



Summary

Link Education believes that all children have the right to inclusive and equitable education. In all programmes we work alongside government and community partners to understand and reduce the barriers that children face to access school, to participate and learn. We know that the children who are most vulnerable and who face the biggest education barriers are also those disproportionately affected by shocks such as emergency, including emergencies linked to climate change. This has been further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Strengthening education systems to reach all children, and engaging communities to both support and hold schools accountable, are core to Link's approach.

About Link

Link Education is Scotland's leading international education charity, working to improve education for children and communities in some of the poorest rural areas of Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda, and helping thousands of people escape the cycle of poverty. We focus on enhancing teaching and learning in schools, as well as building life-skills and promoting inclusion for the most marginalised. Our vision is one where all children have access to good quality education, giving them hope and a strong foundation for a brighter future. We take both a top-down and bottom-up approach to transform education, supporting broad system and school-wide improvements while recognising the need for more tailored, localised support to overcome specific challenges.

Approach

Link believes that all children have the right to quality education in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 which aims to:

"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030."

Link works with government and civil society partners in Malawi, Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda to transform education for children and communities through innovative, inclusive, low-cost and replicable programmes. Inclusive education is at the heart of Link's work and cuts across all five pillars of our theory of change: strengthening leadership and governance, enhancing teaching quality, improving learning environments, supporting community action, and challenging inequity. Our approach to inclusion is broad, challenging inequalities

and discrimination based on factors such as gender, disability and ethnicity as they intersect with children's access to quality education.

We work holistically through partners to understand the often multiple and inter-related barriers that children face to being in school, participating in lessons and achieving socially and academically, whilst also strengthening existing system, school and community structures to respond. The barriers may be related to social attitudes, to education policy, to teaching practice, to the school environment, and to the resources that families need to send their children to school and keep them there.

Link's approach aligns with the '*twin-track*' approach,¹ which supports broad system and school-wide improvements to include all children, whilst recognising the need for more tailored support to children based on the specific barrier(s) they face. Focusing only on provision for marginalised children will not bring about the systemic changes needed to meet the diverse needs of children in schools, and focusing only on the system, may mean missing children's specific needs.

In programme design Link considers what changes to the education system will make education easier for everyone, as well as what additional changes are needed to ensure that children are not excluded based on specific barriers such as gender, disability, linguistic background, wealth status, or other background characteristics. Inclusion cuts across all stages of programming: design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Link recognises that inclusive education is a process which constantly evolves, and not a one-off project that can be delivered within a short timeframe. It is a process of change within the education system, within schools and within communities to make education welcoming to all children.



¹ EENET https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/schools_for_all_poster.pdf downloaded 080819

Background

The rights of all children to quality education are enshrined in international charters and conventions, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), the African Charter on the Welfare of the Child (1999), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) 2006.

Following on from the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals emphasise inclusive and quality education for all, placing inclusive education at the centre of the education and development agenda. This means understanding the barriers that the children who remain excluded from education face, and addressing systemic, structural, attitudinal and social barriers that exclude them. Inclusion is based on principles which value and respect every child, and welcomes diversity as a rich resource for learning.²

268 million children and youth remain out-of-school globally.³ This number represents 59 million primary school, 62 million lower secondary school, and 138 million upper secondary school children. Children with disabilities constitute 15% of the out-of-school population, and children with “a sensory, physical or intellectual disability are 2.5 times more likely to never have been in school as their peers without disabilities.”⁴

It was often assumed that children with disabilities should be educated far from their home and community, and given an undemanding curriculum which did not qualify them for further education or paid work. These efforts did not take the rights of these children to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity into account.

Inclusive education tries to balance all children’s rights in relation to education, so that they have the best chance of taking an active part in society as adults. The rights of children with disabilities to education must be balanced with their right to family life, culture and healthy development; their right to be safe on the way to and in school; their right to an education which gives them skills to earn a living; and the right to learn in a language and way that they understand.

Experience

MALAWI:

In Malawi Link’s TEAM⁵ Girl project aims to **Leave No Girl Behind**. It works across all pillars of our theory of change,⁶ and supports the most educationally marginalised girls, many of whom face multiple and intersecting barriers to their inclusion in education. Many come from extremely poor families, and might be heads of household themselves. Many have

² CSIE (2018) <http://www.csie.org.uk/inclusion/index.shtml>

³ UNESCO (2018) <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/out-school-children-and-youth>

⁴ UNESCO (2020) *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: all means all*

⁵ Transformational Empowerment of Marginalised Girls (TEAM), UKAid-funded

⁶ Strengthening leadership and governance, enhancing teaching quality, improving learning environments, supporting community action, and challenging inequity.



experienced early marriage and pregnancy, and are unable to return to school. Many are affected by disability, and experience difficulties in integrating into an overcrowded, under-resourced and unprepared school system that often presents an unsafe and hostile environment. Many are at risk of sexual exploitation as a result of these multiple vulnerabilities. These educational, social and economic barriers are exacerbated by the gender norms that place a lower value on girls' current and future life prospects.

In response, Link Malawi works with existing government and community-school structures for sustainability, and supports the application of a twin track approach.

