

Strengthening the participation of Organisations of People with Disabilities in education governance



Photographs: Leh Wi Lan

Commitment to inclusive education is progressing across Sierra Leone with government, schools and communities gaining understanding of barriers faced by many learners and ways in which to support their rights to education. However, there is still a great deal of work needed in particular to ensure that children with disabilities can access school and be included in all areas of education.



District-level Performance Management Meetings (PMMs), so they may better advocate for learners with disabilities and develop a stronger, collective voice that amplifies needs and drives more accountable, sustainable inclusive practices.

A key inclusion initiative is the strengthening of opportunities for Organisations of People with Disability (OPDs) to actively participate in education governance structures at national and district levels. OPDs are local groups who have lived experience of the barriers and opportunities faced by people with disabilities and can provide first-hand insights, advice and community representation to decision-making. This makes them uniquely positioned to shape policies, monitor commitments and hold education actors accountable to ensure no one is left behind.

Until recently, collaborations between OPDs and education actors has been infrequent, informal and fragmented. However, in partnership with the Leh Wi Lan programme (LWL), OPDs in all 16 districts have been given training and support to join District Education Committees (DECs) and

Building OPD influence

Throughout 2025, OPDs have strengthened their influence by taking an active role in district level education meetings and working with the national Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Unit to develop stronger advocacy for learners with disabilities. This involvement simultaneously builds their capacity for advocacy as it keeps them up to date on critical information, such as education policies, district budgets and new initiatives.

While valuable groundwork has been laid, initial efforts have highlighted areas for improvement, such as addressing logistical barriers, formalising invitations, and enhancing coordination with district authorities. Where OPDs have been represented, the quality of engagement has been a key learning point: some participants have

already contributed meaningfully to discussions and decision-making, while others are ready to achieve a greater level of influence with targeted preparation and support.

To capitalise on these insights and develop more effective participation, LWL hosted productive workshops for review and reflection, successfully generating innovative strategies for moving forward.

Workshop 1: Review of Capacity Assessment and Planning (CAP) tool to reflect on challenges and opportunities and assess potential solutions.

Workshop 2: Development of Capacity Action Plan to identify skills needed – such as data collection and improvement in communication – as well as ways to unify approaches to advocacy and strengthen collaboration with district level education actors.

Taking a unified approach

Recognising the need for a more unified, strategic and inclusive approach to advancing disability rights, OPDs determined to constitute a Pan-Disability OPD District Team on Inclusive Education, which will:

- Serve as a unified platform for all disability constituencies in the district.
- Champion inclusive education policies and practices at all levels.
- Monitor implementation of the Persons with Disability Act and Sustainable Development Goal Four (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education).
- Collaborate with government, schools and civil society to remove barriers to learning.
- Ensure that no learner with a disability is left behind.

To consolidate this unified structure, OPDs developed and adopted the Pan-Disability OPD District Team Charter – a framework that outlines priority actions for strengthening capacity and fostering collaboration with the SEND Unit.

The Charter has strong institutional endorsement from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), Humanity and Inclusion (HI) and the UK government's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office.

Strengthening the role of OPDs - recommendations

Achieving meaningful and effective representation for OPDs requires a concerted, multi-faceted shift from fragmented individual action to unified, capacity-driven collective governance. The following recommendations provide a roadmap for sustaining and scaling this engagement:

1. Pan-Disability district level action plans:

Secure funding for implementation and include monitoring and reporting within implementation of the Persons with Disability Act and SDG 4.

2. Utilise the CAP tool and incorporate criteria to track progress:

Ensure regular use amongst OPD district teams to foster collective capacity building and facilitate progress monitoring.

3. Targeted support to OPD representatives:

Address logistical and communication barriers to enhance ability to contribute meaningfully to decision-making.

4. Strengthen collaboration between key stakeholders:

Find further opportunities to build partnerships between OPDs, district level authorities and the SEND Unit.

5. Adopt and ensure institutional endorsement of the OPD Charter:

Disseminate and advocate to formalise its structure, mission and collaborative principles through continued engagement with MBSSE, HI, World Bank and FCDO.



“The Charter is a milestone in our national commitment to advancing inclusion, equity and dignity for all persons with disability in Sierra Leone.”

Salamatu N’jah Koroma, Director of Formal Education