

Support Mainstreaming Inclusion so all Learn Equally (SMILE) in Nigeria

Project timeline: May 2019 – September 2023

Project budget: £799,918

Capturing the power of collaboration: Sightsavers, Institute of Development Studies, Nigerian Association of the Blind, Nigerian National Association of the Deaf, Albino Foundation, Home for the Handicapped Persons Foundation, Women with Disability Self-Reliance Foundation, Federal Ministry of Education Nigeria, Ministry of Education Kaduna State, Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, Kaduna State Universal Basic Education Board

Every child has the right to education. However, children with disabilities in low and lower middle-income countries – **including an estimated 3.3 million children with disabilities in Nigeria¹** – are more likely to be left out of school or to receive a sub-standard education compared to children without disabilities. **That is why Disability Inclusive Development - Inclusive Futures is part of the global movement to transform inclusive education for children with disabilities in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). We are working with partners to open up education systems – and children’s future opportunities.**



The situation in Nigeria

Nigeria has the highest estimated number of children out of school in the world². These children include inordinate numbers of girls, children from nomadic communities and **90 per cent of Nigeria’s children with disabilities.** Both Nigeria’s Constitution and the 2018 Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act include educational guarantees. However,

in practice there remains much to be done to widen access to education for children with disabilities. Children with disabilities face multiple barriers to participation including inaccessible schools, a lack of qualified teachers and support services, discrimination and an inflexible curriculum. Further, Nigeria’s education system does not have any procedure to identify children with disabilities at school level.

The SMILE project: creating a blueprint for inclusive education in Nigeria in Kaduna state

Kaduna is Nigeria's third largest state, and its government is committed to achieving change in inclusive education, demonstrated through its policy formulation and several investments in capacity building and resource allocation. Unusually for Nigeria, all 23 of Kaduna's local government areas (LGAs) have inclusion desk officers, school support officers and social mobilisation officers.

As such, it was selected by our consortium of experts for the SMILE Project, including Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), local and national government, education practitioners, international non-governmental organisations, and research institutes **to innovate and test a locally led blueprint for inclusive education in Nigeria.**



“My hope for these children is to one day see them becoming governors, chairmen and presidents”.

Watch teacher Zachariah talk about the SMILE Project in [this video](#) and find out more about the **[project's success in this video](#)**.

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Achieving change

Following an **[inclusive participatory design phase in 2019 – 20](#)**, the SMILE project piloted a locally led, small-scale, sustainable and replicable model for inclusive education at eight primary schools in Jema'a LGA in Kaduna, through key pillars of action:

- **At community level** we supported parents and communities to understand that children with disabilities have a right to education and found this was crucial to increasing uptake. We developed sustainable child participation strategies, distributed a newly developed **[Parent Support Guide](#)** and established strong links between parents, OPDs and schools to significantly increase enrolment rates. Jema'a LGA faced insecurity due to ethnic conflict, however due to strong local leadership, project implementation remained on track.
- **At system strengthening level** we established models of good practice to inform Nigerian state and federal education ministries about low-cost approaches to promote inclusion that can be brought to scale. We trained teachers in inclusive education in support of Kaduna state's current reform process and supported school management committees and parent teacher associations to develop action plans to make primary learning inclusive of disability and gender. Accessibility assessments and action plans guided schools on removing physical, attitudinal and communication-related barriers.
- **At governance and policy level** we wanted to see commitments to scale up inclusive education in Nigeria and, thanks to our partner OPDs, effective advocacy plans were developed. We engaged national, state and local government area level education bodies on the project Steering Committee to further guide project implementation.

Project impact



Across the eight primary schools, over 120 teachers were trained and increased their knowledge and understanding on inclusive education - including on how to identify children with functional difficulties using the Washington Group Questions. **As a result, 280 children with additional needs were identified among newly enrolled students.** Qualitative evidence highlighted that this significant number of enrolments was also thanks to the project's strong parental and community engagement, with insights [shared in this blog](#). Teachers were able to recommend educational interventions and made medical referrals when needed.



As a result of the project's clear impact, the SMILE team were invited to present the project at a number of national and international conferences. This included the 65th National Council on Education meeting – the highest policy making body in education in Nigeria; the Comparative and International Education Society Conference 2023 - one of the world's largest and most influential education in development conferences; and to the Global Campaign for Education [community of practice](#). Read more on our [project webpage](#).

Discovering what works

We delivered extensive learning resources and added to the global evidence base on disability inclusion through situational analysis, reflective reports and blogs. Read our case study in the UK Government's publication [All my friends need teachers](#) and explore findings from the project's [learning and evidence compendium](#).

Delivering change for children with disabilities

Disability inclusion is critical for reaching the Global Goals and we have produced the evidence on what works in a range of different areas. We now need the allocation of resources for disability inclusion in education to turn evidence into action.

To find out more visit

inclusivefutures.org/inclusive-education or contact
Claire Walsh at cwalsh@sightsavers.org.

Endnotes

- 1 JONAPWD (2017), as referenced by Inclusive Futures / Institute of Development Studies (2020), Nigeria Situational Analysis - Version II - June 2020, p. 21
- 2 UNICEF (2018)