Research & Studies

From knowledge to practice:

How can research results be leveraged?

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Content

Abstract

Over the last decade, there has been a shift in focus from simply producing knowledge to ensuring its application and impact. Evidence-based data must be translated into actionable insights that drive meaningful change in attitudes, practices, policies, and behaviours. Despite this recognition, the transition from knowledge production to its effective use remains a challenge. Research dissemination strategies are often fragmented, stakeholder engagement is sometimes limited, and mechanisms to track long-term impact are rarely in place. As a result, valuable research findings risk being underutilized or disconnected from policy and programmatic decision-making. **This study examines how HI has approached knowledge transfer in two case studies**, namely

- To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa (2018–2019) – Funded by NORAD, this study was part of HI's Inclusive Education in the Sahel program in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.
- Disability Data in Schools in Emergency and Protracted Crisis (DiDa Schools) (2021–2023) – Funded through ECW's Acceleration Facility, this research in Uganda tested the feasibility of teachers collecting disability data using the Child Functioning Module – Teacher Version (CFM-TV) in refugee education settings.

It **focuses on how research findings were disseminated, taken up by stakeholders, and integrated into policy and practice**. The goal is to identify key barriers, enablers, and lessons learned to improve the effectiveness of HI's knowledge transfer processes. By examining these aspects, the study provides insights into whether HI's knowledge transfer strategies are systematic, accessible, and effectively embedded into organizational processes. It also assesses whether research findings contribute to shaping programmatic approaches, influencing decision-making, and fostering institutional learning.

To evaluate knowledge transfer within these projects, **the study relied on several methods to collect and triangulate information**. It carried out a rapid review of knowledge transfer frameworks to develop an analysis grid. Based on it, project documents, reports, and dissemination strategies were systematically assessed, followed by conversations with HI staff, researchers, and external stakeholders to understand knowledge transfer processes and challenges. A thematic analysis was then conducted to identify patterns in research dissemination, stakeholder engagement, and uptake and develop recommendations for enhancing knowledge transfer at HI.

The analysis reveals that both studies contributed to advancing policy and programmatic discussions while helping HI strengthen its positioning as a trusted programmatic partner and knowledge-generation actor on disability inclusion. The To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa study reinforced HI's messaging on intersectionality, providing evidence to adjust programmatic efforts and shape national policies and donor strategies. DiDa Schools research instead contributed to the validation of the Child Functioning Module Teacher Version (CFM-TV) while also providing Education Cannot Wait (ECW) with evidence and

tools that the global fund for Education in Emergencies is utilizing to drive the harmonization of disability data collection in its portfolio.

The analysis of the two projects also reveals five key insights where HI should focus on to enhance a systematic knowledge transfer approach.

- **Strategic Alignment but Limited Advocacy Integration**. Both projects were aligned with HI's program priorities, but neither was designed with a strong advocacy component.
- **Limited Stakeholder Co-Creation**. While stakeholders and national teams were engaged in research facilitation, their involvement in shaping research priorities and methodologies was minimal.
- **Ad Hoc Dissemination Strategies**. Research outputs were disseminated through various channels, but structured dissemination plans were not embedded in project cycles.
- **Challenges in Research Uptake and Use**. Research findings were generally well received, raising awareness and contributing to discussions and some policy influence. However, the extent to which they informed decision-making depended on the level of engagement with key policymakers and stakeholders.
- **Gaps in Monitoring and Evaluation and Knowledge Management**. Both studies lacked structured mechanisms for assessing changes in capacities and knowledge, making it difficult to assess how findings influenced policies and programs over time. Whether the knowledge generated was utilized in future programmatic and research efforts was also not systematic.

Therefore, this study indicates that HI has successfully generated high-quality knowledge. But there is a need to strengthen knowledge transfer processes to ensure that findings drive policy change, programmatic improvements, and institutional learning. Moving forward, HI must transition from an opportunistic to a structured knowledge transfer model. This study, albeit its limited scope to two research projects, provides HI with recommendations to kickstart this transition and make knowledge transfer more systematic and, in turn, improve the quality and effectiveness of its projects and programmes in realizing the rights of boys, girls, women, and men with disabilities.

List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ANCEFA	African Network Campaign on Education for All
CFM	Child Functioning Module
CFM-TV	Child Functioning Module – Teacher Version
DiDa	Disability Data in Schools in Emergency and Protracted Crisis
DNEPS	National Directorate for Preschool and Special Education
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EiE	Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
ERP	Education Response Plan
HI	Humanity & Inclusion
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
INSPQ	Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
PI	Principal Investigator
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WG	Washington Group on Disability Statistics
WAFOD	West Africa Federation of the Persons with Disabilities

Part 1 – Introduction & context

Humanity & Inclusion (HI) - formerly Handicap International - is an independent and impartial Non-Governmental Organization working in contexts of poverty, exclusion, conflict, and disaster. Dedicated to supporting people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations, HI operates in over 60 countries, providing essential services to improve living conditions and ensure dignity and fundamental rights. Through its interventions, HI not only delivers direct assistance but also advocates for systemic changes that promote inclusion and accessibility for all.

A core tenet of HI's operational philosophy is its commitment to being a learning organization. HI supports all forms of learning in order to constantly improve its practices and interventions, in the interests of the affected populations for whom (and with whom) the organization works. HI also recognizes that there are diverse channels to produce knowledge, directly from project through monitoring, lessons learned or evaluation but also investing in research activities.

Research activities aim to produce reliable data and acquire new knowledge for specific practical purposes. They are defined by rigorous methodologies, adherence to ethical standards, and the effective use of generated knowledge to inform interventions, support advocacy efforts, and demonstrate the added value of innovative approaches. Over the past decade, however, the focus has shifted beyond research production to emphasize the application and impact of knowledge, requiring a more structured process of knowledge transfer to ensure that evidence informs meaningful change.

The importance of effectively utilizing and sharing knowledge extends beyond the scope of research projects. Lessons drawn from this study can inform broader efforts in knowledge management, encompassing evaluations, lessons learned, and post-evaluation action plans. Ethical data management principles also dictate that collected data should directly contribute to informed decision-making and drive measurable improvements, making the transfer of knowledge an ethical dimension in its own.

However, this transfer is not systematic. It therefore seemed essential to understand why and to suggest avenues for improvement to ensure effective use of the knowledge produced.

1. Knowledge transfer: definition and others initiatives

Knowledge transfer is defined as "all the efforts made to contribute to making research activities and results known and recognized to ensure that they are used by practitioners, decision-makers and/or the general public[1]".

The shift from generation to appropriation is evident in the growing recognition that knowledge transfer is a crucial component of the research process. Evidence-based data must be effectively translated to drive improvements in attitudes, knowledge, practices, behaviours, and policies. Several organizations have embraced this paradigm, integrating knowledge transfer strategies into their research and frameworks. For instance, UNICEF examined how research findings from the Global Kids Online study were taken up in partner countries and used internationally. Similarly, ELHRA conducted an impact evaluation of its research in 2019 and developed a Research Impact Framework to systematically strengthen the influence of humanitarian research on policy and practice. Multilateral development banks, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), have established Knowledge Management Action Plans to ensure that knowledge informs financing decisions and enhances the effectiveness of development projects. Likewise, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has also embedded knowledge (sharing) and learning into its Development Effectiveness Framework, emphasizing how knowledge from research and implementation can improve operational outcomes.

