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## **Disability, vulnerability and citizenship: To what extent is education a protective mechanism for children with disabilities in countries affected by conflict?**

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### **Abstract:**

Humanitarian crises as a result of conflict are often characterised by failure of the social contract between the state and its citizens. For a variety of reasons, children with disabilities are often particularly vulnerable in time of humanitarian crisis. This paper draws on research undertaken by the authors in a series of countries affected by conflict, and looks at how the politics and policies of such countries, and the humanitarian and development agencies working in them, continue to exclude children with disabilities from formal and informal education structures. It will be argued that this exclusion not only impedes progress on inclusive education, but has wider implications as education programmes are often the conduit through which a number of additional child protection mechanisms are implemented. Children with disabilities who are not in the formal education system are therefore at risk not only of missing out on education opportunities, but are also excluded from critical child survival initiatives, thus increasing their vulnerability.

Keywords: Disability, Education, Conflict-Affected Fragile States, Children

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## **Education and Conflict-Affected Fragile States**

This paper is based on research in progress at the Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre, which explores the inclusion of children with disabilities in formal and non-formal education systems in Sierra Leone and Sudan - primarily Darfur and to a lesser extent, Southern Sudan. In countries affected by conflict, such as Sierra Leone and Sudan, children with disabilities who are not in the formal education system are at risk not only of missing out on vital education opportunities, but are also excluded from critical child survival initiatives, which can exacerbate and increase vulnerability. Moreover, despite numerous global initiatives, including Education for All (EFA), and the Fast Track Initiative (FTI), much of the evidence continues to point to the same groups of children with disabilities continuing to be marginalised and excluded from formal education processes (World Vision 2007). A recent paper in this journal called for greater alignment between the concept of EFA and inclusive education (Miles and Singal 2010); we argue here that within these initiatives, funding for education has been mainly channelled into primary education, placing increased importance on inclusion of children with disabilities into primary education systems.

It is important to note that education really only came to be highlighted as an important part of the global humanitarian response in the past few years, and its still limited position within the humanitarian sphere is reflected in budget allocation: in 2008, emergency education received only 3.1 per cent of the global humanitarian aid budget (IRIN 2009). Nevertheless, this represented a 50 per cent increase in education aid between 2005 and 2007 to conflict-affected fragile states (CAFS) (SCUK 2009). Some donors, including the UK Department for International Development (DFID) still do not consider education to be part of the essential life saving basic needs (such as food, water and sanitation) in an acute emergency (IRIN 2009). In 2009, the United Nations General Assembly held a high level discussion on education in emergencies, and education has also been included as part of the Global Clusters for humanitarian responses (jointly headed by UNICEF and the International Save the Children Alliance). Aid agencies can now access the

UN's quick-funding mechanism, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), for emergency education funding.

The global education cluster is working with the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) task group on Inclusive Education to ensure children with disabilities are included in the work of the education cluster. The INEE task group have produced guidelines on inclusion in emergencies: *Including Everyone: INEE Pocket Guide to Inclusive Education in Emergencies* (INEE 2009) According to these guidelines, inclusion of children with disabilities in schools requires measures such as ensuring school buildings are physically accessible (including schools under reconstruction); providing training and support to teachers; raising awareness amongst teachers, parents, other children, communities, humanitarian actors and policy makers. The guidelines also include life skills training and capacity building of the wider community.

Despite these efforts, education for children with disabilities remains marginalised, and it is particularly difficult to hold donors accountable for including disability issues in humanitarian relief efforts. For example, the World Bank has no specific policy on disability or inclusion for school reconstruction, despite the fact that construction of education facilities constitutes 45 per cent of World Bank spending in the education sector (World Bank, 2007).

### **Inclusion in Formal and Non-Formal Education Structures**

In countries affected by conflict, both formal and non-formal education structures offer an opportunity for children to receive basic education skills such as literacy and numeracy as well as crucial life-saving protection measures – many of which are based on behaviour change, such as landmine awareness, HIV awareness and other health education programmes. Other measures offered through education structures can provide even more direct child protection, such as feeding programmes and psychosocial support. Formal and non-formal educational programmes in crisis and post-crisis situations can therefore offer a space for social interaction and learning, as

well as a means of child protection from forced recruitment, exploitation, prostitution and other abuses (Nicolai & Triplehorn 2003). As well as the protective function, research shows that including children living in conflict-affected areas in educational activities has positive and incremental effects on future economic growth, health indices and infant mortality rates, peace and security, and paves the way for good governance and active engaged citizenship (Save the Children 2007; UNESCO 2002). It also has more pragmatic benefits, such as releasing families from childcare duties so they have more time to undertake remunerated employment or household chores.

Despite the numerous benefits of education, children living in CAFS are far less likely to attend school than in other countries: a recent report estimates that half the world's out-of-school children – 37 million children – live in CAFS (Save the Children 2008). A disproportionate numbers of these 37 million are children with disabilities. According to UNESCO “Children with disabilities are still combating blatant educational exclusion – they account for one third of all out-of-school children.” (UNESCO 2009: 5). To understand the impediments faced by children with disabilities in CAFS, it is necessary to first understand the constraints faced by many children in these environments.

