

Concept Note: Why OPD Leadership in Inclusive Education Matters: Lessons from the Together for Inclusion Partnership Model

To achieve quality inclusive education, the involvement of persons with disabilities in decision-making is essential. Persons with disabilities have for decades been fighting for the right to be at the centre of decision-making about their own lives and path towards equity. Governments, development organisations and other stakeholders have often failed to consult people with disabilities and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and have designed policies and interventions accordingly. This is a fundamental reason why persons with disabilities have largely been left behind until today.

Children with disabilities have experienced a lot of discrimination within the education sector, by being excluded completely from education, by being sent away from their communities to special schools, by limited integration in schools and not experiencing full classroom inclusion, and/or other variations on this theme. We are currently seeing an emerging international consensus that education should be provided to all children through one Inclusive Education system, which is an important step in the right direction. In this context, it is important that we learn from the past, take a rights-based approach and put persons with disabilities at the centre of decision-making about what Inclusive Education should look like. This requires us to engage OPDs as key players in Inclusive Education.

Persons with disabilities, including children should be considered the de facto experts on issues related to disability inclusion and consulted about matters that affect them. It also requires us to invest in building the capacity of OPDs to take that leadership role and influence decisions made within the education sector. Equally, we need to increase the understanding and capacity of (I)NGOs and multilateral organisations and governments on the importance of involving DPOs and letting them take the lead.

When Norad launched a call for proposals for disability inclusive development initiatives in 2019, they had listened to the disability movement, and required grant recipients to place persons with disabilities and their organisations as leaders of these new initiatives. A consortium was formed between Norwegian OPDs and NGOs called Together for Inclusion (TOFI) to invest in disability inclusion and equity in Uganda, Somalia, Niger, South-Sudan, Mozambique and eventually also Ethiopia. Education is one of three thematic areas, and this has offered an opportunity to really place OPDs at the centre of inclusive education interventions. NGOs and OPDs have joined forces to ensure that our education initiatives “promote the leadership and diverse representation of all persons with disabilities to be front and centre of change; as leaders, partners and advocates” as stated in the 2018 Charter for Change.

What have we learned from TOFI thus far about the impact of this radical shift towards OPD leadership in the drive towards inclusive education? This event will discuss the impact of OPD engagement and leadership on inclusive education by sharing lessons learned from the TOFI consortium. OPD and NGO representatives from the Global South will raise awareness about the importance of collaboration and facilitation of OPD leadership within inclusive education. Moreover, Norad may respond with their perspective on the experiences shared and thereafter discuss, with global donors such as the EU, the potential impact of adopting the same model for other education initiatives moving forward.