

# Good Examples Hearing from Girls with Intellectual Disabilities

## About the Project

[Inclusion International](#) and the [International Rescue Committee](#) (IRC for short) are working together.

They are doing a project called “Inclusive and Accountable”. One part of the Inclusive and Accountable project is about making sure that humanitarian work includes girls with intellectual disabilities.

“Humanitarian work” means the work organisations do to help people living in difficult situations meet their needs. For example, helping people who have lived through wars or disasters like floods.

This work is about “adolescent girls” with intellectual disabilities. This means girls who are ages 10-19.



Adolescent girls with intellectual disabilities are often left behind and not included in humanitarian work. This project wants to find out why girls with intellectual disabilities are not included and how humanitarian organisations can do better.

This project started in October 2023, and will end in September 2025. The project is funded by the “Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance” or (BHA for short). BHA is part of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID for short).

This work is happening in 2 countries in Africa, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. Inclusion International's members, FENAID from Ethiopia and APEE from Burkina Faso, are working on this project with us.

## How we used Listen Include Respect

Listen Include Respect are international guidelines for organisations about how to include people with intellectual disabilities in different parts of their work.

Including people with intellectual disabilities means making adjustments so they can take part like everyone else and share their experience and knowledge.

The Listen Include Respect Guidelines include "Principles" which are the main ideas on how organisations should include people and "How-To" tools that explain the steps you need to take to include people.

As well as using these "How-To" tools in the project, it was important that the principles were always respected:

- **Believing in Inclusion and Building Awareness and Understanding:**

To make sure that our partners understood what inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities is, everyone in the project was invited to take part in briefing sessions about intellectual disabilities and inclusion. The sessions were led by self-advocate staff members of Inclusion International.

- **Self-advocate leadership:**

We made sure there were self-advocate leaders planning the project from the very start. Self-advocates were part of the project team, the project advisory group and led project activities. Self-advocates were paid for their expertise.

- **Communicating in an Accessible Way:** Project meetings and Advisory Group meetings always followed the Listen Include Respect Meeting Guidelines. The project activities were planned to be inclusive and accessible so that the girls with intellectual disabilities could understand and take part. This included sharing clear information in advance and providing information in different formats, like audio recordings and pictures.
- **Valuing the Process:** We know the process of using Listen Include Respect is as helpful as the result. Solving problems together with self-advocates and hearing experiences first-hand helps teams learn more about inclusion.



*I have got more confidence to talk to the public and raise awareness to other people. I have got more experience in the disability world which I did not know before. I have got more connections and friends during the discussion of the project. The project has been a great acknowledgement of families with children with disabilities.*

**Caroline, Self-Advocate and Advisory Group member**

*The Listen Include Respect guidelines taught me a lot about working in ways that are more inclusive. For example, how to lead meetings in an inclusive way so that everyone feels welcome to share their ideas and perspectives. Getting everyone's input has made our project stronger.*

**Johanna, IRC Staff Member (Global Team)**

## Hearing from Girls

The main activity was focus groups with girls with intellectual disabilities in settings where internally displaced people are living in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. The focus groups were organised by IRC and Inclusion International's members, FENAID and APEE.

We followed the [Listen Include Respect Focus Group How-To Guide](#) to make sure the focus groups were inclusive and accessible.

The project team designed the focus groups to use stories, illustrations, questions and role-plays.

The story we used in the focus group was about an adolescent girl, Mara, who arrives at a camp for displaced people. The stories were about her experience finding information and taking part in a Women and Girls Safe Space.

The story was split into 5 parts, with an illustration and a set of questions for each part. The story and role-plays were much more accessible than asking many questions in a meeting.

They helped the girls understand the topic and gave different ways of responding to questions and being part of discussions.

*Working with people with intellectual disabilities was new for me. It was wonderful because I had to learn more about them, about their needs, and the gaps. It really showed me how we can work together to include people with intellectual disabilities.*

**IRC Staff Member, Ethiopia**

Click here to see the:

- [illustrations](#)
- [stories, questions and role-plays](#)



To get everyone ready to work together, the project team started by running Listen Include Respect briefings with IRC teams online. FENAID and APEE also gave Listen Include Respect training to IRC country teams in person, to help them understand why an inclusive way of working matters.

Inclusion International, FENAID, and APEE also worked together to build the skills of self-advocate leaders, Selam from Ethiopia and Pelagie from Burkina Faso. Selam and Pelagie's roles were to lead the focus groups alongside the IRC teams.

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*Some of the ... adolescent girls, they never talk like that. Even their mothers were surprised - “we never had this discussion in our home, I never saw her to talk like this before,” they were saying. ... I was very excited because it was an opportunity for the adolescent girls to tell us or to say something about themselves.*

**Mihret, FENAID Ethiopia**

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During the planning, there was also time to talk through the barriers the girls may face. FENAID, APEE and Inclusion International shared concerns with the other project team members and found solutions together. For example, changing the schedule to make sure caregivers were available to support the girls during the focus groups. Listening and making changes based on feedback helped to make sure the sessions were accessible.

When it was time to find the girls who would take part, the project team made plain language instructions about how:

- to invite girls to take part
- to collect consent (agreeing to take part) in an easy-to-understand way
- to support the girls to prepare
- to make sure the girls were taking part in the conversation

[Click here to see the facilitator's guide.](#)

FENAID and APEE helped the local IRC teams identify the families of girls with intellectual disabilities in the camps.

This was something IRC teams had never done before, and the knowledge and experience of FENAID and APEE was important in finding the girls with intellectual disabilities, explaining the work to them, and giving support to the families to prepare.

Before the consultations, the local IRC teams and the self-advocate facilitators met to get to know each other and plan how they would facilitate. This helped the facilitators to understand their roles well and share with their co-facilitators how they wanted to be supported.



