

End of Term Learning Review Report: Pamoja Inclusive Education Project

Executive Summary

Author: Jennifer Gwynn and Anna Kuligowska - Sightsavers

Published: January 2021

Background information

Kenya has made significant progress in increasing access to primary education since the introduction of free primary education in 2003, and by 2018 achieved a primary net enrolment rate of 91%. However, substantial disparities persist in access to universal primary education, particularly for children with disabilities and those in rural areas.¹ Enrolment statistics indicate that children with disabilities represent just 2.1% of learners in primary schools and 0.4% of learners in secondary school, compared to a prevalence rate of 13.5% reported by the 2014 National Special Needs Education Survey.² Furthermore, the survey report finds that most out-of-school children in Kenya have a disability. The majority of children with disabilities in Kenya are unable to access mainstream education; they are either kept home or learn in special schools or in schools with special units. Educational Assessment and Resource centres (EARCs) were established to identify, assess and refer children with disabilities to schools, and to provide support to parents and schools through outreach services. However, the system is hampered by insufficient funding, scarce human resource, inadequate assessment equipment and scarce assessment materials.³

Description of project

The five-year Pamoja Inclusive Education Project (PIEP) was implemented by Sightsavers and partners from January 2016 to December 2020. The PIEP sought to contribute to government aims and provide access to quality education through:

¹ Ministry of Education. Kenya National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018-22. Available at <https://www.education.go.ke/images/NESSP/NESSP-2018-2022.pdf> [Accessed 30 March 2020]

² MOEST & VSO (2014). Kenya National Special Needs Education Survey. Available at https://www.vsointernational.org/sites/default/files/SNE%20Report_Full%20-2.pdf [Accessed 30 March 2020]

³ National Gender and Equality Commission (2016). Access to Basic Education by Children with Disability. Available at: <https://www.ngeckenya.org/Downloads/Access%20to%20Basic%20Education%20by%20Children%20with%20Disability.pdf> [Accessed 30 March 2020]

- building the capacity of EARCs to raise awareness of inclusive education in communities and deliver assessment and school placement services.
- building the capacity of pilot schools to improve inclusive learning practices in learner friendly, accessible environments.

In collaboration with project partners and stakeholders, the project aimed to improve retention and transition rates and influence enhanced policy development and implementation to provide quality education for children with disabilities/special educational needs. Alongside the project, Sightsavers also conducted Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) which aimed to capture the perspectives and experiences of learners with disabilities, parents and teachers in three stages: at the start, mid-point and end.

Purpose of Review

The end of term learning review (ETLR) aimed to understand the key successes and challenges in the implementation of this pilot project and sought to generate a set of recommendations to support replication of good practices. It contributes to evidence of what does and does not work in inclusive education programming in East Africa and makes recommendations for future programmes. The primary audience are project partners and Sightsavers (inclusive education programme, programme design and Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) team staff), though findings may also be of interest to other NGOs implementing inclusive education projects.

Methodology

The ETLR considers projects activities from January 2016 to August 2020 through a mixed methods approach. Primary, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with project participants, partners and staff. Secondary data from project documents included narrative reports, the logical framework (log frame) and revisions, monitoring reports, Programme Portal data, learning reviews and research studies collected during fieldwork. This informed the performance review of logframe data and provided evidence to respond to the review questions which was triangulated with primary data.

Sightsavers' Evaluations Team led the review in collaboration with Sightsavers' project staff, the education technical lead and the regional monitoring manager. Fieldwork was conducted by a local consultant in Homa Bay and Nairobi in November, during which time the review team lead held online discussions with Sightsavers informants. The FGDs and KIIs were audio-recorded. Following transcription and translation by a contractor, qualitative data were then reviewed, cleaned and analysed by the consultant and the Sightsavers' review team lead in consultation with project staff. Themes related to the aims of the learning review were drawn out through thematic analysis. Gender and disability lenses were applied to data analysis to identify any learning on the experiences and implications for boys and girls with different disabilities.

