

Experiences and expectations of inclusive pre-primary education in Kenya: Reporting the results of the first round of focus group discussions in Homa Bay and Kakuma

**Disability Inclusive Development programme, Task Order
20: Promoting Inclusive Early Childhood Development
Education (ECDE) in Kenya.**

By Mary Wickenden, Brigitte Rohwerder, Josephine Njungi

With contributions from the peer researchers: Barnabus Abdullahi
Adhan, Dorcas Eipa, Elizabeth Ogutu, Janet Abongo, Joshua Rume,
Masline Ngala, Odhieng Akway Oman, Japheth Otieno, Paul Odhiambo



Inclusive Futures

Promoting disability inclusion

This report has been funded with UK aid from the UK government. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the UK government or members of the Disability Inclusive Development consortium.

Suggested citation: Wickenden, M., Rohwerder, B. and Njungi, J. (2022)

Experiences and expectations of inclusive pre-primary education in Kenya: Reporting the results of the first round of focus group discussions in Homa Bay and Kakuma, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. DOI: [10.19088/IDS.2022.055](https://doi.org/10.19088/IDS.2022.055)



© Institute of Development Studies 2022. This is an Open Access report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited and any modifications or adaptations are indicated.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Methodology	6
The team	6
Training of peer researchers.....	7
Recruitment of respondents for the different groups.....	7
Data Collection	8
Analysis and validation process.....	9
3. Results	11
Introduction to the results	11
Understandings of inclusion.....	12
Expectations of parents/teachers/community	17
Inclusive/conducive environments	21
The processes/practicalities of IECD	27
Parents' needs, worries and fears	29
Teachers' experiences, attitudes and concerns.....	32
Children stuck at home	34
Overarching systems and structural aspects	36
Children's perspectives on school	38
Reflections of the peer researchers	40
Reflection on Process	40
Reflections on the issues arising from the discussions	41
Reflections as peer researchers interacting with parents and children	43
4. Discussion.....	44
5. Conclusions	49
Acknowledgements.....	50
6. Appendix	51
Recommendations from Parents, Teachers, and Peer Researchers.....	51
7. References.....	55

1. Introduction

The Disability Inclusive Development (DID) programme is a large disability programme funded by the UK government's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). DID is working in five countries to improve the lives of people with disabilities in different ways. Task Order 20, under the DID programme, is a project in Kenya aiming to develop the idea of inclusive early child development and education (IECDE), so that children with disabilities will be able to attend pre-schools alongside other children in their community.

Although early childhood development and education (ECDE) services are being expanded across Kenya, families who have children with disabilities experience considerable challenges to access the services they are entitled to. There is a growing urgency to understand how children with disabilities do or do not currently access the provision of ECDE and to improve curriculum and teaching methods to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in inclusive ECDE provision alongside other children. The project is trialling this approach in nine schools in different contexts, six in Homa Bay county (three in urban/peri-urban areas, three in rural areas) and three in Kakuma refugee camp and neighbouring host community.

As part of the project, the Institute of Development Studies UK (IDS) is leading a piece of research running a series of focus group discussions and individual interviews with different stakeholders. This is qualitative participatory research process, which means it involves everyone very actively in the process. It involves having conversations with children with disabilities, parents, teachers and other key stakeholders identified with the support of the consortium partners involved in the programme, to understand their experiences, perspectives and recommendations and making sure we hear everyone's opinion, whatever skills or difficulties they may have. The research was carried out with a small team of people with disabilities who were involved as 'peer researchers'. Working with peer researchers is a method which encourages others in similar positions to share their thoughts openly, as talking to someone who is similar helps participants feel comfortable, as well as providing an opportunity for people with disabilities to learn new skills and experience doing research in their own contexts, and to ensure that 'nothing about us, is without us'.

The overall research question being addressed by the qualitative research reported here is:

What do key stakeholders understand about inclusion and perceive and experience to be the barriers to and facilitators of inclusive ECDE (IECDE) for children with disabilities in Kenya?

A second question will be addressed in later qualitative research:

How can the DID intervention bring about change in quality and access to IECDE and do the stakeholders perceive that this has been achieved by the end of the programme?

In parallel, other researchers are carrying out a quantitative randomised control trial in the nine intervention schools and nine matched control schools, measuring the children with disabilities' progress in their ECDE classes over 2 years, looking at their levels of skills and difficulties using various tools, including the UNICEF Washington group child functioning module (Washington Group/UNICEF) and the IDELA assessment (Save the Children), comparing cohorts of children in the intervention schools with non-intervention groups. The qualitative and quantitative findings should complement and enlighten each other, to produce a rounded and in-depth picture of how a multifaceted programme promoting inclusive ECDE can work in different Kenyan settings.

This report outlines the findings of the first round of focus group discussions (November 2021) and analysis with the peer researchers which occurred before the intervention fully began and gives an overview of the state of affairs for IECDE prior to the intervention. A further round of focus group discussions with the same groups is planned for the end of the programme to explore the perceived impacts of the intervention on the provision of IECDE services, people's experiences and the changes which occurred in knowledge and attitudes of some key stakeholders.

2. Methodology

This section outlines our methodological approach - our rationale for selecting this approach and how we collected (different tools used) and analysed the data.

IDS led a piece of research that focused on running a series of focus group discussions with teachers, parents, and children with disability in Kakuma and Homa Bay county in November 2021. This was qualitative participatory research, meaning it actively involved all members in the process - training, data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

The team

The team was made up of the following members:

- Two team members at IDS.
- A national consultant who led and coordinated data collection with technical support from IDS and DID programme consortium partners working in Kenya (Sightsavers, Leonard Cheshire (LCI), Humanity and Inclusion (HI) and Sense international).
- Peer researchers living in Homa Bay and Kakuma. These peer researchers are connected, either as members or supporters of organisations for people with disability (OPDs); individuals who live and work in project areas; speak the local language(s); have worked or are working in their communities, especially with children with disability.

Recruitment of peer researchers was in collaboration with consortium partners. They supported the IDS team in reviewing peer researchers' terms of reference; circulating these to different OPDs in Kakuma and Homa Bay; being part of the interview panel; and advising on the best individuals based on contextual considerations on ground. For example, in Kakuma understanding the importance of having peer researchers representing the three distinct communities – Kalobeyei Settlement, Kakuma Camp and Host Community - and languages spoken in each community was key.

From this process, nine peer researchers were selected: three from Kakuma, one representing each community, and six from Homa Bay (three from Mbita (rural location) and three from Homa Bay Town (urban/peri urban location)). Eight of these are persons with disabilities – having either physical or visual impairments – and one is a caregiver for a child with disability.

Training of peer researchers

There were two sets of training for the peer researchers. First there were two online sessions where the peer researchers were introduced to the concept of qualitative research, peer research and its process, the project, key concepts in inclusive education, the assignment, the research process, ethics etc. and the peer researchers had the opportunity to run mock focus group discussions and develop their skills. This training took on a blended approach - with peer researchers in Homa Bay and Kakuma together in a room, connected virtually to the national consultant in Nairobi and the IDS team in the UK.

The second round was a physical face to face training, that preceded the focus groups in each location. This training covered in-depth review of the discussion topic guides and practical sessions where team members facilitated 'dummy' focus groups with each other to practice and tease out issues that would likely come up.

Recruitment of respondents for the different groups

In collaboration with the consortium partners (Sightsavers, LCI, HI and Sense International), children with disabilities, parents and early child development (ECD) teachers were selected in the intervention schools to be invited to participate in the focus groups. Guidelines were shared with consortium partners. These guidelines included recruitment of the following in each setting: 4-5 children with disability who are part of the ECD intervention schools, 8-10 parents with children with disability in the ECD intervention schools; 8-10 ECD Teachers from the intervention schools. Furthermore, there was guidance on gender in each of the groups – at least 50 per cent representation of women/girls where possible.

For Sense International, guidance was to suggest families with a child with severe/complex disability who are part of their home-based education intervention.

Recruitment of these families was in collaboration with the Education Assessment and Resource Centres (EARCs). This was specifically in Homa Bay Town and Mbita.

Data Collection

The following were the total number of groups/individuals facilitated in all the target areas.

Table 2.1: The number of parents, teachers and children's groups across the different locations

	Parents	Teachers	Children	Home based
Mbita	2	1	1	2 families
Homa Bay Town	1	2	1	2 families
Kakuma	3	2	3	-

Table 2.2: The number of participants by gender

	Female	Male	Total
Total no. of individuals	56	30	86
Children	4	15	19
Parents	28	8	36
Teachers	24	7	31

In total there were five children's focus group discussions; six parents' focus group discussions, four home visit interviews; and five teachers' focus group discussions.

All logistics and support to run the groups was in collaboration with the intervention schools in Mbita, Homa Bay Town, Kakuma Host Community, Kalobeyei Settlement and Kakuma Camps; consortium partners (this included learning assistants in Kakuma); and EARCs in Homa Bay Town and Mbita.

The focus group topic guides were adapted for each group, with a very simplified version for the children's focus groups that involved child friendly activities. They covered questions under the broad areas of current experience of children with

disabilities of pre-primary education; creating an inclusive pre-primary school; home-based education; other services available for children with disabilities; parent/volunteer support groups; making the curriculum and learning materials inclusive; and support needed to provide inclusive ECDE. The topics differed slightly depending on the group in question and the topic guides were used flexibly, as appropriate.

