MDG 2 – ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND DISABLED CHILDREN[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Despite overall increases in school participation over the past decade, some groups of children continue to be left behind. Chief among these are disabled children. It is estimated that over one-third of all primary-aged children out of school are disabled children.[2] This amounts to approximately 25 million. In Africa alone, fewer than 10% of disabled children are in school. Other surveys suggest that disability has a greater impact on access to education than gender, household economic status or rural/urban divide .[3]

This is a fundamental human rights issue. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly expresses the right of each child to education (Article 28), and the responsibility of governments to ensure that disabled children receive quality education (Article 23). Additionally, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reinforces the rights of disabled people in relation to education and obligates governments to ensure an inclusive system (Article 24).[4]

Moreover, education for disabled children is essential for the alleviation of poverty and sustainable development. The impact of keeping disabled children at home and economically inactive, denying them education, as well as impacting family members who are unable to work due to caring responsibilities, all contribute significantly to the impoverishment of disabled people and their families.

WHAT IS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?[5]

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the right of disabled people to an inclusive education. But what does this mean and how does it differ from other approaches to education for disabled children?

Inclusive education aims to gradually change the whole education system, so that every school and every teacher is able to welcome any child (regardless of their disability, gender, poverty, ethnicity, etc.), and provide them with a good quality education alongside their peers. It is mostly about developing an attitude of flexibility and problem solving – enabling schools, teachers, parents and children to work together to solve the causes of exclusion.

Inclusive education theory says that children are excluded because of problems with the education system. For instance, exclusion happens because the school environment is inaccessible, or because teachers have negative attitudes or have not been well trained, or because the curriculum is not flexible to the needs of certain children. So the solution is to change the way the mainstream education system works, so that it can accommodate all sorts of different children. Figure 1 shows how inclusive education perceives 'the system as the problem'.

Integrated education focuses on getting children from marginalised groups (e.g. disabled children) into mainstream schools. It is often seen as a stepping stone to inclusive education, and is often implemented as part of a community-based rehabilitation (CBR) initiative. Integrated education often involves the provision of specialist equipment, assistive aids, etc.