TEAM supports system-wide change to make education easier for all children through support to the application of National Education Standards⁷ which make sure that schools have gender-inclusive, safe learning environments in which all children can learn. It also develops the capacity of the system, formal and informal, schools and communities to understand and respond more specifically to the diverse needs that girls have to access school, participate in the classroom, and to learn.

The activation and strengthening of Complementary Basic Education (CBE) Centres, linked to a local primary school create space for previously excluded girls to catch-up on missed learning, to build their confidence and self-esteem, to gain knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, and to learn livelihood skills which they may otherwise be unable to access. Activities include the review of the CBE curriculum to ensure it is child-friendly, gender and inclusion-responsive, the training of Learner Centre Management Committees to manage the CBEs, and the capacity development of CBE facilitators to meet the diverse needs of girls in their classroom. They engage communities in reviewing the performance of their schools against national education standards, and on how communities can support marginalised girls to attend school, participate, and learn.

ETHIOPIA:

In Ethiopia, Link's Girls' Education Challenge Transition project STAGES (Supporting the Transition of Adolescent Girls through Enhancing Systems), directly supports 61,345 girls to access better quality education and make the transition from primary to secondary school. The girls are all defined as marginalised, living in rural, poor districts of the Southern Nations and Nationalities Peoples Region (SNNPR). Girls in Ethiopia face many similar barriers to education as girls in Malawi, which contribute to poor literacy and numeracy outcomes, drop-out from school altogether, and poor transition from one cycle of education to the next, particularly from primary to secondary school. Link's first Girls' Education Challenge project in the same local government areas highlighted girls' low levels of confidence and self-esteem which also limit their life-chances. Few female role-models and limited access to relevant life-skills and financial literacy further impact on girls' transition through school and into the world of work, and high levels of migration from rural to urban areas as well as



⁷ Government of Malawi (2015) National Education Standards, development supported by Link

trafficking of women and girls present grave risks and impact on girls' educational opportunity.

As in Malawi, Link Ethiopia's response is to work closely with government and civil society partners across all pillars of our theory of change⁸, and to apply a twin-track approach to programming.

To improve the quality of teaching and ensure that girls participate and learn in the classroom, teachers receive training on gender-inclusion and safeguarding-responsive pedagogy. Capacity development is also provided to local government officers who supervise schools and teachers, to consider gender, inclusion and safeguarding in their monitoring visits and reports which are submitted to a higher level for action. STAGES works closely with the relevant Ministry of Education officers at Zonal, Regional and National level in support of activities delivered at school and community level and for sustainability.

Training content includes support to teachers to employ a variety of methodologies including the use of local teaching aids as a means of meeting the different needs of children in the classroom. To further reach girls who are struggling with their learning, interested teachers receive training as Tutors and they provide extra-curricular support to girls according to their needs. An 'action-research' approach by teachers is encouraged, in which teachers learn to identify children's learning needs, develop strategies to address them, learn, and continually adapt.

STAGES also implements a mixture of activities focused on girls' specific needs including bursary provision for particularly marginalised girls, social and emotional learning through the training of teachers to be 'para-counsellors' in schools and boost girls' self-esteem, and life and financial literacy skills to help them transition to the world of work.



⁸ Strengthening leadership and governance, enhancing teaching quality, improving learning environments, supporting community action, and challenging inequity

UGANDA:



In Uganda, Link supported the Literacy and School Support Intervention (LaSSIB) which was implemented in the marginalised district of Buliisa to improve children's literacy in their mother tongue of *Lugungu*. Data from 2015 highlighted that while Buliisa District had made significant gains in increasing equitable access to primary education, there was little improvement in children's learning outcomes overall⁹.

Link's support in Buliisa was based on learning from the Link supported Early Learning Enhancement Project (ELEP 2014) which demonstrated that by providing direct regular intensive training and support to early grade teachers, learners benefitted from improved local language literacy teaching and were able to perform better generally. Following the ELEP interventions the early grade learners reading capability was significantly better than those of similar schools in the same area.¹⁰

As in Malawi and Ethiopia, Link Uganda's response was to work closely with government and civil society partners across all pillars of our theory of change¹¹, and to apply a twin-track approach to programming. In the case of Uganda, Link worked with the education system to improve teaching and learning for all children in the district through better local language literacy teaching, and to meet the needs of a specific group of children who spoke a minority language.

The Literacy and School Support Intervention worked with existing government, school and community structures including the District Education Office, the National Curriculum Development Centre, the Lugungu Bible Translation and Literacy Association (an affiliate of SIL¹²), the Lugungu Language Board, Headteachers, Teachers, School Management Committees and Parent Teacher Associations to benefit early grade learners in P1-3. The intervention was explicitly supportive of the Ministry of Education and Science's national policy initiative in relation to developing teacher capacity to teach children in their local language (i.e. Lugungu), and to use data to improve school performance.

In addition to strengthening the capacity of the education system, schools and teachers to respond to the language needs of children in Buliisa District, Link supported community engagement in school improvement for local language literacy through the School Performance Review (process), which brings a range of stakeholders together to review school performance against indicators of school improvement.

⁹ UWEZO (2013) testing of P2 learners

¹⁰ ELEP Impact Evaluation Report (2015)

¹¹ Strengthening leadership and governance, enhancing teaching quality, improving learning environments, supporting community action, and challenging inequity.

¹² <https://www.sil.org/literacy-education>