The Covid-19 pandemic was ongoing when the research occurred, although restrictions had been lifted, and children were back in schools. The relevant precautions such as ventilation, social distancing, and masking were made where appropriate to protect the researchers and respondents. It is unclear to what extent Covid-19 affected the research, although the researcher leading the fieldwork felt that it had little effect on the data gathering.

Language: the groups were held in the local languages as appropriate (e.g. in English, Swahili and Luo in Homa Bay, and in Swahili, Turkana, Arabic, Somali in Kakuma). The peer researchers could speak these languages as well as English. Notes were taken by the consultant in English.

Notes from each group were produced and after each group discussion a reflection meeting with peer researchers was held to brainstorm some key themes coming up, reflect on team's experience in running the groups, and propose how things could be done differently in the next round of groups.

Analysis and validation process

An online team thematic analysis process was used by the team to identify key themes that could be seen emerging across the different groups. Several rounds of analysis were held in December 2021 and January 2022. First the IDS team and national consultant reviewed the notes and pulled out potential themes across the different groups. An online meeting was held to organise and name the themes. Two sessions with the peer researchers were held to draw out and refine the themes across the groups. Furthermore, mind maps were developed by peer researchers (working together physically but during an online session) in order to see the connectivity across the different themes.

The themes were further discussed and refined, some being combined or more detail added. A validation meeting with peer researchers was held on the final list of themes. In this meeting, peer researchers also reflected and told their stories on their experiences in facilitating the groups and well as the peer research process. They were also invited to talk to camera or to write their reflections on their experience, which some of them did.

This report for the task order has been jointly written by the IDS team and consultant and also distributed to the nine peer researchers for their review and comments.

An academic journal article based on the focus group findings was submitted to the Disability and the Global South Special Issue on Inclusive education at the end of June 2022.

3. Results

Introduction to the results

The findings from all the focus group discussions and individual interviews with the parents of the stay-at-home children (twenty events in total) have been analysed together as one data set across the two settings, the different types of participants, and all the schools involved. Themes sometimes include material from both parents and teachers (and sometimes children), although some themes are particularly relevant to one group or another.

Normally in focus groups, discussion is structured broadly around the different topics as laid out in the topic guide. However, the conversations can often cut across topics and so as the meeting progresses key themes emerge that represent clusters of contributions that are about the same aspect, wherever they arose in the discussion. That means that the themes do not necessarily directly map onto the original topics listed in the topic guide.

Quotes from participants are reported anonymously, although the location and type of group is noted in brackets e.g. (Homa Bay parents) or (Kakuma teachers) etc.

There are nine broad themes, with each having a number of subthemes. They include: understandings of inclusion; expectations of parents/teachers/community; inclusive/conducive environments; the processes/practicalities of IECD; parent's needs, worries and fears; teacher's experiences, attitudes and concerns; children stuck at home; overarching systems and structural aspects; and recommendations. There are also inevitably some overlaps between themes. The last theme (Recommendations) is presented at the end of the report after the discussion and conclusions. Included in this section are also sub-sections focusing specifically on children's perspectives on school and the reflections of the peer researchers.

We have also developed a visual representation of the themes and how they relate to each other. This is not definitive or set in stone but does provide an overview of the broad themes and the most obvious links between them.

Understandings of inclusion

Parents and teachers' understandings of the meaning of inclusion and inclusive ECD are quite variable and perhaps depend on the type of personal experience, exposure to information and/or training they have had. While the idea of disability inclusion was broadly understood, there was insecurity around the practicalities of it and concerns that there were not enough experienced teachers to handle a wide range of learners with disabilities which suggest more awareness raising may be needed.

A number of parents expressed a desire for their children to attend special schools, although these were far away and expensive in some areas, so they sent their children to the local schools or kept them at home (Parent Group 2 Mbita; Parents Home visits). Others sent their children with disabilities to schools which had a special unit as they felt it would be difficult for their children to go to school with other children (Parents Group Kakuma). The desire for special education rather than inclusive education related mainly to their concerns with the quality of education and care their children were receiving in their local schools, where teachers had often not been trained and where assistive devices and teaching aides were lacking (Parent Group 2 Mbita; Parents Group Kakuma).

He is going to school but he does not know anything. He is going just like the others, but this is not gaining anything. (Parent Group 2 Mbita)

If there is a special school with trained teachers who can give the education it would be better. In the school he is in, there is nothing. (Parent Group 2 Mbita)

The teacher now doesn't care and watch over the child. The teachers in normal schools do not care. (Parents Group Kakuma)

I would like Robert ¹to be taken to a school where the caretaker will be someone who understands the child well. (Parents Home visit 1)

There are concerns that children with disabilities will come away not having learnt much or be properly cared for in 'normal schools', whereas parents feel that in

¹ No real names for participants are used in the report

special schools they could be better taught and learn something, as well as be properly cared for and amongst others who are like them (Parent Group 2 Mbita; Parent Group Kakuma; Parents Home visits). In relation to this, there are worries for the safety of their children in mainstream schools (Parents Group Kakuma; Parents Group Kalobeyei).

It would be difficult [to go to public schools]. The children can step on him and I am afraid he will be beaten. Now my child is in Tarach.

In Tarach there is a special unit. (Parents Group Kakuma)

In Homa Bay Town, a teacher also told us that parents of children without disabilities preferred the special units as they were afraid children with disabilities would beat their children or perhaps the teacher would concentrate more on the children with disabilities and not their own children.

When asked what could be done to make your local pre-primary school inclusive of children with disabilities, parents often responded by suggesting that children with disabilities should get their own class with special teachers, rather than a more inclusive approach (Parent Group 2 Mbita; Parents Group 3 Mbita; Parent Group Kakuma; Parents Group Kalobeyei). Others suggested making children equal and loved whether they have a disability or not (Parents Group 3 Mbita).

In one of the parents' groups in Homa Bay there was an understanding among some that 'inclusive education is where children with and without disability learn in the same place' and acknowledgement of its advantages (Parents Group 1 Homa Bay). However, another parent in the group felt that bullying can be a demotivating issue in the current class and that

If they are in a special school they will try because they will see they are all the same,

while another noted that they'd ideally send their child to a special school if they could afford it as in the current school

teachers are concentrating on children without disability and this affects my child's learning (Parents Group 1 Homa Bay).

Many of the teachers have had some training (which they remembered as being good and useful) and exposure to the idea of disability inclusion but had mixed

attitudes towards it in relation to its practicality and feasibility in their schools. They mostly expressed a generally positive approach with acceptance that children with disabilities had the right to education, and some understood the arguments for and benefit of them being in mainstream classes alongside other children.

It is important to talk to parents so that they are aware that these children with disability have a right to education. They need to be in school. We go through neighbours sometimes who then talk to their parents – saying the children will be taught well and they have a right to go to school like any children in Kenya. (Homa Bay teachers)

Some mentioned that children with disabilities should be valued and invested in, that they should be loved and looked after and that teachers should adapt to their needs in the classroom.

We give them what they are able to do in the learning activity. (Mbita teachers)

What I do I show love and encourage them to complete the task they are doing. Showing love is very important. (Mbita teachers)

We don't leave them behind in the activities they do. They can join the rest and they become one. They are part of the group. They need special attention. (Mbita teachers)

We are in CBC [competency-based curriculum] and we want to identify the talent of the child whether special. We provide materials and observe where they are interested. (Mbita teachers)

Sometimes their attitudes seemed to come from a perspective of 'caring for' rather than educating the children and their expectations of the children's progress were perhaps rather low or negative. There were also some fears and negative feelings about how these children will make the teachers' task in the classroom more difficult, that they needed to adapt and do extra activities in order to include them.

It forces you to give others work and then you come and attend to them. For mine I hold his hand and go slowly together. It is not easy you have to give them extra attention. (Homa Bay teachers)

The important thing I got is the love for the special needs and when you are teaching the child to lower yourself. Sit with them together as you teach them. (Homa Bay teachers)

Some had a more fully inclusive approach:

When we take them to separate schools, they will feel separated and they may complain. They need to be with us so that they don't realise they are different. They should see that they are a learner like the others. They can play with others. (Kakuma teachers)

You must involve all of them in any activities, even give them responsibility like a class prefect or other positions to make them feel they are people in society. (Mbita teachers)

Despite the disability we should accept they are part and parcel of us. Today you can walk but tomorrow you do not know what happened to you. You should take them as important. We should not neglect them. They are God's creations. (Homa Bay teachers)

I start by giving her a chance to read. I will ask her questions and give her time to answer and give her an opportunity to say what she knows and really appreciate her. (Homa Bay teachers)

When you see they have a problem, you go to them, close and guide them close. You realise that some of them are on the side lines and you go and speak to them. (Kakuma teachers)

We need to give them freedom of expression in the class – allow them to touch, play and allow them to do what they want to do on the board. They can do better than other children. (Kakuma teachers)

They did however express some judgemental and negative attitudes to particular children.

One she cannot copy what is written on the board and keeps on making noise. (Mbita teachers)

Some admitted to having beaten or scolded such children in the past because they are slow to learn.

