United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Inclusive education for persons with disabilities – Are we making progress?

Background paper prepared for the International Forum on inclusion and equity in education – Every learner matters, Cali, Colombia

11–13 September 2019

Acknowledgements

The paper 'Inclusive education for persons with disabilities – Are we making progress?' has been developed as a background paper for the UNESCO International Forum on inclusion and equity in education – Every learner matters, being held in Cali, Colombia from 11-13 September 2019. The Forum is being organised in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the passing of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action.

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The team is immensely grateful for the valuable contributions received from experts who wrote detailed inputs for this paper. In particular, Prof. Nidhi Singal (Professor in Education, University of Cambridge), Ruchi Kulbir Singh (Disability-Inclusive Education Consultant, World Bank), Dr Sai Väyrynen (Counsellor, Education, Embassy of Finland in Addis Ababa and Senior Lecturer, University of Helsinki, Finland), Sian Tesni (CBM, IDDC), Julia McGeown and Sandrine Bohan Jacquot (Humanity and Inclusion, IDDC), Dr Humberto Javier Rodríguez Hernández (Director, Escuela Normal de Especialización Humberto Ramos Lozano, Mexico) and Kate Lapham and Dragana Sretenov (Open Society Foundations).

The team is grateful for the support provided by Florence Migeon from the Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality, Division for Education 2030 Support and Coordination, who is co-ordinating the Colombia Forum on behalf of UNESCO.

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1. Rationale and purpose of the background paper

All humans have rights – all rights apply to all humans. Persons with disabilities are rights holders and decision-makers in their own lives. Exclusion from services is a violation of an individual's human rights. Inclusive education is a fundamental right, both a means and an end, for all children, including the most marginalised. It presents an opportunity to build the foundation of an inclusive society, as well as the opportunity to re-imagine and re-juvenate the education system.

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN, 2006) and the subsequent General Comment 4 on Article 24 (2016) were the most critical milestones since the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) to affirm the right of persons with disabilities to access an inclusive education. In 2015 this right was further embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 committing all countries to ensure equal opportunity in access to quality learning opportunities at all levels of education from a lifelong perspective. There is also a new focus on the relevance of **learning outcomes** both for the world of work, as well as for citizenship in a global and interconnected world. This is particularly explicit in target 4.5 which aims to **eliminate gender disparities and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable populations including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.**

Inclusive education is now broadened and seen as a core principle of education to ensure that all children are reached, under the assumption that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive effective educational opportunities. However, this paper aims to make a strong case for ensuring access to quality inclusive education specifically for persons with disabilities, as one of many groups who are vulnerable to exclusion. For persons with disabilities of all ages, the main challenge remains to be able to attend schools and educational institutions in the communities where they live and with their peers. This is deemed important, first and foremost because it provides learners with the fullest realisation of their right to education, but also because it is the most efficient and cost-effective means to ensuring the fulfilment of this right.

The paper will explore the global progress towards inclusive education, the successes achieved and learnings observed specifically in countries of the global South. In these countries the concerns of universal access to and retention in education is still a concern for many governments, but large-scale exclusion of children with disabilities (an estimated 32 million or 1 out of 3 are out of school[1]) remains the order of the day and is not always high on government agendas.[2]

Attention will be given to the reasons for continued exclusion and inequitable educational provision experienced by children with disabilities. The paper will further explore how this could be more effectively addressed by governments in education systems that fully embrace the commitments of Article 24 of the CRPD, as reinforced in General Comment 4 of 2016, and are actively working towards the achievement of SDG 4, to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.'

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2. What is inclusive education?

2.1 The evolving definitions

The Salamanca Statement (1994) was the first to challenge at a global level the "very potent and commonly held idea that children with special educational needs do not belong in mainstream schools or general education systems" and introduced a rights based approach to the education of children with disabilities (Florian, 2019). The following is a famous and widely quoted clause of the Statement: "regular schools…are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system" (ix). This statement further broadened the concept of inclusive education, linking it to the Education for All movement, as well as to the school improvement and effectiveness agenda.

Over the past two decades the concept of inclusive education has been drawn even wider to encompass all marginalised and vulnerable groups, resulting in it "underpinning today's international evaluations of the disparities in educational systems – not only in terms of who has access to them, but also in terms of the quality of education provided" (Florian 2019).

The Incheon Declaration, agreed at the 2015 World Education Forum, emphasises that "equity cannot be fully achieved unless met by all" and highlights that to achieve the full scope of human, social and economic development envisaged in the SDGs, "all forms of exclusion, marginalisation, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes" should be addressed, including for children and youth with disabilities, irrespective of the severity or nature of their disabilities (UNESCO, 2015). This statement and the ensuing commitment made in the Brussels Declaration that followed the 2018 Global Education Meeting clearly embraced this expanded idea of inclusion in education by defining it as the right to "safe, quality education and learning throughout life [...] that requires particular attention be given to those in vulnerable situations, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, those in remote rural areas, ethnic minorities, the poor, women and girls, migrants, refugees, and displaced persons whether as a result of conflict or natural disaster" (UNESCO 2018, 2).

Despite this and the global commitments outlined above, the systematic exclusion of learners with disabilities persists, with many of them still "inhabiting the margins of schooling and looking on at the education main game" (Slee, 2018). Ten years after the passing of the CRPD, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also expressed the concern that "profound challenges persist and that many millions of persons with disabilities continue to be denied a right to education, and for many more, education is available only in settings where they are isolated from their peers and receive an inferior quality of provision" (CRPD General Comment 4, 2016).

"Regular schools… are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all"

Salamanca Statement, 1994

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There is a growing acknowledgement that one of the factors contributing to this state of affairs is the conflation of 'inclusive' and 'special' education. On the one hand this tends to marginalise inclusive education to the periphery of education transformation and improvement agendas rather than seeing it as a key to the transformation. On the other hand, the skills and knowledge associated with 'special needs education' which could ensure meaningful support to children with disabilities (provided they are applied to include rather than to segregate), are lost or under-utilised. This results in a situation where children with disabilities run the risk of not receiving the reasonable accommodation or individualised support that they are eligible to have in terms of Article 24 of the CRPD.[3]

The divergent and often confused definitions of inclusive education are translated into national education policies and education system practices.[4] To improve this situation there is a need to promote a commonly agreed definition of inclusive education which will be translated into legislative and regulatory frameworks and backed by political will, prioritisation of resources (both human and financial) and systemic change brought about by a strong civil society.

UNESCO defines inclusion as a process that helps overcome barriers which limit the presence, participation and achievement of learners. Equity is about ensuring that there is a concern with fairness, such that the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance.[5] Taking these two points together, the definition provided in General Comment 4 responds most comprehensively to what is now needed to make inclusion a reality for all children, but especially for those with disabilities:

> "The right to inclusive education encompasses a transformation in culture, policy and practice in all formal and informal educational environments to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers that impede that possibility. It involves strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It focuses on the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance and achievement of all students, especially those who, for different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalized. Inclusion involves access to and progress in high-quality formal and informal education without discrimination. It seeks to enable communities, systems and structures to combat discrimination, including harmful stereotypes, recognize diversity, promote participation and overcome barriers to learning and participation for all by focusing on well-being and success of students with disabilities. It requires an in-depth transformation of education systems in legislation, policy, and the mechanisms for financing, administration, design, delivery and monitoring of education" (CRPD General Comment 4, 2016, par. 9).

The above definition also endorses the position that inclusion should be seen "as a principled approach to the development of education and society through a framework of inclusive values which provides prompts for detailed action across all areas of a school and its communities" (Booth, 2011). Putting these values into action requires addressing structural inequalities. While the goal of removing barriers for the education of all children has nearly universal support, national policies and local practices differ across regions and countries. In terms of international statutes and best practice, the educational system is required to change to suit the child, but this is rarely done. Instead, most countries adopt some form of integration where the child must adapt to the system into which they are placed.

To help with putting the above definition into practice, Mel Ainscow provides a valuable typology of five ways of thinking about inclusion. These are: (a) inclusion concerned with disability and 'special educational needs'; (b) inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusions; (c) inclusion as being about all groups vulnerable to exclusion; (d) inclusion as the promotion of school for all; and (e) inclusion as Education for All (Ainscow et al., 2000).

It is specifically the first dimension of inclusion, namely **the inclusion of children with disabilities and 'special needs' that has been on a retrogressive trajectory**. Even countries known for the good progress they have made, such as the Nordic countries (as highlighted during the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD (COSP) 2019)[6] and Australia are receiving criticism from rights holders and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Committee Report for the United Kingdom in 2016 states: "The Committee is concerned that: (a) Many children with disabilities do not see that their views are given due weight in making personal decisions in their life, including choice of support and future; (b) Many children with disabilities are still placed in special schools or special units in mainstream schools and many school buildings and facilities are not made fully accessible to children with disabilities; (c) provision of support for the transition to adulthood is often neither sufficient, timely nor well-coordinated, and does not ensure fully informed decision by children with disabilities" (Slee, 2018).

