

## **The community-based actions that removed barriers to inclusive education in Kenya**

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This article represents a culmination of inclusive education projects implemented in western Kenya since 2010. In this article, we discuss the 2018 iteration of this on-going community-based participatory research (CBPR)-informed project in which we utilised multiple theoretical frameworks to inform our methods in this project, including decolonising methodologies and Critical Disability Studies (CDS). We conducted qualitative interviews as a way to learn about the ways in which inclusion committees facilitated the partial removal of barriers to the development of an inclusive education system in the region over the last decade. In this article, we provide an overview of the barriers to inclusive education in the global South and sub-Saharan Africa, with a particular focus on western Kenya. We present findings that highlight the various inclusion committee actions that contributed to the partial removal of barriers which included: sensitising communities about inclusive education; promoting access to inclusive education; and implementing inclusive strategies like income generating activities (IGAs) and co-teaching. We conclude the article by suggesting potential ways forward for inclusive education in Kenya including: a multi-sector approach for family supports; providing government incentives to inclusive schools; and promoting IGAs and co-teaching practices in teacher education programs and in schools.

**Keywords:** Critical Disability Studies; inclusive education, community-based participatory research (CBPR); income-generating activities (IGAs); co-teaching

### **Introduction**

This article represents a culmination of inclusive education projects conducted in western Kenya since 2010. This on-going community-based participatory research (CBPR)-informed project has taken many forms over the years, from two three-month research trips in 2010 and 2013, respectively, to a seven-month Fulbright research project in 2015-16. The 2018 iteration of the project is the focus of this article, where Elder, in collaboration with Oswago, conducted

qualitative interviews with project stakeholders as a way to learn about the ways in which inclusion committees partially removed barriers to the development of an inclusive education system in the region over the last decade. What follows is an overview of barriers to inclusive education in the global South and the current state of inclusive education in sub-Saharan Africa, with a particular focus on western Kenya. We present findings that highlight the various actions taken by members of the inclusion committee that contributed to the partial removal of barriers to inclusive education in the region, and pose potential ways forward for Kenya and other similarly-resourced countries.

### **Barriers to inclusive education in the global South**

While there is not a uniformly accepted definition of inclusive education, for the purposes of this article, we use the definitions provided by the Kenya Ministry of Education's (2018a:vii) Kenya Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities, which are as follows:

**Inclusion:** Philosophy which focuses on the process of adjusting home, school, and society so that all the individuals, regardless of their differences, can have the opportunity to interact, play, learn, work and experience the feeling of belonging, and experiment to develop in accordance with their potentials and difficulties.

**Inclusive Education:** An approach where learners and trainees with disabilities are provided with appropriate educational interventions within regular institutions of learning with reasonable accommodations and support.

According to Peters (2004), although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) advocates for the education of all persons without exclusion on the basis of race, religion, colour, and disability, disabled children continue to face widespread discrimination and lack of access to educational opportunities across the world. Ainscow and Memmenesha (1998) pointed out that children with disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa are frequently marginalised and neglected by education systems and policies that do not create universal access for disabled learners.

The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) advocated for the eradication of segregated education that excludes disabled learners the right to be part of mainstream schooling. The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 1990) affirmed that principles of inclusive education must provide universal access to schools for all persons with disabilities. Consequently, the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) also stipulated that inclusive education ought to be a matter of overall educational strategy by governments of the world. According to the Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2015), access to education must be viewed as a universal good and lifelong achievement that can transform all societies toward

sustainable development and guarantee the rights of all peoples regardless of race, color, gender or disability.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006) is legally binding for ratifying countries. The UNCRPD calls for endorsing parties to protect the rights of all disabled people, and it ensures they enjoy the same privileges as non-disabled citizens in all facets of society. Article 24 Section 2(a) (Education) specifically requires that ‘persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability.’ It also requires that ratifying parties provide access to an inclusive education system for people with disabilities at all levels, including primary, secondary, and tertiary education. More recently, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015), specifically Goal 4, was written to ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ by 2030. Additionally, the Kenya Vision 2030 Special Needs Education Programme (2008:1) affirms the government will invest in ‘Capacity-building to embrace inclusive education practices and innovative methods of teaching, learning and evaluation.’

Such declarations, statements, and conventions were created in response to the concerning statistics related to the education of disabled people around the world. The World Report on Disability (WHO and World Bank, 2011), suggests that more than a billion people around the world live with some form of disability. This report also highlights that disabled people generally have poorer health, experience lower education achievement, enjoy fewer economic opportunities, and tend to experience higher rates of poverty than non-disabled people. A more recent World Bank (2019) report estimates the number of people living with some form of disability to be even higher. Specifically, this report projects that between 110 million and 190 million people worldwide experience some form of ‘significant’ disability. When it comes to the education of children specifically, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2020) approximates that between 93 million and 150 million children are living with some sort of disability in the world, and that most of these children face tremendous discrimination and marginalisation, and many do not access any form of education, let alone an inclusive education.

According to Grech (2011:3), even though there has been significant discussion on the need for inclusion in all aspects of planning development in the global South, ‘the situation in practice remains far from ideal. Disability remains stranded on the margins of development policy, research, and programmes, including poverty reduction and education programmes’ A major barrier with inclusive education in the global South is the attitude of governments and stakeholders toward issues of disability. As Grech (2011:3) observed, disability ‘is not yet seen as a development issue or a question of rights, but instead continues to be cast in the medical and/or charitable sphere.’

