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Educating children with disabilities: comparative evidence from Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Niger

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental human right and it is a global Sustainable Development Goal to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all.” Many children with disabilities in low-income countries, however, continue to be excluded from educational opportunities at great cost to themselves, their families, and the communities in which they live. Realizing the right to inclusive education for children with disabilities requires policies and practices that are tailored to and effective for unique regional and local contexts. Using new qualitative data collected in 2020 (based on a desk review and key informant interviews), this chapter explores the inclusiveness, equality, and quality of education for children with disabilities in three African countries: Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The study countries are at the bottom of the Human Development Index ranking of 189 countries worldwide (Ethiopia 173, Burkina Faso 182, Niger 189, data from 2020). Despite state commitments to education as a human right and legislative support for inclusive education in each country, social, economic, political, and financial factors at the family, community, and system levels contribute to the continued marginalization of children with disabilities. The insights from this multi-country analysis highlight the importance of locally informed and context-specific approaches but also point to broader lessons for the study and promotion of inclusive education in low-resource settings. These insights provide a starting point for further investigation of disability-inclusive education on the African continent and in the developing world.

Keywords: disability, inclusive education, exclusion, children with disabilities, school, developing countries.

JEL codes: I21, I25, I28

1. Introduction

Education, a fundamental human right, is essential for individual development, effective participation in society, and advancing social justice. The nexus between education and social justice was first promulgated by the Salamanca Framework for Action and reflects “recognition of the need to work towards ‘schools for all’ - institutions which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs” (UNESCO, 1994, p.iii). The Framework reflects the need to remove all barriers to education, promote non-discrimination, advance social justice, and accommodate all children, especially those with different abilities and learning needs (United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs (UNDESA), 2016; UNESCO, 1994). These goals are reinforced by Article 28 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC, 1989) which requires States to make education accessible to all children, and Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), which mandates that “persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality, and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live.”

Beyond the human rights case, several studies have shown the high costs of excluding persons with disabilities in the areas of education, employment, and health (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2018; Banks & Polack, 2014; Lamichhane, 2013; Liao & Zhao, 2013; World Bank 2008). Importantly, making educational institutions more inclusive for children with disabilities is essential for preventing their long-term poverty, due to lower employment rates and earning potential later in life (Banks & Polack, 2014). In Bangladesh, for example, the World Bank (2008) found a link between lower levels of education and lower wage earning among persons with disabilities. Inclusive education is also crucial for the improvement of family welfare, national economic growth, and gender empowerment (Kefallinou et al., 2020; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018; Alkahtani, 2016; Banks & Polack, 2014; Buckup, 2009;).

By contrast, in countries where there is inclusive education, there are wage gains for persons with disabilities (Lamichhane, 2013; Liao & Zhao, 2013). In Nepal, inclusive education for people with varying impairments (sensory or physical) led to estimated wage returns of 20% (Lamichhane, 2013). Similarly, an additional year of schooling for persons with disabilities in China was estimated to return an 8% wage increase for urban areas and a 5% increase for rural areas (Liao & Zhao, 2013). Each additional year of school completed by persons with disabilities has the potential to contribute to closing the poverty gap between adults without and with disabilities in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Liao & Zhao, 2013).

Several studies have also found that the schooling deficit, subsequent unemployment, and communications and physical barriers experienced by persons with disabilities have negative effects on the gross domestic product (GDP). Metts (2000) posits that across all LMICs, the annual GDP loss due to lower productivity among persons with

disabilities is between US\$473.9-672.2 billion. This is further supported by Buckup's (2009) estimates that low labor productivity among persons with disabilities costs 10 LMICs about 1-7% of their GDP.

Despite the established high costs of exclusion, there are few studies assessing the inclusivity, equality, and quality of education systems in LMICs for children and young people with disabilities (Wapling, 2016). Whilst the evidence base is expanding, inadequate attention has been paid to the extent to which children and young people with disabilities have been included or excluded from education. Specifically, there is a paucity of recent and reliable data on access to education by children and young people with disabilities across Africa, which ultimately hinders the development of adequate policies (UNDESA, 2016). While international and regional human rights conventions underscore the universal entitlement to inclusive, quality, equitable education, realizing this right requires policy and practices that are tailored to and effective for unique regional and local contexts. Strategies for inclusion developed and researched in high-resource settings cannot simply be transplanted to other parts of the world. The lack of research on local challenges and potential local solutions presents a barrier to advancing inclusive education in LMICs (Forlin, 2013).

This chapter sets out to fill the knowledge gap by exploring the inclusiveness, equality, and quality of education provided to children with disabilities in three African countries, namely: Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, and Niger. These three countries were strategically selected because they were under consideration as sites for an inclusive education intervention, and new information was collected as part of a feasibility and baseline assessment. Importantly, each of these countries also ranks in the bottom 10% of countries on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2020) and faces significant challenges in the provision of basic education for their whole populations. As the analysis shows, the results of the feasibility and baseline assessment illustrate both unique contextual factors in each country and common challenges across East and West Africa. These insights highlight the importance of locally-informed, context-specific approaches, but also point to broader lessons for the study and promotion of inclusive education in low-resource settings.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, it presents the conceptual framework that guided the study, followed by the study methodology. The basic context and background for the three countries are provided as a foundation for the overview of findings on the state of education for children with disabilities in each country. The country-specific findings are followed by a discussion of the challenges and opportunities to achieve inclusive, equal, quality education for children with disabilities.

2. Conceptual framework

UNCRPD (2006) defines people with disabilities as those “who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis

with others” (Article 1, UNCRPD, p. 4). This understanding moves away from the charity and medical models of disability to the social model of disability and the human rights approach, which are discussed below.

