



Research & Studies

**To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa:
The educational situation in question**

SUMMARY BOOKLET - MALI - NIGER - BURKINA FASO

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The website dedicated to this study can be visited at the following address: <https://genrehandicapao.hubside.fr>. The results of study for each country (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso) can be consulted on the website.

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1. Educational situation of girls with disabilities in West Africa

Despite significant improvements in access to education over the last decade, 262 million children, adolescents and young people were out of school in 2016, or **one in five**. Of all the regions of the world, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of out-of-school children. Of the 63 million out-of-school children of primary school age, 34 million, or **more than half, live in sub-Saharan Africa**.¹ More generally, one in three children, adolescents and young people is out of school in sub-Saharan Africa – with girls being more likely than boys to be out of school. Twenty-eight million girls of primary and secondary school age do not go to school,² either because they have never been enrolled, or because they have dropped out prematurely. Moreover, although girls outnumber boys, their access to education is considerably reduced from primary to secondary school.

In countries where patriarchal norms place little emphasis on girls' education and where poverty levels are higher, gender and disability inequalities in education are more pronounced. This is the case in some Sahel countries, including Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, where the study was conducted.

1.1. Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso: major challenges for girls' education

According to ONE³ — an international campaigning and advocacy NGO — 9 of the 10 countries where access to education for girls is the most difficult are all in sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Afghanistan. South Sudan, where only one in four girls attends primary school, is at the top of the ranking. For the three countries covered by the study, **Niger and Mali come in third and sixth place respectively** with more than half of the girls enrolled in primary school not making the transition to secondary education, while **Burkina Faso is in eighth position** with only 1% of girls completing secondary school despite the impressive progress made for primary education.

¹ [UIS Fact Sheet N°48](#), February 2018 p.7 and [Global Partnership for Education: education data](#).

² UNESCO. [Rapport mondial de suivi sur l'éducation 2018. Résumé sur l'égalité des genres](#); UNICEF. [Laissées pour compte: L'éducation des filles en Afrique. une visualisation interactive des données](#)

³ ONE. [Accès des filles à l'éducation dans le monde: les mauvais élèves](#), 2017. The ranking involved 122 countries. It was based on UNESO data and 11 indicators on access to education for girls, the completion and quality of their schooling, and the more general situation of the education sector were used: the rate girls of primary school, lower secondary school and upper secondary school age who are unschooled, the average number of years of schooling for women aged 25 and over, the literacy rate among the female population aged 15-24 years, etc.

>< A few figures⁴

- Niger and Mali have the highest rates of out of primary school children in West Africa (44.2% and 32.7%) along with Liberia and Nigeria, while the rate in Burkina Faso is 23%.
- Niger and Mali have the lowest primary school Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs) in the region (64.1% and 68%), while Burkina Faso is in the process of achieving universal primary education (90.7%).
- Mali and Niger have the lowest primary school completion rates for girls in the region, but Burkina Faso has achieved parity between girls and boys since 2013. The results of the Certificate of Primary Education (CEP) show that girls often do better than boys.

Figure 1. Education systems in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and France

	Age																	
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
Mali	Kindergarten			Primary Education First cycle						Primary Education Second cycle			Secondary Education High School					
				1e	2e	3e	4e	5e	6e	7e	8e	9e DEF	2nde	1ère	Term BAC			
Niger	Pre-school		Primary Education						Secondary Education									
			CI	CP	CE1	CE2	CM1	CM2	Secondary School			High School						
Burkina Faso	Pre-school		Primary Education						Post-Primary Education			Secondary Education						
			CP1	CP2	CE1	CE2	CM1	CM2 CEP	6e	5e	4e	3e BEPC	2nde	1ère	Term BAC			
France	Kindergarten		Elementary school					Secondary School			High School							
			CP	CE1	CE2	CM1	CM2	6e	5e	4e	3e BEPC	2nde	1ère	Term BAC				

Compulsory education Education is now compulsory and free from ages 6 to 16 in Niger, 6 to 16 in Burkina Faso and 7 to 15 in Mali.

⁴ Source: UNESCO, Regional Symposium on Right to Education and Inclusion in Education Policies and Practices in Africa, 21 May 2019; ONE, Girls' Education Worldwide, 2017; SARC, Gender Analysis of Gaps in Learning in Basic Education in Burkina Faso, 2017.

The latest studies⁵ show that **gender inequality is accentuated by additional exclusionary factors**. Children in Mali, Niger⁶ and in Burkina Faso⁷ will find it more difficult to enrol and stay in school if they are girls, are from a poor, refugee or displaced family, are members of an ethnic minority living in a rural area or in a situation of conflict,⁸ or have a disability.

Box 1. Conflict, a threat to girls' education in the Sahel

These three Sahel countries are particularly affected by increasing armed conflicts, which make girls particularly vulnerable. According to the latest UNICEF report *Education Under Threat in West and Central Africa*, in these three countries, school closures due to attacks and threats of violence have increased sixfold in just over two years, from 512 in April 2017 to 3,005 in June 2019. Mali has been experiencing a serious political and security crisis since 2012 following the armed rebellion in the north and the coup d'état in March of the same year. Since January 2015, the worsening of jihadist activities has led to a significant deterioration of the situation. The security threat has taken a cross-border dimension, with numerous attacks on the border between Niger and Burkina Faso. In addition, growing intercommunity conflicts, exacerbated by the effects of climate change, are affecting the country's scarce resources, causing tensions between pastoralists and farmers in particular. The situation is worrying in the north and centre of the country. These crises have particularly affected the education system in these regions, with the looting and closure of more than 900 schools, many of them in the Mopti region, and massive population displacement within the country (Sikasso in particular) and to neighbouring countries, including Niger and Burkina Faso.

Niger is also affected by deadly Boko Haram incursions into its territory causing internal displacements, in addition to the influx of refugees from Nigeria in the Diffa region in particular. Spared by the jihadist groups in the Sahel for a long time, Burkina Faso has been facing increasing deadly attacks since 2015. Recently, the security situation has further deteriorated, jeopardising the progress the country has made in the education sector. More than 2,000 schools have been closed, dozens of teachers have been assaulted, and some have been killed.

This study does not cover the education of refugee or displaced children with disabilities in emergency situations, as this specific issue deserves to be studied in depth in its own right.

⁵ UNESCO. [Rapport mondial de suivi sur l'éducation 2019 - Rapport sur l'égalité des genres: Bâtir des ponts pour promouvoir l'égalité des genres](#). Paris: UNESCO, 2019. World Bank. World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington DC, 2018.

⁶ UNESCO. [Enfants non scolarisés - données interactives](#). Résumé pour le Mali et le Niger.

⁷ Kobiané, J.F. et Bougma, M. RGPH 2006, [Rapport d'analyse du thème IV: Instruction, Alphabétisation et Scolarisation](#). Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso: Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie, 2009.

⁸ UNICEF. [L'éducation en péril en Afrique de l'Ouest et centrale](#), août 2019.

Generalisations about the situation of girls' education are often misleading, as the development of education for girls varies greatly across regions in Mali, Niger or Burkina Faso due to cultural, economic, and geographical reasons, and more recently due to political and security reasons. For example, religion, distance from urban centres, marriage practices, migration patterns, type of disability, the demand for seasonal work, revenues, as well as conflicts (see Box 1) influence girls' enrolment and school completion rates in a country.⁹

1.2. Sahel countries gradually embrace inclusive education

1.2.1. Children with disabilities, the forgotten children of the education system

Worldwide, some **93 to 150 million** children (under age 14) have a disability.¹⁰ However, UNICEF points out that these global estimates are largely speculative, and outdated, and are based on data of variable quality and methods that are too inconsistent to be reliable. **A national data review in the three countries reveals that knowledge about children with disabilities is limited and questionable** (see Box 2). Mali and Niger do not have robust data on the prevalence of disability, neither do they have gender-disaggregated data. As for Burkina Faso, it carried out the first census of children with disabilities in 2013, but it is still limited. In all three countries, it is not known how many children with disabilities are in or out of school, why they are not in school, and what barriers they face. **The lack of data on disability is mentioned by stakeholders as one of the reasons for the weak response to the issue of educating children with disabilities.**¹¹ Data collection on disability is hampered by a myriad of factors: the definition of disability varies from place to place and from year to year, as does the design of studies and the methodology used, so that the trends recorded vary from country to country.

The best estimates suggest that in low- and lower-middle-income countries, about **40 % of children with disabilities are not enrolled** in primary school and **55 % are not enrolled in secondary school**, although these figures can vary widely from one country to another.¹² The literacy rate for adults with disabilities is **3%**. For women, it is even lower, i.e. **1 %**.

⁹ OXFAM. [L'éducation des filles en Afrique. Série sur l'éducation et l'égalité des genres. Aperçu de programme](#), décembre 2005.

¹⁰ UNICEF. [The State of the World's Children. Children with Disabilities](#), 2013.

¹¹ GPE, « [Disability and Inclusive Education: A Stocktake of Education Sector Plans and GPE-Funded Grants](#) », document de travail 3. Washington DC: Global Partnership for Education, 2018.

¹² UIS. [Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries](#), n°49, March 2018 ; Mizunoya, S., S. Mitra and I. Yamasaki. [Towards Inclusive Education](#). Innocenti Working Paper No.2016-03. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research, 2016; UNGEI, Leonard Cheshire. [Still left behind: Pathways to inclusive education for girls with disabilities](#), 2017.

According to a GPE study,¹³ in the majority of the sub-Saharan African countries studied – including Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso – **less than 5% of children with disabilities are enrolled in primary school.**



Box 2. Estimated number of children with disabilities in school in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso

In **Niger**, the Statistics Directorate of the Ministry of Primary Education recorded **10,413, 10,685 and 11,203 children with disabilities enrolled** in 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively.

In **Burkina Faso**, the latest data collected in the field from decentralised directorates of the Ministry of National Education and Literacy (MENA) and from associations show that **10,000 children with disabilities are enrolled in primary school.** As for post-primary and secondary education, 5,390 students with visual, hearing, motor and mental disabilities have been recorded, including 2,702 girls. According to the 2006 General Census of Population and Housing (RGPH), the vast majority of people with disabilities live in rural areas (80.6%) and 85.4% of them have no education, compared to 14.6% for people with disabilities in urban areas.