This expanding body of research highlights that knowledge transfer extends beyond mere dissemination; it requires structured efforts to facilitate the uptake and use of knowledge. In this regard, the model developed by Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec (INSPQ) outlines key stages in the knowledge transfer process. This entails knowledge production, adaptation, and dissemination of knowledge, followed by an appropriation strategy, which involves reception by users and stakeholders, adoption, appropriation, and actual use of the findings. While this structured approach offers a roadmap for effective knowledge transfer, the leap from research production to practical application remains a challenge. Assessing the impact of knowledge is complex and frequently overlooked, with obstacles such as time constraints, limited funding, and a lack of perceived relevance often hindering the effective use of research findings[2][3].

[1] This builds on the work of Equipe Renard on knowledge transfer https://www.equiperenard.org/verdas-en
[2] Carden, F., Hanley, T., Paterson, A. (2021) From knowing to doing: evidence use in the humanitarian sector. Elrha: London.
[3] Ziam, S.; Lanoue, S.; McSween-Cadieux, E.; Gervais, M.; Lane, J.; Gaid, D.; Chouinard, L. J.; Dagenais, C.; Ridde, V.; Jean, E.; Fleury, F. C.; Hong, Q. N.; and Prigent, O. (2024) A scoping review of theories, models and frameworks used or proposed to evaluate knowledge mobilization strategies. Health Research Policy and Systems, 22(1): 8

2. Knowledge in HI

A core tenet of HI's operational philosophy is its commitment to being a learning organization. HI has developed several policies and guidelines to structure its approach to knowledge generation and dissemination. As outlined in its Project Quality Policy, HI fosters mutual learning among its teams, partners and across different operational levels, bridging field offices and headquarters. This dynamic learning model enables HI to refine its intervention methodologies, ensuring they remain responsive to the evolving needs of the populations it serves. Moreover, HI recognizes that learning and knowledge management should be embedded throughout the project cycle, improving the effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability of its initiatives. HI's practical guide on implementing a continuous learning approach also underscores the importance of steering mechanisms and systematic monitoring to ensure knowledge is effectively translated into practice. One key recommendation in HI's Guidance Note on Ethical Data Management in Research and Studies emphasizes the systematic sharing and use of information (Recommendation 6). Similarly, HI's Disability, Gender, and Age Policy, particularly Commitment 3.1, highlights the role of knowledge development, advocacy, and organizational growth in strengthening HI's impact. The HI Guidance Note on Research (2014) reinforces this commitment by advocating for the production of durable, widely disseminated knowledge that contributes to the organization's collective learning and external influence.

Definition of Project Quality at HI

In line with international thinking and approaches, HI defines quality as all the elements and characteristics of its action that support its ability to meet the explicit or implicit needs and expectations of the people it aims to support in a timely manner, while respecting their dignity. The quality policy for projects has three components:
The quality of the response to the identified needs, which questions the contribution of HI to positive changes benefiting the populations.
The quality of the processes of project management, which cover realization, support, steering and measurement, and contribute to the smooth and consistent implementation of the various activities.
The technical quality of the approaches implemented, which applies mainly to the project's products and/or services, with reference to the standards and norms specific to each field or sector of activity.

Despite these robust policies and frameworks, gaps remain in understanding how effectively HI translates knowledge and implementation into action. The degree to which HI applies its knowledge management principles and the extent to which research findings inform real-world practice require further examination.

3. Why this study?

To strengthen institutional learning, HI must assess how well its current frameworks support knowledge uptake and explore ways to institutionalize knowledge transfer more systematically. This requires not only refining existing policies but also embedding more structured processes that ensure knowledge is actively used to inform interventions and improve development outcomes. By identifying gaps and opportunities, HI can enhance its ability to translate research into actionable strategies, ultimately reinforcing its role as a learning organization committed to continuous improvement and impact-driven programming.

Thus, the current study fits into and aims to inform these organizational efforts focusing on research projects that HI has implemented over the past decade. While knowledge is generated across HI's operations, this study focuses specifically on research projects. Research initiatives provide structured opportunities to examine the realization of knowledge transfer. They offer clearer insights into how evidence is produced, disseminated, and applied. In contrast, broader programmatic work often embeds knowledge uptake within ongoing implementation processes, making it harder to isolate for analysis. Given that this is a first step to move toward more structured knowledge transfer practices, research projects provide an opportunity to better understand underlying mechanisms that could then be observed in programmatic work building on the results of the current study. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze how research-generated knowledge is produced, shared, and utilized both within and beyond HI. A key focus is on evaluating knowledge dissemination practices and assessing whether these efforts have contributed to tangible improvements in skills, behaviors, and programming approaches.

By identifying strengths and areas for improvement in HI's knowledge transfer processes, this study aims to offer practical recommendations to enhance learning, research uptake, and the overall quality of HI's interventions. Ultimately, these insights will support HI's strategic objective of ensuring that research-generated knowledge leads to real-world impact, particularly in improving programming effectiveness for persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

Part 3 – Methodology

1. Design

The case-studies approach was chosen as an in-depth exploration methodology from multiple perspectives of a program or system.

2. Research questions

The current study tackles two aspects of knowledge transfer, namely its process and outcomes. In terms of the former, **the study aims to shed light on whether projects embedded and implemented knowledge-sharing strategies**. This operational question takes an organizational perspective on knowledge transfer to understand how research and its dissemination were planned and executed (process).

The second research question of the current study aims to gauge the contribution of the knowledge that HI generated and disseminated (outcomes). These questions could concern outcomes that were produced over the timeframe of the project. Nonetheless, outcomes could also take time to manifest, accruing long after the project has been completed. For this research**, outcomes can be framed at three different levels:**

1. **research uptake** (awareness of the research, discussion of findings in knowledge sharing events), which are inherently a short-term result,
2. **appropriation and use**, which concern effects on targeted audience (knowledge and capacities) and the integration of a promising practice into project design and organizational routines (medium term), or
3. **effects** (or better impact) on, for example, policies and programs' outcomes, which could also be defined as development effectiveness (long-term).

Due to the timeframe and scope of this research, questions on the outcome will refer mainly to short—and medium-term results that the knowledge transfer contributed to. While policy changes or broader programmatic effects have been examined, particularly through desk review, these have not been analyzed in-depth. As a result, references to such impacts remain largely descriptive rather than attempting to isolate the direct influence of knowledge transfer on these changes.

3. Case study selection

This study focuses on two research projects conducted by HI, selected from an initial list of 16. The projects chosen for analysis are:

(1) “To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa" (2018–2019) in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso
(2) "Disability data in schools in emergency and protracted crisis" (DiDa Schools) (2021–2023) in Uganda

The selection process was carried out in consultation with the HI Global Research Specialist and was guided by a set of functional criteria to ensure relevance and applicability.

The first selection criterion was recency, as selected projects needed to be recent enough to observe the outcomes of knowledge transfer. This also ensured that program and project staff involved in implementing knowledge-sharing activities could still be traced and engaged for insights. As a result, the study focused on projects implemented within a time window of approximately seven years (2018–2025), increasing the likelihood of identifying early effects and gathering perspectives from individuals with firsthand experience.

The second criterion was the inclusion of a multi-actor design and implementation framework. The selected projects needed to involve multiple stakeholders beyond HI to avoid an overly internalized, HI-focused case study. By ensuring that different actors participated in the research and its dissemination, the study aimed to provide a broader understanding of how knowledge transfer operates in collaborative research settings.

The third criterion was the diversity in the research framework to ensure the selection of at least one project that was purely (action) research and another that was embedded within an ongoing program. By including both types of projects, the study aims to provide insights into how knowledge transfer occurs in distinct research models, whether as a standalone research initiative or as part of a broader intervention.

