

Summary analysis: Inclusive education - Cameroon

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Executive Summary

The Sightsavers Inclusive Education programme in Cameroon identifies and tackles barriers to participation in education. Sightsavers requires that research from the programme contributes to the knowledge base on disability inclusion in education and, where necessary, uses that knowledge to refine a contextually appropriate and gender-responsive approach to supporting education for girls and boys with disabilities in Cameroon.

This report documents findings from a qualitative study for Sightsavers conducted by peer researchers from Phase 2 of the Inclusive Education programme in Cameroon. Participants in the research comprised children with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities and teachers enrolled in the programme. The objective of the study was to assess how children with disabilities, their teachers, and their parents experience or perceive the programme. Findings are presented according to four overarching themes: shifts in perceptions and experiences since the inclusive education programme; barriers to the inclusive model; gender considerations; and, sustainability of inclusive projects. The data reported here focused primarily on the impact of the programme.

In all the study sites, understanding and perceptions of disability had improved since the introduction of the Sightsavers programme, from knowledge about causes, treatment and identification of disability to changing perceptions of the abilities and potential of these children. Participants recognised the right to education for all children, leading to reported improvements in enrolment rates. Improved integration, acceptance and equal treatment in classrooms were found to contribute to positive learning experiences and increased motivation and attendance by children with disabilities. Parents, teachers and children with disabilities all perceived improvements in academic achievement, abilities, self-reliance, and confidence among children with disabilities. Provision of resources and improvements in infrastructure also had a positive impact on learning, autonomy and safety.

Despite the universal acknowledgment of benefits, participants also identified remaining barriers, these were: capacity of teachers, availability of resources, discrimination, and some types of availability and accessibility. The capacity of teachers was reportedly much improved but additional skills were identified as necessary for effective inclusion. Insufficient numbers of trained teachers and general teacher to student ratios hindered elements of programme implementation. Shortages in resources including both those aimed at supporting individual children, such as medical devices and school supplies, and resources aimed at supporting inclusive classrooms and schools, such as blackboards and accessible toilets and playgrounds, affected children's ability to benefit from the programme. Availability and accessibility issues around both education and healthcare such as cost, distance and transportation proved a significant challenge to consistent participation in the programme for some participants.

Gender considerations included themes of integration and equality, gender roles and vulnerability and protection. The right and access to education for girls was felt to be well recognised in the communities and that access to education for girls had improved substantially with sensitisation activities. Social norms and gender roles in some sites were still described as shaping motivations and outcomes concerning education. Concern regarding the increased vulnerabilities for children with disabilities, particularly girls was

widely discussed and additional consideration and implementation of protection measures for girls with disabilities was regarded as appropriate.

Great appreciation for the many positive results of this programme were expressed by children, their parents, and teachers enrolled in the inclusive education along with hopes for its continuation and expansion. The sustainability of the programme and the resultant positive impacts was linked to continued and scaled up sensitisation and outreach activities, greater parental involvement and parent teacher collaboration, and considerations for continuity and viable futures for students finishing primary education.

Introduction and Methods

The Inclusive Education programme in Cameroon supports education for girls and boys with disabilities. This research conducted by Sightsavers with financial support from Irish Aid was nested within the Inclusive Education programme. The aim is to contribute to the evidence-base for developing and refining contextually appropriate and gender-responsive approaches to improve the programme. Phase II of the study elicits programme stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of the programme and any opportunities they saw for improvements. A specific aspect of this research was gender differences in the experiences of children with disabilities.

Data collection for this study was carried out in six of the nine programme schools (table 1). Due to the political situation in Southwest Cameroon, only three of the originally selected six schools were open at the time of Phase I data collection. For Phase II, data were collected from the same three schools (now grouped as subset 1 schools) and from the three remaining schools for which no research data were previously collected (now grouped as subset 2). Findings are presented by subset in order that Phase II, Subset 1 data can be compared to findings from these schools in Phase I.

Table 1: List of Sightsavers inclusive education schools in Cameroon

Schools (anonymised)	Region	City/Town	Subset
School A	South West Region	Buea	-
School B	South West Region	Muyuka	-
School C	South West Region	Kumba	-
North 1	Far North Region	Maroua	Subset 1
Centre 1	Centre Region	Yaounde	Subset 1
North 2	Far North Region	Maroua	Subset 1
North 3	Far North Region	Maroua	Subset 2
Centre 2	Centre Region	Yaounde	Subset 2
Centre 3	Centre Region	Mbalmayo	Subset 2

Nineteen focus group discussions (FGDs) held with teachers, students with disabilities, and parents of children with disabilities enrolled in the programme at the six selected school sites were facilitated by peer researchers (school teachers and community members) who were linked to the programme areas (table 2). Three focus groups were conducted in each field site: one with children with disabilities enrolled in the inclusive education programme, one with parents of children with disabilities enrolled in the programme, and one with teachers participating in the programme. Respondents were asked about their experiences of the Sightsavers programme and what had changed as a result of the interventions. There were

specific questions about gender, links between parents and teachers and community support for disability. Participants were also asked what they would like to see change in future.

The verbal and written consent of each participant was obtained prior to participation in the FGD. The FGDs were audio recorded, transcribed and translated into English and these transcripts submitted to Anthrologica for thematic analysis.¹ Salient themes were coded in Microsoft Word and the subsequent themes matrix produced in Excel.

Findings are presented according to four overarching themes; shifts in perceptions and experiences since the inclusive education programme began, barriers to the inclusive model, gender considerations, and sustainability of inclusive projects. Participants were aware that this was a Sightsavers study, and as such there may be issues of response bias and a desire to give feedback that would elicit more future investment in the programme. There have been minor language edits and corrections to some of the quotations in this report, where needed. Findings from the two sub-sets of schools are presented separately in order to identify if there were significant differences, however, the analysis does not reveal substantial variation and therefore there is substantial overlap in the findings.

