

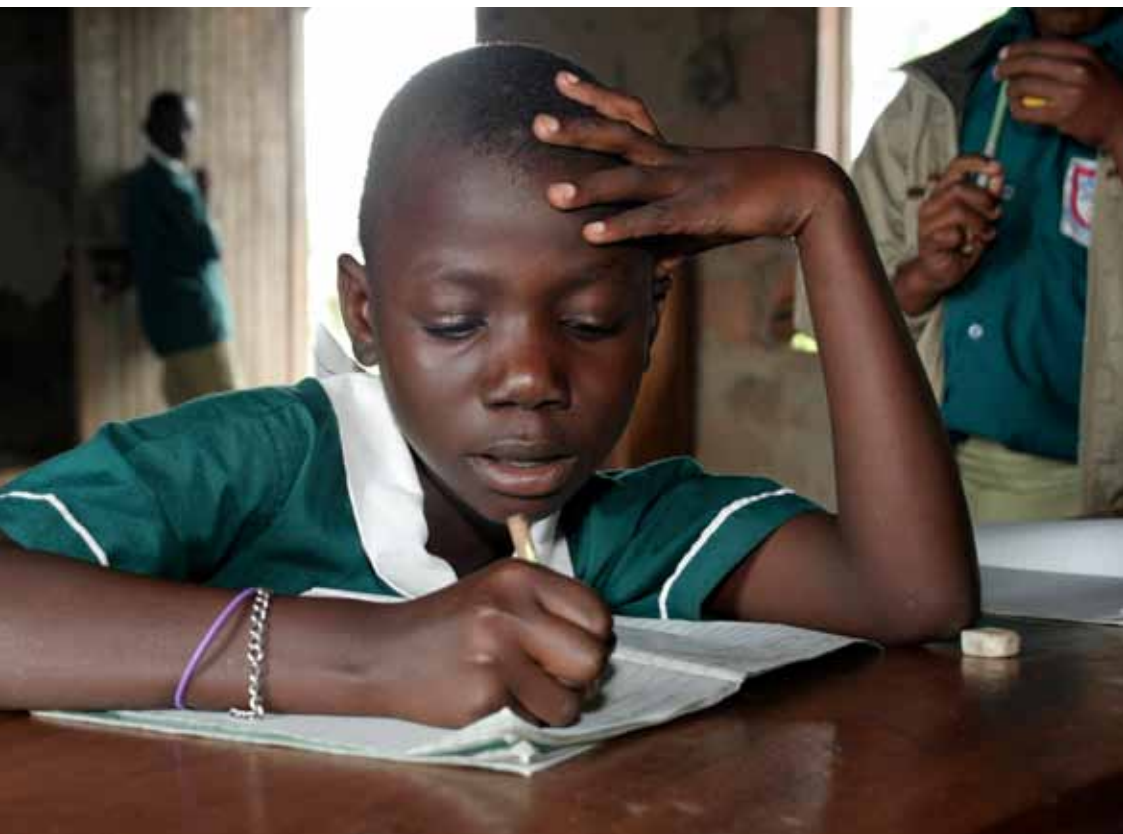


**AbleChildAfrica**

Working with disabled children and young people in Africa

# Still not going to school

**A review of the state of disabled  
children's access to education in Africa**





AbleChildAfrica works with some of the most vulnerable children in the world; disabled children in Africa.

We work with them from birth until they become young people and continue to support them as they make the, often difficult, transition to adult life.

We carry out our work by supporting local partner organisations in African countries to develop innovative and well-managed ideas for making a real difference to disabled children's lives.

Disabled children have a right to education which is enshrined in both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). These conventions have been widely signed and ratified in Africa as well as in the UK. The requirements of the conventions with respect to the education of disabled children are far reaching, involving inclusion at all levels of the education system and participation in lifelong learning. The conventions outline the requirement that the education available to disabled children and young people should facilitate the development of potential, talent and creativity as well as enabling participation in a free society. They also require that inclusive, quality and free primary and secondary education, with reasonable accommodation of individual needs, is available locally for all.