"Many children with disabilities are still placed in special schools or special units in mainstream schools"

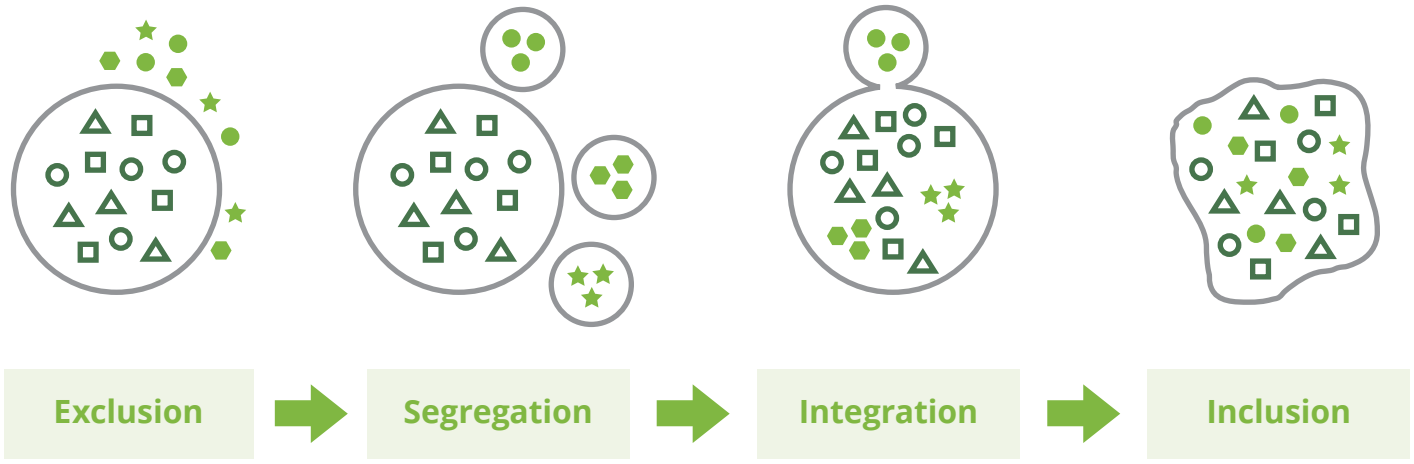
UN CRC Committee Report for the United Kingdom in 2016

This is not the only country for which the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are critical of the progress being made in realising their obligations as signatories of the CRPD. This attests to a reluctance even to minimum compliance with expectations of Article 24 (Slee, 2018; OHCHR). Many other countries, ranging from wealthy countries such as Australia and Germany to low income countries such as Rwanda and Nepal, have also been criticised. For high-income countries, critiques are mostly about the majority of children with disabilities still attending segregated special needs schools, whilst in low-income countries criticisms centre more on the large numbers of out of school children, especially in rural areas, and lack of funding measures to promote inclusive education.

The degree of inclusion for different groups may vary across time but also across different areas, dimensions and elements. Areas of inclusion refer to different spaces in which students interact with each other through interpersonal relationships, such as classrooms, schools, universities or community centres. Individuals can be included or excluded along different dimensions: physical; social (i.e. not everyone may be heard or participate within a group); psychological (i.e. individuals may perceive themselves as excluded); or systematic (e.g. certain requirements, such as documentation, may exclude a group) (UNESCO, 2018).

In reviewing the range of educational provision across various countries, it becomes clear that many are at various stages of development on the trajectory from exclusion, through segregation and integration, to inclusion.

Figure 1: Graphic display of the inclusion trajectory



- **Exclusion:** children with disabilities are excluded from any educational provision and/or educational opportunities and are out of school.
- **Segregation:** children with disabilities are educated in special schools or settings (some residential, some day schools), as well as self-contained separate classes in mainstream schools. Residential schools have the negative impact of taking children away from their homes, families and communities and placing them at increased risk of abuse and neglect. Lowered expectations, shortages of specialist staff and so-called specialised methodologies often mask lowered academic standards and absence of well-conceived reasonable accommodation. Special schools can often also be promoted as specialised schools for teaching children with a particular type of disability such as children with visual or hearing impairments or schools for children with cerebral palsy etc. Research on specialised methods for particular categories of students has concluded that there is little support for a separate special needs pedagogy (Davis et al., 2004; Lewis and Norwich, 2005). However, the World Federation for the Deaf is calling for the "repositioning of deaf schools as bilingual education rather than special education providers and challenges views of deaf schools as segregationist, forcing policy-makers to consider the value of congregated settings for certain groups of learners" (Murray et al., 2018).
- **Integrated education:** children with disabilities attend special classes or units in mainstream schools. Integration is conceived as a process moving from special school provision to integration in full-time mainstream classes (e.g. Hegarty et al., 1981 in OECD 1999), or being locational (in the same building), social (during non-academic time-tabled periods e.g. breaks or sports) (Warnock, 1978 in OECD 1999) or functional (in the same classroom following the same curriculum but without any changes to teaching practices or activities, and often placed in small groups at the front or back of the classroom). This approach is still embedded in national policies such as

that of Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania. A key challenge with integrated education is that children are placed on a different curriculum track, often with lowered levels of expectation for their academic performance, thus still acting as a form of segregation.

- **Inclusive education:** children with disabilities learn effectively in schools which have changed to meet the needs of all children and have become 'learning organisations' (OECD/JRC, 2009). 'Inclusion' refers to changing the education system to adopt inclusive values and put these into action to effectively respond to the diverse needs of individual children. Inclusive education approaches involve flexibility in teaching style and in the way in which the curriculum is mediated. It is a student-centred approach which also allows the teacher to adapt his or her methods – both of instruction and classroom management – in order to respond to students' different capabilities and needs. This flexible, responsive and student-centred approach provides opportunities for schools to become learning organisations, enabling them to find creative solutions to challenges related to the full diversity of students' abilities. Supporting schools to act in this way is a major policy issue which may require reforms that relinquish some centralised control over the curriculum and school organisation, allowing a sense of agency and ownership on the part of individual teachers and administrators to translate inclusive values into action.

2.2 The key features of inclusive education

Key to the successful implementation of inclusive education is deliberate planning for diversity at all levels:

System and policy level

Systemic planning from a policy and resourcing level is required to ensure that support is available at different levels of education through elements such as sector planning, financing, data gathering, management and utilisation, teacher utilisation, training and support, community resource mobilisation, inter-sectoral integration, alignment and collaboration etc.

Classroom level

Central to the successful implementation of inclusive education is what happens in the classroom and how the teacher effectively plans lessons. By applying universal design for learning principles, ensuring that reasonable accommodation is factored in and curriculum delivery and classroom management is effectively differentiated, the quality of education for children across the spectrum of abilities and learning styles is improved and inclusive values are enacted. This can happen to varying degrees of effectiveness, irrespective of the size of the class or availability of resources.

Identification and addressing barriers to learning

In order to meet the diverse needs of all children, teachers need to have the capacity to identify and address intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to learning and participation as early as possible.

Support for teachers and schools

Effective responses to diversity can only be possible if school-based and external support is systemically and structurally available to teachers and schools on an ongoing basis. Apart from obtaining generic information on providing support for all learners, teachers need to have access to information on the range of individualised support measures that can be made available to learners with specific disabilities. Teaching and learning materials in accessible formats must be made available. External support can be organised in various ways through multi-disciplinary itinerant teams and other community resources such as social and health services. All support planning should, however, centrally involve children and parents/caregivers (often to be recognised as the real experts) in the decision-making process.

The transformation that is required to make schools inclusive and effective should be approached from a whole school/pre-school perspective that centrally involves school managers. Schools should be welcoming and accessible – both physically and socially.

Creating opportunities for lifelong learning

To accommodate the needs of the high number of children dropping out of school without achieving an accredited qualification,[7] it is important to ensure that they also have access to various educational pathways (OECD, 2011, 2012; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2002). This should realise their right to lifelong learning opportunities and ensure the transition from basic to further and tertiary education, including technical and vocational education and training (see SDG 4 and Article 24 of the CRPD).

It is also important to fulfil the right to education for persons with disabilities in a rapidly changing world by providing opportunities to develop the skills and competencies (including entrepreneurial skills) that would allow them to seize technical, green economy and other job growth opportunities. In doing this, continuous attention should be given to eliminating gender disparities in education.

