Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Australian Aid

DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: POLICY GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION

How to use this Guidance Document

This Policy Guidance Document provides introductory information regarding inclusive education, to assist DFAT in supporting the design, implementation, and monitoring of inclusive education initiatives. It refers to the international 'Framework for Disability-Inclusive Education' and discusses the key elements of inclusive education identified within the Framework. The Guidance Document can be used to guide assessment of inclusive education at country and program level.

The Framework for Disability-Inclusive Education

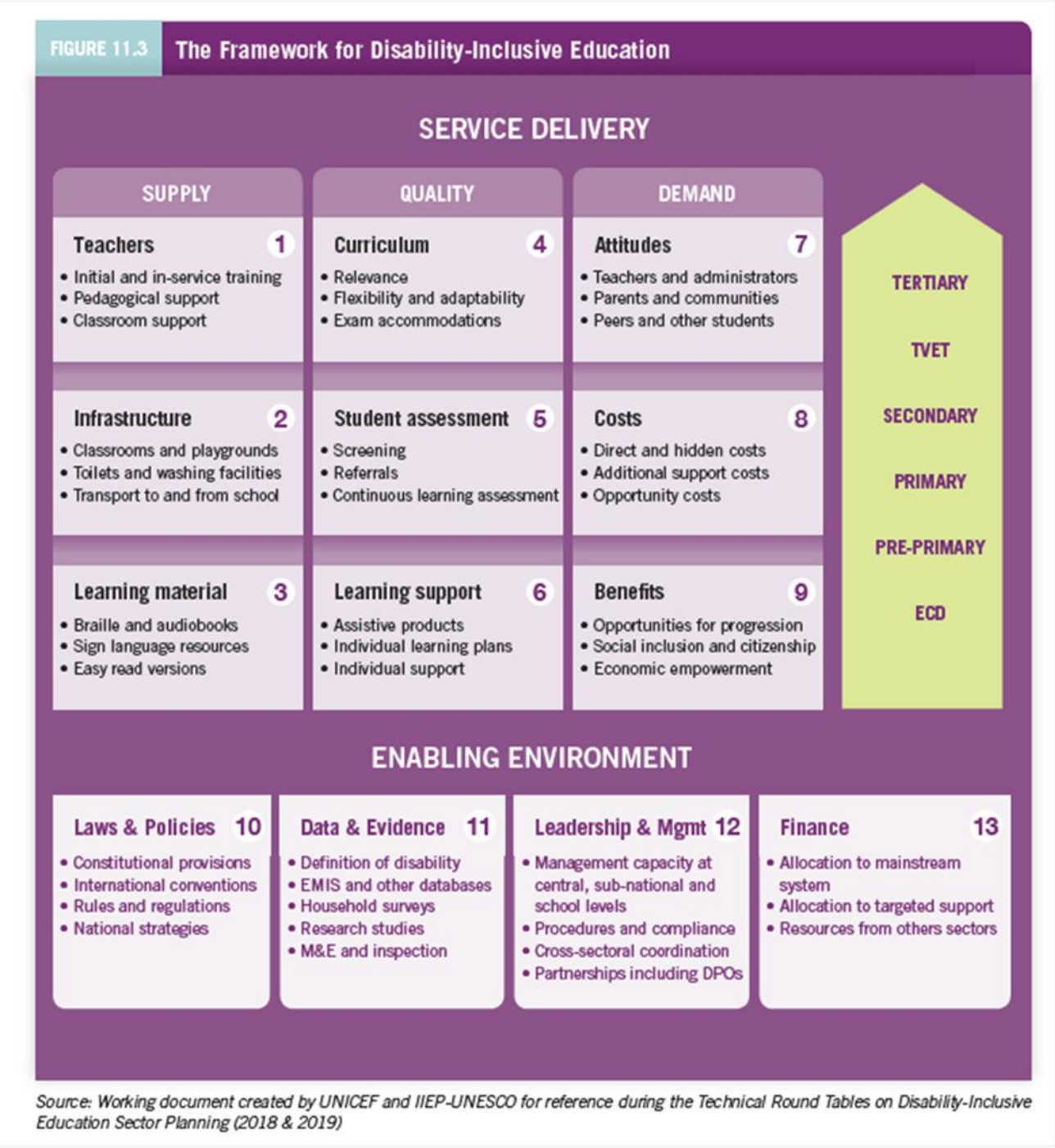
The 'Framework for Disability-Inclusive Education' (see Figure 1 on page 2), is a tool developed by UNESCO, UNICEF, the Global Partnership for Education, and the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The Framework can be used to guide examination and strengthening of an education system, from early childhood education up to tertiary education, through a disability-inclusive lens. [i]

The Framework provides an overview of the different parts or aspects of an education system that need to be addressed, including the social context, to enable the inclusion of children with disabilities. The framework is divided into two main sections: **Service Delivery** and **Enabling Environment**.

Service Delivery consists of three elements that determine the extent to which schools can offer inclusive education for children with disabilities.

The Framework is presented in Figure 1, and detailed descriptions of its components are outlined within the following chapters.

Figure 1: The Framework for Disability-Inclusive Education



Source: Working document created by UNICEF and IIEP-UNESCO for reference during the Technical Round Tables on Disability-Inclusive Education Sector Planning (2018 & 2019)

How to use this document

Table 1 lists questions linked to each element of the 'Framework for Disability-Inclusive Education'. These questions can be used to support conversations with government partners in order to progress the status of inclusive education at country level. It also assists DFAT personnel to locate further information within this Guidance Document.

Table 1: Disability Inclusive Education Country Status Questions

Education system elements	No	Some-what	Yes	Refer page:
Service Delivery – Supply				
1. Teacher training and workforce supply				
a. Are inclusion practices taught to all teacher trainees through mainstream pre-service teacher education?				9
b. Do teachers have access to professional development in inclusive education at least once per year?				9
c. Is there a referral system in place to enable access to specialists to support students with disabilities?				9
2. School Infrastructure				
a. Do students with disabilities have access to accessible buildings and facilities, including playgrounds, washrooms and transport?				11
3. Learning materials				
a. Are accessible learning materials[1] available to support learners with disabilities to access and benefit from school?				12
Service Delivery – Quality				
4. Curriculum and assessment				
a. Is the country implementing an inclusive and flexible national curriculum that is accessible to all learners?				15
b. Is the country implementing inclusive and flexible national assessment systems that are accessible to all learners?				15
c. Are accommodations made to enable transition of students with disabilities between year and school levels?				15
5. Screening and referral				
a. Is there a government-led national early intervention plan in place?				16
b. Is there a process in place to screen children and refer those at risk of disability to services?				16
6. Learning support				
a. Are Individual Learning Plans or Individual Education Plans used to support the learning of children who need extensive assistance to participate in school?				18
b. Are teacher aides available to support the teaching of students with disabilities?				18
c. Are assistive devices available in most mainstream schools?				18

[1] This could include: images, transcripts for videos, visual aids and illustrations to accompany text, adjustable font size, clear headings and content structure that facilitates comprehension and information retrieval, simplified language or easy-read versions, educational technology.

Education system elements	No	Some-what	Yes	Refer page:
Service Delivery – Demand				
7. Attitudes				
a. Are awareness-raising sessions conducted with school communities, supported by OPDs?				21
8. Costs				
a. Are grants available to support children with disabilities and their families?				21
b. Are grants available to support schools which enrol and teach students with disabilities?				21
Creating an enabling environment				
9. Laws and Policies				
a. Are laws in place to protect and promote the rights of learners with disabilities to participate in education?				23
b. Is a policy in place to guide inclusive education efforts?				23
c. Is a policy implementation plan in place to support annual work-planning of inclusive education efforts?				23
10. Disability data collection in Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)				
a. Is an identification system for students with disabilities based on the Washington Group Questions/Child Functioning Module being used to identify students with disabilities, and is data entered into an Education Management Information System?				24
b. Are teachers and school heads trained in disability data collection?				24
c. Is EMIS disability data used to inform ministry-level planning, resource allocation and reporting?				24
d. Does the ministry have a system in place to monitor the participation and achievement of all leaners?				24
11. Leadership and Management				
a. Is there an established system for national inclusive education coordination among government ministries?				26
b. Do OPDs participate in coordination of inclusive education efforts?				26
12. Finance				
a. Does government allocate funding to support inclusive education?				27
Inclusive Education in Emergencies				
13. Inclusive education in emergencies				
a. Are the rights and requirements of learners with disabilities identified and addressed in disaster response plans?				29
b. Do disaster needs assessments collect information about the requirements of children with disabilities?				29
c. Do education sector recovery efforts incorporate disability inclusion and accessibility?				29