4. Data collection

This study combined desk reviews and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to ensure a thorough triangulation of data. Desk reviews provided a structured analysis of documented project results, while KIIs captured the tacit knowledge of HI staff and external stakeholders involved in these research initiatives. This dual approach ensured that recorded findings were contextualized within the lived experiences of those engaged in the projects, strengthening the study’s ability to assess knowledge transfer processes and outcomes.

The desk review encompassed project documents from both the design and reporting stages. This approach allowed for an evaluation of the project's intentions against its actual delivery, as well as an overview of the research context. **The analytical framework for this**

review exercise was based on HI's Research Guidance Note[4], particularly the steps outlined in its research cycle (Figure 1). The first five steps of this framework pertain to research design and knowledge generation, while the sixth focuses on dissemination. The desk review provided background information on how the two projects produced knowledge, while for the sixth step, the review focused on the nature of research outputs produced and how dissemination was planned.

Following the desk review, **KIIs were conducted to triangulate information and provide deeper insights** into the enabling factors and constraints in project implementation. The KIIs were essential in situating and contextualizing the execution of the dissemination stage. They helped explore both short- and medium-term effects of knowledge transfer, while the dimension of impact was addressed more descriptively rather than as an in-depth causal assessment. **HI's guidance note emphasizes research projects as a multi-actor process**, requiring collaboration among technical, programmatic, and research personnel. Accordingly, key figures interviewed included:

- Technical specialists (program and HQ)
- Project managers
- Members of the project team
- Research experts
- External stakeholders/users

Research experts were engaged either as key informants or as reviewers of the study's outputs. The inclusion of external stakeholders was particularly important for broadening the study's perspective and assessing the relevance, uptake, and use of research findings beyond HI. Their engagement also helped mitigate internal bias by incorporating diverse viewpoints and addressing recall limitations from HI personnel reflecting on past projects.

[4] Projects will not be assessed against the recommended steps of the HI Project Quality Policy because one of the project was designed and implemented prior to its adoption.

Figure 1. Research Project Cycle at HI

KIIs followed a semi-structured interview methodology, ensuring flexibility to explore emerging insights while maintaining a structured approach. The interview instrument was developed and reviewed with the HI Global Research Specialist by adapting the INSPQ (2009). This aimed to **unpack step six of the HI Research Cycle, "Promote the Research,"** by capturing four key dimensions:

- **Dissemination** – Examining how dissemination strategies were executed and tailored to target different audiences.
- **Reception (Uptake)** – Assessing audience engagement with research outputs, including initial stakeholder feedback and challenges in understanding the information.

- **Appropriation and Use** – Evaluating changes in awareness and whether research findings were integrated into practices, influenced perspectives, or contributed to policy discussions. Barriers to adoption[5] were also considered under this dimension.
- **Impact** – Describing observable changes in policies, practices, without attempting to establish direct causal links.

Interviews were conducted online using MS Teams either in English or French, depending on the participant's preference. These lasted approximately 60 minutes to accommodate availability constraints, particularly for external stakeholders.

5. Data analysis

Data from the desk review and KIIs were systematically organized using the HI research cycle and INSPQ (2009) framework to ensure consistency and comparability (See Annex 1). This matrix was used to categorize findings by project and dimension, facilitating clear labeling and efficient retrieval during analysis. KII recordings were summarized in detail and integrated with data and findings from the desk review.

A thematic analysis was then conducted within each dimension of the analytical framework (i.e. dissemination, uptake etc.) across KIIs to triangulate insights between KIIs and desk review findings. Aligned findings strengthened conclusions, while discrepancies highlighted gaps between intended strategies and actual implementation. Tacit knowledge from informants was carefully analyzed to capture contextual nuances and implementation challenges. The analysis focused on short- and medium-term outcomes, such as initial engagement with research findings and integration into organizational practices. While long-term impacts were beyond the primary scope, references to policy or programmatic influence were noted as preliminary insights.

Findings were synthesized to identify key patterns, barriers, and facilitators of knowledge transfer. Summarized themes were cross-checked against raw data to ensure accuracy, and study limitations, including recall bias and document availability, were acknowledged. This structured approach ensured a robust and evidence-based assessment of HI's knowledge-sharing practices.

6. Ethics

In line with HI's Ethical Data Management Policy**, the current study obtained informed consent from KIIs**. Given that the study was conducted remotely through desk reviews and KIIs, participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's objectives, voluntary participation, and data-handling procedures. Informed consent was obtained verbally before the interviews commenced. Participants were also informed of confidentiality measures and data usage. Verbal consent was obtained for recording transcripts to ensure accuracy.

[5] This looks at whether end users of the research decided to adopt the findings or ignore them.

The study also ensured that all data collected was securely stored and processed, ensuring compliance with HI's confidentiality guidelines. Interview recordings and transcripts were stored and analyzed offline and anonymized. For the analysis, data were assessed using a structured coding framework to avoid bias. Findings were presented in a balanced manner, ensuring no single viewpoint was overrepresented, and were interpreted within their broader research and policy context. Cross-referencing was also performed by comparing answers between participants in the same project and again project reports. Finally, **all findings have been reported in an aggregated manner**, with no individual identifiers disclosed. This allows sharing of insights with relevant stakeholders while maintaining the confidentiality of informants.

Part 4 – Findings and discussions

1. To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa

1.1 Background

This research, conducted in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, explored how gender, disability, and age influence the schooling experiences of girls with disabilities. The study aimed to assess access to education, retention, and academic performance to guide inclusive education interventions and raise awareness about the need for gender-sensitive approaches. The study used a qualitative, comparative, and participatory approach, including biographical interviews with children with disabilities, participatory observations in schools, interviews with institutional actors, and focus groups with parents, educators, and community leaders. Data collection took place over 15 days in each country **between January and May 2019, involving 370 participants across the three countries**. Given that the research project was part of the implementation of the Inclusive Education Program in the Sahel, the findings were intended to inform HI and its partners' education programs and support advocacy efforts for gender-inclusive education policies in the Sahel region.

1.2 Knowledge production : actors and stakeholders

While action-oriented research was embedded in HI's Inclusive Education Program in the Sahel, **the focus on the girls with disabilities theme was determined later to align with evolving priorities thanks to the flexibility of funding**. At the global and regional levels, the research design was shaped by coordinators and technical specialists who played a critical role in conceptualizing the study. The regional-level coordination was particularly instrumental in aligning the research with existing advocacy efforts, leveraging connections between HI's global initiatives and regional programming. The involvement of HI's research department and international consultants further ensured methodological rigor and alignment with broader organizational priorities.

The lead researcher (consultant) developed the methodology, supervised local research assistants, and oversaw data collection, relying on country teams for site selection and logistical support. **At the country level, program managers and technical coordinators facilitated implementation**. In each country, these coordinators worked closely with local education officers, teachers, and civil society organizations to gain necessary approvals and facilitate interviews with key informants. The integration of the research project into the broader NORAD-funded program on inclusive education facilitated institutional backing and ensured access to key stakeholders across multiple levels. Particularly, **the research project focused on the areas where HI was managing operations of the Inclusive Education in the Sahel program**.

The study engaged a diverse set of stakeholders to capture different perspectives on inclusive education. **Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) were central partners**, particularly in identifying interviewees and validating findings. These organizations ensured that the research reflected the lived experiences of children with disabilities and their families. **Parent associations, school committees, and women's associations were also engaged** to provide insights into cultural perceptions and community-level challenges affecting girls with disabilities.