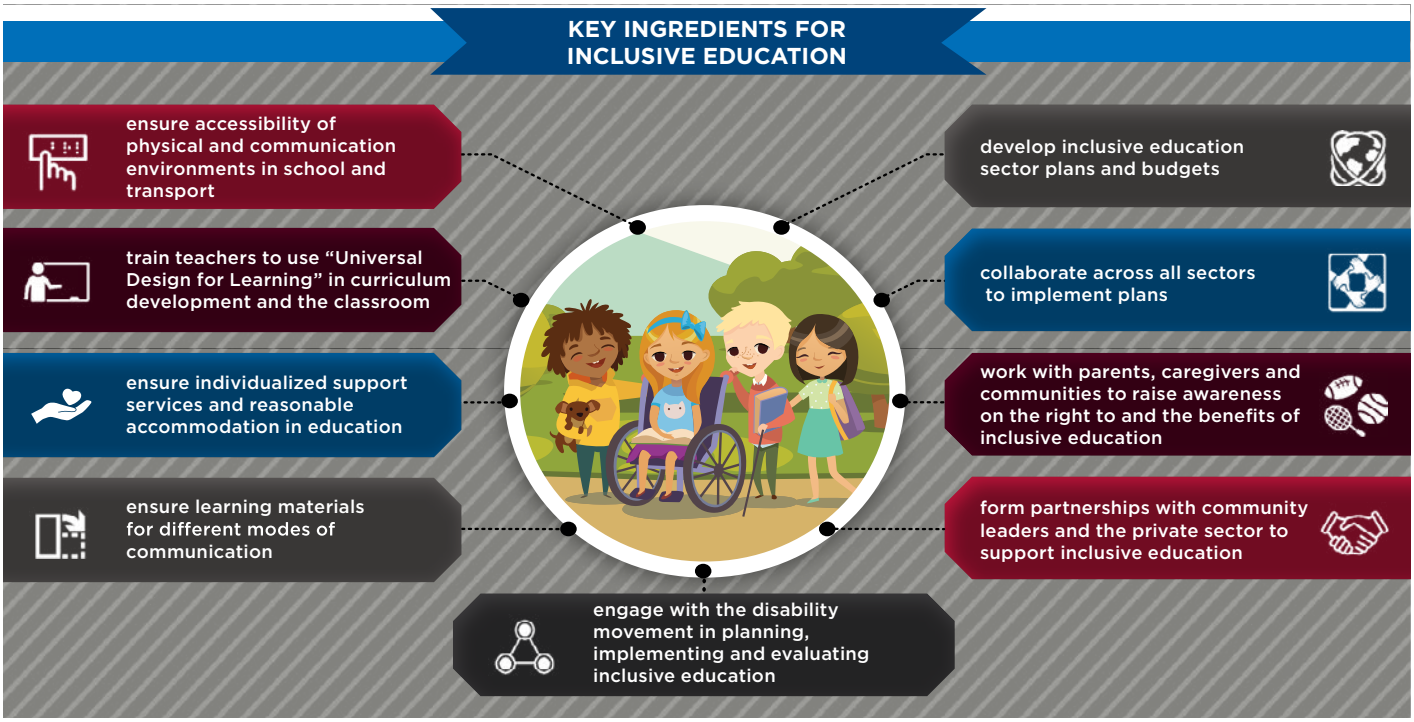
Professional development for teachers

A major aspect of support for inclusive education includes appropriate professional development at both initial teacher education level as well as through continued professional development. This can be provided in multiple ways, such as through mentoring and on-the-job support. Other emerging strategies include creation of professional learning communities amongst teachers.

Partnerships

Community mobilisation and involvement plays a key role in promoting inclusive cultures. Partnerships with and involvement of disability rights holders are critical levers for change.

Figure 2: Key ingredients for inclusive education



Source: USAID, 2019

3. The case for inclusive education

3.1 Dimensions of inclusive education

The move towards inclusive schools can be justified on a number of grounds:

- There is a **human rights** justification; education is the right of the individual learner, and not, in the case of children, the right of a parent or caregiver. Parental responsibilities in this regard are subordinate to the rights of the child (General Comment 4, 2016). Learning with peers in the community where you live promotes a sense of self-worth and dignity, equal access to opportunities and other services in the community and having a say in one's own overall development.
- There is an **educational** justification; the requirement for inclusive schools to educate all children together means that they have to develop ways of teaching that respond to individual differences and thus benefit all children. This can lead to the potential for education innovation – challenges presented by individual needs can motivate and inspire new modalities of teaching and learning provided there is "sensitivity to contextual realities (in low income settings), and in turn, an understanding of the kind of provisions that would optimise and engender quality and equitable education for all children" (Singal, 2019). Once these are established it will lead to improved academic outcomes, including for learners with disabilities.[8]
- There is a **social** justification; inclusive schools are able to change attitudes to difference by educating all children together, forming the basis for a just and non-discriminatory society. This leads to improved social integration, greater resilience and better preparedness for the world of work for learners with disabilities.
- There is an **economic** justification; it is likely to be less costly to establish and maintain schools which educate all children together than to set up a complex system of different types of schools specialising in different groups of children. If access is only made possible in segregated special schools, there will always be large numbers of children with disabilities (especially in remote and poor regions) who do not have access to education. Furthermore, segregated schooling does not build inclusive communities where persons with disabilities can contribute socially and economically through the job market, which would ensure returns to education as for non-disabled children and reduction of loss of GDP.[9] By isolating or excluding persons with disabilities, we are depriving the rest of the community of their potentially substantial social and economic contributions.

3.2 Global commitments

Once largely dealt with through a 'medical model', which saw the individual as the problem, or a 'charity model', which saw persons with disabilities as objects of charitable care and protection, over the past decades disability has been reconceptualised through a 'social model' and is increasingly being addressed as a human rights issue as advocated for by a growing global disability rights movement.[10] In this social model many of the key barriers to full and equal participation are seen as located in the discrimination and lack of access to and participation in the life of the surrounding society, which results in barriers to full inclusion and denial of human rights. From this model's perspective, society disables at least as much as the impairment and can exclude disabled people from full participation. This shift in conceptualisation has led to a series of legal instruments at both international and national levels to protect the human rights of both children and adults with disabilities (see Figure 3, page 16).

These instruments all emphasise the right to education as an essential part of the human rights agenda and have evolved significantly since 1948 in response to the global phenomenon of rights violations. The Salamanca Conference of 1994 was the first to align the Education for All agenda to the concept of inclusion of children with disabilities. And the 'leave no one behind' agenda, which culminated in the Global Education Movement in 2015, has shifted the focus even further from **access** and enrolment to **quality** curriculum delivery, completion and achievement of learning outcomes and how these should be made available to children with disabilities.

Legal tools are essential in the development of an inclusive education system. International conventions and declarations (including guidelines and other supporting initiatives) are important commitments to the inclusion of persons with disabilities. This includes their impact, whether they are supported by national frameworks, whether national frameworks are enforced or if educational stakeholders are aware of them.

Other global instruments such as the SDGs are global commitments and frameworks that hold governments accountable to attaining certain targets that are regularly monitored. Progress is published in global education reports.

Figure 3: Timeline of Human Rights Instruments that have established and protected the education rights of persons with disabilities since 1948 (once ratified by the respective parties, some of these are legally binding instruments)

YEAR	CONVENTION, STATUTE, GUIDELINE OR FRAMEWORK
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
1960	UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education
1989	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
1990	World Conference and Declaration on Education For All, Jomtien
1993	UN Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons With Disabilities
1994	Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education
2000	Millennium Development Goals
2000	World Education Forum/Framework for Action, Dakar
2001	EFA Flagship on Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities
2006	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
2015	The Sustainable Development Goals[11]
2015	Incheon Declaration – World Education Forum Education 2030 Framework for Action and the 'Leave no one behind' Agenda
2016	General Comment No. 4 on Article 24 of the CRPD[12]

3.3 The advantages of inclusive education

Apart from the fact that inclusive education plays an important role in the international drive towards the realisation of the SDGs, there are a number of distinct advantages of opting for an inclusive approach to education including striving for social justice and poverty reduction, ensuring cost-effectiveness, improving quality of education, challenging discrimination, and promoting an inclusive society. All these presumed advantages are unpacked below.

a. Social justice and breaking the cycle of poverty

It is paramount to maintain a rights based approach to disability; that disability is not perceived as causative to the position of persons with disabilities in society. However, the cyclical relationship of social dynamics, such as poverty and its influence on social standing, equally cannot be denied.

Disability and poverty are dynamically and intricately linked, with each being a potential cause or consequence of the other. Poverty can be seen as a major contributing factor towards disability. For example, those living in poor contexts are adversely affected by health inequalities that can cause preventable disability such as communicable diseases, lack of maternal and perinatal care, and birth injuries (DFID, 2010). At the same time, living with a disability can itself lead to poverty, as it makes people less likely to receive an education and acquire the academic and social skills that will allow them to earn a reasonable income, and therefore are more at risk of poverty in their adult and later life. Groce and Kett (2017) argue that, even as countries develop, persons with disabilities are in danger of being left behind due to their widespread exclusion.