### **Barriers to inclusive education in Western Kenya**

Nthia (2009) explains that major barriers to inclusive education in western Kenya are related to issues of scarce financial resources, a lack of facilities with physical accessibility to cater to disabled students, a significant shortage of qualified personnel, a lack of learning materials, and inadequate support from the government and other stakeholders. Nthia (2009) further observed that although teaching disabled students in general education classrooms requires specialists and additional staff to support students' needs, many schools in western Kenya are not able to afford these supports, due to lack of financial resources. Conversely, Kochung (2011) states that a lack of enforced substantial policy frameworks on inclusion is a major barrier to inclusive education in Kenya.

Adoyo and Odeny (2015) observed that the lack of clarity in the inclusive education policy in Kenya is one of the major issues that has prevented disabled people from accessing mainstream education in Kenya. Adoyo and Odeny (2015:47) further state that although people with disabilities have faced exclusion from mainstream education for a long time, 'How best to provide an appropriate and adequate education for learners with disabilities in Kenya has been and still remains the subject of debate.'

Similar to other countries in the global South, people with disabilities in Kenya are a heterogeneous and a multiply-marginalised population that is disabled by a largely inaccessible society. Most disabled people do not have access to education, health, employment, or rehabilitation (Ingstad & Grut, 2007). According to the National Education Sector Strategic Plan for 2018-2022 (Ministry of Education, 2018b), inappropriate learning infrastructure, inadequate facilities and equipment, the high cost of schooling, whether disabled or not, and a lack of teacher training are among some of the reasons many students with disabilities are not attending school, or have dropped out entirely. Other barriers to inclusive education in the region include: poverty, child labour, natural disasters, HIV/AIDS, gender, ethnicity, access to healthcare, access to food, and availability of clean drinking water (Kindiki, 2011; UNESCO, 2012).

### **Context of Western Kenya**

This project has taken place in various forms in an 'agrigo-pastoral-fishing society' in the Luo region of western Kenya since 2010 (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976:11). Here, the number of livestock is a sign of wealth, and local crops include millet, wheat, common beans, and sorghum. In this patriarchal Luo community, kinship is highly valued, and personal needs are typically met when they have other people to love and care for. This means that developing interpersonal relationships that are grounded in respect are exceedingly important, and one principle of Luo reasoning states, 'Every relationship and action is definable [sic] in terms of honour and good name' (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976:42).

For the last decade, there has been some significant progress with inclusion in the region, and schools in western Kenya have exhibited significant growth with inclusive education practices (Damiani, Elder, & Okongo, 2016; Elder, Damiani, & Oswago, 2015; Elder & Kuja, 2018; Elder & Odoyo, 2018; Hayes, Elder, & Bulat, 2020). The Development of Education National Report (Ministry of Education, 2008:ix) affirms that inclusive education is ‘a fundamental right to every citizen and is provided free of charge in primary and secondary schools to all learners in public schools.’ Also, in the National Special Needs Education Policy Framework, the Ministry of Education (2009:5) states that inclusive education is ‘an approach in which learners with disabilities and special needs, regardless of age and disability, are provided with appropriate education within regular schools.’ Although practices of inclusive education are slowly taking hold, there is still much more work to be done.

### **Research Questions**

The following are some of the research questions that guided the 2018 iteration of this work:

1. What do inclusive practices now look like in the context of post-colonial western Kenyan primary schools since the 2015-16 project?
2. What barriers to inclusive education have been removed since the 2015-16 project? Why/why not?
3. What can be learned from the experiences of enacting inclusive reform at the two school sites that could inform efforts to enact inclusive reform in under-resourced schools in the United States and beyond?

### **Theoretical Framework**

For this project, we<sup>1</sup> utilised multiple theoretical frameworks to inform our methods in this project. The following subsections present these.

#### *Decolonising Methodology*

In order to address the post-colonial realities of Kenya, we drew on post-colonial and decolonial studies as well as critical cultural theory as formerly colonised peoples cannot return to their pre-colonial ways of being (Fanon, 1963; Hall, 1990). Fanon (1963:176) described post-colonial populations as ‘individuals without an anchor’ who cannot return to their pre-colonial roots. In this project, being responsive to these realities was immensely important as the work took place in post-colonial and cross-cultural contexts. To address the colonial realities in Kenya, we utilised decolonising methodologies, as outlined by Smith (1999), to guide project discussions and publication decisions. Decolonising methods include: conducting research in the local language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), promoting local ways of knowing, and encouraging local participants to direct the research (Smith, 1999).

### *Community-Based Participatory Research*

The approaches we took to inquiry were also rooted in CBPR<sup>2</sup>. Participants in CBPR projects accentuate community collaboration and maintain concerted practices with the eventual goal of creating actions with clear and instantaneous application to local communities (Israel et al., 1998; Stanton, 2014). Historically, researchers have used CBPR methodology to mobilize marginalised populations around the world (Beh et al., 2013; Bradley & Puoane, 2007; Habgood, 1998). It has also been used in Southern contexts. In Kenya specifically, some village chiefs use ‘marbaraza,’ or chiefs’ council, as a way to educate community members on local issues (Naanyu et al., 2010). In pre-colonial times, the singular form of marbaraza, a ‘baraza,’ was an offering of peace and a method of conflict resolution (Boneza, 2006). Researchers view CBPR as one viable approach to working on social issues in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., high rates of disease, poverty, swift urbanization), and a methodology that has the probability to build communal capacity in the region (Kamanda et al., 2013).