Government actors played a facilitative role, primarily in granting permissions and providing access to schools. The National Directorate for Preschool and Special Education (DNEPS) in Mali, as well as local education offices in Burkina Faso and Niger, were key institutional partners, which facilitated the implementation of the research. **At the local level**, school inspectors, teachers, and traditional leaders in Niger and Burkina Faso participated in discussions on barriers to education and shifting community attitudes.

Throughout the research process, findings were regularly shared and validated with key stakeholders. Country teams conducted workshops and debriefing sessions with education authorities, OPDs, and community representatives to discuss preliminary results and ensure alignment with field realities. Final reports were refined based on input from these validation sessions before being used to inform both programmatic adjustments and advocacy messaging.

The data collection process, therefore, was highly collaborative, drawing on the expertise of researchers, technical specialists, and local education practitioners. Research teams included external consultants, MEAL officers, and inclusive education specialists, who worked together to conduct interviews, analyze findings, and refine the study's conclusions. In Burkina Faso and Niger, young professionals from academic institutions were also engaged in data collection, aligning their research with HI's priorities and providing additional field support.

While participatory engagement was a strong feature of the study, **the research design itself was largely predefined before local stakeholders were brought in**. Participatory elements emerged more prominently during the data collection phase rather than in shaping the study's initial framework. The research tools had been developed externally by consultants in discussion with HI's research department in line with Terms of Reference, with limited scope for contextual modifications at the national level.

Finally, **the research itself was primarily designed to generate evidence on barriers to education rather than to serve as a direct advocacy tool**. Advocacy activities became feasible due to budget allocations at the program level (Inclusive Education in the Sahel) rather than being embedded within the research project itself. Additionally, the regional coordinator's connections with global advocacy platforms helped ensure that the study's findings were positioned within broader policy conversations on inclusive education.

1.3 Dissemination and adaptation: activities, and modalities

The dissemination of findings followed a combination of pre-planned activities and emerging opportunities rather than a structured dissemination strategy embedded in the research design. The researcher produced three country reports (one each for Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) in both English and French, as well as a consolidated report that brought together evidence from all three countries. Further, the researcher designed a website to host all the research outputs, and the stories collected in the field, which made resources easily accessible. However, the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the researcher did not include any dissemination-related activities, except for a restitution session at the end of the fieldwork. As such, while the platform proved useful, this was an initiative promoted by the researcher[6] with no budget and organizational support from HI. Likewise, the research project did not include activities or a budget to make research accessible to a diverse audience. It was thought mainly as operational and action-oriented research to inform programming[7].

Recognizing that full reports were too technical, particularly for policymakers, **a factsheet was developed to distill key findings into an accessible format for advocacy**. Its development was made possible by HI's strategic focus on inclusive education since 2021, which ensured that advocacy on this issue was embedded within the Inclusive Education program in the Sahel, which also provided the necessary funding for the fact sheet. Promoted by the regional coordinator and led by the global advocacy team, **the factsheet was created through a structured process involving both a steering group and an editorial board**. The steering group, composed of project staff, technical specialists, and advocacy leads, shaped the content to align with both program priorities and advocacy needs. The editorial board, which included senior management, ensured that the messaging remained consistent with HI's broader strategic direction. This process helped tailor research findings into a format that could be effectively used for policy engagement and donor outreach.

At the global level, dissemination mainly leveraged this factsheet and included targeted outreach via emails, social media, and webinars. The definition of channels and types of events was explicitly mentioned in the factsheet Tors. As part of it, two webinars were organized—one at the global level, engaging donors and international organizations, and another at the regional level, targeting education actors in West Africa. Networks and partnerships such as the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative and the Global Campaign for Education-US also helped amplify dissemination efforts.

At the regional level, partner organizations, including the Africa Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA) and the West Africa Federation of the Disabled (WAFOD), played a crucial role in amplifying research findings. These organizations used the research

[6] The platform is no longer available. The server hosting it shut down.
[7] The ToR of the research mentions that findings will be used for advocacy. However, it does not articulate how and does not include any outputs or activities for that purpose.

to support advocacy efforts, presented findings at regional and global forums, and engaged their networks to broaden dissemination beyond HI's immediate reach.

In countries, national workshops were held, bringing together education authorities and partners and civil society, including OPDs. In Mali, findings were also presented to the Education Cluster, where they were shared with government representatives, OPDs, and education partners.

At the community level, findings were shared through awareness campaigns, local meetings, and direct engagement with parents, associations, and local leaders. For example, in Niger, dissemination efforts included focus groups with parents and workshops with local authorities, including mayors, traditional leaders, and religious figures. These efforts ensured that research findings were not limited to institutional actors but also reached communities directly impacted by the study. For these activities, HI relied on the use of interpreters during community discussions rather than translating materials, such as the fact sheet, into local languages due to budgetary constraints.

1.4 Uptake: new knowledge, stakeholders' reactions, enablers, and barriers

Overall, the study increased awareness of the compounded barriers faced by girls with disabilities, validating concerns from education officials, policymakers, and communities.

At the global level, the study provided concrete evidence-based findings rather than relying on desk reviews, which was particularly appreciated within UNGEI. The fact that the research was field-based added legitimacy, making it more compelling for external audiences. The research also gained visibility due to growing donor interest in gender and disability, particularly because there was limited research available on intersectionality and even less specifically on the experiences of girls with disabilities. This knowledge gap made the study particularly relevant for informing global advocacy and policy discussions.

At the regional level, the study promoted discussions on gender and disability, particularly in francophone Africa, where these topics had received comparatively less attention than in anglophone countries. **The research was viewed as an opportunity to bring disability-inclusive education into broader regional policy dialogues**. The documented data and personal testimonies made advocacy messages more compelling, increasing their potential influence in policy discussions.

At the national level, the research was well received by education officials and local government authorities, who recognized that the findings aligned with existing education policies and mandates. For example, in Mali, several factors facilitated research uptake, including HI's strong partnerships in inclusive education, collaboration with the Ministry of Education, and active role in the Education Cluster and the Strategic Advisory Group, which provided a platform for sharing results with high-level decision-makers. The research also

aligned with national policy priorities and was relevant to both development and emergency settings, making its findings applicable across different regions.

The research shifted the focus beyond access to education for girls with disabilities, emphasizing the need to ensure they remain in school and complete their education. It highlighted that barriers to retention go beyond infrastructure and include low expectations, household responsibilities, and cultural norms. **The study also underscored the importance of recognizing the diverse needs of girls with different disabilities** rather than treating them as a homogenous group. It emphasized that girls with hearing impairments require sign language interpreters, those with visual impairments need Braille materials, and those with mobility impairments need accessible transport and infrastructure. By differentiating these challenges, the study pushed for more tailored interventions to address specific barriers to education.

At the community level, parents of children with disabilities welcomed the research as it validated their struggles and aspirations. Many parents saw the study as an opportunity to express their concerns about inclusive education, reinforcing the need for greater support at the school and policy levels. In Mali, local engagement in education clusters and municipal education authorities facilitated conversations about integrating the research findings into local governance mandates.

Despite the positive reception, research uptake was not without challenges. While education officials and development partners acknowledged the findings, translating them into concrete policy changes and programmatic shifts represent a longer term process. Deeply ingrained cultural and religious norms continued to influence perceptions of girls' education, making implementation more complex.

1.5 Appropriation and use

While the previous section on uptake has highlighted stakeholder reactions and interest in the findings, this section examines how the research was actively used to change practices, policies, and programs.