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

1.1 Education and disability

Children with disabilities are less likely to be enrolled in school, have lower rates of attendance and of transition to higher levels of education, and are less likely to complete education compared to children without disabilities.[ii,iii] Children with disabilities comprise 15 percent of all out-of-school children.[iv] People with disabilities are more likely to experience lower learning outcomes – the literacy rate among people with disabilities has been estimated to be 54 percent, compared to 77 percent for people without disabilities. This percentage is even lower for women and girls with disabilities.[v]

Early childhood care and education are key contributors to the successful completion of primary and higher levels of education, for all children.[vi] However, available evidence suggests that particularly in low-resource settings, inclusion of children with disabilities in pre-primary education is very limited. This is due to factors such as lack of funding, inadequate policies, stigma and limited knowledge regarding the benefits of pre-primary education for all children, including children with disabilities.[vii]

People with disabilities experience lower enrolment and completion rates in tertiary education. There is little data on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) participation and outcomes for people with disabilities, or disaggregated data on scholarships available to people with disabilities.[viii]

Lower education completion rates lead to reduced access to qualifications and, thus, fewer opportunities to find employment and/or to develop a business.[ix] Consequently, people with disabilities have lower employment rates when compared to others, reinforcing the interconnectedness of disability and poverty.[x]

1.2 Defining inclusive education

Inclusive education refers to education systems that allow all students to participate in learning in mainstream schools/educational institutions, alongside their peers. Achieving inclusive education requires proactive **elimination of barriers** that impede the right to education for many learners. This includes "changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students (…) Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers", so that all students have an equitable and participatory learning experience.[xi]

Disability-Inclusive Education

The term 'Inclusive Education' has been adopted to refer to inclusion of all marginalised groups in education. As such, the term 'disability-inclusive education' is increasingly used to describe efforts that relate specifically to ensuring the inclusion of children (or adults) with disabilities in education. **Disability-inclusive education enables children (or adults) with disabilities to access education within mainstream schools and learning settings alongside peers without disabilities**, in the classrooms they would be attending if they did not have a disability, or within environments that best correspond to their requirements and preferences.[xii]

Special, integrated and inclusive education

From a rights perspective, inclusive education is accepted as the most suitable approach to guarantee universality and non-discrimination. However, the reality in many countries is that education of children with disabilities occurs in a range of settings, including segregated 'special schools' catering solely to students with disabilities, and integration classes in regular schools, as well as in inclusive classrooms.

At times, a child with a disability may benefit more from either a segregated or integrated setting. This will depend on the resources available, policies and attitudes in schools, and the nature of the child's education support requirements. For example, children with low vision may need to learn braille, or Deaf children may need to be immersed in a sign language environment, before enrolling in a mainstream school.[xiii]

Journeys towards inclusive education in diverse countries are affected by many contextual factors, including policy directives and access to resources. While there is a fundamental need to reform education systems so that these become inclusive, a high regard for contextual factors and a commitment to long-term reform must be at the heart of development partner approaches to disability-inclusive education.

1.3 The importance of disability-inclusive development and inclusive education

The case for disability-inclusive education

Attending school offers opportunities for children with disabilities to learn skills and knowledge and gain confidence that can open gateways to social and economic participation later, reducing the likelihood of poverty.

There is frequently **a direct economic benefit when families send their child with disability to school**: adults in the household become available to undertake paid work, increasing family income.

Attending a supportive disability-inclusive mainstream school improves social connectedness and wellbeing. In addition to benefits for students with disabilities, students without disabilities experience improved social skills, a deeper ethical grounding, and opportunities to consolidate their own learning within peer-to-peer education activities. Disability-inclusive education has also been found to enhance school communities by fostering a problem-solving culture.[xiv]

Attendance at school by children with disabilities **challenges societal misconceptions** about the capacity of children with disabilities to participate and learn, which in turn contributes to inclusive communities, enabling participation of people with disabilities in economic and social life.[xv]

DFAT's commitment to disability-inclusive development

Australia's International Development Policy (August 2023) has a strong focus on partnerships and locally led development, with a renewed focus on disability equity. The policy reinforces **for development to be effective, people with disabilities must be partners on an equal basis.** DFAT's *Development for All 2015–2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program* (extended to 2021) commits to ensuring people with disabilities are active participants in the planning, design and implementation of development and humanitarian programming. Australia is committed to ensuring that disability inclusion continues to be at the heart of its development program, and the successor to *Development for All,* the **new Disability, Equity and Rights strategy will ensure that Australia remains a strong and consistent advocate for disability equity and rights.** Australia's commitment to ensuring people with disabilities equally benefit from education investments remains a priority.

Australia adopts a twin-track approach to disability-inclusive development, which incorporates two approaches to promoting inclusion:

1. **Mainstream approach** – including people with disabilities as participants and beneficiaries of general development investments, particularly in sectors identified as key opportunities in *Development for All*.
2. **Targeted approach** – targeting people with disabilities in development initiatives designed specifically to benefit them or address areas of specific disadvantage.

Actively including people with disabilities in mainstream development efforts is necessary to ensure that broader systems, policies and services include and benefit people with disabilities. This cannot be fully realised without

complementary targeted efforts to facilitate equality of access and participation for people with disabilities. For example, you can make a school's infrastructure accessible, and train a teacher on disability inclusion (mainstream approach); but if a child is deaf or has a vision impairment then these changes will not lead to equitable access without additional specific measures, such as a sign language interpreter or assistive technology such as a magnifier or screen reader (targeted approach).

As a cross-cutting priority for Australia's international engagement and being central to development effectiveness, disability inclusion is relevant and mandatory to report on across investments.

Aligned to the *Development for All* strategy, disability inclusion in investments is assessed against the following questions in Investment Monitoring Reports (IMRs):

Question 1: The investment actively involves people with disabilities and/or disabled person's organisations in planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

- This question focuses on disability inclusion as a **process**.

Question 2: The investment identifies and addresses barriers to inclusion and opportunities for participation for people with disabilities to enable them to benefit equally from the aid investment.

- This question focuses on disability inclusion as an **outcome.**

See the Short Note *How to rate and report on disability in investment monitoring reports (IMRs)* for further guidance on use of these questions.

1.4 International commitments to disability-inclusive education

Many of the countries that Australia supports through its development program are signatories to regional and international commitments, which promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities to education. These commitments include:

- Several **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and related targets refer directly to equity, inclusion, diversity, equal opportunity or non-discrimination, including SDG 4 on education**. SDG 4.5 focuses on the obligation to "ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations".[xvi]
- **Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** requires States that have ratified to ensure a disability-inclusive education system at all levels, including post-school education and training, as well as provide opportunities for lifelong learning, on an equal basis with students without disabilities. Reasonable accommodations and individualised support must be provided to students with disabilities to assist their participation in education. Examples include provision of assistive technology, sign language interpreters or modifications to learning and assessment materials.
- **General Comment 4 to CRPD Article 24 (2016)** described inclusive education as involving "a process … to provide all students … with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences".[xvii]
- **The Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016 – 2025** promotes the strengthening of inclusive education across the region, in line with the CRPD. The Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) is committed to inclusive education, as outlined further in the accompanying Pacific Regional Inclusive Education Framework (PRIEF).
- **The Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032**[xviii] includes commitments to ensuring continuous and inclusive education for all learners with disabilities, providing early childhood detection and intervention services for children with

disabilities, and producing disability-disaggregated data to inform policy-making, program planning and implementation strategies.

- The Cali commitment to equity and inclusion in education (2019),[xix] an outcome of the International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education in Cali, Colombia, called for accelerated efforts towards inclusive education, building on commitments made in the Salamanca Statement,[xx] the SDGs, and the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

1.5 Barriers to disability-inclusive education

The social model views disability as the result of **barriers which exclude people with impairments**, preventing their full participation in society and their communities. Several factors act as barriers to quality education for children with disabilities.