All members of the review team complied with Sightsavers safeguarding policies and adhered to Sightsavers MEL team ethical guidance which requires completion of the online UNICEF course 'Ethics in Evidence Generation'. Participation was voluntary, and the

management of safeguarding issues was included in the informed consent process. Activities were sensitive to the needs of participants and ensured inclusivity through accessibility of venues, comfort breaks, sign-language interpreters and other identified needs.

Fieldwork was guided by Sightsavers COVID-19 operating procedures and risk assessment, and complied with government regulations regarding travel, social distancing and other protective measures. As a result, an element of convenience sampling was introduced into the intended purposive sampling method, which ultimately increased the likelihood of bias. However, minimising and managing risk was a vital priority in the context of the pandemic. Mitigation measures were adopted and where possible interviews were held remotely. Other KIIs and FGDs were held in person by the local consultant who was accompanied by Sightsavers' programme coordinator.

The review sought to ensure fair representation of males and females with disabilities. In practice, only one (adult) informant with disabilities was interviewed and discussions were not held with the intended children with (and without) disabilities. During the planning stages, the review team carefully monitored the evolving local context in relation to the COVID-19 global pandemic and the schools and communities in Homa Bay County (HBC). In the end, the team considered that it would be unethical to conduct data collection activities with children with disabilities due to the significant disruption they had been experiencing to their education and the challenges in safely implementing preventative measures to mitigate COVID-19 risk during activities.

The emergence of the global pandemic significantly impacted project implementation, evidence, and the lives of children, families, and project partners in the final year. Schools were closed by the from March 2020, COVID-19 restrictions / protection measures came into effect and project activities were severely restricted. Although schools re-opened to learners in grades four and eight in October 2020, most children remained out of school at the time of the review and were expected to return in January 2021. In addition to the restriction of project activities, planned monitoring of pilot schools progress could not be conducted, nor could the third and final phase of CBPR.

Limitations of the review were also strongly influenced by the pandemic which restricted the number and range of informants. The review attempted to mitigate the absence of learners' perspectives at end-term through proxy data collection with parents and by drawing on the learners' experiences the mid-point CBPR reports.⁴ However, the quality of the data set and overall findings is ultimately limited due to the lack of evidence provided directly by those whose lives the project aimed to improve: children and youths with disabilities. Furthermore, informants' educational experiences and engagement with the PIEP dramatically changed from March 2020 with implications for recall bias and the quality of data which informs the review findings.

Review questions were developed collaboratively with Sightsavers' project staff, education technical lead and monitoring staff. The questions informed analysis of secondary data, the

⁴ CBPR reports for PIEP are available at: <https://research.sightsavers.org/project/pamoja-education-project-participatory-research/> [Last accessed 15 January 2021]

design of primary data collection and the discussion of findings and conclusions in this review.

1. How did the project perform against its objectives, taking into account the limitations of COVID-19 in the final year?
 - Are there any observable differences for different target groups, impairments and sex? If so, what are they?
2. How has COVID-19 affected project delivery and what can be learned from this?
3. How has the project contributed to inclusive education of good quality for girls and boys with disabilities in the project areas?
 - What was put in place and how did it contribute?
 - How relevant are activities to the needs of girls and boys with disabilities?
4. What elements of the model piloted are good practice and should be implemented in future projects?
5. What learning can be identified for the measurement of inclusive education projects?
 - Applicability of indicators and target setting for future projects
 - Measurement of student progress

Main findings

The performance review of the project against the intended outcomes and outputs indicates strong achievement in the following areas:

- Enrolment of girls and boys with disabilities and special education needs (SEN) in pilot schools (349 children enrolled; exceeded target by 11 children or 3%)
- Retention and transition rates of girls and boys with disabilities and SEN in pilot primary schools (average retention 92%; average transition to next class 92%)
- Families' engagement with schools to monitor and support their child's progress (number of parents attending school meetings each year more than tripled from 116 to 367)
- Appointment of one or more SENCOs from the existing teaching staff in each pilot school
- Training of teachers, SENCOs and EARC assessment officers (99% of targeted teachers trained; 89% of EARC officers trained and the 11% or 2 officers were already trained)
- Capacity of EARC centres to deliver increased assessment and placement outreach and services, and incorporation of the three new EARCs (7,191 children assessed: 97% of the target achieved before COVID-19 halted activities during the last ten months)
- Community awareness and support for inclusive education
- Community-led initiatives to improve access of girls and boys with disabilities and special education needs

- Establishment of the EARC Minimum Standards (approved by the Ministry of Education.

