



Education Policy

December 2018

(Reviewed and Updated July 2019)

Aim

Aidlink's Education programming aims to ensure that children, especially girls and those with disabilities, attain an inclusive, equitable and quality primary education that supports the achievement of healthy and fulfilling lives.

Scope

This policy paper sets out Aidlink's objectives with regards to Education programming and clarifies, and sets out the priorities and limits for support from Aidlink. It also seeks to provide guidance and focus for partners in developing their Education programmes. Aidlink, and her partners, recognise the importance of working with local communities and their leaders, and local government in implementing any programme. They are therefore involved at all stages of the process, from planning through implementation to promote the long-term sustainability of the intervention.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right, every child, regardless of their background, is entitled to attend school and learn in a safe, inclusive environment. Since the year 2000, there has been enormous progress in ensuring that children attend school with 91% of children in the developing world now enrolled in education. Nevertheless, 263 million children are still out-of-school – the majority in Sub-Saharan Africa – while over 250 million are enrolled but not learning due to the poor quality of education they receive.

In addition, significant disparities remain. Children from the poorest households are four times as likely to be out-of-school as those from the richest, with girls, children with disabilities, those from minority groups and those living in remote and marginalised communities most often denied their right to an education, with 'far-reaching consequences on their futures and those of their families, communities and countries'¹.

Education is integral to ending poverty, exclusion and suffering. With education comes literacy, numeracy, new knowledge and skills, and the chance to engage in economic opportunities. An educated population is healthier, happier and more prosperous, benefiting everyone from the individual involved to society as a whole. **Global efforts to promote education are focused around Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030².**

Aidlink works to ensure 'people, especially women and girls, living in the poorest communities in Africa are able to achieve healthy and fulfilling lives'³. To that end, **Aidlink's programmes promote access to inclusive, equitable and quality primary education as a basic need and fundamental human right.** In line with our Targeting Policy⁴, these programmes focus on the 'furthest behind first', nomadic pastoralist communities that are not meeting national progress targets in terms of access to basic needs and resources. In the drylands of Kenya and Uganda, in particular the Masai, Turkana and Karamojong. Traditional roles and cultural norms which mean women are disadvantaged and discriminated against in these communities also mean that **our education programmes will prioritise activities which promote gender equality.** Given the global disparities outlined above in terms of access to education, **Aidlink's approach is in line with SDG4 and the global targets set out therein. It is also in line with Ireland's support for "education, especially for girls", as set out as a key priority in the new Policy for International Development A Better World (2019)⁵.** This is realised through targeted interventions at the individual, school, community and civil society

¹ Plan International: www.plan-international.org/education

² United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

³ [Aidlink Strategic Plan 2017 - 2021](#)

⁴ [Aidlink Targeting Policy 2017](#)

⁵ [A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development \(2019\)](#)

levels in contexts characterised by social, political and economic disenfranchisement, a lack of access to basic needs and resources (including schools), and low levels of educational attainment.

Context

Aidlink has prioritised working with nomadic pastoralists in the drylands of Kenya and Uganda, notably the Turkana and the Masai (Kenya), and the Karamojong (Uganda) who, as the below table highlights, score poorly on education-focused development indicators in comparison to the national average:

Indicator	Napak (Karamoja)	Uganda National Average	Mashuru (Kajiado)	Loima (Turkana)	Kenya National Average
Literacy Rate	19%	72%	49%	22%	78%
% of population who have completed primary school	20%	58%	48%	22%	78%
% of children age 6-12 enrolled in primary school	20%	87%	69%	40%	72%

The patriarchal society with traditional gender roles and norms in target communities dictate that a women's responsibilities are to the household, resulting in girls being denied access to education. If they are allowed attend, then often, they are forced to drop out early as a result of harmful cultural practices including FGM and early marriage, poverty, boy child preference, or because school environments are not equipped to meet their needs, particularly in relation to menstrual hygiene management.

Children with disabilities are similarly excluded as a result of stigma and discrimination. Aidlink concentrates efforts within schools and communities to ensure that girls and children with disabilities are able to exercise their right to receive an education that has the potential to improve their learning and development outcomes.

Aidlink works with, and within the government education system, therefore target schools are identified by partners following a needs assessment carried out in cooperation with local government officials and community leaders. They must meet an agreed set of criteria. While these are defined separately with each partner, target schools must be: government-aided or community-owned, have poor or inadequate WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) facilities, and have expressed a willingness to contribute to capital investments as well as ongoing operation and maintenance.