- **Attitudinal barriers**: Negative attitudes and layers of discrimination, based on factors including gender, geographic location, wealth, ethnicity, language, migration, sexual orientation, gender identity as well as disability, deny learners the right to participate in quality education alongside their peers. The beliefs, attitudes, assumptions and fears of policymakers, teachers, school communities, parents and caregivers are key factors in the success or otherwise of inclusive education.
- **Physical barriers**: Inaccessibility of schools, distance to schools and inaccessible transport systems can prevent inclusion in education. This includes inaccessible school infrastructure, including water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, which can prevent children with disabilities from getting to schools and into classrooms, moving around school premises and using school facilities. DFAT's Accessibility Design Guide provides valuable information to address these barriers.[xxi]
- **Communication barriers:** Information and communications that are not provided in a range of accessible formats can limit the progress of learners with disabilities, and the engagement of parents with disabilities.
- **Institutional barriers:** Education laws, policies, curricula, assessment, costs, funding and data collection and monitoring systems that do not actively facilitate inclusive education can prevent enrolment, learning achievement and progression by children with disabilities.
- **Education workforce**: The preparation and motivation of the education workforce can promote or limit the success of inclusive education, depending on the degree to which teachers and other staff have been trained and feel empowered to teach students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 2: SERVICE DELIVERY – SUPPLY

2.1 Teacher training and workforce supply

What is pre- and in-service teacher training for disability-inclusive education, and why is it important?

Pre-service training is **initial teacher training** delivered in teacher training Institutions, such as universities or colleges. **In-service training** refers to professional development of teachers already in the workforce. Both are required to **equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to ensure quality education for students with disabilities**.

Training focuses on understanding diverse needs, **building inclusive values and environments**, employing pedagogies such as **differentiated instruction** and **cooperative learning**, **utilising assistive technologies**, **promoting individualised instruction** and collaborating with other professionals. It promotes positive attitudes, reduces stigma, and contributes to a more inclusive and equitable society.

Teacher training should include practical placements in inclusive education settings with supervisors who are skilled and experienced in inclusion. Teachers' self-efficacy (belief in one's abilities to perform effectively) in inclusive education has been widely shown to positively impact on their attitudes to inclusive education.[xxii]

Teachers who have more exposure to and experience with children with disabilities, as well as receiving inclusive education training, tend to have more positive attitudes towards the concept of inclusive education.[xxiii] Additionally, teachers' awareness of inclusive education policies has been shown to elevate their self-efficacy in inclusion.[xxiv]

What is an effective disability-inclusive education workforce and why is it important?

- **All teachers have an important role in creating inclusive classrooms; and in some schools, the disability-inclusive education workforce may consist solely of mainstream teachers**. However where available, teachers with specialised training (often called 'special education teachers') make an enormous difference to how schools can implement quality disability-inclusive education.
- **Special education teachers collaborate with teachers and other professionals, support the development of individualised education plans, adapt instruction, and help to monitor student progress**. They collaborate in planning and identifying solutions to challenges and through team-teaching in classrooms. They provide expertise, training, and resources on inclusive practices, differentiated instruction, and reasonable accommodations as well as offering behavioural and classroom management support and facilitating communication with families and referral services.
- Another important role in supporting inclusive education is **the school 'facilitator' or 'inclusion coordinator'**, who promotes, motivates and supports the change process being undertaken.
- An effective **disability-inclusive education system has access to a referral network of a wide range of professionals** who work in close collaboration with students, teachers, families and each other. Depending on the availability of various professions, this may include teacher aides (or education assistants), audiologists, educational psychologists, therapists (occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy), behaviour specialists, social workers, counsellors, sign language interpreters, Braillists, orientation and mobility instructors, and assistive technology specialists. These may be available through health services or civil society (see Chapter 2: Screening and referral).

What are the issues?

- A substantial number of **teachers lack adequate preparation and professional development** opportunities for teaching students with disabilities.
- **Traditional teacher training courses often compartmentalise 'special education' into separate, optional subjects**, resulting in many teacher graduates having no training or practical experience in disability-inclusive education.
- **Schools in rural areas often lack access to a specialist workforce or referral services**.
- The ability for teachers to implement disability-inclusive education is influenced by **attitudes of school principals**, school management groups, and local education authorities. The role of leadership in supporting inclusive education is crucial.

- Changing teacher practices towards inclusive education can be a difficult and slow process.[xxv] Many inclusive education guides highlight the need for a sustained process for reforming teacher practice.[xxvi]

Case Study 1: INOVASI – Innovation for Indonesia's School Children

INOVASI is a partnership between the governments of Australia and Indonesia. Working with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the Ministry of National Development Planning, INOVASI works to identify and support changes to education practice, systems and policy which demonstrably accelerate and improve student learning outcomes. INOVASI activities specific to supporting teachers for disability-inclusive education have included:

- implementing teacher and principal training through teacher working groups,
- developing a system for teachers to identify disability, linked to the national education management information system,
- developing 20 micro-learning videos available through the national government's teacher learning platform,
- working with teacher training institutions to strengthen training and partnerships with government,
- publication of a teacher handbook on inclusive education and a handbook for parents of children with disabilities,
- development of Bookbot Indonesia (an artificial intelligence reading assistance app for supporting children with difficulties reading, including dyslexia), and
- policy development specific to provision of reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, disability service units, and teacher competencies and standards for disability-inclusive education.

Lessons learned

Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) is a development approach that focuses on addressing specific challenges through iterative and adaptive processes. In INOVASI's disability-inclusive education work, PDIA has been employed to tackle issues identified by schools, local governments, and collaborations with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. By targeting problems related to disability identification, data systems, regulatory reform, staffing, and support systems, INOVASI has provided targeted responses and continuously iterated on them based on feedback and evidence. This learning and experimentation approach has fostered innovation and refinement of solutions over the course of eight years, demonstrating the interconnectedness and adaptability required in addressing disability-related issues at various levels.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- **Pre-service training should embed disability-inclusive education principles throughout curricula**, especially in non-optional subjects, and ensure all trainees receive practical learning in inclusive classrooms with experienced and skilled teachers.
- **Analyses of pre- and in-service teacher training should include discussions with partner governments, teacher training institutions and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)** to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Some institutions may have lecturers with capacity in specific areas, such as teaching students with vision impairment, while others may have expertise in teaching students with autism spectrum disorder. Collaboration and coordination between different institutions is pivotal to fill workforce gaps in these specialised areas.
- **Continuous professional development for in-service teachers**, using a variety of methods (including online training), is required to build skills and confidence amongst the existing workforce, and to allow for enduring challenges of workforce mobility as staff are moved between schools.
- **Partner governments should be supported to plan, develop and implement sustained, long-term teacher training strategies**.
- **DFAT can support ministries of education to establish referral networks to enable access to a workforce to support disability-inclusive education, including specialised professionals**. To enable this, governments must invest in recruiting, training, and retaining professionals, such as therapists, audiologists, psychologists, health workers, teacher aides etc, as well as developing career pathways and incentives to attract talented individuals into the field of disability-inclusive education.
- **Cross-sectoral and ministerial collaboration and coordination** should be supported.

2.2 School infrastructure

What is accessible school infrastructure, and why is this important?

Accessible classrooms, playgrounds, Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, and transport are essential components of disability-inclusive education, as they promote equal opportunities and full participation for all students.

Accessible classrooms accommodate the diverse needs of students with disabilities, including features such as ramps, wider doorways, adjustable furniture, and assistive technologies. **Accessible playgrounds** provide inclusive spaces for play and social activities, fostering social interaction and physical development for all students. **Accessible WASH facilities** ensure that students with disabilities can access toilets, clean water and hygiene facilities, including menstrual hygiene, independently and with dignity. **Accessible transport** such as wheelchair-accessible buses and taxis, and train stations with ramps or lifts to the platform, reduces barriers to regular attendance and participation.

Figure 2: Accessible playground in Za'atari Refugee Camp, Jordan.

What are the issues?

- The Global Education Monitoring Report 2020 highlighted how few education facilities were wheelchair accessible.
- **A lack of awareness of the importance of accessible infrastructure** and transport limits efforts in prioritising and investing in the necessary designs or adaptations.
- **Limited funding, and an absence of inclusive and accessible planning** and design practices, limit the development or renovation of infrastructure in an accessible way.

- **Physical or geographical constraints,** such as rugged terrain or limited transport options, can make it challenging to provide accessible infrastructure.
- **Lack of accessibility standards for education settings**, or poor regulation of standards, results in a lack of guidance or oversight for the development of accessible infrastructure.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- **Prioritise accessibility and universal design principles in the construction of education infrastructure**.
- Incorporating accessibility features during the initial construction phase typically increases the total cost by only 1 percent.[xxvii] In contrast, adapting existing infrastructure after completion can raise costs by 5 percent or more.
- Addressing these challenges requires raising **awareness among stakeholders about the importance of accessible infrastructure**, advocating for increased funding and resources, integrating universal design principles into planning and design processes, and working with local schools, communities and OPDs to find solutions to overcome physical and geographical constraints.