This report looks at how these rights are currently being realised in our specific context, sub-Saharan Africa. It looks at what has been done and what is not being done yet. Finally, it seeks to offer some suggestions about how to improve the current situation.

# The problem starts with counting

Often when a disabled child is born in Africa his or her birth is not registered.

Take for example a mother for whom the birth of a disabled child is not only a shock but also leads to a breakdown in her marriage, as, blamed for the birth of a disabled child, her husband leaves her for another woman. Feeling hurt and abandoned, she develops coping strategies and for the best part of the day she stays at home with her child indoors – fearing the judgement of neighbours who have seen her husband leave her and also feels she may be at fault. Her child is rarely allowed out into the sunlight and does not socialise with others in the street. **A mother in this state may not register the birth of her child, and if she does she may well not declare a disability. Even if she does – the likelihood of that data being inputted and analysed in any kind of comprehensive system is remote and so generations of disabled African children remain uncoun­ted.**

If they are not counted, disabled children’s voices are unlikely to be heard. The local health centre may be unable to provide for their specific needs, the school remains unequipped to support their learning and the community unwilling or unable to include them in its everyday life.

One of the key challenges we have in obtaining support for our work is a paucity of data. The statistical tables in the recently published UNICEF ‘The State of the World’s Children 2011’ do not even report on childhood disability ‘because new, comparable data are unavailable for a significant number of countries’. The data problem is critical. But at AbleChildAfrica we know that a lack of concrete reliable data does not mean that a problem is not real.

For many disabled children their marginalisation is so great that by the time they reach adulthood they have lost all hope of the life of their choice.



## How many disabled children in Africa are currently in school?

AbleChildAfrica uses the World Health Organisation's 10% estimate to calculate that there are presently approximately 52m disabled children and young people in Africa. In addition we take note of the data from the specific countries where we work. A recent survey in Uganda found rates of childhood disability to be as high as 16% and data from Tanzania shows apparent discrepancies with some regions having disability rates as high as 13%. In addition it is estimated in the State of the World 2011 report that 20% of the world's adolescents have a mental health or behavioural problem. Many of these young people will be disabled within the definition in the newly-ratified UN Disability Convention.

The barriers to achieving an education for disabled children are complex. Many families keep their children out of school. When disabled children are enrolled in school, they often find that negative attitudes amongst teachers and other parents, a lack of resources and specialist teachers and huge class sizes all compound to make the

reality of a local inclusive education for most disabled children unlikely. Enrolment rates vary, one survey showed 25% in Uganda (USDC, 2005) but overall in Africa we believe that very few (perhaps as few as 5%) of disabled children actually complete primary school. As UNICEF points out (State of the Worlds Children Report 2010) disabled children are not only ‘substantially less likely to be in school’ but also even where they are in school they are less likely to complete their primary education and make a successful ‘transition’ to secondary school.

## **This means that there could be over 51m disabled children and young people in Africa who have not achieved basic schooling.**

It is currently believed that 69million children of primary age are out of school in the world (and that the vast majority of them are in sub-Saharan Africa). As UNICEF highlights in the 2011 report, a look at figures for lower secondary age children doubles the problem – since an estimated 71m children in this age group are out of school too because they didn’t complete primary or could not transition to secondary school. So including children of lower secondary age increases the number of children estimated to be out of school in the world to 140million.