Unlike inclusive education, integrated education tends to believe that it is the child's condition that causes their exclusion. For instance, exclusion happens because the child has mobility problems, or does not respond well to the lessons, etc. So the solution is to try to change or cure the child so that he/she can fit into the existing education system. But the education system itself does not change. As such integrated education may help individual children to attend school at a particular point in time, but it may not lead to far-reaching changes in the education system that can make it easier for other excluded children to get an education in the future. Often integrated education works well at helping disabled children to be present in a classroom, but it may not always work towards ensuring their genuine participation in all aspects of school life, or their achievement in education.
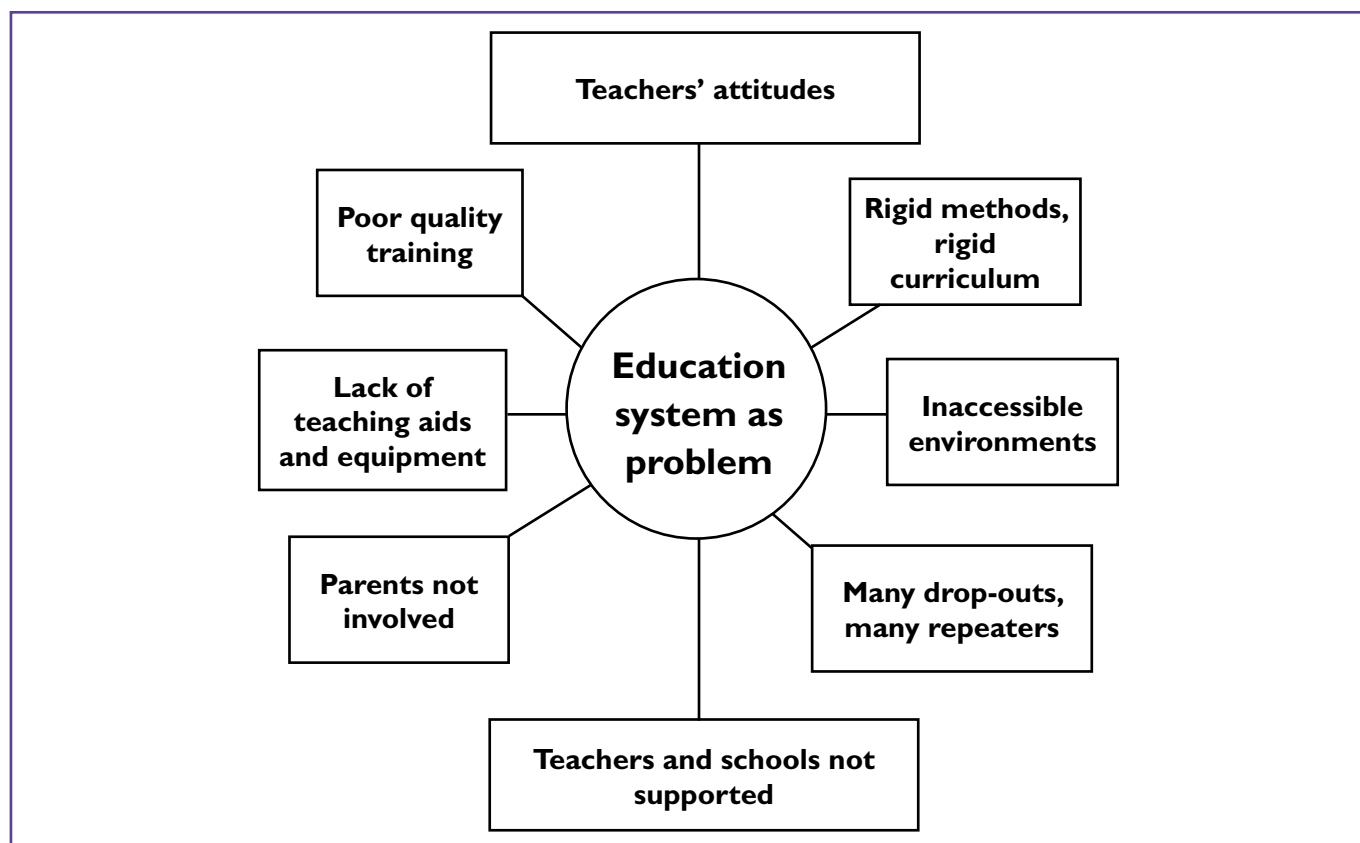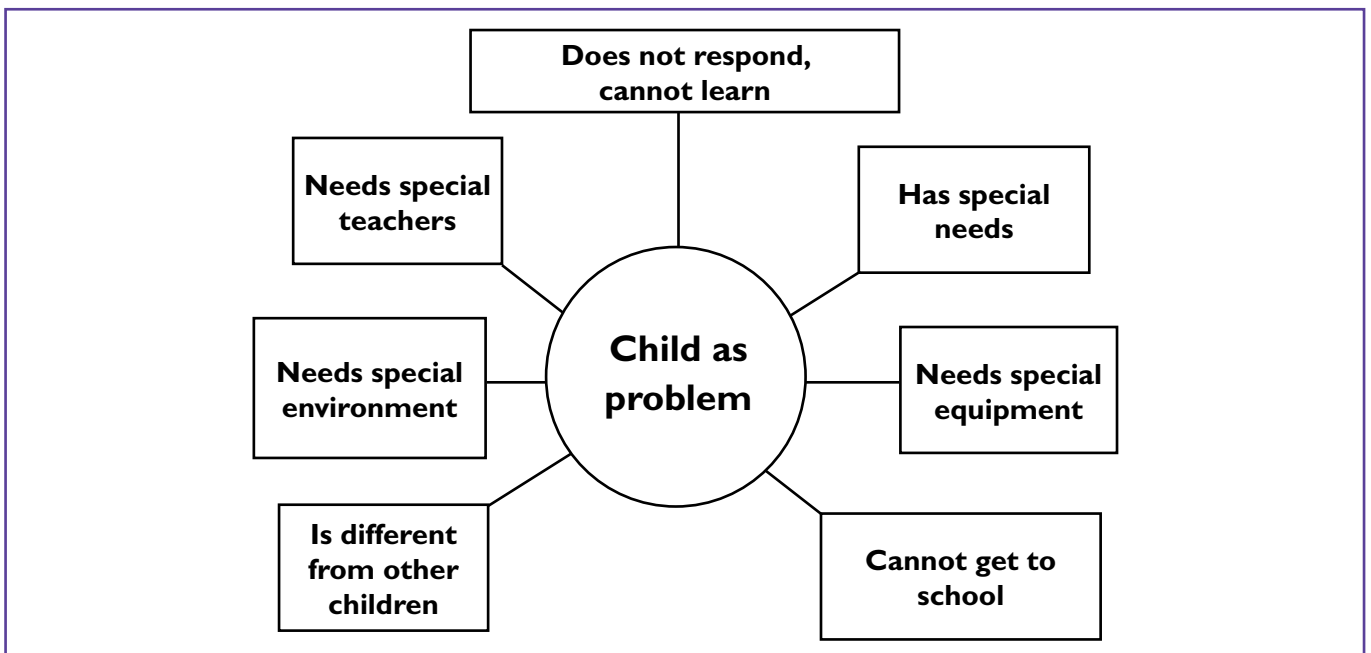

