The digital divide:
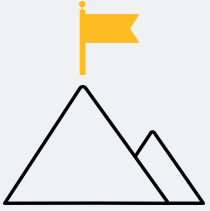## meeting the needs of learners with disabilities in low and middle income settings (LMICs)

Veronica Stapleton

Sightsavers

About Sightsavers

As an organisation, we promote equal opportunities and campaign for disability rights. This is informed by our vision of a world where people with disabilities participate fully in all aspects of life.

Why technology?

Universal design for learning:

- Supporting more effective engagement with curriculum content.

- Access to information in different formats.

- More creative representation of ideas from learners.

- Supporting learners with disabilities to access quality learning more effectively.

…it is about the learning, not the technology.

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Benefits of digital technology for learners with disabilities

- Learning can be self-paced.

- Learning can occur anywhere, at any time.

- Learner has control and independence.

- Access to multiple and diverse knowledge resources.

- Learners with different functional difficulties can benefit – for example, screen readers, voice communication.

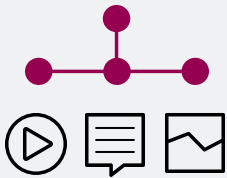Sightsavers

Significant challenges
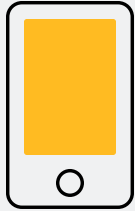
- Lack of access to basic technology

- Prohibitive costs

- Connectivity

- Lack of support services

- Limited skills base (parents, education service providers)

- Unreliable electricity supply

- Sustainability

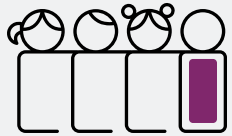Sightsavers

Seeking solutions for learners in low and middle income settings

Benefits of technology are clear.

How do we increase access for children with disabilities?

An integral part of project design and budgeting.

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Guidance Document

Set of guiding principles based on international good practice

Examples from the '6 P's education systems framework': people, products, pedagogy, policy, place, and provision.

Educational Technology for Learners with Disabilities: Sightsavers Guidance Document

March 2022

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Technology or digital technology?

'High-tech' devices:

mobile phones, computers, etc.

'Low-tech' devices:

pencils, exercise books, walking frames, spectacles.

Majority technologies:

Those designed for general use without specific consideration for the needs of people with disabilities.

Accessible technologies:

Those designed for general use, which can be customised by people with disabilities to meet their specific needs.

Assistive technologies:

Those specifically designed to enable people with disabilities to perform tasks.

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A systems-strengthening approach

At local level:

Develop the capacities of schools and communities to provide inclusive education.

At institutional level:

Support the strengthening of policy frameworks, education sector plans, and donor commitments, to promote inclusive education.

At organisational level:

Develop the capacities of Ministries of Education and other agencies to support schools and communities to deliver inclusive education.

In summary

- There are challenges around cost, sustainability and infrastructure.

- The use of different technologies has the potential to engage children with disabilities in LMICs in more meaningful learning.

- Technology is not just about high-tech solutions.

- It is vital that we continue to engage in international dialogue, seeking low-cost solutions to increase equity and accessibility for all children.
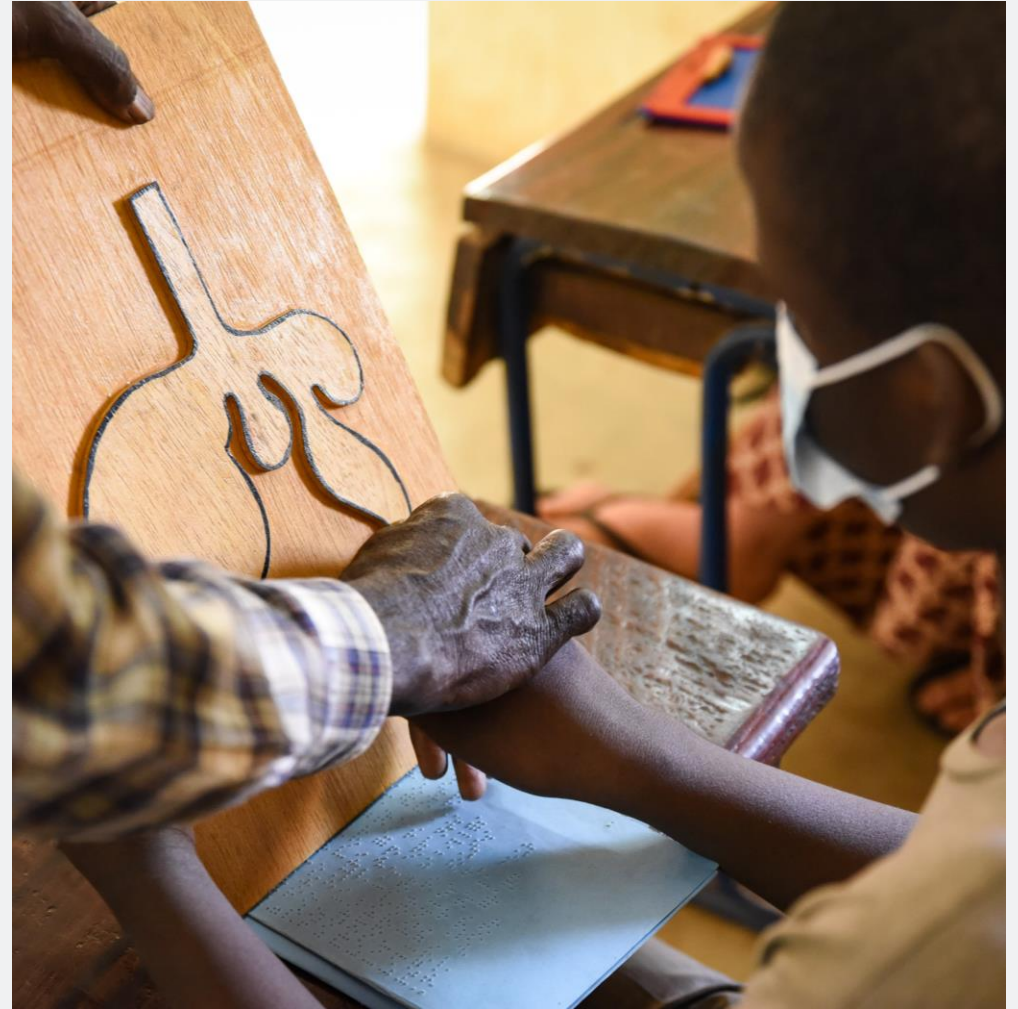
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Thank you

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