AbleChildAfrica believe that the vast majority of disabled children fit in to one of these groups. 38% of adolescents in Africa are out of school [UNICEF, 2011] – but almost all disabled young people are out of school – and so they may make up half of the total number not attending. It follows that without tackling the specific problems of access to education for disabled children in Africa these figures will not change significantly enough to meet global targets, such as the UN Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. Yet even though the global reports touch on the issue of the lack of access to education for disabled children they still do not single it out for particular consideration. The recently published Global Monitoring report for Education for All (2011) only mentions disability once in over 300 pages of text. And although the previous year’s report focused more on marginalisation, the tendency to focus broadly on all excluded groups can actively work against disabled children as one can be said to be ‘inclusive’ if other vulnerable children are included, even if disability has hardly been considered – or completely neglected.



As the Global Monitoring report 2010 admits 'Disability is one of the least visible but most potent factors in educational marginalization'. This is well-known and often acknowledged but solutions which have a real impact are not yet being prioritised. Many existing attempts to solve this problem are small-scale or rely too heavily on advocacy without practical support for tangible solutions. The scale of this problem is immense and many mainstream initiatives, such as the Global Education Campaign (GEC), would appear to us to be unaware of the extent that disabled children should be part of the issues on which they are campaigning. Although disability needs to be viewed as a specific priority, we do

disabled children a great disservice where we do not include them in the mainstream development discourse about education. **We have no doubt that disability is one of, if not the single, greatest barriers to children in Africa accessing education.**

**AbleChildAfrica believes that we need to see an education system across Africa which is focused on the best outcomes or 'best fit' for the child. We believe that this means inclusion in mainstream settings for the majority of children where possible but we also believe that there are some disabled children for whom specialised provision may be a better fit, usually due to the severity of their disability and/or the current lack of capacity in the system to support them. For these children, mainstream inclusion may both reduce their life chances and increase their experience of stigma, because they are singled out as very different.**

**Therefore while we promote and advocate for mainstream schools and educational settings to develop inclusive practice, we support the need for a spectrum of provision in each African country to ensure that children's individual needs can be met.**

# A specific example - Uganda

In 2005 we supported the Uganda Society for Disabled Children (USDC), our partner in Uganda to carry out one of the most comprehensive surveys of childhood disability in Africa ever undertaken. The survey identified that despite a positive policy environment there are still significant barriers to meaningful learning for disabled children and young people. The failure to recognise the special learning needs of disabled children is tantamount to lack of recognition of their rights as children. This lack of recognition undermines the self-esteem and confidence needed by all children to develop to their full potential. Some parents are reluctant to enrol their disabled children in school or pay their school fees, and the higher fees for special schools are prohibitive for many parents.

The USDC survey found that integrated education was suitable for children with mild impairments who have supportive parents, but blind and deaf children with sensory impairments struggle to thrive in the large class sizes found in the average Ugandan school, which allow for only minimal teacher attention to the individual needs of each child. The assessment and examination system rarely allows extra time for students with impairments. Special schools are few and far between in Uganda. Most were established by and continue to be supported by NGOs and faith-based organisations, and they receive little or no government support. Special schools were found to suffer from inadequate teaching materials and equipment.

The lack of a career ladder for trained special needs teachers, and the absence of enhanced salaries make it difficult for special schools to recruit specialist staff. The very short training in special needs education for mainstream classroom teachers renders inclusive education difficult to implement. There is a widespread shortage of Braille equipment and teachers who can translate Braille. All of these factors adversely affect disabled children's performance and the achievement of disabled children in Uganda in public examinations. A welcome development is that a desk officer to handle issues of disability has been appointed at the Uganda National Examinations Board.

While current thinking in Uganda supports inclusive education, in practice the USDC study did not find any fully inclusive school.

Inaccessible latrines, uneven compounds, lack of specialist teachers (especially for deaf and blind children) and the lack of specialist educational material all remain barriers to the full participation of disabled children. The teacher training colleges that were surveyed did not adequately prepare teachers to deliver inclusive education. This included even specialist training institutions such as the college at Kyambogo, where USDC survey staff interviewed a graduate who noted “I have just left college but I cannot sign or teach Braille”.