The charity model of disability regards persons with disabilities as objects of charity who should be grateful for any donations that come their way (Haang’andu, 2019). Retief and Letšosa (2018) explain how ‘disability as charity’ views persons with disabilities as passive objects of society's goodwill, welfare, and philanthropic efforts. Under the charity model, persons with disabilities are viewed as helpless victims who depend on the support of others.

Under the medical model of disability, persons with disabilities are regarded as sick, passive persons who should be “cured” of impairment (Areheart, 2012). With this understanding, persons with disabilities (including children with disabilities) are identified as ‘disabled’ because they have visible impairments or have been medically diagnosed as such by a medical practitioner (Areheart, 2012; Stone-MacDonald, 2012). Prominence is assigned to medical diagnosis, rehabilitation at all costs, and the use of scientific and technological measures that presumably enable persons with disabilities to become “normal” beings in society (Retief & Letšosa, 2018; Stone-Macdonald, 2012).

By contrast, the social model of disability pivots away from the narrow medical focus on curing impairment, to emphasize attaining change at the family, community, and societal levels, given that persons with disabilities live within those social organizations (Harris and Enfield 2003). The aim is to remove barriers and enhance the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in all spheres of life and in multifaceted ways that include anti-discrimination policy and civil rights reforms. Article 1 of UNCRPD (2006) posits the interaction of impairment and various barriers that hinder the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society on an equal basis with others.

The human rights approach builds on the social model by going beyond anti-discrimination policy and civil rights reforms, to encompass civil and political as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. Similarly, the UNCRPD is grounded in a human rights approach, which regards persons with disabilities including children with disabilities as equal rights holders. This study utilizes both the social model of disability as well as the human rights approach. Figure 1 below summarizes the different models of disability.

	The Charity Model of Disability	The Medical Model of Disability	The Social Model of Disability	The Human Rights-Based Approach.
Core Values	The lives of persons with disabilities are tragic and pitiable. Therefore, they should be the object of charity and philanthropic efforts.	Non-disabled people are seen as 'normal', healthy, better and good. Therefore, persons with disabilities are often viewed as in need of fixing/rehabilitation or (a) cure.	There is natural and valuable variation and difference among human beings. Society/environment plays a big role in disabling persons with disabilities	All human beings, including people with disabilities, deserve respect and have human and legal rights protected by the law
Framing the problem	Persons with disabilities are in need of 'help' and unable to do things from themselves	Disability is something that is pathological and problematic	The problem is exclusionary structures, policies, attitudes and environments that have not been designed with a diverse collective of people in mind. Persons with disabilities are more 'disabled' by barriers in society than by any individual trait.	The problem is discrimination and it violates human rights
Vision for Change	Disability is not only something that should be cured, but is something that is tragic	The Medical Model focuses on identifying and 'fixing' 'defects' on individual bodies	The Social Model aims to identify and remove physical, communication, technological, organisational/systemic and attitudinal barriers	The Human-Rights Based Approach emphasized the rights that persons with disabilities have in any social, economic, political spheres, free from discrimination, harassment and hate.
Actions	The Charity Model sees non-disabled people as the saviours of disability	Disability needs to be fixed, cured, removed, hidden or diminished	Challenge ableism, remove barriers and build accessible and welcoming environments for persons with disability	Raise awareness, promote conditions and address violations of rights of persons with disabilities

Figure 1. Models and approaches to disability. Source: Includovate (2022)

3. Methodology

The study employed qualitative methods (desk review and key informant interviews) to explore the social, political, economic, and policy implications of inclusive, equitable, and quality education for children with disabilities in Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

The literature and document review was undertaken using a rapid review approach that is more simplified, streamlined, and less structured than a systematic review (Tricco et al., 2015). This approach enabled a quick appraisal of the available literature combined with elements of context analysis and environmental scan to best meet the objectives and timeframe of the study. The desk analysis covered a range of literature, laws, regulations, plans papers, official statistics, blogs, project proposals, and related documents in Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso, both published and unpublished.

The analysis also included unpublished records from existing projects and initiatives in the study areas of three countries (Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso). The desk analysis was based on a comprehensive literature survey that was conducted using repositories from ResearchGate, <https://sci-hub.se/>, Google, and Google Scholar. The specific query terminologies varied throughout the databases. The desk analysis used several search words, including inclusiveness, integrated learning, inclusive education, quality education, equitable education, educational reform, special needs education, disability, youth, early childhood, several disabilities, disabled persons, inclusive educational opportunities and difficulties, inclusive education status, and inclusive education actors along with location search terms such as Africa, West Africa, and Niger, Burkina Faso, and East Africa-Ethiopia.

All English sources, including peer-reviewed articles, books, dissertation abstracts, and reports were screened for relevance to inclusive, equitable, and quality education. Search results were filtered by date (2004-2020). Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance by a member of the study team. Reference lists were reviewed for relevant sources and older sources were included if they had unique insight or information to offer. The review also included unpublished grey literature, news articles, and websites because published literature that reflects the current situation in Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso is limited. Targeted Google searches were conducted as necessary to find additional information about specific research, actors, projects, and initiatives referenced in the literature.

Following the literature and document review, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted to validate and expand upon the findings from the desk review. Purposive and quota/criteria sampling was used to engage a range of key stakeholders in each country. The key informants interviewed include representatives of children with disabilities, inclusive education focal persons within the government, organizations of

persons with disabilities, and NGOs implementing inclusive education projects. In total, 44 semi-structured KIIs were conducted (14 in Ethiopia, 11 in Niger, 15 in Burkina Faso, and four with international partner organizations headquartered in Europe that operate in the three countries). Data from the KIIs were thematically analyzed in a multi-step process, starting with a basic description of data, then coding and classification according to categories informed by the study objectives and desk review, and finally the coded data were analyzed for key themes and interconnections between concepts. While the KIIs contributed data and insights on the country's context, local initiatives, and perceptions of inclusive education, both the literature review and interviews were used to inform the analysis.