In an analysis of World Health Organisation data on disability, in 12 out of 15 surveyed developing countries, persons with disabilities were found to have fewer years of education compared to non-disabled people. Likewise, the percentage of individuals who had completed primary education was significantly lower among persons with disabilities in all but one of the surveyed countries (Mitra et al., 2011). Households with one or more family members with a disability are especially vulnerable, and are often forced to make tough decisions with regards to the education of their children. In such cases, girls with disabilities in particular may be kept away from school, leaving them at risk of social isolation, poor future employment prospects, abuse and other hardships.

Inclusive education offers children with disabilities the chance to break this cycle. Education lifts individuals and their families out of poverty (Howgego et al., 2014). Participating in education challenges negative attitudes and equips children with the necessary skills and knowledge to increase their chances of employment and in turn the amount they can earn after education. This can reduce the need for an adult to be dependent on welfare services,[13] and increase children's potential productivity and wealth creation (Peters, 2003). In short, the benefits of inclusive education are experienced across the life-cycle and have a significant impact on social justice and poverty reduction.

b. Cost effectiveness and efficiency

Inclusive education, particularly for children with disabilities, is often characterised as a luxury requiring expensive equipment and the kind of one-to-one teaching that is often not possible in schools with large class sizes. However, a UN study found that while the costs of inclusive education and special schools were largely comparable, academic achievement in inclusive schools was significantly higher (UN General Assembly, 2011).

Even for countries with scarce resources, measures to promote inclusion should also not be seen as prohibitively expensive (Stubbs, 2008). OECD research (OECD, 1999) demonstrates that it is far less expensive to establish and maintain schools that educate all children together than to set up a complex system of different types of specialist schools. However, countries that underinvest in education overall will also need to allocate significant resources, if possible through ring-fencing.

Investing in inclusion from the outset will still be less expensive than building segregated systems even if the initial investment is large compared to current spending.[14] Research has demonstrated that the cost of accessibility is generally less than 1% of construction costs, but the cost of making adaptations after a building is completed is far greater (Steinfield, 2005 cited by Howgego et al., 2014). Where resources are scarce, it may be more cost-effective to use these scarce professional resources on a mobile basis rather than just making services available for the few learners who have access to segregated settings.

c. Improving the quality of education for all

Inclusive education goes beyond issues of access and is concerned with the quality of learning as well as the number of children who simply attend classes. It is a catalyst for improved quality of education for all children which has many benefits including better job opportunities, greater participation in society, improved relationships, improved health and a clearer understanding of their rights and active citizenship.

In spite of assumptions to the opposite (e.g. that children with disabilities will take up too much of teachers' time, that class sizes are too big, that teachers are not skilled enough and that resources are limited) the fact remains that by including children with disabilities in mainstream schools, teachers are challenged to develop more child-centred, innovative, participatory and flexible teaching approaches which ultimately benefit all learners.

Curriculum differentiation uses existing time more effectively to meet the needs of all learners. With more learners mastering standards, teachers can provide more in-depth learning experiences. According to The Thought Company: "Traditional classrooms take a whole-group instruction approach because it is a timesaver for lesson delivery. This timesaver is illusory. Without incorporating differentiation based on formatively assessed needs, learners shut down as they believe that they cannot succeed. As the knowledge or skills gap widens, the learning obstacle may turn into something too massive to overcome. If we know that not all learners learn at the same pace and may not process skills and concepts in the same way, then differentiation is **the** solution to maximising the number of learners who can apply their understanding of standards in summative and external assessment."[15]

d. Challenging discrimination

Discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities are still prevalent in many societies. Research shows that discrimination is largely a result of a lack of awareness, information or experience of living closely with persons with disabilities. In some contexts, misconceptions about the causes of disability and the associated stereotypes still persist and lie at the root of this prejudice and discrimination, and can be made worse by an oppressive education system.

Inclusive education is able to help break this cycle of discrimination by enabling children with and without disabilities to learn and grow up together. Within the right context, children can be more accepting of difference than adults. By educating the next generation together in inclusive, safe, non-discriminatory environments, there is a genuine hope for inclusion and a future without discrimination, as children with and without disabilities who have been educated together will become the next generation of doctors, lawyers, teachers and policy-makers, who will contribute to redefining policy and practice.

The segregation or, worse, complete exclusion of children with disabilities from the mainstream education system sets a negative pattern that is carried into and reinforced by wider society. Inclusive education benefits children with or without disabilities – discrimination harms both sides. It is important to create an environment that is realistic, vibrant, and diverse, rather than one that encourages conformity and ignorance.

Inclusive education is increasingly becoming part of a wider approach in international development to move towards more inclusive societies. As barriers between disabled and non-disabled children are broken down in the school environment, discriminatory attitudes in the wider community are challenged, enabling equality of opportunity and the full and active participation of every member of society in all aspects of life. Inclusive education also offers a chance to promote school-community partnerships as part of a broader drive towards inclusive societies.

3.4 Protection against exclusion and marginalisation of children with disabilities

There have been increased commitments from governments to develop their education policies to ensure that they are inclusive. However, the majority of these policies have some clauses of conditionality and others that either allow for segregated placements or exclusion of certain categories of disability on the basis of 'severity' or 'undue hardship' (UN, 2016).[16]

For countries that have legislation (e.g. disability rights legislation) in place, the challenge is to move beyond policy into practice by implementing the significant changes to other relevant legislation, policy, regulations, financing, planning and implementation, as well as the system-level change to offer specific support for children with disabilities that is required to realise inclusive education.

At national level, education systems need significant investment to deliver inclusive education. Even though policy and budgets are in place at the national level, the implementation is often diluted at regional or provincial level in favour of other priorities. A particular challenge is that 'special needs' units in government lack the technical expertise, influence and support to shift budgets from segregated schooling to large scale systemic support for inclusive schools and mainstream support systems.

At societal level, the absence of examples of children with disabilities becoming part of the fibre of school and community life has undermined the participation of children and continued their segregation, marginalisation and stigmatisation. Furthermore, there has not been sustained pressure on governments (at both national and local level) from civil society to drive policy change and implementation.

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At an academic level also, "contemporary theories of inclusive education, have largely been tamed and domesticated – thereby losing the insurrectionary zeal of the early years" (Slee, 2018, 22). "From its initial declaration of a critique of 'special education', much has changed. In many countries, the resilience of special education has blunted the political will to introduce radical systems change" (Slee, 2018, p. 51). As mentioned above, many countries are criticised by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for continuing to build segregated special education schools (e.g. South Africa) and "under the disguise of a benevolent humanitarianism" (Slee, 2018) have no measures in place to sanction regular schools that continue to refuse to admit children with disabilities from the local community. In fact, identification and assessment systems are still widely in place to assess, refer and place children with disabilities in the range of segregated settings that still exist in the poorest of contexts (Ethiopia, Kenya, Zambia, Nepal, etc).

At school level, in spite of arguments (as outlined above) that the adoption of inclusive policies, cultures and practices can contribute to the quality of education for all children, there are generally few systematic programmes that support schools to adapt and redesign their "purpose, plant, programmes, pedagogy and personnel" in support of inclusive education (Slee (2018), Väyrynen et al. (2018), Florian (2019), Singal (2019), Muthukrishna et al. (2018)).

"In many countries, the resilience of special education has blunted the political will to introduce radical systems change"

Slee, 2018

4. Learning from global and national practice

When discussing the barriers that prevent large numbers of children in the global South from accessing quality inclusive education, care must be taken not to ignore the impact of the long term negative economic impact of colonisation and fall into the trap of the "monolithic assumptions underpinning the current discourse around disability in the South, where representations of the lives of persons with disabilities are commonly constructed as backward, victims of society, neglected or hidden away" (see, for example, Swain and French, 2014). "Such representations allow for the perpetuation and legitimisation of discourses which then call for the liberalisation and emancipation of disabled people in the South on the basis of the 'enlightened', 'civilising' work of Northern scholars and agencies" (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2014). Further, "discourses of inclusive education, which continue to be influenced by traditional special education ideologies from the global North and appropriated by the South have the power to undermine or subvert the inclusive education agenda in contexts shaped by neo-colonialism" (Muthukrishna, et al., 2018).

Although challenges are many, there has been extensive progress over the past 25 years in finding contextually relevant responses to improving access to education for the millions of marginalised children with disabilities in countries of the South. Policy makers, researchers and practitioners have learnt from practical and culturally relevant lessons on the ground "which do not always follow the models developed in wealthier and individualistic societies which promote competitiveness, meritocracy and school segregation, under the argument of academic excellence" (Cynthia Duk as quoted by Ainscow, Slee and Best, 2019). There is a call for replacing the dominance of the centralised and professionally dominated service system with a community vision which relies on communities to find their own solutions and "seeks to provide every citizen, no matter how **fallible**, with the opportunity to participate as a political equal with other citizens in the process of community decision making and neighbourhood-building" (Schoeman & Schoeman, 2002).