There are many reasons why children cannot go to school in CAFS: even if children manage to get to school, they often struggle with poor quality teaching, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of facilities and resources. There is often very little support for teachers. In addition, children often face insecurity, lack of infrastructure, resources or personnel. It may be necessary for children to work (both at home and in the informal economy), or even participate in the conflict. Furthermore, many countries choose to prioritise national security concerns over education budgets, which may result in little or no pay for teachers, lack of infrastructure, and few resources, which in turn is reflected in the nature and quality of education received. Additionally, for many children who have lived outside of their countries as refugees, or even are displaced within their own countries, the education they received in camps or schools may be of better quality than that which they received in their own countries. These children may be reluctant to rejoin schools with limited resources and a different curriculum, language and quality of lessons when they return home.

As noted above, the push to achieve EFA has led to an emphasis on basic (primary) education. Whilst this is commendable, it means that, especially in conflict situations, education, particularly for children with disabilities, has received less attention and funding (Wessles and Monteiro 2008). For many children this can not only result in an unequal start that is hard to recover from, but in children missing out on opportunities for early and better engagement which would enhance their capacity for self protection, as well as provide additional means of child protection. For example, Garcia et al report: “Average primary completion rates are strongly associated with the level of preprimary enrolment and children’s health and nutrition status in their early years.” (Garcia, Virata and Dunkelburg 2008: 24).

This is true of both formal and non-formal education programmes. Such programmes have become an important component of services provided by agencies in CAFS, with a strong focus on play and providing an opportunity for children to come together in a safe place – ‘child-friendly spaces’ (sometimes also called child-centred spaces or children’s clubs). There is a growing literature on the psychosocial and protective aspects of child-friendly spaces (e.g. Wessles and Monteiro 2008; Nicolai and Triplehorn 2003). There is not the space here to go in to detail about the role of non-formal education– but we highlight these here as they also have low enrolment rates of children with disabilities.

### **Why are children with disabilities still not accessing schools in CAFS?**

Overall, there is widespread support for the positive benefits of education in emergencies (Nicolai and Triplehorn 2003). This is particularly the case for children who are seen as especially vulnerable, which within most humanitarian programmes includes orphans and separated children, children associated with armed fighting, children with disabilities, and street children.

There is as yet no data on the actual numbers of children with disabilities out of school in CAFS, despite the higher risk of conflict-related impairments (such as landmine injuries), malnutrition, reduced access to healthcare and other services which are compounded by the lack of access to employment and other safety nets. Until recently, children with disabilities were rarely considered in conflict and post-conflict education strategies, or

post-conflict reconstruction and development programmes (World Vision 2007). In their report on the FTI and children with disabilities, World Vision note that:

“[plans] for capacity development in countries which have experienced conflict and are now engaged in subsequent reform/reconstruction (e.g. Timor-Leste, Tajikistan) do not give much attention to training or to system development in relation to the education needs of disabled children.”(World Vision 2007: 28).

The Fast Track Initiative (FTI) aims to “To expand support for education in fragile states to make progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals while increasing states’ commitment and capacity to provide Education for All.” There are a number of tools to assist governments in developing strategies, including the Progressive Framework. Key to these is the need to ensure that the education system does not reproduce underlying inequalities and in fact enhances resilience and capacity of both the education system and the children and youth within it. This includes the promotion of tolerance of diversity; curricula revision; human rights education; conflict resolution and youth engagement (FTI 2008). The FTI progressive framework makes explicit links between issues of inclusion and the education and fragility situation analysis – which proposes that the less inclusive the education system is, the more fragile it is.

Our preliminary research shows that even if children with disabilities are specifically included in national education policies, a number of factors inhibit their actual inclusion. These factors include a lack of commitment by the international and national organisation undertaking the interventions; in the two CAFS where we undertook research, it was rare for even the most recently reconstructed schools to be physically accessible for children with disabilities, including latrines and routes into schools. Accessibility concerns did not stop there. Many of the schools are situated in rural areas some distance from outlying villages and are hence difficult to reach. There is rarely any transportation, and often the only way a child with disabilities can get to school is to have a family member take them. However, this can be costly and time consuming as parents or siblings may have other children to look after, or farming and other chores to undertake.

The journey to school can in itself be dangerous, particularly for girls; young girls with disabilities are especially vulnerable to violence or abuse, all the more so in the volatile situations often prevalent in CAFS (Groce, 2005).

