

Getting Disabled Children into School in Developing Countries

What donor governments must do to achieve Universal Primary Education

Briefing – April 2007

Introduction

While progress has been made in many countries towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education and the goal of Education For All by 2015, 80 million children still remain out of school¹. Of these, over one-third are estimated to be disabled children². In Africa, fewer than 10% of disabled children are in school. Other surveys suggest that only 2% of disabled children receive an education³ and that disability has a greater impact on access to education than gender, household economic status or rural/urban divide⁴.

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). This is reinforced by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, opened for signature and ratification on 30th March 2007, which places an obligation on governments to ensure an inclusive system⁵, and highlights the role of international co-operation in helping governments meet their responsibilities (Article 32).

Moreover, education for disabled children is not only a fundamental human right but 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. An estimated 82% of disabled people in developing countries live below the poverty line⁶ and 1 in 5 people living on less than a \$1 a day have a disability⁷.

In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education, fulfil human rights commitments and mitigate the sustained poverty resulting from the exclusion of disabled children from education, governments in both donor and partner

¹ Global Campaign for Education.

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

³ World Health Organisation estimate.

⁴ Filmer, D. (2005) *Disability, Poverty and Schooling in Developing Countries: Results from 11 Household Surveys*. World Bank Discussion Paper.

⁵ 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.

⁶ UN estimate.

⁷ World Bank estimate.

countries must commit to making inclusive strategies central to education plans and aid packages.

Inclusive Education – Raising Quality for All

Though the focus here is on disabled children as a particularly marginalized group in current education initiatives, inclusive education strategies improve learning for *all* children – a key issue given the pressing need to focus on 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’.⁸

Inclusive education in Malawi: Children learning together

James Kanoute makes the one kilometre walk to Mbavi Primary School every morning with his friend Amadu. James became blind when he was two years old after contracting measles. He comes from a very poor family, living only with his mother who doesn't work and relies on family support. Now fourteen, he has been going to the Primary School for five years as part of the Malawi Inclusive Education Programme.

James' education has released him to new opportunities. He's keen to learn and is fast catching up with his friends, and he's now looking forward to starting secondary school.

James' mother, Laje Petulo is delighted with his progress. “James is very happy going to school. He used to just sit hunched up waiting for his friends to come home from school. Now he goes to school with his friends. Learning with sighted children is good for both him and the other children. They don't think blindness is anything special. They don't discriminate at all. This has helped him feel normal and the other children accept him as normal.”

(Seeing a Future, Sightsavers International 2005)

What Donors Can Do to Make Education for Disabled Children a Reality in Developing Countries⁹

1. Provide long-term, predictable financing to basic education through the Fast Track Initiative and ensure that macroeconomic constraints do not prevent governments from training and paying teachers sustainably.
2. Support national education plans which have strategies to overcome the exclusion of disabled children from education: withhold support for education plans which do not.

In particular:

- Recognise the vital role that teachers play in bringing disabled children into education and call for all pre- and in-service training of teachers in developing countries to concentrate on clear, accessible and participatory teaching focussed on the needs of each child.

⁸ All examples taken from the Enabling Education Network – www.eenet.org.uk.

⁹ These recommendations are adapted from a Save the Children UK (2007) briefing entitled ‘Achieving inclusive education in developing countries: What donors must do’.

- Request consultation with disabled people’s organisations on national education plans.
 - Require plans to make schools¹⁰ and learning materials accessible for disabled children.
 - Champion education for disabled children in the Fast Track Initiative process, and work with the FTI to ensure that all plans approved for funding have an explicit focus on inclusion and disability.
3. Strengthen governments’ capacity to:
- Systematically monitor how many disabled children are in and out of school.
 - Reform assessment and performance management systems, so that teachers are rewarded for supporting disabled children, and not penalised for working with children who may not score highly in exams.
 - Orient school leadership and communities that all children have the right to education.
 - Make existing specialist education expertise accessible equitably to schools¹¹, and enable teachers to share ideas on meeting the needs of disabled children.
 - Develop early childhood care and education and employ an inter-sectoral approach, including links with community based rehabilitation schemes and school health programmes.
4. Request that legislation is in place to counter discrimination against disabled people, and that guidance and monitoring exist to aid implementation.
5. Invest in local civil society capacity to represent disabled children’s voices and rights in education and development processes.

For further guidance on promoting inclusion at a national level, please see the recent report of the UN Independent Rapporteur on the Right to Education entitled ‘The right to education of persons with disabilities’, presented at the fourth session of the Human Rights Council¹².

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¹⁰ ‘It is far more cost-effective to modify plans for a new building at the outset than to adapt an existing building retrospectively to make it accessible. .. providing full access .. from the outset costs an average additional 1.12 per cent. Oosters, B. (2005) ‘Looking with a disability lens at the disaster caused by the Tsunami in South-East Asia’.

¹¹ Linking school clusters to pedagogical institutes with special educational needs expertise is one such approach.

¹² <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/4session/A.HRC.4.29.pdf>