4. Country background

Education for children with disabilities does not occur in a vacuum. Different economic, social, political, and geographic factors all shape how children are educated.

Ethiopia

A landlocked country located in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia has a population of 109 million, making it the most densely populated country in the Horn and the second-most populous nation in Africa after Nigeria (Worldometer, 2021). Ethiopia has nine regional states and two city administrative states. These states are further divided into local administrative units: 800 *Woredas* and around 15,000 *Kebeles*.

Ethiopia ranks 173 out of 189 countries on the 2020 Human Development Index (UNDP, 2020). Nearly nine out of ten children (88%) live in multidimensional poverty and experience deprivation in multiple areas such as health, nutrition, housing, education and/or water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) (Ministry of Education, 2020).

In Ethiopia over 80% of the population resides in rural areas and is dependent on rain-fed agriculture. However, climate change is increasing the severity and frequency of droughts and floods. Coupled with the rising population, these climatic changes result in food insecurity and leave millions of people vulnerable. High poverty levels, an overreliance on subsistence agriculture and pastoralism, and climate shocks often translate into extended humanitarian situations that affect large parts of the country (UNICEF & UNDP, 2017).

Ethiopia has made some strides toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), intending to become a low-middle-income nation by 2025. Monetary poverty has been reduced significantly (from 30% in 2011 to 24% in 2016), but significant disparities exist within the country, including between rural and urban areas and between regions (World Bank, 2020). While some positive steps have been taken, the country still has a long way to go to achieve equitable and sustainable development for all.

Planning and support at multiple levels have contributed to significant improvements in Ethiopia's education sector in recent years, most notably in achieving near-universal primary enrollment. In the last three decades, Ethiopia's education system has expanded rapidly; the number of elementary schools tripled from 11,000 in 1996 to 32,048 in 2014, while the number of students enrolled in these schools surged from less than 3 million to more than 18 million (Trines, 2018). While retention to grade 5 is strong (88% of enrolled students), only 58% of students complete grade 8 (World Bank Group, 2019). Multiple barriers prevent students from transitioning to secondary and tertiary education, including distance, personal security, and economic challenges. In secondary education (Grades 9 to 12), overall enrollment is much smaller, but growing modestly (18% in 2002 to 35% in 2015) (Trines, 2018). Despite these gains, there are still indicators of challenges in achieving consistently strong educational attainment, including high repetition rates, high drop-out rates, low completion rates, and variable enrollment coverage (World Bank Group, 2019).

Disparities in participation in education also persist between rural areas and urban centers, most notably Addis Ababa, as well as between low- and higher-income households, and between boys and girls (World Bank Group, 2019; Ahmed et al., 2018; Trines, 2018). At the same time, the gender gap in primary and secondary education in Ethiopia has narrowed considerably in recent years. The primary school enrollment rate of girls in Ethiopia has increased from 21 to 91% in the last three decades. In 2019/20, the gender parity index was at 0.91 for primary enrollment and 0.87 for secondary enrollment, down slightly from 2013/14. However, gender parity rates vary significantly across regions; in Addis Ababa, girls are attending both primary and secondary school at higher rates than boys (GPI 1.13 for primary and 1.06 for secondary). The Somali region, by comparison, has the lowest GPI at 0.75 for primary school and 0.71 for secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2020). Only 35% of undergraduate university students are female, and 5% drop out in the first year (USAID, 2020).

Niger

Niger is a landlocked country in the Sahel in West Africa. It has an estimated population of approximately 25 million and a high population growth rate (3.8% per annum) bolstered by a high average fertility rate of 6.6 births per woman (Razafimandiby & Swaroop 2021). The nation has a relatively low life expectancy at birth (59 years for men and 61 years for women) and a high infant and child mortality rate (84 per 1000 live births) (World Bank, 2021).

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world and has the overall worst performance across key dimensions of development measured on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2020). In 2015, an estimated 45% of Nigeriens lived in poverty and although the country has considerable natural resources, 26% of its population is chronically poor (Niger Federation of Disabled People (FNPH), 2018).

Women suffer from poverty disproportionately more compared to their male counterparts (Stiftung, 2018). The country is vulnerable to chronic food shortages, recurrent natural disasters, and insecurity which contribute to worsening poverty, putting millions at risk. Food insecurity is widespread, particularly during times of crisis. In 2022, an estimated 3.6 million Nigeriens, 15% of the country's population, will require humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2022b). Droughts and flooding in the summer months are pressing challenges (FNPH, 2018).

Niger also has a very low literacy level, which stands at 19% (27.% for men and just 11% for women) (Stiftung, 2018). The Government of Niger has identified the education sector as a high priority and in 2016 allocated 21% of its public spending (or 5% of GDP) to improve education (World Bank, 2019; Rieser, 2012). Despite the demographic pressures, limited resources, and risks of insecurity, Niger's education system has shown improvements over recent years. For example, the gross enrollment rate (GER) – the total number of students enrolled, divided by the total number of primary- or secondary-aged children – has increased from 64% to 71% for primary schools and from less than 4% to 14% for secondary schools over the period 2010 – 2017 (Stiftung, 2018). The average years of schooling completed by adults (life-school expectancy) are also progressing slowly from 4.7 years in 2010 to between 5 and 6 years in 2017. Despite these improvements, education in Niger has been obstructed by several factors including persistently low schooling rates, regional disparities, inequalities between urban and rural areas, lack of equipment and working materials, and large class sizes.