At the global level, the fact sheet, produced as part of the research, became a widely used tool, also serving programmatic purposes. It is also worth highlighting that **at HI level**, as an organisation, the research findings have also shaped long-term advocacy messages. They have also contributed to the development of organisational policies such as the disability, gender and age policy published in 2021. They have also helped to open up new areas of research concerning intersectionality. The last publication of the Advocacy on adolescent girls with disabilities further integrates the age angle and focuses on education continuity, a little-documented aspect that emerged from the research in the Sahel.

T**he study played a key role in shaping advocacy narratives, refining awareness campaigns, and influencing inclusive education efforts at the national and community**

levels, a finding also emerging from the evaluation of the Inclusive Education in the Sahel program.

At the regional level, the study contributed to greater engagement on disability-inclusive education within OPDs and advocacy networks. Regional OPDs, including those that had previously not focused on inclusive education, integrated the findings into their advocacy strategies and public events. The study was also presented at the Gender Global Partnership for Education conference, reinforcing advocacy messages on the importance of addressing the intersection of gender and disability in education policies. Importantly, the findings helped strengthen programmatic focus across the three countries on the intersection of gender and disability.

At the country level, the findings were used to adapt teacher training on inclusive education methodologies, the content, focus, and messaging of community sensitization, particularly around violence and protection, as well as programmatic intervention to promote access and continuity. In Mali, in each municipality where HI worked, Communal Education Commissions were responsible for awareness campaigns, training community leaders, and facilitating school enrollment for children with disabilities. Once the study was shared, these commissions adjusted their strategies to reflect its findings, ensuring that local initiatives were aligned with the evidence presented. Furthermore, the National Directorate for Preschool and Special Education referenced the study in funding proposals and public presentations on inclusive education, and it was included in Mali's Multi-Year Resilience Plan for the education sector.

Similarly, in Niger, the research pointed to household and livelihood responsibilities as factors that often prevented girls with disabilities from staying in school. Families relied on these girls for domestic work and income generation, reinforcing low expectations of achievement and cultural norms that deprioritized their education. Recognizing that economic constraints played a major role, HI adapted its approach to income-generating activities for families to limit the impact of financial pressures on the attendance of girls with disabilities.

At the community level, the research helped shift attitudes gradually towards the education of girls with disabilities, particularly among parents and traditional leaders. In many cases, parents were initially resistant, but discussions based on the research findings led to greater recognition of the injustices faced by girls with disabilities. OPDs played a crucial role in mobilizing parents and community members, ensuring that the study's findings were widely shared and understood.

Nonetheless, **budget constraints limited the ability to act on all recommendations of the study at the national level**. Further, implementation of all the recommendations made by the study was also not possible due to the timing of the study: the research was not carried out at the start of the Inclusive Education in the Sahel Program, reducing the bandwidth for adjusting program priorities and interventions.

1.6 Impact and learning

While the previous section indicates that the research project contributed to bringing about change in programmatic implementation and perceptions of stakeholders, assessing long-term shifts remains difficult.

At the global level, HI tracked stakeholder engagement, such as webinar participation and positive reactions in the promotion of research outputs and the factsheet. Nonetheless, HI **reports that it used in its advocacy at the federal level research findings to influence donor strategies**. These include the French international strategy on basic education and USAID's 2024 basic education strategy, both of which incorporated disability inclusion and intersectionality. Finally, the study helped strengthen HI's positioning in discussing intersectionality in education, providing an opportunity to develop operational approaches.

At country level, there was no structured approach to tracking the research's long-term impact. For example, while Inclusive Education in the Sahel Program tracked the outreach of sensitization campaigns, there was no dedicated tracking mechanism to measure changes in perceptions or behaviors. Nevertheless, at the national level, **KII suggested that findings informed legal and policy frameworks supporting inclusive education**. In Niger, policymakers relied on the study's data to adjust policies improving access to education for girls with disabilities. In Mali, the study contributed to the revision of the Special Education Policy and influenced local funding decisions, as seen in Sikasso, where the mayor's office allocated additional funds for inclusive education efforts. Additionally, KIIs reported that OPDs felt more engaged and recognized, strengthening their advocacy role following their involvement in the study.

At the individual level, most KIIs actively use findings and lessons in their current work. Some have also integrated insights into their academic and professional development, ensuring the ongoing application of key lessons on disability, inclusion and intersectionality.

2. Disability data in schools in emergency and protracted crisis

2.1 Background

This research assessed whether teachers could generate reliable data on children with disabilities in emergency settings to support program planning in schools. Funded by ECW through its Acceleration Facility, the research tested the use of the Child Functioning Module – Teacher Version (CFM-TV) in Uganda, specifically in the Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, home to 121,934 refugees and 475,600 host community members. While the standard CFM used with caregivers was already widely used to identify functional difficulties among children aged 2 to 17 years, the CFM-TV was in its pilot phase. Thus, HI's study contributed to building evidence on its applicability in education in emergencies and protracted crises (EiE). **The research employed a mixed-methods approach,** assessing

teachers' ability to collect disability-related data through cognitive interviews, quantitative surveys, and focus group discussions. Findings from the Uganda pilot indicated that teachers can reliably collect data on students's functional difficulties. The study also provided insights into when and how the CFM-TV could be effectively used in designing education programs for emergency settings.

2.1 Knowledge production : actors and stakeholders

The DiDa research project was developed through a highly collaborative process. **The HI research specialist and the Inclusive Education Unit HI played a central role in conceptualizing the study, engaging with the donor (ECW)**, and ensuring the necessary technical expertise was available. Initially, an Advisory Committee was envisioned to provide technical guidance and validation throughout the research. Time constraints and competing priorities led to the team opting instead for **bilateral exchanges with the Washington Group on disability statistics (WG) and other key stakeholders** rather than a formalized advisory mechanism and/or partnerships. Nonetheless, the WG organized an informal technical working group given that several organizations were testing the CFM across different contexts but with the common purpose of validating it. HI engagement in this working group provided an opportunity to broaden stakeholder engagement. The working group became an important hub for technical discussions, research design, and sharing lessons and challenges across different research contexts. However, as this working group was not yet active during the research design phase, HI used it as an opportunity to learn and share information but not to co-create the research.

At the national level, the HI inclusive education regional technical specialist provided support in project implementation, process management, and ensuring quality research delivery. **A national principal investigator (PI) was also contracted** to oversee both technical and project management aspects. While the PI had a strong academic background and research experience, he had limited experience in project management, which created gaps in administrative coordination, budgeting and donor accountability. Furthermore, the principal researcher left before the end of the contract, leaving incomplete data sets and analyses and before having developed all the operational deliverables. This led to the recruitment of two international expert consultants: an international researcher to clean and validate the data and write the research report, and an international expert to develop the expected operational guidelines. As a result, **the role of the regional technical specialist evolved beyond technical oversight** to include budget management, timeline adjustments, and direct involvement in protocol writing and implementation, as well as during the project extension period, stepping in to manage outstanding tasks such as coordinating with consultants and overseeing final deliverables.

Since this was a pilot study rather than a large-scale data collection, the team included 6 persons: 3 supervisors and 3 enumerators (so 3 teams of 2 persons in 3 schools). They were **in support of the 21 teachers involved in this research.** This set-up was critical in testing the CFM-TV tool, ensuring its feasibility in real classroom settings and guarantee data

quality. Additionally, **school head teachers provided institutional support**, and the Office of the Prime Minister, which manages the refugee settlements, facilitated access to the study locations. In this regard, **key education actors played an important role in facilitating the research process** and ensuring alignment with national frameworks and protocols for education data collection. The Ministry of Education's Special Needs and Inclusive Education Department was engaged, providing institutional support for the research, but it was not engaged in co-creating it.