In **Mali**, according to the 2009 RGPH, the net enrolment ratio (NER) in primary school for children with disabilities is 42.9%, while the overall NER is 47.5% (49.8% and 45.2% respectively for boys and girls). People with multiple disabilities are more disadvantaged than those with other types of disability, with a NER of 22.3%. 62.2% of people with disabilities in urban areas attend school, compared with only 36.4% in rural areas.

Even when children with disabilities are enrolled in school, they are usually unable to learn because the curriculum is not adapted to their needs or because teachers do not have the time or ability to provide individual support. Children with disabilities are left behind in the global efforts to improve the education of children and young people.

A study by the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)¹⁴ shows that **the gap between children with and without disabilities has widened sharply in developing countries.** While primary school completion rates have increased significantly for children without disabilities, lower gains have been recorded for children with disabilities. The backlog of children with disabilities in primary and lower secondary school completion, literacy or school enrolment continues to grow. The report shows that this gap is the result of disability-related exclusion. The study also found that **children with an intellectual disability or multiple disabilities are at a greater disadvantage** than children with a physical, hearing or visual disability or with speech disorders.

¹³ GPE, Disability and Inclusive Education, op. cit.

¹⁴ Wodon, Q. et al. [The Price of Exclusion: disability and education. The challenge of inclusive education in sub-Saharan Africa.](#) Washington DC: World Bank, December 2018.

1.2.2. From special education to inclusive education

Special education is the poor relation of the education system. There are only a few specialised institutions and they are generally located in the capital or in large urban areas. They are not able to take large numbers of children (see Box 3). Moreover, special schools are expensive. Sponsoring by foundations only enables the schooling of a small number of children. Christian organisations — Catholic education and Protestant evangelical missions — are important sponsors. They also promote girls' education by raising awareness among parents and the community.

In Burkina Faso, DPOs, religious organisations and charities have played a pioneering role in special and inclusive education since the 1970s. Today, they are still very predominant in this field. With the support of foundations and NGOs, they have developed expertise and designed innovative projects. However, due to the lack of funding and partners, they are not able to develop projects in accordance with their ambitions and cover all education levels and all types of disabilities.

In contrast to Burkina Faso where DPOs have spearheaded inclusive education, in Niger it has been driven by NGOs and international organisations, including HI which implements projects in cooperation with state structures. The special education structures run by DPOs are located in the capital and in large urban centres such as Maradi or Zinder. They would like to invest in inclusive education and establish their own inclusive schools, but they need partners and financial resources.

In Mali, in the 1980s, DPOs initiated an inclusive education dynamic by sending children with disabilities to mainstream schools and then by creating inclusive classrooms within their special schools, with the support of NGOs. However, they do not have the necessary resources to expand their activities.

In all three countries, DPOs have formed federations and networks to better influence national education policies. Although there are many civil and religious society actors, they do not cooperate. They share little of their experience and only focus on two types of disabilities, namely visual and hearing disabilities. Organisations promoting inclusive education are supported by foundations and international NGOs, but their funding is declining. They have to find new partners and other sources of funding.

Box 3. Estimated number of special and inclusive schools in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso

- Mali: there are 19 special education institutions but they do not cover the whole country and are concentrated in the capital. They teach more than 2,500 children with all types of disabilities. The existing inclusive schools are pilot projects initiated by NGOs¹⁵.
- Niger: there are 61 schools receiving children with disabilities, namely 27 integrated schools (16 for visually impaired children and 11 for hearing-impaired children), 4 special schools, and 30 inclusive schools supported by NGOs. In addition, there are 3 private centres providing early activities and rehabilitation for children with intellectual disabilities¹⁶.
- Burkina Faso: in 2015, out of a total of 475 Basic Education Districts (CEBs), a number of CEBs (10 in Kadiogo Province, 6 the Boulgou Province, 1 in Yatenga Province and 1 in Ganzourgou Province) joined a primary education inclusion scheme with the support of NGOs, Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and religious structures. At the post-primary and secondary levels, some public institutions in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso are working towards integration by taking in students with disabilities who are supported in collaboration with structures promoting inclusive education. There are 7 Catholic Transitional Inclusive Education Classrooms (CTISs) in 7 provinces (Boulgou, Boulkiemdé, Kossi, Sanematenga, Soum, Yatenga and Zoundweogo); 2 of them are for the inclusion of children with hearing disabilities, and the 5 others are for children with visual disabilities¹⁷.

1.2.3. International organisations and Disabled People's Organisations give impetus to inclusive education

At the World Education Forum in Dakar (Senegal) in 2000, governments, development agencies, civil society organisations and private sector stakeholders committed themselves to achieving Education for All (EFA) by 2015 through inclusive education. Although not all the goals have been reached,¹⁸ gender equality and inclusion have been recognised as crucial for the realisation of the right to EFA in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

From 2007 onwards, the governments of Burkina Faso, Niger and more recently Mali have gradually engaged in developing inclusive education strategies, but there are still significant challenges. These

¹⁵ DNEPS, Working Paper, 8 March 2016.

¹⁶ FNPH, Shadow report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Niger, February 2018.

¹⁷ MENA, National Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education in Burkina Faso 2018-2022, April 2018.

¹⁸ See GPE. [Results Report 2019](#).

countries still lack inclusive education policies at the national and local levels. The medical model of disability is still too often used, and governments do not always translate the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)¹⁹ – signed in 2007 by the three countries – into a workable policy.²⁰ However, governments have recognised the limitations of special education, as it reaches only a limited number of persons with disabilities and at a high cost.

With the support of the Global Partnership for Education,²¹ international organisations and NGOs,²² these countries are moving from funding special education to piloting inclusive education in mainstream schools. Since 2004, HI has been implementing inclusive education projects in the Sahel. It aims to create an inclusive and responsive learning environment by working at the policy, service and community levels through capacity building, advocacy, and technical assistance.

HI's experience in the target countries shows that the vast majority of school-age girls and boys with disabilities do not have access to any form of education due to family poverty, the negative attitude of actors (parents, community, educational actors, etc.), and the lack of opportunities adapted to their needs.

Figure 2. Current HI inclusive education projects in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali

	Area of intervention	Target schools
Burkina Faso	Department of Kadiogo (Centre Region); Department of Boulgou (Centre-East Region); Departments of Séno and Soum (Sahel Region).	959 mainstream schools (including 7 integrated schools): 3 pre-schools, 947 primary schools and 9 secondary schools.
Niger	Districts of Maradi and Madarounfa (Maradi Region); District of Tahoua (Tahoua Region); City of Niamey (Niamey Region)	50 schools (45 mainstream schools and 5 special education secondary schools): 9 pre-schools, 40 primary schools and 1 secondary schools.
Mali	District of Sikasso (Sikasso Region), District of Timbuktu (Timbuktu Region) and District of Bamako (Bamako Region).	52 primary schools (45 mainstream schools and 7 special schools).

¹⁹ [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

²⁰ HI. [Éducation inclusive, pour une école inclusive et solidaire](#). Dossier éducation inclusive. #School4all Campaign, June 2018.

²¹ The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is a multi-stakeholder partnership and funding platform that mobilises global and national support for education in developing countries, focusing on the most vulnerable children and youths. The GPE signed a partnership with Mali in 2006, and with Niger and Burkina Faso in 2002.

²² HI. [Éducation inclusive, pour une école inclusive et solidaire](#). Dossier éducation inclusive, op. cit.

2. Intersectional analysis for addressing the needs of girls with disabilities more effectively

2.1. Discrimination against girls with disabilities in education

The gender analysis (see Box 4.) and the social model of disability (see Box 5) clearly show that girls with disabilities are affected by various systems of social domination based on gender and disability.

Indeed, girls with disabilities experience specific oppression for being girls and persons with disabilities. This occurs in all spheres, public and private, and results in girls with disabilities being exposed to specific inequalities compared to boys with disabilities and to girls without disabilities regarding access to education, training, and health care, and in other fields.

Girls with disabilities are more prone to isolation, stigma and discrimination. They are less likely to receive education or vocational training or to find a job than boys with disabilities or girls without disabilities, and they are at greater risk of abuse, including sexual violence in all its forms. **Women with disabilities are twice as likely, and girls with disabilities are up to four times more likely to be affected by violence than their peers without disabilities.**²³ They are among the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in African societies.

Lack of access to education increases vulnerability and poverty levels, and exposes children to greater social exclusion, violence and discrimination.

In a vicious circle, poverty creates disability, especially among women.²⁴ Faced with limited resources, they are more likely than their male peers to be deprived of basic necessities such as food and medicine, and have less access to assistive devices and rehabilitation. **Disability in turn contributes to poverty** because of the additional expenses it entails.

As a result, girls with disabilities are more likely than girls without disabilities to grow up in poor families, and this places them at an educational disadvantage.

Box 4. Definition of gender

Gender refers to the social attributes, opportunities, roles and responsibilities associated with being a man or a woman, and the relationships between women and men, and girls and boys. Gender determines what is expected, permitted and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. These codes are learned; they can change and vary between and within cultures.

²³ UNICEF. The State of the World's Children. Children with Disabilities. op. cit.

²⁴ Rousso H. [Education for All: A Gender and Disability Perspective](#), CSW, Disabilities Unlimited, 2013, p. 6.

Box 5. Definition of disability

Disability is defined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as “an evolving concept. Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.

This definition is based on the social model of disability which emphasises the importance of interaction and the fact that society is the main factor contributing to disability. It contrasts with the medical model of disability where the focus is on a person's impairment. It is on the basis of the social model of disability that children with albinism have been included in the study, as they are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and physical and sexual violence.

2.2. The proven benefits of education for girls and society

Choosing not to invest in quality education for all girls and boys would be very costly in terms of economic and human development. The income loss associated with gender discrimination in social institutions²⁵ is estimated at **US\$120 billion for West Africa**. On the other hand, providing the same level of education to girls and boys could bring more than **\$308 million a day to the poorest countries**.²⁶

Therefore, investing in quality primary and secondary education can be extremely profitable for Sahel countries in the long term, beyond the benefits it brings to each individual child. Education helps reduce extreme poverty, brings economic prosperity, empowers women and girls, improves health, and promotes peace and security. There is evidence that gender equality in education has a substantial impact on many other MDGs, including economic growth, health, nutrition, agricultural productivity and the reduction of inequalities.²⁷

²⁵ Discriminatory social institutions are formal and informal laws, norms and social practices that impede women's rights or exclude women and thus limit their access to justice, resources and opportunities. The Social Institutions and Gender Equality (SIGI) indicator measures discriminatory social institutions through five dimensions: discrimination in the Family Code, attacks on physical integrity, attacks on individual freedoms, restricted access to resources and goods, and preference for boys. According to the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Mali and Niger are among the countries with the highest levels of discrimination, while Burkina Faso has a relatively lower level; cf. Bouchama, N., G. Ferrant, L. Fuiet, A. Meneses et A. Thim, « [Les inégalités de genre dans les institutions sociales ouest-africaines](#) », Notes ouest-africaines, n°13. Paris: Éditions OCDE, 2018.