Table 2: Peer Researchers for the Disability and Gender in Education Study Phase II, 2019

Region	School	Peer Researchers	Role
Centre	Centre 1	Guedon Jiogue Gisèle Majolie	Teacher
		Caroline Lydie	Teacher
	Centre 2	Tchateu Aristide Lucrece	Teacher
		Mr. Epoupa Patrice Claude	Community
	Centre 3	Etang Gisele epse Obara	Teacher
		Mr. Evouna Marcus	Community
Far North	North 1	Boyabo Fouhba Elise	Teacher
		Ngo-Ambildey Massaka Dieudonne	Teacher
	North 2	Mme Menikeu Tchiepi Françoise	Teacher
		Mr. Adoum Abdouraman	Community
	North 3	Nafissatou Badjoda	Teacher
		Mr Mohamat Said Oumarou	Community

¹ The thematic analysis on the submitted transcripts was carried out by Anthrologica. Lack of demographic or contextual information meant that a full discussion and presentation of programmatic recommendations is not within the scope of the report.

Shifts in perceptions and experiences since the inclusive education programme

Understandings of disability

The Inclusive Education programme is having a clear impact on the perceptions and understandings of disability and what it means for the life and future of a child with disabilities among the programme communities. Parents and teachers across all sites spoke openly about improvements in their understanding about what various disabilities are, how to identify them, what causes them and treatments or options available to aid children with disabilities.

Subset 1:

- Gaining the skills to identify disabilities among children was noted as important, particularly for less obvious instances, ‘thanks to this training I am able to detect a visually impaired child and am able to work and adapt the work in relation to that.’ (Teacher Centre 1) Additionally, the ability of a parent to recognise and understand a child’s disability was also raised as an important issue. A parent from Centre 1 recounted a story of a father who consistently beats his daughter, ‘because he believes that she is pretending, meanwhile she is a child with special needs.’
- Changing understandings about the causes of disability also emerged as a positive result of the programme for addressing stigma and fear of contagion. One Centre 1 teacher emphasised the need to continue work on changing these understandings, ‘it is important to educate the parents of so-called normal children because that’s how they will understand that disability is not a disease like the others.’ Greater understandings regarding the causes of disabilities also spur parents to seek more solutions. For example, a father in North 2 explained that having finally received a diagnosis for his son’s disease, he is now asking questions around possible cures.
- Improvements in awareness and knowledge around treatments, medical devices and aids, and strategies and techniques for working with children with disabilities emerged in teacher and parent groups across sites. Teachers spoke extensively about how they have been ‘enlightened’ and now know that there are options and strategies available so that children with disabilities may also learn and succeed in school. Parents had been surprised and relieved to learn of a programme that would care for their children and allow them to go to school. Some parents also described their new awareness of techniques and medical devices that could improve their child’s health, behaviour and learning.
- The programme has resulted in recognition by the participants that disabled children also have abilities. Teachers discussed how with their new understandings and strategies they viewed all students at ‘the same level’ and saw that children with disabilities had as much potential and could progress to a ‘normal’ level. Children with disabilities also noted that the community was starting to encourage them in pursuing their education telling them they can ‘become what [they] want’. One student stated, ‘in their hearts they thought that

when you are blind you can never go to school, but when they saw me going to school, they were very surprised and they're proud so far.' A parent from Centre 1 also expressed a change in her recognition of her child's ability, 'the child can do many things, but I needed to be courageous and accept to give it a try.' This mother went on to describe a need for greater sensitisation through the communities about the abilities of these children, a sentiment echoed by the teacher groups across all sites.

- Participants highlighted the desire of children with disabilities to learn and participate. 'They are more passionate about school, more than "normal children".' (Teacher, North 2) Children with disabilities often expressed that they liked going to school and liked learning because they wanted to 'become somebody' and 'become important'.
- Despite the progress in understandings of disability, stigmatisation of disability within the community continues. Participants noted that children with disabilities are sometimes considered 'cursed' or 'snake children' that 'can do nothing'. One parent from Centre 1 even stated that some people in the community believe that children with disabilities should 'be abandoned at the banks of a river.'

Subset 2:

- The identification of children with disabilities was more prominent among teachers and parents in subset 2 than subset 1. Teachers and parents both expressed not previously knowing that their students or children had disabilities: *'I as a parent, I did not even know she was ill, it is from this school that we detected that the child had eye problems'* (Parent, Centre 3). In addition to the discussions around the importance of having the skills and knowledge to identify disabilities, participants in subset 2 raised ethical issues around the communication of disability: *'I never know the child had special needs and the mother never showed up or said anything. I called this parent to ask her how she could hide the child's illness and she told us that the child herself should not be told. It put us in a kind of complicated situation'* (Teacher, Centre 2). A parent, on the other hand, stated, *'I had never told my daughter that she was sick, but yesterday she told me that she had had a discussion with one of her teachers who told her that she had a problem with her bones. I thought she would have a crisis as usual but instead she just reassured me that all the goals of her life she had written down were going to be reached before she dies, so I am grateful.'* These experiences highlight that while identification of disabilities in children may present new opportunities for improved educational strategies and responses, it also brings with it some ethical challenges, particularly in a context in which disability has carried heavy stigma for both the child and the parents.
- Parents and teachers spoke candidly about their improved knowledge and understanding regarding disabilities and what can be done to help children with disabilities. Both teachers and parents expressed surprise and hope on learning that these children can be taken care of in school, they can be helped to progress and be 'made to feel more comfortable'. As a North 3 teacher explained, *'it is positive because these children were left to themselves. Parents thought that they could not send them to school because of their disability. Thanks to the interventions of Sightsavers with outreach they were sent to school. Now these children and parents are happy.'* Beyond greater awareness of the opportunities for children with disabilities to be integrated into school, parents in particular noted medications and treatments that could potentially help their children and used the

discussion group to ask if others had experiences or suggestions that could help their child.

