
Anthrologica

Sightsavers

Summary analysis: Inclusive Education, Sierra Leone

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Executive summary

The Education for All project in Sierra Leone identifies and tackles barriers to participation in education. Sightsavers requires that research from the project contributes to the knowledge base on disability inclusion in education and, where necessary, uses that knowledge to refine a contextually appropriate and gender-responsive approach to supporting education for girls and boys with disabilities in Sierra Leone.

This report documents findings from a study for Sightsavers conducted by peer researchers from Phase 2 of Education for All. Participants in the research comprised children with disabilities and their parents and teachers of children with disabilities enrolled in the project. The objective of the study was to assess how children with disabilities, their teachers, and their parents experience or perceive disability. The data presented are drawn from five schools in the Bombali district. Findings are presented according to five overarching themes; perceptions and experiences of inclusive education, barriers to developing the inclusive model, enablers of inclusive education, gender considerations, and sustainability of inclusive projects. The qualitative data focused primarily on the impact of project.

In all the study sites, understanding and perceptions of disability had improved since the introduction of the Sightsavers project, from reduced discrimination and self-stigmatization, to a greater acknowledgement of people with disability being important contributors to society. Participants recognized the right to education for all children and increasing enforcement of these rights. Improved integration, acceptance and equal treatment in classrooms were found to contribute to positive learning experiences and increased motivation and attendance by children with disabilities. Parents, teachers and children with disabilities all perceived improvements in academic achievement, abilities, self-reliance, and confidence among children with disabilities since enrolment.

Children enrolled in the inclusive education project benefitted from a variety of improvements in the schooling experience. Improvements to the built environment of the school, such as the addition of ramps and railings, increased physical accessibility of the schools, while the provision of materials such as school supplies has improved learning. Improved identification of children with disabilities, changes in classroom dynamics and improved methods and strategies for teaching and extracurricular engagement helped to improve inclusion to education. Teachers and parents felt further supported and encouraged by efforts for parent-teacher collaboration and coordination. Increased community involvement had also contributed to a sense of improvement, by filling in gaps and providing additional assistance and encouragement.

Despite the universal acknowledgment of benefits, participants also identified remaining barriers, these were: capacity of teachers, availability of resources, and some types of accessibility. The capacity of teachers to identify disabilities and insufficient teacher training hindered elements of project implementation. Insufficient supply of products such as contact lenses, hearing aids, crutches, wheelchairs and medicines for disabled children affected their ability to benefit from the project along with access issues relating to distance, transport, classroom size, and toilet facilities.

Gender considerations included themes of integration and equality, menstrual care and hygiene. Teachers and parents in Kamabai, Kalangba and Binkolo found the project to have successfully established equal rights and access to education for girls in their communities, while parents in Wuror identified greater stigma and discrimination facing girls with disabilities than boys. Teachers and parents across sites noted the additional stigma and shame associated with menstruation for girls and found the hygiene kits and instructions supplied by the project helped to mitigate this.

Great appreciation for the many positive results of this project were expressed by children, their parents, and teachers enrolled in the inclusive education projects across all five study sites. Parents and teachers also expressed serious concern at the likelihood of negative impacts when the project ends, they had great hopes for extended and lasting positive impacts if it continues and is expanded.

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Introduction and methods

The Education for All project in Sierra Leone identifies and tackles barriers to participation in education. Activities range from tracing individual children currently missing out on education, training teachers, motivating parents, educating the community about disability and physically adapting schools to the needs of its pupils. Practical schemes in the project include mentoring systems where older girls look after younger girls, improvements to sanitation and better access to running water. Research conducted during the project is intended to be used, where necessary, to refine contextually appropriate and gender-responsive approaches to supporting education for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone.

Data collection for this study was conducted in five schools in the Bombali district of Sierra Leone: St. Josephs School Karamanka, Wesleyan Junior Secondary School Kamabai, Binkolo Catholic Junior Secondary School Binkolo, Wurroh Memorial Junior Secondary School Rokulan and Wesleyan Primary School Kalangba.¹ Fifteen focus group discussions were held. Three focus groups were conducted in each field site: one with children with disabilities enrolled in the inclusive education programme, one with parents of children with disabilities enrolled in the project, and one with teachers participating in the inclusive education program. A sample topic guide used for the focus group discussions with teachers is included in the annex to this report.