2.3 Learning materials

What are accessible learning materials?

- Accessible learning materials are **resources, materials and content** that are designed to support students with disabilities or diverse learning needs to access and benefit from education, on an equal basis with their peers.
- **Learning materials that are made accessible can be both targeted,** e.g. braille books specifically for children who are blind or have low vision; and **mainstream learning resources** designed in an accessible way so that they can be used by the widest range of children possible.
- Some examples of accessibility features include alternative text descriptions for images, transcripts for videos, visual aids and illustrations to accompany text, adjustable font size, clear headings and content structure that facilitate comprehension and information retrieval, and simplified language or easy-read versions.
- **Accessible learning materials can be used in class alongside teaching methods which make learning materials accessible**, such as peer-to-peer learning, interactive discussions, storytelling, and group activities. This allows for knowledge sharing and inclusive participation, regardless of individual reading abilities.

Educational technology (EdTech)

Educational technology (EdTech) refers to the integration and utilisation of technology in educational settings to enhance learning experiences and improve educational outcomes. This includes **mainstream technologies** that support learning for children with and without disabilities, and **targeted approaches** and resources which tailor learning to an individual's learning support needs.

Mainstream technologies include:

- Tablets with touch screens, speech-to-text programs, captioned videos, symbol production software and other widely available tools that promote inclusive learning environments by facilitating accessibility, customisation, and engagement for students with diverse learning needs[xxviii].
- E-books (electronic books) are digital versions of books that can be read on devices such as computers, tablets, e-readers or smartphones. Common formats for e-books are EPUB or PDF. Universal design principles (guidelines aimed at creating products, environments, and experiences that are usable by people with diverse abilities and characteristics) make e-books more accessible.
- Classroom technology e.g. interactive whiteboards, tablets/computers.

- Inclusive technologies such as Apps or web platforms that have imbedded accessibility features and allow for access to the national curriculum, reading materials and a range of learning activities – see – UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2023. Technology in Education: A tool on whose terms?

Targeted technologies include:

- Educational software e.g. for braille maths.
- Braille readers, braille notepad, screen readers.
- E-books provided in DAISY format (a digital publishing standard that enables accessible and navigable content for individuals with print disabilities, providing features like text-to-speech, synchronised highlighting, and structured navigation).
- Specialised curriculum software to support students with disabilities including those with complex needs. This is a growing field and includes sophisticated platforms in wealthier countries such as Unique Learning System, from which lessons and inspiration can be drawn. Programs supporting innovation in low- and middle-income countries include examples such as All Children Reading, Global Disability Innovation Hub and InABLE.

What are the issues related to learning materials?

- **Children with a variety of disabilities as well as children without disabilities can potentially benefit from accessible learning materials**, however different aspects of accessibility and universal design need to be considered.
- **Common assumptions are that use of technology provides more access to learning materials**, however EdTech can present different accessibility issues if **not carefully considered and can potentially widen the learning gap** for some children with disabilities.
- Teachers and support staff often **lack understanding** of inclusive information and communication technologies (ICT) and teachers have been found to be reluctant to adopt EdTech in everyday teaching.[xxix]
- **Accessibility of learning materials and EdTech requires careful consideration of their feasibility and utility given the context.**[xxx] For example, electronic tools might be of limited use in locations where the power supply is poor. Country capacity for procurement requirements/logistics, availability of devices, and likelihood of adoption for use, for example integration into current teaching practices and need for training of teachers, are factors that need consideration.
- **There have been significant problems and inefficiencies with programs that bring in vast quantities of hardware into locations that do not have the means to maintain them**, replace parts, upgrade storage over time, or manage the e-waste. EdTech that is designed to work within existing hardware, such as mobile phones, addresses some of these problems.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- Ensure a thorough assessment of the barriers to adopting EdTech – see World Bank's 6 Ps framework for the EdTech ecosystem.[xxxi]
- **Development of curriculum and learning materials must consider accessibility**, including various means of communication e.g. braille, sign language, captioning, 'easy read', images and symbols.
- **Mainstream learning technologies must be developed/piloted/adapted with people with disabilities to ensure they are fit for purpose**.
- **Digital accessibility must consider type of devices available in the location**, access to the internet (including cost of data), accessibility of learning platforms such as ministry websites with learning materials, and training required in use of devices and software.
- **Strategies should be developed for sustained program support including availability of skilled human resources** to maintain, upgrade and problem solve EdTech hard and software.

- Environmentally responsible solutions are needed for disposing of and/or recycling hardware.
- Many countries recognise the value of special schools within a pathway towards inclusive education. Special schools, with concentrations of students with more significant learning support needs, may provide helpful locations to implement targeted accessibility strategies for learning materials. These schools may be useful places for surrounding mainstream schools to visit and learn about the accessible materials and technologies.

Case Study 2: Kenya – E-books are a tool to provide accessible learning materials

Kenya has been a leader in the development of accessible textbooks to support children with a range of impairments. Digitised textbooks are available in EPUB 3 Format, are designed following "Universal Design for Learning principles", and are provided with multimedia overlays to support children with and without disabilities in their learning processes.[xxxii] Features include audio narration and audio description of images, Kenyan Sign Language (KSL), KSL glossaries, and questions for teachers and children to use together.[xxxiii]

Lessons learned in application of EdTech in Kenya include:

- The importance of **engagement of different stakeholders of the ecosystem** to ensure accessible educational materials and technologies – including OPDs, teachers, ministries of education, curriculum developers, designers and publishers and tech experts.
- EdTech must be **linked with national systems and policies** – including curriculum (through the Kenyan Institute of Curriculum) and the government's Inclusive Education Policy.
- The value of **supporting local EdTech start-ups** – Kenya has seen significant investment in the EdTech industry, such as eKitabu, a company producing accessible e-books for countries across East Africa. Donors such as UNICEF are investing in tech companies like eKitabu and other initiatives such as eLimu (which includes educational apps linked with the curriculum), which helps with scalability of this EdTech solution to support learning for children with disabilities.

Further information is at https://www.unicef.org/innovation/stories/digitaltextbookkenya.

CHAPTER 3: SERVICE DELIVERY – QUALITY

3.1 Curriculum and assessment

What is disability-inclusive curriculum and assessment, and why is it important?

- The **curriculum is a description of what, why, how and how well students should learn** in a systematic and intentional way. An **inclusive curriculum takes into consideration and caters for the diverse needs, previous experiences, interests and personal characteristics of all learners**. It attempts to ensure that all students are part of the shared learning experiences of the classroom, and that equal opportunities are provided regardless of learner differences.[xxxiv]
- **Inclusive curricula require flexible processes**. **Accommodations are curricular adaptations that maintain the curriculum standards and expected outcomes but focus on processes**, for instance through providing learning materials in enlarged print, or offering collaborative teaching, to enable student participation and access to information.
- **Universal Design for Learning provides flexible approaches to curriculum design that can be adjusted for individual needs**. It promotes the development of a flexible curriculum that can be adapted to suit students with different learning styles and educational support needs through teaching and learning methods, including technology.
- **Inclusive delivery of curricula and assessments is essential to enable retention and learning outcomes for all children**.
- **All learners have the right to the same curriculum, and the curriculum and assessment must be responsive and accessible to a diverse range of learners**. This supports transition of learners between year and school levels.

What are the issues?

- In practice the flexible delivery of curricula faces many obstacles, such as **insufficient teacher preparation, and lack of resources for adaptations** which support students with disabilities to learn and participate in assessment.
- In some places, persistent beliefs and assumptions regarding the capacity and potential of learners with disabilities result in special curricula being used to teach them.
- **Lack of accessible curricula and school environments**, combined with lack of teacher skills and confidence to deliver differentiated education to learners including those with disabilities, and scarcity of resources to support reasonable accommodations in regular schools, **have led to segregated education for many students with disabilities**. Expectations regarding learning outcomes may be different or lower.[xxxv]
- **The development of an inclusive curriculum requires leadership and genuine interest in inclusive education, from a wide range of stakeholders**. Building an inclusive curriculum provides an opportunity to promote inclusive values through education.
- The delivery of an inclusive curriculum requires teachers and principals who are **prepared and trained to use inclusive pedagogical approaches**.
- Inclusive assessment requires consideration of both **academic and non-academic areas of learning**, as well as use of formative assessment.
- Through misunderstanding, disagreement or lack of resources, school-level implementation and enactment may diverge from original intentions.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- School curriculum and assessment policies and processes should be inclusive and acknowledge the diverse learning needs and modalities of learning and expression of all children. The concept of universal design to meet learners' different needs and different learning styles should be applied.
- All children should learn from the same flexible, relevant and accessible curriculum, one that recognises diversity and responds to various learners' needs.
- Teachers require skill development and empowerment to enable the delivery of curricula in a way that meets the learning requirements of all students, including those with disabilities.
- Curricula must be accompanied by guidance to support teachers, teacher aides and school leaders to adapt lessons and differentiate teaching approaches so that everyone in a classroom can learn.
- Reasonable accommodations are important if all students are to participate fully in the curriculum and assessment practices. They should be mandated in policy, and funding made available for their application in schools, to enable equitable curriculum delivery and assessment.