²⁶ Save the children, UNESCO. [Promouvoir le droit des filles à l'éducation en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre](#), 2017; Wodon, Q. et al. [Missed Opportunities: The High Cost of Not Educating Girls](#), Washington DC: World Bank, 2018.

²⁷ Partenariat Mondial pour l'Éducation. [Promouvoir l'égalité des sexes dans l'éducation dans les pays du GPE](#). Note d'orientation, septembre 2016; PNUD. Promotion de l'égalité des sexes et de l'autonomisation des femmes en Afrique, 2016.

According to the Global Partnership for Education,²⁸ an additional year of schooling can increase a woman's income by 10-20%. If all mothers completed primary school, the child mortality rate would be reduced by $\frac{2}{3}$, saving 189,000 lives. Each additional year of education reduces the probability of contracting HIV by 6.7%. Education empowers women to fight for their rights and protects girls from harmful practices such as early marriage or genital mutilation. Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso are among the 6 countries in the world where **more than half of women are married before the age of 18**.²⁹ In Niger, 77% of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18, and 48% had a child before that age. In Mali, 9 out of 10 women were victims of female genital mutilation, and 72% of women accepted the practice as a rite of passage to adulthood and a determining factor in their "marriageability". Children born to educated women are six times less likely to receive no vaccine. In Burkina Faso, girls are 7 times less likely to undergo FGM when their mothers are educated, and children are 4 times less likely to suffer from severe stunting and 4 times more likely to survive beyond the age of 4.

In addition, studies show that **quality education for children with disabilities generates significant economic and social benefits**. In a set of 12 developing countries, each additional year of school attendance for students with disabilities reduces by 2 to 5 percentage points the likelihood that they will subsequently belong to the two poorest quintiles.³⁰ Girls with disabilities in rural areas are even less likely to have access to education than those living in towns.

However, research is still needed to understand how wealth influences the educational trajectories of girls with disabilities from middle- and upper-class families. On the other hand, we know that girls with reduced mobility have better access to education than girls who are blind, deaf or have other disabilities, especially if education is community-based, as pupils with reduced mobility are less likely to need adapted teaching techniques and equipment if the physical environment is accessible.

However, **it is not clear how gender interacts with the different types of disabilities**. In fact, despite the growing commitment of governments, donors and national and international development organisations to gender and disability-inclusive education, there is little solid documentation and evidence on the marginalisation of girls with disabilities in education and how gender interacts with disability and various other factors, especially in West Africa. Research in this area is limited and comes down to small qualitative studies mainly.

²⁸ Partenariat Mondial pour l'Éducation. [Éliminer les obstacles à l'éducation des filles](#), 29 April 2019.

²⁹ UNICEF. Mariages d'enfants, grossesses précoces et formation de la famille en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre. New York: UNICEF, 2015.

³⁰ GPE, Disability and Inclusive Education, *op. cit.*; UNICEF. The State of the World's Children. Children with Disabilities, *op. cit.*

2.3. Invisibility of girls with disabilities in figures, studies and education policies

The literature review carried out by Leonard Cheshire Disability and UNGEI³¹ shows that little is still known about the situation of girls with disabilities since the first EFA study in 2003.³² There are still many obstacles, including the fact that **the issue of education is analysed through the gender or disability lens but usually without taking into account the intersection between gender and disability** (see Box 6).

Agencies committed to gender equity in education overlook the specific situation of girls and women with disabilities and the additional barriers they face, and those committed to equity and inclusion for persons with disabilities do not adopt a gender perspective. Consequently, while disability and gender are important factors of exclusion, they are often addressed separately. The lack of research on the education of girls with disabilities, particularly in relation to boys with disabilities and girls without disabilities, is a reflection of this. It is therefore difficult to clearly identify gender and disability intersectional prejudice.

Since the 2000s, a twin-track approach has been used to realise girls' right to education.³³ We have a gender-neutral approach, on the one hand, and a gender approach that specifically targets girls, on the other hand. Examples of gender-neutral interventions that have proven more beneficial to girls than boys include those that reduce the distance pupils have to travel to school (as in Niger), initial literacy in the mother tongue (as in Niger or Mali), and the introduction of sustainable nutrition programmes in schools (as in Niger).

It appears that **the gender-neutral approach is an essential step** in improving girls' performance, particularly in primary education, **but is not sufficient to introduce gender equality in education**. A wide range of interventions and initiatives is needed to improve girls' education so that they can succeed in primary and secondary school, as demonstrated by the experience in Burkina Faso.

To implement interventions that specifically target girls, careful analysis of girls' education at the regional and national levels is crucial, as well as appropriate budgets. These actions may target girls directly (e.g. by giving them more secondary school places), or they may attempt to change the gender relations that affect girls' participation and performance (e.g. communities expecting girls to marry early, or teaching styles that discourage girls' participation in class).

³¹ Leonard Cheshire and UNGEI. Still left behind, *op. cit.*

³² Rousso H. [Education for All: A Gender and Disability Perspective](#), CSW, Disabilities Unlimited, 2013.

³³ OXFAM. L'éducation des filles en Afrique, *op. cit.*

The study by Leonard Cheshire Disability and UNICEF shows that **the intersection between gender and disability (taking into account the type of disability) needs to be analysed in depth** to help formulate and monitor policies and programmes. According to these organisations, more attention should also be paid to the power relations on which gender roles are built, and effective inclusive education practices should be shared.

Although child protection issues are recognised, more rigorous monitoring is needed regarding the development and implementation of policies. In the end, the most daunting obstacle to equity in education for girls with disabilities is possibly their invisibility in figures, studies and public policies.

Box 6. Definition of intersectionality

Intersectionality is a sociological concept that refers to the situation of people experiencing simultaneously several forms of domination or discrimination in society.

The concept was first used in 1989 by Kimberley Crenshaw, a black American lawyer who was in the **black feminism** movement of the 1970s. It highlights the intersection between sexism and racism by explaining how African-American women are doubly victimised – as black people, and as women – and why they were not taken into account in the feminist discourse at the time.

This theory met with great success in gender studies, a new field of multidisciplinary research that studies gender relations in society.

The concept of intersectionality was then broadened to refer to the more general interactions between gender and other grounds of discrimination such as disability, through the social model lens.

The intersections between gender and disability for people with disabilities are varied and complex. Gender roles influence their lives, and their experiences of disability are also closely linked to gender.

According to critical theories on gender and disability, the intersection of the different realities and struggles of women with disabilities is still little discussed. Generally, women with disabilities are just said to experience double discrimination on the basis of their disability and the fact of being women. However, the reality is more complex. This study proposes to explore these complex and intertwined social relationships.

3. Objectives

Thus, conducting this study with an intersectional perspective seemed essential in order to analyse the situation of girls with disabilities by combining the effects and dynamics of several vulnerability factors. While important achievements have been made in access to education for children with disabilities and in the development of more inclusive strategies and practices at the level of decision makers and communities, it is becoming increasingly necessary to strengthen the gender approach in interventions on the ground.

The results of the study will serve two purposes:

- **Implementation:** the results will be used to guide the interventions of HI and its partners in the field of education in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, as well as in other countries where inclusive education initiatives are implemented.
- **Advocacy:** key messages from the study will be shared with decision makers, civil society actors and donors to raise awareness of the importance of developing gender-sensitive inclusive education interventions.

3.1. General Objective

Describe and analyse how gender, age and disability shape and influence the experiences of girls with disabilities (aged 6-16), both in and out of school, in terms of access to education and/or retention in mainstream primary and secondary schools.

3.2. Specific Objectives

- Identify the difficulties encountered by girls with disabilities in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali in terms of enrolment and retention in school, taking into account the specificities of the different types of disabilities and the level of severity.
- Make recommendations with a view to developing practices, approaches and strategies that can be used to overcome the specific barriers faced by girls with disabilities in accessing education and staying in school.

Research questions

- To what extent does the interrelation between disability and gender influence the educational pathways of girls with disabilities?
- What are the characteristics related to the type and degree of disability (physical, visual, hearing and, intellectual disability)?
- What are the characteristics related to the age of girls with disabilities?
- What issues do young girls with disabilities face, particularly in terms of child protection?
- What contextual characteristics emerge in the three countries of the study and in the different study areas?
- What role do religion and popular beliefs play in the discrimination against girls with disabilities?
- What conducive factors for the education of girls with disabilities can be identified in the different study areas (family/community/institutions/policy/etc.)?

1. Study design

Due to the lack of reliable quantitative data on disability in the target countries and the invisibility of girls with disabilities in educational figures and programmes as described above, it was decided to conduct a **qualitative, comparative and participatory study using an intersectional approach**.

This approach **based mainly on testimony, observation and debate** seemed to be the most appropriate and relevant for analysing the complexity of interactions, studying opinion mechanisms, perceptions and social understanding, and observing the interactions, tensions and dynamics between actors and children with disabilities. **The comparative approach** used in the three countries and in different contexts (rural/urban area, capital/province) helped **identify trends and specificities**. At the same time, a critical literature review on “gender, disability and inclusive education” was carried out (academic sources, press, reports, official documents and project documents), as well as an **analysis of existing statistical data**. **Fifteen days of fieldwork** were necessary in each of the three countries to carry out the survey.

➤< Box 7. Limitations of the study

This research does not purport to provide an exhaustive analysis of the educational situation of girls with disabilities in these three countries, since their situation changes according to the region, ethnicity, and the security context. Although the results of the study cannot apply to the entire country, the comparative analysis on a micro scale nevertheless makes it possible to identify avenues for reflection and intervention.

Furthermore, this research did not cover the educational situation of girls with disabilities living in fragile areas affected by conflicts where schools are under attack, or girls in nomadic and migrant populations, as this deserves specific and in-depth research.

