



Every child has a right to quality education

Plan International calls for greater inclusion of children with disabilities during Global Action Week on Education and Disability

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Education is both a human right in itself and also an important means in realizing other human rights. However, children living with disabilities are often denied their right to a quality education due to stigma and discrimination at multiple levels. In general, children with disabilities are less likely to start school and have lower rates of staying and being promoted in educational facilities.¹ Structural and social barriers to education such as poverty, lack of accessible infrastructure, negative attitudes, low capacity of teachers and insufficient access to information all contribute to the exclusion of children with disabilities from accessing quality education opportunities worldwide. Children with disabilities who face other forms of marginalization based on their gender, ethnicity or language are at even greater risk of exclusion.

Addressing the root causes of exclusion

The [Outside the Circle](#) report, published by Plan International in 2013, shows that children with disabilities are subject to profound levels of poverty, exclusion and discrimination. One of the main obstacles to the inclusion of children with disabilities in education is the negative attitudes of their families, community members, teachers and education officials, who often view children with disabilities as incapable of attending school. Children with disabilities are often isolated within their societies and communities because of a mixture of shame, fear and ignorance about the causes and consequences of their impairment. The report found that community perceptions are the root causes of endemic violence and discrimination against girls and boys with disabilities. Three key factors are believed to influence the depth of stigma of individual children with disabilities – their gender, their impairment type and the severity of the impairment.

The research conducted by Plan in collaboration with the University of Toronto says that very little progress has been made to include children with disabilities in mainstream education despite legal commitments made by governments. Persistent challenges to inclusion range from inaccessible schools and the lack of accessible transportation for children with disabilities to the lack of suitably trained teachers, limited learning materials and difficulties for teachers and peers to communicate with children with sensory and intellectual impairments. “Children with disabilities, especially girls, are highly vulnerable to physical, emotional and sexual abuse as well as neglect which affects their access to educational opportunities. There is a lack of recognition in countries of the extent of this abuse,” said Adama Coulibaly, Plan’s Regional Director for West Africa, where the research was carried out.

Another piece of research [Include Us!](#) – prepared in collaboration with the International Centre for Evidence in Disability at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine – showed that children with disabilities were often ten times less likely to attend school, and when children with disabilities do attend school their level of schooling is below that of their peers.

“Plan is calling on governments to implement their legal commitments to children with disabilities, particularly the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This historic Convention is an opportunity to emphasize the importance of eradicating discrimination of children with disabilities all

¹ World Bank and World Health Organization (2011), *World Report on Disability*, p. 206, http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf

over the world and ensure they have access to quality education,” said Nigel Chapman, CEO of Plan International.

Call for Action

In unison with the Global Campaign for Education’s 2014 Global Action Week on Education and Disability, Plan is urging concrete action to ensure that children with disabilities have access to quality education and an opportunity to have their voices heard. Plan calls on governments to:

- Take a strong role in disseminating and implementing the conventions and laws made regarding the right to quality education of children with disabilities.
- Train teachers on inclusive education methods, which would benefit all learners including children with disabilities, as part of their pre-service and in-service training programmes.
- Introduce appropriate admission criteria, adaptable school curriculums and exam systems inclusive of children with disabilities.
- Include children with disabilities in early childhood care and education programmes.
- Apply universal design standards in the construction and rehabilitation of educational facilities.

Plan calls on community leaders, non-governmental organisations, development agencies and donors to:

- Collectively advocate at national level for implementation of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Challenge stigma at all levels towards children with disabilities through CRPD-compliant disability awareness campaigns and training.
- Highlight and address the additional disadvantages faced by girls with disabilities in advocacy and programming work.

ENDS

Editor’s notes:

Founded over 75 years ago, Plan is one of the oldest and largest children's development organisations in the world. Plan works in 51 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas to promote child rights and lift millions of children out of poverty. Plan is independent, with no religious, political or governmental affiliations.

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