2.3 Dissemination and adaptation: activities, and modalities

The DiDa Schools project aimed to implement a structured dissemination strategy with clear objectives and measurable uptake indicators. The research specialist envisioned the development of a structured uptake plan to guide dissemination efforts. However, due to staffing gaps, competing priorities, and delays caused by COVID-19 and Ebola, **a formal dissemination plan was never fully designed**. Dissemination activities were carried out under time constraints, without a systematic approach to tracking how findings were being used. The departure of the lead researcher further compounded these challenges, leaving the remaining team members to manage dissemination efforts under pressure and without specialized expertise in knowledge transfer.

Despite these difficulties, **efforts were made to share findings through different channels and formats, leveraging resources allocated in the research budget for this purpose**. The team first produced documents promoting the research itself: a research report, two pages summarising the main findings and an infographic. The team also developed operational documents to translate the research into more accessible formats to facilitate dissemination, knowledge appropriation, and use: a manual for future users, a FAQ on CFM-TV, 8 top tips for more inclusive practices and a video. To improve accessibility, these documents have been translated into several languages: French, English, Spanish, Luganda and Swahili for the research documents; French, English and Spanish for the operational documents; sign language for the video and the webinar organised to present the project. HI also made plans to create an easy-to-read version of the findings to enhance the engagement of OPDs with findings and materials, but this output was not finalized. These resources were made available on a web platform.

Dissemination took place at multiple levels, though gaps remained in engagement with key stakeholders. **At the global level**, findings were presented at CFM-TV working group meetings, the annual WG meeting, and through a global webinar with ECW. **Within HI**, two articles were published on the internal platform to highlight findings and position the research within broader discussions on disability-inclusive data collection. ECW also played a role in promoting dissemination efforts through its website and its communication channels, compensating in part for HI's lack of social media engagement.

In Uganda, a local event was held to share findings with stakeholders. The Ministry of Education's Special Needs and Inclusive Education Department was involved in discussions,

but the findings were not framed with a clear policy entry point. This lack of targeted messaging meant that opportunities to promote the adoption of the CFM-TV to collect disability data informing Uganda's broader education planning efforts were missed. A more precise analysis of which policy frameworks should integrate disability data would have allowed for stronger engagement with decision-makers. Despite having produced two-pagers, infographics or videos, the final outputs remained more research-oriented rather than policy-focused, limiting their influence on inclusive education reforms in Uganda.

Similarly, HI's global advocacy priorities, which focus on high-level political change, and the technical nature of the project meant that **the research did not receive support for translating findings into advocacy efforts**. This support could have helped tailor messaging to reach policymakers, enhancing the effectiveness of dissemination.

2.4 Uptake: new knowledge, stakeholders' reactions, enablers, and barriers

The DiDa project provided evidence that teachers in emergency settings managing large classrooms could collect disability data, challenging previous assumptions about the possibility to do so. Importantly, **teachers themselves reported that the CFM-TV helped them** better understand their students and their challenges. While the study did not introduce a groundbreaking shift in disability data collection, it **contributed to a larger movement, under the aegis of the WG technical working group**, that helped validate the CFM-TV. Alongside research conducted by organizations such as USAID in Nepal, Save the Children in Somalia, and SightSavers in Sierra Leone, among others, the findings played a role in broadening discussions on how disability data can be collected in schools and used for education planning in crisis-affected contexts.

At the national level in Uganda, while some officials within the Ministry of Education beyond the Special Needs Education Department engaged with the study, these were not decision-makers. Additionally, the turnover of key ministry staff hindered continuity, as the person initially engaged with the research left and their replacement struggled to understand the significance of CFM-TV. Nonetheless, current engagement with the Ministry indicates improved awareness about different tools for disability data collection at the Ministry level. To promote uptake, the study findings were also presented to the Education Response Plan (ERP) Secretariat. This presentation allowed pointing to the potential use of the CFM-TV to collect data for the Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). Currently, another tool is being used for refugee registration processes, but the end of the ERP presents an opportunity to push for the inclusion of CFM-TV. This will require targeted engagement of high-profile education decision-makers and EiE actors such as UNHCR, which play a critical role in collecting disability data.

For ECW, the research findings provided critical evidence that CFM-TV is applicable in EiE settings, enabling the promotion among its grantees. In this regard, a survey revealed low awareness of how to collect disability data among ECW grantees, prompting

discussions on tool selection and implementation. Some grantees found CFM-TV too time-consuming, while others questioned whether teachers could serve as reliable proxies for identifying disabilities. In response, ECW has been leveraging the findings and outputs from DiDa Schools to clarify concerns and build trust in the tool. This suggests that the immediate priority is continuing to ensure that practitioners fully understand the added value of using CFM-TV compared to other tools. Competing disability data tools used by different agencies, as well as country approaches to disability inclusion and respective policies, create confusion and hamper uptake.

2.5 Appropriation and use

The research findings were integrated within HI's Inclusive Education Unit, leading to the development of a guidance note on disability data collection in schools. This guidance note was presented internally and shared within HI's network of Inclusive Education specialists. These first steps represent an effort to institutionalize research findings by embedding them into organizational practice.

An interesting externality of the study was that teachers who used the CFM-TV tool reported that the experience changed how they observed and assessed students. The application of the fostered new reflections on learning barriers and promoted changes in teaching and classroom management practices. While the study demonstrated that structured assessments could shift classroom practices on inclusive education by teachers, further research is needed to evaluate whether change are sustained and what are the factors than enable them. Additionally, the use of tablets and digital tools was also seen as a capacity-building opportunity for teachers, especially for those with limited prior exposure to technology in the classroom.

As mentioned earlier, engagement with the Ministry of Education was primarily to the Special Needs Education Department, with minimal involvement from departments such as Education Planning or Basic and Secondary Education, a limitation of the current research. Additionally, staff turnover within the Ministry resulted in gaps in institutional knowledge, further complicating advocacy efforts for long-term adoption. **Strategic engagement with higher-level policymakers, such as the Permanent Secretary, may have strengthened the research's influence on national policy**. These mainstream education stakeholders play a critical role in shaping policy and data integration, particularly for the EMIS. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that while the research indicates that the CFM-TV can be deployed in projects, integration into EMIS would require overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, coordinating multiple stakeholders, and securing long-term policy commitments.

Finally, **ECW, who invested financial resources in this project, is scaling up its use at both the programmatic and policy levels**—engaging grantees early and advocating for consistent disability data collection across the ECW portfolio on EiE. However, a key challenge remains. Organizations tend to favour a single tool, often their own, across all programs, even when context-specific adaptations are needed. As such, ECW is promoting

CFM-TV's adoption among grantees while supporting them in understanding the differences between CFM-TV and the CFM and contextual factors that influence tool selection. At the organizational level, **the research project supported by ECW Acceleration Facility has provided evidence for internal advocacy strengthening engagement from the MEAL and education teams** to ensure disability data collection remains a priority and is done consistently. Moving forward, ECW aims to expand the use of CFM beyond schools, ensuring that out-of-school children with disabilities are also accounted for.

2.6 Impact and learning

Overall, while the research has contributed to ongoing discussions, strategic partnerships, and some programmatic changes, achieving sustained impact will require continued engagement, better institutionalization of past research, and stronger coordination with key decision-makers at both national and international levels.

