

University of Malawi



CHANCELLOR COLLEGE  
Faculty of Education



## *'Making Education Inclusive'*



**Conference at the University of Malawi,  
Chancellor College, 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> September 2010**

**Report by Esther Grieder**

## Introduction

The 'Making Education Inclusive' conference brought together educational practitioners from Malawi and across southern Africa, to consider how education can be improved to accommodate the needs of all pupils.

Hosted by the University of Malawi (Chancellor College) Faculty of Education in partnership with Canon Collins Trust, the conference aimed to explore the challenges we face, share best practice and devise ways to pro-actively increase inclusion in education. The concept of inclusion is that all pupils have the right to receive education appropriate to their specific learning needs through the mainstream school system – including those with disabilities, learning difficulties or experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. 'Inclusion' recognises and values difference, and aims to adapt to pupils' needs rather than expecting them to adapt to the system.



There is an urgent need to ensure that the rights of disadvantaged children to equal educational opportunities are observed. Whilst Malawi is committed to inclusive education as a signatory to the 1994 Salamanca Statement, converting policy to practice has proved a challenge, particularly given the omission of disability and special needs under the Millennium Development Goals. The drive for universal primary education has seen school enrolment rise dramatically in Malawi, but these advances have been accompanied by a decrease in educational quality due to enlarged class sizes and a 'one size fits all' approach which neglects individual learning needs. As a result, many children are in school but unable to participate effectively, and still more remain completely excluded from the education system. Against this backdrop, the conference aimed to explore how the Malawian education system can be more closely tailored to its users' needs.

## Activities

Around fifty educational practitioners attended the conference over three days at the University of Malawi's Chancellor College. Among them were representatives of the Chancellor College Faculty of Education, the Ministry of Education, specialist institutions including Montford and Domasi Colleges, Malawi National Assessment Board, Malawi Institute of Education, Mzuzu University and Lilongwe University of Science and Technology. Also present were representatives from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho and Namibia – educationalists invited from Canon Collins Trust's network.

The conference was structured as follows:

- Day 1: What is inclusive education and what are the challenges?
- Day 2: Stakeholder mobilisation for inclusive education
- Day 3: Influencing policy and practice

Presentation topics ranged from specific research projects to international educational policy and qualitative accounts of the importance of attitude and self esteem. Presentation styles were also varied, with individuals drawing on data, observation and personal experience in order to create a picture of the current challenges for inclusion. Break-out groups allowed for more detailed discussion of specific needs and stakeholder groups, and during the final session we documented our learning and set action points as individuals and as a conference. The full programme is included as Appendix 1, and write-up of the break-out groups as Appendix 2.

## Findings and recommendations

### The Need for Inclusion

The conference reiterated the clear need for education to be made relevant to the needs of individuals. On the basis that each pupil is different we can no longer pursue a generalist approach, although it was acknowledged that in a very small minority of cases impairments are severe that they cannot be accommodated within the mainstream system. Delegates recognised education as a tool of equality and social justice, which must be available to all if society is to be equal and just.

Several presentations referred to the history of 'special' education, the formation of specialist institutions for visual and hearing impairments, and recent attempts at integration. It was agreed that these initiatives were in keeping with the values of their times, leading us to this juncture at which we can embrace difference and promote inclusion in mainstream schooling. Zimbabwean delegate Kudzai Shava rallied the conference with a call for urgency - "*the time for change is now!*"

### Converting policy into practice

A repeated theme of discussion was the disconnect between policy and practice, and the inappropriateness of inclusive education theory to the realities of overcrowded Malawian classrooms. The Malawian government is committed to offering support to all children through the mainstream education system, a pledge it has formalised through ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), its own education policy and the establishment of a separate special needs education unit. The conference allowed for frank discussion of the challenges faced in implementing these commitments on the ground.

Lack of coordination between authorities and institutions was identified as a significant barrier to inclusion. For example, improved communication between schools and health authorities would help teachers to understand their pupils' educational needs, examination boards could be more transparent about their special needs policies, and better communication between the Complementary Basic Education programme and mainstream schools would ensure pupils transfer to the relevant level. Opening channels of communication between institutions would no doubt have repercussions for the effectiveness of the education system as whole.