Contributors to the review also observed the following changes:

- Learners benefitted from accessibility improvements, the provision of learning materials and assistive devices. However, there is an ongoing need and a lack of funding.
- Collaboration and networking have supported schools and families to link funding and support for equipment, materials, infrastructure, and scholarships.
- Inclusion in education has led to improvements in learner wellbeing including increased confidence, self-esteem, self-care and positive behaviours. However, stigma persists and affects children with disabilities both attending school and who remain out of school.
- PIEP's community-based approach helped to foster commitment and ownership across stakeholders and participants. This was supported by strong project management and relationships with stakeholders.
- IEC materials strengthened community engagement and sensitisation.
- Sensitisation and training have helped to improve relationships between teachers and learners with disabilities and strengthened teaching practices.

The review identified the following in relation to the measurement of PIEP:

- The logical framework set out to measure progress through an ambitious set of indicators and not all could be measured during the project cycle.
- There were some challenges in target setting which the project team reviewed and sought to address during implementation.
- There is a need to develop qualitative methodologies and tools which can more easily support quantitative data to understand the quality of teaching and learning outcomes and the impact on improving education for learners.
- CBPR filled a gap in qualitative monitoring but as a research project the timing and use of findings were not strategically built into project plan and monitoring.
- Learning on measurement has informed Sightsavers new projects in Kenya.

Contributors to the review observed significant impacts of COVID-19 on learners with disabilities:

- Most learners with disabilities are not happy about not being able to go to school for a range of reasons including missing peers and teachers, loneliness, lack of access to services such as physiotherapy.
- Communities usually do not have the same skills as the teachers and peers of learners with hearing and speech impairments and struggle to communicate effectively.
- Education either stopped or was dramatically reduced, partly due to the inaccessibility of alternative/remote education provision

- A lack of sensitisation on COVID-19 and personal protection equipment and measures intersected with poverty and impairment type where families struggled to provide PPE and communicate what was happening to some learners.
- Child safeguarding concerns such as teenage pregnancy and child labour were raised and some experiences intersect with sex and impairment type.

Conclusions

Overall, the project demonstrated strong performance and significant achievements despite resource limitations and an exceptionally challenging final year. The performance results and feedback from families, schools and government partners are testament to the hard work of Sightsavers staff and stakeholders.

The scoping study, situational analyses and the collaborative approach taken to working with community members and stakeholders successfully fostered strong community commitment. Additionally, the project coordinator's availability, responsiveness and strong relationships were widely commended by contributors to the review in Homa Bay. Meanwhile, the good will of government partners facilitated the project coordinator to deliver activities and support pilot schools and communities. The facilitation of collaboration and networking linked participants to high-value support at a low cost and in a sustainable manner. Approaches to sensitisation and engagement of communities also led to significant community-level developments. These are key factors in the project's achievement of substantial progress towards its aim of improving access to education of good quality for learners with disabilities.

Teacher training delivered by Sightsavers in partnership with KISE was found to be of good quality and attracted participation from TSC and MoE members. Further training is required for teaching staff who did not participate and to further develop the practice of those who did attend. Meanwhile, the appointment and training of SENCOs was considered a successful approach which also requires development to ensure individuals are not over-burdened. Thanks to learning from the PIEP, teams of SENCOs are instead being explored in a new Disability Inclusive Development (DID) education project being implemented by Sightsavers in Homa Bay County.

