

GENDER EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief provides an overview of inclusive education policies and practices in 18 Anglophone African countries, with a focus on gender equity and disability/special needs education. Research shows that globally, there are between 93 and 150 million children under the age of 14 living with disabilities. Children with disabilities are particularly at a disadvantage in terms of school enrollment, educational attainment, and learning. This is especially so in low-income countries and sub-Saharan Africa (Quentin, Chata, Claudio, & Ada, 2018). It is no secret that children with disabilities are often considered last, with little regard to the impact that this has on individuals, families and economies.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) declares that all children and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations, deserve access to inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. To achieve this, governments must provide the resources and an environment conducive to equitable, quality, and inclusive education for all children.

BACKGROUND

UNESCO, through its International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA); UNICEF, through the Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa (ESARO); and the African Union Commission (AUC) are managing the Regional Anglophone Africa Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Hub, supported by the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX), a joint endeavor with the International Development Research

Centre (IDRC). The purpose of the hub is to collect, generate, exchange, and facilitate the effective use of data, knowledge, and innovation for education policy formulation and implementation among education stakeholders in 18 Anglophone African countries in six thematic areas, namely (1) Strengthening learning assessment systems; (2) Improving teaching and learning; (3) Strengthening early childhood care and education (ECCE); (4) Achieving gender equality in and through education; (5) Leaving no one behind; and (6) Meeting the data challenge in education.

This paper is intended to review these countries' positioning for policy uptake and provide evidence-based policy recommendations for further action in the hub with a focus on two thematic areas: i) Achieving gender equality in and through education; and ii) Leaving no one behind.



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DATA COLLECTION METHOD

DESK REVIEWS

Several existing policies and frameworks uploaded to the [KIX Africa 19 digital repository](#) were reviewed to ascertain whether countries have existing policies, frameworks, or strategies that support gender equity and inclusivity.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE LEARNING SERIES

The Disability and Inclusivity Education community of practice learning series organized by UNICEF-ESARO in partnership with UNESCO-IICBA brought together disability and inclusivity experts and ministry of education representatives from 15 countries, namely Eritrea, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The series consisted of three webinars held over a period of three weeks. The series helped increase participants' knowledge about interventions that governments are implementing that reflect a commitment to quality and inclusivity in education, such as data collection systems that are equipped to collect data on children with disabilities, and ongoing innovations as well as future plans to ensure equitable and inclusive education.

KIX KENYA NATIONAL DIALOGUE

The KIX Kenya National Dialogue presented an opportunity for high-level dialogue between national policymakers, researchers, and other key stakeholders from the government, universities, teacher institutes, and local education groups. The one-day dialogue provided a platform for the participants to discuss existing education policies and whether the policies address equity and inclusivity in education. Participants then identified existing policies and interventions that indicate the government's concern for quality, inclusive, and equitable education. Their responses were then analyzed to identify the most relevant and commonly

held views on gender equity and inclusivity in education amongst policymakers in Kenya.

KEY FINDINGS

FINDINGS FROM THE DESK REVIEWS AND THE KIX COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE LEARNING SERIES

Several Africa 19 countries including Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, and South Sudan have gender as well as special education and inclusivity policies or education strategies in place.

- **Eritrea** has a community-based disability inclusive programme as well as a national ICT based program for inclusivity and disability identification.
- In **The Gambia**, personal protective equipment, such as masks that are user friendly, are being provided to every learner, including children with disabilities.
- **Kenya** has several policies in place to ensure gender equity and inclusivity in education including girl child policies and female genital mutilation (FGM) interventions promoted for the retention and transition of the girl child; a Special Needs Education Policy; and gender-, disability- and disaster-responsive sector plans.

On data collection systems, Kenya has a national education management information system (NEMIS) that captures data on all children in primary and secondary schools, including children with disabilities.

- In **Lesotho**, the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare worked together to help families with economic difficulties following the loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They offered assistance through cash transfers to families to enable students to return to school even if they could not afford the fees. Secondly, Lesotho is revisiting an existing form that is distributed to schools to capture data on children with

disabilities and modifying it to make it accessible, clearer, and user friendly for teachers.

- **Liberia** is planning to train the Inclusive Education Division team on how to apply knowledge gained from KIX Africa 19 hub webinars on disability and inclusivity in education.
- **Malawi** is raising awareness on re-entry programs already in place for young mothers to return to school and is planning to put in place a mechanism to follow up on special needs education students from home.
- **Sierra Leone** has formulated policy strategies to ensure that all children continue to receive quality, equitable and inclusive education as a way of addressing education challenges brought about by economic and social inequalities.
- **South Sudan** is offering cash transfer to girls enrolled in and regularly attending school as a way of ensuring that girls remain in school.



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FINDINGS FROM THE KIX KENYA NATIONAL DIALOGUE

Overall, respondents agreed that existing policies in Kenya address equity and inclusivity. “The concept of inclusivity in public schools is being applied and emphasized,” said one respondent. “In Kenya, there is free primary and secondary education and inclusive education in the Special Needs Education Policy, and equity and inclusivity are addressed in almost all policies in education.” However not all participants

agreed that these policies and strategic plans are addressing equity and inclusivity: “The policies look good on paper but due to various interpretations, practically they are not addressing equity and inclusivity in education,” said a respondent.

Interventions that stand out in Kenya that indicate the government’s commitment to quality, inclusive and equitable education were highlighted by the KIX Kenya National Dialogue participants which indicate the Kenyan government’s commitment to quality, equitable, and inclusive education. Some of the interventions include: (1) Implementing reforms such as competency-based curriculum; (2) Provision of various scholarship schemes by the government; (3) School meal programmes, especially in rural and marginalized schools; (4) Free primary and secondary education; and (5) Resource allocation for learners with special needs.

Overall views from both the capacity building workshops and the national dialogue suggest a platform to continuously exchange critical knowledge and innovations among countries is of utmost importance, especially in the face of the pandemic. Cross learning among experts was the most frequently applauded factor during the learning events and the national dialogue. While a lot of innovations and research exist in-country, participants generally agreed that cross-country sharing is important whether they are looking to acquire new knowledge or weigh solutions to their challenges.

LIMITATIONS OF DATA COLLECTION

Because of the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the limited time, we restricted our data collection to desk review, the community of practice learning series, and the KIX Kenya National Dialogue. While we tried to capture the diversity of experts from Africa 19 countries, only 15 countries participated in the learning series and we understand that our findings may not apply to all Africa 19 countries. Further research needs to be undertaken to understand gender equity and inclusivity in Africa 19 countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUB COUNTRIES

1. **Incorporate gender and inclusion into mainstream education sector policies.**
2. **Engage diverse stakeholders in discussions on integration of gender and inclusivity** into education policies and foster policy dialogues about how to improve existing policies and frameworks for gender and disability mainstreaming.
3. **Establish unit costs for gender equity and inclusivity** to inform funding and advocate for increased allocation of public funds towards equitable and inclusive education.
4. **Establish practical ways of mapping out** rural and urban children with disabilities, economically and socially disadvantaged children, children in emergencies, and refugee children, and streamline the data both at the national and regional level.
5. **Continuously support relevant government departments and other stakeholders** in developing and implementing sustainable resources and support for children with disabilities, and their caregivers and teachers.



Attendees of the Kenya KIX National Dialogue held in Nairobi on September 22, 2021
Credit: UNESCO

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CONTACT INFORMATION

More information can be accessed on the [KIX Africa 19 Hub webpage](#) on UNESCO IICBA's website.