There is also an urgent need to engage stakeholders such as teachers and parents, in order to unite opinion and action behind inclusion. Negativity and hostility to difference among these groups were seen as the result of ignorance and feelings of helplessness due to lack of support. A specific example given was the need to train parents of deaf children to use sign language, as many children are completely unable to communicate with their parents and experience social interaction only through specialist schools.

There was in-depth discussion as to whether our challenges stem from poverty or attitude. Although resource shortages are indeed severe, it was agreed that much can be achieved through positive and pro-active attitudes. At classroom level the key is an ongoing process of assessing members of the class, identifying the challenges they face and finding ways to respond. It was agreed that more practical training would assist teachers to be more confident and positive about special needs.

The conference strongly recommended that increased resources be directed towards research and data collection to inform relevant policy design. The government currently records those with special needs within the school system (69,943 in 2007), but there is no data to indicate how many are out of school or the barriers to their participation. Government support for think-tanks and research bodies would inform the development of more relevant and effective policy. Delegates were concerned that there is a lack of information about the channels through which government education policy can be influenced by researchers and NGOs.

Identifying challenges was a useful exercise which enabled us to draw out commonly experienced barriers to inclusion. There is a clear need for policy-making to become a two-way process, whereby the challenges experienced by stakeholders on the ground are reflected and addressed in local and national educational initiatives.

### **Sharing best practice in promoting inclusion**

Delegates shared examples of where specific projects or approaches have successfully increased accessibility and participation. Presentations by Grace Chiuye and Dinah Katonda showcased Malawi's Complementary Basic Education programme, which enables children who have dropped out of school to reintegrate into the education system via a three-year intervention course.

The conference heard from Francis Simui, a Zambian educationalist who explained the benefits of Collaborative Action Research as a technique to simultaneously train teachers and develop inclusive classroom methodologies. This approach answers the identified need for training to be practical and relevant to actual classroom environments.

Kudzai Shava from Zimbabwe explained the need for 'universal design' to create products and systems which are adapted for all users, while Zelma Mokobane from South Africa talked about the importance of terminology (*differently* rather than *disabled*) to foster more positive attitudes towards special needs. Richard Finch from Namibia explained the importance of giving a voice to those with special needs,

enabling them to share their stories and draw strength and confidence from mutual experience, as well as celebrating difference.

We also heard from David Njaidi, Deputy Director for Special Needs Education at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, about current policies to promote inclusion. These included itinerant teachers, resource centres and the incorporation of a special needs element in teacher training. The Ministry has established a special needs unit tasked with implementing these initiatives.



*Above: Zelma Mokobane's presentation is translated into sign language*

There were many examples of individuals and groups taking the initiative to promote inclusion and creating their own best practice. Jenifer Ngwira explained the responses of teachers at Ekwendeni Primary School to the needs of children with visual impairments, and it was agreed that mothers' groups have proved effective in promoting girls' participation. NGOs have been at the forefront of innovation in inclusion, and it was agreed that local successes should be celebrated, publicised and replicated wherever possible.

### **Engaging stakeholders**

Uniting stakeholders behind inclusion was identified as key to success. Parents, teachers, communities, donors and governments, not to mention the pupils themselves, all require a certain amount of knowledge and skills in order to promote inclusion and tackle stigma associated with disability and special needs. It was agreed that future conferences could usefully include representatives from other disciplines within the university to consider how they include students with special needs. Again NGOs with strong community relationships have been pioneers in this respect.

There was much discussion over who should take responsibility for addressing the challenges associated with inclusive education. As a conference we found we over-used the term 'they' to refer to those responsible for failings in the education system, without specifying exactly who. In the final session we agreed that as educational practitioners we ourselves are key stakeholders with influence and agency, and our activities and advocacy can improve educational quality. There is a need for sustained effort and commitment by individuals and groups to shape an education system which is accessible to all.



*Above: A break-out group discusses gender issues in inclusive education*

### **The way forward**

The final session was facilitated by Richard Finch and enabled us to reflect upon our discussions and set action points to quantify our progress going forward. The emphasis was on formulating achievable and time-bound targets in order that the conference has a practical as well as theoretical impact.

Delegates formulated an imaginative range of personal goals to be achieved within the next month and the next six months, including the following examples.

