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DISABILITY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



Considerations from CBM Australia's meta-evaluation

CBM Australia conducted a meta-evaluation of 26 recent evaluations of projects we have supported, including 19 projects that received support from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). This summary highlights what we learnt about disability inclusive education.*

The evaluations showed significant increases in the number of children with disability newly enrolled in school across a range of projects in the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Tanzania. This included strong success from persistent work with parents, families and school leadership, and increasingly with the broader community, to increase enrolment of children with disability. However, there were

some significant challenges identified with ensuring that children with disability continued to attend or benefit from being at school. Related learnings include:

1. Minimise parents' fears and hesitations

Parents' and families' attitudes and understanding can be significant barriers to education of children with disability. It is important to engage with parents about children with disabilities' rights and potential for education, as well as fears they may have about their child in a school environment. This can involve a significant investment of time, but is important to address alongside attitudes and understanding within schools and the education system more broadly.

2. Involve community members in working towards inclusion of children with disability in education

CBM Australia's evaluations showed strong results because

they engaged members of the broader community to increase enrolments in school of children with disability, and to mobilise resources for inclusion. This included people from self help groups, school committees, local councils and local businesses. In one project, awareness of the rights of children with disability to access education and the responsibility to provide education was raised with local government and businesses at the same time as schools. Teacher champions participated in training to understand the needs of children with disability and then worked with their school communities to identify gaps and source resources from local government and community. Outcomes included formation of school disability clubs that (for example) successfully advocated for funding for accessible toilet facilities from WASH specialist NGOs; advocated to neighbouring schools to make their buildings accessible; and gained local government support for initiatives towards improved inclusion. These changes are leading to increased enrolment and social inclusion.

3. Enrolment is only the start - have strategies for children with disability to learn and benefit from being in school

Ensuring more children enrolling in school is a very important first step that can involve a lot of targeted work, but there needs to be consideration of the outcomes resulting from enrolment. Several challenges were commonly leading to children with disability underperforming or dropping out of school:

- The need for more support and training to teachers was a common challenge being addressed through a range of strategies such as training of trainers, placement of resource people to support teachers, and including inclusive education topics as part of teacher training.
- Effective support to include children with deafness was also a challenge across a range of projects, with different approaches being recommended depending on the context.
- Where accessibility measures were incomplete (e.g. ramps installed but no accessible toilets), these were an important barrier to address.
- Additionally, children with disability being as far as possible placed in classrooms with others of their age level was a factor affecting children's motivation to continue attending.

These challenges are a reminder that efforts to increase enrolment of children with disability need to happen alongside plans to address barriers to inclusion within schools and classrooms, that can prevent children from learning and continuing to attend. This can require context-specific technical advice if needed, that clarifies what inclusive education looks like in that context and identification of gaps in the supports for children with disability to benefit and learn.

4. Don't just count enrolments!

A common need across our projects is for monitoring and evaluation data that goes beyond tracking enrolment numbers, to the quality of outcomes of education for children with disability. Education projects should include systems to track: whether children are continuing to attend school regularly; reasons for discontinuing; whether children are able to participate in learning in the classroom; whether children are achieving learning goals or transitioning from one year level to the next; changes in social inclusion of children with disability; and changes in teachers' and school communities' behaviour as a result of training and awareness raising.

5. Be willing to try different approaches and be ready to learn from these

Disability inclusive education does not involve one specific approach. Across CBM Australia-funded projects, there are examples of many different approaches in different contexts. In one project, local government units have begun funding special education teachers in mainstream schools to facilitate inclusion and promote learning and the success of this will be tracked. In another project, resource hubs have been developed to support inclusion in a number of schools. Another approach involves investing in training teachers more broadly in inclusive education. What is important is that CBM and partners continue to track the outcomes and learning from these different approaches and adapt ways of working to find the best approach for each context.

6. Don't just change the school, work to change the system too

Where CBM and partners are finding evidence of success, there is an opportunity to document the models that are working and use these to influence education departments and policy. In some projects, partners have engaged with local and regional governments and the success demonstrated is leading to further government commitment and support. The most effective programs are not only developing approaches that will improve a particular groups of schools, but are also showcasing an approach that can be used to convince government to support this more broadly.

* The meta-evaluation was based on evaluations done between 2015-17. This paper on disability inclusive education summarises one of four main learning themes identified. The other themes are: inclusive eye health; disability and gender equality; and design, monitoring, evaluation and learning. Separate papers are available.

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