Nor are all the problems solved even when issues of access to the classroom have been dealt with. If a child with a disability does manage to attend school, teachers often lack training or awareness of their capabilities, and consequently the child may be seen as disruptive or problematic. In both Sierra Leone and Sudan, many of the teachers we spoke to during the course of our research had undergone some form of training on teaching children with disabilities; nevertheless, this was rarely backed up with any other support, such as accessible teaching materials. Teachers were often expected to teach children with a variety of different impairments. Moreover, having to teach large classes of children meant that very little of the knowledge imparted in the training sessions was actually used in the classrooms. There are, of course, some notable exceptions to this. For example we found an innovative iterant teaching programme for blind and deaf students in mainstream education facilities in Juba, South Sudan, but overall, this was the exception rather than the norm.

Finally we found very little data on children with disabilities who drop out of school. There are of course many reasons why children with disabilities do not continue their education – these include the attitudes of teachers or other pupils; inability to keep up with lessons; lack of support or financial reasons, as well as difficulties in transportation and accessibility.

Both Sudan and Sierra Leone have Inclusive Education (which also include Special Education) policies and the governments of both countries have signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Whilst there is no specific article on education in emergencies, the Convention does have articles on education (Article 24) and on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies (Article 11). For a variety of reasons, however, including many highlighted above, these are rarely implemented in either country, and there is very little effective monitoring of these policies.

In the next section we will discuss how these issues actually play out on the ground using data from Sudan and Sierra Leone. We then discuss the possibilities and opportunities to 'build back better' in the post-conflict phase.

### **Inclusion in Emergency Programmes and Policies in Darfur, Sudan**

Darfur has been described as a 'protection crisis' since the start of the conflict in 2003 (Pantulo and O'Callaghan 2006), making it a challenging environment within which to undertake any kind of programmes or research. There have been numerous UN Security Council resolutions to enforce stability in the region since 2004, with little improvement in the security of civilians. Currently there is only a small force of African Union and United Nations (UNAMID) peacekeepers in the region to protect the civilian population, who have been subject to forced displacement and armed conflict. As in many other situations, children are at particular risk of violence, neglect and abuse.

In order to support on-going work in the region, in particular to improve the inclusion of out-of-school vulnerable children - estimated to be about 8000 children across several localities in South Western Darfur - we were requested to undertake a survey to assess which children were especially vulnerable, and why. A household survey was undertaken in Umm Kher, Western Darfur State, in collaboration with an Italian NGO active across the region. Any research in Darfur carries the additional challenges of undertaking research in a conflict-affected region, such as logistics, security and resources, but from a methodological point of view, the area was uniformly surveyed, and encompassed rural and urban localities, nomadic and internally displaced persons (IDP) settlements. In addition to Umm Kher, four villages in three other rural districts where the NGO was active (Forobaranga, Garsila and Habila) were also surveyed. In total, 13,000 households were interviewed using a household survey form, plus children between the ages of 6 and 18 from 1,300 randomly selected households out of the total 13,000 were interviewed using four additional modules: a disability screening tool; education; employment; and vulnerability.

Analysis of the data collected is on going, in particular the disaggregation of data to ascertain the total numbers of children with disabilities accessing school; but what was striking even from the initial survey and qualitative components such as focus groups and key informant interviews, is how vulnerable children were identified and selected for schools and disability-specific programs and support mechanisms. Often it is the responsibility of families to ensure their children are registered with local disabled people organisations (DPOs) to be eligible for many of the benefits offered by the government and indeed in some cases, the relief programmes offered by UN and INGOs in the region. This carries a very high risk of continued exclusion for marginalised children. There were approximately 3,850 persons with disabilities registered with one of the two local DPOs in the areas of the survey, though this figure was not disaggregated by age or gender. However, it appeared that a number of groups are significantly under-represented within this process, for example persons with mental health problems and those with learning disabilities. In addition, those carrying out the registration (e.g. the village sheik) sometimes require a fee, which many persons with disabilities and their families in Darfur cannot afford, even if very low. Asking the very poorest to pay a registration fee potentially excludes those at highest risk. Of particular concern is that it is often these lists which are used by NGOs and UN agencies as a primary vehicle for locating persons identified as 'extremely vulnerable individuals' (EVIs) to benefit from targeted aid. If people are unable to pay for initial registration in the first place, further poverty and marginalisation can only be anticipated without access to food support and basic resources.

It is certainly the case that the international community's presence can alter the landscape of an education system completely – and Darfur is a good example. The numbers of schools in the region has dramatically increased, and is continuing to grow. Over 970 additional classrooms have been repaired or built and more than 120,000 children are receiving psychosocial support and recreational activities through community-based child friendly centres

Despite this activity, data from the survey, Table 1 below, shows that only 41.3 per cent of children between six – eighteen years old had received

any education. The three main reasons given why children could not go to school were: absence of school (28 per cent); lack of means (25.7 per cent); and the need to help at work or in the house (18.1 per cent).