- The programme has had a broad impact on recognition of ability among participants in this subset. Teachers and parents felt that these children are not ‘lost’ or a ‘burden’ but that there is ‘hope’ for those with disabilities and they have come to see that those with disabilities have ‘potential’. As a teacher from Centre 2 stated, *‘in the past we did not know that they could do better than others, that they could do as much as others. Now we understand that by giving them a little more time, we can enable them to bring out their genius.’* As teachers, parents and the larger community see more example of the progress that children with disabilities in this programme are making, the shift in perceptions around disabilities continues to be reinforced: ‘also parents who did not want to send their children to school see that this project is useful, so they sent their children to school and they encourage disabled children to go to school’ (Parent, North 3).
- A few of the participants also discussed the ways in which children with disabilities were shifting the way they understood their own capacity and future. Many of the children expressed that they liked to come to school and they intended to work in school in order to *‘become an important personality’* in the future. One parent explained how a heavy weight was lifted as she observed the change in her son and his peers, *‘he himself does not see his disability in the same way and he starts understanding that he can live among other people, and these children begin to be more credible and they have the opportunity to express themselves, they can talk to other people and play with them.’*
- While the majority of participants spoke of the progress made in perceptions of disability, some noted that stigma is still very present and many parents of children with disabilities continue to keep them home: *‘I personally noticed that, as a society, the community is not close to parents who have children with specific needs. Sometimes these children are abandoned, and they are dubbed snake children. These children are rejected. But here we live in a new era in which we understand that these children are full human beings. So, we cannot rely on the whole community because in our neighbourhoods it is unusual for someone to state the importance of such a child, what the child is able to do.’*

Case study: changing perceptions of disability

Sightsavers helped me to understand disability is not the end of the world. They told me that even though my child is impaired, he can still be an important person in life. Sightsavers equally helped me to understand that with my child’s disability, he can still go to school like others. And there are in-home visits for me as a parent and for my child. These in-home visits really strengthened me. I am now different regarding my child’s disability. I am a renewed parent, a parent with hope, a parent who no longer stigmatises. Be it my child or myself. I thank Sightsavers immensely.

Mother, Centre 3

The right to education

The right to education was not raised by participants in all discussion groups. Where a child's right to education was discussed, all participants agreed that children have the right to education regardless of ability or gender. However, there was significant variation in how pervasive they thought this understanding was in the broader community and whether or not this overcame motivations for keeping children out of school.

Subset 1:

- The right to education regardless of ability or gender was raised among teachers in all three schools of subset 1 and parents of children with disabilities in North 2. Teachers noted that there has been progress made in the number of girls and children with disabilities of both genders being sent to school. As one teacher in North 2 notes, *'I know that the education project which incorporates gender and disability issues implemented by Sightsavers is gaining ground. Moreover, the universal declaration of human rights attests to this and also the convention on the rights of disabled persons.'* Teachers from North 1 highlighted that both regulations regarding the rights to education and outreach and sensitisation activities have improved school enrolment for girls and children with disabilities.
- In North 2, continuing problems with the enrolment of girls in school was noted. While this was described as changing, this change is slower to reach villages: *'in the town people know about the importance of education. But in villages, people still keep their girl children at home and between the age of fifteen and sixteen they send them for marriage. They prefer to send the boy children to school'* (Parent, North 2).

Subset 2:

- The growing awareness of the right to education for all children was raised by participants across all schools in subset 2. Children with disabilities, teachers and parents all discussed that children 'deserved' to go to school. Parents and teachers highlighted the training on the human rights of disabled children and noted that parents are now sending their children with disabilities to school. However, as one teacher noted, the change in enrolment is not entirely driven by changes in parents' perceptions, but also by the changes in school admittance policies that now stipulate acceptance of children with disabilities. While most participants discussed the inclusive education programme and the mixing of students of various abilities in positive terms, one teacher related an experience in which a father did not send his child with disability to the school because he refused to accept that the child was disabled and send her to a school for 'lunatics'. It was further noted that some parents were reticent to send their children to school if they helped in the home or business.
- During discussions about community understanding and acceptance of a girl's right to education, participant responses varied. One parent in Centre 2 claimed, *'I think the period is long gone since people made a difference between girls and boys. I think that no longer exists in our society. Whether our child is a boy or a girl, every child must be educated in the same way.'* However, a parent in North 3 noted, *'there are others who say that the girl's education is not taken seriously, they send the boy, they have*

advantages over girls. And we have to let them know that there is no difference between boys and girls as far as education is concerned.' A teacher in North 3 related an experience in which boys in his class had threatened some of the female students telling them that *'the place of a girl is in the kitchen.'* Both parents and teachers in North 3 highlighted the need for more outreach and education concerning this issue.

Integration, acceptance and equal treatment

Across all participant groups at all schools there is widespread sentiment that the Inclusive Education programme has improved the lives, experiences and treatment of those with disabilities and their parents. Additionally, teachers have described the ways in which inclusive education has improved their own abilities and teaching experiences.

Subset 1:

- Children with disabilities expressed very positive experiences of going to school, describing how they liked learning, the way their teachers gave lessons and having friends and playing. Many children highlighted the ways that materials and teacher dictation has aided their learning: *'in my former school, I did not have braille teachers and braille papers or a white cane to copy my notes and I did not even know how to use the white cane. But as long as I come here, I can do everything. I can copy my notes in class, I can read braille. I even have a reader in our class that reads for me. When I copy my notes, I am able to read them in the house and I can do my homework'* (Child with disabilities, Centre 1). Children also noted changes in their treatment by peers, stating that they were now accompanied when they wanted to go somewhere and that other children helped them with things they did not understand.
- Parents of children with disabilities expressed relief and hope in discussing their experiences with the Inclusive Education programme. They described how the programme has made things feasible that had seemed impossible before. Parents expressed pride in the programme and gratitude for the way that it has aided their children, themselves and the wider community: *'my gratitude goes to the NGO for what they have done from my child and not only him but for giving a special place to these children who are rejected by society. It enables both children with disabilities and normal children to nurture a spirit of sharing and communion and we pray that they continue in this spirit not only in Maroua but even beyond'* (Parent, North 1).
- Teachers most frequently discussed the skills and knowledge they have gained through the programme that has improved their teaching method and given them improved capacity for teaching and caring for children with disabilities in their classroom. Some teachers also spoke about the positive changes brought about by the provision of medical and support devices for the children which saved teachers time by giving those with disabilities more autonomy. Gratitude was expressed by teachers for the programme, which they stated not only helped those with disabilities, but also responded to their challenges: *'we were really happy to know that there are people who are also concerned about our situation, even our worries, the difficulties we are experiencing.'* (Teacher, North 1).

