

# Meeting the educational needs of children with disabilities in South Asia: A gap analysis covering Bhutan and the Maldives





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# Foreword

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Children with disabilities are among the most excluded from education. While availability of accurate data remains a challenge, various estimates indicate children with disabilities could easily make up a third of out-of-school children globally. Those who manage to enrol in school continue to face exclusion and marginalization. This is due to lack of appropriate facilities and learning materials, lack of trained teachers to meet special educational needs, inflexibility of the school system, stigma and a host of other factors.

The good news is that governments in the region have shown strong political will and commitment to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities.

Working with the Enabling Education Network (EENET), UNICEF examined how the educational needs of children with disabilities were being met, and what prospects there are for UNICEF to work with national governments and development partners to implement inclusive education policies. The assessment focused on Bhutan and the Maldives, both of which in the last ten years have already undertaken substantive work in the area of inclusive education for children with disabilities.

This report describes the process, findings and recommendations from the needs assessment in Bhutan and the Maldives. A separate assessment will be carried out in Bangladesh. The assessment also complements the Rights, Education and Protection (REAP) project for children with disabilities, which is funded and implemented as a collaboration between Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and UNICEF. The report includes several recommendations linked to improving access, policy and legal accountability, early childhood development (ECD) and early diagnosis, assessment (school tests), teacher training and motivation, school quality, collaborative practices and areas for further research.

The report also show a number of noteworthy practices on inclusive education for children with disabilities in Bhutan and the Maldives. It is hoped that this report will be relevant for other countries in the region and will inform policy and practice to make education systems truly open and inclusive for ALL children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.



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# Acknowledgements

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# Glossary and abbreviations

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These definitions are taken from a set of agreed regional definitions for South Asia. The definitions were developed at the final action planning workshop for the gap analysis project held in December 2013 in Bhutan (UNICEF ROSA, 2014). The definitions reflected government and NGO staff's understandings of key terms for the education of children with disabilities.

**Special educational needs (SEN)** – teaching and education methods for children with disabilities or other needs not currently met by most schools.

**Exclusion** – a child is not included in education, whether or not they are in school; no efforts are made to meet their educational needs.

**Segregation** – where disabled children are educated separately from others, whether in the same school or in a separate institution.

**Integration** – bringing disabled children into schools without making other changes to meet their educational needs.

**Inclusive education/inclusion (IE)** – where the education system and the school environment adapts to the needs of all children.

**Mainstreaming** – The process of getting ordinary schools to the stage where they accept and include disabled children.

**Segregated education** – where disabled children are separate from other children and receive specialist teaching. This may be within a mainstream school or in a special school.

**Special schools** – segregated schools where disabled children are educated.

**Special units** – segregated teaching groups in separate spaces within a school, i.e. separate classes for disabled children.

**SEN teachers/resource teachers** – teachers who work in mainstream schools, special schools or resource centres to focus on the needs of disabled children and other excluded children.

**Resource centres** – groups of SEN teachers who support teachers and schools to use inclusive education approaches. These may be based within schools or in separate units. The SEN teachers usually visit surrounding schools to offer training, advice, lessons for disabled children and equipment.

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# Acronyms

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CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CFS	Child-Friendly Schools
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EENET	Enabling Education Network
GCSE	General Certificate for Secondary Education
GNH	Gross National Happiness
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IE	Inclusive Education
IEPs	Individualized Education Plans
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MNU	Maldives National University
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NIE	National Institute of Education
PEDP	Primary Education Development Plan
REAP	Rights, Education and Protection project for children with disabilities
RFA	Rapid Functional Assessment
RNDA	Rapid Neurodevelopmental Assessment
ROSA	(UNICEF) Regional Office for South Asia
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SIP	School Improvement Plan
TRC	Teacher Resource Centre
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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# Executive Summary

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This report describes a gap analysis and needs assessment commissioned by UNICEF and carried out by consultancy group EENET CIC around the potential to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities in Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Maldives. The UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) requested EENET CIC to investigate how the educational needs of children with disabilities are being met, and what prospects there are for UNICEF to help government implement inclusive education policy. The assessment also complements the work done in Bhutan as part of the Rights, Education and Protection (REAP) project for children with disabilities, which is funded from and implemented as a collaboration between Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and UNICEF.

It was expected that findings will be relevant for other countries in the region and can inform UNICEF's approach to promoting inclusive education for children with disabilities in several countries. The needs assessment was designed to support the capacity of national partners and UNICEF staff to review educational practice from a disability and inclusion perspective, and to plan joint action in response to challenges. After the assessment was conducted, a sub-regional workshop was held in Paro, Bhutan in December 2013 to enable Ministry of Education (MoE) staff, UNICEF and NGOs to process learning from the needs assessment and come up with shared action plans for strengthening the education of disabled children based on the assessment's findings.

A central question for the needs assessment was, 'How can government, civil society and UNICEF in three countries of South Asia work to successfully implement policy which includes children with disabilities and special needs in education?' All three countries have made significant efforts to improve the access of children with disabilities to education, mostly within the last ten years.

Due to various reasons, it became necessary to move the Bangladesh country visit to 2014. Therefore this version of the report focuses on Bhutan and the Maldives. Annex 1 contains a brief situation analysis and action plan produced at the Paro workshop by a team from the Bangladesh Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) and UNICEF Bangladesh.

## Methods

The needs assessment commenced with a literature review of policy and practice documents from each country related to global learning on inclusive education policy and practice. Subsequent country visits involved observation of schools and classes where disabled children are being taught, combined with semi-structured interview and focus group discussions with a range of stakeholders in the education of children with disabilities. These stakeholders included parents, children, head teachers, special educational needs (SEN) teachers, mainstream teachers, MoE officials and NGOs.

## Assessment framework

The literature review led to the development of a simple framework to guide country gap analysis, focusing on four key indicators of an inclusive education system:

- a. Learner-centred teaching is well established in teacher training and management.
- b. Schools and teachers (and early childhood care and health agencies) are linked to resources and expertise on disability and special educational needs.
- c. There is a clear accountability framework for ensuring access to inclusive education.
- d. The assessment system promotes flexible assessment and testing.

The subsequent country visits also revealed the value of investing in assessment and referral for management of disabilities in early childhood, in which both Bhutan and the Maldives are making strong progress.

## Overview of findings

The literature review and country visits for Bhutan and the Maldives revealed that both countries were making substantial efforts to change their education systems to better include children with disabilities.

New documents which only became available during the country visit significantly strengthened the Maldives' policy and accountability framework for inclusive education (IE), offering useful ideas for how IE policy could be strengthened in other countries. A strong focus on learner-centred teaching and emerging willingness to adapt formal assessment offered very good potential for including disabled children more effectively in more schools. Several groups of teachers in special education units within schools had developed successful strategies for helping disabled children catch up with the curriculum and meet personalised learning goals.

In Bhutan, while the legislative and policy framework is not yet that well-established, a wide range of technical improvements had recently been made to teacher training and practice which, while not yet reaching the majority of schools, provided a good starting point for upgrading inclusive teaching. Excellent collaboration between health and education ministries and other agencies have led to a new rapid assessment system for early diagnosis and referral of young children affected by disability. This system offers useful learning for other countries, particularly those with remote populations.

MoE staff in both countries had been very effective in using their personal and professional networks to share ideas and practices among teachers and policy makers. With additional planning support, this could have been built on more strategically.

The openness and willingness of stakeholders to listen to each other and work together appeared to be one of the most important factors in making change happen. The relatively small size of both countries may be a factor in such positive collaboration. In particular, there are already positive links and networks of support within the MoE, and between the MoE and other education stakeholders and other government departments. UNICEF has a close and positive working relationship with MoEs in both countries and has been credited with supporting collaborative efforts around inclusive education.

Both countries were experiencing problems in scaling up the significant innovations and good practices which had been piloted in schools. This was partly due to challenging conditions in each country for bringing teachers and other actors together, but also appeared linked to using a 'pilot school' based approach without clear and costed plans for spreading practice from pilot schools to other schools. There are lessons here for how UNICEF supports IE initiatives in the region. It would be helpful if pilot project-based work funded by UNICEF included holistic strategies to replicate and scale-up projects in a cost effective way taking into account the country context.

Other key challenges included a lack of understanding on how to strengthen schools so that child-friendly, inclusive approaches become normal. There is also a need to show what the future for disabled young people can be after school.

## Education access recommendations

### Bhutan

An increasing demand for inclusion stretches resources, space and capacity presenting challenges for the relatively few inclusive schools in the country. There is a clear need to offer extra help with training, staffing and material resources (including the provision of more space and facilities for teaching and learning) to such inclusive schools as their student numbers grow. Although this can be seen as a challenge, it does present opportunities for linking

inclusive schools with other local schools that have not yet begun (or are not as far along in) their journeys towards inclusion. Such linking can allow schools to support each other by sharing training and experience, pooling resources, etc.

If the current form of school provision - in which model special schools are meant to support mainstream schools in the same local area to become more inclusive - is to be continued in Bhutan, the relationship between special and inclusive schools needs to be looked at carefully. It is important that such relationships be mutually beneficial, drawing on the strengths of both the inclusive and special schools. The expertise of the special schools should be used in a resource capacity to support nascent inclusive schools to include, not just integrate, children with disabilities (see Annex 2).

It cannot be taken for granted that special schools will necessarily be able to support inclusive schools to be more inclusive of children with disabilities (or support mainstream schools to become inclusive schools) without on-going support from the government, NGOs, UNICEF and Community Based Organisations (CBOs). This necessitates a coordinated effort between governmental, non-governmental and CBOs, and the careful monitoring and planning of activities for example, exchange visits for teachers, organised training, collaborative activities for teachers, children and parents.

### Maldives

To effectively include all children, including those with disabilities, in the Maldives education system, it is important for all schools to understand that it is their duty to admit all children with disabilities on the same basis as others. This means that if children are brought to a local school for enrolment, then the school is required to welcome them without question. However, it also needs to be understood that schools need support to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities. Ensuring that principals, deputy heads and teachers receive training to this effect will be important.

UNICEF and the National Institute of Education (NIE) should undertake detailed planning on how to use 'pilot' SEN schools to spread good inclusive practices to other schools using the Imaadhuddin SEN specialist pilot school approach of sharing advice and experience rather than creating hubs wherein children are expected to travel long distances to reach. This will help more disabled children stay in school.

## Policy and legal accountability recommendations

### Bhutan

It is recommended that the language and terminology around SEN and inclusion be discussed openly during meetings/workshops/trainings so that common understandings can be reached.

This is also part of the awareness raising/advocacy that needs to be done to further develop inclusive education.

Alongside a review of language and terminology, it is important that existing policy be reviewed and changed or adapted using an 'inclusive lens', drawing on Bhutan's policy makers increasing knowledge and experience of inclusive education.

It is also important that a proper budget allocated to implement social and educational policies related to inclusion.

### **Maldives**

It has been suggested that a policy be implemented to pay the school fees of children currently enrolled in private SEN schools or institutions because they have been denied places in government schools. This should be limited to a maximum of two years to allow for a reasonable period of preparation for all schools to admit all children with disabilities (including those currently in private schools).

It is also recommended that the IE policy be updated in 2014 with specific statements that schools cannot refuse access to any child and that the MoE has a duty to ensure inclusive access to examinations for all children as they complete their basic education.

It is also recommended for the government and the private sector to facilitate funding for NGOs/CBOs to provide rehabilitation and learning activities outside of and in addition to the normal school curriculum, particularly for young adults.

## **ECD and early diagnosis recommendations**

### **Bhutan**

Bhutan should continue to share its successes around assessment of disabilities in early childhood as part of the two-stage disability survey linked to the national Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and development of the Rapid Neurodevelopmental Assessment (RNDA) tools, and subsequent follow-up support provided to children with disabilities.

### **Maldives**

UNICEF could provide significant technical support to help the Maldives develop early childhood development (ECD) services which stimulate and support children with disabilities, and which act as a basis for bringing these children into the education system.

## Assessment recommendations

### Maldives

Advice for Maldives educators is needed in the area of exam accessibility, as well as on the issue of how to prepare students with disabilities who have missed out on education in the past for exams. Particular attention is needed for hearing impaired students who have not had the opportunity to develop the complex levels of Dhivethi (the national language) and English written languages needed for examinations.