2. Location

The field surveys took place successively in **Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso between January and May 2019**. In each country, the selection of the survey areas was made in consultation with the HI teams in the field and the regional inclusive education coordination unit based in Dakar. The selection focused on areas where HI was implementing inclusive education projects so as to facilitate access to the field and to the actors. The selection was also limited by the security situation in all three countries, because some areas were not accessible to the consultant. The duration of the field work in the provinces was restricted for safety reasons.

In Mali, the survey took place in **Bamako** and **Sikasso**. Sikasso was selected because HI has been active there for a long time; as for Bamako, it is a recent area of operation, but other inclusive education stakeholders are present on the ground. The comparative approach made it possible to analyse the education of girls with disabilities in the capital and in the regions – more precisely in Mali's second-largest city – both in areas where HI was active and in others where it was not, in order to avoid skewing the results.

In Niger, the survey took place mainly in **Maradi** and **Niamey**. Maradi was selected because HI was implementing a major inclusive education programme in the city, which also included health and vocational training components. Most of the observations and interviews with children with disabilities and associative, educational, community and religious actors took place in Maradi. In Niamey, interviews were conducted with institutional and associative actors at the national level as well as with heads of special schools. This helped examine the situation of girls with disabilities in greater depth, both in the capital of Niger and in a province reputed to be religiously conservative.

In Burkina Faso, the survey took place in Ouagadougou and its outlying rural communes (30 km maximum) where HI has been working for a long time. This helped compare the situation in the capital and in rural areas.

3. Target Population

The target population for the study is **girls with disabilities of school age (6-16) who are in school (in mainstream and special schools) and out of school**. All types of disabilities were taken into account (motor, mental and sensory disabilities), as well as severity. **Children and young people with albinism** were also included since they are often victims of prejudice, superstition, persecution, and even abduction and ritual killings, because local beliefs attribute healing powers to their organs.

However, in order to analyse the specific barriers to education for this group, it was important to compare their situation with that of boys with disabilities of the same age and to survey the perceptions of actors in the living environment of girls with disabilities, namely:

- Fathers and mothers of children with disabilities (or family members where applicable).
- Educational actors: teachers, principals of mainstream and special schools, associations of mother educators (AMEs), parents' associations (APEs), school management committees (COGES), and inspectors.
- Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), women's associations, associations promoting education, NGOs, community and religious leaders.
- Institutional actors: town councils, ministries and regional directorates working in the fields of education, the promotion of women and children, and support for people with disabilities.



Box 8. Definition of special, integrated and inclusive education

Special education: Children with disabilities are educated separately from children without disabilities, usually in special schools or institutions.

Integrated education: Children with disabilities are educated in mainstream schools but either separately from other children in special classrooms or alongside their peers without disabilities in mainstream classrooms without any accommodation or adaptation to meet their needs.

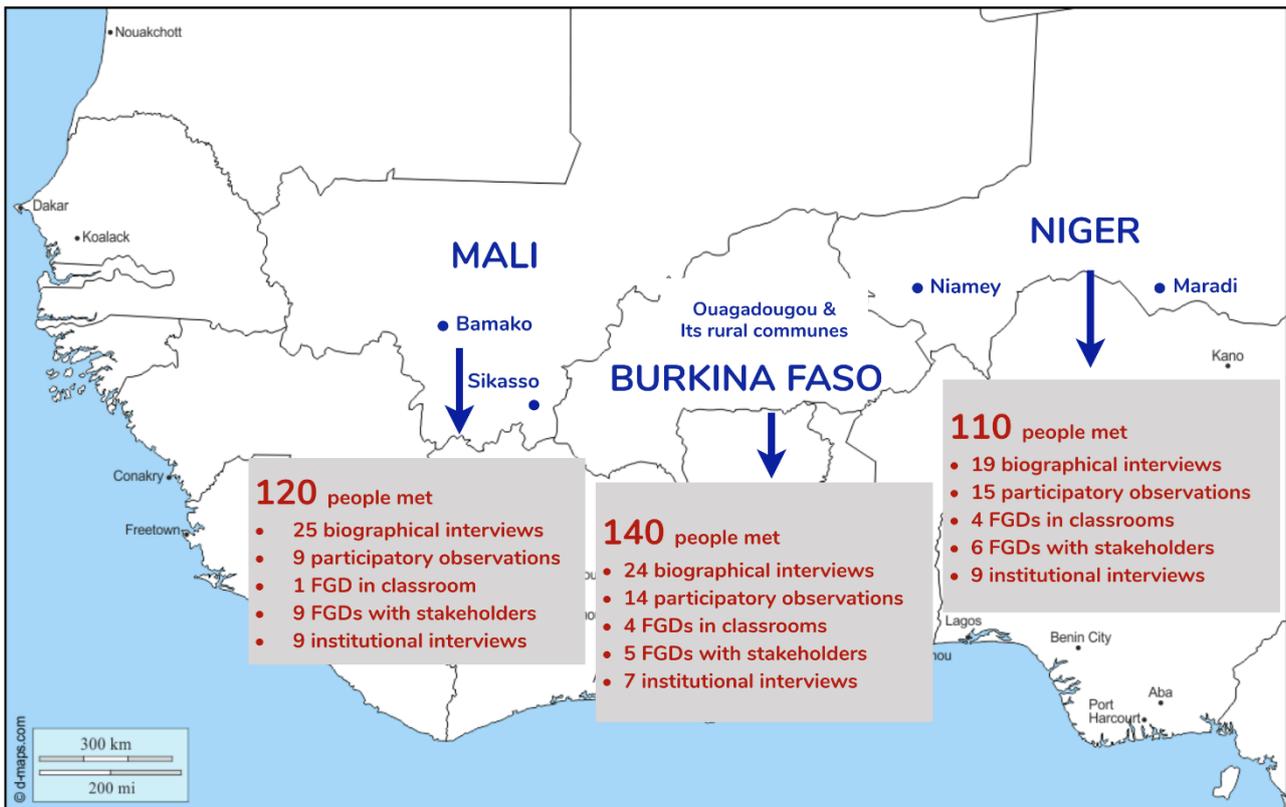
Inclusive education: Refers not only to disability, but also to the concept that education systems must include and effectively serve all children, with a commitment to leave no one behind. All factors of exclusion need to be addressed by taking into account the diversity of learners' needs through inclusive practices in the learning process, in cultures and communities, and by reducing exclusion within and outside the education system.

Inclusive education covers a variety of hard-to-reach and marginalised children, such as street children, working children, children from minority ethnic, religious and linguistic groups, nomadic and displaced children, and children living in informal settings. This means that an array of targeted interventions tailored to the specific situation of each child is needed to ensure that the education system is inclusive.

Initially, the focus of this study was on the formal education system only (mainstream primary and secondary schools, but not literacy centres, non-formal educational institutions or special schools). Once in the field, we considered that it was important to include special schools in the survey in order to find out about the educational pathways of children with disabilities attending these types of institutions and their possible transfer to mainstream schools, and to explore the dynamics and practices of inclusive education in these institutions.

4. Sample

Figure 3. Sample and study areas



5. Methodology used

5.1. Participatory observation

The objective was to observe children with disabilities in their school environment (integrated, inclusive and special education institutions), their interaction with peers and teachers, their behaviour, and their participation in class. The classrooms were selected directly on the spot as we had to adapt to some constraints (absence of teachers, strikes, absence of children with disabilities), but we were able to observe different types of institutions, especially in the areas where HI was not present. It was not possible to conduct more in-depth interviews with children without disabilities for lack of time and because the situation did not allow it (crowded classrooms with more than 100 pupils sometimes).

Given the time constraint, participatory observation proved to be the most effective way to identify children with different types of disabilities and conduct biographical interviews with them. Moreover, for the interviews with children, schools proved to be a more appropriate setting for the participatory observations than parents' homes or the HI office. Children were more comfortable speaking in the presence of their teachers trained in Braille or sign language who served as interpreters, in particular for children with hearing impairment.

The observations were conducted in schools supported by HI as well as in schools where HI was not involved, in order not to bias the results of the study. Public and private schools were visited, as well as Catholic schools and madrasas; most of them were primary schools, and some were secondary schools and technical and vocational institutions. The participatory observations and the interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours per school, and were structured as follows:

- Prior interview with the school principal to explain the purpose of the study and what the team intended to do in the classroom with the children
- Introduction to the teacher and his or her class by the principal Identification of children with disabilities in the classroom Explaining the presence of the team to the children
- Observation (about 15-20 minutes) of teaching methods, the behaviour and participation of children with disabilities in class, and their relationships with children without disabilities and teachers Shooting video sequences
- Interviews with identified children with disabilities The interviews were usually conducted in the principal's office for the sake of privacy, or in an isolated place in the school yard if no other space was available.
- Focus group discussions (FGD) were held in the special or integrated classrooms. For these discussions, the teachers served as interpreters. Sometimes, the observation and the focus group discussion lasted more than an hour.

5.2. Biographical interviews

These in-depth, semi-structured interviews helped account for individual pathways by associating qualitative and longitudinal data. The biographical interviews helped **identify key stages** in the stigmatisation and discrimination process and document how gender, disability and age play a role along the way. Girls **and** boys with disabilities in and out of school were interviewed to compare their experiences and to document how gender contributes to discrimination and stigmatisation among children with disabilities. The study focused on interviews with adolescents (aged 10-11 upward) and young people with hearing, visual or motor disabilities (with varying degrees of severity) who did not have severe intellectual disabilities, in order to lay the foundations for dialogue and to receive structured and thoughtful accounts of their experiences of disability, looking back over the different stages of their lives. The biographical interviews with children with disabilities in

school were mostly conducted after the participatory observations in the school compound, in an isolated place. However, the identification of out-of-school children with disabilities was more complicated. Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), social affairs officers at the town council, and teachers were mobilised to identify and meet them, either at home, at the HI office, or at school. Each interview lasted 30-60 minutes.

5.3. Focus group discussions (FGDs)

In collaboration with stakeholders working with girls and boys with disabilities, groups of 6 to 10 people were formed, for example groups of fathers and mothers of children with disabilities, community leaders, disabled people's organisations, women's associations promoting girls' education, educational actors, and religious and community leaders. The FGDs helped examine the testimonies of children with disabilities in relation with their environment, analyse the views of these actors and better understand whether they supported children with disabilities in their educational pathways or were an obstacle to their education. The FGDs were generally held at the HI office or in a classroom. They lasted 1-2 hours.

