



Project Brief

Title: Inclusive and Accountable: Participatory accountability mechanisms for children and accessible humanitarian action for adolescent girls with intellectual disabilities in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia

USAID/BHA and IRC/ VPRU

What do we want to do:

This project aims to foster a more inclusive and accountable humanitarian system that proactively engages with affected girls and boys and enables them to meaningfully influence decision-making and contribute, collaborate, and partner in initiatives that impact them. It also brings a specific lens to the inclusion of adolescent girls with intellectual disabilities in humanitarian assistance and aims to strengthen sector capacity to respond to their needs, barriers, and risks while promoting their rights. This will be done through two workstreams on accountability to children and inclusion of adolescent girls with intellectual disabilities. A third and separate workstream aims to enhance field-wide understanding of funding realities, challenges, and opportunities for gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response through the development of an analysis report.

Where and why:

Burkina Faso and Ethiopia were selected based on a) the ongoing protracted emergencies which have resulted in large numbers of people (including children¹) being displaced internally resulting in multifaceted impacts on children's education, protection, health, and wellbeing, and b) IRC's presence and ongoing Child Protection and Women's Protection and Empowerment programming. Overlapping variables such as armed conflict, climate change, resource scarcity, access restrictions and economic deprivation have led to multiple rounds of displacement, despite concerted efforts of the respective governments and development partners. Dependency on external aid and the protracted nature of the crises has resulted in an extended presence of humanitarian organizations and actors, engaged in a range of service provision across sectors. This underscores the need for enhanced engagement with affected persons, particularly children, across a diverse range of skills, abilities, and capacities.

How:

Accountability: assess and understand barriers and enablers to accountability to children in humanitarian spaces and identify possible solutions through partnership with four child/ youth led organizations in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia to design and field a qualitative study. This will support practical understanding of the barriers and enablers and findings will be used to develop a resource kit for the sector. Further to testing and validation, resources will be disseminated widely. IRC co-leads the Accountability to Children Advisory Group (A2CAG) of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. The A2CAG brings together key subject and sector experts and representatives of member organizations, to share expertise on how to work with children, to ensure that they are optimally involved in all points of the humanitarian program cycle, influence, and advocate for improved recognition of children as rights holders and support a coordinated and cohesive approach to accountability to children.

¹ As per UNICEF estimates circa 3.4 million children in Burkina Faso and 10.8 million children in Ethiopia are in need of humanitarian assistance (UNICEF Humanitarian reports for Burkina Faso and for Ethiopia, 2024)

Inclusion: The IRC is working in partnership with Inclusion International and their member organizations in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia to lead consultation workshops with internally displaced adolescent girls with intellectual disabilities² and their caregivers which will be co-facilitated by self-advocates³ and family members of people with intellectual disabilities based in each country. The approaches and questions were co-designed by IRC and Inclusion International and informed by a global Inclusion Advisory Group created under the project. Through this consultation process, we aim to learn directly from the girls about their strengths, needs, risks, and barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance – as well as what humanitarian actors need to do better to ensure their inclusion. Consultations with the girls' caregivers are designed to learn about their experiences with humanitarian assistance and to better understand what support they need as family members. Based on these learnings, the IRC and Inclusion International will co-develop training materials that can support humanitarian actors to reach and include adolescent girls with intellectual disabilities in services and programs. These materials will be validated by the same girls before being disseminated widely to the humanitarian community.

What have we learnt thus far:

- Important to support children and adolescents to understand how they can engage in each space and intervention, in line with their evolving capacities.
- Partnership: working with collectives and individuals in an emergency context requires an agile and adaptive approach that builds on the lived experiences, knowledge, and skills of the affected population, with proactive collaboration, to identify and formalize their contributions.
- A co-design approach to develop approaches and tools strengthens their quality and relevance while cultivating joint ownership and a shared stake in outcomes.
- Working with organizations of persons with disabilities and self-advocates is essential for informing consultation approaches, identifying participants in a context where disability disaggregated data is unavailable, and building trust amongst girls and their family members.
- Accountability and inclusion are the responsibility of all organizations and should not be confined to specialist agencies.

Envisioned output:

Humanitarian actors across sectors and specializations, are better capacitated to identify barriers to accountability to children and inclusion of adolescent girls with intellectual disabilities and have tested and validated tools and resources to expand outreach, engage with these two affected populations (and their caregivers) and ensure responses are aligned to their needs, preferences, and priorities.

Contact:

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² All engagements with children, including adolescent girls with intellectual disabilities, follow IRC protocols on child safeguarding. Additionally, the work with adolescent girls is guided by the 'Listen Include Respect Guidelines', which were developed by people with intellectual disabilities to provide clear guidance on inclusion.

³ Self-advocates are people with intellectual disabilities who speak up about themselves about the things that are important to them.