4.1 Contextual opportunities and challenges in resource poor countries

There are tremendous opportunities in developing inclusive education in resource poor countries. For example, the lack of an entrenched special education sector in some contexts and the existence of strong connective tissue in communities in general provide a natural opportunity for planning and establishing an inclusive system as part of strengthening the whole education system. Furthermore, it is often not the sheer amount of resources that matters but how they are utilised.

However, even where there is a national commitment to build an education system on the basis of inclusivity and access for all as a core principle, it must still be recognised that children with disabilities face considerably more barriers in accessing education than their non-disabled peers. This is evidenced in General Comment 4, paragraph 4 (UN, 2016). The challenges they face can be grouped into:

a. Attitudinal and behavioural barriers

b. Physical and environmental barriers

c. Screening, identification and assessment

d. Pedagogical barriers

e. Policy barriers (including lack of data)

f. Financial and resource barriers

Figure 4: Inclusive education challenges

Source: USAID, 2019

The process of making education inclusive involves removing or minimising these barriers so that all children can access education. Within each barrier lies a potential creative and innovative solution. This requires that inclusive education policies and implementation strategies should be multi-layered and multi-sectoral. These include Education Sector Plans, donor harmonisation in implementation plans, national education policies, and inter-ministry coordination between health, education and social protection.

a. Attitudinal barriers

One of the most significant obstacles in relation to inclusive education is the prevalence of negative attitudes towards persons and children with disabilities. Such attitudes can be found among a wide range of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, community members, government representatives and even children themselves. These attitudes often translate into negative behaviours at all levels from homes and communities to schools and at national level in terms of policy making.

Impact of negative attitudes at family and community level

Children with disabilities are often invisible in their communities because parents hide them away or keep them at home to protect them. As a result, children miss out on the stimulation of interacting with others and the development of essential social skills. In addition, this makes early identification and assessment very challenging. Negative attitudes can also impact on children's self-confidence and own sense of identity. Children can also be subject to neglect, as a result of negative attitudes, which in turn can negatively affect health, for example through malnourishment.

Impact of negative attitudes at school level

Many parents of non-disabled children fear that the academic progress of their own children will be slowed by having a child with disabilities in the classroom. Many also worry that their children will learn 'inappropriate behaviour' from their classmates with disabilities. Evidence from Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice (KAP) studies highlights that a significant number of teachers also think that parents are worried their children with disabilities will be abused (bullied, teased, ill-treated, etc.) (Deluca et al., 2014a, 2015, 2016 a&b). This results in the marginalisation of children with disabilities at school.

There are also few positive role models, e.g. teachers with disabilities or disability advocates in the community.

Impact of negative attitudes at national level

At the national level, negative attitudes can lead to discriminatory policies which segregate children with disabilities and prevent them from accessing schools in the mainstream education system. In some cases, governments actively oppose initiatives that include children with disabilities in mainstream schools because they see it as an overly expensive and complex process. This can have a significant impact on how governments allocate finances and plan for budgets and programmes.

b. Physical barriers

The physical safety and comfort of children should be a major priority in all schools in order to make learning accessible. Although inclusive education advocates that all children should be able to attend and benefit from school, irrespective of individual differences, there are a number of physical and environmental barriers that often prevent children with disabilities from being included. These include difficult terrain and poor quality of access roads, distances that children have to travel to school and lack of transportation. Natural environmental barriers (e.g. animals, rivers, floods, etc.) were also reported as preventing children with disabilities from going to school. If they do make it to school, accessibility within school becomes an issue, because few schools comply with the principles of universal design, water and sanitation facilities are poor and there are many physical elements at school that make it difficult to access learning in classrooms with their non-disabled peers. Lack of sufficient classrooms further results in large class sizes and overcrowding.

Research on transport solutions for pupils with disabilities (Kett and Deluca, 2016) highlighted transport-related exclusion of children with disabilities from school and proposed measures for achieving more coherent, integrated policy making, such as including representatives from the departments of transport, roads and planning in discussions about inclusive education, and education ministry representatives in discussions about urban planning, transportation and mobility. The evidence highlighted that a multi-sectoral approach is essential, with transport being one aspect, but health, finance and justice also being of importance.

Engaging with schools, communities and parents themselves is needed to better understand the challenges as well as solutions for physical access. This includes the role of School Management Committees (SMCs) and including pupils with disabilities in the SMCs or parents of pupils with disabilities. These were previously not considered in the absence of children with disabilities actually attending school.

Physical infrastructure requirements for introducing assistive technology have also become critical in recent years, with a focus on the availability of connectivity and electricity in schools. This still remains a huge challenge in resource poor countries and in remote areas, and is often coupled with a lack of technical maintenance capacities.

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c. Screening, identification and assessment as barriers

Appropriate screening, identification and assessment can facilitate inclusion through improved understanding of specific needs. However, there is no systematic assessment in developing countries that results in actionable steps to provide reasonable accommodations in the classroom, as opposed to identifying specific needs to aid inclusion Similarly, where education assessment resource centres exist, they often assess learners for the purpose of referring them for medical interventions and subsequent segregated placement. In developed countries assessment more often focuses on deficiencies rather than potential.

Assessment of learning outcomes is also problematic as learners with disabilities (especially learners with intellectual or learning disabilities) are often excluded from external national exams and do not have access to reasonable accommodation measures. The consequence is that they often leave school early because they do not experience meaningful learning and progress (World Bank, Leonard Cheshire, Inclusion International, 2019).

d. Curriculum and pedagogical barriers

A lack of awareness and technical knowledge within education ministries responsible for designing school curricula can lead to the implementation of particularly inflexible approaches that do not cater for the needs, potential and interests of children with disabilities. In order to create a curriculum that allows for universal design for learning and can adapt to the individual needs of all children, attitudes among key decision makers in the government, teacher training institutions and curriculum bodies at the national level must change.

One of the critical weaknesses in national teacher education policies and programmes in almost all contexts is the near total absence of core modules in initial teacher education for all teachers to understand the reasons for learning breakdown and how to address barriers to learning and participation for all children. One critical aspect is also that 'inclusive pedagogy' is rarely adopted as an overall approach, but subject-based didactics is still prevailing. While there is a lot of research on 'inclusive pedagogy' it has proved to be hard to integrate in the teacher education

programmes. Topics such as classroom management, group dynamics, co-teaching, etc. are often ignored. A further critical barrier is to separate education of teachers, according to levels, disciplines, etc. A useful resource for teacher education is the 'Profile of Inclusive Teachers' by the European Agency for Special Needs Education and Inclusive Education.[17]

Furthermore, modules on inclusive education more often continue to have a 'special needs' focus and overemphasise specialist knowledge on specific impairments (such as learning sign language and braille) rather than looking holistically at the needs of learners and addressing the critical skills of inclusive pedagogy. Another weakness of the inclusive modules is that they are usually very theoretical rather than practical, and generally have no, or limited, practical application of knowledge or observations of practice in the field.

The implementation of inappropriate curricula and learning schemes as well as inflexible teaching methods and assessment policies and procedures in developing countries are often due to the fact that teachers are not very skilled in pedagogy, and therefore, curriculum directives are used to ensure minimum levels of quality. Inflexible teaching methods are also due to the fact that educators in teacher education institutions have not been exposed to more efficient and flexible approaches. Evidence from the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) studies (Deluca et al., 2014a, 2015, 2016 a&b, Carew et al. 2018) supports the need for prioritising content on disability inclusion in continued professional teacher development.

e. Policy and systemic barriers

Inclusive education is seldom central to the education transformation agenda of governments and more often seen as an 'experiment'. A majority of governments still have a special needs focus with various modes of segregation. Few countries have policies and legislation that promote a 'zero rejection' approach.

Lack of policy coherence and implementation

Policy making tends to be incoherent and inconsistent across government departments. In many cases, separate policies for mainstream and special education are formulated by different ministries. For example, the line management for children with disabilities in many countries is the ministry of social welfare or the ministry of women and children, rather than the same education ministry that deals with education for all other children (in Bangladesh education of children with severe disabilities is managed by the Ministry of Social Services). This lack of inter-ministry collaboration and alignment of services and budgets poses a major barrier to sustainable inclusive education. Even when, on paper, a reasonable policy that supports inclusive education is in place, in many cases it is simply not implemented because of lack of data to inform implementation plans and the total absence of a dedicated budget. If budgets are made available, these are still mostly to sustain existing segregated special schools and settings. There is also often a lack of genuine commitment to the basic principles of universal primary education and the right to education for all children irrespective of individual differences. General Comment 4, Article 4.2 requires that States parties undertake measures to the maximum of their available resources regarding economic, social and cultural rights, and, where needed, within a framework of international cooperation,

with a view to achieving progressively the full realisation of those rights. Progressive realisation means that States parties have a specific and continuing obligation "to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible" towards the full realisation of Article 24.