Respondents were asked about their experiences of the Sightsavers project and what had changed as a result of the interventions. There were specific questions about gender, links between parents and teachers and community support for disability. Participants were also asked what they would like to see change in future. A total of one hundred and twenty-six participants (46 children with disabilities, 44 parents, 36 teachers) were included in these focus group discussions:

Overview of key informants

Location	Participant Group	# of Participants
Karamanka	Children with disabilities	10
Karamanka	Parents	8
Karamanka	Teachers	7
Kamabai	Children with disabilities	10
Kamabai	Parents	8
Kamabai	Teachers	10
Binkolo	Children with disabilities	9
Binkolo	Parents	9
Binkolo	Teachers	5
Wuror	Children with disabilities	8
Wuror	Parents	8
Wuror	Teachers	8
Kalangba	Children with disabilities	9
Kalangba	Parents	11
Kalangba	Teachers	6

¹ Throughout this report, data from focus group discussions with children with disabilities, parents and teachers are referenced by location unless otherwise stated.

The focus group discussions were transcribed into English and these transcripts submitted to Anthrologica for thematic analysis.² Coding was conducted in Microsoft Word and the subsequent themes matrix produced in Excel.

Findings are presented according to five overarching themes; perceptions and experiences of inclusive education, barriers to developing the inclusive model, enablers of inclusive education, gender considerations, and sustainability of inclusive projects. Participants were aware that this was a Sightsavers study, and as such there may be issues of response bias and a desire to give feedback that would elicit more future investment in the project. There have been minor language edits and corrections to some of the quotations in this report, where needed.

² The thematic analysis on the submitted transcripts was carried out by Anthrologica. Lack of demographic or contextual information meant that a full discussion and presentation of programmatic recommendations is not within the scope of the analysis.

Shifts in perceptions and experiences since the inclusive education project

Understandings of disability and perceptions of the future

- The Sightsavers project had a clear impact on the perceptions of some members of the community across all field sites. Parents and teachers spoke openly about improvements to the way disability was viewed. Prior to this project, participants described how disability had been considered a 'curse' on the parent, but that this was changing. One parent from Kamabai explained, *'back then children with disability were regarded as demons or witches, but now that they have seen those with disability in the school that Sightsavers are taking care of, they are no longer seen as demons or witches. They are now learning so they are sending them to school and parents are no longer afraid but are happy for their children to be in school, so they have the same opportunity as people with non-disability.'* There were also changes regarding what was termed 'sickness transferring', where previously communities believed that disability was contagious and could be transmitted by touch, but recently this perception had changed, and communities increasingly recognised that disability is not contagious.
- Participants in all field sites concurred that children were changing their perceptions and understandings of their own disabilities. Prior to the project, participants described the ways that community understanding and treatment of disability had fostered self-stigma in children. One parent from Wuror explained that his child *'used to fear and panic'* about his epilepsy because it was understood as *'devilish behaviour'*. Many children with disabilities were described by parents and teachers as not having *'confidence'* to attend or engage in school prior to the project. Whereas, a teacher from Binkolo noted, *'there is now a great sense of motivation among the disabled children. They believe that disability is not inability.'* While a child with disabilities in Binkolo stated, *'I like to be in school because every day I learn more things and it will help me in the future and it will help the country as a whole.'*
- The project had resulted in broad recognition by the participants that disabled children also had abilities. It was felt that teachers, parents, peers and the community at large have come to see that there is *'hope'* for those with disabilities and to recognize their *'talents'* and *'potential'*. As a teacher in Kamabai expressed, *'at first, disabled children were seen as a lost cause and were discouraged, but through the intervention of this organization the parents have got hope and have realized that their children can be successful. Disability does not mean the children cannot be successful.'*
- There had also been in community understanding about the future potential for people with disability. Some spoke of how the disabled children would *'never marry,'* would find *'life difficult'* because they *'cannot farm'* or would not find anywhere willing to make *'accommodations'* for them. However, the majority expressed hope for the future of these children, a teacher from Wuror explained: *'Before this project we saw parents who have these physically impaired children say 'go to the blacksmith, go and make cutlasses, make hoes or whatever. School is not meant for you. What would you go to school for? In which office would you sit? Where will they accommodate you?' So, with our intervention, and because we've been trained by Seaford and Sightsavers, we came and cascaded the message to them. Now it's much better, they are now willing to send their children to school.'* A parent from Wuror also explained how they expected the project to set their child up for the future: *'we want this thing [the project] to continue and if it continues, we are expecting at the end of the day these children will become somebody else in the society.'* A child with disabilities in Binkolo stated, *'I am encouraged to come to school by people in my community. They even tell me that one day I will become somebody great.'*