There is one who jumps up and down and beats others. Before the training she was giving me hard time and I would cane her every day but now I am different. (Mbita teachers)

I realised that I can do it. Before I used to believe that those who can handle learners with special needs are those who have been trained by KISE. So, I thought I could not do that. From the training I realised its easy. Show them love and you will find yourself accommodating the learner. (Mbita teachers)

Some teachers expressed both more positive or conversely exclusionary or stereotyping views, especially about children with particular impairments.

There is one who can speak... he can't hear but when you ask with signs he can speak and answer. It would be that he needs a hearing aid. If you don't bring them close, they will get nothing. You need to bring them close to feel they are part of the other children. (Kakuma teachers)

In our school we have a child with one leg. He is in class 3. That child is a good footballer and runs really well. There is nothing they do not do. (Homa Bay teachers)

There are materials the teacher can improvise. We have small stones we can group. But there are children who can use the stones to hurt others. So you cannot use these materials with these children with disability who will desire to hurt others. (Kalobeyei teachers)

It depends on the kind of disability though. When it's a physical disability, say both my limbs are missing and I cannot sing. We cannot generalise. Sometimes, others may only enjoy going to school. They wake up looking forward to going to school. (Homa Bay Teachers)

The training the teachers had received seemed to make a difference to their attitude to inclusive ECD. Some had felt that special schools were a better place for some children or that special education teachers were better placed to teach them. However, after their training some teachers felt confident enough to have children with disabilities in their class.

The way I used to perceive or handle children with disability is different now. I look at the child in my school and see him like a normal child. I don't over sympathise and I look at him and see that I should treat him like I treat the others. (Homa Bay teachers)

After the training, I changed my attitude towards the girl. I would assume her and wish to advice the parent to take her to a special school because I felt she was wasting her time. Now I changed and she is a friend of mine. I pay attention to her. (Homa Bay teachers)

Before the training I did not know inclusive education is good but in the training I realised it is good to include all learners so that they feel they are part of others. Before I had questions why would they have all children together. (Kakuma teachers)

The additional training could perhaps increase parents' confidence in their local teachers being able to teach and look after their children with disabilities.

After graduating as a trained teacher who can sensitise parents, give us a certificate of participation, as you talk to parents they realise I have something to show as evidence and they will listen to me. (Homa Bay teachers)

Expectations of parents/teachers/community

Teachers' views of the communities' and parents' understanding on inclusive ECDE was that some would not think it could work.

Creating awareness that these children are human beings. We should not hide them at home. They think if they are brought, they will be beaten. They need to be told that by bringing them to school they can be helped. (Kakuma teachers)

They say they had better keep their child at home and take care of them. They may ask other organisations to take their children to special school. (Homa Bay teachers)

They will google and see they can go to Kakuma Mixed and support them. It may help people know that we are a source of information and experience. (Kakuma host community teachers)

People have hidden their children with disability at home. But if you support us with training and all the things the children will be helped. Our people are not educated. They may say by taking my child to school they would have to take on the expenses. But if you train the teachers, it would help the community. (Kakuma host community teachers)

The value of education for children with disabilities is not necessarily agreed on and some parents have different fears around how their children will cope and do in school, although others felt school attendance was very important. For example, there were tensions within some families about sending their children with disabilities to school, as some family members wanted to send their children and others did not see the value of it. In Mbita, the headteacher noted that one of the mothers of the children with disabilities was very distressed as their husband did not want the child to go to school. In Homa Bay Town one of the parents was worried about their child's aggressiveness, but meeting other parents reassured him that enrolling his child was the right decision. As a person with disabilities themselves, the headteacher in Mbita noted that without the support and persistence of their own mother in sending them to school, they would not be where they are now in life.

We want our children to go to school so that later they can take care of their lives. (Parents group Kalobeyei)

Parents often seemed to feel that their children with disabilities were not learning much from school, even when they love to go there. This resulted in some parents using corporal punishment towards their children or trying to stop them from going to school. Some parents also mentioned not being engaged in supporting their children's education when they were at home, for example by monitoring their studies or helping with any homework.

He goes to school and he knows nothing. He is going to school but he does not know anything. He is going just like the others, but this is not gaining anything. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

He doesn't hear anything. If he is given homework, he doesn't do it. The father keeps canning the child badly and this makes me feel bad and sad. I feel he is being canned because he is someone with disability. He loves school and when we tell him not to go to school, he feels he is being punished. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

I have a son with mental disability. He cannot write and he has a problem talking. I discovered this later since we normally cane him when we ask him to do something and he cannot do. When he comes from school he gets/understands nothing. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

My child loves school and when he comes home he is happy. But there is nothing he brings (knowledge) from school to home. We don't monitor studies, we just let him go to school. When he comes from school, he is happy but he does nothing in school. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

My child has been in the same nursery for the last 3 years and cannot move to the next. He also has low memory. He cannot learn things fast so when he is in class, the teacher may not wait for the one learner. They go on with the lessons leaving my child behind. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

The low expectations of their children's learning seem to be a combination of low expectations of what their children can do and of the teachers' skills and ability to help in the local schools (Parents group 2 Mbita; Parents group 3 Mbita; Parents group 1 Homa Bay). As noted in the previous section parents expected their children to receive a better education in special schools.

I have a son and he has a hearing impairment. He cannot get what is being taught in class. When he comes home and I ask what was taught he cannot tell me. The teacher told me my son is not getting

anything and I told her to take her time and teach him. (Parents Group 3 Mbita)

If there is a special school with trained teachers who can give the education it would be better. In the school he is in, there is nothing. He cannot write the word 'mother' and would not be able to do his class 8 exams. He would need a special school. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

A special teacher is careful with the children. They will also try to help the child to talk. They will motivate this child. Now the teacher there just writes on the black board and leaves the child. The teacher now doesn't care and watch over the child. The teachers in normal schools do not care. (Parents group Kakuma)

I am thinking of taking my child to a special school but due to lack of school fees I cannot take my child to a special school. My reason for this is that the teachers are concentrating on children without disability and this affects my child's learning. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

Some parents did acknowledge that the teachers were trying and their children were making small improvements.

The teachers are trying. The child could be told to sit but would not sit. Now they are told to sit and they sit. (Parents group 3 Mbita)

While in school she is okay. While she has been there, she has changed. The teacher teaches well and I am happy. (Parents group Kakuma)

For me, they were enrolled in a private school and has been there for 3 years and the child did not learn anything new. I decided to transfer the child to public school and during enrolment shared with teacher about the child and right now there is something small the child can do – they can read now numbers 1-10 after this change. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

A representative from ECD County in Mbita noted that disability stigma was still an issue in their community, with children with disabilities still being hidden at home or verbally or physically abused. Some of the community were happy if children with disabilities did not attend school. These community attitudes complicated parents feeling towards their child with disabilities, with some accepting of them and some feeling it is a curse (Parents group 2 Mbita).

In our community, you find some parents saying God has given you a child with disability. This child has been kept separate from the other children. Sometimes he goes to toilet on himself, he is beaten. If you love your child, you will not beat your child with disability. Some have been hidden or already cursed the child, they sleep separately from others and where he is sleeping is not organised. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

The most we must do is that we have to love them. As parents we do not love our children. So, you need to love them. (Parents group 3 Mbita)

For parents some of us do not accept we have children we disability. We hide them and cannot come out to tell other parents. They may only see them when we are taking them to hospital. You are not ready to open up. (Parent Group 3 Mbita)

Inclusive/conducive environments

Teachers had a lot to say about the resources they needed in order to make their classrooms and school environment more inclusive and conducive for children with disabilities. They tended to focus more on physical aspects such as the size of the rooms and making them and the school compounds accessible and safe, including have suitable toilets. In addition, they noted that student-teacher ratios were very high, which affects their ability to manage their class and support learners with disabilities. Parents also noted that improvements could be made to the physical environment, including the toilets.

Enough space in the classroom. They are not happy being squeezed. (Kakuma host community teachers)

The children also focused on the physical environment as something they wanted changed, both in terms of cleanliness and in terms of physical supplies.

I would want compound to be clean. (Children friends school Kalobeyei)

We want more chairs so that when we come, we can sit. (Children friends school Kalobeyei)

I would like a very big class with big tables. (Children group 1 Homa Bay)

Teachers and parents also mentioned needing more teaching materials although this was a rather nonspecific need (e.g. books, posters) which may indicate a general lack of suitable pre-school materials in the classrooms rather than any disability specific ones. It may be that the teachers think that there are very specialised materials needed, when actually those that work for all children can be used for those with different impairments with only a few adaptations. There was relatively little mention of specialist assistive devices such as adapted furniture, special grips pencils, puzzles etc, enlarged print, although sign language and braille were mentioned, as were objects with round edges and not sharp corners and more rubber materials.

Learning materials: young children like looking at pictures and are curious. Charts – so a child can see what we are learning ABCD they can see the lion, elephant and the ones who cannot hear can see what we are talking about. (Kakuma host community teachers)

Availability of resources – play and writing materials. If they are coming to just play, they will be told by other children with disability that they write in their school and they will compare what happens in their school. (Kakuma host community teachers)

In my school, some years back we used to be provided with braille machines so that children with sight impairment can learn. (Kalobeyei and Kakuma teachers)

The things for people to play are not enough. Children come to school and say they will come and enjoy and play. But the materials they have are not enough and this is a problem. (Parents group host community)

Children noted that they liked playing with things like balls and coloured pencils and that they want more things to play and learn with (Children Kakuma mix; Children group 2 Mbita; Children group 1 Homa Bay; Children group Tarach).