In this project, the ‘community’ component of CBPR consisted of inclusive education stakeholders who formed inclusion committees at two different school sites, Dhiang School Site and Punda School Site. Dhiang School Site is composed of two schools where one is a primary school and the other is a special school that practices reverse inclusion (i.e., non-disabled students attend a special school because of the proximity to their home). The Punda School Site is similarly composed of a primary school and an adjacent school for the deaf. The stakeholders included: disabled and non-disabled students, the parents of disabled and non-disabled students, teachers from special and primary schools, head teachers from special and primary schools, disabled and non-disabled community members, and members of the Ministry of Education’s Educational Assessment and Research Centre (EARCs). The task of the inclusion committees was to identify barriers to inclusive education and then design and implement inclusive strategies that increased access to education for disabled students (see citation removed for anonymous review; citation removed for anonymous review). One way the inclusion committees removed barriers to inclusive education was to begin rearing poultry through income generating activities (IGAs), which is a community-based activity that raises funds for a common goal. Funds from the IGAs were used to remove barriers to inclusive education. For more information on project stakeholders, see Table 1 below.

### *Critical Disability Studies*

For this study, we also utilised a Critical Disability Studies (CDS) framework, which promotes participatory citizenship of people with disabilities in Southern countries. According to Grech and Soldatic (2014), disability theory remains grounded in the global North, but go on to note how Disability Studies, more generally, continues to be forcefully applied to regions in the

global South without recognition of cultures, context, and histories. Meekosha (2004) states that countries in the global South require an examination of disability that reflect their own individual historiographies. Meekosha (2008:2) also suggests that ‘placing disability in the global context requires an analysis of the power relations between the global North and the global South’.

When applying CDS to transnational research projects, it is foundational to recognise that over 75 percent of the world’s population has had their lives impacted by colonialism, with the other 25 percent being the colonizers (Meekosha, 2011). As researchers, we must frame this work through a colonial perspective because: (1) countries are never ‘post’-colonial because the traumas remain and many of the systems persist (Hall, 1990); (2) most of the world has been colonised (Meekosha, 2011); and (3) through global forces like capitalism and globalisation, disabled bodies are colonised by able-bodied people (Grech, 2015; Meekosha, 2011).

The crux of this work has been the participation of stakeholders in inclusive education. We believe this approach has promoted a notion of participatory citizenship within the project that has allowed us as stakeholders to push back against the uncritical transfer of Western understandings of inclusive education and disability to the global South. This uncritical transfer has historically been done ‘with minimal attention paid to cultures, context and histories, and rarely responsive or even acknowledging Southern voices, perspectives and theories that have been developing as a counter discourse’ (Grech & Soldatic, 2014:1). In this project, this has meant we have had direct discussions with stakeholders about the larger systems of oppression that impact the students in those classrooms like neo/post/colonialism, capitalism, globalisation, and neoliberalism (Grech, 2011; Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011). This approach has allowed us to construct new and community-based understandings of how CDS-informed inclusive education practices can emerge, evolve, and be sustained in the global South (citation removed for anonymous review).

### **Positionality**

Elder’s positionality is inherently tied to Western understandings of inclusive education and disability. Because of his privileges as a white, non-disabled, non-colonised, educated, academic, he understands that his role is not to speak for or represent colonised people. However, he believes he can leverage these privileges to his partners in the global South through transnational collaboration in ways so that historically marginalised and colonised people have allies committed to inclusive education and decolonising practices outside of their respective communities (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Elder understands that his privileges allow him to do such work, but only through his own partial lens. Through international decolonising research, he tries to be actively aware of how his work may perpetuate neocolonial or marginalising systems. While his outsider status conducting research in Kenya is unavoidable, he does have extensive experience conducting transnational CBPR and

decolonising research around the world.

Payne was born and raised in Cameroon. He has a lived experience of how the system of education in the global South has continued to pose a difficulty to people with disabilities who are in need of access to services that are culturally and contextually appropriate inclusive practices in post-colonial countries. He is acutely aware of the challenges that local customs and societal beliefs pose in the effort to organise inclusive education in the global South (Englund et al., 2000). He staunchly believes that inclusive education is one important medium through which the educational systems of the global South could partner with the larger global community for sustainable development. Payne has enjoyed the privilege of Western education, and his personal experience within this system has also shaped his research interest in finding a nexus between traditional customs and practices and inclusive education in the global South.

Oswago is a Kenyan from a Luo community near Lake Victoria. He has been involved in this project since 2010 and has played a critical role in providing Elder with access to project stakeholders and local schools. He has served in various roles since the beginning of the project including: interpreter, researcher, participant, co-author, and consultant. The various roles he has taken in this project, in addition to his job as a member of the EARC in the local Ministry of Education, make his contributions invaluable. Due to his in-depth understanding of the local community, his insider status has allowed him to independently oversee the sustainability of the project while Elder was not in Kenya. Additionally, his reputation within the community promoted maximum cooperation from pupils, teachers, and community members who have been involved in the project.

### **Methodology and process**

The purpose of the 2018 iteration of the project was to better understand the barriers to inclusive education that the inclusion committees helped to break down since 2015-16. To make sense of the interview data, we used qualitative analysis informed by CBPR and decolonising methodologies. The purpose of qualitative research is to better understand how people ‘make sense out of what is happening to them’ (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007:248). This approach helps to center individuals’ experiences in the world ‘from their own frames of reference’ (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:27). Qualitative research approaches can help to make sense of ‘how people construct the world around them’ (Flick, 2007:ix). We chose a qualitative approach in Kenya because it allowed us as researchers committed to promoting decolonising research methods ‘to bring to the surface stories of those whose voices have not been heard, those who have been oppressed or disenfranchised in schools’ (Pugach, 2001:443). This allowed us to capture experiences and perspectives of stakeholders that could have otherwise been omitted or ignored (DeVault, 1999).



