



Request for Information (RFI)
USAID/India Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) outcomes for
Children with Disabilities¹ (CwD)

Reference Number: 72038622RFI00002

Release Date: April 5, 2022

Questions/inquiries Due Date and Time: April 13, 2022, 23.59hrs (India Local Time)

RFI Response Due Date and Time: May 4, 2022, 23.59hrs (India Local Time)

NAICS Code: 611710

The United States Agency for International Development's Mission to India (USAID/India) is in the process of gathering information to support an anticipated design for a new USAID/India Basic Education activity on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) outcomes for Children with Disabilities (CwD), as described in Attachment 1.

The purpose of this Request for Information (RFI) is to solicit comments/suggestions in order to incorporate new, innovative solutions into a solicitation or notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) to address Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) outcomes for Children with Disabilities (CwD) in India should USAID decide to issue one. By issuing this RFI, USAID/India aims to consult with the broad community of private sector actors, public institutions, organizations of and for persons with disabilities, development partners, non-governmental organizations, industry associations, think tanks and academia, concerned with Education for CwD and Foundational learning in India. Please see Attachment 1 for more details.

This RFI neither constitutes a solicitation, NOFO, or a Request for Application (RFA), nor does it commit USAID to issue one or to make an award. Please note that responding to this RFI will not give any advantage to or preclude any organization or individual from any solicitation, NOFO, or RFA that may be subsequently issued. USAID will not pay for any costs associated with responding to this RFI and information received will become the property of USAID and can be made public. Therefore, information that cannot be shared should not be submitted.

Any future solicitations or funding opportunities for the new Basic Education Activity on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) outcomes for Children with Disabilities (CwD) will be announced on the "Contract Opportunities" section, website link is <https://sam.gov/content/opportunities> or at www.grants.gov at a later date. USAID/India is not seeking technical or cost applications/proposals at this time through this RFI.

¹ The terminology of Children with Disabilities is used as a synonym for Learners with Disabilities, to follow Government of India nomenclature. For all technical purposes, the document refers to the children as learners who are attending or enrolled in a preschool/school regardless of age. Also, USAID acknowledges that learners with disabilities are a diverse population with many types of disabilities and the use of acronyms is only for improving readability of the document.

Responses to this RFI must be submitted by email to clal@usaid.gov and pnanda@usaid.gov with a copy to indiarco@usaid.gov no later than the date and time shown above. Please include RFI number “72038622RFI00002” and Title of activity “***Basic Education Activity on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) outcomes for Children with Disabilities (CwD)***” in the subject line and use the format provided in Attachment 1, Section II. RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS. Responders will not receive individualized feedback. All inquiries concerning this RFI must be directed only to the email addresses identified above by the due date and time cited above. Hard copy submissions will not be accepted nor will phone inquiries be entertained. This Notice is available at www.sam.gov and www.grants.gov. We look forward to receiving your comments.

Best regards

Cheryl Hodge-Snead
Agreement/Contracting Officer, USAID/India

Attachment 1 - Background and Response Requirements

Inclusive education systems which are both equitable and empowering can provide each and every child an equal opportunity for educational progress, as articulated in SDG 2030. India is a signatory to the UN Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) thereby adopting a rights-based approach to inclusion of Children with Disabilities (CwD). The Right to Education (RtE) Act 2009 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD) Act 2016 has also helped create a comprehensive legal framework for inclusive education. Disability inclusive education helps to foster a culture of respect and belonging in schools by creating an environment where everyone is fair to one another and accepting individual differences becomes the norm. This results in reduced levels of gender-based violence, crime, bullying, and discrimination. However, there remain several gaps and challenges in terms of physical, social and learning access for CwD in schools. Even the ambiguities about- should children with disabilities go to mainstream preschools and primary schools and/or be taught by regular teachers or special educators still remain. This already bleak situation of mainstream school access for CwD is further compounded by a lack of understanding on delays and disabilities in children in early years within the larger education ecosystem. Further gaps remain in the form of appropriate norms and standards applicable to all preschool and school infrastructure and the mandatory services that must be provided to CwD, and the absence of a coordinated authority to enforce the norms and standards. While the Government of India flagship program, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, laid down principles for convergence among the various schemes and programs for CwD, its implementation remains a challenge.