3.2 Screening and referral

What is disability screening and referral and why is it important?

- 'Disability screening' is a systematic process of identifying potential disabilities or developmental delays in children through various assessments and observations. It includes identifying children who may face activity limitations or functional difficulties.
- 'Referrals' refers to the process of recommending or directing individuals with disabilities to appropriate services, professionals, or programs that can provide specialised support, interventions, or assessments tailored to their specific needs.
- Early detection of developmental delays and health conditions is vital for identifying children who may require referral to services for treatment and additional support. Prioritising screening and referral allows for early intervention and support, fostering inclusive education environments that cater to individual abilities.

What are the issues?

- Disabilities can manifest at any stage of life, and the needs of individuals may change over time. The identification of disabilities is a continuous process that extends beyond the education sector, involving stakeholders both within and outside educational settings.
- Screening programs, for example to identify hearing and vision impairments, may be run through maternal child health services, early childhood education, school health programs, and non-government services.
- Early screening and intervention should ideally happen before a child reaches school age, but these should extend into school to identify children who have not been identified earlier, or whose disabilities have arisen subsequently.
- Maternal child health services can identify developmental delays through developmental milestone assessments.
- Children who are out-of-school need to be considered in screening and referral programs, which often requires leadership by multiple ministries and stakeholders.
- Community attitudes and awareness towards disability may negatively impact whether families choose to attend screening programs, due to fear of discrimination or social exclusion, or limited understanding of the availability and potential benefits of early intervention and support.
- Resources for screening programs can be limited, including lack of equipment and trained professionals, especially in rural and remote areas.

- If screening programs are undertaken and developmental delays, impairments, health conditions or disabilities are identified, but families are not then supported to access services, this can lead to **raised expectations and concerns with no solutions**.
- Effective implementation of disability screening programs requires **coordination and collaboration among multiple stakeholders**, including government agencies, healthcare providers, education institutions, community organisations, and non-government organisations. Limited coordination and fragmented systems can hinder the establishment of integrated and sustainable screening programs.
- **Reliable and comprehensive data collection** is essential for facilitating linkages between screening and referrals, and for monitoring the effectiveness of these programs. Some countries face **challenges in data collection**, including lack of standardised data collection tools, limited capacity for data management and analysis, and insufficient monitoring mechanisms to track the outcomes and impact of the screening and referral programs.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

Cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination

- Education programs should c**ollaborate closely with the Ministry of Health and other relevant departments, as well as OPDs and non-government services providers**, to ensure effective implementation of disability screening initiatives and alignment with early intervention services.
- A long-term approach should aim towards a **comprehensive and integrated system that connects disability screening with other essential services** such as health, early intervention, social services and rehabilitation.

Professional development

- **There is a need to provide training** for healthcare professionals, teachers, community leaders and organisations.
- **Mobile clinics and outreach services should be supported** to reach remote and underserved areas where access to health facilities is limited.

Involvement of families and communities

- Interventions are most effective when **families are actively engaged in the process**.
- **Parental involvement in screening processes** allows parents to provide unique information while also gaining a better understanding of their child's needs.
- Parental engagement can be increased through **information sessions and workshops**, where families can learn about the screening procedures and receive guidance on accessing appropriate services for their child's well-being and development.
- **A variety of programs and partnerships** may help to create positive community attitudes which enable families to access these services.
- **A community-based approach is important** to raise awareness about disability, promote acceptance, and ensure the screening and referral system is contextually appropriate and relevant.

Role of Teachers

- **Teachers play a crucial role** in identifying and referring children with disabilities. (See Case Study 3: Fiji on page 19).
- Through training and awareness programs, teachers can be equipped with the knowledge to identify various types of disabilities. For instance, trained teachers can help to identify signs of autism spectrum disorder, such as social communication challenges, repetitive behaviours, or sensory sensitivities. For specific learning disabilities, teachers can focus on assessing difficulties in reading, writing, or mathematics. Motor impairments, such as cerebral palsy, may require screenings that

assess mobility, muscle coordination, and fine motor skills. Intellectual disability screenings should encompass cognitive functioning and adaptive skills assessment.
- A robust referral system supports teachers to refer identified children for further assessments and support services. Individual Education Plans can be an important tool for teachers and families to record discussions and agreement on services required.

3.3 Learning support

What is learning support and why is it important?

Learning support includes **adjustments and supports made available to learners with disabilities** to enable them to participate in learning and assessment. Learning support can include:

- **Specialist services**, which can maximise the function and independence of learners with disabilities. These can include early intervention, orientation and mobility instruction, physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, counselling, braille instruction, sign language instruction or secondary language instruction.
- **Individual Learning Plans (also referred to as Individual Education Plans or IEPs)**, which determine student strengths as well as their learning goals, strategies and assessment plans. IEPs are developed by teachers and/or teacher aides with students with disabilities, their parents and other key people, including specialists. IEPs take a holistic view of the child and of learning, and guide adaptation of the curriculum so that all children can benefit. IEPs are generally not used with all students with disabilities, but rather with those who need extensive assistance to participate in lessons and assessment according to the curriculum.
- **Individual support through teacher aides**, who provide small group or individual instruction related to the content of the class.
- **Assistive devices or technologies**, which are items or equipment that can be used to maintain, increase or improve functional capabilities of people with disabilities. These can include eyeglasses, hearing aids, wheelchairs, canes, walkers, prosthetics and orthotics, and educational technology such as braille, large-font papers and books, sign language accompanying videos, audiobooks, tablets and electronic learning devices.

Learning supports required by students with disabilities may change over time. Measurement of learning outcomes can contribute to monitoring whether changes need to be made to learning supports.

What are the issues?

- For most students with disabilities, **learning supports should allow them to achieve the same outcomes as their peers**. For select students, terms of grade promotion and graduation may be modified to something more suitable for the child's abilities.
- It is important for **learning support to be available to the child at school and/or home as required, promote the child staying in school, and not be cost-prohibitive to the school or family**.
- Access to learning support is often **impacted by limited resources** to purchase equipment and/or services, limited availability of assistive technology and specialists, and lack of coordination between education departments and government and civil society organisations which offer specialist services.
- **Availability of sign language education is limited**, especially outside of urban areas. Teachers and teacher aides who can use sign language are few. As a result, Deaf children are more likely to miss out on education compared to others with disabilities.
- **Early intervention services, and broader early childhood development programs**, support young children and their families to facilitate cognitive and emotional development and to prevent developmental disability or delay. However access to these services is limited, especially across the

- Pacific, limiting the life chances of people with disabilities.
- **Teacher aides or assistants can provide critical support to teachers** in implementing inclusive education within classrooms. However across the Pacific region, there are limitations on both their availability and their skills to fulfil their roles.
- To ensure appropriate and priority allocation of teacher aides, there is a need for **effective use of student data systems**, particularly in relation to disability data and school staffing formulae.[xxxvi]

Case Study 3: Supporting the Strengthening of Inclusive Education in Fiji

DFAT's support to inclusive education in Fiji, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, has catalysed multi-faceted change over a ten-year period.

Substantial support has been provided to strengthen Fiji's Education Management Information System (FEMIS). The online, individual-level system replaced the previous school-level system in 2013. While disability disaggregation was possible from the beginning, the system was initially limited: teachers gave simple responses to whether disabilities on a list were present, and there were no instructions or training on how to respond. The system was expanded in 2013 to include a more sophisticated disability disaggregation toolkit based on the draft UNICEF / Washington Group Child Functioning Module.

Among other components, teachers receive a guidebook and are trained to assess the difficulties students experience, compared with children of the same age. They are encouraged to complete a student learning profile for any child with functional difficulties or who consistently performs poorly. The form is meant to be completed with parents, taking clinical assessments into account when appropriate. Parents and teachers review the assessments and agree on any need for targeted support. Ministry personnel verify data, which is then used to support calculations of the Special and Inclusive Education Grant. This grant is used by schools to cover the costs of additional learning supports required by students with disabilities, for example assistive technology or costs of accessing referral services.