Training around disability for teachers tends to concentrate on the causes and effects of impairment rather than pedagogical issues, adopting a medical model rather than the social model enshrined in the international conventions which require respect for the rights of disabled children. Resource rooms at district or county level offer specialised equipment and materials to teachers working in special needs education, but the survey found that only hard work by USDC kept these facilities functional and well resourced. Outside USDC-supported areas, resource rooms commonly degenerate over time into more general purpose meeting halls. Vocational training for disabled children and young people was found to be underdeveloped in all the districts surveyed, and the two vocational training institutes are heavily dependent on USDC support. Vocational training could more usefully be included in selected schools, especially those with special education units.

Recent data from the Uganda Household survey suggests that the number of disabled children may be larger than we thought previously – based on the latest data there may be 2m disabled children in Uganda and perhaps only 20% of them are in school.





‘While globally comparable, reliable data are notoriously difficult to obtain, one widely cited source estimates that 150 million children worldwide live with disabilities (WHO and UNICEF,2008). Around four in five children with disabilities are in developing countries. In addition, many millions of children live in households with parents or relatives who have disabilities. At all ages, levels of both moderate and severe disability are higher in low and middle-income countries than in rich countries. They are highest in sub-Saharan Africa (WHO and UNICEF, 2008). The scale of disability and its concentration in the world’s poorest countries contributes significantly to marginalization in education.’

‘In the 1970s, the World Health Organization estimated that 10% of the global population lived with a disability. This rough estimate is still in use today, suggesting that there are about 650 million people with disabilities. It is the basis for the estimate of 150 million of children with disabilities’

‘Many impairments can be traced back to poverty, poor nutrition and restricted access to basic services (Yeo and Moore, 2003).’ State of the World’s children report, UNICEF (2010)

# What can be done about this? Our Recommendations

- Disabled children in Africa need to see DFID not simply mainstreaming disability but making access to education for disabled children a key focus of its work and funding. This should not be difficult, given the expressed commitment in the aid review ‘Changing children’s lives through learning’ in which DFID recently pledged to support 9 million children to attend primary school, 2 million in secondary and to train teachers and improve the quality of children’s learning. However, the summary of DFID’s recent aid review does not mention disability, though it pledges to help many more children to go to school. **We want to see improved quality and access making a real difference to the chance of a disabled child completing their primary education and indeed transitioning to secondary.**
- Since a large percentage of the children out of school are, we believe, disabled, we want to see specific targets as to the percentage of the 11 million children DFID would support who will be disabled and DFID’s strategy for ensuring that this takes place so that disabled children do not remain the ‘uncounted’.
- We think in order to do this **DFID should ensure more effective data collection about childhood disability.** DFID’s work should be focused on minimising the disabling effects of impairment through early interventions and ensuring that DFID’s commitment to improving the quality of schooling includes teachers having the skills to promote and work in inclusive settings.
- We think there are clear actions, tried and tested by AbleChildAfrica over the past 25 years which can improve the quality of education for disabled children and help African governments achieve the commitments enshrined in the UNCRPD. Amongst these approaches we would include developing strategies for working with parents and local government, changing not just policy but practice at local and national levels and ensuring that **International NGOs take seriously**

**the need to ensure that their work in seeking the achievement of MDG 2 prioritises the inclusion of disabled children.**



## **What are international NGOs doing at present? What would we recommend?**

- We surveyed 20 UK-based International NGOs last year about the work they currently do on childhood disability in Africa. We found a widespread acknowledgment that generalist agencies lack clear commitment to developing genuinely inclusive practice and strategies to ensure that their work supporting vulnerable children to attend school includes disabled children adequately. We believe this is critically important because access to education for disabled children cannot be an optional specialism, but must be central to the work of all INGOs and donor agencies. Donors must begin to insist that projects and programmes they fund can demonstrate a positive impact on disabled children that is at least as great as for other marginalised groups. Supporting disabled children effectively should become as non-negotiable as gender mainstreaming has now become.



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