Presently available data indicates that in India, an estimated 7.8 million children aged under 19 live with disabilities.² Amongst CwD, three-fourths of the total population of 5-year-olds, and one-fourth of the CwD population aged between 5 and 19 years do not go to any educational institution. The proportion of children with disabilities who are out of school is much higher than the overall proportion of out-of-school children at the national level. COVID has only exacerbated the numbers. Girls with disabilities are further marginalized as families are less inclined to send them to school. Thus, although the schemes and programs have brought children with disabilities into schools, substantial gaps remain. It thus becomes imperative to bring children with disabilities into the fold of mainstream basic education, with a particular focus on foundational learning and life skills so that they can grow up to maximize their potential as individuals and as citizens.

At the 2022 Global Disability Summit (GDS), in line with the recent congressional discussions and directives, USAID announced new commitments to disability inclusive education, cementing its role as a leader and joining global partners to advocate for education for every learner. Disability inclusive education at USAID encompasses disability inclusion across the entire education continuum, from pre-primary through higher education, including youth workforce development. Announced by USAID Administrator Samantha Power, the Agency's commitments to disability inclusive education include working towards advancement of the knowledge base of what works in disability inclusive education to strengthen Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for all learners in all new USAID Education programs, especially in the foundational learning space.

USAID/India is considering the following areas for potential engagement:

- **Enrich school ecosystems** (improved service delivery mechanisms at the state, district, and block as well as regional resource centers) and involve all stakeholders in support of children with disabilities.
- **Expand and innovate the use of assistive technology** and artificial intelligence for the learning outcomes for children with disabilities.
- **Strengthen data and student assessment systems** to make them robust, reliable, and useful for

² <https://en.unesco.org/news/n-nose-state-education-report-india-2019-children-disabilities> (pg: 13); accessed on January 11, 2022.

- planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- **Comprehensive and convergent school planning** through an integrated approach including learning, school health, child protection and school WASH.
- **Supporting evidence-based and feasible policy initiatives at State and National level.**

Also, thematic convergence is the key for efficient and impactful inclusive programming. Key convergence points include:

- **School WASH-** inclusive clean toilets and accessible safe water drinking facilities for CwD
- **School Health** - to ensure CwD can access health facilities and benefits they are entitled to.
- **Child Protection** - to ensure they are protected from any form of physical, mental, psychological, or sexual violence so that schools and preschools remain safe spaces.
- **Climate change and resilience-** integrating climate change curriculum within the regular teaching learning processes.

II. RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS

Please share information on how USAID/India can best provide the support needed to address CwD's participation in primary education in the Indian context. In your responses to the questions below, please provide any relevant sources for the information, including peer-reviewed or literature, expert opinion, project evaluation reports, position papers and other documents.

Respondents are free to answer any or all the questions below [10 pages max. excluding the cover page].

(1) Please share information and your reflections on the following:

- Key inclusion and different challenges/ gaps and programming niche areas for boys and girls with disabilities in the context of FLN in India.
- Different geographies (regions, states, cities) where the activity should focus, and provide rationale for the state selection criterion including need and state readiness; and
- Different types of successful interventions in each of those geographies where you have worked, or based on your or your organization's experience in the sector?
- Other key gender inclusion challenges and opportunities

(2) What programmatic recommendations can you provide to ensure FLN outcomes for CwD in India, while simultaneously considering USAID's objectives on inclusion, equity, and diversity, for everyone, and promoting system strengthening? Please include the approaches your organization has already implemented and/or novel approaches, in the context of mainstream pre-primary and primary schools and special schools.

(3) Are the five areas of potential engagement outlined above adequate and feasible for addressing the challenge of inclusion for CwD in mainstream pre-schools and primary schools? What are your recommendations for further refinement of these areas of engagement?

(4) What are some of the most promising scalable innovations, seen in India or regionally, in assistive technology and artificial intelligence to promote CwD inclusion in pre-schools and primary schools in India?

- (5) Who are critical stakeholders, including your partner organizations, that USAID should engage with to better understand the challenges and opportunities for inclusion of CwD in FLN space? Include global, regional, and national actors.
- (6) What are the important advocacy and networking groups working globally and regionally on the inclusion of CwD in mainstream preschools and primary schools for improved FLN outcomes?
- (7) Please identify and reflect upon the opportunities and challenges that exist in current National and State Government policy, norms, incentives, and programs for mainstreaming of CwD to preschools and primary schools.
- (8) Analyze the root causes of gender and social inequalities, gaps, needs and opportunities in terms of policy and programming specific to learners with disabilities in the geographies where your organization is working.

No other documents or information are requested at this time. USAID asks respondents to not send any additional information other than what is requested above and to kindly adhere to the page limits mentioned.