Parents also noted the need for assistive devices such as wheelchairs and glasses so that their children could access school (Parents group 3 Mbita; Parents group Kakuma; Parents group Kalobeyei; Parents group host community).

There were many comments from teachers about the type of attitudes that were needed, mostly expressed positively in relation to the children's right to attend school, being accepting and encouraging etc. However, there may have been a degree of courtesy bias here (with teachers saying what they thought was required), especially as the focus groups were being facilitated by people with disabilities.

Parents noted that their children often enjoyed school, but they were not always impressed by some teacher's attitudes towards their children, and some felt like the teachers didn't care about their children or help them to learn. Others noted that the care shown by the teachers helped their children enjoy going to school.

According to me, some teachers are not as serious with those children. She has finished with all children and does not follow up with the child with disability. They are following up with the child(ren) who are moving fast. Better a moving class. The parents may be complaining by they do not address it. The one who is active is the one they concentrate on. They don't seem to care. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

A special teacher is careful with the children. They will also try to help the child to talk. They will motivate this child. Now the teacher there just writes on the black board and leaves the child. The teacher now doesn't care and watch over the child. The teachers in normal schools do not care. (Parents group Kakuma)

She should put the children close. They should not divide the children in the class. She should put all the children together and love them. By doing this, they will make them to be equal to the children. There are some teachers canning the children and this is a problem. (Parents group 3 Mbita)

When he started going to school he was stubborn, the teacher showed love to the child and he came to love the school. (Parents group 3 Mbita)

One thing noted to be especially important by some parents, was informing the teacher about the child's needs, to ensure that the teachers understand the child, although they need to take action to support the child for this to be effective.

If you take the child without informing the teacher then the teacher will not know if the child can talk, play or anything else. Most important thing is to be open to the teacher during the registration and the teacher will nurture the child gradually and after one year you will realise there will be a difference for the child. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

However, some teachers mentioned that parents did not share their child's challenges during enrolment or even take part in the admission process (which was done by the child's sibling). This meant some teachers had to learn the child had a disability while teaching, which made it harder to adapt their activities to the child.

There were many mentions by teachers of the likelihood of bullying and teasing of children with disabilities, either by other children or by adults in school and that teachers needed to keep an eye out for this. Some teachers admitted to previously having negative attitudes but these having changed after they received training on inclusion. They suggested that they have to protect the children with disabilities from bad treatment from others.

One [problem] we face is that these children with disability are laughed at and beaten by other children. This causes them to be absent. They can't play with others. They do not participate. They

think if they go to one or the other they will be beaten. (Kakuma teachers)

In my class I have one with speech difficulty and when he tries to speak out the learners want to hear what he has to say and this is because he sounds different. They laugh at him but I tell them we need to accommodate others. (Homa Bay teachers)

Parents were also worried about their children being teased/bullied/beaten when they go to school (Parents group 2 Mbita; Parents group 3 Mbita; Parents group Kakuma; Parents group Kalobeyei; Parents group 1 Homa Bay). When this had occurred, it made their children reluctant to attend and causes distress to the parents.

Children with disability have a problem in school. They need a separate room for them to learn. Sometimes when its breaktime, those without a disability jump over them and harm them which is not good for them. (Parent group Kalobeyei)

The child has a difficulty because when he is class the other children laugh at him. He feels like he is in jail. He likes hiding from school. I told the teacher and they disciplined the other children. Now he seems to be loving school. (Parents group 2 Mbita).

When they want to talk in class, other children laugh at them. So sometimes they are afraid to speak because when they speak other children make fun of them. When they are in class, they normally cry. (Parent group 1 Homa Bay)

The teacher should be stricter on children who are abusing the children [with disabilities]. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

Some children also noted that they faced violence from their teachers: 'We don't like the teachers. They beat us', although others the same group liked their teachers (Children Kakuma mix; also: Children group 1 Homa Bay; Children group Tarach).

It was suggested by some teachers that children with similar impairments are likely to stick together, and it is interesting to consider whether this is the children's choice,

or whether they are put together by adults. There may be an element of group safety and solidarity between them, but this may also indicate a lack of a truly inclusive atmosphere in the classroom, where groups of children with certain characteristics are in advertently othered.

Those who have physical impairment will try and relate with those with physical and those with mental impairment will also be together. (Mbita teachers)

They are always playing together and sitting together. (Mbita teachers)

Some teachers seemed to have low expectations of the children's behaviour and relations with others.

The parent will always ask me how the child is doing and I say the child is not beating the children. (Mbita teachers)

However, there was also recognition from parents and teachers that positive relationships were possible and helpful in influencing the children's view of school.

If they interact with other learners, they will be comfortable, if not they will be uncomfortable. (Homa Bay teachers)

Friends. When they have friends, they don't miss school. (Kakuma teachers)

My child likes school. They like it because they like playing with toys and football with friends and some games. (Parents group Kalobeyi)

When they are in school, they are with other children. They can make friends but when they are at home they are lonely so you find they are sad when they are home. When they are in school and during PE (physical education) he is happy because he also participates in the activities. Sometimes another child or classmate assists them or helps them to play. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

Teachers recognised that sometimes the main motivation to come to school was for food and to play.

They want play materials. The children will come when they see this.
If not, they will sneak in to eat and leave if these things are not there.
(Kakuma host community teachers)

The processes/practicalities of IECD

The process of getting a child with disabilities assessed and supported in school did not seem clear to the parents. None of the parents in Mbita groups (rural area) had taken their children for assessment or knew where to do this. The EARC in Mbita noted that the main registration and assessment points are in Homa Bay Town, which would mean parents would need to take a whole day (or more) to complete the processes and most cannot take a day off to do this. In Kakuma, some parents were unhappy with the outcome of their children's assessments as their child was said to not have a problem or support was not provided. In Kakuma, community mobilisers were active in encouraging parents to take their children with disabilities to school.

Parents in Homa Bay noted the importance of informing teachers of their child's abilities during enrolment or registration. However, there is also an issue with stigma as:

Assistance is also needed for parents to be able to identify if their child is either sick or has a disability. It is important to differentiate the two. Then fear also makes parents to hide their children. So sometimes such things mean there is need to create awareness a sensitisation so that such a child is not kept in a house. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

Teachers noted that the process of children getting into school seemed to be quite haphazard, with several examples of children with disabilities being brought along for admission by older siblings, thus suggesting that conversations between teachers and parents may not be optimal yet. As noted above, this means teachers are not informed by parents of their child's disabilities.

You will find that in a class 1 student admitting their sibling to PP1.
They will tell us their parent sent them and say their parents said

they would come. Parents can be difficult to deal with. (Homa Bay teachers)

Teachers had some awareness of processes of assessment and identification of children with difficulties, though many said they had had training but needed more knowledge on this.

This tool is for a child with a challenge. I identify the challenge and I try to help the child on the problem. You find the child does not have an awareness. You use the next options. You will then get to know the best way. (Mbita teachers)

Some remembered being introduced to individualised education plans (IEPs) but most had little practical experience of using these and how they might help them with their work with children and their parents.

Experience: no experience of using it in the class. Need to revise it and then we can use it. Thinking about it, we have to get history from mother and then there is a form to be filled and after interacting. (Homa Bay teachers)

Teachers' knowledge of types of impairment seemed quite basic (for example tending to conflate deafness and a speech difficulty, not being clear about types of learning and behavioural difficulty). This suggests that their confidence with planning what to do to help the child practically may be weak, and they may indeed do something unhelpful (e.g. shouting at deaf children), or assuming lack of ability rather than being able to adapt activities or break them down into smaller stages.

We need training on how to handle the children. It would make it easy. These skills are important. Now we wonder how we would help them. (Kakuma host community teachers)

Teachers also seemed to have little knowledge of external services that they could refer children to for further assessment or where assistive devices and other advice could be acquired.

Parents' needs, worries and fears

Parents needed and worried about a number of different things in relation to their children with disabilities accessing pre-primary education. Some of these have already been noted above, such as family tensions over whether or not to send their child with disabilities to school; concerns over the quality of teaching and the care shown by teachers to their children with disabilities and their desire for special needs education trained teachers; bullying of their children in school; how their children would cope in school and if they could/would learn; and issues accessing assessments and assistive devices for their children. There is a general lack of services and support for parents of children with disabilities.

They [children with multiple disabilities] need help but those who are supposed to support them have neglected them. Sometimes if we go to ask for help sometimes you fail to get it. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

Another major issue for parents related to poverty, especially for the parents in Kakuma. Sending their children to school involved paying for things like transport to school (especially if their child had mobility issues), paying for their uniforms and school fees. In Kakuma, not having a uniform meant children were sent home. However, in Kakuma, there were also school feeding programmes which meant their child was fed.