**Table 1 Access to school and reason why no access in Darfur for children between 6 and 18 years old**

	Girls n (%)	Boys n (%)	Total n (%)
<b>Received education</b>	2902 (31.4)	4903 (50.9)	7805 (41.3)
<b>Reason for no access</b>			
School too far	1474(31.3)	1617(25.6)	3091(28.0)
Lack of money to send me to school	1239(26.3)	1592(25.2)	2831(25.7)
Child too young to go to school	802(17.0)	838(13.3)	1640(14.9)
Need to work	387(8.2)	205(3.2)	592(5.4)
Need to help with household chores	340(7.2)	1058(16.7)	1398(12.7)
School useless for girls	10(0.2)	339(5.4)	349(3.2)
Child too old to go to school	114(2.4)	108(1.7)	222(2.0)
Absence of school because of war/situation	60 (1.3)	138(2.2)	198(1.8)
School not adapted to girls	29(0.6)	147(2.3)	176(1.6)
No teacher because of war/situation	71(1.5)	84(1.3)	155(1.4)
Because of disability/difficulty	34(0.7)	45(0.7)	79(0.7)
Did/do not like school	36(0.8)	25(0.4)	61(0.6)
There was no school in my time	18(0.4)	35(0.6)	53(0.5)
School not very useful (for children)	17(0.4)	4(0.1)	21(0.2)
Insecurity and risk of child abduction	7(0.1)	10(0.2)	17(0.2)
Other	43(0.9)	49(0.8)	92(0.8)
No answer	26(0.6)	24(0.4)	50(0.5)

Note: Pearson  $\chi^2$  test.  $P < 0.001$  for difference in access and  $P < 0.001$  for difference for reasons for not accessing school by gender

There are relatively few formal schools in western Darfur: according to WebGis, the web-based geographic information systems resource used by many UN and humanitarian agencies to map population movements and potential humanitarian crises, in the areas we undertook research there was a total of 160 primary schools. These included public and private schools and, though education is ostensibly free, there are still some costs related to attending school - ranging from three Sudanese Pounds (US\$1.3 at current exchange rates) per month for government schools, to more than double that for private schools. Most of the classes are overcrowded and there is a lack of trained teachers, materials and other resources. Despite these conditions, primary school enrolment has increased from 516,000 children in 2006 to more than 976,000 in 2008 across the Darfur region (UNICEF, 2088a). This information is not disaggregated by gender or disability, but according to one

experienced teacher at a school in a semi-settled nomad camp, there are very few children with disabilities attending schools in the region - partly because of parental and teacher attitudes, as well as common misunderstandings about disability; lack of access and assistive devices, and overall lack of support.

We found that in Darfur, as in many other places, access to school for a child with disabilities depended largely on parental attitudes, proximity and physical access to the structure, and likelihood of acceptance in class. Moreover, it seemed from discussions with other teachers that even if there are children with disabilities registered in school, they often do not attend school regularly. Compounding this, the absence of good governance structures means when children with disabilities are absent their school administrators rarely follow them up to see why they are not in school.

For the international NGOs working in the region, education has been a key priority; nevertheless, inclusive education, or more specifically education for children with disabilities has not been a priority – in part because of a myriad of competing priorities and competing vulnerabilities. Even in agencies mandated to protect children, children with disabilities are seen as one group amongst many ‘extremely vulnerable individuals’ who require specific attention. Others include orphans, child-headed households, street children and children associated with fighting forces.

Of additional concern in our findings is the lack of inclusion of children with disabilities in non-formal education structures, including child-friendly spaces, or children’s clubs. In Darfur, these centres function to both protect and educate children through play, learning and socialisation. At various times during the crisis they have also been used to provide extra food to children, as well to provide information such as upcoming vaccination campaigns. In Western Darfur, it was not unusual for clubs to have up to several hundred children registered, although not all the children attend daily. In most clubs, there are more girls than boys registered to attend, possibly as boys are expected to assist with agricultural chores such as minding cattle. With regard to their possible protection function, if the staff do not see a child for several days, in theory they visit the parents to see if there is a problem. However, in practice, the large volume of children compared to relatively small

numbers of staff means this is sometimes difficult. Other children or siblings would also point out if a child was not attending. According to the staff we spoke to at the clubs we visited, the most common reasons for non-attendance was ill health or the child being left at home alone. The age of children attending the children's clubs ranged from toddlers (often accompanying older siblings, who looked after them), to children over 12. Though technically children over seven should be attending primary school, in reality, many do not, for reasons of access, money or parental understanding, so the children's clubs becomes de facto schools.

Few children with disabilities were reported to be attending such programs. Most staff questioned thought this was due to shame within families and the adverse reactions of other children (e.g. teasing). Few staff had thought about ways to increase attendance or include such children in club activities. Our study did locate a very small number of children with disabilities who participated in clubs, though no specific provisions had been made for them; for example, no sign interpreters for a deaf child.

For all children, it seems physical proximity to an NGO-funded children's club was the key factor in their attendance. This of course raises the issue that a child with disabilities who cannot physically get to the club will be excluded. In terms of which children are least likely to attend children's clubs, staff highlighted those whose parents lacked the knowledge or awareness about the benefits of attendance; those who kept their child at home to assist with chores; and orphans (which includes single female-headed households, or those living with grandparents). All these categories are likely to include children with disabilities.