The research was monitored within a standard project management framework. The research monitoring plan did not include indicators relating to the dissemination or use of results, which limits the ability to assess the influence of the research. **Nonetheless, elements of the research have informed ongoing and future initiatives**.

Within HI, the Inclusive Education Unit and the regional technical specialist continue to promote the CFM-TV. For example, discussions in Rwanda have referenced the guidance note developed from DiDa Schools to explore integrating CFM-TV into data collection for the EMIS. Similarly, a new project in Senegal builds on this research by implementing CFM-TV in two regions. However, this initiative does not explicitly acknowledge the Uganda research, highlighting a recurring challenge: ensuring past research is systematically referenced and integrated into new projects.

Within HI, the lessons from this study have started to influence how new research projects are structured, with greater attention to what happens after the knowledge is produced. For example, uptake plans are being developed in the early stages of the research cycle (ideally at the design stage).

In Uganda, the Regional Technical Specialist is working to ensure findings are systematically referenced in future initiatives. She ensures that CFM-TV is considered in new project proposals and is included in technical reviews.

Importantly, **the research played also a key role in strengthening HI's credibility as a technical expert in disability data collection**. Within the EiE sector, HI is increasingly recognized as a resource for evidence-based approaches to disability-inclusive education. In Uganda, this has contributed to better relationships with the Ministry of Education, particularly among officials who value data-driven policymaking. The trust built through this research has led to further collaboration on new research proposals and continued engagement with key government actors. For example, efforts are being made to engage the Ministry of Education in Uganda through another ECW Multi-Year Resilience Program,

with activities planned to revive discussions on incorporating CFM-TV into the ERP and national data systems.

At the donor level, ECW has also integrated disability data tracking into its annual grantee reports, collecting detailed information on data collection tools, enumerators, and sample sizes. While the research has helped ECW grantees develop a stronger interest in functional disability measurement, many still rely on the WG Short Set and or do not follow standard guidance on the use of the WG tools. This indicates progress in raising awareness but also underscores the need for awareness raising and capacity-building to promote harmonization of how tools are utilized to collect data. In this regard, ECW continues to use research findings and outputs to enhance these efforts.

3. Takeaways and lessons learned on knowledge transfer

The case studies of To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa and DiDa Schools provide initial insights into how HI has approached knowledge transfer. While both projects sought to generate evidence to inform inclusive education, their differing scopes, methodologies, and dissemination strategies reveal broader patterns in how HI designs, implements, and shares knowledge. Examining these two cases together allows us to distill key lessons on what has worked, where challenges remain, and how HI can enhance its research impact in future initiatives.

First, **the research projects were both strategically aligned with internal and sector-wide programmatic priorities**, primarily aimed at improving data collection and enhancing the quality of inclusive education interventions. However, **neither project was initially designed with a strong advocacy focus**, limiting their direct influence on policymaking. To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa emerged as a relevant research priority to mainly inform ongoing inclusive education program. However, its late implementation within the program cycle restricted its ability to influence key programmatic decisions. In contrast, the DiDa Schools study was conceived from the outset as a technical validation exercise with strong donor support but without a clear advocacy component, making it less impactful in shaping HI's broader advocacy agenda.

A key lesson from both studies is the importance of participatory engagement in research design. While stakeholders across different levels—including governments, civil society, and OPDs—played facilitation roles, their involvement in shaping the research agenda and methodology was limited. The To be girl with disabilities from West Africa study benefited from buy-in due to its integration into an existing program, but country teams and national stakeholders had little influence over its design. Similarly, the DiDa Schools had limited engagement of national actors in the research design process. This reduced opportunities for local ownership and policy influence, underscoring the need for more inclusive co-creation mechanisms in future research efforts. This resonates with the missed opportunity of establishing a formal advisory committee. The research project overcame it partly by

engaging the WG bilaterally and engaging in the WG technical working group of the CFM-TV.

The dissemination of research findings was another critical challenge. **Neither project had a structured dissemination strategy embedded in its design, relying instead on a mix of opportunistic and ad hoc approaches around the production of knowledge products**. The To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa study successfully linked its findings to global advocacy efforts, producing a widely used factsheet, which was only possible thanks to resources in the broader program Inclusive Education in the Sahel, which then triggered the engagement of HI Global Advocacy. However, the independent initiative of the researcher in developing a website to host research outputs was not formally supported by HI, highlighting a misalignment of understanding between HI and the researcher, which hampered sustainability of the effort given that the platform is now offline. Meanwhile, the DiDa Schools project aimed to create diverse outputs to reach different audiences, including translations into multiple languages and an easy-read version for OPDs. However, time constraints coupled with limited project management capacities, prevented the full implementation of these efforts. **Both cases reveal the importance of embedding a structured dissemination plan from the outset, ensuring that findings reach key decision-makers in an accessible and policy-relevant manner. This also includes assessing whether a dedicated digital platform is necessary and how it aligns with HI's long-term knowledge management strategy, particularly when research has strategic advocacy objectives at the regional or global level.**

Finally, **findings from these case studies highlight the importance of clear Terms of Reference (ToRs) and well-defined deliverables** to ensure alignment between research objectives and execution. For example, the PI leading DiDa School had a strong academic background but was lacking in operational project coordination, which required HI staff to step in during data management and eventually take on the lead on research synthesis and deliverables production. Similarly, the lead researcher in To be a girl with disabilities in West Africa collected data rigorously and thoroughly, but beyond the scope of HI's needs. To prevent these challenges, **ToRs, particularly those of external experts, should explicitly define the scope**, **intended use of findings, and type/structure of outputs ensuring shared expectations between HI and researchers from the start. These should then be further developed in technical proposals where methodologies and scope of the data collection should be in line with the purpose of the project and, ultimately, with the outputs to be produced**. Differences in expectations and understanding between HI and external experts, if not properly managed, can lead to shifts in research focus, competing perspectives within the organization, and ethical concerns about collecting data that is collected but not used.

Despite these challenges, **both studies generated valuable evidence that contributed to advancing discussions on disability inclusion in education**. The To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa study provided concrete cross-country data on intersectionality, reinforcing the need to move beyond access-based approaches towards ensuring continuity and tailored support for girls with disabilities. The DiDa Schools study, in turn, demonstrated

that teachers could effectively collect disability-related data, offering practical insights into the applicability of the CFM-TV tool in emergency and protracted crisis settings. However, the DiDa Schools experience shows that national-level research uptake was weaker, particularly due to the limited engagement of high-level policymakers. This suggests that while research findings can stimulate global conversations and raise awareness, translating evidence into national policy change requires deliberate targeting and engagement with decision-making authorities.

The influence and institutionalization of research findings were also shaped by financial and structural constraints. Findings from the To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa study informed HI's internal programmatic policies on intersectionality and strengthened the advocacy capacity of regional partners such as ANCEFA and WAFOD. However, implementation of recommendations at the national level was constrained by budget limitations and the late timing of the research within the program cycle. The DiDa Schools study led to the development of an HI guidance note on disability data collection and contributed to greater awareness among education stakeholders, particularly of ECW, which is actively promoting tools coming out of the research in its EiE portfolio. Nonetheless, promoting systematic adoption, uptake, and correct use of tools like the CFM-TV by other organizations in the sector will require time. Thus, both cases highlight the **need for sustained advocacy, awareness raising, and resource allocation to translate research findings into tangible programmatic and policy outcomes**.