- Propose a special needs education centre for Mzuzu University
- Present conference findings to teacher colleagues and school communities
- Research how many students with disabilities are enrolled at Chancellor College and produce a survey of their educational experiences
- Apply for school sponsorship to hold a stakeholder meeting promoting inclusion
- Hold a meeting with the new Special Needs Education Officer at work to find ways of coordinating
- Contact a specific conference delegate to find ways of working together in future

As a group we agreed to maintain communication, and several ideas were suggested to help sustain the momentum of the conference:

- Communicate via email
- Display conference papers on a webpage on the University of Malawi site
- Disseminate conference report and papers via the Enabling Education Network (EENET)
- Submit a list of policy requests to the Ministry of Education
- Submit our views on inclusion to the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) project, currently being established in Malawi

## **Conclusions**

The conference exposed a great deal of passion for inclusion among educational managers, academics, students and policy-makers – extremely heartening for the continued improvement of educational opportunities both in Malawi and across the southern African region.

It was evident from our discussions that the challenges for inclusion still outweigh the solutions. However, by identifying challenges we gained solidarity and a united sense of purpose, and took another step towards improving practice. We made connections and shared experience from across the southern African region and formulated specific action points to follow up through our networks and workplaces. We presented opinions to the Ministry of Education and created a dialogue which may open channels to influence policy and budgeting in future. The group pledged to maintain contact as a regional inclusive education network whose communication will be facilitated by Bob Chulu at the Faculty of Education and by Canon Collins Trust.

## **Thank you**

Canon Collins Trust would like to thank our partners at Chancellor College, and particularly Bob Chulu, for hosting the *Making Education Inclusive* conference and making it such a successful event.

We would like to thank our donor Maggie Hughes, who has worked tirelessly to raise funding for scholarships through the Faculty of Education in memory of her husband James Learmonth. We would also like to thank Michael Bird, who has raised funds in memory of his wife Elizabeth which will be invaluable in helping us sustain the partnership in future. Finally, we would like to thank the Commonwealth Foundation for their financial support without which foreign delegates would not have been able to attend.

## Appendix 1: Programme

### ***Making Education Inclusive*** **University of Malawi, 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> September 2010**

#### **Day 1: Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2010**

Chairs: Morning: Bob Wajizigha Chulu, Afternoon: Joseph Chomombo

- 8:30am** Registration
- 9:00am** *Welcoming remarks*  
Dean of Education, Dr Mercy Kazima Kashindo
- 9:10am** *Opening remarks*  
The Principal of Chancellor College, Dr Chris Kamlongera
- 9:20am** Group photograph
- 9:30am** *The need for inclusive education: a global perspective*  
Dannie Soko
- 10:15am** *Issues of inclusion in education: what are the policy options for Malawi?*  
Joseph Chimombo
- 10:45am** *Alternative education for rural youth: lessons from Complementary Basic Education*  
Grace Chiuye
- 11:15am** *How do we define special needs and inclusive education? The Zimbabwean case*  
Kudzai Shava
- 12pm** Lunch
- 1:30pm** Brainstorming and break-out groups: types of special needs and the challenges they pose
- 2:30pm** Break
- 2:45pm** Reporting back from break-out groups and discussion

#### **Day 2: Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2010**

Chairs: Morning: Alick Chavuta, Afternoon: Esther Kumkwezu

- 8:30am** Introduction to the day's topic
- 8:45am** *Preparing teachers for inclusive education: the story of Montford College*  
Lazarous Thom
- 9:15am** *Job satisfaction among special needs teachers of public primary schools in Malawi: what makes them love their job?*  
Vincent Mitambo
- 10:30am** Break
- 10:45am** *Giving a voice, raising self esteem and promoting empowerment*  
Richard Finch
- 12:15pm** Lunch

- 1:30pm**      *How regular primary school teachers teach children with visual impairments at Ekwendeni Primary School*  
Jenifer Ngwira
- 2:15pm**      *Practical ways of changing attitudes and behaviours to make schools more inclusive*  
Zelma Mokobane
- 3pm**              Break
- 3:15pm**      Brainstorming and break-out groups: stakeholder engagement
- 3:45pm**      Report back on challenges and best practice