Subset 2:

- Children with disabilities frequently discussed how they are 'happy' going to school because they are with friends and classmates, and how they feel accepted. When asked what they like and dislike in school, answers ranged from sports to maths or French. As with any children, they have their favourite and least favourite subjects. While many students expressed that this year was harder than last year because they are in a more advanced grade, they also highlighted improvements in teaching that have made learning easier. Children across all schools expressed that *'the teachers teach us well'* and that they take the time to explain again and show them lessons in different ways. One student described, *'this year is easier than last year because last year I was in a school where we did not sign and this year the teacher makes an effort to explain some lessons in sign language.'* Beyond improved experiences of treatment and teaching strategies from the teachers, children also discussed the help and acceptance they receive from their classmates: *'in class our classmates help disabled pupils to read and those who cannot write to write'* (Child with disabilities, Centre 3). Both students and teachers have noted that the other children have begun to accompany and help the children with disabilities get to and from school.
- Parents described their experiences of having their child enrolled in the Inclusive Education programme with words such as 'surprise,' 'relief' and 'blessing' and highlighted the great change that this programme brings not only to their child's life, but to their own experience. Even parents who stated that they had not yet received the medical devices or supplies for their child expressed that this programme has benefited the community at large. Not only did parents express hope around learning that there are places their children can be accepted and things done to improve their life and help them learn, they also described feeling less alone, more understood and accepted. This greater acceptance was noted by one teacher as enabling the parents of children with disabilities to be more engaged in their child's education and outreach activities to other parents. Many parents described instances where they gave recommendations to teachers for ways to help their own child and for the most part these were accepted by the teacher and incorporated into the classroom. Other parents expressed hope that the teachers with their training and knowledge could give them suggestions for how to better aid their child at school and home.
- Teachers gave numerous examples of positive change. Many noted that before the trainings, they had children with disabilities in their classes but did not know how to identify them, how to behave with them or care for them. Now, with their new strategies and skills they stated that they can identify special needs, make children with disabilities more 'comfortable' and employ various strategies to integrate them into lessons in ways that improve the classroom experience overall. Teachers described these skills as improving their own capacity and making the teaching process easier. Additionally, teachers discussed the ways in which the new materials and medical devices have greatly improved their teaching experience: *'working in classrooms seems easier, since they were given hearing aids they now face less difficulties when it comes to listening'* (Teacher, Centre 3).
- Positive changes in community support and encouragement towards children with disabilities and their parents was also widely discussed among participants in subset 2.

Children with disabilities in particular described how their neighbours not only encourage them to attend school, but also helped them study and gave them school supplies, transportation money and sweets.

Case study: peer acceptance and assistance

I noticed the behaviour of disabled students and other students. There is assistance, they study amongst themselves. We see children who come here, and the parents do not know how to come pick the child up from school every day. We notice that. And the problem gets solved because classmates decide to come to school with their friends and do the same going back home. That is how the problem is solved.

Teacher, North 3

Progress in learning and ability

The participants broadly recognised positive impacts from the programme on the learning, abilities, and behaviour displayed by children with disabilities. Overall, it was reported that children are progressing academically, engaging socially and displaying greater autonomy.

Subset 1:

- By and large, participants noted progress in learning among children with disabilities enrolled in Inclusive education. Children noted with pride things they were able to now understand and the way they were being taught that allowed them to understand: *'I failed to get my first school-leaving certificate [from the old school], but here I passed my exam'* (Child with disabilities, Centre 1). Parents discussed specific skills and abilities that their children were now displaying, such as writing and reciting. Teachers noted the general improvements of children with disability, although some noted that not all children have seen improvements yet. A teacher in Centre 1 also noted the need to use report cards to raise awareness and show *'that these kids can really do something in a quantifiable way.'*
- All participants noted improvements in behaviour among children with disabilities enrolled in the programme. The children themselves emphasised that they liked that school helps them to *'be well behaved'* and have *'good manners wherever I am.'* The students also highlighted that the programme gave them more motivation. Parents and teachers also remarked on the motivation of the children both to attend school and to be more autonomous. One Centre 1 parent described the changes in his son's behaviour since starting the programme, *'now he is the one who wakes me up, he wants to go to school, when there are assignments, he wants to write!'*
- Parents and teachers also raised the importance of the changes some of the children's health had undergone as a result of the programme. A parent in North 2 noted that his child's hearing was improving, while a Centre 1 parent expressed great benefits for her children's health from work with the psychologist.
- A teacher in Centre 1 also noted that the positive changes to the school and the improved teaching methods were beneficial to all the children in the class, specifically noting that the new writing board enables all the children in the class to benefit from it.

Subset 2:

- The notable progress in learning for children with disabilities enrolled in the school was recognised in all schools. Parents and teachers both remarked on the positive changes from the previous year in the ability of the children to speak, write and participate in class. A North 3 teacher noted that she has seen children with disabilities in her class score better results than children without disabilities. Some of these improvements were attributed to the equipment given to the children, such as eyeglasses and hearing aids. However, even in a case where the child had yet to receive equipment, the parent stated that she had noticed changes in the way her child expressed herself and applied herself to her homework. One North 3 parent spoke candidly about the fact that he had not seen any big change in his daughter's fine motor skills despite the work being done in that regard, but he was still hopeful that it would improve with time.
- Parents and teachers across all three schools noted positive changes in the behaviour of children with disabilities due to the programme. They highlighted that the children are much happier and more confident about engaging and being social. A few parents related their experience of reduced aggression and frustration in their children and increased autonomy. As one parent described, *'when he was sent to the store, he preferred to go with his brother who would speak on his behalf, but since the start of this year he tries as much as possible to be composed and sociable.'* Teachers also noted that the children socialised at the school and felt welcomed and comfortable, which motivated them to be in school and do well. However, a few teachers in North 3 have also described negative changes due to the increased confidence of these children explaining that where they used to be shy they are now sometimes 'too bubbling' and their pride in the extra attention they receive sometimes results in them thinking they will not be punished if they do not do their work.

Case study: positive changes in behaviour

In the past, when he returned from school, he was always tired, frustrated, he was not even motivated to come back because he could not see so he had to crawl to go near the blackboard. Sometimes the teacher did not allow him to. But now that he received the eyeglasses, he works hard. He is very happy because he can do all his homework and read his lessons. He now sees a little better without them too. When he comes home, he is happy to have worked. There is joy at home, his is no longer frustrated and his is no longer sick.

