



Inclusive Futures
Promoting disability inclusion



Report: This is what disability inclusion looks like

Proven results, practical lessons,
and guidance for the future



Vanadis - a microentrepreneur supported through our livelihoods project in Kenya.



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Cover image: © Gateway Studios/Sightsavers
Aisha, a young woman and wheelchair user, who participated in our inclusive sexual and reproductive health project in Nigeria.



1. From progress to precarious: an urgent call to sustain disability-inclusive development

At a time of shrinking aid budgets and shifting global priorities, the world cannot afford to let disability inclusion slip backwards.

Disability inclusive development works. It is central to sustainable global development and creating a fairer and more prosperous world.

Yet myths persist that inclusion is too costly, complex, or optional. Inclusive Futures proves otherwise. Over eight years, with UK aid funding¹, the programme reached 3.8 million people with disabilities and 17.5 million others. The return on investment is clear:

- More children with disabilities enrolled and thriving at school.
- Inclusive education embedded in government policy.
- Increased household incomes and reduced poverty.
- Expanded access to quality healthcare.
- Reduced stigma and more supportive communities.
- More people covered by social protection and state systems.

¹ The Inclusive Futures consortium has comprised of three programmes: Inclusion Works (2018–2022) and the Disability Inclusive Development (DID) programme (2018–2026) that were both funded by UK aid as well as the Global Labor Program (2022–2025) previously funded by USAID. The vast majority of this report primarily focuses on the Disability Inclusive Development programme within Inclusive Futures.

The current situation is stark. With Inclusive Futures ending, and funding for development scarce, urgent action is needed or people with disabilities, especially women and girls, will be left behind.

Global challenges are intensifying exclusion. **Climate change disproportionately affects people with disabilities.** Poverty, stigma, and discrimination, disrupt health, education, and livelihoods, and increase vulnerability to extreme weather. Across the world, the refugee population has more than **doubled over the past decade** and it's estimated that roughly **15 to 20 per cent of people who are displaced have disabilities.**

Many assume that making programmes inclusive of people with disabilities is prohibitively expensive, but **evidence from Inclusive Futures shows this isn't the case.** By setting clear guidelines, using flexible budgeting, tracking spending carefully, and drawing on existing social protection systems, Inclusive Futures demonstrated that financial concerns are not a valid reason for continued exclusion.

Now is the moment to redouble efforts to target inequality and create an inclusive future. Your support has never been more important.

Why disability inclusion matters



One in six people worldwide have a disability (**1.3 billion**).



80 per cent live in low- and middle-income countries — often hardest hit by the climate crisis.



Children with disabilities are nearly **2 times** more likely to miss school.



Exclusion costs developing countries up to **7 per cent** of GDP.



Only **one in three** working-age people with disabilities are employed.



In low- and middle-income countries, people with disabilities earn **26 per cent** less than their peers.



Women with disabilities are **twice as likely** to face violence and discrimination than their peers.



Up to a **20-year gap in life expectancy** compared to people without disabilities.

2. Executive summary:

This report shows that **disability-inclusive development is one of the smartest, most transformative investments in global aid**. It draws on eight years of impact from Inclusive Futures, the UK government's flagship programme led by Sightsavers and the International Disability Alliance, alongside a network of partners including: BBC Media Action, BRAC, Humanity & Inclusion, the Institute of Development Studies, Light for the World, Social Development Direct, and Sense International.

Inclusive Futures has supported people with disabilities across key stages of a life journey: education, employment, health, and family life — whilst also tackling stigma to build more inclusive societies. **Partnerships have been central to Inclusive Futures**. Over 200 organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) shaped and delivered interventions, ensuring their lived experience guided change. Many OPD leaders, especially women, harnessed the Inclusive Futures platform to take up key roles at global conferences and forums.

Governments, INGOs, research institutes and OPDs joined forces to embed inclusion into regional and national policies. For example, in Nepal, OPD advocacy secured recognition for 50,000 deaf and hard-of-hearing people in national data. **Through strong partnership working, Inclusive Futures has secured £11m from local governments and NGOs to embed disability inclusion in the longer term.**

Learning and evidence have underpinned the programme, generating **more than 300 resources** to inform policy and practice. Collaboration with research institutions such as the Institute of Development Studies and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine has strengthened understanding of what drives real impact.