Of additional concern is that staff working at the centres said they saw the children's clubs as a 'first step' to school. Currently, UNICEF and other INGOs in the area are working with the Government of Sudan to formalise the children's clubs into official preschool education structures. Certainly the more vibrant children's clubs we visited were those attached to, or next to, primary schools. Formalising them would have the benefit of state and UNICEF support for curriculum and supplies, as well as offer the benefits that preschool has shown in terms of retention in formal education structures. Lack of inclusion of children with disabilities in clubs therefore will have increasingly

dire implications for lack of inclusion in formal schooling as 'clubs' become more formalised. This will be a missed opportunity for these children as Sudan now has legislated for free education for children with disabilities – which appears will increasingly be contingent on initial preschool access.

### **Access to school in Sierra Leone**

Almost a decade after the end of the conflict, Sierra Leone remains a chronically poor country. Its health and nutrition indicators are among the lowest in the world: according to the World Health Organisation, life expectancy is 42 years and under-5 mortality rate is 269 per 1,000 live births. Over 70 per cent of the population live below the poverty line, in rural, semi-rural and urban areas outside of the capital, Freetown. Unemployment and underemployment rates remain high across the country (World Bank).

Rehabilitation of the education sector has been a priority in Sierra Leone since the end of the war due to the years of missed education, destroyed infrastructure, and numbers of children affected by armed fighting. Schools are overcrowded and under-resourced, and teachers only receive very small salaries, if at all. In such circumstances, many teachers lack motivation. According to UNICEF, over 400,000 children still do not attend school. Primary school enrolment/attendance rates between 2000 and 2005 averaged 41%. The reasons for these low rates are numerous, but poverty is a key factor in the decisions made by families as to who should attend school, and for how long. Feeding a family may take priority over a child's education: for example, even if primary education is ostensibly free, money is needed for uniforms, books, and even to supplement the feeding programmes undertaken by some schools. Many parents, having low levels of education themselves, have low expectations regarding the benefits of education for their children; a situation exacerbated by a gender bias toward boys, and lack of employment opportunities even for those with a relatively good education.

In order to better understand this situation, UNICEF recently commissioned a detailed report on the situation in Sierra Leone – *The Out of School Children of Sierra Leone* (2008a) – which examines which children, and why, are still not attending formal schooling, despite enormous efforts across the country. Key reasons for lack of school attendance include:

1. Poverty
2. Parental situation (e.g. orphans)
3. Parental attitudes
4. Children facing abuse/trafficking (including internally)
5. Children forced into early marriage/pregnancy
6. Children with disabilities/children of parents with disabilities
7. Homeless/street children
8. Children withdrawn from armed conflict

Though Sierra Leone has signed and ratified the UNCRPD, it does not yet have any specific disability legislation. However, national education legislation references children with disabilities, with the education sector objectives being basic education for all and manpower development in key sectors. There are four priority areas in national legislation: access to basic education, especially for girls; providing school feeding and qualitative improvement (books, materials and teacher education) tertiary training to meet human resources for poverty reduction programmes; and HIV/AIDS prevention education. Special needs education for the disabled and vulnerable children is also stated as a further objective.

According to UNICEF, the prevalence rate for children aged between two to nine years old who screen positive to the disability module of the Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey disability tool varies between 19 – 54 percent. Whilst these figures seem high, and UNICEF acknowledge this variation could be due to a number of factors, including social, economic and geographical, they also call for more research to better understand these differences (UNICEF 2008b; Trani 2009).

Leonard Cheshire Disability has had a long standing presence in Sierra Leone, and the Centre has undertaken two pieces of research on education in Sierra Leone to determine why there still a gap between rhetoric and reality, and what policies and practices have the best results in a poor country like Sierra Leone. The results of both studies broadly corroborate the findings in the UNICEF report (2008b). The first survey, carried out in 2006 in Koinadugu District in the Northern Province and Kono District in the Eastern Province, looked specifically at access to pre- and primary school education for children

with disabilities. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to 647 respondents, and focus group discussions were held with teachers, pupils, community members and programme staff.

Koinadugu and Kono districts were amongst the worst affected areas during the 10-year civil conflict. Much of the infrastructure was completely destroyed. Both districts were earmarked for revival under the Sierra Leone Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Much premium has been put on the provision of and improvement to existing schools and health centres. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), in collaboration with a number of international organisations have embarked on school revitalisation programmes. However, not much has been done in the area of pre-schools in these districts. This sector of the school system has been left mainly in the hands of private agencies and missions. As a result, preschool programmes are few, expensive and concentrated in district headquarter towns like Koidu and Kabala.

At the time of the first survey in Koinadugu and Kono, both areas faced chronic poverty; unemployment; insufficient food; poor access to utilities - especially sanitation facilities, poor communication and road networks; and inadequate housing and health facilities, some of which had been destroyed during the conflict. There are also a growing number of street children, especially in the urbanised communities. On a more positive note, the communities did highlight social cohesion as a positive aspect – particularly important in the post-conflict context.