Parent, Centre 2

Resources and infrastructure

The positive impact on learning, autonomy and safety provided by the provision of supplies and improvements made to the school was discussed across all sites and participant groups.

Subset 1:

- Positive changes and gratitude and appreciation were widely noted from the resources that have been made available to both the school and children with disabilities. Children from Centre 1 highlighted that one of the things they liked best about the school was the quality of the equipment available. Parents and teachers more broadly spoke about the supplies, medical devices and treatments that were given to their children and many parents expressed pride in this support.

Subset 2:

- Gratitude and appreciation for the provision of medical support devices for children with disabilities dominated discussions across all study sites: *'our children benefitted from a lot of equipment, devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, the visually impaired from class one to four were given eyeglasses, those with hearing loss were given hearing-aids'* (Teacher, Centre 3). Parents also discussed the doctor exams and follow up visits that were giving them 'hope' and 'joy'. Some parents from Centre 3 and Centre 2 related that they are still waiting on promised medical devices for their children or the devices they received were the wrong size. However, these parents also expressed hope for the future, happiness for those children and parents already benefitting and gratitude to know that there is a programme doing this type of work for parents like them.
- Participants in subset 2 also spoke of the positive changes in the built environment and layout of the school that has improved accessibility, safety and learning for the children. Parents, teachers and children at all three schools noted the access ramps. As a student from Centre 2 explained, *'it is easier now that last year when I climbed the stairs. I no longer have to climb stairs and it is less painful because with crutches every time I went up my arms hurt.'* Access ramps to blackboards, installed wall mirrors in classrooms, electricity for visibility and new or painted blackboards were described as important enablers of learning in the classrooms and beneficial to all students. Teachers in Centre 2 also highlighted the rearrangement of the school that brought all classrooms to the first floor facilitated integration of the children.

Barriers to inclusive education

Teacher capacity

While the improved capacity of teachers was discussed with great appreciation across all sites, it was also frequently noted as a barrier to inclusive education. Teaching methods were thought to be much improved, but more skills were requested and needed to match the demands. Further, limits in numbers of teachers receiving training and general teacher to student ratios were deemed insufficient for effective implementation of inclusive education. It was also noted that teachers are not provided with motivation and compensation for taking on the additional trainings and duties associated with inclusive education.

Subset 1:

- Teachers across all three schools expressed enthusiasm and gratitude for the trainings received, but stress that more trainings would be highly beneficial for continuing to build capacity. As a teacher from North 2 pointed out, *'these trainings are very useful for us, but it is true that not many of us benefit from them.'* A parent from North 2 further explained that in her child's class it was very challenging for just one teacher to handle the number of students and address the needs of the children with disabilities as well. Teachers also noted that even those who have had training need *'recycle trainings'*, particularly in mastering new skills such as sign language and braille.
- A teacher from North 1 also noted that there is insufficient motivation and compensation for teachers that are taking on these additional trainings and tasks, which can undermine their performance.

Subset 2:

- Teachers across the schools of subset 2 relayed that their own limited capacity and need for 'deepened' trainings was a barrier for Inclusive Education in their classrooms: *'to be frank, we are still at an infant stage, as a result all of what we have learned so far is not really deep'* (Teacher, Centre 2). Another expanded, *'we still face some challenges, especially when it comes to teaching and you are required to show diligence. How should we go about teaching a lesson of history to a deaf-mute child? Especially when it comes to explaining words it is very complicated for us.'* In addition to a general deepening of trainings, teachers from Centre 3 specifically requested training in braille and those from North 3 requested training in sign language.
 - Parents and teachers, particularly from North 3, raised the need for recruitment and training of additional teachers noting the large class sizes and the need for two teachers per classroom to effectively address the needs of a 'mixed' class.
 - Teachers from Centre 2 also expressed that while they are very dedicated to their pupils, being an inclusive education teacher involves additional duties, long hours, follow-up, and research for which they use their own money. Despite this, there is no additional motivation or incentive for teachers in this role. Teachers noted that the duties are exhausting and pleaded for Sightsavers to exert pressure on the ministry to improve salaries for these teachers.
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Lacking resources and infrastructure

While participants expressed appreciation and gratitude for all that Sightsavers has done and provided them with, participants in all groups across all school locations noted that continued shortages in resources and infrastructure created barriers for fully implementing inclusive education programmes. Noted gaps in resources included both resources aimed at supporting individual children, such as medical devices and school supplies, and resources aimed at supporting inclusive classrooms and schools, such as blackboards and accessible toilets and playgrounds.

Subset 1:

- Lack of medical aid devices was identified as a barrier for implementing inclusive education. As one North 2 parent explained, ‘if [Sightsavers] are assisting the child it also improves his disability. Even if the child cannot walk, a tricycle can aid the child to move and eyeglasses can help the child to see and write. It is not easy for a teacher to handle these alone.’ The need for additional aid in accessing medical devices was expressed by participants, particularly in the North 2 site. Many North 2 parents noted that their children had been given prescriptions for eyeglasses but that they needed aid in order to afford them. One parent also raised the concern of their child’s eyeglasses breaking and not being able to replace them. Addressing the disabilities of the children not only helps them more fully engage in learning but was noted for the extended benefits of allowing these children to have increased autonomy in their life outside of school.
- Lack of school supplies was noted as a challenge across all three schools. Supplies that were reported as needed included standard school supplies such as pens, books, slates and stylus’, school bags, and shoes. One North 1 teacher highlighted that it is common for children with disabilities to be missing standard supplies. Additionally, specialised didactic teaching materials were needed for employing new strategies for inclusive education. As a North 1 teacher explained, ‘the didactic materials are not available to facilitate the tasks for these disabled pupils.’ It was further discussed that access to more modern technological devices and internet would greatly benefit inclusive education, both for the applications to aid the children and in terms of ongoing learning and research for teaching methods for the teachers.
- Parents and teachers in North 2 and North 1 also raised concerns about needed updates to the built environment of the schools. In North 2 it was requested that additional bannisters, particularly to the bathrooms, be installed to improve safety and access. In North 1 it was noted that the school was yet to be fenced and that the schoolyard and playground was not safe or accessible to children with certain disabilities which was a barrier to inclusion in extracurricular activities.