### *Design*

To guide our data analysis, we used a grounded theory approach informed by CBPR and decolonising methods. We used a constructivist grounded theory approach concurrently with a constant comparison method as outlined by Charmaz and Mitchell (2001). A continual comparative analysis allowed us to evaluate, analyse, and complicate our data simultaneously throughout the analysis phase of the project (Charmaz, 2005).

### *Sites of study*

In 2015-16, Elder enacted his dissertation research at two sites— the Dhiang School Site and the Punda School Site. Each site contained one primary school and one special school, and both sites were located at geographically opposite borders of a rural school district. There were living quarters at both school sites campus for ‘boarders,’ who were students who could not commute to and from school on a daily basis due to chronic illnesses, physical disabilities, and for Deaf students whose parents live too far away to transport their child to school daily. Students at both school sites were in the equivalent of preschool/kindergarten in the United States (i.e. ‘pre-unit’ in Kenya) through grade six (i.e. ‘standard six’ in Kenya). For the portion of the project that is the focus of this article, which took place in July 2018, these two school sites served mainly as a location for initial project meetings and qualitative interviews with project stakeholders.

### *Timeline*

In order to gain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at Elder’s university, Oswago procured letters of support from the head teachers at each school site in spring 2018. All data were collected in July 2018.

### *Participant selection*

Following IRB approval, Oswago contacted the members of each inclusion committee at both school sites and asked if they would be interested in participating in an additional round of interviews focused on better understanding the barriers to inclusive education that had been removed since 2015-16. All participants were either fluent in the local language, Luo, or English, or would use both languages depending on the language demands at the time of the interviews. To mitigate the language barriers since Elder is not fluent in Luo, we had a Luo-English interpreter present at all project events.

### *Data Collection and Participants*

Due to Oswago’s insider status, he and Elder collected data in the form of written memos and

audio-recorded semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes to an hour. Oswago and Elder collaborated with 26 stakeholders in inclusive education, they conducted 19 one on one interviews with adult participants, and held four small-group interviews with seven students at the end of each cycle of research. We conducted interviews at both school sites, and recorded interviews on smartphones. Oswago and Elder felt students would potentially feel more comfortable having project-related discussions in small groups.

Following the data analysis phase of this project, and once we identified the quotes we were going to use in the article, Oswago conducted member checks with all participants whose quotes we wanted to highlight prior to submitting the manuscript for review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Oswago’s member checks provided a greater reliability within the project, and shaped how we made sense of the complexities of the project that were related to sustainability. See Table 1 for more information on each participant at each school site.

*Table 1: Inclusive education stakeholder interviewed at each school site*

<b>Stakeholder Interviewed</b>	<b>Dhiang School Site</b>	<b>Punda School Site</b>
Disabled students	2	2
Non-disabled students	3	0
Parents of disabled children	1*	2
Parents of non-disabled children	0	0
SNE teachers	2	3
Primary school teachers	3	2
SNE head teachers	1	0
Primary school headteachers	0	0
Disabled community members	1	0

Non-disabled community members/Board of management members	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>N = 14</b>	<b>N= 12</b>

\*This participant was a parent of a disabled student and a primary school teacher.

### Data Analysis

We used Bogdan and Biklen’s (2007) coding procedures (i.e., open coding, axial coding, and selective coding), described below, to analyse the data. Oswago and Payne held weekly writing meetings and established a framework for open coding. Oswago did not participate in the data analysis due to distance, time difference, and the unreliability of internet connection in Kenya. However, he did provide feedback on the emerging themes as well as feedback on the initial interpretation of participant excerpts, which helped us collectively interpret and triangulate the data. Elder and Payne used the online platform Dedoose (Lieber & Weisner, 2015) throughout the data analysis process.

*Open Coding:* Since Payne joined the project as a university research fellow at a later date, each week he read interviews, added codes as he deemed fit, and emailed Elder, who then verified the codes and provided feedback on Payne’s analysis during weekly research meetings. During the research meetings, Author One and Author Two emailed Author Three with analysis updates. This triangulation process continued throughout the open coding process until Elder and Payne coded all interviews line-by-line and triangulated emerging findings with Oswago.

*Axial Coding:* To initiate the axial coding phase of the analysis process, Elder and Payne used the ‘Analyse’ feature of Dedoose. Specifically, they used the ‘Qualitative Charts’ function and analysed codes with the ‘Code Co-Occurrence’ feature. This feature allowed us to see the top five codes we applied to participant excerpts. We identified these as themes and labeled them as: (1) ‘Language used to describe disability’ (114 excerpts), (2) ‘Sensitisation’ (214 excerpts), (3) ‘Access to education’ (187 excerpts), and (4) ‘Removal of barriers’ (304 excerpts).

*Selective Coding:* At the beginning of the selective coding process, Elder and Payne read each excerpt and collectively identified the top five excerpts for each theme, which were then verified by Oswago. This process allowed us to identify 20 excerpts, five per theme, that spoke most powerfully to each theme. Due to space limitations, we chose three excerpts that most accurately represented the data.