Guiding Principles

Aidlink Education programmes are governed by the following principles within an overarching Human Rights Based Framework to programming:

- **The Partnership Approach.** Aidlink works in partnership with local NGOs and government, building capacity to develop innovative approaches and leverage resources. We encourage greater coordination and collaboration, knowledge management, use and sharing, both between partners and other agencies/stakeholders.
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- **Rights Based Programming.** Education strategies and programmes will be guided by a Rights Based Approach to Development.
- **Participation.** Programmes are founded on a participatory approach which brings together key stakeholders including local communities, authorities and partner organisations in an open, accountable and transparent manner to bring about community-owned and sustainable change.

- **Gender Equality.** Women and girls are disadvantaged and discriminated against in target communities with Gender Based Violence including early marriage and FGM (among the Masai community) considered the norm. Ensuring gender equality and equity of opportunity for girls and boys is at the centre of all education programmes. The needs and views of women are considered in all planned interventions and they are fully involved in all decision-making processes.
- **Pro-Poor Approaches.** Meeting the rights of the poor is at the heart of Aidlink's mission. Aidlink, alongside its partners, will undertake concerted efforts in advocacy to ensure that the voices of the poor are represented at national level and that government resources and policies are directed to those most in need.
- **Working with Government.** Aidlink and partners continue to work with and alongside local government to ensure aid harmonisation, the equal and fair distribution of resources, and improved service delivery in the context of local Poverty Reduction Plans and National Development Plans.
- **Collaboration.** Aidlink believes in working with others to promote good practice and amplify support for inclusive, quality education. To that end we are members of *Coalition 2030*⁶, working in alliance with over 60 civil society organisations to ensure Ireland keeps its promise to achieve SDG4, both at home and abroad. We are also active members of the Dóchas Education Working Group / Irish Forum for Global Education⁷, sharing resources and expertise on education in development.
- **Evidence-Based Advocacy and Programme Design.** Aidlink aims to ensure that programme designs are based on the best available information and knowledge, and that advocacy is based on rigorously analysed evidence.
- **Learning-Based Approaches Guided by Results.** Programme activities should reflect clear learning and evidence of what works in practice.
- **Value for Money.** Aidlink's partnership model maximises the impact of every euro by promoting local procurement, enabling efficient logistics systems and contributing to responsive resource allocation. Our approach, including oversight of partner procurement policies and practice is guided by the 4 'E's: Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity.

Strategies

The Education strategies employed by Aidlink and our partners fall under 4 areas: the school, the community, the child and civil society.

School-based interventions aim to create a child-friendly, gender-sensitive and inclusive learning environment that contributes to improved enrolment, retention, performance and transition. This can include the construction of physical infrastructure including inclusive, gender-sensitive WASH facilities, i.e. latrine blocks and water tanks. The absence of separate latrines, a water supply, and disposal facilities for used sanitary pads has been highlighted as a major cause of absenteeism among adolescent girls, causing them to miss approximately 10-20% of all school days. Given its impact on a girls' learning outcomes, this may eventually lead to some girls dropping out of education entirely as they fall behind their male peers. Other interventions can include teacher training on gender and disability-responsive pedagogy, and training of School Boards of Management on child protection and school development, ensuring the right of every student to an inclusive, equitable and quality education.

⁶ www.ireland2030.org/coalition-2030

⁷ [Dóchas Education Working Group](#). The Dóchas Education Working Group is currently transforming into the Irish Forum for Global Education which will encompass other stakeholders with an interest in global education including the trade union movement and the academic sector.

Aidlink's experience has shown that often, the most significant barriers to education are at the community level with negative social norms and cultural practices (including FGM and child marriage) contributing to children, particularly girls' and children with disabilities, either being denied an education or dropping out early. **Community interventions** therefore aim to build support for education, particularly of girls and children with disabilities, within the wider community as well as tackling the negative social norms which limit their participation. Interventions can include training on human rights, the negative impact of harmful (and illegal) cultural norms, and the benefits of education. An emphasis is put on working with local leaders including traditional chiefs and religious leaders who have the power to influence the wider community and challenge the practices which create a barrier to education.

Individual interventions aimed at the child build students' self-confidence, aspirations to succeed and awareness of legal rights and protections so they stay in school and learn. Lacking both awareness of their rights and the skills to successfully negotiate out of harmful situations, children in target communities are socialised into accepting FGM, early marriage, GBV and harmful stereotypes as integral to their culture. They therefore do not assert their right to an education or challenge harmful practices which impact upon their lives. Aidlink and partners work to inform and empower boys and girls to advocate for their own education and protection, as well as support and defend their peers. Evidence shows that children are excellent agents-for-change, disseminating their learning to other students and the wider community and representing another avenue through which harmful practices and the barriers to education can be challenged.