It has been argued that not only does this exclusion hamper progress on inclusive education, but it also has wider implications as education programmes are often the conduit through which a number of additional child protection mechanisms are implemented. Children with disabilities who are not in the formal education system are therefore at risk not only of missing out on education opportunities, but are also excluded from critical child survival initiatives, thus increasing their vulnerability (Trani et al., 2011).

This is also true with regard to implementing targeted actions towards addressing the needs of refugee children with disabilities if they are to successfully access the curriculum.

"Progressive realization means that States parties have a specific and continuing obligation "to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible towards the full realization of Article 24"

General Comment 4 on Article 24, CRPD Committee

Lack of data

Education planning should be strengthened through evidence gathered through research. All efforts should make it clear that successful inclusion relies on many components (school, community, family etc.) which need to be combined to ensure meaningful inclusion, and quality learning for children with disabilities.

There is also a huge lack of capacity in using the data available, for example in the Education Management and Information Systems (EMIS). Schools might collect data but this data is not used in schools or at provincial and national planning levels. Difficulties in collecting education data in general poses a major barrier.

'Disability data' is also elusive. Some might use the Washington Group Questions;[18] some countries use various categories of disability (which might be very poorly understood in schools). But for education, 'category of disability' might not be that useful; it may be more beneficial to establish the kind of (educational) support that is needed or provided.

The most serious gap in data is for out of school children with disabilities.

f. Funding and resource barriers

Overall aid investment into education is in a continued state of stagnation, as highlighted in the 2019 Global Monitoring Report. The report showed that investment is growing by only 1% per year on average since 2009. This raises questions about the global commitment of donors to achieving SDG 4.

A lack of sufficient funding and resources is frequently cited as a major barrier to making inclusion happen in practice. Research in four African countries (Leonard Cheshire, 2018), highlighted that one of the main reasons identified for children with disabilities being out of education was the extra cost of schooling (IDDC, 2016) incurred by persons with disabilities. Inability to pay fees was also a reason for leaving school before completion commonly cited in the literature.

Despite this, there are resources available, and as the Index for Inclusion notes, inclusive education is also about identifying resources in and around schools (Booth & Ainscow 2011).

In countries where funding models have been applied that devolves funding to school and learner level (e.g. The Girls' Education South Sudan programme), schools are capacitated to introduce context relevant solutions which increase access and participation. Also in Ethiopia, additional funding for children with special educational needs has been a part of school grants, through a multi donor-funded government programme. Currently, the funding has shifted from a student-based funding model to supporting the establishment and functioning of inclusive education resource centres. Schools can still use their school grants to make appropriate adaptations or to procure assistive devices.

"Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all"

Incheon Declaration, 2015

The challenge lies not just in a lack of funds and resources per se, but the question of how effectively to use and allocate the funds and resources that already exist. For example, lack of investment into assistive devices can be a major barrier. This is evidenced by the pre- and post-intervention KAP studies undertaken in Kenya (Deluca et al., 2017, Carew et al., 2018) and in Zimbabwe (Deluca et al., 2014b and 2016b). Teachers identified the lack of resources such as assistive devices, for example glasses, hearing aids, magnifiers, wheelchairs, crutches, Braille writers and readers and communication devices.

Resourcing policies should also not only make provision for capital funding but more importantly for human resource provision. There is an endemic shortage of health professionals and inclusion specialist staff, especially in low and middle income countries. Governments should explore new models of service delivery such as mobile outreach services so as to make more efficient use of those few scarce professionals.

The KAP studies also highlighted that classroom assistants had a key role in providing support to children with disabilities (and teachers) in the class. The role of classroom assistants was seen to be useful in a variety of ways such as in supporting basic activities of daily living, or specialist support such as therapy assistants and sign language interpreters. In very large classes, additional adults (even volunteer parents) were found to be of great support to teachers in maintaining discipline, control and acting as a stand-in for the class teacher (Deluca and Kett, 2017).

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4.2 Impact of inclusive education particularly with regard to improved learning outcomes.

a. Pre-conditions and challenges for successful implementation of policies to improve inclusive education at school and classroom level

System change

Changes at system level and beyond are needed to deliver better learning outcomes for all – children, youth and adults – including the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Inclusive education programmes are successful when the system changes to accommodate training of teachers, the preparation of conducive learning environments in schools, the empowerment of parents, and the education of community members and professionals in allied service systems. Policy makers need to be involved because the more they understand, the more supportive they become. When policy makers understand issues of different disabilities, their causes, their rights and inclusiveness, issues of inclusive policy are then better handled.

Evidence shows that there is a general need to understand the specific approaches that work to create an inclusive classroom, particularly in resource poor settings. These could include positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion, adoption of inclusive teaching practices (de Boer et al., 2011), and teacher training (Bakshi, Kett, & Oliver, 2013; Carew, Deluca, Groce, & Kett, 2018; Walton & Osman, 2018).

Intersectionality

The intersection of other disadvantages in relation to achievement in education is significant for learners with disabilities.

Moreover, poverty and deprivation are thought to magnify experienced inequalities, so that women with disabilities living in low and middle income countries, and in particular resource-poor areas in these settings, are likely to experience poorer outcomes relative to other groups (Emmett & Alant, 2006). In the context of education this is reflected in (for example), rates of education being lower among girls, compared to boys with disabilities (UNESCO, 2017). Girls with disabilities may also face specific and particularly distressing forms of marginalisation that impede their access to education such as sexual abuse in school (e.g. Caldas & Bensy, 2014; Phasha & Nyokangi, 2012) or forced marriage at an early age (Groce, Gazizova, & Hassiotis, 2014).

Learning outcomes

Evidence from two studies in Pakistan (Singal, 2015; Manzoor, Hameed, and Nabeel, 2016) indicates that while children with disabilities might be more successful in entering school compared to previous years, this does not guarantee improved learning outcomes. Growing evidence focusing on teaching and learning processes in the classroom clearly highlights that these poor learning outcomes are mostly due to the lack of meaningful participation in learning opportunities for children with disabilities (Singal, 2015).

Out of school children

The causes of children being out of school identified by the studies of Singal (2015) (in ranked order) were: (i) lack of school readiness (ii) lack of an inclusive admission policy (iii) poverty (iv) severity of disability and child health conditions (v) distance from home to school and (vi) overprotection of children with disabilities. If these marginalised children could not reach special schools, the possibility of establishing outreach services from the existing special schools to regular schools consisting of training, mentoring on curriculum adaptation, adaptive assessment techniques and specialised interventions (Singal, 2019, p.87) became a lifeline for many children who would otherwise have been excluded from education altogether.

b. Examples of successful implementation

Inclusive education models that are generally effective for children with disabilities may need additional components to allow the most marginalised of children with disabilities to access high quality education. Often this may necessitate a broader focus than just on the school or classroom, highlighted in the examples below.

One recent example provided by Scior et al. (2015) is the role that parents and community members with intellectual disabilities (as role models) may play in combating the stigma of intellectual disability, which is comparatively widespread compared to that encountered by other impairment groups. The importance of involving parents as partners in providing support to children with intellectual disabilities has been recognised.

An example from an inclusive primary school in the City of Payakumbuh on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia demonstrates how the implementation of inclusive education and the enrolment of children with disabilities and other special educational needs can help improve the quality of education offered to all children who attend school. This school has improved its average rate of academic performance (measured according to national tests) after children with disabilities and other special educational needs started enrolling in their school. In 2003, the school decided to welcome all children (without exception) from the community that surrounded the school. Teachers became more sensitive and responsive to the needs of all the children in the school, and community participation increased. Currently, about 20% of Payakumbuh's school students have a disability or another special education need. As the result of these efforts, the number of children dropping out of school decreased from eight in 2004, to four in 2005, to zero in 2006 and 2007. The goal of the municipal government in Payakumbuh is therefore that all their schools become inclusive, child-friendly and welcoming. They have realised that an inclusive school is a quality school.[19]

It must further be recognised that most inclusive education programmes are delivered by non-state actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with some notable exceptions such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme in India (e.g. Singal, 2015 and 2016). Very few countries in Africa have such state level programmes and rely on NGOs to deliver inclusive education. This means that most inclusive education programmes are relatively small scale, and although they provide valuable evidence of good practice at a regional level, have little evidence of efficacy at scale. Actors in this field include Leonard Cheshire, Christian Blind Mission, Humanity and Inclusion, Sight Savers, Light for the World, Sense, ADD and an ever growing number of mainstream programmes that are mainstreaming disability as an integral part of a large scale education development programme (such as the second phase of the Girls' Education South Sudan project).