Subset 2:

- Parents in all three schools discussed their child’s need for medical aid and functional devices. Many parents noted they had been ‘promised’ these devices and so were waiting for them to come and were very optimistic about the impact they would have on their child. A few parents also highlighted that some children already had support devices while others had yet to receive anything.

- A commonly raised issue across schools were the lacking classroom equipment and materials: blackboards, chalk, improved lighting, mirrors and didactic materials for teaching children with various disabilities. Students in Centre 2 stated that the blackboards needed repainting and different colour chalk should be used for those with poor vision. Teachers in Centre 2 also raised the issue that while the intervention added electric lighting in the classrooms, the lights were not bright enough and visibility remains a challenge. Shortages of desks and benches in general, and special desks to accommodate those with motor disabilities were also discussed. Additionally, it was noted that computers, phones, tablets and wireless internet would be very beneficial for many children with disabilities as well as teachers in pursuing follow-up research.
- Issues and challenges accessing toilets were raised in the three schools. In Centre 2 it was stated that Sightsavers had renovated the toilets the previous year, but they had subsequently been ‘spoiled’ and now have no water supply. In Centre 3 a teacher also noted that there is *‘something wrong with our toilets’* and that their borehole was ‘bad’. In North 3 the toilets were described as very far from the school. In all cases the toilets presented frustration and challenges for children, especially children with disabilities.
- Teachers in North 3 also raised issues around the built environment of the school. They expressed appreciation for the handrails that had been installed while also noting that they do not extend to every classroom, resulting in continued access challenges for children with disabilities. It was also explained that the entrance to the school and the gate often got flooded, creating challenges for everyone trying to enter the school.
- The need for leisure materials, facilities and grounds was also raised. Teachers noted that they did not have specific equipment for children with disabilities to play sports and that the playgrounds and schoolyards were not accessible and safe for the children creating challenges for them to participate in play. As one Centre 3 teacher explained, *‘we need leisure facilities, like games, after all the stress they accumulate learning in the classroom, when they go out for break, disabled children should relax, and we lack these facilities.’*

Discrimination

Despite to overall substantial improvement in the understandings and perceptions of disability, residual experiences of discrimination or fear of discrimination against both children with disabilities and against the parents of these children were raised as barriers to implementing inclusive education programmes.

Subset 1:

- While stigmatisation against children with disabilities had reportedly improved, remaining discrimination was described in all schools of subset 1. A parent from North 2 related her experience, *‘at first my son liked it but now he does not want to go to school. He told me that when coming out of class pupils push him and he falls down.’* Students in North 2 expressed that in the community some people encourage them to go to school while others say, *‘don’t go to school, don’t go to school.’* A North 1 parent also noted that many parents do not send their children with disabilities to school for fear their child will be ‘mocked’.

- A few parents also highlighted that discrimination against the parents of children with disabilities is also a problem. Prior to the programme it was expressed that many saw disabilities as a curse on the family, so parents were very 'discouraged'. While this has reportedly changed with the programme it was still noted that parents may refrain from sending their children to school for fear that other parents will complain about children with disabilities being allowed in the school.

Subset 2:

- Among the three schools in subset 2, discrimination was discussed as being much improved but not eliminated. Students in Centre 3 described schoolmates laughing at them and teachers having to explain to them *'that we do not make fun of disabled children.'* As one child with disability in Centre 3 explained, 'some change and others do not change.' A parent in North 3 highlighted that, *'in school during break when they all find themselves in the school yard, [the classmates] reject disabled children.'* A North 3 teacher also reported that they receive updates of stigmatisation and abuse, *'either a neighbour hitting on the child because his is intellectually deficient or neighbours who do not want to see the child because they are afraid the deficient child will give the ailment to their children.'*
- It was also noted by parents of children with disabilities that some community level stigmatisation against them remains: *'when you have a child with special needs you are despised'* (Parent, Centre 2). Discrimination against parents was identified as a continuing barrier for inclusive education as many parents with children with disabilities did not enrol them in school because they were 'ashamed'. Further, *'some parents after enrolling their children will come take them back once they realise it is a school for deaf and dumb'* (Teacher, North 3).

Availability and accessibility

The availability and accessibility of inclusive schools and healthcare was not a common theme across all sites, but when it was discussed it was noted as a substantial barrier to inclusive education. Parents of children with disabilities were particularly burdened by additional costs associated with healthcare and transportation needs.

Subset 1:

- The distance to North 1 was a barrier for timely and consistent attendance by parents. As one parent representatively stated, 'the distance between the school and homes is great, I do not know if we can be assisted with transportation means and a dormitory too if possible.' Wheelchairs and bicycles were requested to address the issues of distance and timely attendance.
- It was further noted by parents from all sites that the accessibility and availability of healthcare and treatment options for their children was an additional barrier for them. Distance to health centres, lack of rehabilitation centres, and the cost of treatments were all identified as challenges for aiding children with disabilities and helping them fully realise their potential.

- School fees were noted as a greater challenge for parents already burdened with additional costs associated with caring for a child with disabilities. This challenge was felt to compound the discouragement and stigma parents experienced around enrolling children with disabilities in school and result in many of these children being kept at home. As one parent from Centre 1 explained, ‘when there are schools which train children with special needs, education is very expensive. Because of this, many parents are really discouraged, and they just believe that at the end of the day [the child] is going to be nothing, [the child] will never go anywhere, and then they are abandoned.’

Subset 2:

- Transportation difficulties and distance to the school were noted as a challenge in Centre 2 and Centre 3. Children with disabilities in Centre 2 highlighted the traffic delays they encountered taking a taxi to school that often resulted in them being late, while parents in Centre 3 discussed the costliness transportation as preventative for many parents to send their children to school at all. One Centre 3 parent also expressed concern about the safety of children travelling so far to school, particularly girls.
- The costs associated with continued healthcare and treatments for children with disabilities was also raised as a challenge among parents. It was noted that unaddressed relapses and sicknesses not only stalled the progress of the children’s health, but frequently took children with disabilities out of school and disrupted their education.