5.4. Institutional interviews

Several individual interviews were conducted with institutional stakeholders such as officials in ministries and regional directorates dealing with education, the advancement of women and children, and support for people with disabilities; as well as with deputy mayors and their social affairs officers. The main was to examine some points in greater depth (national and local strategy for inclusive education and training, responses by type of disability, protection of children with disabilities, role of civil society organisations, etc.). Individual interviews were conducted with NGO and special school managers when they were unable to attend the FGDs. These interviews lasted about 1 hour.

5.5. Recruitment of research assistants

Research assistants were recruited and trained in all three countries to support the field survey. They were responsible for preparing the ground, facilitating the organisation of the individual and group interviews, and translating during interviews with people who were not fluent in French. Most interviews and FGDs were conducted in the local language. The assistants also participated in documenting the survey with notes, photos, videos and audio recordings. They also transcribed the interviews conducted in the local language.

Results and Discussions

The field survey found that girls with disabilities are more discriminated against in education because of their gender and their disability. The survey team tried to better understand the role of religion and popular beliefs in this double discrimination. The researchers looked at how gender, disability and age shaped the experiences of girls with disabilities regarding access to education and school retention; they also looked at other factors that aggravate their discrimination, specificities related to the type and degree of disability, and protection issues. Moreover, the team tried to identify common points and characteristics in the different environments and countries studied.

1. Influence of religion and popular beliefs in the education of girls with disabilities in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso

The negative perceptions and attitudes of families and the community in general due to popular beliefs that are still firmly rooted in society constitute one of the strongest barriers to the schooling of children with disabilities, and girls in particular.

- In Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, as in other West African countries, **disability representations are mainly spiritual, divine and relational**. Perceptions of disability are strongly influenced by popular beliefs and parents' ignorance about the real (medical) causes of disability. **These representations vary from one ethnic group to another**.
- Disability is most often seen as a « tragedy », a « punishment » inflicted on the family by evil spirits, resulting in discrimination and shame for all family members. In most cases, **the mother is blamed** for violating taboos. In Niger, some mothers have to leave the community to escape stigma.
- **This negative perception is more accentuated for certain severe disabilities** (especially intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, cerebral palsy and albinism) **and for girls**. Children are sometimes kept hidden and are not entered in birth registers. In Niger, girls with severe disabilities are more likely to be abandoned or killed at birth, and they have higher mortality rates than their male counterparts. According to popular belief in all three countries, body parts of persons with disabilities, including persons with albinism and persons with intellectual disabilities, have magical powers. People with disabilities are mistreated, mutilated or killed to obtain parts of their bodies for use in rituals, potions or amulets with the aim of becoming rich, gaining social status, being loved or defeating competitors. In Mali, their body parts are particularly in demand during elections because some people are

convinced that tearing off the limb of an albino can win them an election. **Girls with intellectual disabilities are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence**, because “some people believe that having sex with a girl who has an intellectual disability will bring them wealth or power, or cure them of AIDS”.

- Due to poverty, access to care for children with disabilities is low, and quality is poor. **Parents find the remedies of traditional healers** appealing, but these remedies often worsen their children's health, and can even be fatal.
- In all three countries, the interviews show that **the negative perceptions of disability are more often attributable to popular beliefs than to religion**. Actually, religion – be it Islam or Christianity – extols the virtues of care and protection for people with disabilities.
- However, some parents prefer Islamic education for their daughters because they fear the values and behaviours promoted by modern education, which can be contrary to cultural norms (see Box 9). In Niger, parents more readily send their children to Koranic schools. Almost all the children with disabilities met in Niger during the study attended Koranic school in parallel with a mainstream or special education.
- Catholic schools occasionally take children with disabilities (even from Muslim families) in Niger (*École des Sœurs de Tibiri*) and in Mali (*École Sainte Thérèse*), and sponsor their education. In Burkina Faso, Christian organisations – Catholic and Protestant – were pioneers in the field of inclusive education, and still dominate the sector today. Christian organisations encourage parents to send their daughters with disabilities to school by fully financing their education (accommodation, transport, canteen, school fees, etc.).



Box 9. Madrasas and Koranic schools³⁴

The madrasas are public schools offering religious primary and secondary education (Arabic language, Koran and Islamic sciences) alongside the learning of French, reading, writing and arithmetic, from primary to secondary school. With the rise of the Wahhabi “reformist” movement in Mali and Niger in particular, the number of madrasas has increased significantly over the last 20 or 30 years. At the same time, the number of traditional Koranic schools seems to be decreasing. Koranic schools are private, non-formal schools that do not adhere to the national education agenda, whereas Franco-Arab madrasas are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Traditional Koranic schools provide religious education in Arabic and are exclusively devoted to Islam. Children learn verses of the Koran by heart and devote part of their time to begging.

³⁴ See Lozneau, S., Humeau, P. Écoles coraniques et éducation pour tous: quels partenariats possibles ? Mali, Niger, Sénégal. AFD, 2014.

Begging is said to have been originally instituted to enable disadvantaged families to enrol their children in school. Every day, each pupil devotes some time to begging for food. The system has been perverted and students often spend a large part of the day begging for their Koranic teacher instead of studying.

In general, people are more favourable to secular education nowadays, even if in some areas, particularly in rural areas, there is still some resistance or reluctance. However, they remain fundamentally committed to the Islamic education of their children.

Franco-Arab schools seem to offer an adequate response to the social demand for dual education. Yet, it often proves to be a solution, which, from the point of view of families falls between two stools: religious education is weaker there than in Koranic schools, and learning the Koran is often almost absent from the teaching.

The social context seems favourable to reflection and dialogue on the way(s) to reconcile the Koranic school project, on the one hand, and the secular school project, on the other hand. Governments seem to have opted for the integration of secular education into Koranic schools, although they are still looking for ways to implement this. According to the AFD study, the donor community generally seems to have failed to take into account the fundamentally cultural need of populations for dual education or the possible risks associated with the development of an Islam that is “foreign” to West African culture.

2. Discrimination related to the gender & disability intersectionality

In all three countries, boys and girls with disabilities experience similar instances of social exclusion at school. However, during the study meetings, girls with disabilities were regularly reported to face increased stigmatisation, lack of opportunities and further marginalisation compared to boys with disabilities. In particular, they are less likely to receive an education than boys with disabilities.

The opportunity costs of educating girls with disabilities are considered too high³⁵.

Socio-cultural and socio-economic factors play a significant role in a family’s decision not to send a girl to school or to take her out of school. Families and communities often favour boys at the expense of girls, resulting in differences in educational opportunities and outcomes. The traditional conception of the social roles of men and women influences the way families and communities invest in the education of children. Boys, who are oriented towards activities outside the household and are considered as future providers of financial resources, are more frequently enrolled, thus increasing their chance of paid employment, contrary to girls who are confined to the domestic sphere. In families where patriarchy prevails, a woman is a perpetual “stranger” because she will marry and join her husband's family.

³⁵ OXFAM, Girls' Education in Africa. op. cit.

The interviews echoed the analysis of the Plan International report, *Let me Decide and Thrive*: **“Girls with disabilities are last in the priority list for scarce resources”**.³⁶ Indeed, children with disabilities are seen as an additional burden on the family, and girls with disabilities even more so, in a context where unequal gender norms severely restrict girls' opportunities to go to school. Persons with disabilities are considered as being “of lesser value” because they are “unprofitable”, which means that educating a girl with a disability is even seen as a loss. The opportunity costs of sending girls with disabilities to school are considered too high (see Box 10), especially because of the economic loss this represents, as they actively contribute to the economic survival of the household through begging and their participation in household chores.

Box 10. Girls' schooling in West Africa: high opportunity costs

Studies by OXFAM and Plan International show that these costs are related to the “services” that the family loses when a girl goes to school. Once the barriers presented by direct and indirect costs are lifted, it is important to understand these opportunity costs. The opportunity costs of sending girls to school are particularly high because the time-consuming and labour-intensive fuel and water fetching is usually done by school-age girls. Girls also care for younger siblings when their parents work or when there is no local child care service. Girls often sell products in local markets and are involved in a wide range of commercial activities. They are also the most affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Not only are they at greater risk of getting AIDS than boys, but they are also the ones who have to miss school to care for sick family members.

The decision to enrol a girl will depend on the economic and social benefits perceived by parents and people in their immediate environment.

The opportunity costs of sending girls to school vary across Africa. For example, in Sudan, the more educated a girl is, the less valuable she is considered to be, with significant opportunity costs for parents. By contrast, in much of southern Africa, an educated girl can command a higher bride than a less educated girl.

In the countries of the study, there is a need to reduce the opportunity costs of sending girls with disabilities to school by gradually changing the negative representations associated with girls with disabilities. To do this, we have to demonstrate that girls with disabilities who are educated are more likely to be self-sufficient, to have a job, to earn better wages, and to have a better quality of life; above all, they will no longer be a burden, but a source of income for their parents.

³⁶ Plan International, [Let me Decide and Thrive](#), December 2017.

In all the institutions visited, **boys with disabilities outnumber girls with disabilities**, whose numbers are drastically reduced as they progress through school. Boys with disabilities also have a longer school career than girls with disabilities. Girls generally have higher grade repetition, failure and dropout rates than boys due to heavy domestic burdens and unequal family investment in their education.

3. Age discrimination

As with girls without disabilities, the **age variable very often aggravates discrimination against girls with disabilities** compared to boys with disabilities, particularly because of the gender difference in treatment at the age of puberty.

When girls with disabilities manage to attend school, they often start school late. Consequently, they reach the age of puberty at the end of primary school. Few girls with disabilities complete primary school.

Puberty is a pivotal and sensitive time in a girl's life; at this period, gender inequalities are accentuated due to household chores and social pressures related to marriage and menstruation.