- Those with disability were also described as now being understood as ‘human’ and belonging to society. A parent in Kalangba described that after the implementation of the project by Sightsavers, *‘our children are no longer asked to stay out of public gatherings, because Sightsavers has made them all important in the society.’* Another parent from Wuror stated, *‘the coming of this project has made our children feel like they belong and [they] have seen themselves as humans. In previous years they have not been treated as if they are humans, so [that] alone is a development.’*

The right to education

- Teachers working in the inclusive education project and parents of children with disabilities across all field sites agreed that children had a right to education, regardless of gender or ability. They noted that previously this was not generally accepted to be the case, with many parents keeping disabled children and girls at home and some schools not admitting disabled students. A teacher in Kalangba stated, *‘the help of Sightsavers has made the school inclusive. Before this time, we were only admitting children in school who were not disabled, but now we also have an interest in children with disability.’*
- Parents suggested that despite improvements, more could be done, and called on teachers to encourage and explain to children with disabilities and their peers that they are all ‘as one’ with equal rights to participate and benefit from educational opportunities. As a parent from Kamabai expressed, *‘the teachers should also encourage the children and help them know that being disabled does not mean you cannot have access to the privileges others are enjoying but that disabled people can do what non-disabled people can do.’*
- In addition to the benefits from the project there were other examples of progressive change. Parents of children with disabilities and teachers in Binkolo, Wuror and Kamabai discussed community expectations relating to enforcement of the right to education. A teacher in Binkolo explained *‘they have made by-laws for any individual who refuses to send their disabled children to school.’* A parent in Kamabai noted, *‘there are by-laws which have been enforced by stakeholders in order to protect the rights of people with disability, this law has been firmly established and this has helped greatly.’* In Wuror, a teacher noted that more sensitization about the right to education for the disabled is needed for the by-laws to be effective. *‘We believe that most of the communities have laws... but if Sightsavers can try to change the philosophy and try to change the mentality and try to create the awareness and enable the environment for these physically challenged people that will help a lot.’*

Integration, acceptance and equal treatment

- Before the Sightsavers project started, participants across said that discrimination against people with disabilities was pervasive, describing experiences where they were ‘mocked’ or ‘threatened’ by peers and teachers. However, there was widespread sentiment that this has changed. Parents, teachers and children also discussed how inclusive education has promoted improved equity in the classroom. Positive experiences were described with regard to disabled children becoming more integrated and accepted in the classroom and community.
- Teachers gave multiple examples of positive change. For example, by this Kamarankan teacher, *‘the disabled children found it very difficult to enter some classrooms because the mocking was too much to them, but we say that thanks to Sightsavers the able and disabled are now mingling together.’* Children with disabilities previously experienced marginalization in classrooms that further excluded them from learning, but are now actively integrated, as observed by a teacher from Wuror, *‘before this time pupils were suffering [at] the hands of their colleagues in terms of provocation, especially those that were disabled. But through the help of Sightsavers, we teachers now help other teachers not to provoke these people that are suffering from disability.’*

- Parents noted the link between increased integration and acceptance and improved school attendance by children with disabilities. One parent in Wuror explained, *'it makes me feel happy because my child had almost already become a dropout. But since Sightsavers arrived, ... I don't even [have to] tell him to go to school and [he] has got friends, and he too can feel lively like any other person.'* A Kamarakan parent agreed, *'My son is always playing with his colleagues happily, in the morning he said, mommy I want to go to school! My son is now bold enough.'* The progress made by the children with disabilities in the project appeared to be having a wider impact on enrolment of children with disabilities in the schools. A parent from Kamabai described simply, *'parents with disabled children are sending their children to school because they see the positive changes of those already enrolled at school.'*
- Disabled children enrolled in the project also felt that treatment from teachers and peers had improved. One child from Kamabai described his experience of being in the project, *'I like coming to school and making friends. The encouragement I receive from teachers and fellow students is why I like coming to school. I feel depressed when alone at home. I gain knowledge from friends and teachers at school.'* Children expressed experiences of more acceptance and inclusion from both their teachers and peers. One child from Wuror explained, *'at first when the programme was not available our friends use to provoke us and push us away. But now when this programme arrived they trained our teachers.'* As one child from Wuror described his classroom experience before the project, *'when we were in class they always push us at the back of the class, we were not considered and placed at the back of the class, therefore not making us have class participation or either pay attention.'* Since the project started participants agreed that children with disabilities are given attention and brought to the front of the classroom to ensure they can see, hear and engage.