Case study: accessibility of inclusive education

As far as parents with disabled children are concerned, we all know that in our society these children only attend school when they are born of wealthy parents. They are enrolled in schools that are adapted to their needs and it costs a lot of money to send them to such schools. As for poor parents, they can only feel discouraged since they are not able to send their children to such schools, it is not even possible.

Parent, Centre 2

Gender Considerations

In the focus groups held with children with disabilities, no specific references were made to gender, gender roles or the implications of gender on inclusive education or the child's future. In the focus groups with parents and teachers, however, specific questions in the topic guide discussed gender issues.

Integration and gender roles

Findings showed that the right to education for girls was felt to be well recognised in the communities and that access to education for girls had improved substantially with sensitisation activities. Social norms and gender roles in some sites were still described as shaping motivations and outcomes concerning education.

Subset 1:

- Teachers and parents across sites felt the Sightsavers programme had contributed to equal rights and access to education for girls in their communities. Participants emphasised how educational activities and subjects were the same now regardless of gender or ability: *'there is no difference between able-bodied girls and boys, I don't see why there will be a difference between disabled girls and boys, given that they are all pupils in front of me in class. Here we consider both pupils who are disabled and able-bodied at the same level. We equally don't differentiate between girls and boys'* (Teacher, North 1).

Subset 2:

- Findings concerning the equality of teaching provided regardless of gender in subset 2 were consistent with subset 1 themes. This statement by a North 3 teacher is representative of others, *'there is no difference between girls and boys. When we teach, it is done the same way because they acquire the same knowledge, they will have the same foundation.'* Any differences in teaching methods were noted as being in response to different disabilities with no variation based on gender. Further, many teachers discussed the active attempts to improve gender equality in classroom activities, assigned chores, and extracurricular activities.
- Despite the equality of education provided to both girls and boys, teachers and parents across sites did note the impact that gender roles had on education, although there were variations in how these were perceived. Some participants raised the point that as girls were seen as *'just for marriage'*, they were not sent to school, or were sent to school to learn to be good wives. Other participants explained that girls were often kept from school because they were helpful in the home and parents were reticent to lose their aid. In North 3 it was reported that girls outperformed boys in the classrooms. One teacher claimed that this was a result of boys being taught to be more concerned with trade and girls more invested in education. Another teacher proposed that it was because girls were taught to be more obedient and responsible in the home, which carried over to their schooling. Disability was occasionally highlighted as overriding gender roles as all children with disabilities were considered and treated in light of their disability first.

Gender roles were also discussed in relation to parental involvement with mothers listed as being the parent more frequently involved in the care and education of her child with disabilities.

Case study: improving gender equality

Before people were discriminating between girls and boys. Now that the world is advancing, now we are no longer discriminating between boys and girls. A girl can be a minister, a president of the republic!

Parent, North 2

Vulnerability and protection

Concern regarding the increased vulnerabilities for children with disabilities and in particular girls with disabilities were discussed across sites and additional consideration and implementation of protection measures for these girls regarded as appropriate.

Subset 1:

- Parents and teachers across sites raised concerns about the vulnerability of girls in their society, which was felt to be heightened among girls with disabilities. Parents and teachers discussed the need for teaching girls to care for themselves, to not *'expose themselves to boys'*, and to *'understand certain things'*. It was reported that girls with disabilities may often be the victims of violence and not know or not have the confidence to speak about it. A Centre 1 parent pointed to the larger issue of societal taboos around speaking about sexual violence which results in silent suffering. While violence and sexual violence were discussed as concerns for all children with disabilities, girls were described as particularly vulnerable and pregnancy highlighted as an additional concern.
- Teachers and parents also highlighted the need for avenues for girls to gain independence as protection against vulnerabilities: *'what really pleased me was the idea that young girls should be trained in certain domains like tailoring, restaurant management and computer technology to enable them earn a living. This is because it was discovered that some girls were already found with men in hotels, while others were doing prostitution in the streets'* (Teacher, North 2).

Subset 2:

- The vulnerability and need for increased protection of girls with disabilities was emphasised by parents and teachers across all school sites. They highlighted that girls with disabilities had reduced ability to protect themselves and were often limited by their disability from being able to report their abuse. It was specifically noted that they were vulnerable at their homes, in transit to and from school, in the toilets, and on school grounds where *'sexual touching'* was reported. Participants were very aligned with the emphasis the programme placed on additional protections and attention concerning girls with disabilities.

Case study: increased vulnerability of girls with disabilities

Concerning the assistance given to girls and boys, a disabled boy is not as vulnerable as a girl. We know full well that girls are vulnerable. They can be victims of all sorts of abuses, even in the neighbourhood it can happen. When a girl is grown up and stays in the house, she is first disabled and cannot defend herself. There are deaf and dumb children who cannot express themselves. In case of abuse, they cannot reveal the perpetrator. We would want to say that girls should be taken into consideration. We do not undermine boys, but girls are more vulnerable.

Parent, Centre 3

Sustainability of inclusive programmes

Sensitisation and outreach

Sensitisation and outreach activities to continue changing understandings and perceptions of disability among the larger community, parents and children with disabilities themselves were widely recognised as necessary for creating a broader enabling environment for inclusive education.

Subset 1:

- Parents of children with disabilities in the Centre 1 and North 2 programmes stressed the need for more awareness raising about the availability of programmes and methods that address the needs of those with disabilities in their communities: *‘when we were looking for a school for our daughter, I went on the internet and I did not find anything. I searched. I did all the research and there was nothing in Yaoundé. Someone recommended the school and that is how we came here. But we did not know anything, and we are not very far from here, but we did not know that this school was taking care of children with special needs. So, sensitisation. Do everything possible, radio, television, internet, for people to be aware’* (Parent, Centre 1).
- Beyond awareness, participants across sites felt that additional sensitisation of the broader communities was needed to continue to improve understanding and perceptions of disabilities and overcome stigma and discrimination. Discussions of sensitisation needs included parents of *‘so-called normal children’* to address misconceptions around contagion, parents of children with disabilities to encourage them about their child’s potential and future, and children themselves to build their confidence and reassure them they are not alone.

