



## Sustaining and Improving

# The Participation of Organisations of People with Disabilities in Education Governance



## Key lessons and recommendations

Disability-inclusive education cannot be achieved without the full and direct participation of people with disabilities. Yet, in many countries, they are not recognised as long-term partners in education planning and decision-making, monitoring and accountability. In Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) with support from the Leh Wi Lan Programme (LWL) 2, has sought to engage people with disabilities in planning, monitoring and advocating for disability inclusive education. This has been done by strengthening the capabilities of Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) and embedding them in existing education governance mechanisms at school, district and national levels. As a result, OPDs are becoming recognised partners in creating an education system for learners with disabilities that is a more responsive and accountable.

## “Nothing About Us, Without Us”

### Key Achievements and Progress

Built the capacity of OPDs to engage in education governance: Representatives from OPDs in all 16 districts received practical training in organisational development, advocacy, accountability, communication, disability-inclusive planning, referral pathways and participation in monthly Performance Management Meetings (PMMs) organised by District Education Offices (DEOs).

Created a unified voice for disability advocacy: The programme supported OPDs to move from individual organisational advocacy to coordinated Pan-Disability District OPD Teams. Guided by the Pan-Disability Charter, Guidance Framework and District Action Plans, all 16 districts have established functioning OPD Teams that coordinate priorities, advocate collectively and monitor progress on disability-inclusive education.

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 accountability for learners with disabilities: Working alongside Inclusion Champions and district officials, OPDs participate in school visits, support referrals, identify barriers to learning and advocate for practical improvements relating to accessibility, safeguarding and bullying and learner participation. Their lived experience strengthens accountability and helps ensure that education responses reflect the realities faced by learners with disabilities.

### What We've Learned

#### Strong OPDs require investment in organisational capacity

Meaningful participation requires more than inviting OPDs to meetings. Organisations need the knowledge, confidence and systems to engage effectively in education governance over the long term, and not just as occasional consultees.

**Building  
on Strong  
Foundations**

### Meaningful participation involves sharing decision-making

Participation alone does not strengthen accountability. Learning from LWL demonstrated that OPD participation becomes meaningful when they hold recognised roles within existing education governance structures. Regular participation in PMMs, joint monitoring visits, and DEC meetings involves OPDs in decision-making when plans are being made and action agreed - rather than commenting on decisions after they had been made.

### Lived experience strengthens education systems

OPDs bring lived experience that complements the expertise of teachers, district officials and ministry staff, thus helping identify children who remained excluded, strengthen referral pathways, challenge stigma and improve engagement with families.

### Disability inclusion requires collaboration across sectors

Many barriers facing learners with disabilities extend beyond education. The programme demonstrated the importance of coordinated action between education, health, social welfare, local government actors, and community organisations. OPDs can be the 'connectors', linking schools, families and service providers, thus strengthening referral pathways and helping ensure learners received coordinated rather than fragmented support.

### Sustainable partnerships require institutionalisation

The programme demonstrated that lasting participation depends on embedding OPDs within government systems rather than relying on project-based relationships. Representation in PMMs and DEC meetings, and their engagement with District Disability Inclusive Focal Persons to develop district level plans for disability inclusive education, position OPDs as recognised partners in education governance beyond the lifetime of the programme.

## Recommendations

| Sustain progress made                                                                                                                 | Improve progress further                                                                                                                                                                    |
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| <b>School Level</b>                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Inclusion Champions to continue working with OPDs in their districts so that their lived experience informs school improvement        | OPDs to connect to more schools to share their experience and expertise                                                                                                                     |
| <b>District Level</b>                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| OPD representatives to continue playing an active role in PMMs and DEC meetings and in joint monitoring visits                        |                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| DDFIPs to meet regularly with District OPD Teams to review progress on district disability inclusion action plans                     |                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| OPDs to continue engaging with education, health, social welfare and local government to improve referral pathways and accountability |                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>National Level</b>                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Establish regular OPD participation in meetings of the National Technical Advisory Committee on disability inclusive education        | Embed OPD participation within national policy, planning, monitoring and review processes and invest in the long term in building organisational capacity so OPDs remain effective partners |

### 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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