A number of these organisations use a holistic approach in line with the CRPD (2006), adopted from existing literature on inclusive education, as well as an understanding of what can work in practice from programmatic experience. This broad approach is endorsed in the UK Department for International Development's (DFID) Statement of Action on Inclusive Education which was launched at the Global Disability Summit in 2018. The priorities of the DFID Education Policy include a) investing in good teaching, b) backing system reform which delivers results in the classroom, and c) stepping up targeted support to poor and marginalised children.[20]

c. What constitutes good inclusive pedagogy?

The UNESCO definition of inclusive education emphasises the pedagogical intent by seeing it as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through inclusive practices in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children" (UNESCO, 2005).

However, the "transformative and radical vision of inclusive education which has been focused on making the centre more responsive to meet the growing diversity of learners, finds itself increasingly being pushed into efforts at assimilating children with disabilities into normative ways of thinking and doing, with little reflection on what they are being included into". In most countries of the global South, it must be recognised that this mainstream system into which children with disabilities are being included is "itself fraught with systemic problems that remain largely unaddressed" (Singal, 2019).

General Comment 4 provides clear direction on the training that all teachers should be receiving to change this situation. It states that "all teachers must be provided with dedicated units/modules to prepare them to work in inclusive settings, as well as practical experiential learning, where they can build the skills and confidence to problem-solve through diverse inclusion challenges. The core content of teacher education must address a basic understanding of human diversity, growth and development, the human rights model of disability, and inclusive pedagogy including how to identify students' functional abilities" (UN, 2016, par. 79).

Several research studies in recent years have explored how best the dynamics in classrooms can change so that teachers' actions reflect the core values of inclusive education, which could be seen as (1) valuing student diversity, (2) supporting all students, (3) working with others and (4) personal professional development (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2012), as cited by Väyrynen et al. 2018).

Lani Florian eloquently pleads for fundamental pedagogical change in which "thinking about learning as a shared activity where a single lesson is a different experience for each participant encourages a shift in thinking away from teaching approaches that work for most learners existing alongside something 'additional' or 'different' for those (some) who experience difficulties, and towards one that involves providing rich learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for everyone, so that all learners are able to participate and feel they belong" (Florian, 2019).

In addition, General Comment 4 states that "teachers need practical guidance and support in, among others: the provision of individualized instruction; teaching the same content using varied teaching methods to respond to the learning styles and unique abilities of each person; the development and use of individual educational plans to support specific learning requirements; and the introduction of a pedagogy centred around students' educational objectives" (UN, 2016, par 79).

"The core content of teacher education must address a basic understanding of human diversity, growth and development"

General Comment 4 on Article 24, CPRD Committee

5. Discussion and recommendations

This background paper has aimed to make the case for ensuring access to quality inclusive education for children and youth with disabilities in the communities where they live and with their peers – in line with their right to education. Inclusive education has been discussed as the most efficient and cost-effective educational provision to ensuring the fulfilment of this right.

The paper has explored the global progress towards inclusive education, the successes achieved and learnings observed, specifically in resource poor countries with high exclusion rates of children with disabilities in mainstream education.

The paper has also looked at reasons and challenges for the continued exclusion and inequitable educational provisions experienced by children with disabilities and how this could be more effectively addressed by governments in education systems that fully embrace the commitments of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The following have been identified as gaps and limitations to be addressed by governments if effective inclusive education is to be implemented with a view to reducing the gap between policy and practice.

5.1 Most important gaps and limitations identified

Lack of **awareness of the importance of inclusive education** as a central contributing approach towards overall improvement of the quality of education – there is a lack of understanding about what it means in practice and how to implement it. More work in this area should include technical support to policy makers, advocacy, public campaigns and information sharing.

Education strategies and plans should **include children and young persons with disabilities** in processes of decision making. Accountability mechanisms should be put in place to monitor and review progress.

Lack of **capacity in schools**. More work should be done to improve teachers' capacity to respond to the diversity in their classrooms through inclusive pedagogy. This will require innovations formalised in government policies and standards in pre-service as well as ongoing teacher professional development. Capacity of school managers also needs to be built on understanding the value of and the way in which to run schools that respond to the values of inclusive education. At an infrastructure and resource level, there is a need for the construction of accessible schools, the distribution and integration of assistive devices and accessible versions of school textbooks, as well as the overall adoption of the universal design approach to inclusive education.

There is a lack of **quality and reliable data** on which to make evidence-based policy decisions. More work in this area should focus on expanding EMIS to collect data on children with disabilities in school and the **accessibility of existing schools**, as well as more accurate **information on out of school children** with disabilities: how many, who they are and what resources are available in their localities. This might require integration of data systems (where they exist) of various sectors such as health, education and social protection.

The successful achievement of SDG 4 is dependent upon reaching a **common goal for quality learning for all children** irrespective of gender, location, socio-economic status or disability. However, there is very little consolidated evidence about what children with disabilities are learning in schools at basic and further education levels that also enables them to transition into post school and higher education and training. Conservative estimates suggest that in low-income countries only 5% of children with disabilities access schools (UNICEF, 2013 in World Bank et al., 2019). Even if 5% were in school, there is no clear way of establishing their learning gains in a way that feeds into larger education system evaluation, planning and development. Recent research has also pointed out that there is limited data which establishes the type of knowledge and skills students with disabilities are acquiring by attending school (World Bank et al., 2019).

At the **sector planning level**, evidence from the recent stock-take on disability carried out by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) on how countries prioritise inclusive education and children with disabilities in their Education Sector Plans (ESP) suggests that only 24 out of the 51 ESPs (47%) addressed education of children with disabilities (GPE, 2018). The report further notes that improving learning outcomes for children with disabilities was not discussed directly in any ESP. However, four countries (Guyana, Nepal, Nicaragua, and Kenya) have plans to measure learning achievement of children with disabilities by aligning their assessment methodologies and ensuring the availability of differentiated assessment and reasonable accommodation (GPE, 2018).

In a recent study on disability published by the Global Partnership for Education (2018), only 24 out of 51 countries had ESPs that include aspects related to disability and inclusive education. Many of them did not allocate any budget to the activities nor did they have a monitoring and evaluation mechanism for tracking implementation and progress under the following goals:

Goal 1: Improved learning outcomes: Only one third of the countries are expected to have implemented learning assessments twice to measure learning improvement between 2015 and 2020

Goal 2: Increased equity, gender equality and inclusion: Steady progress on enrolment and completion, but gender parity is stagnating

Goal 3: Effective and efficient education systems: Strong on domestic finance, challenges with pupil-teacher ratio and data

There were strong results on sector planning and grant financing on the review of country-level objectives that include sector planning, accountability, and financing. There was mixed performance on mutual accountability.

5.2 Recommendations

In order to meet the SDGs by 2030, international and national development programmes will need to prioritise inclusive education as a way to build a more inclusive and equitable society. Removing the barriers outlined above and restructuring national education systems to provide inclusive education curriculum and support services that meet the learning needs of all will require political and practical actions (World Bank, et al., 2019).

The divergent and often confused definitions of inclusive education are translated into national education policies and education system practices. To improve this situation there is a need to promote a commonly agreed definition of inclusive education which will be translated into legislation and regulatory frameworks, backed by a political will, prioritisation of resources (both human and financial) and systemic change brought about by a strong civil society that demands change.

The following recommendations emerge from this background paper:

Family and community level

- Improve understanding of the benefits of inclusive education for children with disabilities, not only for the individual child but also for the wider community and the education system.
- Engage civil society, persons with disabilities, their families and Disabled People's Organisations to demonstrate the value of and advocate for inclusive education.
- Listen to the voices of children with disabilities, including by involving children and parents/caregivers in decisions about their education and learning needs.

School and governance Level

- Develop, train and support a professional education workforce that responds to inclusive education and encourages teachers with disabilities into the profession. This should include provision of essential pre-service training and in-service professional development provided in multiple ways, such as through mentoring and on-the-job support.
- Increase participation and achievement of learners with disabilities by building capacity of schools and teachers to create inclusive policies, cultures and practices which include differentiated teaching, learning and assessment.
- Provide school-based and external support to teachers on an ongoing basis, including through access to the range of individualised support measures that can be made available to learners with specific disabilities. External support can be organised in various ways through multi-disciplinary itinerant and mobile teams and other community resources such as social and health services.
- Involve the community and parents of children with disabilities in school boards and parent teacher associations to improve governance and transparency.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms, for example applying sanctions to regular schools that refuse to enrol children with disabilities from local communities.

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Post school level

- Attention should be given by governments as part of the worldwide reform of further education, to ensure access for children and youth with disabilities to further, higher and technical vocational education and training (TVET) pathways.
- This will require active measures to be put in place to combat discrimination in TVET and tertiary education by ensuring that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities (CRPD, Article 24, par 5).
- Specific attention should also be given to ensuring gender equity.