In most of the chiefdoms surveyed the few existing primary schools were far apart, with no regular transport, so parents were reluctant to send very young children to school (the average distance to school was around two miles each way). Moreover, parents could not afford the time to drop children off as they had to go back to work in their farms or other paid jobs. This created a major barrier, particularly for children with disabilities. While many parents reported that education was important, the two most common reasons given for children not attending school were that the parents needed the children to assist with agricultural or other income-generating activities; and the distance to school. If parents had relatives or friends in the chiefdom headquarters, some sent their children to stay with them during the school

week. It was surprising to note that none of the parents interviewed mentioned the inability to pay school fees as a reason for their children not attending. It is possible that they were unwilling to disclose this to the interviewer – anecdotally, in focus groups and one to one discussions, the issue of cost was always highlighted.

One of the most notable results was the dearth of girls at secondary level. In all the chiefdoms surveyed, almost 50% less girls than boys transferred on to secondary school. The two main reasons given were poverty (secondary education is not free, unlike primary school), and traditional gendered roles, particularly early marriage and pregnancy. It is also important to note that the age distribution of the pupils in both primary and secondary education vary considerably. Though the national school going age is six years old, in many districts children begin schooling much older. This may be attributed in part to the years of schooling lost during the war and the need to catch up, as well as the need for children to remain at home to help parents. In the survey, the average age of pupils in primary school across all the chiefdoms was 12 years old, and 15 years old for those in secondary schools. This has implications for programme planning and for specific targeting of out of school children, including children with disabilities.

In Kono, one of the districts surveyed, of the 392 children with disabilities (under 18 years of age) identified within the community, 296 (76%) were attending school. Of this, 174 (59%) were males and 122 (41%) were female. Of the 24 % not attending, there was an equal proportion of males to females. According to some respondents, many persons with disabilities were not enrolled in schools as they are already above school age. In Koinadugu District, 77% of children with disabilities were in primary school and 22% in secondary. There were no reported cases of attendance in vocational/technical institutions. According to our survey, the cost of education, distance from schools and the fact that most of the children were already above the official school age were the main factors cited as why children did not attend school by the families. In many cases, children with disabilities had been left with their grandparents while the parents worked or cared for their other children. These children are especially vulnerable, and even if they are in school, there is a very strong likelihood of them not even

completing primary education, particularly if anything happens to the grandparents.

Furthermore, programmes need to take into much greater consideration practical issues such as the necessity for children who have a parent with a disability to work, or the more gendered implications of wives, daughters and sisters of a disabled man needing to earn money. How can a child in a household with a disabled parent attend school if their labour is the only source of income; how can a parent of a disabled child attend a training programme if they are the sole carer of that child?

Within the education system itself a number of disability-related challenges need to be addressed. The inclusion of disabled children in secondary education and pre-schools requires much more attention. The large size of classes (in some cases over 70 pupils) are not just disability-related issues, but particularly affect children with disabilities. When asked, most of the people with disabilities interviewed strongly felt that they would have benefited from pre-school education. When adults with disabilities were asked how attendance could be improved, over 50 percent said that the community must be educated / sensitized in order to change their perception about their capabilities in school and community activities.

Our first survey specifically targeted families and persons with disabilities identified by community leaders and other community members – therefore some families and persons with disabilities are likely to have been missed out . Our more recent survey was carried out in June and July 2009 in Freetown, and the districts of Bo, Kono, Kabala and Makeni in 277 randomly selected households representing 2190 individuals, where 424 respondents were interviewed. This survey, described in detail elsewhere (Trani et al 2010), incorporated a disability screening tool based on 35 questions encompassing six dimensions of activity limitation and body functioning difficulties in order to gain as complete an overview as possible of the range of disabilities within households, allowing levels of disability to be categorised into mild, moderate and severe to give a more nuanced picture of the level of difficulties faced (Trani and Bakhshi, 2008; Trani et al 2010). According to results, 83% of the sample respondents had no difficulties at all, 17% of respondents experienced some degree of difficulty, ranging from some to

constant. Of these, 2.2% of respondents experience very severe difficulties in terms of functioning difficulties or activity limitations. We have categorised those who scored over 2="some difficulty" in any question as having some degree of difficulty which may manifest as a disability. Those who had no difficulties, we have categorised as 'non-disabled'. This method of screening enabled the comparison of the lives and livelihoods of persons with disabilities those without in Sierra Leone. The survey comprised of seven modules, and included one specifically on education. This assessed literacy and numeracy, type of education facility attended, reasons for lack of education, difficulties in transportation to school, financing education and issues with the teacher and other students. Questions also addressed whether the person interviewed would like to go back to school, what he or she would like to learn and whether the education (if any) they had received was considered useful.