As women or caregivers we are suffering. Even the support from WFP or UNHCR is delaying. It takes 2 months before receiving support and children are hurt. (Parents group Kaloyebei)

The children are being chased away from school because of lack of uniform and as mothers have no jobs and are buying other things like food. So, if children are supported with uniform they will study without fear. (Parents group Kaloyebei)

Another barrier, as a parent you may see you want to empower a teacher with Ksh 500 per month [equivalent to £3.50] for your child and if you don't then the teacher will not assist your child. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

Our income is not favourable so it cannot allow a parent to buy some teaching aides because they are expensive. So, when taken to school, the child would need a wheelchair which is not easy to buy.
(Parents group 2 Mbita)

Most young children with disability face a lot of challenges. They are hungry at home and they faint when like this and this causes them to not come to school. (Parents group host community)

School fees and travel costs were a factor for some parents in not sending their children to their preferred choice of a special school.

It is not easy taking the child to Nyamunga [special school] and this is why we take them to the nearest school. We would have to use *boda* (or *piki*, motorbike taxi) and lunch and this is expensive.
(Parents group 2 Mbita)

I am thinking of taking my child to a special school but due to lack of school fees I cannot take my child to a special school. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

As noted above there was also a major cost involved in getting their children assessed for families in Mbita, which was unaffordable to many as they were small scale businesspeople who could not afford to take a whole day off.

Transport issues did not just relate to their cost, but also to parental worries about their child's safety, and issues if they were not around to accompany their child to school.

I have a child who cannot walk well. When coming to school I have to use a *boda* and sometimes I am not available and this makes the child not go to school because the *boda* will not remember to pick him. (Parents group 3 Mbita)

The child can be brought by *boda* maybe alone and may be hit by a vehicle when he is saying bye. So security for the child is important.
(Parents group 3 Mbita)

I fear the *piki*. Sometimes it is late but the teachers take care of my child. My child sits and they take care of my child. The problem is transport. Sometimes there is no transport. The mother cannot take the child to school and I had an accident and I cannot carry him.

(Parents group Kakuma)

Some parents were also worried about knowing how to properly care for their child with disabilities, to love them, and wanted additional support to do so. This was also related to the stigma they and their child faced in their communities.

Some of the parents do not know where to start from with these children with disabilities. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

It is good for parent should be taught how to take care of our children. We need advice on how to guide and mentor our children. If we don't know we give the teacher a lot of work. Sometimes we can't identify what the issue is and we keep beating the child. There is need to have close relationship with the children. (Parents group host community)

In our community being that you have a child with disability, it's a happiness to some parents and other it is a curse. Some feel sad. We are different. There are those who love and others laugh. There are those who abuse. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

It is probably a communication barrier between the child and the parent. So, we need someone who has the ability to communicate and will assist this parent and eventually the child might become a very good person. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

Some parents talked of themselves or others in their family caning or physically punishing their child because they were unable to do things.

The father keeps canning the child badly and this makes me feel bad and sad. I feel he is being canned because he is someone with disability. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

I have a son with mental disability. He cannot write and he has a problem talking. I discovered this later since we normally cane him when we ask him to do something and he cannot do. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

Others noted that they needed to prepare their children 'mentally, physically and psychologically' before they go to school, although the manner in which some of what they suggested was not necessarily child-friendly as it involved corporal punishment (Parents group 1 Homa Bay). Some of this might involve support with materials.

My child is normally angry so before he is enrolled, I should be able to learn and talk to this child so that the child has understood or understands that when he joins school he is not beating other children. This is something I can start doing. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

In preparation, if the child cannot count one to ten you start by teaching the child so that by the time they are being enrolled they can have some knowledge. They can also be canned a bit so that his angriness can reduce. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

To me, what is possible is maybe look for materials like charts to start training the child from home before joining preschool. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

Teachers' experiences, attitudes and concerns

Teachers in the FGDs reported the number of children with disabilities in their class and this was usually between one and five per class. The way that they described the children was sometimes quite anecdotal or inaccurate, with some 'lay' judgements rather than using the language of access needs used in the Washington group child functioning module, which suggests that they still have a rather individual/medical way of categorising children.

Five children, two with multiple not talking and walking and paralysed on side, third is sight and the two are one is multiple –

cannot walk or do anything moving or writing and one is physical disability. Four boys, one girl. (Mbita teachers)

I have a child with albinism. I encouraged the mother to bring the child to school. When he came in, the children started shouting asking what happened? And the child got scared and up till now has not been back to school. (Kakuma teachers)

Child who doesn't speak, boy – we were trained but we don't know how to communicate with the child. we need someone with sign language. (Kakuma teachers)

The mother told me he cannot walk, he can hold the cup well, meaning he can hold the crayon. I will make him sit next to me, in case there is something he has to scribble I have to put it on book for him to be able to write. (Homa Bay teachers)

As noted above, some teachers said that their attitude to children with disabilities had changed over time and after receiving training and they were now more accepting of them.

Teacher's views of their relationships with parents were mainly positive and they saw the importance of regular contact and discussion with parents in order to work together for the wellbeing of the children.

When I was teaching, we would sing with them and when you finish they would start singing. If we are clapping, once we are done, they would start clapping. I called the parent after observing them for a while. This is when they opened up and told me. (Homa Bay teachers)

The parents should have a positive attitude towards the learners. They should say positive lessons that encourages a learner. (Mbita teachers)

A few expressed negative attitudes, suggesting that parents were overprotective or not well informed about the concept of inclusive education for their children in local schools

In some classes we do not have children with disability because their parents fear to bring them to school. For the children who have been to school, I don't think they have a fear. (Homa Bay teachers)

Several teachers emphasised the difficulties of large class sizes and the impossibility of attending all the children's needs in this situation. This is a clearly a source of stress and strain on them and even if they believe in inclusion, they feel it is difficult to do in practice.

We are ready to include children but there are some challenges we face as teachers. The children with disability are neglected.
(Kalobeyei and Kakuma teachers)

They understand the idea of a Competency Based Curriculum and the idea of adapting to the child and that it was designed to be inclusive and allow them room for creativity. However, they emphasised the challenges of this in reality, with the expense (time and money) for the teachers to develop the materials. One solution is to have more adults in the classroom (e.g. classroom assistants or similar) or have parents support in making teaching materials, via parents/volunteer groups.

There was a lot of recognition from teachers that they needed to focus more on the topic of disability, learn more and admit more children with disabilities to their schools.

As far as disability is concerned, we cannot say this is the end of this meeting or workshop. We anticipate having more workshops. We need to learn and know more about disability so that as we admit these children we give you more information about them. We are going to mobilise for the children to come. (Kakuma host community teachers)

Children stuck at home

Some children with disabilities, especially those with multiple disabilities, are 'stuck at home' and do not currently have access to school:

We also have children with multiple disability and they are not able to walk and cannot feed and they are at home. We have identified some and talked to parents. What support is there? (Mbita teachers)

There were concerns that children stuck at home would be lonely and slower to develop.

When they are in school, they are with other children. They can make friends but when they are at home they are lonely so you find they are sad when they are home. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

There was a recognition amongst parents that early support was needed for these children to prepare them for school, both support that parents could provide for their children themselves and external support, although this was often lacking (Parents group 1 Homa Bay). However, there were also some concerns that their difficulties were so great that they cannot go to school.

For my child, the child is six years and cannot chew. They cannot chew food. They just swallow. If you don't support this child even if you bring the food in front of them they cannot take and eat. The child cannot talk or pick anything. Can this child go to school?
According to me they cannot go to school. (Parents group 1 Homa Bay)

Four parents of children with multiple disabilities in Homa Bay County were interviewed about their experiences. These were parents who were receiving some support for their children through a programme by Sense International so their experience does not necessarily reflect the experiences of parents of children with multiple disabilities who lack such support. Through the programme, learning support assistants come and teach basics such as activities of basic living, literacy, and numeracy to children in their own homes.

A number of themes emerged relating to the care and love the parents of these home-based children have for their children, the support they need to help their children at home, including physio and learning support, their desire to find a suitable school for their child and their worries about whether this is possible.

I normally talk to her and touch her. Like I can touch her tummy when she is hungry just so that she knows.

I have been trying to look for a wheelchair for Robert because he is heavy and tall. Up to now I have not got a wheelchair.

I would like Robert to be taken to a school where the caretaker will be someone who understands the child well... If the environment does not support Robert's condition then I would not enrol him.

I wonder if the teachers can take care and have a heart of taking care of these children. I would like to know if there are children like her, does she have company so that she is not lonely. I wonder if she would be able to go to the local school. I would also like to know if the toilets accessible for her. The environment has to be able to confirm that she could be comfortable.

If I found a school, Paul can learn with children like him I would be happy... Can Paul be enrolled in school?

I am planning to take him to Nyamuga [special school]. I have not thought about any other school. I would like to take him to school because in school there are things that can be done for them.

Overarching systems and structural aspects

As noted above, the wider systems in place to support children with disabilities are perceived to be either not in existence or inadequate for meeting the needs of children and their families and are very hard to access.

There are no services. It is expected that the parents provide all the services. (Parents group 2 Mbita)

As parents we help them but we are limited. We help them as their parents. And have not heard of any organisations helping these children. (Parents group Kakuma)

The first thing is through registration with national council. My concern is some people fear the process. (Parent group 1 Homa Bay)

There was a time I went to look for the disability form and I was told the forms were over in Mbita. I went to town at the office, SOS children and they told me the forms were over. And if I still wanted some I should go to Homa Bay to the government office... I have not yet managed to go. (Parents homecare visit 4)

Teachers felt that volunteers and other community members could be helpful in promoting inclusion, in persuading parents to enrol their children in school, and being supportive.