## **Findings and Discussion**

In this section, we present, unpack, and discuss the four major themes that emerged through our analysis. Even with the data narrowed down to 20 excerpts, we had to make choices as to how to effectively present the most salient information in this article, while still honouring what emerged during the analysis process. Since ‘Language used to describe disability’ had the fewest excerpts of the five themes (114 excerpts), we used the data as a way to introduce the top three themes and labeled them: (1) ‘Sensitisation,’ (2) ‘Promoting access to inclusive education’ and (3) ‘IGAs and co-teaching.’ Rather than have a separate ‘Discussion’ section after presenting our findings, in order to immediately respond to participant quotes, we weave together our analysis, connections to relevant literature, and discussion after each interview excerpt. We then conclude this article by offering the summarising findings and unpacking the implications of this expanding this work throughout Kenya and beyond.

### **Language as a barrier to inclusive education**

Throughout all of the interviews, we discovered evidence of deficit-based perspectives of disability of which we observed through participants’ uses of terms like ‘burden,’ ‘bad omen,’ and ‘useless.’ For example, a deputy teacher (equivalent to a vice principal in Western contexts), Ben,<sup>3</sup> describes typical disability narratives in his community:

[Disabled people] have been considered as people who are useless in the community, people [who] cannot help anything. But, when they expose their talents...there’s a change of attitude, and now they are regarded as human beings.

This is very important because Ben talks about the need for people to change their attitudes towards disabled people and embrace them as very successful members of society (Monk & Wee, 2008). Another example of deficit-based perspectives on disability is from the Board Chairman at the special school at the Dhiang School Site, Japheth, and the impact of disability on family structures. He states:

We had some men who actually divorced some women because of having lame (disabled) child...Because they think that this lame [genetic] line will pass on, so you’ll still be giving the disablement [sic].

This confirms what other scholars have found about negative views of disability in the African context that speak about disability being viewed as a curse from God, or retribution from past ancestral misdeeds (Abosi, 2003; Mukuria, 2012). While understanding the cultural context of disability is important, it is also imperative that the community works together to educate and sensitise people in the community so this deficit-based disability narrative changes over time. This shift to strength-based thinking and discussing disability is exemplified by Kennedy, the

father of a boy with multiple complex disability labels:

Through this project, now the community and the parents are coming to actually learn that it is important to bring people with disability on board so that at least they can be assisted in areas of their needs. Also, if there is some potential in them, [community members] can also be able to nurture them...it's like coexistence.

Connecting to Kennedy's quote above, sensitisation of the community is the focus of the first theme. In this theme, the authors specifically highlight how these inclusion committees initiated actions related to sensitisation that had an immediate impact in their respective intimate social spaces in their communities.

### **Theme 1: Sensitisation**

In 2015-16, inclusion committees at both school sites identified the need to sensitise members of their respective communities. When reflecting on committee sensitisation efforts, in this first excerpt, Omullo, a primary school teacher with a vision impairment, describes what sensitisation should look like at the school level:

First, the schools must have enough personnel. The teacher: pupil ratio should be reduced. Right now, the policy says [there should be] one teacher for 45 children in primary schools. So, you see, if you have 45 [pupils] per teacher and then you have learners with a complex disability, you will not have time to concentrate on the learner with the special need.

Also, the government must post more teachers, and each school should have at least one or two teachers who have knowledge of special needs education. Right now, all the teachers with special needs education [backgrounds] typically run to special schools because the government pays an extra 10,000 Kenyan shillings (~ \$100USD) special school allowance...If he is told you are now going to teach in a regular school where he is not going to honor allowance, that teacher will feel demoted and will be demoralised.

Here, Omullo highlights the need to sensitise teachers so they advocate for getting special education teachers posted in adequate numbers in inclusive schools. This connects with the research that identifies overcrowded schools as a barrier to inclusive education (Barrett et al., 2019). Aside from the need for more teachers to be physically placed in schools, special education pre- and in-service teachers need to learn how to advocate for their placement in inclusive settings, and be able to cite this placement as a social justice and disability rights issue (citation removed for anonymous review). Additionally, Omullo points out that special education teachers are paid more than general education teachers. While this financial incentive may look good on paper, unequal and inadequate teacher pay in Kenya (Cherotich, Kosgei, & Lelan, 2018) reinforces an already segregated school system where special education teachers

will always be expected to do more work in order to support students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Such systemic inequities do not lend themselves to developing parity between special and general education teachers in inclusive co-taught classrooms (Friend et al., 2010).

Above, Omullo spoke of the need to sensitise teachers and government officials. In the next excerpt, Japheth, the Board Chairman of the special school at the Dhiang School Site, highlighted the need to sensitise parents:

We need to talk to [parents of disabled children] just in the way that we are sensitising the [parents in this project]...We call them in to actually see our project so that they know that they're not the only one...This satisfies their doubts or beliefs that it's not only them, and now they can see that there's a change for [pupils with disabilities] who have come here. So even [these parents' disabled children] can come here as well.

Of note from Japheth's quote is that parents of disabled children in western Kenya may be keeping their children at home because they may not know that inclusive education is a possibility, or even that their children have a right to education (Constitution of Kenya, 2010; UNCRPD, 2006). Further, what Japheth implies is that parents should be educated on their rights so they can form communities of like-minded inclusive-thinking parents who can provide encouragement that advocate for developing an inclusive education system, and that it is within their rights (citation removed for anonymous review). One potential way forward to educate parents on their rights is to take a 'multi-sectoral' approach (Grech, 2014:147). This means that when parents seek medical care for their disabled children, they can also be given information about their rights to an inclusive education and local schools that have embraced inclusive education.