Student-level information in the system is complemented with school information, including an accessibility audit. Involvement by OPDs and students with disabilities and their families is encouraged. The system records information on the services needed and those available.

Schools provide information on out-of-school children with disabilities known to them, as well as on engagements such as home visits. There are links with the national teacher data system and literacy and numeracy assessments. A collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and two NGOs (Project Heaven and the Frank Hilton Organisation) undertakes school vision and hearing screening and referrals to relevant services. Additional allied health services are provided to students with disabilities to the extent possible, largely through the network of special schools. The screening and referral data is recorded in FEMIS to help monitor and record access to and the results of referral services.

The Ministry of Education has also been supported to review the national curriculum framework and identify areas for development, to better enable use of the framework by teachers in their efforts to differentiate their teaching approaches so that all students can learn, including those with disabilities. Handbooks and factsheets have been provided to teachers, alongside training and coaching in the use of diverse approaches to teach literacy and numeracy to diverse learners.

In the last decade, Fiji's Special and Inclusive Education Policy and Implementation Plan has been redeveloped twice, collaboratively with stakeholders from across government and civil society. These policies and implementation plans have provided stakeholders with the opportunity to review progress, and develop shared, agreed, updated guidance regarding inclusive education processes and ambitions.

Lessons

- **Work in close partnership with responsible personnel across the Ministry of Education**, including but not limited to the inclusive education team. Develop joint workplans and be prepared to adjust these based on emerging priorities and opportunities.
- **Support Ministry of Education colleagues to engage with stakeholders from other government and non-government organisations**. Role model this through co-facilitating deep collaboration with stakeholders during consultations and other work.
- **Work with colleagues across DFAT's education program**, to ensure inclusive education has maximal opportunity to be built in across all the program's strategic directions.
- **Utilise Ministry data in program reporting, creating additional value for the EMIS**.
- Influence change across the sector by **ensuring lessons and achievements from efforts are incorporated in policy development discussions**.
- Seek DFAT's assistance in **keeping inclusive education on the agenda** despite high level political and administrative personnel changes.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- **Coordination between ministries of education and health, and civil society organisations** where appropriate, requires strengthening. This can then enable them to work together to plan, allocate funding, build a workforce of personnel with qualifications in priority specialisations and/or identify external – sometimes international – sources of specialist support.
- **Early childhood development requires support, including early intervention, to maximise childhood development and prevent developmental delay**.
- **Disability data should be collected and used alongside school staffing formulae to enable evidence-based decision-making** regarding the engagement and allocation of teacher aides.
- **The use of IEPs with students with disabilities who need them** should be guided by policies and supported by training for teachers and teacher aides.
- Policies, programmes and budgets should prioritise learners with disabilities who are particularly marginalised, including Deaf children. **In countries where an agreed sign language is not present, ministries should work with Deaf people and their representative groups (OPDs) to develop sign language and train teachers and teacher aides in this**.
- **Ongoing professional development is required to enable teacher aides to fulfil their roles**.

CHAPTER 4: SERVICE DELIVERY – DEMAND

4.1 Attitudes

What are attitudes and why are they important?

- **Attitudes are the values and beliefs toward disability which may be held by teachers, administrators, parents and communities**. These attitudes can vary across contexts, and relate to cultural beliefs and understanding of the capacity and potential of children with disabilities to engage in learning and the school environment.
- Attitudes are important to be aware of as they **create barriers to accessing education for children and youth with disabilities**. Attitudinal barriers are important to understand as they influence the demand for education.

What are the issues?

- **Negative and unwelcoming attitudes from administrators can mean caregivers are less inclined to send children to school**, as they may be concerned that negative attitudes will harm their child's social-emotional wellbeing.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- **Programs should conduct situation analyses exploring local attitudes and beliefs, to understand attitudinal barriers as they exist and how these attitudes may differ across different types of disabilities and gender**. Refer to Case Study 6: The Philippines on page 30 for an example of the Pathways program and its approach to addressing attitudes. The Pathways program undertook a child mapping study as an opportunity to explore attitudes of the community.
- **Awareness-raising sessions conducted with the school community** can have a powerful effect. Where basic awareness-raising, sharing information about disability and reducing stigma are the focus, involvement of OPDs in these sessions is essential. For example, the Pathways program in the Philippines undertook an 'Inclusive school initiative' which involved community awareness-raising sessions and involved people with disabilities.

4.2 Costs

What are costs and why are they important?

- **The cost of sending children to school can include direct fees and hidden fees**. Hidden fees are not obvious but necessary expenses such as uniforms, learning materials, food etc.
- **Families with children with disabilities bear additional costs and considerations** when sending their children to school. These costs may include the cost of assistive devices, medical fees, medication, and transport to and from school.

What are the issues?

- Students with disabilities and their families **may be eligible for subsidies and grants, but may not be aware of this**, and require referral and support to navigate and access funding available through a range of government ministries and civil society organisations. These might include grants, transport subsidies, school feeding programs and access to support services and assistive technology.
- **Government grants for schools enrolling students with disabilities can support the additional costs of inclusion faced by schools**. However, the allocation of funding, particularly in resource-constrained settings, must be informed by reliable data regarding the disability status of students.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- **Coordinated and cost-efficient delivery of support services to children with disabilities and their families requires coordination** between ministries of education and health, and civil society organisations to foster synergies, and share resources, facilities and capacity development opportunities.
- The allocation of funding to support inclusion in schools, particularly in resource-constrained settings, **must be informed by reliable data** regarding the disability status of students.

Refer to Case Study 1: Indonesia on page 10, and Case Study 3: Fiji on page 19, for examples.

CHAPTER 5: CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

5.1 Laws and policies

What are laws and policies and why are they important?

- **National regulatory frameworks incorporate legislation, regulations, policies and frameworks.** These outline the specific legislative and policy environment for inclusive education, and the measures in place to support it. These are often inspired by international commitments.
- **A legislative framework for disability-inclusive education is an explicit commitment by a government.** It serves to define inclusive education, clarify obligations and support progress at the national and local levels. It must comply with relevant international human rights standards, including the CRPD.
- **An inclusive education policy is required, together with a clear implementation plan with timeframes.** This should address issues of flexibility, diversity and equality in all educational institutions for all learners, and identify responsibilities at all levels of government, including national, regional and local.

What are the issues?

- Countries are increasingly introducing legislation to facilitate inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. However, **laws promoting inclusion in education may coexist with laws promoting special education in separate settings**, preventing a shared, coherent understanding of inclusive education ambitions.
- Inclusive education policies need to **cover and be pursued at all education levels and ages**, from early childhood education to TVET skills development, tertiary education and opportunities for lifelong learning.
- **Inclusive education policies are often not accompanied by implementation plans**. Resources, political will and understanding of inclusive education varies. Without an implementation plan, policies can stagnate.
- **Implementation of policies relies on planning processes, which are often limited.** References to inclusive education policy commitments are frequently missing from education sector plans and strategies.
- **Monitoring** of inclusive education policies and implementation plans is frequently absent.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- Inclusive education policy development must be accompanied by **development of implementation plans** outlining responsibility, timeframes, budget and monitoring approaches.
- Inclusive education strategies, as outlined in policies and implementation plans, must be **incorporated within education sector plans and strategies**.
- **Monitoring progress of inclusive education policy implementation** would support further planning, however this is limited.

5.2 Disability data collection in Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)

What is disability data collection and why is it important?

Disability data collection in Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) refers to the **incorporation of disability information into education data systems used by governments to assess education performance,**

plan and monitor program implementation, and evaluate outcomes. It allows countries to provide resources and reasonable accommodations on the basis of need, track progress and learn lessons, and remain accountable to education laws, policies and international obligations such as the CRPD and the SDGs. Collecting data on students with disabilities in EMIS helps distinguish their situation from those without disabilities, enabling the **identification of barriers to learning and the evaluation of inclusive practices** within the education system.

EMIS should not only focus on personal characteristics or impairments of students with disabilities, but also on the **quality and inclusiveness of the school system**. Inclusive education encompasses physical and informational accessibility, as well as teacher training, availability of support services, and curriculum and assessment methods that accommodate diverse learning styles. Therefore, EMIS should collect data not only on children's functional difficulties but also on **factors within the school environment that can either hinder or facilitate access to quality education**. The Fiji case study on page 19 provides information on a comprehensive approach to disability data within an EMIS.