*My presence as a self-advocate in the running of the projects activities gave the IRC team more concrete elements to put the Listen Include and Respect guidelines into practice. The girls with intellectual disabilities also felt more comfortable expressing themselves when they saw the self-advocates. This encouraged the girls to feel valued and to give their all in the discussions. What more, the support people have become contacts for the IRC team. They now know who to contact to continue the project.*

**Pelagie, Self-advocate Focus  
Group Facilitator, Burkina Faso**

The focus groups were held successfully in both Ethiopia and Burkina Faso. Pelagie and Selam co-lead the sessions. In each country, 12 girls took part. The girls understood the ideas and were able to share their experiences, ideas, and recommendations.

## Challenges

We faced some challenges during our project. These were things like barriers or other issues in the project.

The self-advocate leaders from Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, Selam and Pelagie, needed more time to practise their roles. Although they met the local IRC teams beforehand, there was not enough time to get to know each other well.

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*[The self-advocate] - they have experienced ...support from the IRC team, because there is a kind of sharing the roles. Pelagie was to present the photos - the drawings and the stories. Then Christine, the IRC Staff Member, was to ask questions. The roles have been really shared in a good way, planned first because before they went to the ground, and this has been respected.*

**Issoufou, APEE Burkina Faso**

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The local IRC teams are often in places that do not have good internet, which made it hard for them to join online meetings and understand in detail about Listen Include Respect and why things were suggested to happen in certain ways.





It was hard for the IRC local teams to meet and give information to all the girls in the camps before the focus groups.

In Burkina Faso, the team was not able to collect consent in advance because of security issues, which made it difficult for the girls to come prepared.

There were too many things to cover in the focus groups. The girls got tired. The meetings were long, so it was challenging to keep everyone interested and involved throughout the whole meeting.

In Burkina Faso, it was hard to reach some communities because they were far away, and people were tired from travelling to the meeting and working on farms beforehand.

Also, people in Burkina Faso spoke different languages, which made communicating with everyone difficult.

*We need to start this process ahead of time. Maybe three days, two before we arrive there, we need to discuss that. We need to give them [the IRC workers] the assignment to see the illustration and to familiarise with them.*

**Miheret, FENAID Ethiopia**



These challenges helped us learn that next time, we will:

- Make sure everyone involved in doing the work locally understands Listen Include Respect at the start.
- Give more time for co-facilitators to prepare and work with local staff teams.
- Emphasise the importance of preparing people with intellectual disabilities to take part.
- Make focus group plans flexible so we can easily cut things down.
- Create more energiser activities we can use when people are tired.
- Plan for sessions to be as local as possible so people do not need to travel.
- Think about how people's daily work lives affect their ability to take part.



## Key Recommendations

Although there were some challenges, this kind of partnership taught us some important lessons.

We have some key recommendations for future projects using Listen Include Respect.

- **Work with local organisations of people with disabilities.** Ask them to train humanitarian organisations on disability inclusion. This helps local teams learn from local experts. Build good relationships. This way, you can work together in the future.
- **Include self-advocate leaders in all parts of your project.** Their ideas and experiences can improve the project, and this role models people with lived experience as experts.
- **Tell others in your organisation about how to include self-advocates** when planning projects. This helps make future projects better.
- **Keep training country staff about how to include girls with intellectual disabilities.** This helps them stay excited about including everyone.
- **Be creative when designing accessible activities.** Use stories, pictures, acting, and fun activities. This helps everyone understand and share their thoughts.
- **Create a welcoming place where all people feel respected and comfortable,** and all families and girls can share their thoughts and take part. This shouldn't end once the project ends.



*I want adults and all staff to learn from us to be inclusive, to provide services for people like us without any discrimination.*

**Girl with an intellectual disability  
from Focus Group, Ethiopia**



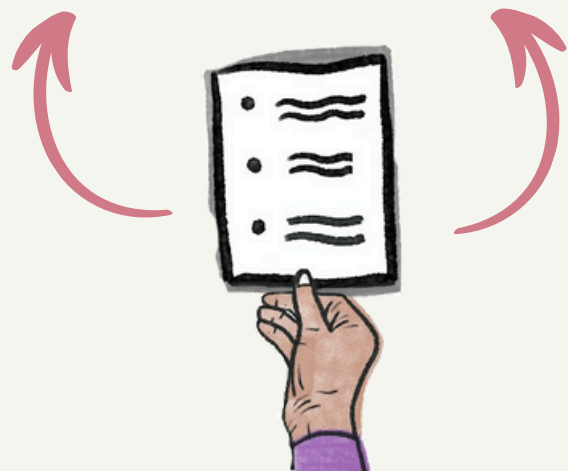
## Next Steps using Listen Include Respect

We learned a lot from talking to girls and other people. Now, we will use this information to make a training package. The training will help teach people who work in humanitarian organisations about how to include girls with intellectual disabilities in their work.

The training will follow the Listen Include Respect training guidelines. This means it will be easy to understand and use. Self-advocates will be part of creating and leading the training.

Before we finish the training, we will ask the girls with intellectual disabilities from Burkina Faso and Ethiopia to look at it. We want to make sure the materials work for them and get their feedback. This way, we know the training is useful.

The project team will continue to follow the Listen Include Respect inclusive project guidelines in this project.





*And my attitude before and after - it's different. There was an attitude change. At first, I was struggling to communicate with girls, working with them, talking with them, engaging with them. I didn't think they would even understand me or what I was saying. But really, they just needed a little support.*

**Fana, IRC Staff Member, Ethiopia**



## More information



This project was funded by the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance, a part of US Aid.

For more information on Listen Include Respect and how you can also run inclusive projects visit: [listenincluderespect.com/projects](https://listenincluderespect.com/projects)