Some organisations can support financially to support parents to own they have children with disability. (Homa Bay teachers)

If they can be there and help it would be good. Organisations / groups can go to the chief and call a *baraza* (council) to push for things to change. (Homa Bay teachers)

We lack someone who would act as a classroom assistant. We would like to have a classroom assistant and then we would mobilise and advocate in the community asking them to release their children to school. (Kalobeyei and Kakuma teachers)

Teachers also suggested that the ethnic/religious and language background of families could intersect with attitudes to disability and parents' willingness to send their children to school

We are also receiving learners from the camps. We have Congolese, Burundian and Sudanese children. This would be an opportunity to work closely with these children and they benefit from this programme. (Kakuma host community teachers)

There were only a few views expressed about the gender of the children and whether being a boy or a girl makes a difference to their inclusion. However, those that did mention this suggested that boys were more difficult to include because it

was expected that their behaviour would be more difficult to manage. This of course may not necessarily be the case in reality.

The boys even though they have a disability they will try and struggle and match others. The girls will be quiet they will not be as aggressive as boys. The girl with mental challenge will not be involved but the boy can walk the whole class and will wish to touch everyone but the girls are not like that. (Mbita teachers)

There was a rather stereotyping view that boys were more aggressive, disruptive and outgoing than girls.

The boys are quite wild as compared with girls. (Homa Bay teachers)

Although more balanced views were also expressed

The challenges are different depending on the disability they have. (Kakuma teachers)

Children's perspectives on school

As might be predicted because of their ages and stages of cognitive development, the views expressed by the children with disabilities in the five children's groups were quite concrete and concerned with immediate aspects of their school experience. It may also be that some children were unable to express their ideas because of lack of enough adaptation to their impairment (e.g. children with deafness, cognitive or severe physical impairment). Being asked to express their views was also probably a new experience for them and they may not be used to working together in a group or being asked questions of this sort. Nevertheless, it was good to give them an opportunity to contribute.

There was a generally positive attitude to school (though of course this may be a biased sample, as those for whom going to school had not been successful are not represented in FGDs run in school). Some of their views are difficult to distinguish as being specific to having an impairment and may be similar to the views that might be heard from any pre-school children. Indeed young children with impairments may not

always know that they are categorised by others as being different or having disability as a status.

The children enjoyed playing in school and wanted to be there to learn.

I like our school. I normally play with the ball. (Children's group Kakuma Mixed)

I like to learn. (Children's group, Mbita)

I like the class. (Children's group, Mbita)

The children expressed views about the physical environment, wanting it to be clean, spacious, having enough chairs, a toilet, and feeling safe (e.g. with a fence and a guard).

I like the class. I like the desk I sit on. (Children's group, Homa Bay Town)

I like the gate because it is nice. (Children's group, Homa Bay Town)

I like the chairs. (Children's group, Homa Bay Town)

I like the trees. (Children's group, Homa Bay Town)

They also expressed a range of views about the food provided at school, some positive and some negative.

I don't like the food they give in school. This is food distributed by UNHCR. It is yellow in colour. (Children's group Tarach)

Contrasting opinions about the teachers were also mentioned, including teachers who were kind and loving, and conversely being worried about being scolded or beaten.

I like teacher. They teach us. (Children's' group Kakuma Mix)

I like the teacher. She plaits her hair nicely and she doesn't beat me. (Children's Group, Homa Bay Town)

We don't like the teachers. They beat us. (Children's' group Kakuma Mix)

I don't like being beaten. (Children's group, Homa Bay Town)

The teachers also expressed views that were informed by what they have observed of the children's behaviour and attitudes – so these are proxy children's perspectives.

When we were growing up, we would be told to go to school and eat. Now school is the place for food. We know the child is here is eat. So, for me as a teacher I take the initiative to teach them something. They then realise that the learning is accompanied with food and playing. (Kakuma teachers)

They are not happy about being beaten. They say a teacher is bad when they are being beaten. They like coming when the teacher plays with them and allows them to play. (Kakuma teachers)

Some of them are happy. We have one who used to go to school on Sunday and is surprised there is no teacher in school. (Kakuma teachers)

If you don't give them playing materials they do not enjoy. (Kakuma teachers)

Reflections of the peer researchers

As part of the process, the nine peer researchers reflected on their experience of being involved in this qualitative research: initial training, running the groups and hearing what was coming out from the groups, analysis and interpretation, and subsequent review of their own learning during the project.

The following is a summary of their reflections: These have been divided into three subthemes.

Reflection on Process

The peer researchers loved the collaborative research process. Although some had been involved in some research before, their reflections indicated that this was the first time they have been involved all through the research process – data collection, analysis, validation and reporting. They indicated that they were apprehensive at the

beginning as the process was not clear. However, they appreciated that the IDS team and national consultant walked with them through the process, equipping them to be able to run the groups and get involved in the analysis process. They did share that running the children's group was a new and different experience. They noted that simplifying and shortening the discussion guides for next time would be crucial for the next round of discussions. Additionally, there was agreement to run dummy groups in dholuo (local language in Homa Bay) for more practice on how to word questions etc.

Reflections on the issues arising from the discussions

Peer researchers shared the following observations and issues arising from the groups. These were linked to their lived experiences.

- There were a number of children in ECD who are older than the expected age. Reflecting on this, peer researchers note that children with disability (and especially those with intellectual disability) have difficulty in transitioning from one class to the other, meaning there are older children in ECD (some have been in the same class for between four and six years).
- Parents of children with complex/multiple disability do not have support for their children. They are stranded at home with their children. More support for these parents and their children is crucial.
- Parents of children with disability are still talking ill of their children and in some instances beating their children for not passing exams or not doing as they are told (e.g., when sent for something at home and do not come with the item). As a result, they do not see the importance of investing in them with regards to education. This contributes to decisions about whether they transition from class to class, as well as when they enroll their children. A lot of community sensitisation is required to shift these attitudes.
- Inclusive education (IE) has different definitions for different individuals.
 - For some teachers and parents, it meant having separate classes for children with disability in the same school.

- Parents still consider special schools to be important for their children as they do not trust that their children will be well taken care of in public schools.

Some quotes from the peer researchers' reflections in relation to these points are noted below. Comments from other stakeholders are also included here. They were not officially part of FGDs but were involved in incidental conversations in the schools.

Children with and without disability, they are learning in the school. Parents find this learning to be a challenge. This is why parents are not bringing their kids to school. In an integrated school, the children are taken to that school e.g. in Katilu. An integrated school is a school that has children with different types of disability. (Classroom Assistant)

What seems to be happening now and what is being proposed is for public schools to have designated classes for children with disability as opposed to having all children in one class. This seems to be a recommendation by teachers and parents. (Peer Researcher)

The idea is not special units within a public school. This is what has been happening within Kakuma. Children with disability learn in the special units and have limited time to interact with the other children. IE [inclusive education] increases participation and reduced separation. So, IE is same class, pit latrine, access to food, outside classroom activities. Everything has to be designed to include all children – with or without disability. The teaching institutions for teachers have not been talking about IE. What they currently have is training of special needs teachers. The current curriculum is integrated and should be delivered in the classroom. This is an issue. IE may be the affordable option in the long run. Children should be able to pick the school they want to go to. (HI Staff)

Parents have a perception that my child has a disability and cannot learn with other children since they will be beaten and discriminated. This is where we are in the nation and county. (Peer Researcher)

There is a lot to be done to change thinking/mentality/perception of the teachers, students and the parents to get them to IE. (Peer Researcher)

The point is inclusive education can work. (Classroom Assistant).

Reflections as peer researchers interacting with parents and children

- They felt that having peer researchers with disabilities as part of the process, and especially leading groups had an impact on parents. There was a feeling that their presence was a form of role modeling and inspiration to parents on what their children could become and for the children on what they could aspire to.
- Peer researchers in Homa Bay felt that running the groups, especially for parents, was an opportunity for experience sharing. One parent who was considering enrolling their child, made a firm decision to enroll his son after hearing from the other parents. This child was part of the focus group discussion the next day.
- One peer researcher in Homa Bay sensitised us on how to engage with children with multiple/complex disabilities. She advised us to not touch or speak directly to the child unless the caregiver was in the room. She shared this from her experience of working with children with multiple/complex disability. (Nb this was an unusual view and not one that is supported by the IDS research team. There is no reason not to talk directly to any child, as long as safeguarding practices are in place and a communication mode that suits the child is used).

A quote from the peer researcher reflections:

I graduated from Moi University and when we are preparing the teaching plan, we learnt and saw that there is a section where you include information on special needs. You don't teach and assume everyone can hear you and see the blackboard. It is designed in a way where you need to include children with disability. Everyone is not yet informed. More engagement is needed at the community level. (Peer Researcher)

4. Discussion

Early years are an essential phase of children's growth and development, which influences their outcomes across the entire life, helping to prepare them for lifelong learning and social integration (Okiyo and Muema 2021). For children with disabilities, it is a vital time to ensure access to interventions which can help them reach their full potential (WHO and UNICEF 2012). Ensuring they can access early childhood development and education is vital as disparities in educational attainment between children with and without disabilities starts at the first grade (after pre-school), and the gap widens as each year, contributing to increased chances of living in poverty as adults due to lost education and human capital (Howgego *et al.* 2014; Filmer 2008). However, there is little research on what works for children with disabilities in ECDE, especially in relation to attendance, participation and learning (Okiyo and Muema 2021). This study goes some way into looking at the experiences of disability inclusion in ECD in Kenya. The focus group discussions generated rich and varied data from the parents and teachers and much of what they said was echoed by parents of children on the home programme and other incidental conversations that the research team had with school staff (head teachers, teaching assistants) and others, including community mobilisers, ECD County representatives, NGO staff, EARC officers, and learning assistants.