Our findings show (Table 2) that more than one third of children with severe and very severe disabilities are excluded from school (68.8%), while only 11.3 per cent of non-disabled children did not go to school.

Table 2 Level of education for children aged 6 to 18 years old by severity of difficulty in Sierra Leone

	no difficulty n (%)	mild/moderate difficulty n (%)	severe/very severe difficulty n (%)	Total n (%)
Received education girls	265 (86.3)	55(96.5)	10 (55.6)	330 (86.4)
Received education boys	262 (91.3)	45 (93.8)	12 (85.7)	319 (91.4)
Together	527 (88.7)	100 (95.2)	22 (68.8)	649 (88.8)

Note: Pearson  $\chi^2$  test.  $P < 0.001$ .

We have already outlined above some of the reasons for the low level of attendance at school for children with disabilities. We found that not only do these children face marginalisation and exclusion within their families and communities, but also children with disabilities may face stigma and discrimination in school, as well as low parental expectations (Trani et al 2010). In line with the previous research the results also show a significant gender gap in access to education, which widens as children move to secondary school, when many girls leave to marry and have children. Overall, more boys had received an education than girls; and slightly more boys with severe or very severe difficulties had received any education than girls with

severe or very severe difficulties: 44.4 per cent of girls with severe or very severe difficulties received no education at all, compared with 11.3 per cent of boys.

Table 3 shows that a higher proportion of children with severe to very severe difficulties are working or in charge of household tasks (8.3% compared to 4.6% of children with mild to moderate difficulties and 5.4% of non-disabled children.) This suggests that children with severe or very severe difficulties are more likely to be assigned household chores than their peers, and are less likely to go to school than them.

Table 3 Percentage of children aged 6 to 18 years old in Sierra Leone who are working by severity of difficulty

	no difficulty n (%)	mild/moderate difficulty n (%)	severe/very severe difficulty n (%)	Total n (%)
Working or household tasks	31 (5.4)	5 (4.6)	2 (8.3)	38 (5.4)
Not working	540 (94.6)	103 (95.4)	22 (91.7)	665 (94.6)

Note: Pearson  $\chi^2$  test.  $P < 0.001$ . Figures in col.3 have to be considered with caution due to the small number of cases.

Our survey demonstrated remarkably similar levels of access to school and literacy rates for persons with and without disabilities - however, these results are disappointingly low. Over half of all respondents cannot read, write or count (Table 4).

Table 4 Literacy rate and access to school for the whole population surveyed in Sierra Leone

	no difficulty n (%)	mild/moderate difficulty n (%)	severe/very severe difficulty n (%)	Total n (%)
Cannot read, write, count	902 (54.3)	68 (54.0)	36 (53.7)	1,006 (54.3)
Can read, write or/and count	759 (45.7)	58 (46.0)	31 (46.3)	848 (45.7)
Access to school female	76 (57.1)	32 (46.4)	17 (51.5)	125 (53.2)
Access to school male	51 (50.5)	35 (66.0)	20 (58.8)	106 (56.4)

Note: Pearson  $\chi^2$  test.  $P < 0.993$  for difference in literacy and  $P < 0.172$  for difference for access to school for female and  $P < 0.340$  for male.

These results show there is still a huge effort needed to get this new generation of children into school, as half of the previous generation - those

who are adults now - did not access school. This has implications on their perceptions and value of education for their own children, and particularly profound implications for children with disabilities under such circumstances.

A higher proportion of respondents with severe or very severe difficulties do not know if education is useful – almost 12 per cent compared with fewer than 3.4 per cent of other respondents (Table 5). Related to this, a higher percentage of non-disabled respondents believed education would improve their chances of getting a job – almost 23 per cent compared to 14.3 per cent of respondents with mild or moderate difficulties and 10 per cent of respondents with severe or very severe difficulties.

Table 5 Perception of education in Sierra Leone

	mild/moderate severe/very severe			Total n (%)
	no difficulty n (%)	difficulty n (%)	difficulty n (%)	
It is useful for everyday life, to exchange with others	871 (52.4)	74 (58.7)	36 (53.7)	981 (52.9)
It improves the prospects for finding a job	380 (22.9)	18 (14.3)	7 (10.5)	405 (21.8)
I liked school	68 (4.1)	0 (0.0)	3 (4.5)	71 (3.8)
I have a better position in society/ the community, I am recognized	97 (5.8)	9 (7.1)	3 (4.5)	109 (5.9)
I want to be independent/ I want to be less of a burden on others	50 (3.0)	8 (6.4)	4 (6.0)	62 (3.3)
It is important for personal progress/ because it is better for getting married/ I am more confident	124 (7.5)	8 (6.4)	6 (9.0)	138 (7.4)
Other reason	50 (3.0)	5 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	55 (3.0)
Don't know	21 (1.3)	4 (3.2)	8 (11.9)	33 (1.8)

Note: Pearson  $\chi^2$  test.  $P < 0.001$ . Some figures have to be considered with caution due to the small number of cases.