In the previous excerpt, Japheth spoke of the importance of sensitising parents, in the next excerpt, two non-disabled students from the Dhiang School Site speak about the importance of the role students can play in sensitising people in their communities:

Max: There are boarders [at this school], so whenever the school closes, [disabled pupils] go home. Being that they are wearing the uniform, some [people in the community] do ask them where they are learning, the type of the school, and how the teachers treat their pupils. So, it's also a form of sensitisation that the parents [of disabled pupils] are bringing their children too to attend this inclusive school.

Tina: I normally sensitise people in my church. In church, there's a section whereby people are given a chance to introduce themselves, so I normally use that opportunity to do sensitisation and also maybe to let the congregation know that the school is there and [people in the community] can bring their children with disabilities.

These student excerpts not only illustrate that non-disabled and disabled students have

important roles to play when discussing inclusive education in their respective communities (citation removed for anonymous review), but also that the perspectives of historically marginalised and excluded people should be highlighted more often in research (citation removed for anonymous review; Valle & Connor, 2019).

## **Theme 2: Promoting Access to Inclusive Education**

The excerpts in the previous section all underscore the importance of sensitising many people in the community and in a variety of ways. While sensitisation is one way to create sustained access to inclusive education for disabled people, it is important to hear from stakeholders *why* education is so important for disabled people. In the following excerpt, Kennedy, a member of the inclusion committee, a father of a student with multiple disabilities, and a primary school teacher, describes what could happen to disabled students in Kenya if they are not provided with access to education:

If [my son] lived at home, his condition would have been worse, and he probably would have just been laying at home idle and unable to communicate. This would interfere with his future, and he would encounter a lot of challenges when he grows old...He would face discrimination. You find that those who are actually disabled are not allowed to join others in social places. So, if he was not included it limits his chances of actually interacting with people.

In this excerpt, Kennedy provides a glimpse into the lives of disabled people in Kenya who often do not have the means to be included at multiple levels within the society because they have been denied access to education (Mitra, 2005). Additionally, a common refrain we hear from disabled people and the parents of disabled children on the inclusion committees is that this project is the first time they have been asked to participate in anything related to disability and inclusion. While this project happens to focus on inclusive education, it is evident that disabled people in western Kenya are not involved in other aspects of society, and thus are rendered invisible. Hughes (2012:17) states that this exclusion from the broader social sphere leads to ‘ontological invalidation of disabled people,’ which in turn validates the exclusion of disabled students in schools.

In the next excerpt, Simeon, the Board Chairman of a primary school, discusses the harsh realities disabled people face if they are denied an education:

Those who do not go to school can do what we call ‘agriculture.’ We call it ‘hard labour.’ They become a human resource, they provide the human labour. When people get education, they become what we call ‘technical’...When you go to school, you acquire a technical job.

Here, Simeon references the reality that we live in a capitalist society, and human labour is a commodity that is oftentimes exploited, particularly in the global South. If one does not have an education, they can be forced into a life of hard labour where they risk acquiring disabilities or even face death from unsafe and insecure labour practices (Meekosha, 2011). Additionally, when people with disabilities are systematically denied education, they can become even more vulnerable and are relegated to live a life of extreme poverty (Goodley, 2011). Further, it is important to note that providing an education to a disabled person living at the intersections of poverty, disability, and rurality does not mean that education will ‘lift’ the poor out of poverty’ (Grech, 2014:142). There are many barriers, both structural, socio-political, and beyond, that can keep even educated disabled people in poverty (Grech, 2014). However, having an inclusion committee in place is one mechanism through which members of the committee, like Simeon, can actively and collectively work to remove such barriers for disabled people looking for employment after they receive an education.

While it is certainly important to understand *why* access to education is critical, it is also imperative that teachers know *how* to support students with disabilities inclusively. In the next excerpt from Jackline, a teacher at the school for the deaf at the Punda School Site, explains how she includes students with multiple disabilities in her class.

You know, for the deaf and autistic students, I give them a variety of activities so everyone collaborates...I give them a variety of activities and a variety of materials...For [students] with challenges, like some cannot hold a pencil, I have to give them something like clay or plasticine so that they can manipulate because their muscles are weak.

What Jackline says here is important because she provides a specific example of how she includes students with multiple disabilities in her class rather than speaking in generalities about inclusion. Learning specific strategies about how students with multiple disabilities have been successfully included in contexts like western Kenya move beyond the argument as to why inclusive education is important, and focus on the *how*. This helps fill the gap in CDS literature on how to develop sustainable inclusive practices in countries with resources similar to Kenya (citation removed for anonymous review; citation removed for anonymous review). In the final theme, we provide additional examples of specific actions members of the inclusion committees took to dissolve barriers to inclusive education.

### **Theme 3: IGAs and Co-Teaching**

We view the previous two themes, ‘Sensitisation’ and ‘Promoting Access to Inclusive Education,’ as inextricably linked to the promotion of actions that remove barriers to an



inclusive education system. This means that if communities are not made aware (sensitised) that disabled people have a right to an inclusive education, then the policies and legal mandates that require such access will ‘mean little in practice when in rural areas’ (Grech, 2014:146). Additionally, if people are not shown concrete ways in which inclusive education can be a reality for their families, then inclusive policies remain symbolic and ineffective. In this third theme, we discuss the specific actions members of the inclusion committees took in order to provide sustained access to inclusive education for disabled students.

A major role of the inclusion committee was to design IGAs that would fund the committees’ on-going dialog and actions aimed at removing barriers to the development of a sustainable and local inclusive education system. In the following excerpt, Naphthali, a parent of a nondisabled student and a member of the inclusion committee, explains the benefits of the IGA at his school site, and how its implementation was helping disabled students and their families:

You can see after [working on this IGA], we started to talk to the community and teach them how they can manage [IGAs] at home themselves, including how they can teach their children. [As a result of the IGAs], they [have fewer] problems because they can manage to pay their school fees and buy clothes for their children because of our chicken poultry.