Parents and teachers had mixed understandings of the concept of inclusion. However, overall and looking across the perspectives of the teachers and parents there was growing understanding of the purpose and justification of inclusive education at pre-school level and the idea that children with disabilities had a right to be in school with their nondisabled peers. Training, community mobilisation, and exposure to other parents who had sent their children with disabilities to school had contributed to this increased acceptance that children with disabilities should be in their local pre-primary schools. According to some teachers, this increasing acceptance of inclusive ECDE was not necessarily shared by the parents of children without disabilities in their community.

However, concerns about the quality of education and level of care received by their children with disabilities meant that many parents still tend to favour sending their children to special schools (although cost prohibited them from doing this) or having

a special unit in their school for their children, with specially trained teachers who could properly care for and teach their children, rather than having them in mixed classrooms. Concern about the level of care teachers could provide was especially acute among the parents of home-based children with disabilities, whose care needs tend to be greater than children with disabilities already accessing schools, as it was a factor in whether they would be comfortable with sending their child to school.

Some of the concerns about the quality of education their children with disabilities were receiving may partly arise out of the expectations or misunderstanding parents had of the contents of early childhood education. For example, some parents expressed disappointment that their child had not learnt to read yet. There may also be issues with what the teachers were expecting of children as some parents reported that their children had homework. While literacy skills are part of the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (KICD 2017), along with language and communication skills, physical education, child disability assessment, creative arts, emotional awareness, and health and nutrition, experts in ECDE are concerned that trends in early childhood education programmes are increasingly veering toward formal academic learning that children are not developmentally ready for and which take away from letting children be children (Okiyo and Muema 2021).

There was evidence of some stereotyped expectations about children with some impairments and around their genders. The capacity of children to progress developmentally and subsequently academically, and the speed at which this would occur was perhaps underestimated or overestimated in relation to ECDE and understanding of the types and extent of support that some would need was lacking at times. It was perceived that some children with disabilities were easier to include than others and some children are still regarded as not suitable for school enrolment.

Despite the importance of early identification and assessment of children with disabilities, parents, especially those living further away from EARCs, struggled to get their child assessed. The distance to travel to the EARCs and the time that would need to be taken away from livelihood activities was not affordable for many families, especially those living in rural areas or in poverty. In addition, families still struggled with disability stigma in their communities, and this meant some parents may be reluctant to accept their child with disabilities.

There were major concerns about lack of knowledge about how to teach inclusively, more knowledge about IEPs, and material resources in school, a need for more training, space, equipment, suitable physical environments, and teaching materials to suit different children, or more generally. These findings support similar findings by Kiplagat *et al.* (2019) in their study on learning challenges to disability inclusive learning in ECDE Centers in Eldoret East Sub-County, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, who noted challenges to inclusive ECDE, including resistance to accommodations for children with disabilities, lack of facilities and support services, and negative attitudes by teachers and support staff. The National Pre-Primary Education Policy of 2017 also identifies insufficient instructional and play materials, high pupil-teacher ratios and inappropriate teaching methods as persisting challenges to ECDE education more generally (Republic of Kenya 2017).

There were serious concerns about bullying and teasing of children with disabilities by both other children and adults (including teachers) and the effect this had on their experience of ECDE, but also a recognition that children need to learn to appreciate and accept each other's differences. This acceptance needs to be modelled by the teachers and some parents noted that teachers had disciplined other children in the class for bullying their child and since then their child was happy to go to school. Interestingly the benefit of having contact with peers who are different was not particularly mentioned, just the enjoyment of having friends and playing with others that children with disabilities had.

The effective involvement of parents/caregivers in the education of their children was also an issue in some cases. Some parents asked for more support in how to care for their children, while others noted that they never helped with their child's homework. It was not clear whether this lack of engagement in their children's education and development was a result of their time pressures, poverty, their lack of knowledge of how to support their children's education, or their lack of investment in or expectations for their child's education. There were no parents' groups in any of the schools, but parents recognised that these could be beneficial for supporting them and their children.

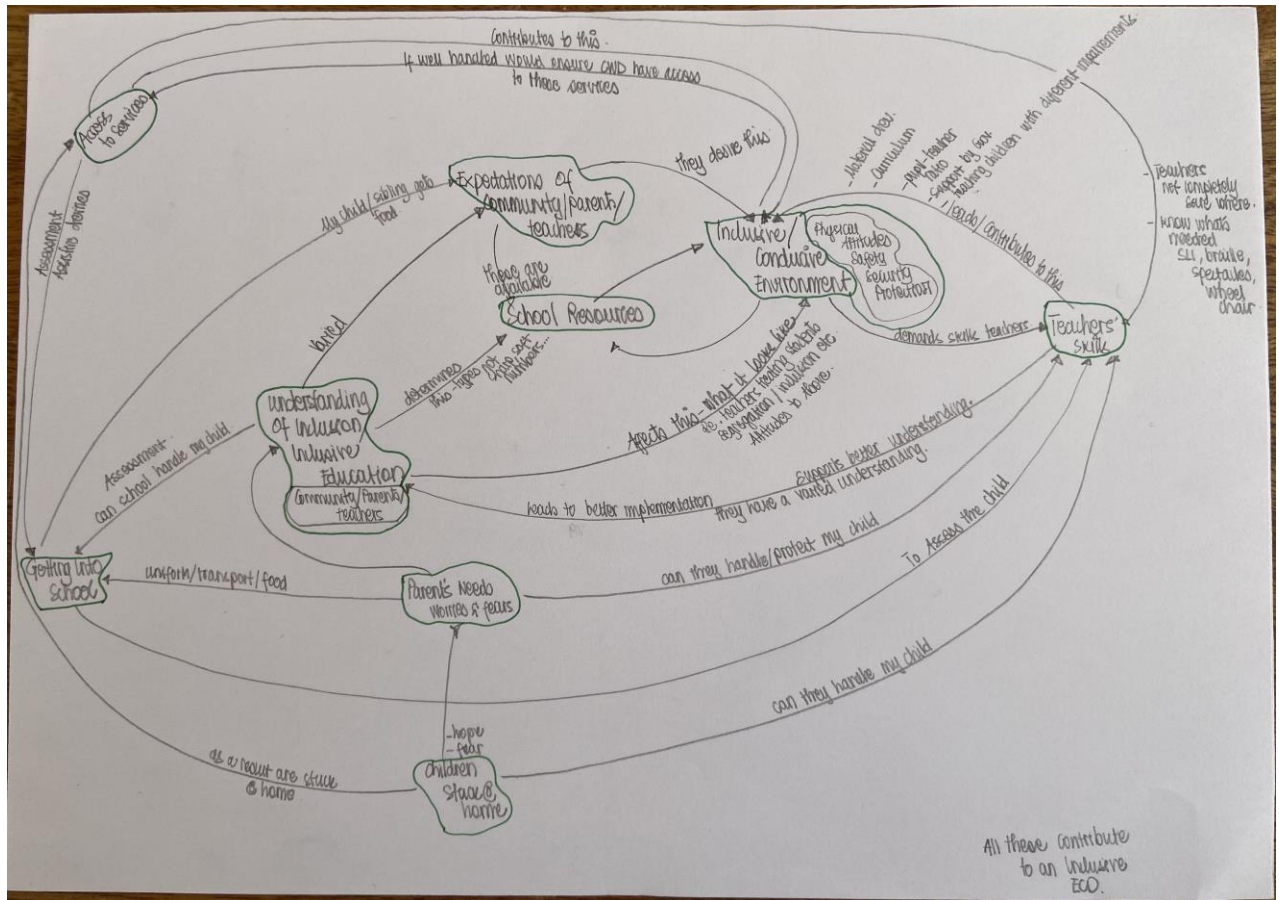
Homa Bay County and Kakuma, are different contexts but many of the experiences and perspectives shared were rather similar. However, a number of differences were

noted. In Kakuma a refugee context, where many are dependent on social assistance from UN agencies and NGOs, the impact and importance of poverty as a factor affecting school attendance was more noticeable, although poverty was also an issue in Homa Bay County, especially for those in rural areas who may have to pay more for transport costs, for example. Families were grateful for the food that was offered at school and also mentioned costs such as school uniforms, school fees, transport, etc as limiting their choices for their children. However, the food rations were not always to children's taste. The environment in Kakuma was also noted to be dustier and dirtier. There are a variety of different nationalities in Kakuma but there was surprisingly little mention of the differences these different cultures and ethnicities had on attitudes towards disability. It would be interesting to learn more about how refugee children with disabilities adapt to the ECDE provided in the camps.