**Day 3: Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2010**  
Chair: Bob Wajizigha Chulu

- 8:30am**      Introduction to the day's topic
- 9am**              *Implementation of non-formal education policy in Malawi: the integration of Complementary Basic Education learners into formal primary schools*  
Dinah Katonda
- 10am**              Break
- 10:15am**      *Strategies for Inclusive Education in Malawi*  
David Njaiidi, Ministry of Education
- 11am**              Discussion and question and answer session
- 12pm**              Lunch
- 1:30pm**      *Inclusive education in Malawian primary schools*  
Alick Chavuta
- 2:30pm**      *Participation of special needs students in national assessments*  
Bob Wajizigha Chulu
- 3pm**              Break
- 3:15pm**      Facilitated discussion: lessons learned and ways of working together  
Richard Finch
- 4:15pm**      Closing remarks



## **Appendix 2: Flip charts from break-out groups**

### **Session 1: Types of special needs and the challenges we face**

#### **Group 1: Gender and inclusion**

##### **Challenges:**

- Harassment
- Stereotyped subjects, ie curricula myths
- Learning environment – furniture, sanitation, distance to school
- Cultural beliefs and values
- Domestic chores
- Priorities – ie which child is chosen for schooling
- Socio-economic factors
- Early marriages
- Teenage pregnancies
- Child labour
- Labour migrants in Mzimba and Mangozi

##### **Resources and development needed:**

- Financial and skilled human resources
- Civic education
- User-friendly school environment
- Rights-based approach
- Effective curriculum delivery
- Gender sensitivity
- Community involvement
- School infrastructure such as toilets, classrooms, libraries, desks, hostels
- Reinforcement of child protection act
- Livelihoods programmes and safety nets

##### **Best practices:**

- Community involvement – mothers' groups and PTAs
- Girls' education movement

#### **Group 2: Visual impairment and inclusion**

##### **Challenges:**

- Appropriate method of instruction
- Teacher preparation/training
- Lack of resources to enhance education for people with visual impairments
- Lack of political and bureaucratic will
- Overprotection which denies visually impaired people the opportunity to gain certain skills

##### **Resources and developments needed:**

- Human resources
- Trained personnel with the right attitude
- Material resources
- Specific policies relating to education of the visually impaired
- The use/widespread adoption of universal design

##### **Best practices:**

- Universal design – including the necessary adaptations for visual impairments in all gadgets and equipment
- Special education facilities such as resource centres
- Parental involvement in the education of their children (IEPs)

### **Group 3: HIV/AIDS (OVCs) and inclusion**

#### **Challenges:**

- Stigma
- Discrimination
- Malnutrition/poverty
- Abuse
- Risk of HIV infection
- Emotional and behavioural disorders
- School dropouts
- Low self-esteem
- Child-headed families without parental guidance

#### **Resources and developments needed:**

- Care and support
- Psychosocial support to meet mental, social and spiritual needs
- HIV/AIDS education
- Life skills
- Home-based care
- School feeding programmes
- Universal precautions
- Supportive environments – schools and communities
- Guidance and counselling
- Access to health services
- Flexible approach in curriculum and assessment
- Learning materials and uniforms

#### **Best practice**

- Training of teachers to be able to offer care and support and to be resilient in the face of HIV/AIDS
- Involvement of all stakeholders in the fight against HIV/AIDS
- Peer support
- Flexible approach (extra to teaching classes – pastoral support)
- Access to resources
- Intervention programmes for teachers, parents and care-givers
- Wide knowledge and research about the pandemic
- Improving attitudes and perceptions of the pandemic

### **Group 4: Hearing impairment and inclusion**

#### **Challenges:**

- Communication
- Too few sign language interpreters
- Negative attitude from the school community as a whole
- Lack of hearing aids
- Teachers not trained in sign language

#### **Resources and developments needed:**

- Finances
- Equipment
- More teachers trained in sign language
- Awareness campaigns and development
- Training more sign language interpreters
- Sign language as part of the curriculum
- Early identification and intervention
- Policy framework to be supporting
- In-service training for all educators in system

**Best practice:**

- Community-based support systems **implemented**
- Itinerant programme of specialist teachers visiting schools regularly
- Learners seated at the front, teachers speaking more slowly, keeping eye contact, flashing words together with pictures and writing words on the board