Figure 1: Inclusive education

Figure 2: Integrated education

Figure 2 shows how integrated education is built around the concept of 'the child is the problem'.

It is important to mention that there is often not a totally clear-cut boundary between inclusive and integrated education approaches.

Special education creates separate education systems for different types of children (e.g. special schools for disabled children). Special schools may offer disabled children a chance to receive an education. But often they also risk violating other important child rights (e.g. residential special schools may violate a child's right to stay with his/her family and to grow up with his/her peers; or they may be places where the right to freedom from abuse is violated).

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IS QUALITY EDUCATION

Though the focus here is particularly on inclusion of disabled children in education, inclusive education strategies improve learning for all children – a key issue given the pressing need to focus on education quality. Many programmes have shown these benefits. For example, in South East Europe teachers have collaborated on ways to support disabled children and produce their individual work plans, and this has promoted active, child-centred learning across their classes. In the Middle East and North Africa teachers have used tools such as the Index for Inclusion to improve school culture, infrastructure and teaching methods and so ensure that all children are welcomed and supported. In Lesotho, teachers who adopted

inclusive approaches said this helped them improve school for all learners and made them 'better teachers'.

HOW CAN EDUCATION BE MADE MORE INCLUSIVE?

Inclusive education is an aspirational process (it is something we always keep working towards, because we can always keep improving). It is not a quick-fix – the development of inclusive education takes time and requires everyone involved to commit themselves to permanent, ongoing action. A number of steps that can be taken towards making education more inclusive are as follows:

1. **Determine who should be held accountable for ensuring that all children can fulfill their right to an inclusive education** – Parents, communities and governments all act as duty-bearers for this right and should be challenged on social prejudices that assume that children with learning, speech, physical, cognitive, or sensory impairments are unable to participate in mainstream education.

2. **Promote positive attitudes towards difference** – Disabled children are often excluded from education as a result of society's lack of knowledge and negative attitudes towards them. Government, education officials, teachers, communities, parents, peers and NGOs need to understand disability as a social phenomenon whereby individuals with an impairment are socially excluded because of discriminatory attitudes rather than an inability to participate.

3. **Support the process of changing the education system to one that is inclusive** – Currently the vast majority of education systems are not geared to treating children as having diverse needs. For education systems to be able to provide quality education for all children, they need to be planned and resourced from the perspective of inclusion, particularly in terms of teacher recruitment, training and development and creating an environment supportive of inclusion (through, for example, materials and other supports in accessible formats – such as Braille or large font, building accessibility, inclusive curriculum, smaller class sizes). This planning and resourcing must be done in consultation with children, families and communities.

4. **Promote child-centred teaching** – Teachers often think they need 'special skills' to teach disabled children. However, experience shows that, in the majority of cases, good, clear, accessible and participatory teaching skills are effective in including disabled children in learning, as well as improving education for all children. Training in child-centred teaching strategies can give teachers the skills and confidence to teach a diverse range of abilities and promote active learning to meet individual student needs.

5. **Ensure that everyone is involved in working towards inclusion** – A 'whole community' approach must be taken if education is to become more inclusive. As such, active participation of children, parents, teachers, community members and leaders in making education more inclusive must be encouraged and strengthened.

6. **Ensure multi-sectoral collaboration** – Disabled children and their families may receive services from a number of different sectors (e.g. social services or health services). For an inclusive education strategy to be effective it must be developed and supported in collaboration with these sectors. Close

collaboration with services for early childhood is particularly important because if impairments or developmental delays can be caught at an early stage, interventions can be made which will have an enormous impact on a child's inclusion.