We did not have the capacity to run groups for children with disabilities not attending school, or with other nondisabled children so the perspectives of these children or of parents whose children are not enrolled in school or the home-based programme is missing in this study, apart from those in the Sense International home-schooling programme.

The main themes and how they relate to each other is represented on the mind-map below (Figure 4.1). This is not definitive but does demonstrate that many of the themes are interdependent. Improvement in any one aspect would not alone achieve the goal of good inclusive practice and a positive experience for all children. Attention needs to be given to many areas, both inside schools, in the community and in supporting structures and systems.

Figure 4.1: Mind map of the interlinking themes arising from the focus group discussions



Source: Josephine Njungi

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, we can see that the process of running sixteen focus groups and four individual interviews to gather the perspectives of children with disabilities, parents and teachers about inclusive education at pre-school level working with peer researchers with disabilities has worked well. The research has produced rich and varied findings and many of the themes were common among both parents and teachers in the two contexts of Homa Bay County and Kakuma. The collaboration between the consortium partners meant that logistical and recruitment, understanding of the context, and support arrangements went very smoothly and with local OPD involvement.

The methodology worked well, although of course there is always room to collect more information if resources are available for a more extensive data collection period, to talk to a great variety of respondents. For example, we did not talk to older children with disabilities who might have reflected on their past experiences of pre-school, or to children with disabilities who are not in school, or to parents who have actively chosen not to send their children to school or were not able to do so, apart from those in the Sense International home-schooling programme.

Both parents and teachers had mixed understandings of the concept of inclusion, about whether it could benefit all children and how it could work. There was quite a strong feeling that special schools, if they were nearby and affordable, would be provide better education and more safety for the children with disabilities. Parents and teachers were worried about children being bullied and also not learning well in mainstream classes. The pressures on teachers with already large classes was also mentioned by many. However, the benefits of inclusive approaches and the human rights arguments for them were also understood and promoted by some participants.

Teachers felt that they need more knowledge and resources in order to practice inclusively (including more knowledge about how to use IEPs), and many had mixed expectations of what children with disabilities could achieve. The social benefits for children of being in school were appreciated and it was also recognised that for very poor children, the main motivation may be access to food rather than education per se. Ethnic and faith-based aspects were very rarely mentioned (and were not

specifically probed for), and gender differences in the learning potential and wellbeing of boys and girls with disabilities were not a major theme, though boys were seen as more difficult to handle in the classroom.

These FGDs and interviews were undertaken before the main Task Order 20 interventions had commenced, so more training, awareness raising, positive parent resources etc have been initiated since this data collection. Thus, the views expressed here can be regarded as baseline data and we hope that on repetition of the process near the end of the project, more nuanced understandings of inclusion, positive experiences of its value and identifiable progress in the children's wellbeing and development will be evidenced. We would expect more uniformly positive attitudes from parents and teachers if the programme's various interventions have been effective.

The peer researchers' reflections show that they enjoyed and learnt a lot personally from being involved in the research. This was in relation to their own skills, self-esteem and awareness of inclusion as a concept and understanding the current state of play amongst parents, teachers and others in the communities of Homa Bay and Kakuma. Ideally, we would have had peer researchers with a broader range of impairment types and experiences, but this seemed to be difficult to achieve.

We hope to repeat the process with the same team in late 2022 or early 2023.

Acknowledgements

We would particularly like to thank our peer researchers for their hard work and the children, parents and teachers for their participation in the focus groups and for sharing their experiences and perspectives honestly and in-depth. These have been richly informative and have helped us all to learn a lot.

We would also like to recognise and heartily thank all our DID TO20 consortium partners: Sightsavers, Humanity and Inclusion, Leonard Cheshire, and Sense International, and the local organisations of persons with disabilities for their support and cooperation with our work.

6. Appendix

Recommendations from Parents, Teachers, and Peer Researchers

Physical environment

Involve the school board of management as they are the members who approve the usage of the school resources. For instance, they can approve the construction of disability friendly toilets, ramps, learning materials for learners with disabilities, amongst others.

Classroom: should be spacious, compounded fenced, watchman at fence to watch who is coming in and out, relevant materials.

Building more classrooms. The classes are congested and they are small.

Enough tables and chairs.

Toilets improved, disability proof. Everyone shares, all the girls go to the same toilets from ECDE to 8. They can be kicked out by the older students. They should have a separate toilet. If it's the hole it should be small so that they don't fear. Important to have a toilet for the children with disability and should be clean. Water is also an issue. They go drinking porridge and there is no water.

Physical access inside and outside: For those with physical disability, have ramps so that they don't struggle to come in.

Good playing ground for all: levelled... the one we have is hilly and it's not safe for them. For example, one child cannot go where the other children are since it is not safe for him. It needs to be clear of bushes and stones.

The play materials that are fixed are needed in the learning centres. But our school is very small – swing that a physically challenged child can use.

Classroom equipment and materials

Assistive devices provided.

With visual impairment – writing materials bold and big. For those with visually impaired should have materials in braille and videos they can listen to.

Materials should be accommodative to all children.

Improved playing materials, learning materials.

Additional support and advice: more training (material development – get skills to make materials to suit these learners. This is an important skill) and support – the materials that are accommodative and classrooms.

Need training more especially on sign language. I was saying I have a child with hearing impairment and I cannot talk to them. Hearing aids should be provided so that children with hearing problem can have them and they can hear what we are teaching.

Classroom must be talkative. This means – with charts, pictures written in bold with bright colours and can be seen from far. It should be a talking wall.

How will talking wall help with visual impairment? – there are touching ones and we put videos on the phone and they listen to it. They will enjoy it. The phone really helps. We record them using our phones and we show them.

The materials should be adequate. Sometimes they are being shared by both classes. It is difficult to refuse the child who wants the one piece. They may withdraw if you refuse.

Good playing materials: attractive, colour makes them attractive and variety.

There is need for the teachers to use locally available materials to improvise certain play items to reduce high dependence on commercial items.

Other resources that would help children come to school

Transport provided.

From the children's perspective, the provision of food is important: I would want food to be there for me so that I can learn. They should cook rice, porridge, maize, beans.

Trained teachers

The government should employ enough qualified teachers and to give them training on how to handle children with special needs and train them on CBC.

More training on how to handle children with disability, including for all staff members in school, not just teachers. Supporting learners with disabilities should be a collective responsibility

The teacher should be stricter on children who are abusing the children. They should love the children with disability, bring them close and take care of them. They should not see the disability in them.

There is need for specified disciplinary action taken to teachers and pupils teasing or bullying others. This will help to reduce chances of children with disabilities leaving school to stay at home.

When they are in class and are teaching the teacher should check the work of children with disability, talk to them, check if they understand and put them together as other children. Put more effort in those children.

Knowledgeable and attentive teachers – well informed and has a component of early children would be important.

Flexible teaching approach: If they don't enjoy lessons in class, they can enjoy learning outside. Interaction between talking wall and outside learning materials. This mix will help with learning.

Enlightening others about the conditions and telling them to accommodate him.

Friendly environment.

Caring caregivers (in school).

All would like to get the report. They would like to hear from Kakuma as well. It would be good to see if we are on the same boat because we are partnering in this programme.

Parents and families

Parents should be trained and taught on inclusive learning so that if they have other children at home, they can bring them to school. They can be trained on care – how to handle the children at home.

Parent and teacher should work collaboratively and be sensitised together.

Invest in supporting children with disabilities stuck at home so that they can attend school.

Parents agreed that it would be a good idea to set up parent's groups: *When we are together as parents, we can realise that it is not only me as a parent who has the same issues. We can support each other.*

Parents suggest that one way in which they can avoid sending their children to special schools and ensure they are understood is to employ teachers with the relevant skills: *If there is a trained teacher on special needs educations in normal schools then it would be good. It would mean that they do not have to go to special schools.*

Livelihoods support for families: *As parents some of us are farmers and some of us are in business. So, if organisations can support the parents by purchasing bulls for digging or capital for business then the parents can be empowered to take children to school.*

You cannot help the children without helping the family.

Assessment

Movable assessment and registration.

More EARC centres should be centralised to avoid long distant travels and this will enable those concerned to have close and effective monitoring for quick placement.

7. References

- Filmer, D. (2008) [Disability, Poverty, and Schooling in Developing Countries: Results from 14 Household Surveys](#), *The World Bank Economic Review* 22(1): 141-163, DOI: 10.1093/wber/lhm021 (accessed 21 July 2022)
- Howgego, C., Miles, S., and Myers, J. (2014) [Inclusive learning: Children with disabilities and difficulties in learning](#), Health & Education Advice & Resource Team (accessed 21 July 2022)
- Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) (2017) [Basic Education Curriculum Framework](#) (accessed 21 July 2022)
- Kiplagat, H., Syonhi, J. and Situma, J. (2019) [Learning Challenges to Inclusive Learning in an ECDE Centres in Eldoret East Sub-County, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya](#), *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9 (11): 513–535, DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v9-i11/6572 (accessed 21 July 2022)
- Republic of Kenya (2017) [National Pre-Primary Education Policy](#) (accessed 21 July 2022)
- Okiyo, M., O. and Muema. M., K. (2021) *Current practices in early childhood development education in Kenya and other low and middle income countries in sub-Saharan Africa: A desk review*. Haywards Health: Sightsavers