This report highlights the strong return on investment in disability inclusion, points to practical guidance, and calls for proven approaches to be scaled so people with disabilities, especially women and girls, are not left behind.

© Light for the World



Joan, a microentrepreneur and careprovider for a child with complex disabilities, at her home in Kenya.

Headline results from across Inclusive Futures:



Nepal

Every child enrolling in primary school will now be assessed, giving **tens of thousands** of children and families earlier support.



Kenya

207 per cent increase in children with disabilities in project schools enrolling in early years classes.



Household finances of people who participated in the programme increased by **30 per cent** for at least a year after they took part in the programme, suggesting lasting impact.



Tanzania

The government has committed to deploying permanent staff across the country to ensure children with disabilities are identified early and get the support they need in school.



Bangladesh

Employment of programme participants rose by **33 per cent**, and earnings by **50 per cent**.



Uganda

Household incomes of people supported by Inclusive Futures grew by **\$185** annually, with women-led households benefiting most.



Nigeria

800,000+ women and girls with disabilities can now access sexual health and reproductive services.



Media impact

Our radio programmes made listeners **75 per cent** more confident in challenging disability stigma.

This is what inclusion looks like: Lois's story

Lois Auta-Udonkanta is the CEO of the Network of Women with Disabilities (NWD) based in Nigeria. Her organisation has played a key role in Inclusive Future's sexual health and reproductive rights work. Lois is an influential leader and has leveraged Inclusive Futures to advocate for people with disabilities through forums and high-profile events such as the Global Disability Summit and intergovernmental meetings about the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with in Disabilities. She also helped to launch **the six principles for inclusive development** based on learning from across Inclusive Futures.

Discover practical tools and learning:

- [Driving change: six principles for inclusive development](#)
- [Reaching women and girls with disabilities](#)
- [A guide to building partnerships with OPDs](#)
- [Inclusive budgeting](#)
- [Inclusive practices](#)

Lois speaking at our event at the Global Disability Summit in Berlin.

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Enablement, engagement, education and empowerment.

When you have these four Es for the inclusion and involvement of people with disabilities, then everyone will begin to say yes: we are getting there, we are doing the right thing, we are including every status that we have. Everyone is carried along. Everyone is included.



3. Education: unlocking the future

Globally, there are 240 million children with disabilities, and they are **nearly twice as likely to be out of school compared to their peers**. Over the past eight years, Inclusive Futures has made remarkable progress in changing this in the countries where it's worked, through an investment of £11 million in inclusive education.

The programme ensured that teachers received training, mentorship, and practical tools, to support diverse learners.

Communities helped identify out-of-school children, while parents were supported to navigate education, health and social services. An important aspect of Inclusive Futures was providing inclusive education to children living in refugee settlements. OPDs were central throughout, embedding inclusion from the outset rather than as an afterthought. **This meant that over half the children supported in Inclusive Futures education projects then also accessed healthcare or assessments.**

Impact of Inclusive Futures:



Nigeria

114 per cent increase in children with disabilities attending classes in project schools and a **20 per cent** increase in children with disabilities transitioning to a higher grade.



Tanzania

Children with disabilities improved maths scores by **13.5** points and writing by **8.5** points, outpacing peers without disabilities and effectively narrowing the gap.



Bangladesh

Over half of out-of-school children with high support needs reached by the programme entered school and our advocacy secured inclusive policies in **2,444** schools, reaching **490,000** students.



Nepal

Every child will now be assessed in primary school – helping **tens of thousands of children** with disabilities and their families get the support they need, earlier.



Kenya

The local governments in Turkana and Homabay have invested **£1.8m** in new early childhood education centres which are disability-inclusive, and will take care of the needs of children with disabilities and support their development.

This is what inclusion looks like: Manita's story

Manita is 14 years old, lives in Nepal and has multiple, complex disabilities with high support needs. Initially, her mother, Manju, was sceptical about whether she could go to school but now she is thrilled that Manita is learning and thriving.

Manju said: "When she first started, the teachers were unsure about handling a child like her. But now, they are giving her the attention she needs, and it's making a difference.

