



Sustaining and Improving

Disability Inclusive Education through Inclusion Champions



Key lessons and recommendations

Inclusive education is fundamental to ensuring that every child can access, participate in and benefit from quality education. Yet, many education systems continue to struggle to translate inclusive education policies into practice. Teachers often lack confidence in supporting learners with disabilities, referral pathways are weak, responsibilities are unclear and there is lack of coherence through different ministries working on separate issues with limited budgets dedicated to inclusion support disability inclusion. As a result, disability inclusion frequently depends on individual commitment or externally funded projects rather than being embedded within education systems.

In Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), through the Radical Inclusion Policy, sought to strengthen the systems needed to support learners most at risk of exclusion including learners with disabilities. Therefore, a key question was: How can the Leh Wi Lan Programme (LWL) 2 contribute to implementing this policy in schools?

One of the programme's most significant innovations was the Inclusion Champion (ICs) model introduced in 2024. ICs became the entry point for this response, not as standalone specialists, but as school-based disability inclusive school leaders who supported learners with disabilities and linked them to support within and outside of the school.

Key Achievements and Progress

Established a cadre of ICs. More than 825 Inclusion Champions were trained across five pilot districts. Drawn from existing teachers and school leaders, they coordinate the identification of learners with disabilities, lead on the development of action plans to increase disability inclusion in their schools, engage with families and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), and seek to embedding disability inclusion in everyday school practice.

Embedded OPDs within education system governance: For the first time, OPDs became regular participants in district PMMs, District Education Committee (DEC) meetings and the joint monitoring visits they make to schools.

Strengthened the legislative foundations for sustainability. Through engagement with the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) during the review of the TSC Act, the role of ICs has been incorporated. Although the legislation is still awaiting approval, this signals growing recognition of disability inclusion as an integral component of teacher professionalism and education leadership.

Elevated disability inclusive practice as a marker of teaching excellence. During the 2024 National World Teachers' Day celebrations, the Government introduced, for the first time, a dedicated Disability and Inclusion category within the Presidential Teachers' Awards. The award was presented to an IC from Bombali District, demonstrating national recognition of efforts to improve disability inclusion in schools.

Developed a framework for the IC role. The MBSSE has endorsed the 'Guidelines on the Role and Establishment of Inclusion Champions within Secondary Schools' providing a framework that defines the purpose, responsibilities, support arrangements and coordination mechanisms for ICs.

Tested and documented a school-based approach to Screening, Assessment, Referral and Follow up so that learners with disabilities are identified and provided with the support they need.

825

**Inclusion Champions
trained across five
pilot districts**

Building

on Strong

Foundations

What We've Learned

Disability Inclusion Champions were most effective when they acted as coordinators rather than specialists

ICs greatest contribution was not in delivering services, but ensuring that the right systems, people and processes worked together effectively. ICs connected teachers, school leaders, parents, OPDs and referral services to ensure that learners with disabilities were identified early, supported appropriately and followed up over time.

Disability Inclusion Champions are catalysts for changing school culture

Inclusion Champions can have influence beyond individual learners. By mentoring colleagues, modelling inclusive practices, engaging families and challenging stigma, they encourage schools to see inclusion as a shared responsibility rather than the role of one specialist teacher.

Disability Inclusive education requires partnerships beyond the education sector

Schools cannot remove every barrier facing learners with disabilities alone. Many require specialist support from healthcare providers, social protection services and their community. ICs worked closely with families, OPDs, health providers and district governance structures, while the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Disability Inclusive Education strengthened cross-sector coordination.

School-based disability inclusion depends on strong district and national support

Although ICs worked in schools, their success depended on support from the wider education system. The MBSSE Special Education Needs Department Unit, District Education Offices, School Quality Assurance Officers (SQAOs), NTAC and district coordination mechanisms provided leadership, supervision and accountability that enabled ICs to be effective.

Government ownership is the strongest predictor of sustainability

Successful innovations become sustainable only when governments choose to institutionalise them. From the outset, LWL 2 worked with MBSSE to ensure that the Disability Inclusion Champion model become part of national systems. The endorsement of the National Guidelines for Inclusion Champions, incorporation of the role into the final draft of the revised TSC Act, and national recognition through the 2024 Presidential Teachers' Awards, all represent important milestones in the process.

Recommendations

Sustain progress made	Improve progress further
School Level	
Continue supporting ICs to coordinate school-based inclusive education	Ensure that disability inclusion is reflected in school improvement planning, school-based teacher professional development and that school leaders are championing inclusive education.
District Level	
Ensure that the District Disability Inclusion Focal Persons is actively connecting with and supporting existing ICs	Use the 'Guidelines on the Role and Establishment of Inclusion Champions' to increase the number of schools with ICs
National Level	
Continue including the Disability and Inclusion category in the Presidential Teachers' Awards	Institutionalise the IC role in MBSSE and TSC systems
	Support nationwide expansion and scale-up of ICs to all schools

Where to get more information

Review the Information Brief Strengthening the participation of Organisations of People with Disabilities in Education Governance on the Sierra Leone Education Knowledge Platform: <https://mbsseknowledgeplatform.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Strengthening-the-participation-of-OPDs-in-education.pdf>



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