supporting both formal education and non-formal, community-based learning, especially for children with severe and multiple disabilities, who are often excluded from main-

1 Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO

2 UNICEF (2021) Nearly 240 million children with disabilities around the world, UNICEF's most comprehensive statistical analysis finds. See: (<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/nearly-240-million-children-disabilities-around-world-unicefs-most-comprehensive>) [accessed 09.12.2025]

3 ACERWC (2025) Statement of the working group on children with disabilities of the African committee of experts on the rights and welfare of the child on the theme of the day of the African child 2025 – Planning and budgeting for children's rights

4 United Nations Children's Fund, Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities, UNICEF, New York, 2021. p. 176

5 United Nations. (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities & Optional Protocol. New York, United Nations.

African Union. (2018). Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa. Addis Ababa: African Union.

United Nations General Assembly (2015), Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1 New York: United Nations, p. 17

stream systems. Since 2013, we have deepened our commitment to systemic, rights-based change by linking international human rights advocacy with national policy engagement, and by promoting the rights of children with disabilities.

## **Our priorities**

**To ensure sustainable impact, we have five strategic priorities:**

### **1. Advancing quality inclusive education at individual and community level**

- ▶ Prioritising inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education at the individual and community level as the foundation for lifelong learning and equity.
- ▶ Providing families with counseling and information to dispel harmful myths and stigma, while connecting them to early childhood intervention services, assistive technologies, rehabilitation and livelihood opportunities.
- ▶ Strengthening early identification and referral systems linked to inclusive early childhood education and play-based learning. Collaborating through community workers, youth leaders, local partners and networks, we deliver targeted support and foster inclusive environments across homes, schools and communities.
- ▶ Building the capacity of teachers and mainstream education actors to apply inclusive pedagogies and technologies, such as individualised education plans (IEPs), accessible and low-tech learning materials, and inclusive play approaches, anchored in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.

### **2. Driving systems change through strategic partnerships and direct action**

- ▶ Piloting and scaling innovative, whole-school, child-centered models of inclusive education.
- ▶ Partnering with governments, education stakeholders and civil society, and leveraging the power of youth and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), we help integrate inclusive education into national policies, planning frameworks and resource allocations.

### **3. Embedding inclusive education in emergencies**

- ▶ Ensuring access to gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response services, making learning environments physically and digitally accessible, integrating assistive technologies into education kits and training teachers and frontline responders.
- ▶ Co-designing inclusive education solutions in emergencies and monitoring progress together with OPDs, while investing in their leadership and capacity.
- ▶ Collecting disability-disaggregated data and understanding barriers to inclusive education in emergencies to guide evidence-based interventions.

### **4. Scaling inclusive EdTech**

- ▶ Scaling innovative, accessible and affordable education technology (EdTech) solutions that enhance access, participation and learning outcomes for children with disabilities.
- ▶ Providing accessible devices, digital storybooks, as well as audio readers, recorders and players tailored to learners with print disabilities and for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

## 5. Advocacy and resource mobilisation

- ▶ Collecting and analysing disaggregated monitoring and evaluation data on output and systems change level as well as documenting and sharing best practices from our programmes and partners.
- ▶ Supporting resource mobilisation and engaging in strategic advocacy across national, regional and global platforms.

## Our targets

**We have identified the following targets as part of our Strategy 2030:**

1. Expanding our programming and advocacy on inclusive education to increase access and participation for children with disabilities from the earliest years by removing barriers across the education journey. Addressing stigma, improving infrastructure and ensuring access to assistive devices and inclusive play-based learning.
2. Embedding inclusive tools and methodologies in all our programmes and education systems, including Universal Design for Learning (UDL), assistive technologies and accessible (digital and low-tech) learning materials.
3. Through our humanitarian action programmes, building the capacity of humanitarian actors and OPDs to deliver inclusive education in emergency contexts.
4. Advancing digital inclusion by scaling accessible, affordable and context-appropriate EdTech solutions tailored to diverse disability needs.
5. Mobilising funding and building multi-sectoral coalitions: including OPDs, ministries, NGOs and private sector actors, to scale inclusive education.
6. Promoting inclusive education financing and accountability through contributions to global platforms, strategic partnerships and high-level advocacy.

### Accessible learning materials

**Light for the World, in partnership with Education Cannot Wait (ECW) in South Sudan, worked to ensure teacher training guides were transcribed into Braille, making them accessible for teachers with visual impairments.**

**To break barriers for learners, Light for the World also transcribed all national primary school textbooks (grades 1–8) into Braille and audio formats, enabling children with visual impairments to access the curriculum alongside their peers. With these inclusive materials, learners with disabilities have been shown to be progressing at comparable rates, improving their performance and confidence in the classroom. The replicable model can transform education systems to be more inclusive, resilient and equitable — in South Sudan and globally.**

## Acknowledgements

Light for the World was founded, and is supported by our trusted donors and partners, to serve people with eye conditions and disabilities, so that everyone can fully exercise their universal human rights. We would like to thank all Light for the World colleagues, leadership and Board Members, past and present, and thank Rediet Mesfin as lead for this issue paper.



**info@light-for-the-world.org**  
**www.light-for-the-world.org**