Finally, **neither study had a structured system for measuring long-term impact**, making it difficult to assess sustained changes in policy or programmatic implementation. While HI successfully used research findings to inform donor strategies and national education policies under To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa , the lack of a dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) framework limited the ability to assesses influence of research findings over time, particularly in the implementation of activities adapted based on them. The DiDa Schools study contributed to strengthening HI's credibility in disability data collection and led to greater technical recognition within the EiE sector. Encouragingly, there is some evidence that HI is embedding research uptake plans into new projects and utilizing digital platforms for research dissemination, signaling a shift towards more structured knowledge management. Moving forward, **ensuring that research findings are systematically tracked and integrated into future initiatives will be key to maximizing their long-term impact**.

Part 5 – Recommendations

1. Embed Structured Dissemination into Project Proposals

Dissemination in both studies was largely ad hoc, relying on existing networks rather than a structured approach. While some efforts, such as the widely used factsheet in To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa , were successful, they were opportunistic rather than planned. Thus, HI should:

- Define expected changes and develop structured dissemination and uptake plans for all project proposals, outlining suggested formats, target audiences, and approaches to reach them. Define how findings will be used, the responsibilities for implementation, and how they will be monitored.
- Ensure knowledge transfer plans embed a multi-channel approach to dissemination to amplify outreach, particularly social media and websites hosting knowledge outputs.
- Engage local stakeholders to better understand the most appropriate and fit-for-context formats. For example, translate findings into accessible formats, including easy read versions, promote translation to reach affected populations, and utilize digital tools.
- Allocate specific budget and staff time for deliverables production and dissemination activities to prevent last-minute constraints.

2. Strengthen Stakeholder Co-Creation (Design and Implementation)

Both studies engaged a range of stakeholders, including CSOs, OPDs, and national authorities, but primarily in facilitation roles rather than as co-creators of research. This commitment would also be an opportunity to strengthen ownership of the results and contribute to effective change, as well as promote capacity building. Thus, HI should:

- Design proposals that outline co-creation strategies aimed at informing the design and implementation of research.
- Establish advisory committees that include key national stakeholders (e.g., ministries, OPDs, CSOs, implementing partners) to provide strategic guidance from the design stage.
- Ensure that projects start with joint planning workshops that bring together stakeholders to ensure that methodologies and implementation are informed by and respond to the needs of local decision-makers and practitioners.
- Integrate feedback loops with stakeholders to increase the relevance and usability of knowledge.

- Embed these aspects in consultants' ToRs such that their technical proposals must explain how they would promote and operationalize co-creation.

3. Enhance Uptake through Targeted Engagement with Policymakers/Practitioners (if policy changes is targeted)

Despite strong research outputs, limited engagement with high-level policymakers reduces the likelihood of findings influencing national policies. Thus, HI should:

- Clearly define advocacy objectives in all projects from the outset, ensuring that findings contribute to ongoing policy discussions.
- Conduct stakeholder mapping to identify key policymakers, influencers, and decision-making processes where findings from projects can have an impact.
- Organize or participate in policy dialogues and roundtables with national and regional authorities to discuss project implications for national/regional policymaking.
- Engage with national clusters/working groups, UN agencies, and donors to integrate knowledge generated by project implementation into broader sector discussions.
- Develop policy-friendly outputs, such as two-page executive summaries with clear recommendations, tailored for government and donor audiences.

4. Assess Change and Enhance Knowledge Management

Neither study had a structured mechanism for tracking the long-term impact of findings. They also indicated the need for strengthened HI knowledge management practice. Thus, HI should:

- Develop project MEAL framework with indicators that track, as relevant, outreach and policy uptake, changes in capacities and awareness, and stakeholder engagement.
- Develop post-research reflection templates to systematically capture lessons learned from project implementation, dissemination, and uptake efforts.
- Establish/update quality assurance processes to ensure that new projects integrate evidence from past interventions.
- Ensure that a research repository is available to facilitate access to former initiatives (including quick retrieval by thematic focus, geographic region, and key stakeholders for example).

Part 6 – Conclusion

The two case studies, To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa and DiDa Schools, offer valuable insights into how HI approaches knowledge transfer. They reveal a strong commitment to generating evidence for disability inclusion, with research deeply embedded in program priorities in both cases. HI has successfully positioned itself as a key knowledge producer, with its research contributing to donor strategies, technical guidance, and global conversations on disability data and intersectionality.

However, these case studies also highlight gaps that limit the full potential impact of knowledge that HI produces. As mentioned, knowledge generation is a recognized strength, but knowledge transfer remains partially structured. Limited strategic stakeholder co-creation, occasional advocacy and communication expertise integration and the lack of metrics to assess changes in uptake reduce the ability of HI to understand and document how it is adding value through knowledge.

Moving forward, HI must transition from an opportunistic to a strategic knowledge transfer model, ensuring that knowledge from projects is actively used to drive programmatic improvements, policy change, and institutional learning. The integration of structured knowledge management practices, stronger dissemination pathways, and stakeholder-driven approaches will be critical in ensuring that HI's research is actionable and influential.

To achieve this, HI must leverage its position as a thought leader in disability inclusion, deepening its engagement with policymakers, donors, sector partners and communities. By embedding knowledge transfer as a core component of its research and programming, HI can enhance its role as a global leader, ensuring that its findings help realize the rights of girls, boys, women, and men with disabilities.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Analysis grid

Dimension	Question for KIIs
Context	Examined team composition, roles, and responsibilities within the inclusive education program. Assessed how staff contributed to the program's implementation.
Participation in Research Activity	Explored the level of involvement of different actors in the research process, including how they engaged with the study, their perceived relevance of the research within the broader programming, and how it aligned with ongoing initiatives.
Production and Co-Production	Assessed the design of the research, including which internal and external stakeholders were involved, how they contributed, and whether any key voices were missing. Evaluated the extent of participatory engagement in shaping research objectives and methodology.
Dissemination	Investigated the existence and execution of a formal dissemination strategy. Examined the channels, modalities, and resources used to share findings and whether dissemination efforts were tailored to different target audiences to maximize outreach and engagement.
Research Uptake & Short-Term Effects	Evaluated what new knowledge was generated through the research, how stakeholders reacted to findings, and what factors facilitated or hindered initial interest and engagement. Assessed whether findings were acknowledged, discussed, or referenced in relevant spaces.
Appropriation and Use	Explored whether the research findings contributed to changes in skills, awareness, or capacities among targeted audiences. Assessed whether findings influenced programmatic decision-making or were integrated into organizational practices. Identified barriers to the uptake and application of findings.
Impact	Considered long-term changes linked to the research: measurable shifts in policies, institutional practices, or programmatic approaches.
Learning	Examined whether knowledge generation and its contribution were documented within MEAL frameworks.

Appendix 2. Profiles of KIIs

To be a girl with disabilities from West Africa	**DiDa** Schools
Researcher (Consultant)	HI Research Specialist (HQ)
HI Regional Coordinator for Inclusive Education in West Africa (Dakar)	HI Regional Technical Specialist (Uganda)
HI Advocacy Manager (HQ)	ECW - MEAL and Disability Leads (HQ)
HI Technical Coordinator for Inclusion - Niger, Burkina Faso	Global EiE Specialist (HQ)
HI Technical Coordinator for Inclusion – Mali	Consultant (knowledge synthesis)
HI Technical Coordinator for Inclusion - Togo, Benin	Global Disability Statistics Expert
HI Project Manager - Niger	

From knowledge to practice:

How can research results be leveraged?

This document presents two case studies to document and better understand the levers that have encouraged the successful production and dissemination of knowledge, and to identify the change(s) to which these projects have contributed.

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