There are also a number of useful resources that can support efforts to make education more inclusive.

WEBSITES

The Enabling Education Network (EENET) – **www.eenet.org.uk** – an information-sharing network on the issue of inclusive education.

Source – **www.asksource.info** – a collection of over 25,000 information resources on international health and disability.

REPORTS

P. Grimes' (2009) report *A Quality Education For All: A History of the Lao PDR Inclusive Education Project 1993-2009*, documents some of the challenges faced and lessons learned by Save the Children Norway over the course of its Inclusive Education Project in Lao PDR.
See: **www.right-to-education.org/sites/r2e.gn.apc.org/files/A%20Quality%20Education%20For%20All%20Lao%20PDR.pdf**

Save the Children UK's (2008) report *Making Schools Inclusive: How change can happen. Save the Children's experience* presents programme examples of inclusive education from 13 countries around the world.
See: **www.eenet.org.uk/downloads/Making%20schools%20inclusive%20SCUK.pdf**

The Stubbs, S./Atlas Alliance (2008) publication *Inclusive Education: Where there are few resources (revised)*, aims to provide a background and critical overview of key issues, concepts and strategies in relation to inclusive education, that are relevant to situations where economic resources and access to information is limited.
See: **www.eenet.org.uk/theory_practice/IE%20few%20resources%202008.pdf**

World Vision UK's (2007) publication *Education's Missing Millions* provides a number of recommendations as to how inclusive education can be best supported by governments through national education sector plans (ESPs) as well as by the donor community. It also considers some local and NGO initiatives to support inclusive education.
See: **http://www.worldvision.org.uk/upload/pdf/Education%27s_Missing_Millions_-_Main_Report.pdf**

UNESCO's (2009) Policy Brief on Early Childhood entitled *Inclusion of Children with Disabilities: The Early Childhood Imperative*, argues that early childhood care and education (ECCE) is a powerful means of nurturing diverse abilities and overcoming disadvantages and inequalities, and discusses main approaches to responding to developmental needs of young children with disabilities.
See: **http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001831/183156E.pdf (English)**

http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001831/183156F.pdf (French)

http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001831/183156S.pdf (Spanish)

TOOLKITS/GUIDELINES

T. Booth and M. Ainscow's (2002) *Index for Inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools*, is a set of materials to help schools reduce barriers to learning and participation for all children and young people. It also helps schools develop themselves in a way that values all students equally. It is available in over 20 languages.

See: **www.eenet.org.uk/index_inclusion/index_ inclusion.shtml**

Save the Children's (2002) publication *Schools for All: Including disabled children in education*, provides guidelines to developing inclusive education practices for education staff.

See: **www.eenet.org.uk/bibliog/scuk/schools_for_all. shtml**

UNESCO's (2004) *Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments*, contains an introductory booklet and nine booklets, each of which contains tools and activities for self-study to start creating an inclusive, learning-friendly environment (ILFE).

See: **www2.unescobkk.org/elib/ publications/032revised/index.htm**

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2009) guide *Education in Emergencies: Including Everyone*, outlines useful principles for an inclusive education approach to education in emergencies and provides advice for planning, implementing and monitoring inclusive education in emergency contexts.

See: **http://www.ineesite.org/uploads/documents/ store/INEE_pocket_guide_Final.pdf**

[1] This article draws on various briefing papers produced by WVUK and colleagues in other agencies, including Save the Children UK, Sightsavers International, Handicap International and the Enabling Education Network (EENET), as well as World Vision UK's report *Education's Missing Millions* and the 2007 review of World Vision Armenia's Inclusive Education Programme, undertaken by Ingrid Lewis of the Enabling Education Network.

[2] UNESCO (2006) *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007*.

[3] Filmer, D. (2005) *Disability, Poverty and Schooling in Developing Countries: Results from 11 Household Surveys. World Bank Discussion Paper.*

[4] Article 24 of the Convention states: "States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education." With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive, education system at all levels, and life-long learning, directed to:
  a. The full development of the human potential and sense of dignity and self worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
  b. The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;
  c. Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.

[5] This section is taken from the 2007 review of World Vision Armenia's Inclusive Education Programme, undertaken by Ingrid Lewis of the Enabling Education Network (EENET).