Progress in learning and ability

- Children with disabilities across the field sites explained how *'happy'* they were to now be able to understand what is being taught and to *'acquire knowledge'*. They gave explanations, for example a child with a disability in Kamabai stated, *'with the start of the project we are happy because we are now learning, answering questions the teachers ask.'* Another, from Kamaranka agreed, *'I like the learning that's why I stay in school, to gain experience.'*
- Parents and teachers frequently discussed the progress of the children with disabilities enrolled in the project, many stating that the positive changes in the children are *'too many'* to describe. Positive progress in behaviour, attitude and abilities were all noted. A Kamabai parent explained, *'since they took our children, they have provided them with medical care, have shown concern for them even though our children used to be ashamed because of their disability but Sightsavers has helped change their attitude, behaviour at home and school as well.'* They observed great progress in academic achievements of the children since enrolling in the project. Many parents elaborated on how their children before could not read, write or speak but since joining they are able to and are doing well in school. A parent from Kamaranka stated, *'my child was unable to do anything but now he can read and write and he can recall plenty of things.'* Another, from Kamaranka, said, *"Now our children can go to school... my own child was not clearly talking but now he can talk clearly and play with his colleagues. I call him and ask him a question and he can answer well with a proper explanation through the help of these people."*
- Teachers noted that disabled students are at times excelling beyond the other students, for example, a teacher in Wuror said, *'even [among those who] just concluded BECE³ we have those who are physically challenged who made it better than those who are able.'*

³ BECE is the Basic Education Certificate Examination which is the examination that marks the end of Junior Secondary School (JSS) for Sierra Leone students.

Enablers of inclusive education

Accessibility

- A key enabler for education at all field sites was the improved accessibility as a result of the Sightsavers investment into the built environment of the school. The addition of ramps and railings allowed students with disabilities to gain access to the classrooms and facilities, as well as preventing accidents from falls. A parent from Wuror explained, *'I am so glad of this organization - my child had polio and was afraid to come to school because there was no railing in the school; now that the NGO has put a railing to protect himself and enter into the class, he will not fall down again.'* Another student with disabilities, from Wuror, identified an additional benefit, not only does he have better accessibility to education but also has more freedom to interact with his peers. It should be noted that despite the advances made in the structural accessibility of the schools, limitations were still noted at some sites. As one parent in Wuror noted, despite improvements, gaining access to the toilet was difficult for some physically challenged students at the school: *'if you look the railing it does not even extend to the toilet.'*
- Beyond just allowing greater access, some participants found that the improvements to the structure and appearance of the school created a better environment for learning and teaching for everyone. One parent in Kamabai further described the positive effect this had on the children with disability in the project, *'the children are also proud that it's because of them that the school is now attractive.'*

Material resources

- Gratitude and appreciation for the provision of school supplies for children with disabilities dominated discussions across all study sites. Listed materials that contributed to *'happiness'* included bags, books, pens, chairs, bicycles, sanitation and hygiene products and medicines. The following comment from a parent in Kamaranka was representative, *'our children are now going to school happily with the material they receive. Those things help them and motivate them to go to school.'*
- Many participants expressed the desire for Sightsavers to continue supplying educational materials, as without their support the children may not have access to the supplies they need for school. As one child from Kamabai expressed, *'before the programme I was not happy to come to school, because there was no one to assist me, but now after the implementation of the programme, they provide me with school-going stuff that my parents cannot afford. This is why I am happy.'* A few participants in Kamaranka and Kalangba also noted that the provision of aids to support them in living with disability, such as special shoes, crutches, and medications were of enormous benefit to those children who received them.
- Sanitation and hygiene kits were gratefully received and featured in discussion among parents and teachers as having a positive impact on self-care and confidence among children. Parents observed their children as happy to receive the kits, and how they had increased their child's desire to attend school, for example, actively waking up to use their *'pastes'* first thing in the morning, as described by this Wuror parent: *'you hear your child first thing in the morning when he wakes up he looks for his paste, toothbrush and soap to go and wash ... when they get those [freely supplied] things they are always glad to come to school.'* Teachers across all sites described improvements in the students' appearance at schools as noted by this teacher in Kamabai, *'previously the disabled children came to school untidy and were not taken care of, but now they are now coming to school clean and tidy.'* A teacher in Binkolo agreed, *'the children can now take good care of themselves.'*

Identification of pupils with disabilities

- Teachers across all study locations discussed identification of children with disabilities as a key enabler for successful inclusive education. Being able to recognize disabilities in children is integral to employing strategies for inclusion and education. A teacher in Binkolo noted that with the implementation of the project, *'people are coming and identifying the different disabilities.'* A teacher in Kamabai further expressed that Sightsavers is helping the teachers learn to identify these disabilities among their pupils. *'The intervention of Sightsavers has made differences in our lesson delivery methods. We can now identify disabled children and we can now deliver lessons with them in mind.'* Ability to identify disabilities was also a limiting factor on the impact of the project, presented in the next section