Making individual requests to adapting examination standards is not appropriate. More focused planning by teachers to boost gaps in students' foundational learning skills will be needed, particularly where students are approaching exams and have already missed schooling. This will need clear and collaborative planning across all teachers working with such students, so that teaching time is used effectively to fill key learning gaps, and to cover the main aspects of the exam curriculum needed to get the three General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE) passes required for further study.

More thinking is needed on the variety of roles that SEN teachers can play in improving teaching practice across and between schools, rather than only running direct SEN classes. It will be important to bring SEN teachers together and support them to work in different ways in different contexts.

## Teacher training recommendations

### Bhutan

Pre-service teacher education should offer a more comprehensive IE programme to all teacher education students. Different opportunities for doing so exist alongside the potential for developing more specialised modules to accompany a broad programme on IE.

Bhutan should exert additional efforts to align pre-service and in-service teacher training on inclusive education. It is also essential for the country to develop a high quality programme of local in-service teacher training that utilises local resources instead of relying on sending teachers abroad.

A better system of monitoring and support for existing in-service teacher education programmes is recommended, although it is understood that this will take time to develop.

Additional questions which need to be considered in regards to pre- and in-service teacher education and training include:

- Although there is much training to be had abroad, what about local training? What exists? What can be further developed, tapping into existing networks of support?
- What are the core teacher competencies that need to be promoted and supported through teacher education as a basis for all inclusion (e.g. teacher research/reflection, child-centred teaching and learning, positive discipline, differentiated approaches to teaching/learning, etc.)?

### Maldives

Development of modular in-service SEN/IE courses based on the previous successful certificate in SEN developed locally should be continued.

## Teacher motivation recommendations

### Bhutan

It is recommended that the MoE in consultation with other education stakeholders (including the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Finance) continue to develop strategies for recruiting, motivating and supporting teachers and ultimately retaining high-quality teachers in the profession. Flexibility is key and the more (and varied) opportunities teachers have for professional development, the greater the likelihood of retaining them in the profession. Support also needs to be considered for school management.

For practical support in schools and classrooms, it is recommended that work on recruiting, training and placing teaching assistants in classrooms be pursued (parents should also be considered for these positions).

### Maldives

Policy commitments to offer incentives for SEN teachers' extra time and effort should be continued and implemented. It is also recommended to set up information sharing networks and recognition mechanisms for all teachers who work on issues of inclusion.

## School quality recommendations

### Bhutan

There are several key issues/questions that it will be important for Bhutan to consider as it continues to develop inclusive education in the country. These include:

- What is the vision for rolling out 20 further model schools? What will be the relationship between these schools and other local schools and school communities and other social services (e.g. health)?

- What of the other schools currently trying inclusion? What do we know about their experiences (e.g. challenges/needs/barriers, successes/strategies/solutions)? Gathering research on this is particularly important as it will support a necessary culture of promoting inclusive education based on existing resources.
- Care needs to be given towards promoting some schools over others (e.g. school ranking can work against inclusion).
- Inclusion needs the broadest, deepest network of support possible.

### Maldives

Work towards making the current optional inclusion standard compulsory in school self-assessment should be a priority. However, schools should be enabled to get positive recognition for identifying even very low standards, if they make progress against them.

Develop networks of teachers who would lead on whole school development and self-assessment across the Maldives. Currently, only a small team in the MoE is managing this.

## Collaborative practice recommendations

### Bhutan

The MoE is interested in working more closely with the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (e.g. in relation to providing enough well trained teachers to support inclusion). This is essential and it is recommended that such collaborative work be developed further with continuing support from UNICEF.

Another aspect of policy discussed during the needs assessment was the importation of foreign models of education. It is recommended that although foreign models of inclusion can be of value, they need to be examined critically. The Bhutanese version of inclusion should draw on what's useful from outside Bhutan, but pay greatest attention to what is locally available (e.g. Gross National Happiness, existing networks of community support).

More work should be done in considering the strategic linkages (e.g. how 'informal' school exchanges can be recognised, supported and more formalised in connection with the Educational Monitoring and Support Division of the MoE, and with other Divisions in the MoE) and how these can be further developed. It will be especially valuable to develop better links between the MoE and Ministry of Finance to support appropriate resourcing for inclusive education.

More work should be done to further build on existing networks (formal and informal) involving the Teacher Education Board, UNICEF's Consultative Group For Inclusive Education and other (nascent) networks between the MoE, UNICEF and NGOs to ensure that there is proper time and space for such collaborative relationships to develop. This needs to be mandated in policy

and driven and supported in practice. UNICEF can also continue to support the capacity development of local NGOs/CBOs working with children with disabilities.

### Maldives

1. Set up a cross-organisational email list of stakeholders to continue to share good practices and advice on moving towards inclusive, quality teaching and learning.
2. Set up SEN teacher networks to share encouragement, innovations and good practices remotely, for example through a Facebook group. (Weekly practice questions, sharing of pictures and videos of teachers' practice, and so on.)
3. Request an expert working group on new curriculum implementation to be set up under the MoE Advisory Committee. This working group (or issue-focused subgroups) should work with relevant departments in the MoE, such as quality improvement and curriculum development, to ensure that written guidance and training schemes are produced to enable detailed implementation of the new national curriculum framework. The working group should bring together available experience from the Maldives National University teacher training department, schools and MoE departments on the following priority areas:
  - developing appropriate pre-school teaching capacity
  - differentiated teaching techniques
  - curriculum adaptation and differentiation
  - language development within the new curriculum
  - accessible assessment and learning targets
  - inclusive whole school development and self-evaluation
  - engagement with vocational training providers to support the new curriculum inclusively
  - effective, inclusive school management for the new curriculum.
4. Encourage MoE to set up a teacher network on whole school development and self-evaluation.
5. Discuss whether UNICEF can support such a working group with technical assistance on differentiated teaching methods, curriculum differentiation, and accessible assessment.

## Research recommendations

### Bhutan

More work should be done on mapping existing strengths, resources and connections that will support inclusion, as well as the barriers and challenges preventing inclusion (particularly for children with SEN). This should involve meetings and consultations with as wide a range

of stakeholders as possible, including from the MoE, teacher education sector (e.g. Paro College); school management and teachers; UNICEF, local/international NGOs supporting inclusive practice; children and adults with and without SEN; parents; and other school community members. Specifically:

- There needs to be a consideration of which stakeholders can help organise and 'drive' research initiatives (e.g. Royal Education Council, Royal University of Bhutan, the MoE, etc.).
- Research funding should be prioritized at all levels.
- More funding and greater incentives for educational research should be provided specifically at the level of higher education.
- Quantitative and qualitative research are both important. What counts as research should be as broad as possible (e.g. surveys/questionnaires, action research/teacher action research, different forms of assessment, community based participatory research, etc.). Research also needs to be made accessible to different stakeholder groups.
- Research, training and advocacy should be developed and practiced as being intrinsically linked as this will work towards changing attitudes and opening up spaces and opportunities for inclusion as well as supporting and furthering existing inclusive practices.
- More support for action research at the school community level and greater efforts to account for such research within policy and practice planning.

## Conclusion

Rated against the initial framework of four central characteristics for a successful inclusive education system, the gap analysis found that both countries had taken steps to set up the foundations of inclusive education in place, and were moving to strengthen these foundations.

The analysis found that there are strong policy intentions and significant good practices in each country. There are many examples of good, collaborative practices between education stakeholders which can be supportive of each country's inclusive education aspirations.

The range of good practices and collaboration seen during the country visits, and the inventiveness with which some stakeholders had tackled inclusion problems, indicated that both countries had made good progress in adapting principles of inclusion to their own context. The commitment and innovation shown by individuals within schools, Ministries and NGOs was impressive, particularly in the Maldives. This indicates that national capacity to solve remaining challenges is good in both countries. In fact, findings from this research provided less of a gap analysis than a list of opportunities, where recent progress could be built on to expand inclusive education across the school system.

## UNICEF's role

The gap analysis indicated many opportunities for UNICEF to promote attitude change, demonstrate inclusive school communities, and develop teachers. UNICEF should take a lead role in sharing noteworthy practices between countries, promoting inclusive school development standards, and supporting early detection of children with disabilities and developmental delays as part of ECD.

A workshop in Paro, Bhutan in December 2013 provided follow-up from the gap analysis and needs assessment, producing clear plans for practitioners and policy makers from six countries in South Asia – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka - to collaborate on making inclusive education a reality (UNICEF, 2014). UNICEF country teams committed to work with Ministry of Education staff and other agencies to take forward detailed plans for 2014 and beyond.

It was clear from both the gap analysis research and the workshop that, while Bhutan and the Maldives have relied on training and advice from Europe, Australia and the US, there are very strong examples of good practices now available in each country and in nearby countries. Sri Lanka and India have already provided technical support to the Maldives, but there is good scope for far greater sharing, not only of practice but of approaches to problem solving around education for children with disabilities. Sharing ideas on how to scale up new systems and methods, and how to spread inclusion techniques and principles among teachers, should be a priority for the network of inclusive education champions formed through the Paro workshop.

UNICEF ROSA should support and encourage this network to have regular contact, but should also develop detailed plans with HQ and other regional offices on how UNICEF can proactively support collaboration and information sharing between those working on education for children with disabilities. One option could be to attach conditions to grants which ensure detailed planning of collaboration, aimed at facilitating scale-up.

In general, UNICEF's support to IE efforts in South Asia during 2014-15 should prove critical in the long term. Given the strong progress found in the Maldives, Bhutan and other countries in the region to take pilot IE efforts towards sustainability and scale-up, this is an important time for support to ensure that momentum is not lost.

# 01

## Introduction

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This report describes a gap analysis and needs assessment commissioned by UNICEF and carried out by EENET CIC around the potential to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities in Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Maldives. EENET CIC is a global group of consultants who focus on practical ways to build inclusive education in low and middle income countries. The UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia requested EENET CIC to investigate how the educational needs of children with disabilities are being met and what prospects there are for UNICEF to help government implement inclusive education policy.

It was expected that findings will be relevant for other countries in the region, and can inform UNICEF's approach to promoting inclusive education for children with disabilities in several countries. The process of the needs assessment itself was designed to support the capacity of UNICEF staff and national partners to review educational practice from a disability and inclusion perspective, and to plan joint action in response to challenges.

A central question for the needs assessment was, 'How can government, civil society and UNICEF in three countries of South Asia work to successfully implement policy which includes children with disabilities and special needs in education?' All three countries have made significant efforts to improve the access of children with disabilities to education, mostly within the last ten years.

Due to various reasons, it became necessary to move the Bangladesh country visit to 2014. Therefore this version of the report focuses on Bhutan and the Maldives. Annex 1 contains a brief situation analysis and action plan produced at the Paro workshop by a team from the Bangladesh Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and UNICEF Bangladesh.

Findings from the needs assessment have been considered from an IE perspective, recognising that inclusive education means adapting the education system to the needs of learners. This is a progressive task which is not expected to be fully delivered in a short space of time, but requires teachers and others to continually ask, 'what could be done to make

learning and participation easier for every child?’ Inclusive education also emphasises the rights of children to learn without being deprived of their rights to family life and protection.

## 1.1 Assessment process

A consultative steering group was set up, composed of UNICEF and government education representatives from each country and from UNICEF ROSA. Key documents were shared more widely with UNICEF ROSA’s regional network. Once detailed methods and schedules had been agreed by the steering group, the needs assessment began with literature review of policy and practice around disability and education in each country.

The next step involved a visit to each country to view practice in schools and interview education stakeholders, using participatory techniques. Recommendations were produced by the consultant for an initial action plan to be taken forward by country level stakeholders. Finally, needs assessment findings were discussed at a sub-regional workshop held in Paro, Bhutan in December 2013 for the Maldives, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Three other countries also took part in the first day of the workshop: India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Teams of government, NGO and UNICEF staff from all six countries produced action plans during the workshop (UNICEF, 2014).

## 1.2 Research questions

A research framework was developed by EENET to shape the literature review and country visits.

## 1.3 Methods

As a key component of the capacity building aspect of the work, EENET aimed to support local participants in working with and reflecting on research methods and their use in researching inclusive education. EENET developed a methodology paper to share key approaches with stakeholders, and reviewed methods with country teams during visits.