- **Late enrolment:** Girls with disabilities are often enrolled late. Some were refused because of their advanced age. In Niger, “transitional classes” have enabled girls with disabilities such as Yahanazu, a 19- year-old albino girl in Maradi, to attend school.
- **Domestic work:** Girls with disabilities lag behind because they have less time to do their homework; like girls without disabilities, they also have to do their share of domestic work, which is generally not the case for boys. In the study, some boys with disabilities reported that they also participated in domestic work or worked to help their mothers, particularly in Niger. Girls with disabilities sometimes participate more than their sisters, but they are spared difficult tasks (such as making fire when they are blind or working in the sun if when they have albinism).
- **Early marriage:** Girls with disabilities seem to be less at risk early marriage, as it is more difficult for them to marry, except in Mali where it seems that “[girls with disabilities withdrawn from school when they are between 12 and 15 years of age, so that they do not put up resistance to forced and early marriage³⁷](#). They usually marry older men or else boys who are themselves disabled. Many poor families try to marry off their daughters with disabilities as soon as possible in order to shift the burden of caring for them. Some parents are willing to give their daughters with disabilities in marriage “for free”, i.e. without

³⁷ Forced marriage is union without the free consent of both future spouses. Early marriage, on the other hand, is union in which one or both parties do not meet the minimum legal age for marriage.

demanding a bride price.” As a result, these girls are at greater risk of violence and of being denied access to education.

- **Puberty-related risks of dropping out:** girls with disabilities are withdrawn from school as they approach puberty in order to protect them from pregnancy outside of marriage, which is considered shameful. They are more vulnerable to sexual violence that may occur on the way to or from school. The lack of adapted toilets for girls with disabilities, especially during menstruation, is also a cause of repeated absences and dropout. It is estimated that 1 in 10 African female students misses school during menstruation due to a lack of adequate sanitation facilities.³⁸
- While the idea of enrolling girls with disabilities in school is beginning to make headway in the minds of parents, **parents do not encourage them to move on to secondary school.** Education stakeholders observe that when a boy with a disability performs poorly, parents are more likely to make him repeat a year, whereas in the case a girl with a disability, parents would take her out of school to help her mother at home and to reduce expenses.

4. Difficulties Compounded by Poverty and Place of Residence

Censuses and studies³⁹ show that the chances of attending school for a girl with a disability depend on her socio-economic background, the level of education of the head of the household, and her place of residence. All actors say that “[educating children with disabilities is primarily a question of poverty. If a girl with a disability is from a wealthy family, she will have no problem going to school.](#)” But living in a rural area is far more detrimental to a child's schooling than being a girl. Being a girl who is double orphan and living in a rural area considerably limits the chances of schooling. Similarly, being a girl with a disability in a rural area is a major obstacle to schooling. There are also significant disparities within countries and between regions.

- **Children with disabilities are often left with grandparents**, especially in Niger; in this country, the researchers came across many cases where parents of children with disabilities divorced after the father or mother had left home because of a child's disability. In polygamous remarriages, children with disabilities were often left with grandparents.
- **Begging:** the main concern for the stakeholders interviewed is the exploitation of children with disabilities due to the poverty of households. It appears from the interviews that begging by children with disabilities is **a major problem in Niger** — more so than in Mali⁴⁰

³⁸ Global Partnership for Education, “12 years to break down the barriers to girls' education”, op. cit.

³⁹ Kobiané, JF. [La non-scolarisation des enfants issus de populations marginalisées au Burkina Faso: Ampleur, causes et initiatives des pouvoirs publics](#). Background paper prepared for the 2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report – Reaching the marginalised. Paris: UNESCO, 2009.

⁴⁰ Educo. [Analyse Situationnelle des Droits à la Protection des Enfants à Bamako et Ségou - Mali](#), avril 2017.

or in Burkina Faso — and that **the image of people with disabilities is strongly associated with begging**. Begging is done by both boys and girls with disabilities. It is a social phenomenon in the sense that it is created and maintained by society and the family, which automatically consider a person with a disability as a beggar who brings in resources. For people with disabilities in Niger, “it is better to go begging at the mosque on Fridays, because you get more money than when you work”.

- **Transportation problems leading to dropout:** In all three countries, special or inclusive schools are usually located in the capital and in major cities. Even when school fees are subsidised, the cost and the time spent on transport are often an insurmountable obstacle for parents and put them off the idea. Long walking distances between home and mainstream public schools – especially in rural areas – also raise the issue of the **safety of children with disabilities, especially girls**, and are an additional reason for parents not to send their daughters with disabilities to school. **This is why bringing mainstream schools closer to children with disabilities is paramount.**
- Educational actors note that the existence of **a school canteen increases school attendance rates**, as it motivates parents and allows children to spend the day at school without having to go home for lunch.
- **Problems in providing housing to enable girls with disabilities to attend school:** the lack of housing solutions when families live far from the school is also a major obstacle to the schooling of girls with disabilities. Few special or inclusive education institutions are boarding schools. In Mali, the AMALDEME boarding school for children with intellectual disabilities is for boys only, because “if a boarding school for girls were available, parents would tend to abandon them to associations or NGOs”. Having family members or a guardian near the school increases a child's chances of being enrolled. However, parents are reluctant to leave their daughters without adequate supervision for reasons of safety and protection. Rural families are more likely to send a boy with a disability to study in town than a girl with a disability. In Burkina Faso, UN-ABPAM faced challenges in schooling blind girls in the regions, as the association was unable to find host families for them. “For ethnic and clan reasons, families are reluctant to take in girls with disabilities”.

5. Specificities related to disability type and severity

- Of all children with disabilities, **children with physical disabilities have the least difficulty in being educated in a mainstream school** near their homes, provided that physical accessibility is improved (ramps, adapted toilets, mobility aids).

- Children with visual, hearing and especially intellectual disabilities have more difficulty in this regard. **Most of the time, there are no solutions for children with severe disabilities.** Parents don't even try to send their children to school. Special and inclusive institutions are rare and are mainly located in the capital or in large urban centres. Many parents cannot afford to send their children to special or private schools, above all if they live in rural areas, and the vast majority of mainstream public schools are unable to receive them. Children with visual, hearing or mild intellectual disabilities are often sent to mainstream schools where teachers have not been trained in inclusive education and where neither the facilities nor the teaching method are adapted to their needs.
- **The integrated education system (CTIS) for children with hearing and visual impairments seems to work well** in Niger and Burkina Faso when teachers are well trained and the teaching method is adapted. This system teaches the basics of sign languages or Braille to children of different ages in the early years of learning, and integrates them later into mainstream classes in the same school, with an itinerant teacher to support the regular teacher.
- **The inclusive classroom system for children with hearing and visual impairments appears to work well in Mali,** provided that there is sound initial training for teachers and children before the start of the school year, close support by itinerant specialist teacher, and continuing education for teachers, children, and parents throughout the year outside the classroom.
- The cost of specialised equipment for blind children is particularly high, and this limits their learning.
- When children with hearing and visual impairments are enrolled, they have **difficulty getting beyond primary school because the teaching method in secondary school is not adapted.** Children with a hearing impairment seem to have more difficulty, as they often do not have professional sign language interpreters and receive less support than children with a visual impairment. Children do not have the same learning problems. Deaf children often have problems with language due to the syntax of sign language, while blind children often have problems with science.
- **Support for children with intellectual disabilities remains problematic** in all three countries, especially in Niger, where the Committee on the rights of persons with disabilities has noted significant gaps. The more severe the disability, the greater the risk of exclusion and abuse. Children with multiple disabilities very rarely attend school due to the lack of adequate institutions. Enrolling children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools remains extremely difficult because of the lack of trained teachers. The few specialised structures that exist lack resources for children who have specific needs.

6. Gender-based violence and issues related to the protection of girls with disabilities

- Studies show that women with disabilities are abused far more often than women without disabilities.⁴¹ Girls with disabilities are also **more vulnerable** than boys with disabilities and more likely to be abused, mistreated and sexually assaulted.
- Sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence awareness programmes should be developed to guarantee their physical and psychological integrity and prevent sexual abuse. DPOs have raised the issue of supporting girls with disabilities when they are raped or have unintended pregnancies, because “they can no longer stay with their family, are abandoned and have to fend for themselves”.
- There is no institution or public policy to support these young mothers with disabilities. Moreover, legal proceedings are rare due to sociocultural burdens. The phenomenon remains largely invisible because it is very poorly documented.

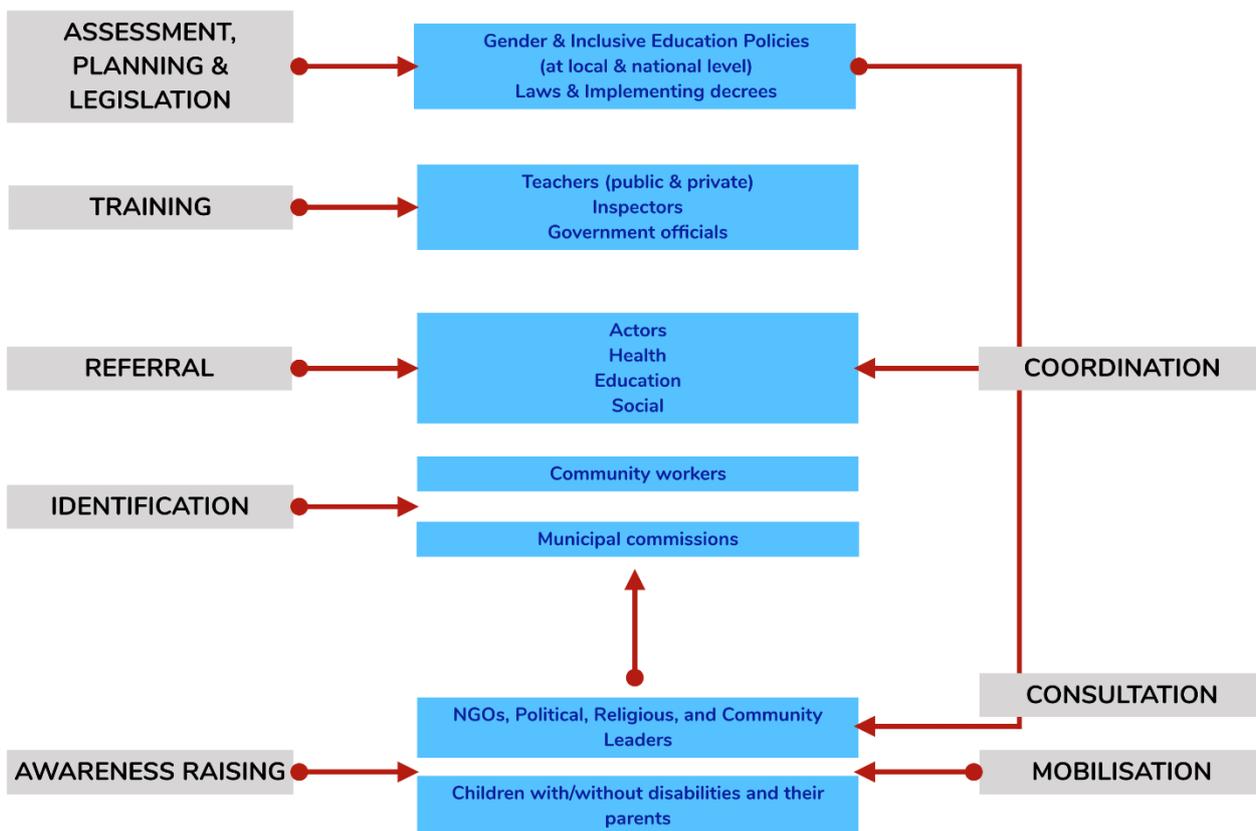
⁴¹ Jones, L. et al., [Prevalence and risk of violence against children with disabilities: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies](#), The Lancet, 2012, Sep 8, vol. 380, n°9845, pp. 899-907; Iglesias, M. [Violence and women with disability](#). Vedras, Spain: AIES, 1998; The Swedish Research Institute for Disability Policy. [Men's violence against women with disabilities](#). The Report Series, 2007; European Disability Forum. [Report on violence and discrimination against disabled people](#), 1999.