The results from these surveys clearly indicate that children with disabilities are not only missing out on opportunities to attend school in Sierra Leone, but are also potentially missing out on other vital interventions such as food supplements, HIV/AIDS awareness and other health education programmes.

## **Conclusion: Are Children with Disabilities Missing Out?**

What can we surmise from these surveys about education for children with disabilities in CAFS? Education should not only contribute towards students' basic survival and income-generation skills, but should also reduce their vulnerability to risk, increase their potential to fight poverty in the long-term, and develop their knowledge of more general issues such as health, communication technologies and politics. A quality education also aims to equip individuals with all elements required to ensure they are fully participating members of their community (UNESCO 2005). This approach moves beyond the idea of education as a fundamental human right and focuses on the development of the individual. Such protective measures can be vital in situations such as those found in CAFS. Unfortunately our preliminary data shows that children with disabilities and children of parents with disabilities continue to fall between the gaps in programmes, and much of this exclusion, whilst unintentional, begins very early on in interventions, or unintentionally replicates the existing status quo.

Previous research consolidating work done on education and conflict has highlighted the need for more research into education as a protective mechanism; the links between citizenship education and peace education in countries affected by conflict; and the impacts of education interventions in post-conflict areas and wider societal approaches to discussions of conflict-related issues (Wessles and Monteiro 2008; Nicolai and Triplehorn 2003). Inclusive education promulgates broader values than education as a means to an end (skills acquisition, employment); it also highlights issues of social justice (Miles and Singal 2009). This has enormous potential for peace-building benefits in CAFS (FTI 2008).

These are of course all admirable and necessary aims. Our concern here though is that exclusion from school goes beyond issues of lack of education and lack of awareness about citizenship and rights – important as these issues are. We find that formal and informal emergency education programmes, for example, in Darfur, and those in countries in transitional phases, such as Sierra Leone have benefits beyond the pedagogical. Schools, especially in CAFS, increasingly have broadened their role, teaching

life skills and serving as a conduit to all sorts of medical, social, nutritional and developmental resources and education.

There are a number of other interventions which could be beneficial. Encouraging parents, especially parents of children with disabilities, to become more engaged in initiatives such as parent/teacher associations or school management committees may ensure that they have a greater say in the decision making processes about schools in their communities. Furthermore, we found a number of other initiatives that are being implemented by NGOs which include fostering inclusive child to child mentoring systems, as well as improving teachers awareness and training which, in the post-conflict phase, present an ideal opportunity to 'build back better'. Moreover, such inclusion of children with disabilities should begin even before the start of any emergency, and should be included from planning and contingency through to the development of national education plans in the recovery phase.

Furthermore, it was apparent in both Sierra Leone and Darfur that disabled peoples organisations (DPOs) are only marginally engaged with children's issues. Some DPOs support small schools specifically for children with disabilities, or children of parents with disabilities, but the position would be stronger if they linked, for example, with ministries of education and parent groups. Many DPOs are in a position to lobby ministries and local government personnel to move away from long held charity/welfare models to a child-rights based model, and increase regulation of independent schools.

Within the global education system itself a number of challenges still need to be addressed. The inclusion of children with disabilities in pre-school and secondary education requires much more attention, as does the on-going gender gap for children with disabilities, particularly at secondary level. Unmanageable class sizes, teacher training and improving retention rates are not just disability-related issues, but particularly affect children with disabilities.

Making education more inclusive will be a gradual process, and partnerships between governments and other organisations (e.g. DPOs, disability INGOs, CSOs), as well as communities, are all necessary to achieve this goal. And perhaps most importantly, in many focus groups discussions

held by the authors over several visits in Sierra Leone, parents of both disabled and non-disabled children asked the same questions – education for what, what jobs and where? Such questions are also reflected in a recent survey undertaken by UNICEF in Sierra Leone (UNICEF 2008b).

In summary, children with disabilities not only face a lack of expectations by their parents, teachers and wider community, but also by the agencies tasked with reconstructing and developing the education sector, who may not be clear themselves in understanding why and how children with disabilities will benefit from the services provided. There needs to be more research on the inclusion of children with disabilities in emergencies, as well as better understanding of the factors that affect retention rates in formal schools. The protective factors of education are now much better understood and elaborated, but there is a great need to develop this research to look more closely at the specific benefits for children with disabilities.

Given that in the post-conflict phase there may also be opportunities to rebuild more inclusive societies (beyond merely buildings themselves), a lack of disability inclusion represents a missed opportunity. The challenge therefore is for international organisations and international education programmes to rethink who they are targeting and how. There is a need to consider broader incentives for families as well as education staff, in formal and informal settings, as well as radically overhauling the processes and challenging prevailing attitudes. However, a caveat: the examples from Sierra Leone and Darfur illustrate that whilst statistics can be improved, such statistics do not necessarily reflect inclusion of the very children who would most benefit from education. We must work to ensure that this does not continue to be the case.

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