The needs assessment was begun through **literature review** of policy and practice documents from each country, related to global learning on inclusive education policy and practice. The literature review uses documentation about the focus countries of Bhutan and the Maldives to analyse the status and prospects for including children with disabilities effectively in basic education. It also identifies areas where the literature review was unable to find definitive information, which received further investigation during planned needs assessment visits to each country. Findings of the literature review are framed in the context of global learning and ideas about disability and education. Findings on the policies and conditions for implementation in the two countries are set against a summary of global experience on what conditions and interventions have proven most useful to support children with disabilities in basic education.

## Central research question

How can government, civil society and UNICEF in x countries of South Asia work to successfully implement policy which includes<sup>1</sup> children with disabilities and special needs in education?

## Supporting research questions

### A. Understanding the context

1. What is the overall priority for basic education against other political and public service priorities?
2. How does decision making, guidance and management flow around the education system?
3. How do money and other resources flow to school level, and how are resources leveraged for education? How is information used to determine resource allocation in education?
4. What information is currently captured about disability or special needs, both within and outside education?
5. What are the capacity strengths and weaknesses of the basic education system at different levels and in different parts of the country?
6. How do resources targeted at disability flow within the country's public service structure?
7. What other public services affecting children interact with education and with community life? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these services?
8. What is the prevailing view about disability in society? What other views exist?
9. How are schools and the education system influenced and held to account by families and communities?

### B. Policy implementation

1. How has educational policy been implemented in this context in the past?
2. Do different policies get different types of implementation? What conditions or support have tended to lead to successful, large scale implementation of policy in this context?
3. How would key stakeholders like policy implementation processes to work in their context going forward?
4. Which policy and guidance statements affect the inclusion of children with disabilities or special needs in education?
5. Has any costing or budget allocation been put against these policy statements? Why/why not? Have any funds been released if so? Why/why not?
6. Which policy gaps are currently acknowledged in relation to the educational inclusion of children with disabilities or special needs? Has any planning or costing been done against these gaps?

### C. Specific challenges within the education system

1. What beliefs and attitudes among teachers, principals and teacher educators hinder educational inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs?
2. What issues related to flow of finance and other resources to school level affect the educational inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs?

<sup>1</sup> Inclusion was defined as 'presence, participation and achievement' of learners, using Mel Ainscow's definition of inclusive education (Ainscow, 2005).

3. What education system issues related to enrolment and attendance affect the educational inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs?
4. What issues related to classroom practice affect the educational inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs?
5. What issues related to teacher and head-teacher performance management and motivation affect the educational inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs?
6. What issues related to formal assessment and certification affect the educational inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs?
7. What issues related to transition between levels of schooling affect the educational inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs?

#### D. Specific challenges within wider society

1. What beliefs and attitudes among families/parents hinder educational inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs?
2. What beliefs and attitudes among school communities hinder educational inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs?
3. What is the current or potential role of local and national media and opinion formers in relation to educational inclusion for children with disabilities or special needs?
4. What economic issues related to enrolment, attendance and participation in learning affect the educational inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs?

#### Main sources of information

- Stakeholder interviews and questionnaires
- Public and internal documentation about education system structure, workings and policies in target countries and countries with similar education systems and/or challenges
- Research and grey literature about successful projects or programmes within target countries and countries with similar education systems and/or challenges
- Research, grey literature and personal accounts of mistakes or unsuccessful efforts in target countries or similar countries.

Subsequent **country visits** involved observation of schools and classes where children with disabilities are being taught, combined with semi-structured interview and focus group discussions with a range of stakeholders in the education of children with disabilities. These stakeholders included parents, children, head teachers, SEN teachers, mainstream teachers, MoE officials, and NGOs.

**Observations** were conducted in schools (and other institutional settings such as NGOs offering education services) to give the research team a better sense of the practical contexts in which education is taking place, where the positive conditions/practices exist, and where the barriers are - in relation to inclusive education broadly and including children with disabilities in particular.

**Semi-structured interviews** with open-ended questions were used to provide a basic structural framework for the enquiry. This method of interviewing addresses existing questions and hypotheses, but also allows respondents a degree of freedom to discuss what they understand to be areas of interest and relevance.

Given the scope of the project, involving multiple stakeholders across a relatively large geographical region, a flexible approach to interviewing was employed. This allowed for the consideration of emergent issues and concerns as well as those which are pre-determined by the EENET research team and local UNICEF/MoE/University counterparts.

In conducting interviews, EENET intended to elicit illuminating narrative accounts of how respondents' experience of education played out in practice, which detail positive outcomes and how these were achieved, as well as any tensions and challenges. EENET was interested that respondents provide not only descriptive accounts of what has happened (or failed to happen) but also their own reflective and speculative accounts as to causes and effects.

Focus group interviews were conducted with teachers, children and parents in schools, as well as with MoE and other institutional stakeholders. Both children with disabilities and no disabilities took part, sometimes in separate groups.

Individual semi-structured interviews with heads of government departments and head teachers, as well as with specialist SEN teachers, were also conducted. Individual interviews offer scope for a greater level of depth than afforded by focus groups and help mitigate against the false consensus that can occur in focus groups where particular individuals are uncomfortable speaking out against, or contradicting the (perceived) perspectives of other group members.

**Graphic thinking and planning tools.** Using graphic thinking and planning tools, such as visual mapping, photographic elicitation was identified as a key research method. This was in keeping with the project as being a formative learning process for everyone involved, so that stakeholders reflect on and learn more about their own experiences, and also experience and learn about different communication and documentation methods.

### 1.3.1 Limitations

Some key policy and guidance documents were in national language, which consultants were unable to read. Several were translated into English, but consultants recognised that it was important to talk through translated documents in detail with country teams in order to make sure what people's understanding of policy was. In some cases, consultants talked through key documents which were not in English, in order to make sure that they understood all the key guidance to schools and Ministries.

Due to budget and time constraints, it was not possible to visit far outside each country's capital, restricting the amount of input on the range of good and poor school practice in each country. However, consultants' prior knowledge of the education system in each country was used to help situate the findings from the visits and the desk research.

EENET had proposed using a range of participatory photographic and graphic elicitation approaches in discussion with stakeholders, but time constraints limited the scope for using these during country visits. Several were used during discussion in the final project meeting, however.

Alongside conducting their own observations, the EENET team had aimed to support local participants (e.g. UNICEF and MoE stakeholders) in a process of conducting observations through which observation data is critically reflected on to inform analysis. This happened to an extent, but UNICEF staff and MoE stakeholders did not always have time away from their busy workloads to take active roles in observations. However, EENET's observations found that the visit stakeholders already had good capacity in observing school and classroom interactions from a perspective of inclusion.

# 02

## Good practice to shape the education of children with disabilities: findings from the global literature review

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### 2.1 How have efforts to meet disabled people's needs in education developed?

Efforts to include disabled people in education have been affected by changing notions of what is expected from education and from disability. In the 20th century it was globally agreed that all people should receive a basic education (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Education for All initiative, Millennium Development Goals), with quality free primary education a right for all children of school age (starting from 5 or 6 years old in most countries of South Asia). However, it soon became apparent that children with disabilities were not being considered equally within efforts to meet these goals, with UNESCO estimating that one third of children out of school were disabled (UNESCO, 2009).

In 2007, the growing global disability rights movement led to the establishment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD, 2007). For the first time this laid out clearly the specific entitlements of people with disabilities to participate fully in society. The UNCPRD stated that children have the right to be included in inclusive education systems. The Convention requires an inclusive education system to be set up, and for children with disabilities to be supported to access this system without damaging their other rights to family life, protection, participation, survival and development.

### 2.2 Inclusive education versus special educational needs provision

It has been globally recognised that an inclusive education approach, which prioritises education of children within welcoming and supportive local schools, is the only feasible and effective way in which the educational needs of all children with disabilities can be met. Inclusive education has gradually replaced the idea of special educational needs services, as most appropriate for educating people with disabilities. In a SEN approach, traditionally children with disabilities have been educated in separate schools or units, often residential, deemed to have extra capacity

to provide appropriate support. However, many disabled children and adults have spoken out against such methods, because they contribute to segregation from the rest of society (Save the Children, 2008). Segregated residential education detracts from children's right to family life, and puts them at greater risk of protection violations.

In addition to rights-based objections to a segregated SEN approach, SEN special schools are not economically viable once it is recognised that the vast majority of children with disabilities need to be educated to the same levels as the rest of the population, to support economic growth and development. Special schools are usually far more expensive per head than education of disabled children in mainstream schools, and have tended to offer far lower education outcomes than inclusive mainstream schools with appropriate SEN support. Extensive exploration of the research in this area is offered in Peters (2004). Traditionally, SEN special schools have used a different curriculum, and have not provided the qualifications needed for further education and employment, limiting disabled people's ability to be productive and independent members of society (Mitchell, 2010). There are high costs to families and society of taking family members out of work to care for disabled people who have not been able to gain the skills they need to support themselves.

Mitchell (2010) explains how these issues have moved national governments and education authorities away from special educational needs approaches towards inclusive education: "Economic considerations play a significant role in determining approaches to inclusive education. These include (a) a recognition that it would not be financially realistic to provide special schools throughout a country, [and] (b) the adoption of a human capital policy of developing all individuals primarily as a means of enhancing the economy".

Collated experience and research has led to increasing global acceptance that inclusive education, based in learner-centred teaching approaches, is the appropriate direction for education systems.

## 2.3 Features of an effective inclusive education system

What does an education system need to become inclusive? Based on recent research into policy and practice in a range of countries, the literature review identified the following framework, based on consolidated experience from countries which have been pursuing improvements in inclusive education, with a particular focus on disability. Of particular use in coming up with these criteria were major meta-reviews conducted for the UK government, the OECD, and the European Union (Mitchell, 2010, OECD, 1999, and EADSNE, 2005). The following describes a condensed version of the key elements that support inclusive education, and which education systems aiming to improve inclusion of people with disabilities should focus on.

### **a. Learner-centred teaching is well established in teacher training and management**

The basis of inclusive education is teachers who are able to consider each student in their class and identify ways to help them overcome any problems they are experiencing with presence,



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Meeting the educational needs of children with disabilities in South Asia

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Children in a child-friendly classroom at a pre-school in Maafushi Island, Maldives.

participation and achievement in education. This applies to all learners, and is essentially the basis of good teaching, defined as learner-centred pedagogy (Ainscow, 2005). Annex 2 offers a detailed description of what an inclusive, learner-centred teacher should be trained to, based on EENET's experience.

As inclusive education approaches start to become established within national education systems, the role of existing SEN schools and experts often changes - from offering education directly, to supporting local mainstream schools with additional expertise, so that local schools can work with disabled learners. In several middle income countries, this transition has been marked by a preference to retain the direct provision of education by SEN schools or units for children considered moderately to severely disabled. This can stem from a lack of confidence in ordinary school teachers to genuinely take on learner-centred pedagogy, i.e. to understand and respond to all children's characteristics and needs. When examined, this lack of confidence (often shared by teachers themselves) reflects a view of local schooling as quite basic in scope.

However, 21st century drivers of human capital development are increasingly requiring standards in primary education to be raised, with consequent increases in what is expected of primary school teachers. Large investments are being made in upgrading teacher training and professional development in many countries (Mitchell, 2010). This leaves many education policy makers in a difficult position: trying to rapidly upgrade the capacity of teachers in learner-centred teaching, while often believing that many teachers do not actually have the capacity or resources to deliver an individualised learning experience to children.

Where children with disabilities are considered markedly different to other children, or far more difficult to understand, combined with the assumption that ordinary teachers are not able to be fully learner-centred, disability issues can be omitted from general teacher training, out of assumptions that only expert teachers can deal with such advanced issues. In fact, experience from many countries shows that as professional development and management of primary schoolteachers rise in quality, and learner-centred techniques are fully established in

## **Schools should be linked with medical services and should be able to call on their expertise.**

classrooms, teachers become increasingly able to provide individualised support to all children in their classes, no matter what their disability or other needs may be (Save the Children, 2008).

### **b. Schools/teachers are linked to resources and expertise on disability and special educational needs**

To ensure teachers are confident to work with children with disabilities extra support is often provided to offer additional focus and information around disability and SEN. This can be particularly valuable where teachers initially feel that working with disabled children is not appropriate or them. However, this extra support should be organised around helping local teachers to work better with children with SEN, rather than moving a child into the care of another teacher or institution.

