

Disabilities-Inclusive Education

According to the World Health Organization, over 15 percent of the world's population has a disability; an estimated 150 million are children, the majority of whom live in low-income countries. Education systems, educators, communities, and family members must prioritize the rights of all children, including those with identified or unidentified disabilities, to have full access to high-quality instruction and learning environments.



Photo@USAID/Cambodia—All Children Learning project

For nearly four decades, RTI has worked to improve education globally. In collaboration with funders such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and partners (government and nongovernmental), we implement programs that promote equitable, quality, and inclusive education, embedding Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles throughout the education activities we design.

To support inclusion in the development and use of materials and training for teachers, RTI has introduced low-cost innovations that enable teachers to sustainably use formative assessments and differentiate instruction to meet the specific learning needs of students. RTI has also developed open-source tools that enable teachers and schools to reliably screen students for disabilities.

At the system level, RTI informs education sector plans by using findings from national-scale assessments regarding the status of education for children with disabilities. RTI also helps governments develop and implement policies and mechanisms to achieve equitable and quality primary and secondary education for all children—an objective outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Recent Project Highlights

USAID's **All Children Reading–Asia (ACR–Asia)** (2016–2023), which RTI led, developed innovations to improve early grade learning at scale for children with disabilities. Highlights include:

- Developing and piloting a prototype for remotely assessing sign language and reading skills by using an adapted Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) on electronic tablets in the **Philippines**.
- Working with the Public Association of Disabled People “Mehrbakhsh” to print large font books and textbooks in braille for students who are blind or have low vision in Grades 1 through 4 in **Tajikistan**.
- Conducting a **multi-country** review of the scope of USAID's disability-inclusive early grade education programming throughout Asia.
- Redesigning **USAID's Early Grade Reading Barometer** (earlygradereadingbarometer.org), including selecting color combinations appropriate for those who are colorblind and/or have low vision, and providing alternative text for all images and graphs so users can access the text by employing screen readers. Developers also ensured that the site is fully operable through keyboard-only navigation and provides multiple means of representation where needed.



USAID's **Bangladesh Shobai Miley Shikhi (Everyone Learns Together) Activity** (2022–2027) focuses exclusively on improving education for children with disabilities. This Activity is building the capacity at all Government of Bangladesh levels, especially at the *upazila* (sub-district) level, to provide quality inclusive education, disabilities screening and extracurricular support to children with disabilities.

The **USAID/Cambodia—All Children Learning (Cambodia ACL)** (2018–2022) project piloted innovative hearing and vision screening tools which, coupled with clinical referral services, resulted in more than 5,000 preschool and Grade 1 children being screened and provided glasses and hearing aids. The project also taught children Cambodian Sign Language (CSL). The **USAID/Cambodia Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) Activity** (2020–2025) focuses on enhancing nurturing care for children from birth to 5 years, including children with developmental delays and other disabilities.

The **Tusome (Let's Read) Early Grade Reading Activity** (2014–2023) is supporting Kenyan students with disabilities by adapting materials into braille for children who are blind or have low vision and supporting teachers by adapting teacher guides to address the specific needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. All Grade 1-3 teachers across the country have received targeted training on how to provide quality instruction for students with disabilities, and instructional coaches have been trained on how to support teachers. Teaching and learning materials have been developed to ensure inclusivity of students with disabilities.

The **USAID/Tanzania Hesabu na Elimu Jumuishi (Arithmetic and Inclusive Education) Activity** (2019–2021) built the capacity of ministry staff on the Mainland and Zanzibar to develop an instrument and a guide for conducting school-based vision and hearing screenings at all primary schools in the target regions. Building on this work, the **Jifunze Uelewe Activity** (2021–2025) is expanding in-school vision and hearing screening, developing an early grade assessment in braille and sign language, providing classroom resource kits for children with low vision and/or hearing loss, and training teachers from specialized schools for disabilities to serve as resource persons for inclusive classrooms.



Photo© USAID/Tanzania Hesabu na Elimu Jumuishi (Arithmetic and Inclusive Education) Activity

USAID's **Malawi Early Grade Reading Improvement Activity** (2015–2020) worked with District Education Managers nationwide to enhance sensitivity to children with disabilities, strengthen collaboration between them and teachers of special needs education in their districts, and help District Education Managers explore the use of assistive technologies to increase learning of students with disabilities.

USAID's **Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance (READ TA)** project (2012–2018) established guidelines for developing materials for students with severe vision impairment, adapted seven Grade 2 student textbooks (one in each of seven mother tongue languages) into braille, rolled out a resource package based on UDL principles to all teacher colleges of education, and designed and implemented an intervention featuring smart phone–based screening to identify vision and hearing impairment and provide instructional support for reading instruction.

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