National and system level

- Ensure national legal and policy frameworks (including education sector plans and budgets) reflect the rights of persons with disabilities to access education in inclusive settings, thus addressing structural inequalities.
- Build capacity of Ministries of Education to identify and implement strategies for inclusive education and to reduce barriers to inclusion by adopting a cross-sectoral and life course approach.
- Reform national teacher education policies and standards (both at pre-service training and continued professional development levels) to embody inclusive teaching methodologies that support throughput rates and reduce early school leaving. This should include exploring the cost-effectiveness of a range of delivery models such as e-learning modalities, mentorships, co-teaching, etc.
- Adopt a multi-sectoral approach to inclusive education. This is essential for ensuring children with disabilities can access quality education and recognises that other sectors, such as transport, are equally important as are health, social protection, finance, and justice. Building inter-ministry collaboration is key to sustainable inclusive education.
- Strengthen the evidence base through continued and more in-depth generation, analysis and dissemination of data on education and disability to improve education sector planning – including commitments to measuring learning outcomes for children with disabilities.
- Plan for diversity. This requires systemic planning from a policy and resourcing level to ensure that support is available at different levels of education through elements such as planning, financing, data gathering, management and utilisation, teacher utilisation, training and support, community resource mobilisation, inter-sectoral integration, alignment and collaboration etc.

Government and donor funding level

- Ensure implementation of education policies and allocation of education budgets, recognising that even though policy and budgets are frequently in place at the national level, their implementation is often diluted at regional and provincial levels in favour of other priorities.
- Hold donors to account for meeting their promise to reach the UN target of 0.7% of gross national income allocated to foreign aid.
- Improve financing, build stronger partnerships and ensure greater alignment and harmonisation of donor funded programmes.
- Improve funding and availability of inclusive education service delivery for persons with disabilities in schools and other education facilities, including through improved monitoring and accountability systems.
- Invest in more effective use of assistive technology and ICT connectivity. Setting up systems for the provision and effective integration of assistive technology to improve access to the curriculum, also for learners in poorly resourced settings, could be a game changer for many learners with disabilities.
- Improve multi-sector collaboration and multilateral fund coordination to ensure funds are being used effectively. This, combined with regular monitoring and a robust financial reporting system, can go a long way towards promoting cost-effectiveness when allocating resources.

To date, in resource poor countries most inclusive education programmes are delivered by non-state actors such as NGOs. Particularly in Africa, countries rely on NGOs to deliver inclusive education. This means that most inclusive education programmes are relatively small scale, and although they provide valuable evidence of good practice at a regional level, have little evidence of efficacy at scale. **Governments must take ownership – if they are to fully embrace the commitments of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**

"A child who is denied the opportunity of inclusive elementary schooling in their neighbourhood school is not only deprived as a youngster, but is also disabled throughout life by not being able to do the things that rely on reading, writing, social skills and the curiosity that is learned in school"

Amartya Sen (2000). Development as Freedom

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Endnotes

[1] UNICEF (2014) Mapping Children with Disabilities out of School, Webinar 5 Companion Technical Booklet.

[2] Male and Wodon (2017) "Overall, the analysis (of the study) demonstrates that children with disabilities are being left behind by global efforts to improve education opportunities for all. The rising gaps between children with and without disabilities in developing countries call for stronger policies and interventions to achieve the target of inclusive education adopted under the Sustainable Development Goals".

[3] Lani Florian (2019) 'On the necessary co-existence of special and inclusive education' argues that "distinguishing between the two concepts ('special' and 'inclusive' education) is essential to future developments that support a good quality education for everyone and calls for a post-Salamanca decoupling of inclusive education from special education on the grounds that the twenty-first century challenge of SDG 4 requires renewed engagement with the contested conceptual problems associated with inclusion and equity in education". Nidhi Singal (2019) contests the binary view of 'special' being bad and 'inclusive' being good as long as the normative centre of education is not radically transformed to respond more effectively to learner diversity.

[4] Titles of policies embody the uncertainty, e.g. being called a policy on special needs education and only referring to children with disabilities, with lip service being paid to inclusive education or a policy on inclusive education but making different provision for the various vulnerable groups and continued exclusion of certain children with disabilities on the basis of the level or extent of their disability (cf. Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Nepal, etc.).

[5] UNESCO Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education (2017) unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254

[6] webtv.un.org/watch/children-with-disabilities-shall-not-be-left-behind-%E2%80%93-good-practices-and-challenges-in-inclusive-education-cosp12-side-event/6047205101001/

[7] Large gains in secondary completion rates have also been achieved for boys and girls without disabilities, but gains are again smaller for children with disabilities, leading to disability gaps in completion rates of 14.5 points for boys and 10.4 points for girls (Male & Wodon, 2017).

[8] Nidhi Singal (2019) quotes Graham and Slee who propose to deliberately use the term 'inclusive', where the quotation marks remind us that the centre is in constant demand of being transformed for all students. However, the transformative and radical vision of inclusive education which was focused on making the centre more responsive to meet the growing diversity of learners, finds itself increasingly being pushed into efforts at assimilating children with disabilities into normative ways of thinking and doing, with little reflection on what they are being included into. This is glaring in the Indian context, where efforts continue to be focused on including children with disabilities into a mainstream system, which is itself fraught with systemic problems that remain largely unaddressed.

[9] documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/171921543522923182/pdf/132586-WP-P168381-PUBLIC-WorldBank-SSAInclusive-Disability-v6-Web.pdf

[10] Nidhi Singal (2019) reports that the term 'divyaang' declared by the Indian prime minister in 2015 to replace previous negative terminology for disability and which implies something 'divine', instead of disease, "puts people with disabilities on an unnecessary pedestal, perpetuating 'Othering' and continuing to reinforce a charity approach with attached religious connotations. It is rather patronising and takes responsibility away from the state and society to remove barriers that exist for persons with disabilities".

[11] The SDGs are the first global goals to mention persons with disabilities and provide a clear message to 'leave no one behind' (UN, 2016) through a firm commitment to improving equity globally. They clearly identify persons with disabilities as being at particular risk of living in poverty, with less access to education, health systems, and formal employment on an equal basis with non-disabled people, facing many barriers to living a full and productive life (WHO/World Bank, 2011; Groce et al, 2011). The intersectionality of disadvantage, e.g. gender, is also brought to the foreground as a key consideration.

[12] General Comment 4 on Article 24 of the CRPD further expands on how governments should be responding to Article 24 in their policies and strategic plans, leaving little room for interpretation. Most importantly it clearly sees inclusive education as central to achieving high-quality education for all learners, and to be realised at all levels (pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary education, vocational training and lifelong learning, extracurricular and social activities), for all students, including persons with disabilities, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others.

[13] Filmer (2008: 141) found that "adults with disabilities typically live in poorer than average households…" and that "each additional year of schooling is associated with about a 2 to 5 percentage point reduction in the probability of being in the two poorest quintiles" (Filmer, 2008: 150). Children with disabilities are less likely to attend school and acquire the human capital that will enable them to earn higher incomes than other children, suggesting that disability is associated with long-term poverty (Filmer, 2008). Wage Return Evidence: A study in Nepal found that wage returns to education associated with increased schooling for children with disabilities are substantial, with estimated returns to education for persons with disabilities ranging from 19.3% to 25.6%. (DFID, 2015).

[14] Evaluations by the Department of Public Works in South Africa (Accessible Design Case Studies, 2004, in Metts, Robert, 'Disability and Development', Background paper prepared for the disability and development research agenda meeting, 16 November 2004, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., pp. 15–45. International Disability and Development Consortium (2013) Teachers for All: Inclusive Teaching for Children with Disabilities, Brussels, IDDC.) states that "it makes financial sense to plan for inclusion at a stage when the education system is being established and schools being built. The cost of making a new school building accessible is negligible (less than 1%), whereas adapting an existing building – an exercise which many countries are undertaking – costs about 20% of the original capital cost".

[15] The Thought Company:
www.thoughtco.com/exploring-the-value-of-whole-group-instruction-3194549

[16] Several African and Asian Governments have adopted general measures for inclusive education such as Tanzania (National Strategy on Inclusive Education, 2019), Kenya (Inclusive Education Sector Policy, 2018), Bangladesh (National Education Policy, 2010), Nepal (Inclusive Education Policy, 2016), etc.

[17] www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/Profile-of-Inclusive-Teachers.pdf

[18] www.washingtongroup-disability.com/washington-group-question-sets/

[19] From UNESCO, Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive Learning-Friendly Environments Specialized Booklet 3 - Teaching Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Settings, Bangkok, 2009, p.2-3.

[20] The 2018 Global Disability Summit organised by DFID and the collective Statement of Action

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