Schools should be linked with medical services and should be able to call on their expertise. Local medical services should have contacts with sources of specialised expertise on particular impairments. Medical or SEN recommendations for support to help the child cope better in its local learning environment should be open for discussion and adaptation in consultation with the school, parents and the child themselves.

Resources should be identifiable to help implement such recommendations, and to meet schools' requests for additional support costs relating to disability and SEN. In all places where inclusive education has been successfully taken forward, having a clear source of funds for meeting at least some additional support needs related to disability has been important.

Sometimes this has taken the form of a disability or inclusion element within school development grants (such as in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina; or a national budget line that local education authorities can apply to for support with disability related costs (as in India) (Save the Children, 2008). At its simplest and most effective, resourcing support for education of children with disabilities has involved a school capitation grant system which attracts an additional premium for each child (UNESCO, 2009). While there will always be debate about how much extra funding is reasonable to provide, and which resources should flow to disabled children via the health system and the education system, the principle that clearly marked funding for disability and SEN which flows to mainstream school level is a necessity for inclusive education.

Having access to teachers or other experts with special educational needs knowledge can be a time-saver for teachers, as these experts will have more experience of which strategies may be likely to work. It is important to note that, when good practice is in place, these strategies are not actually based on specific disability types; they are based on the types of challenges which children experience in accessing education. So, for example, once diagnosis has taken place, a SEN expert will know that children with cerebral palsy are more likely to need supportive seating. Some children with cerebral palsy, who have not received appropriate

medical support, may not be able to sit at all. Children with other disabilities will also need supportive seating; perhaps of the same or different type to a child with cerebral palsy. A child who needs a wheelchair will need a different type of wheelchair depending on which bits of their body are stronger and weaker; what their levels of pain are; what type of terrain they need to traverse; and so on.

Determining which type of 'disability aid' is needed will depend on a thorough assessment of the child's individual physical condition, the setup of the school, the journey from home to school, conditions at home, and so on. The SEN expert cannot know these things, and so they will need to work in consultation with the local teacher. In a case of cerebral palsy, for example, the local teacher may be able to tell the SEN expert that this child can actually walk and does not need a wheelchair, but has difficulty holding a pen. The SEN expert can then focus their attention on teaching methods and physical aids which have proven useful in the past to help children who have difficulties holding pens.

The SEN expert should have knowledge of the types of support available for the specific challenges that all this information highlights (in this example, mobility aids; but it could equally be sources of funding, or entitlements to medical treatments such as physiotherapy). The expert and the local teacher will then have to consult with the head teacher, and come up with ideas for the best ways of sourcing and funding any equipment identified. Thus any recommendations from the expert, if they are to be useful for the child's situation and context, will only come through a collaborative process.

It is not usually necessary for local mainstream teachers to be trained about which disability equipment is available, or which types of impairment tend to point to which types of support need, other than perhaps to an overview level. Because no person experiences disability in the same way, or experiences the same barriers to participation linked to their disability, the key thing is for the teacher to know the child, and to use this knowledge when working with others to get better support for the child.

In wealthier countries providing extra SEN support for local teachers has tended to combine visits and advice from SEN experts with placing SEN focus teachers in schools, and sometimes teaching assistants to support children with particularly high support needs in the school environment. Experience has shown that the use of teaching assistants has to be carefully managed to stop them creating a barrier between the disabled child and the rest of the school.

In less well-resourced educational settings, teaching assistants and specialist teachers in the school have not been used, but volunteers or parents from the school community have been encouraged to act as classroom supports. Also, children in communities with a strong ethos of helping others have been used to act as 'buddies' for children who may need help with toileting, feeding, and getting around the school safely.

Sometimes, additional support from a SEN perspective has been directed towards children with more severe levels of disability. This need not conflict with inclusion, if it is aimed at supporting children in their local environment and society. However, where extra SEN support requires children with more severe levels of disability to leave their homes and attend SEN units or separate schools, this does conflict with the right to family life and participation in society. It can be helpful to consider how an inclusive, local-schooling approach to supporting children with more severe levels of disability can be pursued.

The subsequent country visits also revealed the importance of investing in **assessment and referral systems for management of disabilities in early childhood**, in which both Bhutan and the Maldives are making strong progress. This requires engagement from health and children/family ministries, and should have the effect of minimising impairments in children in later life, reducing demands on school-based SEN support.

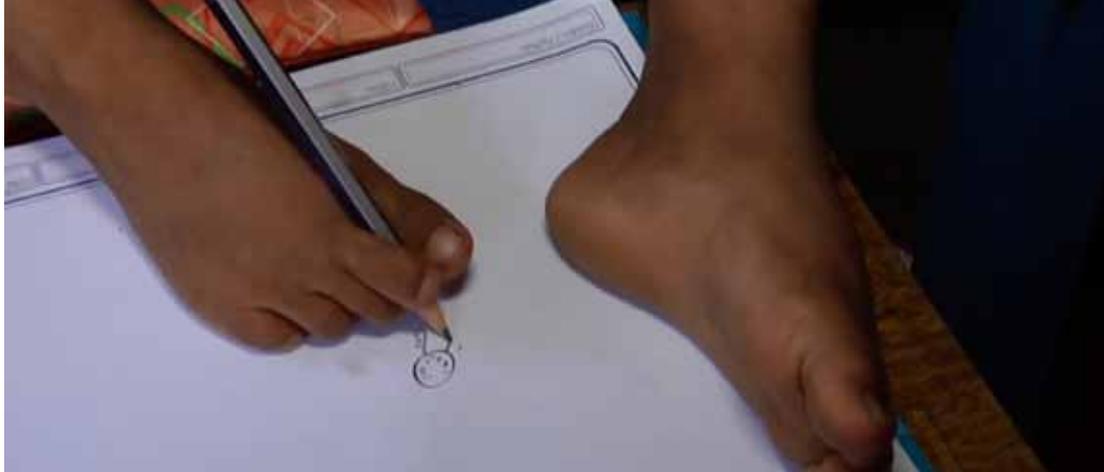
### **c. There is a clear accountability framework for ensuring access to inclusive education**

The varying pace of change in attitudes around disability, and the extent to which schools feel unsupported to work with disabled children, is likely to result in resistance to admitting disabled children to their local schools. This is particularly likely in the early stages of a country's journey towards a more inclusive education system. It is therefore important for parents to have a clear route of appeal if children are denied access to education, or if children are given education options which would damage their rights to protection or family life.

This means that legislation is necessary to guarantee the right to inclusive education, and this legislation must make it clear what parents are entitled to. The law should clearly state when, if ever, a local school can deny access to a child. Under what circumstances? Who should parents contact if their child is denied education? Who will adjudicate if schools express concerns about accepting children?

#### **What does a good accountability framework look like for inclusive education?**

India's 2009 Right to Education Act gives full legal status to the right to education for the first time, unequivocally guaranteeing that all children, no matter what their circumstances, may access elementary education. Education is guaranteed as free and compulsory for all children aged 6 to 14, with no testing or other eligibility criteria allowed. Children cannot be expelled or held back until they have completed primary education. While birth certificates are mentioned as a proof of age, no child may be denied access to school for lack of a birth certificate or any other proof. Accountability is assisted by sharing contact details of representatives for the Right to Education Act in every state. There is provision for all schools to reserve 25 percent of their capacity for 'disadvantaged sections' of the population. This means that limited school capacity/resources cannot be used as a means to deny access to excluded children. While the Act, when initially passed, did not include all types



of disabled children in the 'disadvantaged sections' category, campaigning led to a rapid amendment to correct this (India Development Gateway, 2009.)

The UK's Equalities Act, adopted in 2010, is another useful example because of the detailed legal requirements it brings in for disabled children's access to education (CSIE, 2010). The Act takes into account pre-existing school selection practices and makes it clear in law that no group may be discriminated against in the manner in which selection takes place. Therefore, if a disabled child wishes to attend a local selective secondary school, adaptations must be made in the entrance test to enable their knowledge to be tested accurately. If one child of a particular religious group *without* disabilities is accepted into a religious selective school, a child from that same group *with* disabilities must also be accepted.

A key part of the legislation's usefulness is government's willingness to share the provisions and accountability for the law in clear language on the Internet. Government web pages relating to the Act provide clear formats and contact details which can be used to pursue legal claims under the Act, as well as guidance documents for schools on what the Act means for them, with many practical examples of both good and bad practice. This guidance document contains telephone numbers and email addresses for further advice and is available to all members of the public.

### **Policy**

Below the level of legislation, clear policy which describes what is expected of schools, teachers and parents in regard to the education of all disadvantaged or excluded groups is needed for an inclusive approach. Highlighting disability is important in policy, so that the needs of disabled learners are not forgotten due to the often-prevalent social invisibility of people with disabilities. This can often mean a separate policy document around disability and/or inclusion of all marginalised groups in education.

At the same time, if such a policy document is the only statement of intent for disability and inclusion in education, it can mean that disability and inclusion are considered separately from wider education policy. This often means that no changes in the wider education system are made to move towards an inclusive education framework, preventing any meaningful progress. An important indicator of the effectiveness of disability and/or inclusion policy is whether the overarching policy documentation for basic education also refers to disability and exclusion; and whether such policy documents direct the reader to the more detailed disability and/or inclusion policy document.

Bangladesh's PEDP II (Second Primary Education Development Programme) has a detailed inclusive education component integrated into the main strategy, which is focused on several categories of excluded children (see Annex 1 for further detail). Lao PDR has an inclusive education plan both attached to its education sector plan, and referenced in the main plan.

#### **d. The assessment system promotes flexible assessment and testing**

Often attempts to promote inclusive education focus on parental awareness and teacher training. However, without a focus on inclusive assessment, these efforts can be compromised. A major barrier to inclusive education is the extent to which class or school test averages are used in management and motivation of teachers. Each field visit aimed to identify the extent to which this is an issue. If teachers are trained to be inclusive, but they or their schools lose funding when average test scores drop, they will be strongly motivated to stop using inclusive approaches. Bringing more children into the classroom who have previously missed school, or who are not currently able to take part fully in examinations, means that test scores are likely to drop to an extent.

One key point is not to focus on average scores. If the top achievers in a class are still scoring well, but three or four new children are scoring poorly, a teacher should not be penalised. Another key issue is to develop better ways of capturing learning achievement. If a child enters school with very limited literacy skills, but goes on to be able to write sentences within a short time, teachers should receive recognition and credit for supporting the child, rather than criticism for not getting the child up to the literacy standard expected of someone in their age group. Guidance for head teachers and education management is vital in this area.

A further issue in assessment is that many children with disabilities (and many other children) cannot participate in the test itself. Giving a child with mobility difficulties a standard examination time will not accurately reflect their knowledge: if it takes them more time to write answers, they will need an extended examination time. If a child does not speak the language used for testing well, they will not be able to communicate their knowledge. Some teachers are aware of this and, in the absence of permission to offer changes to the test approach, try to keep children with disabilities out of examinations. However, this often means those children cannot progress through the grade structure and parents may feel their education is a waste of time.

Delivering the necessary flexibility to be inclusive in administering formal testing is particularly challenging where efforts are taking place to make exam scores more accurate, through increased standardisation and independent testing. Where corruption or poor documentation capacity has been an issue, it is often very difficult for policy makers to admit the need to change testing practices to allow marginalised students to participate. But until this happens, children with disabilities and other issues will not be able to reflect the true level of their knowledge in testing, and so average scores will be brought down. In an age where education funding often depends on learning outcomes, this issue will not go away.

Education systems which have attempted to solve these problems usually set up a series of adaptations designed to allow children with disabilities or other special educational needs



to take part fairly in examinations. These may involve, for example, allowing children to take exams in a different language; or allowing children to have an assistant to write answers for them (supervised by an exam invigilator). This carries with it the need for some extra resources, mainly in terms of extra time needed for examiners.

However, these resources can be minimised. In many cases, similar types of examination can be offered for groups of students with similar educational needs. For a variety of reasons, including difficulty writing, dyslexia or vision problems several students in each examination session will need extra time to study. In many countries, such students are grouped together in a separate examination space and given an agreed percentage more time to complete the exam. Other groups of students will need alternative means of communicating questions and answers; this may involve being tested orally, or having an assistant to read and write answers for them. Again, independent examiners can supervise such students as a group. In most cases there are simple methods available to make it easier for all students to take part in formal testing, and additional costs are not large: it is simply a matter of agreeing clear policy guidance to ensure that principles of both inclusion and integrity are balanced in the way testing is administered.