Classroom dynamics and support

- Teachers and students with disabilities enrolled in the project highlighted the great changes that are resulting from the new teaching methods being used by teachers trained through the project which are creating an enabling learning environment. Students described being placed in the front of the class so they can see and hear the lessons, teachers taking the time to check and correct their work, teachers writing larger on the blackboard so that they can read it and explaining lessons in different ways if they don't understand. Teachers also noted the ways in which the Sightsavers training has empowered them with the knowledge to *'handle'* children with disabilities in their classrooms. As a teacher in Kalangba explained, *'it is true that Sightsavers has helped us a lot in our teaching method, especially in handling children with disability in our different classes according to the training we have attended, we have gained much knowledge with Sightsavers ... especially of spending quality time with the children.'*
- The improvements targeting disabled children have been noted not only as just facilitators for learning for children with disabilities, but for the classes as a whole. A teacher in Kalangba states, *'we want to take this opportunity to thank [Sightsavers] for the great thing they have done in the life of our children. Not only for the children with disabilities, but also children that are okay benefited because of the methods they have introduced ... I want to complement their effort; it has been good for the lives of our children and that of us teachers.'*
- Students with disabilities enrolled in these projects also frequently mentioned the kindness, understanding, and encouragement they were now receiving at school and at home that motivated them to continue with their learning and made them *'feel good.'*
- A progressive enabler of inclusive education raised by parents and teachers in Kalabanga and Kamarank was the inclusion of children with disabilities in leadership roles, clubs and sports. It was noted that prior to the project these children were not included in extracurricular roles and activities, but now efforts are being made to include with perceived benefits to the children with disabilities and their peers. A teacher in Kalangba explained, *'we discovered a leadership role in [students with disability] to lead others, so therefore we have given them the opportunity to serve as class prefect ... some can [lead] better than the children that don't have any disability.'* Also, *'we have what we call child-to-child clubs wherein children with and without disabilities are allowed to play together and they see themselves as one of the community.'* Another teacher in the same community added, *'we have [been] told that we should include them in game and sports.'*

Parent involvement

- A positive factor for inclusive education noted by parents and teachers across all sites was improvement in parent-teacher relationships which facilitated continuity of strategies and methods for supporting children with disabilities across their school and home lives. Participants found that these improvements in communications from regular meetings provided benefited for their children. A teacher in Kalangba described how, *'the parents give us information about the improvement of their children in their homes and strategies for handling the children. We too, the teacher, give information to the parent about strategies and the improvement of their children in the school; the relationship between the teacher and parent has helped the children to improve more and more.'* Some respondents mentioned an element of the project called the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that parents provide inputs to, this was highlighted as another enabling tool for collaboration on methods and strategies to benefit the pupil. A teacher from Wuror described it as follows:

'We have two major links between us teachers and the parents. One is the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and, of course, the other one is the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) meeting we hold in our school here. Each time parents come for the PTA meetings we tell them when we have filled in the IEP form. There is a column under the evaluation wherein we need the parent to give their input on how they are seeing the progress of their children before the intervention of the project and during the intervention of the project. When we meet, sometimes we meet them at their houses and sometimes they come here to school, I think that is a great. They are giving us positive responses, of course, and some are proudly telling us that they don't even need to tell their children to come to school anymore, the children will opt to come to school by themselves.'

- Children with disabilities spoke of the benefits they derive from the parent-teacher meetings, describing instances where teachers counselled parents to care of them *'properly'* and instances in which parents asked teachers to *'talk to the children nicely'* and *'encourage'* them and not *'despise'* them. The majority of the children with disabilities stated that it made them happy when their parents came to meet with their teachers. Only one respondent expressed a negative perceptio, in saying he was *'ashamed'* of some of his teachers and was not happy for his parents to meet with them.
- Parents of children with disabilities enrolled in the project described how they had assumed the role of sensitizing others in their communities. They explained how through the project they have gained a lot of knowledge and seen a lot of progress in their children and they use this to encourage other parents to also send their children to school. In Kamabai, the community has formed a *'Mother's Club'* to support the project and spread awareness. As one parent explained, *'members of this club were going from village to village sensitizing parents about the project, explaining to them and encouraging them to send their children to school. They have also supported the school with any activity the school has.'*