Niger, along with other Central Sahel countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali, is experiencing escalating insecurity and violence attributed to extremist groups (OCHA, 2019; African Development Bank (AfDB), 2017). The continued insecurity and instability caused by Boko Haram in Tillaberi, Tahoua, and Diffa regions have forced schools to close, teachers to flee, and schoolchildren to remain at home (UNICEF, 2020). The threat of attacks has also resulted in demand for increased security-related expenditure by the government, leading to budget cuts to the education sector (UNECA, 2017; Rieser, 2012).

Gender inequality and the large population of school-age children and young people exacerbate these challenges (FNPH, 2018). The GER for girls in primary schools was 12% in 2016, compared to 82% for boys. Only 69% of girls enrolled in primary schools in 2019 completed their primary education, compared to 87% of boys. This gender gap persists into secondary education and contributes to disparities in the economic participation of women (Yahaya, 2020).

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is a landlocked, francophone West African country to the southwest of Niger. The country's population is approaching 22 million and is very young with 47% of the population under age 15. Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world and is ranked 182 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index

(UNDP, 2020). The vast majority of the population (84%) lives in multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2019).

The agriculture sector employs close to 80% of the country's labor force (AfDB, 2017). Food scarcity and famine are persistent challenges, exacerbated by climate change, natural disasters, and insecurity (OCHA, 2019; Charvon & Chase, 2016). As in Niger, violence and insecurity pose challenges to education access in Burkina Faso. The northern and eastern regions of the country are most affected, including the Sahel, Center-Nord, Est, Boucle de Mouhoun, and Nord regions. According to the World Food Programme, Burkina Faso has one of the "fastest-growing displaced population crises in the world" (UN, 2020). In addition to displacement threatening children's access to education, there have been direct attacks on schools, students, and teachers by terrorist groups. Before the mid-March 2020 closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2,512 schools were already closed in response to insecurity, affecting over 300,000 students (OCHA, 2020).

The right to inclusive education at all levels, from pre-school to university, is guaranteed in Burkinabé law (Act No. 12-2010, Section II Article 9). The law prioritizes enrollment in mainstream education for all, with access to specialized assistance, adapted teaching, and/or dedicated classes mandated when required to meet student needs (Articles 10-12). Two key strategic policies are the Programme Sectoriel de l'Education et de la Formation, 2012-2021 (PSEF), and the sub-sector strategy, the Programme de Développement Stratégique de l'Education de Base, 2012-2021 (PDSEB). The two national strategies are aligned, and both include specific objectives and actions to improve access to inclusive, quality, and equitable education for all students.

The average years of schooling completed by adults in Burkina Faso are only two years for men and one year for women (UNDP, 2019). The literacy rate of adults (aged 15 and up) is under 35%. However, the expected years of schooling of children today (a projection if the current trends in education were to continue) are 9.1 years for boys and 8.7 years for girls (UNDP, 2019). This difference points to Burkina Faso's significant recent progress in expanding enrollment in primary and secondary schools for both boys and girls. Gross primary school enrollment was 94% in 2017, up from 58% in 2005 and 33% in 1990. Less encouraging is the 34% primary school drop-out rate (UNDP, 2019). Additionally, these numbers do not reflect the recent impacts of escalating armed conflict and insecurity.

5. Children with disabilities and the status of inclusive education in the three countries

Around the world, 65 million learners of primary and secondary school age with disabilities are out of school (International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, 2015). According to the 2011 World Report on Disability, 6% of children

under the age of 14 in Africa have moderate or severe disabilities, and less than 10% of all children with disabilities in this age range are attending school (WHO and World Bank, 2011). For Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the estimates for the overall prevalence of persons with disabilities, and children with disabilities specifically, range widely. Similarly, there is no single, consistent source of data on educational enrollment and attainment among children with disabilities. While data availability, reliability, and comparability across the three study countries are a challenge, the available evidence points to high levels of exclusion and marginalization of children with disabilities in each country.

Ethiopia

According to the World Report on Disability, there are about 15 million children with disabilities in Ethiopia (WHO and World Bank 2011). Accordingly, the government of Ethiopia has ratified several international and regional agreements on persons with disabilities, including their right to education. The country signed the UNCRPD in 2007 and ratified it in 2010 (Proclamation No. 676/2010). Ethiopia is also a signatory of prior conventions that seek to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities to fair treatment, appropriate care, inclusion, and full participation in society, including the UNCRC and its optional protocol, ratified by Ethiopia in 1991 and 2014 respectively; the 1999 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), ratified in 2002; and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995). Ethiopia has also adopted and implemented several domestic laws, policies, and standards supporting persons with disabilities (Mitiku et al., 2014; Sida, 2014; ILO, 2009; Lewis, 2009).

The Ethiopian government's commitment to achieving inclusive education is expressed in legislation and policies, including the Ethiopian constitution, the educational and training policy, the higher education proclamation, the National Plan of Action for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities 2012-2021; Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs); the Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy 2012; and the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018-2030).

Ethiopia adopted its first strategy of Special Needs Education in 2006 to help ensure that children with disabilities have access to quality education. Subsequently, the government offered new teaching programs for the education of children with disabilities (UNDESA, 2018). Inclusive education is also currently seen as a priority by several international bilateral development partners active in Ethiopia, including Finland, Austria, the United States, and the Czech Republic (Šiška et al., 2019).