Naphthali’s experience with the inclusion committee’s IGAs spread to other families in the local communities and helped families pay for school fees. So, while the IGAs were initially focused on providing more equitable access to education for disabled students, the ideas spread in unintended ways. Naphthali’s quote illuminates the notion that school-based inclusion committees can replicate IGAs in their own schools while parents of disabled children could replicate such practices in their own homes. This dual benefit of the IGAs could not only help schools anticipate the needs of disabled students as their enrollment numbers increase in the region, but it could also help parents who adopt similar IGAs to procure more funds to enroll their own disabled children in inclusive local schools while at the same time empowering them economically (Cobley, 2012).

As a member of the inclusion committee at the school for the deaf at the Punda School Site, Jackline explains that they removed barriers to inclusive education in her school by adopting strategies that emphasised sport-based co-curricular (co-teaching) activities between Deaf and hearing students:

Our [disabled] kids and the regular kids are doing the co-curricular activities together...Last month we had sports for the special schools and we all [participated] at regular schools, and regular kids joined us. In fact, it was ball games...And now poems and other activities like drama they are doing together.

In Jackline’s experience, the most effective strategy that works to sustain inclusion for all

students is to bring them together to work on tasks and activities in and out of the classroom (Belch, 2004). She explains that by designing co-taught and inclusive activities that unite students, like sports and drama, they promoted a greater enthusiasm for the students to learn from and with one another. By using this strength-based approach, Jackline explains that students bonded together through common interests, and explored their natural talents, and developed an affection for each other based on the recognition of diversity (Lopez & Louis, 2009).

In this final quote, a primary school teacher from the Dhiang School Site describes how he and a teacher from the special school at the same site developed a co-teaching partnership teaching a core subject area as a way to remove barriers to inclusive education:

Erick: I can say [co-teaching] happens once in a while. [Co-teaching] is always full of joy because pupils from this school then pupils from the special school come together, and there's always that curiosity. They want to see maybe how the other school participates in the lesson. The other school participates, so it always becomes joyful. The last [time], we were with Mr. Kuja when he was teaching maths...One time we co-taught at [the primary school], and then there was a time we co-taught [at the special school]. We switch.

What is particularly powerful about this final quote is that Erick directly references the dissolution of the barriers between the two schools through co-teaching math. While the practices occur 'once in a while,' Erick describes the student enthusiasm and interest co-teaching sparks in their students. It is promising that these two teachers took various approaches of co-teaching (Friend et al., 2010) and applied them at their respective school sites together in an attempt to sustain inclusive practices at the school site. While we recognise co-teaching to be a Western approach to inclusive education, such approaches have been successful in other countries in the global South, including Benin (Gbènakpon, 2018), Tanzania (Frey & Kaff, 2014), and South Africa (Krüger & Yorke, 2010).

## **Implications and Conclusion**

In order to highlight the complexities related to the partial removal of barriers to the development of an inclusive education system, above, we have shown how language used to describe disability is inherently connected to the need to educate and sensitise communities about inclusive education, and that there is a need to simultaneously provide concrete examples of how to continue to remove these barriers through targeted action by community stakeholders. From this project, we offer the following as potential next steps which we hope could have critical implications for the continued dissolution, partial or otherwise, of barriers to inclusive education in rural areas in Kenya and similarly-resourced locations around the

world: (1) develop a multi-sectoral approach to supporting families with disabled children, (2) encourage governments to incentivise schools that embrace and enact promising inclusive practices, (3) encourage governments to apply IGAs to inclusive education on a larger scale, and (4) promote co-teaching practices, among other inclusive education strategies, in pre- and in-service teacher education programs. Below, we outline the specifics of each of these implications as they apply to Kenya and beyond.

### *A multi-sectoral approach*

As noted by Grech (2014) in his work in Guatemala, families living at the intersections of disability and extreme poverty in rural regions of the world are fighting just to survive. This means that educating disabled children may not be a priority for such families due to many factors, which could include prioritising farming over paying expensive school fees, transportation costs, and fees for school materials and uniforms (Bunning et al. 2020; Odongo, 2018). While other aspects of daily life may take precedence over education, families may prioritise basic needs like visiting a community health clinic or securing access to clean water. When families interact with such health services as they pertain to their disabled child(ren), they could then be given information about their rights to inclusive education, and they could be informed about local schools with promising inclusive practices, which includes government incentives that pertain to inclusive education. In this fashion, these families could be connected to a network of families who experience similar marginalisations and connect with one another as a form of support and disability advocacy. These clinic visits could also be tied to other programs related to distribution of educational materials for children, food security, clean water, family planning, and other local initiatives.

### *Government incentives*

For families living in poverty in the global South, paying for education-related expenses is not attainable (Du Plessis & Conley, 2007; Mumbi et al., 2013). In the absence of government support, many families of disabled children simply cannot afford education. For countries that have signed and ratified such legally binding instruments like the UNCRC (2006:Art. 24, Sec. 1), this means that the onus to provide access to an 'inclusive education system' falls on ratifying governments. While governments in the global South do not have surplus piles of money to allocate towards education, they have a legal responsibility to move beyond symbolic support of such initiatives and identify and then replicate cost-effective grassroots and community-based local initiatives that promote access to inclusive education. This requires governments to identify successful local projects that have provided incentives to parents who have taken their disabled children to the schools they would attend in the absence of a disability, and expand such projects on a national scale to subsidise school transport (Karani, 2019; Muthini, 2007), to provide free or reduced price school uniforms (Evans et al., 2008), to allocate partial or full vouchers for school fees (Nafula, 2002; UNICEF, 2009; World Bank,

2009), and to grant schools food subsidies (Kisurulia, Katiambo, & Tanui, 2015; Mwendwa & Chepkonga, 2019).