System benefits

- **Policy development and monitoring:** disability data in EMIS enables policymakers to **develop evidence-based policies and monitor their implementation**. It provides insights into the prevalence, distribution, and needs of students with disabilities, helping shape inclusive education strategies and interventions.
- **Planning and resource allocation:** accurate disability data allows for **effective planning and allocation of resources**. It helps identify areas with high concentrations of students with disabilities, enabling targeted resource allocation for specialised services, assistive devices, trained personnel, and infrastructure modifications.
- **Performance evaluation:** disability data supports the **evaluation of educational outcomes and progress towards inclusive education goals**. It enables system-level analysis of enrolment rates, attendance, retention, and academic achievements of students with disabilities, facilitating evidence-based decision-making and accountability.
- **Monitoring of inclusion and equity:** by tracking the enrolment and participation of students with disabilities, EMIS data can **monitor the system's progress in promoting inclusion and equity**. It helps identify gaps, disparities, and areas requiring intervention, ensuring that educational opportunities are accessible and equitable for all.

Benefits for children

- **Individualised support:** disability data **enables personalised interventions and support for students with disabilities**. It helps identify specific needs, determine appropriate accommodations and adaptations, and develop individualised education plans. This promotes tailored instruction, support services, and inclusive classroom practices.
- **Early intervention: timely identification of disabilities through EMIS data allows for early intervention.** Early screening and referral can lead to early intervention services, facilitating optimal development, reducing potential learning barriers, and improving long-term outcomes for children with disabilities.
- **Targeted support services:** disability data guides **the provision of targeted support services for children with disabilities.** It facilitates the coordination of inclusive practices, specialised teaching methodologies, therapeutic interventions, and assistive technologies, promoting their active participation and progress within the education system.

Benefits for teachers

- **Informed instructional strategies: disability data empowers teachers with information about the specific needs and learning profiles of students with disabilities**. It enables them to adapt

instructional strategies, differentiate instruction, and create inclusive learning environments that cater to diverse abilities and learning styles.

- **Referral and collaboration: EMIS data assists teachers in identifying students who may require additional support or specialised services**. It facilitates collaboration with special education professionals, enabling timely referrals, shared expertise, and collaborative problem-solving to address the unique needs of students with disabilities.
- **Professional development: disability data supports targeted professional development for teachers. It helps identify areas where additional training and resources are needed**, enabling teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills in inclusive teaching practices and effectively support students with disabilities.

What are the issues?

Some common challenges countries face in implementing effective disability data in EMIS include:

- **Limited resources and technical capacity** to collect, maintain, and analyse disability data.
- Disability data that is **not accurate and not comprehensive**.
- **Language barriers, inaccessible data collection tools, and insufficient outreach to remote or marginalised areas** can exclude certain groups, leading to a lack of representation and accurate representation of disabilities in the data.
- Limited access to **early screening and diagnostic services**.
- **System integration and interoperability**: lack of interoperability between different data systems and limited coordination among relevant stakeholders (education, health, social services) can hinder the integration and sharing of disability data across systems.

Other challenges include that disability data collection tools may:

- Not cover the **diverse range of disabilities** or functional difficulties faced by learners.
- Not be **adapted to suit the EMIS**, but instead simply embed census and household survey-based disability tools.
- Not be tested to check **accuracy of teacher responses** before they are scaled up.
- Not be **standard across the whole country**.
- Not be **translated into relevant local languages**.
- Not include **information on the educational support needs of students**, instead simply focusing on categorising disability.
- **Be impacted by cultural or social stigma** which may hinder the identification and disclosure of disabilities, leading to underreporting or misclassification of students.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- **Policy advocacy and integration**: prioritise disability data within national education agendas and advocate for policies that **emphasise the collection and utilisation of accurate and comprehensive disability data**. This involves integrating disability data as a core component of national education planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes.
- **Capacity-building and training**: invest in capacity-building initiatives to **enhance the technical skills and knowledge of education officials, teachers, and data managers**. This includes providing training on data collection methodologies, disability-inclusive practices, and data analysis techniques.
- **Intersectoral collaboration**: promote collaboration between different sectors, such as education, health, and social services, to ensure the **integration and sharing of disability data across systems**. This approach involves establishing coordination mechanisms and information-sharing to facilitate data exchange, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of students' needs and better-targeted interventions.

- **Development and testing of tools**: support the development and testing of accurate disability data collection tools that cover a diverse range of disabilities and functional difficulties faced by learners, as well as the learners' educational support needs, and school environmental factors which relate to disability-inclusive education. These tools should be designed in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including educators, disability experts, and data specialists. Pilot testing and validation of the tools should be conducted to ensure their effectiveness before scaling them up nationally.
- **Data protection and privacy**: support countries to prioritise data protection mechanisms. This involves developing and implementing **policies and protocols to safeguard the confidentiality and security** of disability data.
- **Technical support and knowledge sharing**: facilitate international support and knowledge sharing by fostering partnerships with organisations, experts, and other countries that have experience in effective disability data collection.

5.3 Leadership and management

What is leadership and management, and why is it important?

Leadership and management is critical to effective delivery of inclusive education at central, sub-national and school levels.

As the main governance body, **the Ministry of Education has a central role in enabling consistency, coherence and coordination** throughout the education system, towards a common vision of inclusive education. This includes:

- **leading national policies and plans** to progress inclusive education,
- **centralising responsibility** for the continuous planning, review and readjustment of inclusive education measures,
- **leading quality assurance** on inclusive education,
- gathering data to inform the **monitoring of inclusive education practice, policy and legislation**,
- ensuring **inclusive pathways** for students with disabilities throughout all educational levels,
- provision of competency frameworks, professional development on inclusive education pedagogy, and support for the improvement of the working conditions of teachers,
- **establishing and maintaining coordination mechanisms** that link the Ministry of Education with other ministries, government disability focal points and civil society, to enable access to health services and social protection to students with disabilities, and
- **collaboration with local governments** to ensure that the delivery of inclusive education is **decentralised and responsive** to changing requirements at the school level.

Effective implementation and monitoring of disability-inclusive education involves many stakeholders. Services for children with disabilities are often **delivered by a range of government and nongovernmental institutions**. Multi-sectoral coordination, including the involvement of OPDs and family members, is an important leadership role of ministries of education.

What are the issues?

- In some locations, **responsibility for educating children with disabilities sits outside of the Ministry of Education**, for example with the Ministry of Social Welfare. This can mean that the education of learners with disabilities does not follow the mainstream curriculum, pedagogy or assessment systems, reinforcing the segregation of people with disabilities.
- Quality inclusive education outcomes rely on **inclusion embedded within relevant policies and processes** in various parts of ministries of education, including divisions responsible for exams and assessment, curriculum, textbooks and learning materials, workforce, training and development,

finance, information management systems, information technology, infrastructure and assets, and disaster management. In order to embed inclusion in these systems, ministries require a **dedicated inclusive education officer or team with the time, capacity and authority to work with these divisions**.

- Inclusive education is more effective when **championed by senior ministry leaders**, and when they have the motivation, political will, and authority to promote and support inclusive education.
- **Partnerships and collaborations between ministries of education and other ministries and government and non-government stakeholders**, including OPDs, are fundamental in achieving the wide-ranging conditions to enable inclusive education. Some ministries of education struggle to sustain regular working partnerships and co-commitment to build the enabling factors required for inclusive education.

What are the important approaches for DFAT programming?

- To build political will and momentum, **inclusive education should remain on the agenda of high-level discussions** with ministries of education.
- Support for inclusive education should include support to **strengthen coordination, leadership and monitoring of inclusive education** at the Ministry of Education level.

5.4 Finance

What is finance and why is it important?

Financing inclusive education in line with national policies is critical. Required expenditure may include:

- school-based costs,
- disability screening/assessments,
- accessible school infrastructure,
- specialist services and assistive technologies,
- staffing at the ministry and in schools,
- training of the inclusive education workforce,
- development of curriculum guidance and assessment standards and processes, and
- awareness-raising.

What are the issues?

Data collection and monitoring for inclusion are critical to enable **equitable resource allocation**, including grant disbursement to schools for education support and adjustments. Disaggregated data is rarely connected to finance and resource allocation systems.

The accessibility and inclusion needs of schools and of students with disabilities must be identified through the **application of agreed assessment tools**.

Decision-making regarding the financing of inclusive education requires an understanding of:

- inclusive education policy directives,
- sources of funding available, and
- challenges in directing resources towards inclusive education.