It is challenging to identify recent, reliable estimates on access to education by children and young persons with disabilities in Ethiopia. For example, only 4% of the estimated population of children with special educational needs are enrolled in primary school, although this has been increasing in recent years (Trines, 2018). A study by Franck (2015) reported that most children with disabilities are still out of school. One 2015 study documented 15 special schools, 285 special units attached to

mainstream schools that cater to children with disabilities, and an unknown number of schools offering integration into mainstream classes across the country (Franck, 2015). The special schools in Ethiopia are characterized by low quality and lack of regulation, are crowded, poorly staffed, under-resourced, and generally concentrated in urban areas (Franck, 2015). The findings echo those in Child (2015) who shows that most children with disabilities in Ethiopia lack access to inclusive education.

Challenges at the family and community levels that impede access to education for children with disabilities include the financial burden of school fees on families, a lack of community and parental awareness about the options available to children with disabilities, environmental obstacles, and a lack of accessible transport, facilities, and materials. These issues are particularly prevalent in rural settings (Abera et al., 2020; Yohannes, 2012). Additionally, prejudice and negative stereotypes regarding the capacity of persons with disabilities to learn and work are formidable social obstacles (Geleta, 2019; Sedeto & Dar, 2019).

Furthermore, since late 2020, civil conflict has resulted in the damage, looting, and destruction of over 5,200 schools across the Amhara, Tigray, and Afar regions of Ethiopia, affecting over 2.1 million students (OCHA, 2022a). Thousands of children are displaced due to the conflict and some are receiving education in camps for internally displaced persons. In some cases, displaced persons are sheltering in schools, further affecting access for students (OCHA, 2022a).

In Ethiopia, girls with disabilities face particular barriers to education and even when they are enrolled at school, they do not receive an equitable education. Ethiopia faces a daunting challenge in overcoming both deeply rooted gender biases and disability stigma (Sedeto Dar 2019; Eleni 2016).

Niger

Niger signed the UNCPRD in March 2007 and ratified the convention and its optional protocol a year later. It has also adopted many legislative and regulatory provisions taking into account persons with disabilities or specifically those that consider them (Mandrilly-John, 2010). To address the exclusion of children with disabilities, Niger has enacted strong legislative frameworks to promote the rights of children with disabilities including the Niger Constitution, Order No. 99-68 (1999) on the opening of a special account called the “National Fund to Support Disabled People”. After signing several international human rights laws, Niger reaffirms its commitment to the principles of the rule of law and explicitly guarantees the rights of persons with disabilities in the 2010 Constitution.

Based on the latest available data from the 2012 census, people with disabilities represent an estimated 4.2% Niger’s population (2.11% men and 2.06% women, Niger Statistics Institute, 2012). According to the FNPH (2018), the prevalence of disability among the age groups 0-14 years is 1.9%. Due to cultural beliefs that surround

disability, most persons with disabilities in Niger suffer from exclusion and marginalization. Persons with severe disabilities are excluded from participating in family and community life and are often abandoned by their families. Being rejected by family is a source of intense shame and this stigmatization and marginalization puts persons with disabilities at particular risk of exposure to violence and abuse (Nyangweso, 2018).

Disability is a major cause of educational exclusion in Niger. Children with disabilities are far less likely to go to school or stay in school compared to children without a disability. In 2016, very few children with disabilities were enrolled in school (0.4%, 0.4%, 0.3%, and 0.1% in primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and vocational and technical training, respectively) (FNPH, 2018). Similarly, primary school completion rates for children with disabilities are very low (UNESCO, 2010), and the GER for boys with disabilities (0.29%) was slightly higher than the GER for girls with disabilities (0.2%) (FNPH, 2018). Exclusion of children with disabilities from education is exacerbated by poverty, inaccessible schools and public transport facilities, and public prejudice (Wodon et al., 2018).

Niger has identified inclusive education implementation strategies related to access to school buildings, curricula and instructional materials development, and school support centers (Tsegaye, 2011). Different approaches to addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities could focus on inclusive education, integrated schools, special schools, catering for students with sensory, intellectual, motor, psycho-social, or communication disabilities or specific language disorders, in-hospital schools or classrooms and home teaching (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2019).

Burkina Faso

The 2006 census (Recensement général de la population et de l'habitation de 2006) found that just 1.2% of the population identify persons with disabilities (Leonard Cheshire, 2018). Other sources, however, offer higher estimates of prevalence rates from 7% (Sida, 2012) to 13.9% (WHO, 2011). There is a lack of reliable data on children with disabilities, particularly data that can be disaggregated by impairment type, sex, ethnicity, and other key demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

Similarly, there is a paucity of recent and reliable data to estimate access to education by children and young persons with disabilities in Burkina Faso. Multiple reports cite the 2006 population census which found that two-thirds of children and youth with disabilities had not completed any level of schooling and just 16% had completed primary school (Bationo et al., 2019; Bezzina, 2017). The 2006 census found that children with disabilities were half as likely to have completed primary school as their peers without disabilities (Leonard Cheshire, 2018), while UNESCO reports that children with disabilities in Burkina Faso were two and a half times more likely than their peers to be out of school (UNESCO, 2010).

The 2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report noted that in Burkina Faso school enrollment rates differ substantially by “impairment type”, with higher rates of enrollment among children with physical impairments than those with intellectual or sensory impairments (UNESCO, 2010). A 2006 study found that 40% of children aged seven to 12 with physical impairments were enrolled in school (a similar proportion to their peers without disability), compared to only 10% of deaf children of the same age (UNESCO, 2010). Barriers to education for children with disabilities are felt doubly by girls with disabilities who also face gender-based inequality. One World Bank estimate places literacy among women with disabilities in Burkina Faso as low as 1% (Sida, 2012).