The EARCs in Homa Bay were strengthened, particularly in relation to community outreaches and assessment services. The project adapted to ensure that the new sub-county EARCs were integrated into the initiatives and promoted collaboration between the EARCS to deliver services. Infrastructure developments were implemented primarily in two centres but generally restricted by the availability of funding. This has implications for the sustainability of project interventions if county EARCs are not sufficiently funded to ensure staff, equipment, skills and transport are available for assessment and placement of children. This is particularly important given the retirement of some staff trained by the project, and the change in the role of the EARC officers from Assessment Officers to Curriculum Support Officers which brought competing workload challenges and affected their capacity to conduct assessments. Given the systemic resource challenges, funding gaps are likely to persist for schools, EARCs and families of children with disabilities until education budgets include adequate allocation. In the meantime, the development of community support and ownership

demonstrated a sustainable approach to meeting inclusive resource requirements beyond the life of the project.

In terms of broader sustainable impacts of the projects, the EARC Minimum Standards are expected to make a valuable contribution to improvements in assessment quality. The report on safeguarding which Sightsavers shared with the MoE was not a project aim. However, it identified important issues in the safeguarding of students with disabilities and special education needs in schools. The lack of response to follow up by Sightsavers staff, suggests there is a need for increased advocacy if projects seek to help systemic strengthening of safeguarding.

The project generated learning on the selection and use of indicators for the measurement of inclusive education programmes. PIEP underlined the importance and complexity of tracking student outcomes across schools with different curricula and approaches to progress, and the different needs of students with diverse improvements.

Learning and good practices

Project implementation

- Successful demonstration of peer support could encourage and include strategies for groups to self-sustain and take ownership beyond the project. For example, through facilitating members to develop their own Memorandum of Understanding for the group.
- Include a gender component in community sensitisation initiatives to identify and develop strategies to engage both male and female parents and guardians of children.
- The project identified that safeguarding requires strengthening in Kenya at school level. Sightsavers could consider how to support this in future projects through advocacy to strengthen systemic governance and oversight of safeguarding.
- Share and review project timelines for key initiatives with project partners to identify factors which could influence stakeholders' ability to engage and maximise participation.
- The development of criteria for the selection of training participants could support Sightsavers' work with partners to identify trainees who will have the most sustainable impact, and mitigate the impact of trainees who leave through retirement etc.

Measurement of inclusive education projects

- Explore how to collaborate more effectively across project, monitoring and research teams on monitoring initiatives for timely evidence generation which informs implementation.
- Challenges in interpreting Programme Portal data for education indicators were identified in the recent review of Sightsavers' measurement of inclusive education projects. Experiences in analysing performance data for this review also reflect this.
- When developing indicators, consider the challenges identified in interpreting data on the Programme Portal, and any advances made by Sightsavers to address the challenges.

- Ensure changes to targets and data are updated in logframe and portal data to avoid complications when assessing performance.
- Tracking student experiences following transition out of pilot schools is required to understand the continuum of inclusive education and inform initiatives which contribute to maintaining the gains made in pilot schools.

Recommendations

Key recommendations for Sightsavers teams are drawn from project learning and examples of good practice which could be replicated in other inclusive education projects.

Recommendation	Responsible team
1. Continue to promote strong, collaborative relationships and flexibility in project implementation to strengthen responses to key community needs.	Project team
2. Continue to develop stakeholder capacities to link to and generate community resources in combination with project resources.	Project team
3. Build understanding of gender gaps, barriers and experiences into project studies to inform project strategy and action plans to meet the specific needs of girls and boys with disabilities and special education needs.	Project team
4. Disaggregate data by sex and impairment where possible to understand and respond to education quality discrepancies and experiences related to sex and/or type of impairment.	MEL & Project teams
5. Gather and use evidence of learners' progress, sex and impairment type to identify patterns in performance.	MEL & Project teams
6. Limit complex indicators and, where possible, continue to build a logframe/MEL review into the early stages of the project cycle.	MEL & Project teams
7. Review and develop measurement approaches including calculation of retention and transition; tracking drop-out rates to understand patterns; and qualitative methodologies and tools to support quantitative data.	MEL & Project teams