## 2.4 Conclusion

Moving towards inclusive education is a work in progress. Few countries have an education system which delivers on all these criteria. However, several countries are in the process of reworking their education systems to fit this type of framework. For countries which are able to reliably measure learning outcomes at national level, those making efforts to increase inclusion alongside learning standards are finding that not only are learning outcomes rising, but rising equitably: far fewer children are being left behind. These countries include Lao PDR, Finland, Sweden, Canada, Italy, and Scotland (Mitchell, 2010; OECD, 1999).

# 03

## Country-focused literature review findings: Maldives

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How well does education in the Maldives compare to the ideal characteristics of an inclusive education system discussed in Chapter 2? With the specified elements of an inclusive education system in mind, the Maldives specific literature review was conducted to see how far each country had progressed towards such a system, and the extent to which conditions were in place to support progress in the future. Documents describing the national education system, policy on disability, and the situation for teaching and assessment were collated and analysed. The views of a small number of key education stakeholders were also sought in informal telephone interviews to provide background. The country literature review was used to shape particular areas of inquiry for more investigation during the country needs assessment visit; conclusions and recommendations in this section are therefore tentative.

### 3.1 How well does the Maldives fit the inclusive education framework?

#### **a. Learner-centred teaching well established in teacher training and management**

The Maldives has made impressive progress in recent years towards establishing learner-centred teaching, particularly in the capital Malé, in the context of rapidly expanding population and demand for education (MoE, 2007). Efforts have also been made to encourage teachers to take up basic IE approaches. However, geographical challenges for Maldives because of the difficulty in reaching some of the atolls, limit access to services and slow the pace of capacity building and attitude change. Discussions about inclusive education have tended to focus on Malé more than other places.

ECD capacity has been limited, with teacher training taking place mostly abroad in Sri Lanka and other neighbouring countries. Sound training for early childhood teachers is still being developed in Maldives and limited to short-term courses at the local Education Faculty. Most ECD teachers in the islands are untrained and become educators because it is one of the few available job opportunities (Duch, 2005).

It is reported that children with disabilities on other islands where a special unit has not been placed in a school can attend their regular classes, if teachers accept them. However, many teachers are seen as lacking training, skills and willingness to do this. Primary teachers are expected to develop individual education plans (IEPs) for children with disabilities, although stakeholders have suggested that this area of work needs to be improved. Significant problems with bringing in new approaches have been identified around head teachers, who are not seen as open to change (MoE, 2007).

Children with mild to moderate disabilities therefore may sometimes access school, but those with disabilities considered more severe, like cerebral palsy or autism, often do not attend school at all. There are plans for home schooling for such children, but this has not been developed yet (MoE; HRCM, 2010).

At the moment about 50 percent of teachers at secondary level are expatriates, although at primary level (Grades 1-7) teaching has been 'localised'. At secondary level, education is in English and teachers need specialist subject knowledge, but there have not been enough local teachers/trainees with the education or skills for this. Slowly the expatriate figure is falling as more nationals are encouraged into secondary teaching (MoE, 2007).



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Children in a child-friendly classroom at a pre-school in Maafushi Island, Maldives.

## **b. Schools and teachers linked to resources and expertise on special educational needs**

To date the system for developing education for children with disabilities is primarily with special units attached to mainstream schools. There are no special schools as such, although in Malé there are three schools whose units have specialist focus (one focuses on visual impairment, one on hearing, one on other disabilities). The units within schools aim to prepare children for entry into regular classes as far as possible (MoE, 2007).

In general, specialist services like speech therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy are not in place within the education system. There are a few such services in the health system, but they are usually only privately available through a few individuals, who may not have disability experience. It can be hard for children to access these services as they have to access them as a medical patient rather than as a pupil at school (HRCM, 2010).

There is a general problem in the Maldives with the late identification of special needs/disabilities because there are only three people in the country who have necessary specialist skills. There is one specialist who travels to help screen, develop IEPs and train teachers, but on the whole there is almost no decentralised service. There is no early identification mechanism in place prior to Grade 1 (age 6-7 years). It is reported that local teachers may notice if there is a disability once children start school, and then there is some identification available. UNICEF has been supporting the Ministry of Health efforts to improve early identification of disabilities through island health clinics by upgrading the health record card given to parents.

Because there is a shortage of specialist services in the Maldives, policy aims to have one school that can offer special services for disabled children in each atoll. The policy expressed in the Ministry of Education's Mid-Decade Report on Education for All (MoE, 2007) states that one school per atoll should set up a SEN unit, which should have a large number of staff, several of whom specialise in issues relevant to children with SEN. However, the policy wording is extremely unclear about what the SEN unit should look like. At present the MOE is helping schools to pilot different ways of meeting this requirement to have a SEN unit. The first islands that would house this special unit per atoll have been selected following a screening exercise to identify children with/at risk of disabilities (MoE).

## **c. A clear accountability framework for ensuring access to inclusive education**

Support for disability rights is clear in the intent of overall policy, as expressed in the Constitution and the ratification of the UNCPRD. There are impressive policies for providing social welfare support for disabled people (MoE, 2007). However, there appears to be no clear accountability system or detailed plan for implementing these commitments.

The Maldives ratified the UNCPRD in 2010, which commits government towards developing a fully inclusive education system, and provides a clear accountability focus for ensuring that

children with disabilities have access to education. Progress with developing a more inclusive education system had been held back by a disability law which was rejected by Parliament in 2010 for not fulfilling principles of inclusion (IDA, 2012). The literature review was unable to establish the status of revised legislation in this area.

Policy around disability and education exists, but 1) suffers from lack of clarity on implementation and 2) is unclear in its basic terminology and principles. Although the UNCPRD has been ratified, which requires the country to work towards an inclusive education system, the wording of policy focuses on special educational needs issues. The country's IE policy refers to disabled, gifted and other 'at risk' children, though it has a major focus on disability (MoE, 2007). Current policy in the Maldives seems to have been developed with a focus on segregated education, without the necessary consideration of supporting mainstream schools to become more inclusive. However, efforts to improve learner-centred education in general schools do support inclusive practice. Difficulties accessing teachers to improve their practice appear to be a challenge.

Efforts to implement policy so far have focused almost exclusively on setting up segregated education units on each atoll (aiming at four). This indicates that a SEN approach has been adopted in disability policy. In practice, the drive to set up rehabilitation and disability-focused services for children is understandable, given the current lack of medical diagnosis and support services for children with disabilities on the islands, particularly in the early years.

However, it was hard to understand why these services would be provided in schools rather than in healthcare facilities; and why children should be expected to attend such units if they are not near their homes - either for daily schooling or residential living. The field visit investigated more about why there is insufficient healthcare and rehabilitation provision for children with disabilities, and what the potential would be for creating greater links between health and education services.

#### **d. An assessment system which promotes flexible assessment and testing**

In concert with efforts to build capacity for learner-centred teaching, assessment capacity has been improved, but still contains challenges. At primary level, there is continuous assessment in Grades 1-3 and exams three times a year in Grades 4-7 (MoE, 2007). Examinations three times a year seems like a major burden for relatively young learners, and may distract teachers from learner-centred methods aimed at helping pupils make individual progress, towards 'teaching to the test', aimed at getting all students up to exam standard.

This type of pressure on teachers can encourage them to exclude learners who may be likely to bring exam score averages down. Even if children with disabilities are likely to score highly in exams, the perception is often that they will score too low. The country visit should look into whether teachers feel pressure from Grade 4 onwards to remove children considered likely to

bring averages down. There was no information on whether adaptations are made to enable children with disabilities to take part in these exams: the field visit should also investigate this question.

For secondary education, the formal assessment system uses international certification based in the UK examination system, linked to the use of English as the medium of instruction. IGCSE examinations indicate that only about 50 percent of students achieve a pass percentage in at least five subjects, with as little as 10 percent achieving pass percentages in some subjects. The average pass rate of students in English is 20 percent (Mohamed, 2013).

The issues posed by a foreign language of instruction and a mainly foreign examination system indicate that some children with special educational needs are likely to do worst of all in this setup. A 'foreign' curriculum in a foreign language may present more challenges for children with learning difficulties. Also, parents may not see the relevance of pursuing secondary education, particularly if children have specific learning needs which make formal academic learning more of a challenge.

Although the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) offers some basic adaptations to make IGCSE testing more accessible for students with disabilities (CIE, 2013), these have to be arranged in advance between schools/testing centres and CIE. The field visit should aim to find out whether schools or testing centres in the Maldives have taken steps to arrange these adaptations for students with disabilities, or whether the administration involved in liaising with a foreign organisation has been considered too off-putting.

There are also local secondary school exams. "The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examination is offered to students at the end of Grade 10 and the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) Examination offered at the end of Grade 12... These two exams are of utmost importance to students as at least a C is required for job opportunities and for seeking tertiary education" (MoE, 2007). If it is the case that it is not possible to secure a job without a C grade, this appears to be an extremely demanding examinations system, potentially meaning significant social and economic exclusion for students who do not secure C grades. The country visit should investigate the participation and pass rates of pupils with SEN or disabilities in these examinations.

In 2007, it was recognised that continuous assessment was weak: "With a no detention policy in place, it is only at Grade 10 that the first real assessment of learning levels takes place through the Cambridge Ordinary level exams that students have to take. The challenge is putting in place a continuous assessment system that would inform the strategies to strengthen teacher capacity and the teaching and learning process. Work is in progress to establish a national assessment mechanism" (MoE, 2007). This appears to conflict with the information in the same document that testing is used in Grades 4-7. If such tests are

***However, in recent years, due to community media and mobilisation campaigns, attitudes appear to be shifting towards a more positive recognition and acceptance of disability.***

not considered useful, why continue with them? The status of the various assessment approaches currently used in the Maldives, and their accessibility for students with disabilities, should be a feature of the country needs assessment visit.

In general, efforts to keep improving the assessment system will need to have a strong focus on how they affect marginalised learners - such as resolving how challenges with English instruction can be overcome for those with least access to English, what alternatives to highly academic examination requirements could become available for learners who are less academic, and so on. Depending on how much pressure is placed on teachers to achieve higher formal examination results, this could be a major challenge to inclusion. Possibilities for developing clear indicators of how examination and testing can be made accessible to learners with disabilities will also need to be considered during the field visit.

The literature review was unable to find clear indications of how testing is intended to be made more inclusive for children with disabilities.

### 3.2 Other issues

Attitudes around disability in the Maldives appeared from the literature to be relatively negative, suggesting that the rights of children with disabilities to inclusive education may not be actively pursued by families or civil society, with low expectations on the employment of disabled people. Enrolment of children with identified disabilities in school is reported to be extremely low (HRCM 2010). It is unclear whether this relates more to poor facilities for identification and assessment than to exclusion from school. However, in recent years, due to community media and mobilisation campaigns, attitudes appear to be shifting towards a more positive recognition and acceptance of disability (HRCM 2010).

There is also a previous history of dismissal of disabled children in education thinking, consistent perhaps with traditional attitudes that people with disabilities are not to be included actively in society. Statistics from 2005 represent universal primary education (UPE) as having been 100 percent achieved, with the caveat that children with special needs were not included in that figure (MoE, 2007). This betrays an assumption that children with disabilities do not count as children in the same way as non-disabled children, and that the education of children with disabilities is not a priority. This feeling may have since changed, but it was important for the needs assessment visit to establish whether any key decision makers in education still hold these views.

The literature review was not able to find sufficient information on how moves to strengthen provision for learners with disabilities would be funded. The country visit should aim to produce more information on finance flows and funding formulae for disability-focused public

service delivery, both in healthcare and education. While education takes a substantial amount of the government's overall budget, 80 percent of the education budget is spent on basic salaries, leaving little for quality improvement programmes (MoE).

Another issue raised through the literature review is that some policy commitments may conflict with others, and may not be realistic. The field visits were therefore shaped to focus on which aspects of policy are appropriate to carry forward in terms of taking clear, accountable steps to deliver them, with necessary resourcing commitments.