Aidlink's education programmes work within existing government systems and therefore require an enabling policy environment that is accountable and responsive to the needs of community members. Achieving this requires a strong civil society capable of holding government to account. Aidlink's **Civil Society interventions** are therefore based on our Capacity Building Approach⁸ and aim to create strong, sustainable local NGOs capable of championing the right to education through quality programming and targeted lobbying and advocacy.

Approach

Aidlink promotes education that is:

- **Inclusive.** i.e. available to all children regardless of their background or capabilities;
- **Equitable.** i.e. ensuring that a child can achieve their potential regardless of personal or social circumstances;
- **Quality.** i.e. focused on the whole child, including their social, emotional, mental, physical and cognitive development.

As such, Aidlink subscribes to the UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools Approach⁹ aim and expects partners to do likewise in developing and implementing education programmes.

A Child-Friendly School operates in the best interests of the child. Gender-sensitive and equipped with appropriate resources and facilities (including girl and disability-friendly latrines), it recognises and nurtures children's basic rights and promotes their physical and mental well-being through improved nutrition, counselling, clubs and other activities. It enlists the support of parents and the community to promote a safe, clean, healthy and protective environment. The respective governments in our target countries of Kenya and Uganda have promoted the Child-Friendly Schools Approach since the early 2000s. For more information on the UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools Approach, please visit: <https://www.unicef.org/cfs/>.

Crosscutting Issues

- **Gender.** Despite a strong legal framework which promotes equal access to quality education for boys and girls, the reality remains that there are less girls than boys enrolled in school in Kenya and Uganda, with the disparities in target nomadic pastoralist communities most striking. There are a number of reasons for this

⁸ [Aidlink Capacity Building Approach](#)

⁹ UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools Approach: www.unicef.org/publications/files/Child_Friendly_Schools_Manual_EN_040809.pdf

including negative social norms and practices which discriminate against women and girls, the lack of gender-sensitive school environments, girls' lack of confidence and aspirations to learn, and systematic barriers resulting from a lack of policy enforcement or low capacity. Aidlink aims to mainstream gender equality and promote women's empowerment across all programmes by ensuring that the needs of women are considered in all planned interventions, and that they are fully involved in all decision-making processes. Aside from being a human rights issue, this also has practical benefits in terms of improved health and wellbeing, in line with Aidlink's ultimate strategic goal.

- **Environment.** Drought represents the biggest risk to livelihoods and long-term development in target nomadic pastoralist communities with access to education particularly impacted. When drought occurs, both boys and girls will drop out of school to respond to the family's survival needs. Whilst boys migrate with their family's animals, often hundreds of kilometres in search of water and pasture, girls stay behind, their domestic responsibilities increasing with the distance to water (from an average of 5-6km to 12-18km in Turkana during the 2017 drought) alongside other chores. The likelihood of early marriage also increases. In times of need, families manage risk by marrying their daughters, resulting in both a dowry to replace livestock lost to drought and fewer mouths to feed. Having dropped out, a girl is unlikely to return to school, limiting her life opportunities and trapping her in the poverty cycle. Recognising the risk of drought on the sustainability of education programmes, Aidlink seeks to incorporate Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), utilising traditional coping mechanisms, capacity building and strengthening linkages with local government to ensure communities can collectively manage the effects and reduce its impact on access to education, particularly for girls.
- **Sustainability.** Working in partnership with local NGOs, communities and duty-bearers is the most effect and sustainable means to achieve positive change for the world's poorest people. Supporting their active participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of projects enhances local ownership and supports the development of skills, knowledge and confidence required to lead their own development post-intervention. Evidence shows that trained School Boards, students and community gatekeepers continue to engage their peer groups after our departure, their greater understanding of rights and responsibilities giving them the confidence and direction to continue working to transform attitudes. The sustainability of programmes is also enhanced by Aidlink's capacity building of partners, supporting the development of a strong civil society that can advocate for an enabling policy environment.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation.** Aidlink's approach to Monitoring and Evaluation is governed by our Monitoring and Evaluation Policy¹⁰ which outlines both our partners and our own commitments to M&E. The implementing partner is responsible for front line monitoring and evaluation, Aidlink monitors activities from its Dublin base, receiving both informal and formal reports on a regular basis and tracking emerging results against expected outcomes. At least 2 site visits are conducted to each partner per annum to verify the implementation of activities and assess reported outcomes. These visits also include an assessment of the lessons learnt from each project in order that future planning can be improved.

Further Links and Resources

[Sustainable Development Goals](#)

[Kenya Basic Education Act \(2013\)](#)

[Uganda Education Act \(2008\)](#)

[National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya Strategic Plan 2015/16 – 2019/2020](#)

¹⁰ [Monitoring and Evaluation Policy \(2014\). This policy is due to be reviewed in 2019.](#)

[Global Partnership for Education - Kenya](#)

[Global Partnership for Education - Uganda](#)