**Session 2: Engaging stakeholders to promote inclusion****Group 1: Engaging government for inclusion****Challenges:**

- Lack of awareness from government because special needs education is not their priority
- Lack of training
- Communication difficulties due to bureaucracy
- Communication with decision-makers is difficult
- Negative attitudes

**Resources and developments needed:**

- Civil society and other stakeholders' advocacy

**Best practices:**

- Using the media to highlight the positive stories
- Engaging specialist teachers to sensitise the communities
- Developing professional social networks
- NGOs forming partnerships with government

**Group 2: Engaging communities for inclusion****Challenges:**

- Resistance and desire to stick to old ways
- Lack of awareness
- Communication that is effective
- Misconceptions, eg how an impaired child should be treated
- Cultural beliefs and values
- Limited resources

**Resources and developments needed:**

- Community civic education programmes, eg village meetings, radio, PTAs, newspapers
- Human resources, persons to talk about in inclusive education
- Financial resources to support the programmes
- Initiatives to strengthen already existing programmes

**Best practices:**

- Promoting community ownership of programmes by involving them in planning, implementing and monitoring
- Support and involvement of all forms

**Group 3: Engaging teachers for inclusion****Challenges:**

- Lack of training
- Lack of resources
- Lack of recognition and promotion
- Negative attitudes
- Type of training
- Communities' attitudes
- High pupil teacher ratio

**Resources and developments needed:**

- Increased funding
- Inclusive environment
- Training that caters for all special needs students
- In-service training
- Promotion
- Awareness campaigns and empowerment
- Support
- Using peers

**Group 4: Giving a voice to those with special needs****Challenges:**

- Lack of confidence
- Isolation
- Communication
- Fear of not being accepted
- Discrimination
- Lack of appropriate for a
- Need for early identification / diagnosis

**Resources and developments needed:**

- Community involvement, for example street committees starting with families
- Government involvement – interdepartmental coordination and record-keeping
- Resources and training – classrooms, trained educators, specific budget
- Availability of information
- Training for parents – eg sign language. Parental involvement

**Best practices**

- Involvement from organisations, eg pilot programmes run by NGOs
- Training colleges – part of the training involves the idea of giving voice to those with special needs
- Secure livelihood programmes
- Sensitisation programmes for parents and communities
- Projects such as Look at Me which directly enable people with special needs to tell their stories and put across their views

**Session 3: Lessons learned and ways of working together****Group 1:****Lessons learned:**

1. The basis of inclusive education is the change in attitude, ie considering inclusive education as an open system. Inclusive education vs inclusive schooling. Re-engineering the education system.
2. Teacher training must be all-inclusive to meet every student's need, eg inclusion of sign language in the curriculum.
3. There's a need for increased funding for human resource training, infrastructure development and teaching resources.

**Ways of working together:**

Networking through 1) emails, 2) visits

Theme for 2012:

“Turning impossibilities into possibilities: the future of inclusive education.”

**Group 2:****Lessons learned:**

1. Mandatory **practical** training module at higher education institutions on inclusive education
2. Stakeholder involvement to introduce and implement change

3. Improved coordination between departments and disciplines

**Ways of working together:**

- Having a webpage on the University of Malawi's website to display papers and discuss ideas
- Produce a condensed list of policy requests for the Ministry of Education

**Theme for 2012:** "Inclusive education: translating theory into practice".

**Group 3:**

**Lessons learned:**

1. Parents' involvement in the instruction
2. Sensitisation at school, community, district and national level
3. Develop new modes of professional development and new professional networks

**Ways of working together:**

- Professional dialogue/networks among conference participants
- Collaborative research – identifying and conducting research on common issues in our countries.

**Topic for 2012:** "Inclusive education in action: every child can learn"

**Group 4:**

**Lessons learned:**

1. Strategies of implementing inclusive education: research, collaborative action, community mobilisation
2. Knowledge of what challenges people with special needs face
3. Something is being done, however there are challenges. Hence, there is a need for a coordinated approach and use of best practice

**Ways of working together:**

- Organise a regional committee in making education inclusive in southern Africa
- Developing a website to disseminate information, or an e-newsletter or journal for southern Africa

**Theme for 2012:** "Inclusive education in practice: experiences from southern Africa."