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UNICEF EDUCATION

Education Case Study

ETHIOPIA

Strengthening policies to mainstream disability inclusion in pre-primary education

February 2024

In Ethiopia, where there are over 1.2 million young children (ages 4-6) with disabilities, the Government has made significant efforts to leave no child behind by mainstreaming inclusion of children with disabilities within education policies, strategies and plans. This includes ensuring that financial planning and data collection are also disability inclusive.

Notably, evidenced-based planning for children with disabilities has been integrated into education sector planning from pre-primary through to secondary school to make sure every child learns. The current Education Sector Development Plan (2020-25), mainstreams provision of services for children with disabilities. The plan includes programmes and strategies to strengthen pre-primary teacher trainings to promote inclusion and make all pre-primary teaching and learning materials and environments gender-transformative and disability-inclusive.

In addition, the Ministry of Education has updated a number of existing training policies and strategies to include greater emphasis on developing inclusive education systems including in pre-primary, such as the 2023 Education and Training Policy and the Inclusive Education Strategy.

In 2023, the Ministry of Education launched the Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) policy framework with UNICEF's support – a significant tool which emphasizes disability inclusion as a key priority. It highlights the importance of timely identification and integrated interventions and underscores that children with disabilities have the right to inclusive quality education alongside their peers in any pre-primary school in their locality, without any discrimination.

These policies have been informed by a robust data strategy and Education Management Information System (EMIS), which disaggregates data on children with disabilities, including enrollment, barriers children face, number of teachers trained in inclusive education and the capacity of schools. The EMIS data gathering tool is based on the Child Functioning Module (CFM) developed by UNICEF and the Washington Group, and plans are in place to further strengthen

the data collection by encouraging the full use of the CFM within EMIS data gathering tools. This data has also informed planning and decision-making including targeted capacity building, installation of ramps, innovative classrooms, and accessible toilets and water facilities.

At the school level, the Ministry of Education with support from UNICEF, developed screening toolkits for school directors and teachers to help screen children with disabilities in pre-primary and primary schools for further identification and diagnosis. This tool has been distributed to all schools and regional Education Bureaus to build teachers' knowledge around child development and help identify and support young children with developmental delays or disabilities.

UNICEF also supported the General Education Curriculum Reform to include teacher training on inclusive pedagogy, supporting learners with disabilities and providing learning experiences that are equitable, inclusive and engaging for all learners. Additionally, pre-primary curriculum materials at national and sub-national levels were developed to include a play-based learning approach to accommodate all children with diverse needs, among other interventions.

RESULTS

- From 2020-2023, over 63,000 children with disabilities were reached through the pre-primary programme as part of the national Education Sector Development Plan. Through biannual back-to-school campaigns, regular community mobilization and engagement of the parent-teacher association (PTA), parents of young children with disabilities were supported to send their children to pre-primary schools.
- According to the 2022/23 Annual Abstract, since the introduction of the screening tool, 41,808 children (18,580 girls) were identified and enrolled in pre-primary schools. The data collected through this tool was entered into the national education data gathering system and helped inform evidence-based planning.
- The Government of Ethiopia, World Bank, UNICEF and other implementing partners established 700 inclusive education cluster centers with teaching-learning materials and teaching professionals to support 3,500 satellite schools (pre-primary and primary). The resources in these centers help neighbouring schools

and teachers with training, equipment and assistive devices as well as screening, identification, and referral of children with disabilities at the school level.

- In 2023, UNICEF reactivated a national-level taskforce on Disability Inclusion led by the Ministry of Education and have developed a three-year action plan to advocate for inclusive education in Ethiopia.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Strong integration of services at all levels in collaboration with other sectors is important.** Multisectoral coordination across areas including health, protection, water and sanitation during data collection, screening, early identification and referral proved to be critical. For example, at times screening questions cannot be addressed alone by education practitioners and require the expertise of a health professional.
- **Appointing an inclusive education focal person working within the Ministry of Education is crucial** to advocate for and ensure the effective implementation of inclusive education practices at all levels.
- **Having a resource mobilization and financing strategy is key** to ensuring adequate budget allocation for inclusive education at the federal, regional and school levels, particularly for young learners with disabilities.
- **Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) play a vital role** in promoting more inclusive education systems and policies. These groups can help identify schools that are willing to move towards inclusive education and establish partnerships with education authorities to support inclusive practices.

NEXT STEPS

In collaboration with relevant ministries, UNICEF plans to advocate for the endorsement of the Disability Act by the House of Representatives, which will strengthen policies that support children and people with disabilities. UNICEF is also leading the development of a national Early Childhood Development parenting package that will include guidance around supporting children with disabilities.

Costs and financing: Within its education programmes, UNICEF Ethiopia allocates 12 per cent of its education budget towards initiatives that support with children with disabilities. UNICEF is working towards securing a dedicated budget for inclusive education support including training pre-primary and primary teachers, procuring assistive devices and ensuring preschools and schools are inclusive and disability-friendly environments.

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