Negative cultural perceptions regarding disability are often cited as a challenge to inclusive education in Burkina Faso (Humanity and Inclusion, 2018; Peyraud, 2018; UNICEF, 2013; ODDS, n.d.). Experiencing a disability or having a child with a disability may be interpreted as divine or supernatural punishment for individual transgression (Peyraud, 2018; UNICEF, 2013). Some parents do not believe that their child with a disability can learn (Peyraud, 2018) or has a reasonable opportunity to gain employment following education (Bezzina, 2017). Importantly, though, traditional beliefs vary across the country and there are also examples of communities that uphold some persons with disabilities as having special powers or a valuable social role (UNICEF, 2013).

Opportunities and Challenges for Inclusive Education across Countries

Children with disabilities are diverse and the nature and severity of impairments may significantly affect access to education (keeping in mind that disability is a function of the interaction between the individual and environmental barriers). Across the three countries, children with disabilities continue to face disproportionate exclusion from educational opportunities, resulting in the perpetuation and deepening of their economic and social marginalization. Understanding both the specific challenges and opportunities for strengthening the inclusion of children with disabilities is an essential starting point for change. The KIs in Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso reiterated the findings of the literature review regarding the limitations of education for children with disabilities in each country but also provided some nuanced insights into shared challenges across the different contexts and optimism regarding the potential of inclusive education interventions.

Table 1 outlines challenges that cut across Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso at the family, community, school, and systems levels. The key informants also identified ways that challenges at different levels can interact with and reinforce each other. For example, it was noted that in Burkina Faso, a lack of adequately trained teachers and support resources in schools can reinforce parents’ belief that school is not the appropriate place for their children with disabilities: *“We cannot ask parents to send their children if we do not have competent people to actually take care of the children”* (KI, Burkina Faso). In Ethiopia, stakeholders noted the reality of policy coming up

against societal assumptions that undermine implementation. Despite federal policy supporting inclusive education, government officials at multiple levels mistakenly interpret this as calling for the education of children with disabilities in separate settings, impeding meaningful implementation of inclusion. In Niger, the lack of resources in the school system for transport and accommodation makes it difficult to address barriers of familial poverty except on an ad-hoc basis: *“I know a - children with disabilities who lives in Guidan Roumji and his father wants to enroll him, but he does not have a house. So, one of our female teachers housed him”* (KI, Niger). These examples suggest that barriers at the family, community, and institutional levels cannot be adequately addressed in isolation from each other. Education of children with disabilities takes place within an ecosystem of family, community, and system dynamics. Addressing barriers at one level, while important, may fail to be effective without considering the complexities of how factors interact across different parts of the ecosystem.

Table 1: Common challenges to inclusive education across Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso

	Challenges
Family level	Parental attitudes towards disability and awareness of education opportunities
	Family poverty
School level	School facilities & accessible infrastructure
	Lack of educational materials
	Inadequate supply of teachers
	Inadequate teacher training
Community level	Societal attitudes towards disability
	Lack of accessible forms of transportation to/from schools
	Insecurity and violence, including war, terrorism, and intracommunal conflict
System level	Lack of reliable data for understanding the situation, and for monitoring progress
	Inadequate attention in government policy & programs
	Poor coordination across different government bodies involved in disability inclusion and education
	Lack of government resources for education generally

Despite the substantial barriers to realizing inclusive, equal, quality education for children with disabilities in low-resource settings, key informants also highlighted

opportunities and reasons for optimism. Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso all have strong legislative foundations for inclusive education, including both commitments to international human rights frameworks, and domestic legislation, plans, and strategies. Engaged and committed governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, including Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, were identified in each country. While many of these stakeholders face capacity limitations, the presence of such actors is a starting point for intervention.

Just as barriers to inclusion can be mutually reinforcing, so too can improvements. KIs in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso noted that parental and societal attitudes towards disability were barriers to children with disabilities accessing education but where inclusive education exists, it can be a driving force in developing a positive attitude towards disability among community members. Key informants highlighted how including children with disabilities in mainstream schools encouraged the wider community to reassess their opinions on disability and helped people see that persons with disabilities are capable of learning and contributing to community life. As one key informant put it:

It will encourage many people to think about this [disability] and say that people with disabilities are not incapable people. Just because a person with a disability or a child with a disability doesn't mean that he or she can't do anything. (KI, Burkina Faso)

Efforts to include children with disabilities equally in education can also offer opportunities to strengthen other service systems. In Ethiopia, for example, an inclusive early childhood education program initiated a memorandum of understanding with the local health offices to strengthen coordination between the two systems and capitalize on opportunities to cross-train teachers and health extension workers on early identification and intervention.

Stakeholders in Niger and Burkina Faso also noted the importance of community-based approaches to inclusive education that extend beyond the school system. As one KI in Burkina Faso explained, inclusive education efforts must:

Take into account the needs of the children in a holistic way... we involve the community much more in our approaches and we try to organize them into networks, committees, or self-help groups so that parents can play their role in achieving the objectives. (KI, Burkina Faso)

Key informants also recognized that in order to be effective, the current project will need to adopt a multi-level approach (micro, meso, and macro levels) that engages families and communities, schools and municipalities as well as the state. KIs in Niger similarly noted that no single entity can effectively implement and sustain inclusive education.

Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso share many of the same core challenges in achieving inclusive, equal, quality education for children with disabilities. Beyond the bleak

statistics on enrollment and achievement gaps, however, stakeholders on the ground in these countries point to opportunities for change. The calls for community-based interventions that engage multiple actors at different levels underscore the importance of context-specific, locally-informed approaches.

Lessons learned from the three countries

Inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities

Across the three countries, inclusive education is being promoted at the legislative and policy level as the primary educational approach for children with disabilities' full participation in all aspects of learning. However, there is a disconnect between commitment, policy, and practices in these countries. Specifically, the study countries' education systems are yet to fully meet the four interrelated features of inclusion: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability as stipulated in the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment No. 4 (2016) on the rights to inclusive education.