In terms of disability policy, indications are that present policy emphasis on SEN units as the main solution for education and disability is not designed to suit the practical realities of educating all – or even most - children with disabilities in an archipelago setting. Practical issues include the assessment pressures experienced by students; potentially negative attitudes towards disability; and how technical support can be given to teachers were identified as areas of focus for the country visit.

Strengthening teacher support and development in general, with integration of IE concepts and advice, may help build teacher confidence to accept working with disabled children better in local schools. Examining mainstream teachers' potential to become more inclusive was therefore identified as a priority issue to investigate during the field visit. The needs assessment project aimed to help suggest ways in which 'embedding' IE in teacher training could be done in the Maldives. This would enable every teacher to get basic IE training within existing budget limitations, and would mean that specialised SEN courses can then 'dig deeper' into the issue and prepare more specialist staff. Exploring whether this is realistic was added as a key focus of the country visit.

Strengthening technical support links between special atoll units, local mainstream schools, and health services, would be an easy area for policy and practice reform to focus on. This could make policy more coherent and relevant. The field visit therefore aimed to find out more information on attitudes to disability and inclusion of key leaders with control over policy support and finance flows.

There are indications that this need is already being looked at: there are plans to develop a 'road map' of what needs to be in place to achieve the one-special-school-per-atoll aim; to develop early screening/identification; and to get the Ministries of Education and Health working together to implement policies. Ascertaining how these plans had progressed was a key task for the needs assessment visit.

It was also considered relevant for the field visit to look at how the gradually-developing ECD sector could be supported to take an increasing focus on assessment, referral and rehabilitation of children with disabilities, as return on investment in this area would likely be high.

Further information in general on how policy around disability in education is made and supported was considered necessary, as was further information on finance flows to schools; how does the 20 percent of budget used for non-salary expenditure impact on school level activities? Given restricted financing, the needs assessment visit attempted to identify ways in which IE and education for children with disabilities could be enhanced through adjusting activities that are already within the 'basic' budget, as opposed to requiring additional/ separate budgets.

### 3.3 Conclusion

The education system in the Maldives has undergone rapid development and improvement in recent years, and now offers some encouraging characteristics to support inclusion of children with disabilities; particularly if it becomes possible to include disability issues in upgrading of teacher practice and leadership in general schools. The mechanism for boosting teacher professional development in the context of an atoll setting required further focus during the country visit. What are the prospects and plans for giving isolated teachers increased chances to innovate and strengthen their ability to work with a diverse range of learners? Are any teachers working in island schools trying out new approaches when faced with children with special needs? How can existing good practice be shared?

It is apparent that there has been high uncertainty about how to expand SEN services in practice: "Creating access [to SEN services] for children in atolls will be the major challenge as provision of trained teachers and support systems would not only be expensive but uneconomical as well... What perhaps needs to be explored is the possibilities of home based/community level care and teaching, which in turn poses the challenge of equipping community members to provide this kind of service" (MoE, 2007). The country visit aimed to explore what gains could be experienced if every teacher were given solid training in IE and full learner centred pedagogy in combination with developing the expertise of SEN teachers who can visit schools to support local teachers. This would reduce the need for a large numbers of specialists.

# 04

## Country visit findings: Maldives

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### 4.1 Introduction

The needs assessment visit was conducted by Helen Pinnock of EENET CIC from 18 to 29 August 2013. The visit was hosted by UNICEF Maldives and by the SEN Unit in the Ministry of Education's National Institute of Education (NIE), which focuses on technical leadership within the Ministry. The aim of the visit was to help UNICEF and the MoE identify challenges and gaps towards delivering quality education for children with disabilities; to help key stakeholders develop plans for reducing these challenges; and to identify where external technical support is most needed to deliver these plans. In addition the visit aimed to capture good practices for sharing across the region.

The needs assessment visit was preceded by a detailed literature review into the development of policy and practice around the education of children with disabilities in the Maldives (Chapter 3). However, several important new policy documents were translated into English in the days before the visit, and therefore review of these documents was incorporated into the visit.

The country visit found that much impressive work was already being undertaken to improve education for children with disabilities, particularly in the last year. Recommendations arising from the visit and literature review therefore focused on helping the NIE refine and strengthen their plans to continue with these efforts in the next two years.

### 4.2 Country visit activities

A range of recent policy, strategy and technical guidance documents were reviewed and feedback on these was provided during the visit. Where documents did not exist in English, the SEN unit provided verbal translation. More detailed initial recommendations on strengthening specific policy and guidance documents are included in this report.

Three pilot ‘SEN specialism’ schools supported by the MoE’s SEN unit were visited, to understand how a pilot capacity building scheme was working, and how each school as a whole was functioning in relation to disability and inclusion issues. Good practices from each school was identified. SEN classes and activities in each school were observed, and in one school a full mainstream class lesson was observed.

Three other schools were visited; one island school near Malé with a fully functioning SEN unit, one large island school further from Malé with a SEN lead teacher but with limited SEN capacity; and one small island school with no clear SEN capacity. Mainstream and SEN teachers were interviewed together in focus group discussions; focus group discussions with parents of children with special educational needs were conducted, and segments of classes were observed. The aim of these visits was to understand how schools functioned in general, how inclusion and disability issues were dealt with, and whether any differences in strengths and weaknesses could be identified in different types of school.

Several consultation meetings were conducted with key government departments involved with education and disability issues. These focused on issues identified in the policy document review, and on challenges and gaps raised by teachers, parents and children in school visits.



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*A student at a child-friendly pre-school in Maafushi Island, Maldives.*

The consultant conducted a half-hour consultation session at a training workshop on disability for pre-school heads and Teacher Resource Centre (TRC) coordinators from each atoll in the Maldives. The workshop was also an opportunity to see how the SEN Unit approached training for educators.

Two visits to disability NGOs were conducted, in order to understand civil society action and views around education for disabled children, and to see what good practice and capacity gaps were observable in the education services provided by these NGOs. The Autism Association and the Care Society were visited, as these are the main civil society groups providing education and development activities for children with disabilities.

Review and input was conducted into the SEN Unit’s draft guidance document on child development milestones for teachers, to be used when teachers notice children struggling at school. Recommendations on simplifying the milestones were made and these were harmonised with the early childhood milestones guide being produced for health clinics. The

health milestones guide was also reviewed with UNICEF and the SEN unit, to ensure all milestones were consistent and appropriate. The consultant also produced draft text to be added to the SEN unit's teachers' guide to direct teachers in how to use the milestones consistent with an inclusive education approach (see Annex 2).

Finally, a short workshop was conducted with a group of 22 key participants in the visit. The workshop focused on the areas arising from the needs assessment where potential to take forward substantial collaborative action had been identified. Participants stated willingness to continue to work together on improving inclusive education, and it was agreed that all participants would be able to comment on the draft visit report as a step towards further joint action.

#### 4.2.1 Places and people visited

##### **SEN specialist pilot schools, Malé**

- Imaadhuddin school (Autism specialism)
- Jamaluddin School (Hearing impairment specialism)
- Kalafaanu School (Visual impairment specialism)

##### **Mainstream schools visited**

- Muhyiddin School, Villimale Island, Villinguli (had SEN Unit with two SEN teachers)
- Maafushi School, Maafushi Island, Kaafu Atoll (had one SEN lead teacher and a SEN class focused on children without parental care living in the local orphanage)
- Gulhi School, Gulhi Island, Kaafu Atoll (no specific SEN provision but disabled children were admitted)

##### **Institutional representatives met**

- Ministry of Education: Quality Improvement and Policy departments
- Curriculum Development Team, NIE
- SEN Unit, NIE
- National Examinations Authority
- Teacher training lecturers, Maldives National University
- Ministry of Health: Ministry for Gender, Family and Human Rights
- Autism Association (NGO offering special and supplementary education, family support and advocacy)
- Care Society (NGO offering special and supplementary education, family support and advocacy)

These schools and organisations represented the totality of people and agencies working for inclusive education in the Maldives. Some small private tuition agencies and schools offer provision for children with disabilities, but these were not considered to be offering best practice.

### 4.2.2 Limitations

Time limitations meant that more remote schools and teacher resource centres could not be visited, although the consultation slot at the TRC and preschool workshop helped to get a picture of common issues across the Maldives.

Most parental and child discussions took place in the presence of teachers providing translation, which may have limited participants' ability to make criticisms. However, it was possible to pick up on challenges and criticisms from these discussions.

The shortness of most school days (most schools are still running double shifts despite policy aims to move towards a single session) meant that time to interview parents, children and teachers at each school was around 30 minutes for each group, as well as some time to observe classes. This meant that more in-depth participatory consultation activities could not be conducted. Nevertheless, the quality of discussion was generally good, as interaction and translation in English were very strong. Participants were very willing to come forward with ideas.

## 4.3 Visit findings and recommendations

### 4.3.1 Access to education

It was clear that most schools had children with a range of special needs and disabilities, both in mainstream and in SEN classes. However, all groups of stakeholders in all locations were able to describe cases of children who had not been able to go to school due to disability.

Two of the four head or deputy head teachers interviewed mentioned advising parents that children with disabilities in their local area not be admitted into their school, and that they should seek admittance to the 'SEN specialist' pilot schools in Malé which focused on that particular disability. This is in contrast to what happens with admissions for a non-disabled child, where the MoE allocates them to a local school without debate. The discriminatory aspects of these access decisions were apparently not recognised by the head teachers concerned. It should also be noted that two of the three 'SEN specialist' schools in Malé reported pressures on their ability to enrol SEN students in their specialist programmes, particularly as many of their SEN students were over age and therefore places were not being freed up.

The heads teachers' statements also indicated that providing education for children with certain disabilities is considered too specialised for ordinary schools, even though the issues raised by admitting these particular children involved quite basic arrangements. In one case, a child used a wheelchair and would have required a ground floor classroom. Concerns were raised that the library was on an upper floor. However, an empty room was available, although relatively small, and no-cost solutions could be made such as making arrangements for tuition there with staff or students bringing books from the library as required.

The other case was of a visually impaired child advised to commute to Malé because of a lack of Braille facilities in his local school. Again, this made no sense from an inclusion perspective because of the difficulties and dangers of commuting by boat and navigating the traffic-crowded streets of Malé for a visually impaired person. A safer and less stressful solution would have involved admitting the child to his local school, and encouraging teachers and students to transmit textual information verbally wherever possible, while in the longer term requesting external support to offer Braille for that student.

There is a need to focus more strongly on ECD provision as a means to mitigate impairment and get the learning of disabled children off the ground. ECD is a new area in the Maldives, with private pre-schools about to come under the responsibility of government.

### *Recommendations*

It will be important for inclusion of children with disabilities for all schools to understand their duty to admit children with disabilities on the same basis as others; i.e. that if children can be brought to a local school, then the school is required to welcome them without question. However, it also needs to be understood that schools can call on sources of help in improving how they meet the educational needs of children with disabilities. Ensuring that principals, deputy heads and teachers receive training to this effect will be important.

UNICEF could provide significant technical support to help the Maldives develop ECD services which stimulate and support children with disabilities, and which act as a basis for bringing disabled children into the education system. UNICEF can also work with the government and other NGO partners to raise the awareness of parents thereby raising the demand for education for children with disabilities.

### **4.3.2 Policy and legal accountability**

The Disability Act 2010 is a strong piece of legislation that sets out clearly what educational entitlements children with disabilities have, in addition to specific supports that people with disabilities should receive from government. Essentially, the Act states that children with disabilities are entitled to full access to education without discrimination.

The IE policy, sent to all schools by formal circular in May 2013, instructs schools and the MoE how they should deliver on the Disability Act, with clear and task-oriented responsibilities for school management, the MoE, SEN teachers and parents. Responsibilities for non-SEN teachers are less clear. In two areas the IE policy does not reflect the implications of the Disability Act in giving disabled children full access to education: 1) access to examination and certification of achievement; and 2) equitable access to school.

These entitlements need to be more clearly stated in the policy, particularly as challenges around examination and school access came out strongly in stakeholder discussions. A major

strength of the IE policy is that it states it should be updated each year to focus on relevant issues, which would enable improvements like this to be made easily. Another strength of the policy is its focus on all children with SEN, to include gifted children and children experiencing family disruption. These elements of the policy require further development and advice is sought on how to make them a reality.