Analysis of facilitating elements and recommendations

Based on an analysis of facilitating elements from the interviews with children with disabilities and the discussions with the actors involved in their education – (parents of children with and without disabilities, children without disabilities, religious and community leaders, educational actors, public institutions and policies), recommendations were made to improve the schooling of girls with disabilities.

Inclusive education needs to be supported by legislative and regulatory frameworks backed by political will, prioritisation of resources (both human and financial resources) and **systemic change** induced by **strong civil society mobilisation** to demand change (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Theory of change

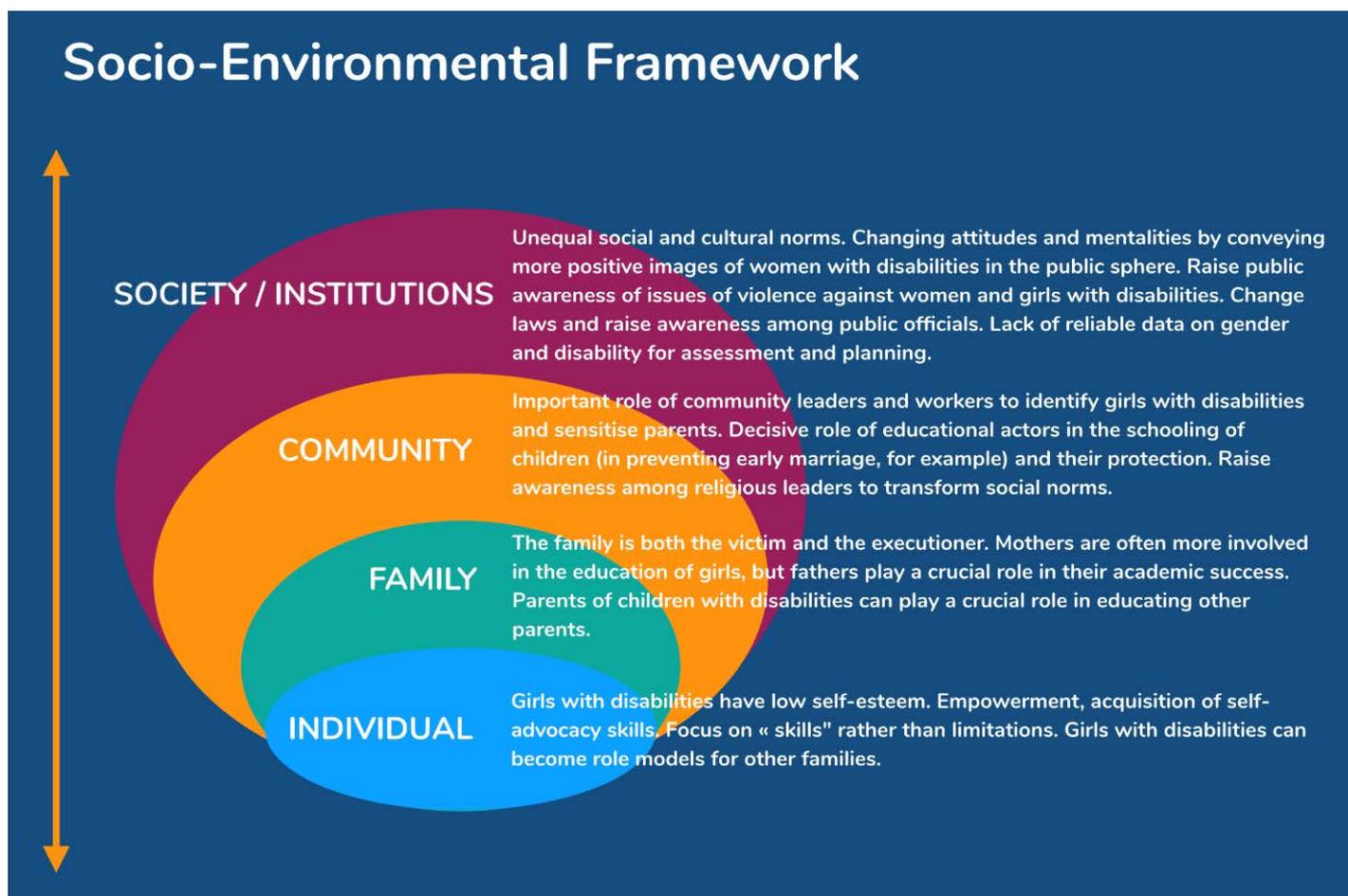


Enrolling and keeping girls in school is a problem for which there is **no “one size fits all” solution**. Strategies vary from country to country and depend on different factors: Has the country achieved universal primary education? Does it have a strong political commitment to gender equality? Overall, in all countries, there is a need for a **double approach** to promoting the education of girls with disabilities, which involves improved access and quality education for all children as well as targeted programmes for girls with disabilities in particular. To be able to plan all these policies, there is an

urgent need to fill the data gap on disability and gender. Donors and NGOs investing in education programmes should ensure that the programmes take into account the specific needs of girls with disabilities.

We should keep in mind that **disability, gender and age are social constructs**. Taking into account the wider environment and understanding the **unequal power relations** in society is necessary to transform social norms and **empower** girls with disabilities (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Socio-environmental framework



1. Children with disabilities and their parents

Analysis

- The family is both the **victim and the executioner**, as it is influenced by sociocultural burdens, leading to practices of discrimination, abandonment or seclusion.
- Mothers are often more involved in the education of girls, but **fathers play a crucial role in their academic success**.
- Parents **are often unaware** of the rights of their children with disabilities.
- Parents of children with disabilities play a **crucial role in raising awareness** among other parents. Girls with disabilities can become **role models** for other families.
- Children with disabilities – and girls in particular – **have low self-esteem**. Girls with disabilities are more likely to drop out of school and to suffer sexual violence.
- Family **poverty** is a barrier to the schooling of girls with disabilities.

Recommendations

Awareness raising

- Change attitudes and mindsets by conveying **more positive images** of women with disabilities in the public sphere.
- **Raise public awareness** of issues of violence against women and girls with disabilities.
- **Raise parents' awareness**: civil registration, rights and health of children with disabilities, harmful effects of early marriage, benefits of sending girls to school, etc.
- Develop targeted outreach strategies to identify girls with disabilities and convince parents that they belong in school. Secure support from community workers.
- Organise national and local awareness-raising campaigns and invite **women/girls with disabilities who are models of success**; for instance, organise travelling caravans that use social networks, television, radio, cinema or theatre.
- Develop **information/awareness raising kits** on the difficulties encountered by girls with disabilities: poems and articles written by women/girls with disabilities, resource materials, including websites, information on initiatives to combat violence, etc.

Mobilisation / Training

- **Encourage parents to mobilise** through Parents' Associations (APE), Associations of Mother Educators (AME) and School Management Committees (COGES): organise exchange of practices, awareness campaigns, mutual aid systems for transport and the school canteen, etc.
- Train fathers of girls with disabilities to become **mentors to other fathers** in order to increase their participation in the schooling of their daughters with disabilities.
- Propose **Income Generating Activities (IGAs)** to parents (especially mothers) to solve the problems of poverty and begging and let girls devote themselves to their studies.
- **Make programmes inclusive** in order to improve girls' education (collaboration with NGOs and associations working for girls' schooling such as Plan, Save, FAWE, etc.). Focus on skills, not on limitations, and give girls with disabilities the opportunity to meet role models and develop their talents and interests, rather than trying to “fix” their limitations. For example, organise theatre competitions and other artistic projects; involve girls with disabilities in the Children's Parliament to defend the rights of people with disabilities); test the **Child to Child (CtC)** approach to raise peer awareness and build self-esteem, and involve girls with disabilities in awareness-raising campaigns; set up **CtC clubs** in schools so that children with disabilities can organise activities and benefit from **mentoring** (sex education, violence prevention, guidance, tools for recognising and confronting obstacles, etc.).

2. Children without disabilities and their parents

Analysis

- Parents of children without disabilities often do not set a good example and contribute to stigmatisation by students.
- When sensitised, children without disabilities **show solidarity** with children with disabilities.
- When not sensitised, their mockery contributes to children with disabilities dropping out of school.

Recommendations

Awareness raising

- Change attitudes and mindsets by conveying **more positive images** of women with disabilities in the public sphere.

- **Raise public awareness** of issues of violence against women and girls with disabilities.
- Carry out back-to-school awareness-raising activities in the form of forum theatre, role-playing, etc.
- **Invite women with disabilities who are successful role models** to the awareness-raising activities.
- Raise awareness among parents of children without disabilities through the AMEs, APEs and COGESs.

Mobilisation

- Set up **pairs** (children with disabilities and children without disabilities) to create empathy, solidarity and mutual aid in the classroom.

3. Political, religious and community leaders

Analysis

- Political, religious and community leaders exercise great influence in their communities.
- Religions convey messages of caring and protection for persons with disabilities, but practices are influenced by **popular beliefs** that **portray disability negatively, especially in girls**.
- There are religious leaders and traditional chiefs who are **less favourable to the enrolment of girls** in “modern” schools, which are said to “pervert traditional values”.