The three countries profiled in this chapter each face unique challenges in delivering inclusive education, but also reflect issues that are common across Sub-Saharan Africa. Available data suggest that the vast majority of children with disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa are excluded from education. Using the national censuses of 11 countries in SSA, the World Bank found that a 12-year-old child with impairments has a 10% lower likelihood of ever attending school than a youngster without disabilities (Wodon et al., 2018). This exclusion is due to a myriad of physical, attitudinal, and institutional barriers (Meseret, 2019; Geleta, 2019; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2015). Bakhshi, Babulal and Trani (2017) note that "the causal link between disability and access to school is not a simple linear relationship but multidimensional and includes multiple factors." Similarly, while the three countries are mandated to make functional educational institutions and programs available in sufficient quantity for children with disabilities within their areas, the analyses showed a stark disparity between rural and urban children's access to education. Specifically, children with disabilities are usually disadvantaged due to the limited number of schools and longer distances as most of the programs and institutions are largely confined to larger urban areas.

The Africa Report on Children with Disabilities indicates that most educational buildings are inaccessible to children with disabilities due to the lack of ramps, handrails, and especially lifts to make facilities accessible to all children (ACPF, 2014). A study of education provision for children with disabilities in the eastern Ethiopia town of Harar found that schooling and educational programs are inaccessible to children with disabilities (Hankebo, 2018). Similarly, in Burkina Faso, basic infrastructure inadequacies pose hurdles to inclusive education efforts. Many schools lack the necessary equipment and resources to enable access by students with disabilities, including adaptations like ramps and basic infrastructure like safe drinking water in classrooms (Bationo et al., 2019; Wodon & Allasuutari, 2018). It is therefore important to eliminate barriers to access to ensure access to and full participation in education for all (IDA, 2020). Education-related accessibility measures should include those that reflect and follow the principles of universal design which calls for

environments and products to be accessible to all people, regardless of disability (IDA, 2020). Universally accessible design can remove barriers for children with disabilities, but also improve the experience of all students.

The key barriers that impede inclusive education include attitudinal barriers, physical barriers, and resource barriers. Attitudinal barriers encompass discriminatory social norms, prejudice, negative stereotypes of the learning capacity of persons with disabilities, lack of awareness around the causes of disabilities, and negative assumptions and beliefs about children with disabilities. These beliefs discourage parents from sending children with disabilities to school, undermine community and institutional motivation to integrate all children into mainstream classrooms, and reinforce discrimination against children with disabilities. Barriers in the physical environment include inadequate and inaccessible facilities (lack of adaptations such as ramps and accessible toilets), basic infrastructure gaps (access to clean drinking water in schools), and lack of accessible transport options. Resource gaps further undermine the capacity of schools to effectively meet the educational needs of students with disabilities, including a lack of adequate supplies, adapted materials, and trained teachers. Costs such as school fees, transport costs, and the cost of school materials) create more significant barriers to enrollment for children with disabilities from poor families, especially those who have lost their livelihood due to climate change and conflicts in Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

Improving the quality of education of children and young people with disabilities

Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso face significant challenges in delivering high-quality universal basic education to their populations. Although the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools is one piece of the puzzle, ensuring that the education system is equipped to support meaningful learning and educational attainment for all children is also essential. The ability to provide quality inclusive education is underpinned by teacher training (including specialist teachers), pedagogical methods, educational content and learning environment (materials and curriculum, and delivery processes), as well as managerial and administrative structures and processes, including funding (Pigozzi, 2010).

The three study countries, together with development partners, are working to implement initiatives to improve the quality of education for children with disabilities. In Niger, for example, the government is collaborating with international NGOs and bilateral donors on several initiatives to improve quality inclusive education in line with the country's Education and Training Sector Programme, 2014-2024, including the introduction of an inclusive education module in the Ministry of Education's teacher training program, through the project *Promotion d'un modèle d'éducation inclusive à Maradi* [Promoting an Inclusive Education Model in Maradi – PMEI] (UNESCO, 2021). The PMEI project, together with another project (*Agir pour la pleine*

participation des enfants handicapés par l'éducation [Working Towards the Full Participation of Children with Disabilities through Education – APPELH]), have trained over 450 teachers and school principals on the inclusion of children with disabilities (UNESCO, 2021). Ethiopia is also investing in teacher training through the project entitled "Enhancing Teacher Education and Resource Centers in Ethiopia; and the Inclusion in Education for Persons with Disabilities" (INEDIS), which aims to strengthen the capacity building of partnering higher education institutions, namely Addis Ababa University, Gondar University, and Dilla University, to facilitate inclusive education for students with disabilities.

In 2018, the World Bank approved funding to Burkina Faso's Ministry of Economics and Finances for a project titled "Burkina Faso improving education for children with disabilities" to be implemented by the Ministry of Education and Literacy (MENAPLN) (Lompo, 2019)¹. The project's primary objective is to support the education of 7,000 vulnerable children with a focus on children with disabilities, including at least 50% of girls, in the five poorest regions of the country and Ouagadougou (Lompo, 2019). Additionally, the literature highlights specific schools and projects that showcase effective inclusive education efforts, including the Garango inclusive education pilot project (Bationo et al., 2019; UNICEF, 2013; Light for the World, 2012), and the Ecole Jeunes Aveugles or the School for Blind Youth (EJA) run by the Burkinabe Association for the Promotion of the Blind and the Visually Impaired. The latter provides special needs elementary school education for 6 to 11-year-olds and inclusive preschool education for children with visual impairment and other local children aged 3 to 6 years. Upon completion of elementary school, students are then supported by EJA tutors to integrate into mainstream middle school (Peyraud, 2018). As in Ethiopia and Niger, isolated inclusive education projects point to possibilities for expanding opportunities for children with disabilities despite widespread challenges and barriers.