It was reported that the MoE has already made headways in developing policy and action to deliver on the Disability Act. This progress is indicated by the 2013 inclusive education policy and efforts by the MoE's SEN Unit to build capacity of schools for meeting the needs of children with SEN. The SEN Unit, which has been leading on disability in education issues since 2008, has two full time members of staff and sits within the NIE. In addition to drafting and securing approval for the IE Policy, the SEN Unit has secured budget and approval to implement several key provisions of the policy this year.

The Health Ministry's Gender, Family and Human Rights department has also drafted a disability policy. The most relevant clause in respect of education is a statement that if disabled children are being denied appropriate access to public schools then the fees for their enrollment in private or charity schools should be paid by the MoE. This raises the prospect of public schools refusing to make changes towards admitting more children with disabilities on the basis that children can be catered for in the private sector (especially if children's unequivocal right of access to public schools is not clarified in policy). It was recognised that this is a challenge, and that paying education replacement fees is a different issue to government funding NGOs' rehabilitation, research and advocacy work with disabled children, which is also being considered.

Provisions for government funding of disability charities who provide rehabilitation and other support, such as parents' groups, is particularly overdue given the lack of other sources of rehabilitation, particularly disability-focused physiotherapy. It was emphasised that not too much burden should be placed on SEN teachers to provide therapy services that should be offered by the health services; but that schools could be useful sites for delivering therapy brought in by medical experts.

At present children with disabilities can stay in school even if over the age appropriate for the grade. This is crucial for children with learning delays and children who have missed out on education due to being disabled, as is the case for many in the Maldives. However, it creates a problem of throughput for schools with good SEN provision, and there are no opportunities for study after leaving school, particularly for young adults with learning difficulties. Many parents reported children with disabilities leaving school and losing their skills quickly at home and being very unhappy.

### *Recommendations*

It is recommended that if policy on school fees is considered essential, it is only made for a maximum of two years, as a reasonable period of preparation for all schools to admit all children with disabilities (including those currently in private schools).

It is also recommended that the IE policy be updated in 2014 with specific statements mandating that schools cannot refuse access to any child and that the MOE has a duty to ensure inclusive access to examinations for all children as they complete basic education.

It is recommended for the government and the private sector to facilitate the funding of NGOs and CBOs to provide rehabilitation and learning activities outside of and in addition to the normal school curriculum, particularly for young adults.

#### **4.3.3 SEN teaching within schools**

Significant efforts had been made by the NIE SEN Unit to encourage schools to allocate SEN teachers and develop SEN teaching capacity. This is the main means of realising the policy commitment to set up 'SEN units' in atoll schools: by having one or more SEN teachers and at least one dedicated classroom space for teaching disabled or marginalised children.

In particular, three schools in Malé, two of whom had been focusing on educating children with disabilities for a number of years, were being supported in conjunction with UNICEF to develop into disability-specific national hubs. These schools were termed 'pilot SEN schools'. Work had mostly taken off in 2013 and each school is in a different stage of capacity development.

There was no clear evidence of how each school was expected to work as a hub, with several stakeholders in the MoE and different schools indicating that their understanding was that children with a particular disability would all go to the national hub school. However, this is a very different approach to SEN specialist schools in many other countries, which would usually play more of an outreach role – particularly where schools are remote and spread out as in the Maldives. It was becoming clear that parents and children were often not happy with the apparent need to move to Malé for their child's education, particularly where mobility difficulties and visual impairment were an issue.

There was, however, plenty of scope to clarify the focus of work with specialist SEN schools so that they became more focused on transmitting capacity to children's local schools, rather than expecting children to come to them. Workshop participants were willing to consider this idea. The Imaadhuddin School, a SEN pilot school in Malé specializing in autism, had through its very active and experienced lead SEN teacher, already been playing an active role as a hub to support other schools. Teachers regularly travelled to other islands to advise SEN teachers on how to work with children with disabilities, particularly learning difficulties related to Down's Syndrome and autism. Imaadhuddin teachers were observed training TRC coordinators and pre-

## **NOTEWORTHY PRACTICE:** **Helping children with learning disabilities catch up with academic and practical learning**

Imaadhuddin School's SEN approach focuses on gradually building routines with children in separate classes, to help them cope with the concentration and focus required for academic learning. It also focuses on taking children through personalised education plans which aim to help them catch up with the curriculum, building on their strongest areas and reducing teaching load in other areas. The physical environments in SEN classes are bright and full of children's work on the walls. They offer dedicated areas for relaxation and time-out as well as for learning practical skills such as washing and cooking. Classrooms are kept secure to protect children who have learning difficulties from getting lost.

Once children have caught up to an identifiable grade level in a good spread of curriculum areas, they are supported into mainstream classes, often sitting with a SEN teacher to help them with additional needs in accessing the lesson. This was consistent with the approaches observed in the Autism Association and Care Society schools, and was reported to have been influenced by support from visiting experts from India and Australia. Imaadhuddin School is one of the SEN pilot schools in Malé specializing in autism.

school heads at the disability training session, and had a history of working closely with the NIE SEN unit to develop in-service training.

Similar, although less intensive, learning environments were seen in Villimale School and Jamaaluddin School. SEN teaching observed in four schools (three specialist schools in Malé and one mainstream school in Villimalé) was generally very positive, with good facilities and small, ability-focused groups following individual education plans (IEPs), which were related to the overall curriculum in varying degrees. There was significant focus on building up students' physical and cognitive capacities to engage in both academic and practical learning, containing an element of therapy.

Where teachers responded to students' and parents' priorities, progress in learning and development was generally strong. This SEN provision tended to be focused on students with relatively noticeable support needs who were considered otherwise not able to participate in education. Some students were being encouraged into mainstream classes in addition to their separate SEN classes, but were not often getting ideal support from mainstream teachers.

Students were encouraged to take part in all aspects of learning open to the rest of the school, such as library time and physical education, albeit mostly in separate SEN groups. Each school had made significant efforts to encourage socialisation and friendliness between SEN students and other students. SEN students reported being very happy with how other children treated them (although some parents in Maafushi school reported bullying).

For older students identified as having significant disabilities, participating in examinations had only come up this year. Prior to that few students had had the opportunity to take part in formal examinations, although a deaf teacher in Jamaluddin school had taken O-levels at a sixth-form college (before Jamaluddin offered O-levels). Each 'specialist hub' school had been liaising with the National Examinations Authority (which had been supportive) and the NIE SEN Unit to request specific adaptations to students' examinations, but this had been done on a relatively ad hoc basis, with sometimes inconsistent results.

A major demand for SEN students was to have more vocational training and qualification opportunities. At present, schools can offer vocational training programmes, but none are accredited or examined. Polytechnics exist but do not seem engaged in issues of disability or inclusion.

### *Recommendations*

UNICEF and NIE should undertake detailed planning on how to use 'pilot' SEN schools to spread good practice to other schools using Imaadhuddin's approach of sharing advice and experience rather than creating hubs in which children are expected to travel long distances to reach.

#### **4.3.4 Finding SEN teachers**

Policy and plans now require every atoll school to have at least one SEN teacher, and the NIE SEN Unit had encouraged schools to identify SEN teachers. However, reluctance to become a SEN teacher has been slowing progress, which has also affected the three specialist SEN schools that had very few candidates for new SEN roles. Charities reported the same problems. SEN teachers were not generally working together across schools to develop solutions to problems faced by their students, although some had had support from Care Society and Imaadhuddin School.

Encouraging teachers to network and share experiences on the positive side of working with children with disabilities may be one solution. More importantly, NIE had recently secured budget for a special allowance for SEN teachers, a key incentive given that SEN teachers are currently expected to undertake additional training and self-development. This was achieved by linking SEN teaching to an existing 'hardship allowance' already established for health workers. The policy definition of 'SEN teacher' has been made flexible to enable SEN teachers working in different settings – separate SEN classes, mainstream classes, atoll and island schools – to qualify. This is expected to encourage much more uptake of SEN teacher positions.

### *Recommendations*

The MoE needs to look at exam accessibility and how to prepare for examinations students with disabilities who have missed out on education in the past. Hearing impaired students who have not had the opportunity to develop the complex levels of Dhivethi and English written languages needed for examinations will need particular focus.

## NOTEWORTHY PRACTICE: Introducing trainee teachers to disability and inclusion

Teacher training as part of tertiary education for those who want to become teachers includes a basic module on SEN in Year 3. This module is supported by the NIE, which provide an expert to run lectures and seminars. The training involves an introduction to concepts around disability and inclusion, including contact with disabled students from Imaadhuddin School (a pilot SEN school) to promote familiarity and comfort with disabled children. Photos and accounts of the training revealed that it was lively and learner-centred. Ideas around differentiated teaching for children with different learning support needs are discussed. Teachers are encouraged to come up with lesson plans with the assumption that a class includes a child with disabilities.

Requests for adapting examination standards are not appropriate. A more focused planning by teachers to boost gaps in students' foundational learning skills will be needed, particularly where students are approaching exams and have already missed schooling. This will need clear and collaborative planning among all teachers working with such students so that teaching time is used effectively to fill key learning gaps and to cover the main aspects of the exam curriculum needed to get the three GCSE passes required for further study.

More thinking is needed on the variety of roles that SEN teachers can play in improving teaching practice across and between schools, rather than only running direct SEN classes. It will be important to bring SEN teachers together and support them to work in different ways in different contexts, while continuing with existing incentive schemes.

### 4.3.5 Teacher training on SEN approaches

Teachers have access to training on IE (described as 'SEN', but not only focused on segregated settings). This training is currently provided in Year 3 of the pre-service teacher training or as part of optional in-service teacher training and certificate courses. However, many students take a teaching diploma which lasts one year only. Employed teachers reported that they cannot leave childcare responsibilities to visit Malé for in-service training, so they do not get to take the SEN modules. SEN courses in years 1 and 2 of teacher training courses have been proposed. Continuing to develop these courses in modular format which fits around teachers' commitments is recommended.

The SEN Unit had recently assisted the Maldives National University (MNU), which provides all pre-service teacher training, to develop a certificate in SEN to enable teachers doing pre-service training to specialise. The course focused on had very good feedback, and a teacher trained through this course was observed using very positive approaches in Villimalé school. However, there was insufficient demand in 2014 to run the course full time. Mainstream teachers interviewed in Maafushi and Malé stated that they would not want to retrain as SEN teachers because they could not spare the time away. The SEN Unit is considering the



possibilities of splitting the SEN certificate into modular units which could be accessed by serving teachers. It is recommended that this is pursued.

It was also recognised across the board that mainstream teachers needed SEN training. NIE's SEN Unit staff had helped MNU develop sessions within their standard pre-service teacher training which focuses on disability issues and teaching techniques. The final workshop organized as part of the country visit identified a need to extend provision and availability of disability and inclusion-focused training within standard pre-service teacher training.

#### 4.3.6 Quality and inclusiveness of mainstream teaching

Teaching in the Maldives has gone through a dramatic transformation to adopt learner-centred, active pedagogy, most noticeably in primary grades. Moves are in process to increase the training levels of all teachers. Pre-school education is currently being regulated by the MoE and plans are in place to extend pre-school education more consistently to all children. TRCs are working to provide regular in-service training days to all teachers, supported by Training of Trainers in Malé.

However, given that competition is fierce for education scholarships abroad, parental pressure to score well in regular grade tests is high. The shift system limits teaching time and individual periods are only 35 minutes. Teachers only get one or two free periods every day, which they tend to use for marking and other administrative tasks, rather than detailed lesson planning. There was a sense that lead teachers often set the pace of lesson planning, encouraging standardised approaches to delivering lessons and managing assessment, often done through photocopied worksheets.

Several teachers and teacher trainers spoke of pressure from management to get through the curriculum at a standard pace, rather than adjusting pace and focus to children's needs. As a result, a significant minority of children was reported to be falling behind every year in all schools. These children were reported as often reaching higher secondary without basic literacy and numeracy skills. Some teachers indicated that parents were expected to ensure children's learning levels through tuition. Remedial classes were in place for 'slow learners'. But these were reported to often not work as they were only 35 minutes a few times a week and were held after normal school hours when children were overtired. One school reported giving children a break and a snack before their remedial classes, which had helped.