### *Promoting IGAs*

In this article, we have discussed how the inclusion committees have utilised IGAs as a way to sustain discussions and subsequent action to break down barriers to inclusive education. With a relatively small amount of funding from a federal grant from the United States grant of roughly \$22,000USD, during the course of eight months in 2015-16, two inclusion committees at Punda and Dhiang School Sites were able to plan, enact, and sustain the community-based efforts aimed at removing barriers to disabled students accessing inclusive education. In terms of government spending, \$22,000USD is not a lot of money, especially considering existing government school funding could be allocated to support the formation and sustainability of inclusion committees which could promote school access for all students, with and without disabilities, who live at the intersections of poverty and rurality. For more budgetary-specific information about the costs involved in developing inclusion committees in rural western Kenya, see (citation removed for anonymous review). Similar IGA-based projects have been successful in other areas of Kenya (Arasio et al., 2018; Kiarie 2018), and Sierra Leone (Kallio, 2019).

### *Co-teaching*

Co-teaching is an often-cited best practice in inclusive education in the global North (Friend et al., 2010). However, it is rarely cited as an effective inclusive education practice in the global South (Frey & Kaff, 2014; Gbènakpon, 2018; Krüger & Yorke, 2010). Given the geographic proximity of some special and primary schools in western Kenya, co-teaching across special and primary school campuses was a viable option to promote inclusive practices. As noted in the Findings section, some schools chose to enact co-teaching approaches outside of the classroom through sport and ‘co-curricular activities’, while other teachers utilised co-teaching to instruct students in core subjects like mathematics. Understanding that approaches to co-teaching may vary widely in Kenya, if practiced at all, it is important to give teachers credit who are willing to try new approaches in order to promote social and academic interactions between disabled and non-disabled students. The existence of these approaches in western Kenya is transformative. As one way to better understand just how transformative these co-teaching practices developed in western Kenya have been on the rest of the country, a professor of education at Kenyatta University (KU), the largest teacher training institution in Kenya, who was involved in the 2015-16 iteration of this project, had this to say about their recent updates to their current teacher education curriculum:

With the new competency-based curriculum in place, Special Needs Education is now on the map fully in our country. As a department we shall be offering a unit on ‘inclusive

education' as a university unit which shall be taken by all students doing education. (personal communication, June 12, 2020)

By making inclusive education a compulsory unit through KU, this provides hope that all pre-service teachers coming out of those programs will have at least an introduction to inclusive education and the application of practical approaches in Kenya.

While all of these implications we have proposed are complex at both the local and national levels, we strongly feel that starting small (i.e. at the family level) and expanding as initiatives gain traction over time is a solid starting point. To keep focus on the family level, we felt it was important to close with a personal reflection from a father, Kennedy, who reflects on his disabled son's future. Kennedy's reflection provides us with a grounding 'why' behind all of this work:

Through the school...[my son] has developed some element of knowledge and skills that can enable him to become an expert in a given field maybe. He can be an expert, God willing, with vocational training...We could have an institution that is a kind of transition from school...from this level of primary maybe to that kind of school...I don't want my son to live a life that is special. I want him to live in an inclusive world...A world where he can also be counted as someone with value in him. One where he can learn anywhere with others. I would like for him to live in an inclusive world.

Kennedy's powerful words serve as a reminder that there can be an equitable future for disabled people. However, for disabled people in rural locations with minimal resources, like in western Kenya, the development of inclusion committees may be one potential way forward to support early inclusive education primary schools. In addition to inclusion supports starting early, as we have shown in this article, removing barriers to developing inclusive education is a complex process with many elements to consider, including issues related to language, community sensitisation, IGAs, and co-teaching, to name a few. While this article spotlights the work of two inclusion committees in one small area of western Kenya, being that this work has sustained in some form since 2010 shows that developing such educational supports is not only possible, but absolutely necessary. The removal of these barriers to inclusive education also happens to align with the UNCRPD (2006), SDG 4 (2015), Kenya Vision 2030 (2008), and the Kenya Ministry of Education's (2018) Kenya Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities. Aside from a legal impetus to develop an inclusive education system, as evidenced by the words of inclusion committee members like Kennedy, it is also the right thing to do.

### **Acknowledgments**

We would like to thank our colleagues in western Kenya without whom this work would not be possible. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Kenyan Ministry of Education, as well as the stakeholders on our inclusion committees who were so generous with their time and expertise.

We hope the rest of the world appreciates your creative approaches to inclusive education as much as we do.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> While much of the methodology for this project came from Elder's dissertation (Elder, 2016), the methods established in that project informed how all of us collaboratively analysed data, and how we collectively discussed the project throughout the writing and publication process.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that we view CBPR not only as a method for this work, but also as a useful theoretical lens through which to view inclusive education. In particular, we find work that is rooted in CBPR as useful in thinking about how to engage stakeholders in the inclusive education reform process.

<sup>3</sup> All student names are pseudonyms, and we use all adult names with their permission. Additionally, we invited all stakeholders to comment on, edit, and approve the quotes we present in this chapter.

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