Recommendations

Awareness raising

- **Educate** political, religious and traditional leaders on gender, disability and inclusive education.

Mobilisation

- **Involve** political, religious and traditional leaders in awareness-raising campaigns.

Consultation

- Set up a **consultation framework** composed of religious leaders, traditional chiefs and municipal councillors in charge of solving problems related to the schooling of children with disabilities (cases of early marriage, for instance). This consultation framework would also

have the task of **promoting mentality change** in favour of the schooling of girls with disabilities.

4. Women's associations, Disabled People's Organisations & structures promoting inclusive education

Analysis

- DPOs take little account of gender issues in their agenda, just as women's associations do not sufficiently consider the specific situation of women with disabilities.
- **DPOs often initiate innovative inclusive education projects. Their expertise is essential** for greater impact.
- Their **means are limited** and there is little sharing of practices and coordination between them. “Each organisation operates in isolation”.

Recommendations

Awareness raising / Identification

- Increase the number of awareness-raising campaigns and use different channels such as social networks, radio programmes, cinema or open-air theatre, which have a strong impact in rural areas.
- For the awareness-raising campaigns, invite girls and women with disabilities who are role models.

Consultation

- Produce a **guide to good practice** in inclusive education to address issues relating to girls with disabilities, in cooperation with women's organisations, DPOs and inclusive education structures.

Coordination / Mobilisation

- Create more spaces for exchange and capitalisation of practices for actors involved in gender, disability and inclusive education at the local and national level, in West Africa and beyond.

Training

- Help associations working for women's rights to initiate specific activities addressing the situation of women with disabilities.
- Help DPOs and inclusive education structures to develop a gender approach in their programmes.

Project development

- **Provide support to programmes that help parents** deal with the problems faced by their children with disabilities, especially girls (teaching sign language and Braille, raising awareness of issues related to puberty, sexual health, early marriage, etc.).
- **Launch a helpline** to advise and refer children with disabilities and their families.

5. Education stakeholders

Analysis

- **Lack of teachers** trained in gender and inclusive approaches, both in special schools and in mainstream schools, or inadequate training of these teachers
- Teacher mobility prevents the inclusive approach from being maintained over time
- **Decisive role of educational actors** in the schooling of children (in preventing early marriage, for example)
- **Teaching materials not suitable** for the different types of disabilities
- **Manuals and curricula not gender- and disability-sensitive**
- **Under-representation of women — especially women with disabilities** — in educational programmes and in teaching. There is evidence that the low representation of women in classrooms, especially in rural areas, negatively affects girls' enrolment rates.
- The integrated education classrooms (CTISs) in Niger and Burkina Faso appear to be working well, but CTISs in public schools in Burkina Faso need to be redesigned for more efficiency.
- The inclusive education classrooms in Mali seem to be an interesting educational option, provided emphasis is laid on initial training (before the start of the school year) and on training during the year for teachers, children and possibly parents.
- Higher schooling cost for special education. **Gap between public and private schools** in terms of education quality and capacity

- Lack of accessibility in schools (ramps and adapted toilets), lack of specialised supplies, overcrowded classrooms
- The education of girls with disabilities should not be limited to primary school; **the efforts should be continued at secondary school and beyond.**
- Early childhood and **pre-school education interventions** for girls (and boys) with disabilities are also important.
- **Education and vocational training** need to be coupled to solve the problems of integrating students, especially girls with disabilities, into the labour market and make basic education attractive to parents.

Recommendations

Awareness / Training / Referral

- **Review the curricula and adapt the teaching materials** to make them gender- and disability-sensitive. Revise the conditions and content of examinations and competitions for certain types of disabilities. **Include images of women with disabilities** in educational materials.
- Include specific modules on inclusive education, disability and gender in the initial training. Provide in service training.
- Develop a **good practice guide** on inclusive education in cooperation with teachers, with sections on girls with disabilities. Train teachers to use it.
- Develop **comprehensive sex education programmes** for children, including girls/children with disabilities, taking into account the cultural context of the countries.
- Train teachers to **detect situations of sexual violence/early marriage/exploitation affecting** girls with disabilities and to support/guide them.
- Raise awareness inclusively on issues related to menstrual hygiene and provide sanitary protection materials in schools for girls with and without disabilities. **Establish self-help mechanisms** for girls with and without disabilities.
- **Help madrasas** to mainstream inclusive education and gender awareness, given the presence of children with disabilities in these schools.

Planning

- **Improve the presence of women in teacher training institutes, especially women with disabilities.** Scholarships could be granted to women with disabilities to participate in teacher training programmes, and incentives could be given to schools to encourage them to adopt inclusive enrolment practices.
- Continue to **bring schools closer to children**, especially in rural areas, as the issue of distance from school is particularly sensitive for girls with disabilities (train more teachers on direct inclusion; set up inclusive classrooms for hearing and visual impairments to allow progressive inclusion).
- Improve vocational training access and quality, especially for girls with disabilities.

Assessment

- Ensure that enrolment and progression rates for girls, including girls with disabilities, are included in **performance criteria** (both for schools and their staff).

6. Institutions & Public Policies

Analysis

- National gender- and disability-sensitive strategies are beginning to emerge, but **strong political will and financial resources** are required to implement them.
- Most inclusive education programmes are implemented with the support of non-state actors such as NGOs.
- **Progressive ownership** of the issue of inclusive education by governments so that they can meet their commitments under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- Mobilise **community workers and stakeholders** at the local level for the identification of children with disabilities.
- An approach that involves medical staff, educational stakeholders, DPOs and community leaders (such as **municipal commissions**) is crucial to better identify and refer children with disabilities.
- **Targeted scholarships for girls with disabilities** to cover tuition and transportation are a key incentive to encourage school enrolment and retention.

- **Lack of reliable data, including quantitative and qualitative research** on disability and gender to **measure, assess and plan** (lack of essential indicators such as the number of school-age girls with disabilities, their level of education and their educational achievements; lack of a common definition of disability).

Recommendations

Awareness / Training

- Media campaigns encouraging parents to send their daughters to school should include non-stereotypical disability content and images.
- Sensitise and train public officials on existing gender and disability provisions.
- **Translate legal texts** into different languages, **popularise them, and inform** people with disabilities about their rights through awareness campaigns (television and radio programmes, social networks, etc.)

Planning / Legislation

- Provide budgets for the implementation of existing education policies for girls and people with disabilities. **Apply a gender equity approach** in budgeting and resource allocation to better address the needs of girls with disabilities.
- **Explicitly take into account the needs of girls with disabilities in gender policies** and in education equity programmes for children with disabilities: education and training of actors, granting of scholarships, provision of school bags and kits, setting up of canteens, improving the school environment (separate latrines, water points), provision of means of transport (bicycles), construction of boarding schools, foster care system with rigorous monitoring and child protection mechanisms.
- **Provide grants for families of children with disabilities** for transport and food, school supplies and specialised teaching materials (Braille textbooks, tablets, paper, sign language alphabet, etc.) throughout their schooling, as well as scholarships for children with disabilities entering secondary school.
- **Integrate existing good practices** on the education of girls with disabilities into education plans.

Consultation

- Develop a strong inclusive education policy in consultation with all key players, including DPOs.

Assessment

- There is an urgent need to **design more reliable statistical tools** for better analysis, evaluation and planning in the education sector, and for measuring changes in the enrolment of girls with disabilities.
- Establish **robust processes for monitoring the impact** of activities on girls with disabilities.
- The development of gender- and disability-sensitive indicators will give a more coherent picture of inclusive education and allow comparisons between programmes.
- Set up a **national observatory** to report breaches of the law, monitor the efforts to reduce gender inequalities and propose concrete solutions. Organise a conference and produce an annual report on equity in education for girls with disabilities.
- **More research** on the enrolment, outcomes and barriers to education for girls with disabilities.

Protection

- Governments should develop national education policies to protect girls with disabilities from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation within and outside the school environment.
- Develop a comprehensive approach to the prevention of gender-based violence and sex education in order to prevent sexual abuse, including with reference to girls with disabilities.
- Put in place **protection and support mechanisms** (particularly at the judicial level) for girls and women with disabilities who are victims of sexual violence; train police, child protection and judicial officers).
- **Better document** the issue of violence against girls with disabilities through more qualitative research, and set up a monitoring system to detect cases of violence more effectively.

1. Acronyms

AFD	French Development Agency
IGA	Income Generating Activities
AME	Association of Mother Educators
AMALDEME	Malian association for the fight against mental deficiency in children
APE	Parents' Association
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CEB	Basic Education District
CEP	Certificate of Primary Education
COGES	School Management Committee
CTIS	Inclusive Transitional Classroom
CVD	Village Development Committee
EFA	Education for All
EJA	School for children with blindness
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
MENA	Ministry of National Education and Literacy
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
DPO	Disabled People's Organisation
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
RGEH	General Census of Children with Disabilities
GPHC	General Census of Population and Housing
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
UN-ABPAM	National Union of Burkina Faso Associations for the Promotion of the Blind and Visually Impaired

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**To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa:
The educational situation in question**

**SUMMARY BOOKLET - MALI - NIGER - BURKINA
FASO**

Since October 2017, Humanity & Inclusion (HI) has initiated an inclusive education project in the Sahel with the aim of contributing to quality inclusive education for marginalised girls and boys in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger with co-financing from NORAD and AFD.

Girls with are among the most marginalised groups in society due to social norms and cultural prejudice related to gender and disability. Yet there are few studies documenting their situation and the specific challenges they face. This study adopts an intersectional approach in order to analyse the situation of girls with disabilities by combining the effects and dynamics of several vulnerability factors. Using the gender analysis lens and the social model of disability, the study clearly shows that girls with disabilities are affected by various systems of social domination based on gender and disability. Thus, they experience specific oppression because of their gender and their disabilities. This occurs in all spheres, public and private, and results in girls with disabilities being exposed to specific inequalities compared to boys with disabilities and to girls without disabilities when it comes to access to education, training, health care, and in other fields.

The results of the study will inform the interventions of HI and its partners in the education sector and will also be used for advocacy purposes.

Key messages from the study will be shared with decision makers, civil society actors and donors to raise awareness of the importance of developing gender-sensitive inclusive education interventions.

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