

Progress on inclusive education, and the UN High Level Meeting on Disability in September

This Background Sheet tells you more about why inclusive education is so important, the positive progress we've seen, and gives you more detail about the UN event in September.

Why is inclusive education so important?

In 2000, the world came together to agree the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This was an historic moment – goals were set covering many aspects of human development, from improving children's health to cutting poverty – together they represented a global commitment to improving the life chances of the poorest people in our world. Education, through the targets set in MDG2 and MDG3, was central to this vision:

MDG 2 Target: Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

MDG 3 Target: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

The last decade has seen millions of children's lives transformed. Last year there were 50 million fewer children out of school than in 1999.

But UNESCO recently reported that **more than 57 million children continue to be denied the right to primary education, almost half of whom will probably never enter a classroom**. This figure has decreased only slightly from the 61 million figure from the previous year, and shows that the world is not on track to meet the MDG commitments to education.

A lack of disability focus, or even mention, in the current MDGs has contributed to the comparative neglect of children with disabilities. Spending and policies have too often failed to reach these children, some of whom are the most in need of support. A disproportionately high number of disabled children are out of school – poor disabled children, whose families cannot help support them, fare worst.

Children with disabilities are often effectively invisible, especially in official education statistics. The lack of adequate health assessments for children in many countries means that many children with disabilities

are never identified. However, it is estimated that being disabled more than doubles the chance of never enrolling in school in some countries.

According to the World Health Survey, 50.6 per cent of boys with disabilities complete primary school, compared with 61.3 per cent of those without. Similarly, only just over 4 in 10 girls with disabilities finished primary school compared with over 5 in 10 girls without disabilities.

What is inclusive education?

Failing to educate children with disabilities often leaves them in a lifelong poverty trap, whilst a decent education can provide a lifeline. The provision of inclusive education benefits all children, not just those with disabilities. Inclusion means that schools are designed so that all children experience quality learning and recreation together. This means providing students with disabilities with help like access to Braille, sign language and adapted curricula that allow them equal opportunity to learn and interact.

Inclusion benefits everyone. An inclusive, child-centred curriculum can broaden the horizons and strengthen the values of equality and diversity amongst all children. UNESCO's research has also shown that inclusive education is 9 times more cost-efficient than establishing segregated schools.

What progress have we seen for UK aid and inclusive education?

Following the campaigning that took place last year, RESULTS has been working with the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) UK to support the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) to take action to ensure all their education programmes are inclusive of disabled children. We met with Lynne Featherstone MP, the lead Minister at DFID on education and disability, in January to discuss our proposals. We discussed proposals such as DFID producing a central policy on inclusive education, appointing leads within each DFID Country Office on disability, and putting in place mechanisms to measure the success of all their education programmes in terms of whether they are reaching disabled children.

Very recently, we were excited to see that Lynne Featherstone had published an opinion piece in the Sunday Times on this very issue. Entitled ***“The disabled people hidden from view”***, the Minister’s article said that *“For every Paralympic medal-winner, there are millions of disabled people in the developing world who are treated as sub-human and forgotten”*. She called for supporting disabled people to be a top priority for the aid community, and said:

*“As a minister at DFID I am proud that we have a good track record on disability. DFID was the first donor to develop an issue paper on disability in 2000 and has commissioned important research to help address the evidence gaps around disability. **But what is abundantly clear is we can do more. Otherwise our proud Paralympic legacy is under threat.** Last summer the Paralympics captivated this country and the world, and we cannot let that spirit fade away.”*

A parliamentary inquiry on disability and development?

Last year, we called on the parliamentary International Development Select Committee, which scrutinises the work of DFID, to hold an inquiry on disability and inclusive education. If successful this would shine a light on DFID’s support to disabled children and galvanise them to do more.

We have seen progress here too. At the Advocacy Day during this year’s National Conference, several of our campaigners met with Sir Malcolm Bruce MP, the chair of the IDSC. He re-affirmed his commitment to holding an inquiry on disability and, when pushed, said that he anticipated that this inquiry will happen ***“Not later than the first half of 2014”***. We’ll be keeping a close eye on this and seeking to support the IDSC with as much evidence and information as possible.

A post-2015 agenda inclusive of disabled people?

Prime Minister David Cameron has been co-chairing the UN’s High Level Panel on Post-2015 Development, which recently published its report proposing what should replace the MDGs in 2015. We and many other organisations have been arguing that new post-2015 development goals must not repeat the failure of the MDGs to include disability as a major issue. So we were excited to see that the final report included several strong references to disability, and argued for a shift that *“Leaves no-one behind”*. Crucially, the Panel’s

report emphasises the need for all goals and targets like those on education to be ‘disaggregated’ so that progress is measured in relation to disabled children and other marginalised groups. In a major shift from the MDGs, the Panel says that *“Targets will only be considered ‘achieved’ if they are met for all relevant income and social groups”* – including disabled people.

The report signals real progress but it’s vital to remember that this is just the start of the post-2015 process. The Panel’s report is only one of several that feed into the UN Secretary-General, who will now produce his own report to the UN General Assembly which will be discussed in September at a special MDGs Summit just two days after the UN High Level Meeting on Disability and Development...

The UN High Level Meeting on Disability & Development

This meeting will take place on 23 September, the Monday before the start of the annual UN General Assembly, at UN Headquarters in New York. The overarching theme is *“The way forward: a disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond”*. We expect that attendance will be Heads of State or Ministers, and that Lynne Featherstone is the most likely UK representative.

The event will involve a plenary meeting and several round tables with participation from Member States, UN organisations, civil society, organizations of persons with disabilities and the private sector. Crucially, the event will result in what is being described as *“a concise, action-oriented outcome document in support of the aims of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities”*.

This is a very important moment for global action on disability – a rare event that is dedicated to the theme of disability, and coming just before the UN will discuss progress on the MDGs and planning for post-2015 development at a summit two days later.

We want Lynne Featherstone as the UK representative to call for ambitious global action to support disabled people and to ensure every disabled child can achieve their right to a good education. **(You can find more detail of the UN event at <http://bit.ly/xb3hLo>).**