Subset 2:

- Awareness of the programmes was a minor theme in subset 2. However, it was mentioned among parents in Centre 2 that some had not heard about the programme prior to being invited to participate in the meeting. A teacher in Centre 3 also highlighted that their school does not even have a sign to promote awareness that the school exists in the community.
- Widely discussed among teachers across sites were sensitisation activities and the need for additional outreach to reduce abuse and improve enrolment rates of children with disabilities. Teachers stressed that showing the evidence and progress of the children currently in the programme can effectively improve enrolment and retention of these students in the programme as well as reduce instances of discrimination and abuse.

Case study: community sensitisation

I remember there was a community gathering at the end of the year during which we saw young girls and boys who were taken care of. We were particularly dazzled by a young girl who did not really have arms but was doing craft work, which the parents marvelled at. This galvanised parents to realise the abilities, particularly that of girls. It stirred them and, as a result, this year we have more disabled children in school. Here, given the fact we have been trained, we don't consider them as disabled persons, but we see them like every other normal child. And this helps these children feel in their natural environment. They are inside, if you can only come here one day and see how they are playing with the others and those who are not disabled know that these ones are peculiar, and they show them more love and respect.

Teacher, Centre 2

Parental Involvement

The involvement of parents in their child's education was recognised by both teachers of children with disabilities and their parents as necessary for the effective implementation of inclusive education, continuity between school and home life, and sustained progress in the child's education, behaviour and autonomy. However, experiences and opinions on parent-teacher relations differed between and within sites and participant groups.

Subset 1:

- Teachers at all three schools discussed the importance of the involvement of parents in inclusive education, noting that sustained progress relied on continuity of strategies between school and home. Two-way communication between parents and teachers and co-creation of strategies for supporting the children in their schoolwork, life skills and autonomy were felt to be hugely impactful on their effective progress. It was recognised that children that had help and support on their homework and were encouraged in consistent ways in the home showed better progress. However, the experiences and needs that teachers highlighted varied between and within schools. In Centre 1, while some teachers reported good relations and communication with the parents of the disabled children in their class, others noted poor or non-existent communication with some parents. Some of these teachers expressed feeling alone in their efforts to support the child and stated that advice to parents fell on 'deaf ears'. Teachers in North 1 reported good relations with parents and related experiences of parents helping them to better care for their children and address any issues that arose. In North 2, parental involvement did not emerge as a major theme. However, one teacher noted that while he was aware that parent meetings occurred, he himself did not attend.
- Parents of children with disabilities had diverse opinions and experiences of their current and desired levels of involvement in their child's education, ranging from statements such as, 'I have no idea about anything' to 'we offer the teachers much assistance to help them take good care of the children or better educate them.' Parents who had made suggestions to the improvement of their children's education also noted that they felt that for the most part those suggestions had been taken into consideration by the teachers

and were pleased with the resulting changes. One parent in Centre 1 raised the point that parents should also know what trainings and materials teachers are receiving from Sightsavers so that they are aware of what is being done to care and educate their children.

Subset 2:

- Consistent with findings from subset 1, teachers in subset 2 schools also emphasised the importance of parental involvement and continuity between school and home life for sustained and effective progress in children with disabilities. Teachers at the North 3 and Centre 3 school sites generally expressed positive experiences collaborating with parents. However, parent involvement was reportedly lower in the Centre 2 school site. Teachers in Centre 2 noted that while there were meetings between ‘Champions’ and parents, the teachers were not involved. This was felt to be a missed opportunity for direct engagement and collaboration between teachers and parents.
- Parents in North 3 and Centre 2 discussed their experiences and opinion concerning their involvement in their child’s education and the impact this had on their child extensively. Parents in North 3 highlighted the benefits of the home visits and follow up, noting that these helped provide them with advice and training on what can be done in the home and simultaneously helped those doing the outreach better understand their child. Some parents related their positive experiences of being able to provide support and suggestions to the teacher to improve their child’s progress. Others emphasised the advice and training that should be given to them by the teachers: *‘teachers are the ones who are better placed to say what can make the education of our children better, we did not go to school’* (Parent, North 3). The discussion among parents in Centre 2 centred around home visits and meetings with the ‘champions’ with mixed responses from those who had and those who had not follow up meetings. Parents that had regular meetings with the champions spoke of their ‘advice’ and ‘encouragement’, while others said they have never had the opportunity to meet them or had received calls but no visits to follow up.

Case study: parent-teacher collaboration

The experience that I have had in entering into relationships with parents of disabled children, girls as well as boys, is very good indeed. I have had a lot of experiences working with parents. For example, if I have in front of me a disabled girl or a disabled boy and I notice there is a problem, I will approach the parents of these children, who in turn will be able to give me some advice regarding their child; and if there are difficulties, together we shall look for solutions.

Teacher, North 1

Continuity and the future

Continuity and viable futures for both the programme and the children that would be finishing their primary education were raised as concerns for sustainability. Teachers and parents expressed commitment to continuing the efforts and hopes that the programme would continue and that next steps would be established to ensure the positive impacts for children with disabilities would continue and expand.

Subset 1:

- Parents and teachers expressed considerable enthusiasm for the continuation of the programme. This parent from North 2 is representative of many: *'my experience is that what you people are doing is really good, that we should continue to send the children and you people will continue to take care of them so that they too will one day become a person like others.'* The work left to be done and the incredible potential of the programme to make even greater impact was also noted: *'this is just the beginning, as a house we are building, we have just laid down the foundations and we still need to build the walls and I would like Sightsavers to help us in that regard'* (Parent, North 1).
- Continuity of the programme and viable futures for those children finishing school was also identified as a concern. As a Centre 1 parent expressed, *'I really hope this goes beyond, because after school what are we going to do about our children? This is a real problem and of concern for the parents. A parent who has a child in class six, he does not know what to do.'* Some participants suggested vocational workshops and training centres for these children so that they can further develop life skills and have a means of independence and *'become someone tomorrow'*.

Subset 2:

- Findings regarding enthusiasm and commitment to the continuation of the programme were consistent with those seen in subset 1.
- Continuity of the programme and the viable futures available for children with disabilities finishing primary school were also raised as concerns among parents and teachers in subset 2. One suggestion was that school fees and medical follow up for these students should continue as they moved onto secondary school.

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