Community Involvement

- Community involvement in the daily lives of those with disabilities was widely noted as a facilitator for inclusive education. In addition to the changes described of the community perceptions of disability, there have also been changes in action and response. Community members are described as stepping in to offer assistance to children with disabilities ranging from material resources like school supplies, money and food, to transportation to and from school, to protection from discrimination. A child with disabilities from Kamabai explained the assistance he receives in the community, *'when I am walking to school the commercial motorcycle riders usually give me a free ride to school. The community people usually give me lunch and help me with my laundry. The community people intervene on my behalf if someone wants to bully me.'*

- The encouragement now offered by the wider community to children with disabilities and their caregivers was acknowledged by the children, parents and teachers across study sites as contributing to them being able to gain their education. Children described how people in their communities encouraged them to go to school and continue their education and talked with them about their future. Parents and teachers highlight that community members will also encourage parents to send their children to school and even hold them accountable for doing so. This wider community involvement directly contributes to motivation for students with disability to attend school.

Barriers to inclusive education

Capacity of teachers

- In some sites, training issues were identified that affected the service that schools were able to provide. The number of trained teachers was discussed as a barrier to inclusive education by parents of children with disabilities in Wuror: *'we have met [to ask] for the organization to train more teachers so that they can be able to [teach] our children ... the ones that are here are very few and can't teach all the children.'* While this barrier did not emerge in any of the other focus groups, some teachers in other areas did describe *'cascading'* messages to teachers that were not trained, implying that there is a need for more trained teachers in these areas as well. In Kamaranka, teachers in the education project raised a need for more in-depth training beyond what Sightsavers has provided. It was suggested that more time spent in training and additional training materials would be incredibly beneficial, and one teacher suggested, *'they should make a special training college for this programme. Teachers should go for this special training and qualify for that and not only for week but continue on [to a] university standard.'*
- Despite the previous described enabler of improved disability identification noted by the majority of teachers, a few teachers still touched on the fact that identifying some disabilities still proved challenging. Despite being qualified in inclusive education methods, teachers could be hindered if they were not aware of students' disabilities or where are unable to identify them. For example, if it meant that children would not be supported by the appropriate methods and aids. A teacher in Wuror explained: *'initially when I was teaching, especially for those children with mild visual impairments, I was unable to detect them'*: without realizing that a child has an impairment, the teacher would inadvertently allow the child to be left behind.

Resources and infrastructure

- While all groups discussed great gratitude for the supplies provided to the children with disabilities in the project, the need for aids such as contact lenses, hearing aids, crutches, wheelchairs and medicines was expressed by teachers, caregivers and children with disabilities across all field sites. Insufficient supplies or lack of these aids for all children with disabilities was described as one of the greatest challenges to these students being able to *'fully benefit from their lessons.'*
- Parents of children with disabilities in Wuror highlighted that a major barrier for children with certain disabilities was the size and overcrowding of the classrooms. One parent representatively described, *'I am asking them to add more buildings to the school which should reduce the congestion of the classes. Then the kids will have free space and make it easier for them to walk freely in the class and make it possible for them to go and sit or go and do other things around. For example, if it is in this classroom, assume there are 50 pupils in these class room or let us say 100 kids, and if polio or disabled person is around or among this classroom, he will find it very difficult to sit and go outside or maybe the place is too congested for that particular individual to go outside to urinate it will be very difficult.'*
- The lack of appropriate toilet facilities for students with disabilities was brought up as an issue among teachers and parents in Binkolo, Wuror and Kalangba. In Binkolo teachers noted that the toilet facilities needed to be upgraded and made *'disabled friendly'*. A student with disabilities in Wuror expressed that his largest challenge at school was use of the toilet, *'I am unable to go to the toilet because they are not properly made.'* Teachers and parents in Kalangba requested a special toilet made just for the students with disability. Those making such requests were sometimes misinformed, for example the parent who stated, *'I am hereby requesting that the restroom facility be separated between the disabled and un-disabled because the disabled should only use their own restroom as well as the un-disabled to avoid disease contracting and many more.'*

- Parents found that awareness about the success and progress of their children is spreading to other communities. This is positive in terms of the way that children with disability are perceived but creates a parallel awareness that not all areas are covered by inclusive education projects and a sense of exclusion. A parent from Kamaranka explained, *'we have given ideas to other parents that have children in other schools telling them about how our children are benefiting from this project. Those who have children in other schools regret that their children are not in this school with this privilege.'* Even within the communities that are covered by the project, some parents noted that not all of their children with disabilities were accepted into the project.

