

## **Learning lessons from using the Washington Group Questions in education programming**

Girls Education Challenge (GEC) is a flagship DFID programme aiming to help up to a million of the world's poorest girls across 18 countries to improve their lives through education. It's focused on finding more effective ways of getting girls into school, to receive a quality education and to transition appropriately.

GEC is committed to ensuring that girls with disabilities benefit from the programme and as part of that requires accurate and relevant disability disaggregated data to be collected by all grantees. In this way we hope to be able to raise the visibility of girls with disabilities within all programmes, to begin to identify their learning and transition needs and to assess the impact of GEC projects on their opportunities. Whilst the intention is for the GEC itself to have a transformative effect directly on girls with disabilities, our hope is also that the lessons learned across the GEC portfolio regarding disability will provide insights of value to all future education programmes. To this end, all GEC projects are required to use the Washington Group questions to collect disability disaggregated data; the Washington Group Short Set of Questions and the Child Functioning Set of Questions have been integrated into household and school surveys.

The collection of disability disaggregated data is ongoing at the time of writing but at this early stage using the Washington Group questions across the GEC programme has already generated valuable learning. Here are four key lessons we've learned to date:

### **1. All education programmes should accommodate disability from the start.**

The disability disaggregated data collected so far by GEC projects reports an overall prevalence rate of 5% amongst 'mainstream GEC projects' (GEC projects that do not specifically target girls with disabilities). Given that many of the mainstream GEC projects did not actively plan or expect the inclusion of girls with disabilities this finding underscores the importance of making all education programmes accessible from the start. Anticipated or not, persons with disabilities (especially hidden disabilities) will be present in most schools. Education programmes always need to consider this by ensuring that existing project activities are accessible rather than creating separate, disability-specific interventions and by working with schools to reduce any barriers to learning and transition for disabled students.

### **2. Targeted projects increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities.**

While this appears an obvious lesson, data collected from GEC projects serves only to underscore its importance. The prevalence of disability across the entire GEC portfolio (including a small number of projects that specifically target girls with disabilities) is 10.8%, according to the data currently available. The overall prevalence rate is double that of mainstream only GEC projects (see point 1), suggesting that it's only by systematically targeting girls with disabilities that education projects will substantially increase the number included in project activities.

### **3. Specific impairments are more prevalent in mainstream schools and some settings than others.**

Girls who have difficulty remembering or concentrating as well as girls with difficulty seeing are especially prevalent in mainstream schools supported by GEC projects: girls reporting difficulty with self-care are the least prevalent. Globally there are no reliable and comparable disability

disaggregated statistics on disability in children and young people either in school or out of school meaning we must take this data at face value. Anecdotally, however, these differences may stem from ideas around which impairments are more easily integrated by schools insofar as children with difficulties in remembering or concentrating on the surface seem to require schools to make fewer adaptations to infrastructure and pedagogy than is required to accommodate children with significant mobility, self-care, hearing and communication difficulties. In practice of course, without appropriate support children with these difficulties may still find themselves excluded within the classroom which is why raising their visibility is so important. The extremely high numbers of girls who have difficulty remembering and concentrating found by some GEC projects may also reflect the conflict affected and/ or fragile settings in which the projects operate; difficulties remembering or concentrating could be a product of personal trauma, insecurity or poor health and nutrition. Global research initiatives focused on the use of Washington Group questions in humanitarian contexts currently underway will shed further light on this issue and its implications, but this lesson underscores how important it is for education programmes to consider what would constitute the most effective learning environment. Not just in fragile settings but also in those where children are more likely to be attending school having missed meals.

#### **4. Using the Washington Group questions increases awareness and engagement with disability.**

Requiring GEC projects to collect disability disaggregated data using the Washington Group questions has fostered among grantees a greater awareness of girls with disabilities and focus on improving their inclusion. For many grantees, disability is an entirely new issue to consider but rather than shy away from the issue for lack of experience many GEC projects have actively sought to build their capacity regarding disability: delivering disability awareness training to project staff; taking steps to challenge harmful social norms at community-level; identifying low-cost, innovative solutions to improve accessibility for girls with disabilities to project activities. Projects have access to technical support through the Fund Manager, but many GEC projects have been prompted by the data collected to engage civil society groups such as Disabled People's Organisations or NGOs working with disabled people to produce synergies that may benefit everyone.

The GEC is breaking new ground by using the Washington Group Questions across such a large portfolio of education projects. As more GEC projects collect disability disaggregated data we will be able to learn more lessons of practical importance to the sector. Most significantly, the resulting dataset will be substantial and promises to provide enormous opportunity to document what works. By standardising data collection across the GEC it will be possible to analyse prevalence rates, learning and transition outcomes for girls with disabilities and to investigate the impact of disability on education. To this end, we will continue to monitor progress and share insights and learning regularly.