"Seeing her happy and engaged at school brings me so much joy. She's thriving and really enjoys going to school now.

"We've seen real improvements in Manita. We have been consistently taking her to school, and sometimes she even wants to go on her own and rides her bicycle there."

Discover practical tools and learning:

- [Find and enrol children with disabilities in school.](#)
- [Preparing schools to welcome children with disabilities.](#)
- [Centring children with disabilities in teaching.](#)
- [Unlocking potential: transforming education for refugee children with disabilities.](#)
- [Supporting people with complex disabilities.](#)
- [Evidence digest focus issue: education and disability inclusion](#)

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To other parents, I would say that educating children like Manita is incredibly important. Even if they haven't had the chance to study before, they can still learn so much.

Manita with her mother, Manju, at their home in Nepal.





4. Creating economic opportunities

Employment opportunities for people with disabilities remain limited due to stigma, discrimination, and physical barriers. Although most of the world's 1.3 billion people with disabilities are of working age, only one-third are employed. Evidence from Inclusive Futures demonstrates that, with inclusive design and appropriate support, people with disabilities, particularly women, can succeed and contribute to measurable economic growth. However, evidence also shows that disability inclusion strengthens economies and businesses by increasing productivity, innovation, and participation.

A report from the World Bank indicates that there is nine dollars of economic gain for every one dollar invested in assistive technology and disability inclusion.

In Kenya, Inclusive Futures also improved livelihoods and education for refugees with disabilities in the Kakuma and Kalobeyei refugee settlements. Building on this experience, the programme developed practical guidance for delivering inclusive initiatives that help unlock the potential of refugees with disabilities.

Evidence from three randomised controlled trials delivered by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine confirmed these gains; showing that livelihoods, social protection, and financial inclusion programmes, for people with disabilities deliver real economic and social returns. Participants reported higher self-esteem, greater inclusion, and, when supported with assistive devices and accessible spaces, they matched or outperformed peers without disabilities.

This challenges myths about disability and highlights the need for mainstream programmes to adopt targeted, inclusive approaches with OPDs to avoid reinforcing inequalities.

Impact of Inclusive Futures:



Bangladesh

Employment rate of programme participants rose by **33 per cent**, and earnings by **50 per cent**.



Nepal

Coffee farmers connected to Inclusive Futures saw **14 per cent** income growth, with potential for 12-fold gains as crops mature.



Uganda

Incomes of programme participants rose by **\$185**, reducing the poverty gap for ultra-poor households.



Kenya

Household finances of people who participated in the programme increased by **30 per cent** for at least a year after they took part in the programme, suggesting lasting impact.

This is what inclusion looks like: Mary's story

Mary has eight children and is a refugee from South Sudan living in Kalobeyei, Kenya. Mary runs a business and took part in training through Inclusive Futures to grow it.

“Personally, the project has really helped me a lot. Before, I did not know much about financial management, and how one can at least make sure that one’s taking records of the business. They have also given me a partial grant, which I have used to add stock to my shop. I have at least been able to support my family at the same time. Of course, I’m both a mother and a father at the same time to my children.”

Discover practical tools and learning:

- [Disability confident employers' toolkit](#)
- [Economic self-assessment tool](#)
- [Unlocking potential: transforming livelihoods for refugees with disabilities](#)

Mary, who owns a shop, has greatly benefitted from financial management training.



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My hope is that my business continues to grow and things go well for another ten or fifteen years.



5. The building blocks of inclusive health services

People with disabilities rely on health services more than others, yet too often struggle to access the care they need. Stigma, discrimination, inaccessible facilities, and higher costs, create persistent barriers — especially for women and girls with disabilities.

Drawing on lessons from our Inclusive Futures projects, we have generated evidence on how to make health systems more inclusive. By combining targeted initiatives with mainstream approaches, the programme has improved access and demonstrated practical ways to embed inclusion in health programming.

Impact of Inclusive Futures:



Co-designed **£15.8m** sexual health and reproductive rights plan with Kaduna state government, that will reach **800,000+** women and girls with disabilities.



In Kogi State, almost **700** health workers and officials were trained to deliver inclusive eye health services.



Renovated health centres improved the satisfaction rate of people with disabilities from **12 per cent** to **70 per cent**.