Transport and accessibility of education

- Accessibility for disabled students was a key challenge affecting regular and timely attendance. The distance to the school was highlighted as being too great for many of these children, as a Binkolo student with disabilities described, *'[from] my house to the school is too far and I walk to school every day, without enough food. This is what disturbs me.'* Trying to address this issue added pressure to parents of disabled children, as observed by a teacher in Kamabai, *'disabled children were not regular and punctual at school. Now parents are going the extra mile to pay commercial motorcycle riders to take disabled children to school [so they can] benefit from education.'* However, this solution is not always feasible for these parents, as noted by a parent in Wuror, *'she is late to school unless I pay transport for her ... but I can't pay transport for her.'*
- Teachers from Binkolo and Kamabai explained that lack of transportation for themselves limited their capacity to provide a good service. They felt they needed help with transportation to visit disabled children when the children were absent from school and to check up on them on weekends and during holidays.

Gender considerations

In the focus groups held with children, no specific references were made to gender, gender roles or the implications of gender on inclusive education or the child's future. In the focus groups with parents and teachers, however, specific questions in the topic guide discussed gender issues.

Integration and assistance

- Teachers and parents in Kamabai, Kalangba and Binkolo felt developments in legislation and the Sightsavers project had both contributed to equal rights and access to education for girls in their communities. Many participants from these areas described how there was no longer any difference in the access to education or the treatment of boys and girls in school. As explained by parent in Kalangba, *'I say there is no difference between a girl and a boy anymore, because in previous days our people use to say schools are not for girls but for boys. But [now] both boys and girls go to school together.'* A teacher in Kamabai explained how the equal right to education, while a major departure from previous customs, is now being enforced in the community, *'in the past, parents with little education gave their girl child into marriage as they entered maturity. With the intervention of Sightsavers, other NGOs, and with the government, these rules have compelled parents to send their girl child to school.'*
- Despite progress, parents in Wuror expressed concern about the greater discrimination and exclusion still faced by girls with disabilities than boys with disabilities in their community. Some participants described parents of girls with disability in the community as holding beliefs that their daughter was of *'no use'* and that sending her to school would be a *'waste of money'*. While none of the parents participating in the Wuror focus group held these beliefs, one of the parents explained the thought process as follows, *'they just think that when girls are disabled or have a physical challenge, they have no use. That's how they think. They think that those who are physically challenged will hardly pay attention to their schooling and after they spend their money on [their disabled daughter] she will just end up pregnant. So that [is] how they look at it. But the boy child will never be pregnant, and he will have the chance to push his schooling far.'*
- The implementation of the gender action plan was mentioned by teachers in Binkolo, Kalangba, and Wuror who explained it worked to actively integrate girls more into the education system and structure, with specific efforts for inclusion of girls with disabilities. Ensuring girls are selected for roles of responsibility was the most frequently stated strategy for improving the status of girls. As a teacher in Binkolo described, *'whenever we want to select prefects in the school, we give preference to the girls. It is not only boys who should lead but girls can also lead.'*

Specialist attention

- Parents and teachers in Wuror described the specialist or extra attention that is given to girls with disabilities over boys with disabilities, from community members and beyond. As one teacher stated, *'well as far as the community is concerned, they provide much support to the girls.'* This response is partly attributable to the recognition in the community that girls with disabilities have tended to face additional discrimination and stigma and this needed to be addressed. When asked about parental involvement with the school, a teacher noted that parents of disabled girls are more involved than those with disabled sons and explained, *'sure the parents of disabled girls are coming more often to the school than the parents of disabled boys, of course. They are always afraid of their daughters being harassed and otherwise, so they are checking more often than the parents of disabled boys.'*
- A teacher in Wuror brought up the issue of resentment from boys and parents of boys at the additional attention given to girls in the project, stating *'those parents who have sons and their*

boys will maybe feel offended that we are paying more attention with girls.’ However, he explained that when parents raise these concerns he provides this scenario for them, ‘if you have a boy and a girl, lets imagine both are able, but being a girl in our society usually means you are lacking, so if you put them together you will see that the boys progress more than the girls. So now this project has come and we try to encourage the girls to narrow that gap. So [yes], those parents with sons will feel a bit offended. That’s the difference.’

Menstrual care and hygiene

- Stigma and shame associated with menstruation was noted as a barrier to education for girls (regardless of disability) in these communities. With the implementation of the gender action plan, actions are being taken to care for girls during menstruation. A teacher in Wuror illustrates this with the following story, *‘there was a girl and when she had her menstrual time, she was ashamed, she went to the side door and had wanted to go home. A boy in the class noticed that, he was trying to make fun of her, so I was able to detect that as well. I had a meeting with the girl and made some interrogations of her, she explained to me and I called the female teacher, who went in the classroom to try to console her. [She] took her to the restroom and dressed her up [sic.]. So, we see this focus especially on girls has a good impact. Now they feel good to come to school because they know there is somebody taking care of their menstrual cycles ... and now they are doing better at school.’*
- Teachers and parents across all field sites noted the beneficial impact that the supplied hygiene kits had on the children with disability and the inclusion of menstrual care products and instruction were specifically noted as very beneficial for girl students. One parent in Wuror described that before knowing about sanitary pads, girls used to *‘hide when they mess.’* The introduction of sanitary pads and menstrual care education and hygiene have been found to make girls more comfortable and increase their attendance. The Wuror parent further explained that the new information was not only of benefit to her child with disability, but also to herself and her elder daughter.