However, various studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have indicated the low quality of education for children with disabilities due to various barriers including limited funding, ineffective teaching methods, late identification and support for children with different forms of disabilities; and a limited number of trained teachers to support children with disabilities (Bezzina, 2018; Franck & Joshi, 2017). To promulgate high-quality education for children with disabilities, it is important to support the development of curricula and pedagogy that are relevant to local realities (Bezzina, 2018; Charvon & Chase, 2016). An analysis of Ethiopia's approach to inclusive education found that attitudes and community outreach, teacher abilities and training, and resources all influence inclusive education (Franck & Joshi, 2017).

A fundamental hurdle to the implementation of quality and inclusive education is a lack of adequate finance (IDA, 2020; Ebersold & Meijer, 2016). Limited funding

¹ An official project document (Lompo 2019) indicates that the project was approved by the World Bank in 2018. However, the World Bank online project inventory lists the project status as "pipeline".

constraints on education systems' ability to train and support adequate numbers of professional teachers, provide appropriate educational materials, and maintain accessible school infrastructure. Ideally, sufficient funding would enable education systems to "take learners' educational needs into account and support parents in meeting the direct and indirect costs of education" (Ebersold & Meijer, 2016). Governments and donors should allocate funding to respond to the best interests of children with disabilities and make quality education available in their local communities (IDA, 2020).

Investing in high-quality education for all children and youth, including those with disabilities, is at the heart of education system reform and inclusive education (IDA, 2020). Quality inclusive education requires effective teacher training and support. Teaching and learning methods should be based on student strengths, and instructors need who work with children with all types of impairments need the required training to be professional in their teachings. Quality is also strengthened through responsive curriculum improvements that focus on the needs of various groups of students and emphasize individual pathways that will enable them to contribute to the economy (IDA, 2020).

It is also important to note that while challenges in providing basic quality education for all children are sometimes cited as a reason for not being able to deliver inclusive education, the two endeavors can be complementary rather than competitive. The analysis reveals that inclusion and quality can be reciprocal and mutually reinforcing since inclusive approaches that equip schools to meet a range of learner needs can improve the quality of education for children with and without disabilities alike.

Equitable education for children with disabilities

Equal opportunity is now firmly enshrined in both domestic and international legal frameworks in the three countries, as well as beyond them. It's at the "heart" of much international human-rights legislation, dating back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child places a legal obligation on governments to work toward the realization of the right to education "progressively and on an equitable footing" (United Nations, 1989, Article 28). The right to an equal education is also incorporated in the national laws and constitutions of most countries (UNESCO, 2010).

The implementation of inclusive education has resulted in an increase in primary school attendance in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2020). However, participation in school among learners with disabilities lags significantly behind that of their peers without disabilities. Similarly, increases in enrollment among children with disabilities have not kept pace with increases in enrollment among children without disabilities, resulting in widening enrollment gaps. For instance, in Ethiopia, the out-of-school rate for children with disabilities is nearly twice as high (World Bank, 2020). The literacy

gap between children with disabilities and children without disabilities has widened over time, according to a comparison of enrollment and completion in primary and secondary education. Similarly, while primary school completion rates have grown in both groups, literacy improvements for children with disabilities have been substantially smaller - a phenomenon possibly related to the "disability and development gap" (Groce & Kett, 2013). These disparities have been attributed to various financial, social, and physical factors including parents', teachers', and students' attitudes toward children with disabilities, and the cost of school fees and materials (Geleta, 2019; Sedeto & Dar, 2019).

In sum, the observations from the analysis indicate that children and young people with disabilities do not have equal access to education as children without disabilities. Notably, this usually starts with the lack of early identification and early intervention systems, which is important to transform the situations of children with disabilities in the study countries. Failure to identify disabilities as early as possible makes it difficult to plan and implement adequate interventions including healthcare or other development support necessary to ensure a successful and independent life for children with disabilities.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

This chapter set out to explore the inclusiveness, equality, and quality of education provided to children with disabilities in Ethiopia, Niger, and Burkina Faso. While the three countries are committed to improving education for children with disabilities, the findings of this chapter reflect the observation of the International Disability Alliance (2019, p.8) that "there is no certainty that any country... is on track to ensure access to quality inclusive education for all children with disabilities by 2030."

This chapter has also shown that context matters in ensuring inclusive, equal, and quality education (Ainscow, 2020) and that the structures and mechanisms that lead to the exclusion and marginalization of children with disabilities in education are deeply ingrained, complex, and context-specific (Ainscow, 2020; Wulff, 2020). Addressing the myriad of individual, community, and system-level barriers to disability-inclusive education requires a comprehensive multi-sectoral approach toward the design and implementation of inclusive education (Ainscow, 2020).

Despite the commitment by governments to ensure inclusive, equal, and quality education and equal opportunities for all, children with disabilities in Ethiopia, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Africa at large continue to experience educational exclusion and resulting social and economic marginalization. Beyond the human rights perspective, it is equally important to invest in inclusive and quality education to allow children or persons with disabilities to benefit from education, access gainful employment and

wages, contributes to economic growth, improve their own and their family's welfare and close the poverty gap between adults without and with disability.

These findings, therefore, call for immediate actions by government officials, development partners, and other stakeholders. Key focus areas include ensuring adequate and sustainable financing; raising awareness of disabled children's rights more broadly and promoting inclusive education within a broader framework of children's rights and the rights of persons with disabilities; engaging and partnering with multiple stakeholders including parents, organizations of persons with disabilities, and communities; investing in developing or adapting infrastructure to promote accessibility and safety; and investing in capacity building, training, and tools for teachers and students.

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