During COVID-19, people with disabilities were less likely to receive hygiene messages and faced major barriers to water and sanitation. Our inclusive outreach reached **60,000** people directly and **14 million** through media.



In northern Nigeria, regular listeners to our radio drama were twice as likely to use sexual and reproductive health services as non-listeners (**61 per cent** vs **30 per cent**).

This is what inclusion looks like: Hussaina's story

Hussaina is 30 years old and took part in Inclusive Futures' family planning project in Kaduna, Nigeria.

"I was with someone for 14 years. When we were about to get married, his family objected – they said he was not going to marry a person with disability. We had been together since primary and all through secondary school.

"That's why I told Ibrahim that I didn't want anything that looks like it will work and later not work out. He promised me that won't happen with him. We've been dating for two years.

"Before we started attending the seminars, we were scared.

"After I joined this programme, I was enlightened that you can be tested to find the best [family planning method] suited [to you]; pills, injections...you can choose."

Discover practical tools and learning:

- [Guide on sexual and reproductive health and family planning](#)
- [Inclusive budgeting](#)
- [Inclusive practices](#)

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Hussaina and Ibrahim are excited to be getting married to one another.

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I'm most excited about getting married to Ibrahim and coexisting in understanding.



6. Breaking down stigma

People with disabilities face major barriers to education, work, and healthcare, due to stigma and misconceptions about their abilities. Inclusive Futures worked with families, communities, OPDs and state institutions to shift attitudes and behaviours. We also used radio programmes and worked with social media influencers to counter myths.

We found that parents of children with disabilities can experience stigma from their communities and may inadvertently pass on these beliefs to their children.

In Tanzania, home visits helped address fears that prevented parents of children with disabilities from enrolling in school. Inclusive Futures also empowered individuals directly. In Kenya, training on disability rights and confidence-building helped participants push back against different types of stigma, empowering them to advocate for themselves and also create change in their communities.

Impact of Inclusive Futures:



In Nigeria, our partnership with BBC Media Action led to a **radio drama 'Story Story'** addressing disability stigma, reaching **3.9 million adults** (including **750,000** people with disabilities).



One in four listeners reported changing their behaviour – from stopping discrimination to being kinder and more supportive.



Nearly **75 per cent** of regular listeners to our radio programme felt more confident challenging stigma, and over **70 per cent** said they would support people with disabilities to access services.



In Tanzania, the proportion of children with disabilities who felt confident to participate in school activities rose from just **4 per cent** to **83 per cent**.

This is what inclusion looks like: Emmanuel's story

Emmanuel worked as an actor on **Story Story**. He lost his sight at birth and used braille scripts to play his part in the series.

“On Story Story, I’m an actor and I play the character of ‘Bulus’. I initially thought I was the only person with a disability that was called to be one of the actors in the series and, after a while, I discovered that I wasn’t actually the only person.”

Discover practical tools and learning:

- [Tackling disability stigma](#)
- [Using radio to tackle attitudes towards family planning in Nigeria](#)
- [Inclusive and participatory behaviour change](#)
- [Guidance tool on reducing stigma](#)

Daniel during a recording session for Story Story.

© BBC Media Action



What impresses me about Story Story is the scripting. Being able to put together this thing, in very plain terms, so that every kind of person listening to it will understand and [clearly] get the message.



7. Conclusion: inclusion is a valuable investment

The Inclusive Futures programme proves disability-inclusive development works.

Led by Sightsavers and the International Disability Alliance, the Inclusive Futures approach shows that partnering with OPDs, listening to lived experience, embedding learning, and shaping policy with governments, will provide a strong return on investment.

We are now at a critical moment. Momentum towards disability rights must not be lost. We have the roadmap for change, but we need further financial support and partnerships to create a more equal and prosperous world.

Take action:

- **Funding**
Help us continue vital work to reach millions more people with disabilities.
- **Create change**
Partner with us to embed inclusion in more systems and services.
- **Learn:**
Access our evidence and learning resources to create a more inclusive future.

Inclusive Futures Partners

ADD International | BBC Media Action | BRAC
Humanity & Inclusion | The Institute of Development Studies
International Disability Alliance | Light for the World
Sense International | Sightsavers | Social Development Direct

www.inclusivefutures.org/