Sustainability of inclusive projects

Appreciation and commitment

- Great appreciation for the many positive results of this project were expressed by children with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities and teachers enrolled in the inclusive education projects across all the study sites. Praise for the provided structural improvements, materials, trainings and sensitization was pervasive across all study sites. Not only was progress seen in the abilities of children with disabilities enrolled in the project, but children with disabilities, parents and teachers across study sites expressed themes of empowerment in their own capabilities to accommodate disabilities.
- Teachers and parents also expressed commitment to carrying their new perceptions forward and spreading awareness and understanding on these issues.

Sustainability and the future

- Participants across all focus groups expressed considerable enthusiasm for the continuation of the project. Many parents and teachers stated that Sightsavers is the only help available for these disabled children and without the continuation of the project all the progress made for these students with disabilities would be lost and the children would again be excluded from school. A parent from Kamabai explained, *'we are pleading that the help that the programme has brought to the community continues. If the programme stops all the gains will be lost. We want our children to have better living conditions than us.'*
- Further, having seen the progress the children have made in the time period that the project has been running, many teachers and parents expressed greater hopes for the future. A parent in Kamabai described, *'now that they have bought this initiative for disable children to be happy when going to school, if the project continue like this, the children will be given more regard and the children would not be afraid as they used to be but if this project comes to an end, the children would be discouraged knowing they have no one to help and encourage them as well. So, we want this project to continue so that these children would be educated until university level.'*
- These hopes went beyond just their own children and current pupils. A parent in Kamabai explained, *'my own idea is that because this project has gone so far so, we want them to continue in order that other children who are suffering like our children would also have the opportunity to benefit from this project.'*
- Teachers in also felt there was scope to expand as explained by these two, the first from Binkolo, *'we want an extension of the project. We have pupils who have just entered this school and they have not benefited from this project, so we are kindly pleading for you to extend this project.'* The second from Kalangba: *'What I want Sightsavers to do, I thank them for all their effort that they have made for our children, may God bless them, and we don't want them to leave these children behind! And once in a while let them come and see how these children are doing. And also, we the teachers ... if there are lapses, then they come in and train us. That is what I am asking Sightsavers to do for us. The thing that I want Sightsavers to add onto the project is to continue to monitor the good work that they have done in the school. If they keep on motoring, the project will not die out completely. The teachers will continue to do their best according to the training that has been given to them and also for the children both disabled and normal children should continue gaining what they have learned.'*

Annex: Interview guide for teachers

1. In the last year, have you seen any Sightsavers, or others, project interventions targeting girls and children with disabilities in your school or community? If so, what are they? (if projects are not Sightsavers please check links to Sightsavers projects)
2. What has been your experience of them, if you have come across them?
3. Are there specific ways the Sightsavers interventions, in the last year, have changed your teaching experience? If so, what are they? If not, why do you think this is? (please check: any differences for teaching girls and boys?)
4. Have you seen specific interventions focused on girls? Have you seen positive or negative changes for girls and boys with disabilities? If so, what are they? If not, why do you think this is?
5. Have the gender action plans been implemented, and do you see any change at school / classroom level so far?
6. Now the project is coming to a close, what has been your experience of links between parents of girls and boys with disabilities and the school? (check: parent-teacher meetings to discuss progress? Is there any change in children's progress as a result of these meetings? Are there any differences between parents involvement if they have a girl or boy child?)
7. If not already discussed, what is your experience of community support for inclusion of boys and girls with disabilities in the last year? Are there any differences for girls and boys?
8. Are there still things that need to change? What are they?
9. Is there anything more you would like to add in relation to this subject, either to your responses, or about something we haven't asked?

Useful prompts

- How did that make you feel?
- What do you think about that?
- Who was involved in that?
- Where did you feel able to do that?
- When did you feel able to share that?
- What's that like?
- I think I hear you saying... is that correct?
- I imagine... (e.g. that is difficult/frustrating for you)
- You seem... (e.g. sad about that)

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Summary analysis: Inclusive Education, Sierra Leone

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