Ministries of education typically have **few personnel dedicated to inclusive education**, and these may not be invited to join budget decision-making fora. Governments typically **allocate insufficient resources** to enable inclusive education.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- Coordinated and cost-efficient delivery of support services to children with disabilities and their families requires coordination between ministries of education and health, and civil society organisations to foster synergies, and share resources, facilities and capacity development opportunities.
- The allocation of funding to support inclusion in schools, particularly in resource-constrained settings, must be informed by reliable data regarding the disability status of students.
- At the ministry level, disability data can inform reporting on results, as well as planning and budgeting for support to enable strengthening of inclusive education efforts.

Case Study 5: Samoa – Supporting development of implementation and review processes for Inclusive Education Policy

Samoa's Ministry for Education, Sports and Culture has incorporated indicators related to inclusive education within its Education Sector Plan, and a budget has been identified to progress efforts in line with its *Inclusive Education Policy for Students Living with Disability*.

Through the Education Sector Support Program, DFAT has provided support to the Ministry to develop annual policy implementation plans and review the progress of these. A cross-sectoral Inclusive Education Reference Group steers this work. This group is guided by a Memorandum of Understanding, which various Ministries and civil society organisations have signed.

This group also worked together to develop an agreed referral form to expedite access to specialist services for children with disabilities. The Ministry partners with OPDs in order to identify out-of-school children with disabilities, and to support them to enrol and attend school. In partnership with disability service providers, the Ministry funds teacher aides to support students with disabilities attending mainstream schools.

Lessons:

- Support the Ministry of Education to lead collaborative efforts to develop a costed inclusive education implementation plan.
- Formal architecture such as a **memorandum of understanding** can support collaboration between Ministries and civil society, improving access to services for children with disabilities.

CHAPTER 6: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

6.1 What is inclusive education in emergencies?

Children with disabilities are among the most at-risk people in communities affected by humanitarian crises, and they are often excluded from humanitarian assistance.[xxxvii] Armed conflict and disasters further increase disabilities among children, with higher rates of mental health issues, new impairments, loss of access to essential medicines and assistive devices, and increased reliance on caregivers. Girls with disabilities are more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, gender-based violence and are at higher risk of malnutrition.[xxxviii] Children with disabilities, especially girls with disabilities, are far less likely to return to school following an emergency or natural disaster.

DFAT's education investments span both development and humanitarian contexts. It is important that these programs reflect the vulnerabilities and barriers faced by children with disabilities, make efforts to reduce the gaps to accessing education, and support return to education after a significant interruption to learning.

Education provision in an emergency context requires a range of interventions and includes a variety of actors (government, UN, INGOs etc). This will be different depending on the stage of the humanitarian crisis, emergency or conflict. **Education in emergencies can provide an opportunity to build inclusive education systems from the beginning**, in situations where education systems have largely or sometimes entirely broken down.[xxxix]

What are the issues?

In low-income settings prone to humanitarian emergencies (conflict, natural disaster), there are various issues facing education actors in supporting learning of children with disabilities, including:

- **Mainstream humanitarian education actors are often not well versed in inclusive education**, leaving children with disabilities behind in an emergency response.
- **Education systems are not well prepared for a disability-inclusive response in education in the case of an emergency response**. National government preparedness is poor and children with disabilities often experience large gaps in education and learning loss; many never return to education.
- **There is a paucity of disability data both in national data sets and EMISs**, which in many cases don't include disability-disaggregated data.

What are important considerations for DFAT's programs?

- **Flexible approaches and responsive programming is often necessary** e.g. development of mainstream inclusive short-term home-learning materials in the situation of Covid-19, political instability or disaster events.
- **Taking a staged and well-coordinated approach towards recovery and building back better, that builds on inclusive education objectives.**
- To ensure that humanitarian education programs reach and include learners with disabilities, Table 2 sets out key entry points.

Table 2: Key Approaches to Inclusive Education during Emergencies

Phase	Key Actions
Preparedness	Establish coordination mechanisms for disability-inclusive education e.g. disability focal persons or agency, education coordination or working groups, clusters. Foster partnership between national governments and OPDs, including special and inclusive schools. Ensure collection of disability data e.g. through an EMIS. Map resources and expertise on inclusive education e.g. braille printers, sign language interpreters, inclusive education schools or resource rooms etc. Disaster preparedness planning for education facilities.
Acute emergency	Mainstream disability into non-formal education and child-friendly spaces (CFS), basic training on inclusion for education actors including where possible OPD involvement, and technical support on disability inclusion to humanitarian actors to ensure referrals and access to assistive devices etc.[xl] Engage with education cluster to advocate for mainstreaming inclusive learning approaches for children with disabilities. Needs assessment – consider existing disability data (EMIS, MICS) or use Washington Group Child Functioning module in data collection tools; consult with OPDs and NGOs to identify children with disabilities. Conduct focus group discussions to understand the barriers faced by children with disabilities and caregivers in accessing education. Include accessibility in assessment to effectively assess the accessibility of emergency related and educational buildings.
Protracted crisis (IDP camps, host communities)	Ensure activities support mainstream agency (UN, INGOs) education service delivery to be disability-inclusive. Provide community-based support for children with disabilities and caregivers. Where there is opportunity – engage with government actors to support teacher in-service training on IE pedagogy, and community awareness-raising activities.
Transition/ Development	Increase focus on local authorities and basic education school improvement plans; engage with OPDs. Increase focus on national and local authorities as well as teacher training institutions and policy.[xli]

Adapted from Humanity & Inclusion (2019). *Briefing note on Inclusive Education in Emergencies and Protracted crisis;* UNICEF (2017). *Guidance on including children with disabilities in humanitarian action: Education.*

Case Study 6: The Philippines – DFAT's Pathways Investment

Australia, in partnership with the Government of Philippines, supported conflict-sensitive quality education services in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). This area has the Philippines' poorest education learning outcomes, and is affected by conflict as well as natural disaster.

The Pathways program has built participation of people with disabilities in a number of ways including co-design activities with OPDs at the ministry level, and in schools and communities where the program works. Pathways progressed the retooling of Special Education (SPEd) Centres into Inclusive Learning Resource Centres to shift mindsets from segregated to mainstreamed classes. A total of 76 key stake-holders, including 10 women and seven men with disabilities from three communities, and four OPDs, engaged in 'visioning exercises'. These consultations created new avenues for engagement, strengthened communities' understanding of education barriers, and led to the Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education's (MBHTE) development of the 'Inclusive Schools Approach', a framework to anchor other access-focused programs (e.g. special, indigenous peoples, alternative and non-formal education).

Pathways has invested in **technical assistance on disability inclusion to enhance MBHTE's capacity to deliver inclusive education**, which led to the incorporation of disability-inclusive education provision in the Bangsamoro Education Code. As part of this work, Pathways was also able to support initial processes for MBHTE's Disability Information Management Sub-System.

In an effort to remove barriers, **Pathways conducted a child mapping study** in South Upi, an indigenous and conflict-affected community, showing that 10 percent of children may have functional difficulty associated with learning (or be at risk of intellectual disability), higher than initial findings from low/middle income countries.

As part of its **'Inclusive Schools Initiative', Pathways conducted awareness sessions with a wide range of community members** including teachers, school administrators, local government actors, parents and with participation of people with disabilities. These sessions were intended to share information about disability rights and to break down stigma, negative attitudes and build understanding of the capacity of children with disabilities to engage in learning alongside their peers without disabilities.

Covid-19 saw a changing context, and the need for Pathways to pivot support. Pathways supported a multi-platform communication system and deployed offline and online strategies to better support the MBHTE's Covid-19 Learning Continuity Plan. This included the use of SMS and text blasts, two-way radio, social media, broader mass media platforms, and message dissemination through community level partners and volunteers. In October 2020, Pathways provided communications support to address a Covid-19 induced enrolment crisis through these strategies. As a result, enrolment had climbed from 72.5 percent to 88 percent (from 662,340 students to 803,204 students) by November 2020[xlii].

Lessons:

- **Participation of OPDs** in discussions, awareness-raising and dissemination of data at the level of the Ministry of Education can have catalytic benefits and precipitate change in policy and practice.
- **Involving the community** was pivotal to a more disability-inclusive whole of school approach.
- Technical assistance to support **EMIS and quality disability data collection** is important to DFATs education programming.
- **The participation of parents and community actors in the child mapping study** strengthened disability awareness. The study and shed light on some of the drivers of exclusion for children with disability, such as cultural dynamics.
- Covid-19 saw an emergency response and provided **opportunities to pivot programming and address disability inclusion** in mainstream education activities.

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