Most non-SEN teachers interviewed expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to teach children with disabilities. Most were aware of several children in each of their classes with significant support needs who were achieving well below curriculum targets. Some teachers described substantial

adaptations which they had made to support such children, particularly at Imaaduddin school where SEN teachers were encouraged to work with mainstream teachers. Even then teachers reported being advised not to use differentiated assessment techniques, indicating some confusion in school leadership about what learner-centred teaching involves. It was apparent that where SEN teachers were in place, they were seen as having responsibility for disabled children, meaning that mainstream teachers did not seem to take responsibility for the education of all children.

Discussion with teachers and parents in Maafushi school revealed very different perceptions of the capabilities of children with disabilities among parents and mainstream teachers. Teachers came across as viewing students' abilities on the basis of their ability to read and write. Parents highlighted that students often had much higher levels of knowledge that could be expressed through practical tasks or less text-heavy assessment.

The mainstream Grade 6 English lesson observed reflected these issues. Engaging and active methods were used, but they were focused on the upper ability level of the class. Simple adaptations for different ability levels, such as repeating instructions in more simple language, speaking only when facing the class, using body language to indicate meaning, or writing tasks on the board, were not made. A child with autism was identified (in a non-stigmatising way) by the teacher, who had placed him at the front of the class. However, several students at the back of the class were observed to be struggling to engage in the fast-paced lesson. The teacher referred to the lack of time and the need to get through certain tasks several times.

During the final workshop, most participants expressed strong feelings of frustration that the job of getting learner-centred, inclusive teaching practice in place was not complete. Participants expressed an aspiration for all students to have IEPs, and for differentiated teaching methods to become a core part of pre-and in-service teacher training.

Another important development was the UNICEF and World Bank-supported school self-evaluation and development system currently being piloted. Strong indicators of whole school development have been put together, and work is in progress to develop progress indicators, as schools report being worried about not reaching the target indicators. There is a very positive inclusion standard, which includes indicators such as 'all local children are enrolled', but it is one of five optional standards, of which schools choose two. Discussions revealed that schools are anxious about inclusion because they feel they will not achieve well in this area. Maafushi school opted to focus on management and community relations during the visit.

A key challenge for any attempts to strengthen teaching practice is the reliance on foreign teachers, particularly at the secondary education level. Foreign teachers are considered less likely to change their practice in line with policy, and may not have had access to inclusive training. It is hoped that as demand for and confidence in inclusive, learner-centred approaches grows, locally trained teachers or appropriately-skilled foreign teachers will increasingly be sought out by schools.

### *Recommendations*

In order to deliver on government obligations on children with disabilities, it would be better to work towards making the inclusion standard compulsory in school self-assessment. However, schools should be enabled to get positive recognition for identifying even very low standards, if they make progress against them.

One issue about the school development approach is that currently only a very small team of MoE staff is managing it, meaning that action in response to school self-assessments and development plans takes a long time. The final workshop identified the need to develop networks of teachers who would lead on whole school development across the Maldives.

#### **4.3.7 Curriculum redevelopment**

A major focus of discussion at the final workshop during the country visit was the need for adapting curricula for children with disabilities and/or SEN. Requests had been received for the NIE SEN Unit to produce an adapted curriculum for SEN children, but these had been resisted. During discussion on the risk of reducing perceived standards of achievement for SEN children through adapting curricula, it was clear that stakeholders did not want SEN children to receive lower levels of qualification, but that they wanted advice on how learners with disabilities can be supported to access curriculum content and certification, and for achievement to be recognised in line with ability. This was the top area of technical support identified as being necessary from outside the Maldives, preferably via UNICEF.

Many of the challenges identified with schools' limitations on supporting the needs of all learners are likely to diminish dramatically if the new national curriculum framework is fully implemented as intended in 2015. The framework was reviewed by the EENET consultant and found to be extremely positive for promoting inclusive values and practices. It has emphasis on a fully holistic set of learning areas, and practical skills such as entrepreneurship and life skills.

Such a curriculum framework should in principle enable learners who have difficulty accessing text, or expressing themselves in writing, to shine. Achievements are described in terms of skill areas and the full range of development domains is included. This will allow learners to achieve in a wider range of areas than before and focus on foundational skills rather than how much information has been recounted by the teacher. The curriculum development team at the NIE reported that the intention behind the new curriculum was to foster a transformation in school culture and practice, towards learner centred education which is fully relevant to the Maldives' social and economic needs. Pilots of the curriculum framework in several schools had gone well.

However, discussion with curriculum developers revealed two major challenges with implementing the new curriculum framework. One was that it was not clear whether the new government in place after the national election would appreciate the need to commit resources for the substantial retraining and guidance needed to embed the new approaches implied by the curriculum. It



was recognised that few teachers had the confidence to come up with detailed teaching and formative assessment approaches indicated by the curriculum on their own, and that a full guidance and training package would be needed. However, it is possible that the government will only recognise the need for much more limited capacity supports.

The other major risk reported by respondents was a lack of technical capacity within the MoE to produce sufficiently detailed technical guidelines for training and guidance materials, particularly around ensuring the curriculum is made accessible and engaging for all learners. What should teachers be told about how to track students' progress, and what specific learning targets should teachers be looking for in more practical and holistic areas?

The issue of language development also came up in the discussions. Dhivethi should be the core of active oral and written language development for children, but at present is taught primarily as writing, with passive reading and copying being the main focus. The new Dhivethi syllabus does not move Dhivethi towards becoming an active language-development subject area. For children with developmental delays, or any other obstacle to language and literacy, this misses a huge opportunity to build foundational linguistic skills in the early years. Given that speech problems were cited by many SEN and mainstream teachers as a priority challenge for children in their classes, this is an urgent issue. There are only two speech therapists in the Maldives and they do not apparently distinguish clearly between speech impairments and language delays.

On a similar note, there is currently no clear strategy for strengthening the capacity of pre-school teachers many of whom are not qualified to deliver on the potential for developmentally-beneficial early years education offered by the new curriculum. Pre-school education which addresses disability and diversity issues as well as building core learning skills must be an essential foundation of the new curriculum.

## 4.4 Immediate next steps: stakeholder workshop in Malé

The following ‘next steps’ were identified by workshop participants (who included NGOs, MNU, MOE, SEN teachers and principals) as important to building progress around inclusive education. Ideas focused particularly on the opportunities offered by progress towards the new curriculum framework. NIE’s SEN Unit may need to take leadership of these for the moment, but ultimately they relate to much bigger changes within education which need cross-MOE leadership.

1. Set up a cross-organisational email list of workshop participants to continue to share good practice and advice on moving towards inclusive, quality teaching and learning.
2. Set up SEN teacher networks to share encouragement, innovation and good practice remotely, for example through a Facebook group (to include weekly practice questions, sharing of pictures and videos of teachers’ practice, and so on).
3. Request an expert working group on new curriculum implementation to be set up under the MoE Advisory Committee. This working group (or issue-focused subgroups) should work with relevant departments in the MoE, such as quality improvement and curriculum development, to ensure that written guidance and training schemes are produced to enable detailed implementation of the new national curriculum framework. The working group should bring together available experience from MNU, schools and MoE departments on the following priority areas:
  - developing appropriate pre-school teaching capacity
  - differentiated teaching techniques
  - curriculum adaptation and differentiation
  - language development within the new curriculum
  - accessible assessment and learning targets
  - inclusive whole school development and self-evaluation
  - engagement with vocational training providers to support the new curriculum inclusively
  - effective, inclusive school management for the new curriculum.
4. Encourage the MoE to set up a teacher network on whole school development and self-evaluation.
5. Discuss whether UNICEF can support such a working group with technical assistance on differentiated teaching methods, curriculum differentiation, and accessible assessment.
6. Identify where EENET CIC can be of most help to the NIE SEN Unit and UNICEF Maldives.

## 4.5 Maldives action plan: objectives identified at the Sub-Regional Needs Assessment Workshop, Paro, December 2013

### A. Early detection and intervention

#### Objective 1. Ensure early identification of children with SEN and disabilities

##### What is happening now?

- No formal identification procedure only informal identification
- (Early childhood) milestones and delays identified by health workers but children are not referred for further assistance

##### What opportunities are there for 2014?

- Work with Health Ministry and Faculty of Health Sciences to incorporate this component in teacher training and in referral mechanisms
- Work with Health Ministry to include (an inclusion objective) in their public health policy

#### Objective 2. Provide early intervention

##### What is happening now?

- Some NGOs working in this area
- Some schools in Malé working on this, with educational focus only
- Hospitals in Malé provide limited service and only when approached

##### What opportunities are there for 2014?

- New government with promising pledges
- Parliamentary election
- ECCD is going to be part of formal education
- Pre-school teacher training will be developed

### B. Advocacy and raising awareness

#### Objective 1. Raise awareness on IE among school heads, teachers, students and parents; raise awareness among the broader community

##### What is happening now?

- Denial
- Children with disability stigmatised
- Laws and policies are in place
- NGOs are working at some level but in isolation
- Inquiry on “access to education” by human rights commission is ongoing at national level
- UNCRPD ratified
- CRC and other commitments not implemented fully

##### What opportunities are there for 2014?

- Training sessions
- Media advocacy
- NGO collaboration

## Detailed action plan for 2014

### **Human resources capacity building on IE**

- Form technical group
- Take stock of existing capacity, HR and resources, and other needs
- Plan twin-track capacity building for pre-service and in-service teacher training

### **Supporting the IE policy**

- Prepare framework to monitor IE policy
- Review and update of policy

### **ECCD and early intervention**

- Advocacy for a multisectoral ECCD working mechanism
- Lobby health, protection ministries and Maldives National University
- Pilot in selected schools linked to Key Stage 1
- Develop and adapt early assessment tools, e.g. from Bhutan and Bangladesh

## After 2014

- Roll out HR capacity development plan for pre- and in-service teacher training
- Set up inclusive education forum (try for 2014)
- Activate early identification system through training for teachers and health workers
- Use communication for development to promote community awareness on inclusion. Campaign in media (TV and video) and document success stories
- Scale up SEN teaching and rehabilitation on islands

# 05

## Country-focused literature review findings: Bhutan

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How well does Bhutan compare to the ideal characteristics of an inclusive education system discussed in Chapter 2? With the specified elements of an IE system in mind, the Bhutan-specific literature review was conducted to see how far the country had progressed towards such a system, and the extent to which conditions were in place to support progress in the future. Documents describing the national education system, policy on disability, and the situation for teaching and assessment were collated and analysed. The views of a small number of key education stakeholders were also sought in informal telephone interviews to provide background. The country literature review was used to shape particular areas of inquiry for more investigation during the country needs assessment visit; conclusions and recommendations in this section are therefore tentative.



## 5.1 How well does Bhutan fit the inclusive education framework?

### **a. Learner-centred teaching well established in teacher training and management**

The government of Bhutan has demonstrated clear commitment to work towards learner-centred teaching (MoE 2012c; Gyamtso & Maxwell, 2012). Policy aims to establish differentiated teaching methods (MoE 2012c) and pre-service teacher training attempts to introduce the concepts and methods of learner-centred teaching. Bhutan has processes in place that measure gross national happiness (GNH) and other school improvement indicators – many of which are equity-focused indicators similar to those used in inclusive education school improvement and assessment tools such as the Index for Inclusion (Save the Children, 2008).

However, the country is experiencing some challenges in working towards establishing good practice as the norm. Teacher training is usually lecture-based and although trainee teachers get six months of practicum experience, there is little evidence that this is of a long enough duration, or that such a practicum period is properly mentored and supported (within teacher training institutions and practicum schools) to enable trainees to put any knowledge of pedagogy into practice. Despite recent improvements in human resource management (MoE Bhutan, 2014) quality control in selecting teachers is still an issue due to the high demand for teachers given the rapidly expanding education system. Few trainee teachers fail, and some trainees find jobs even if they have not successfully graduated. A comprehensive Teacher Human Resource Policy was launched in 2013 to improve teacher quality. But respondents from UNICEF, the MoE and Paro College suggested the policy had not yet been able to overcome these issues in practice. There is often limited motivation to teach among trainees, with many intending to leave the profession after a few years (VanDolkar, 2010). This means that classrooms are more likely to receive demotivated and inexperienced teachers who have no practical familiarity with good practice.

Two innovative education improvement initiatives could be particularly useful in helping to set the foundations for inclusive education of children with disabilities. One is the School Improvement Plan (SIP) approach (MoE guidelines), and another is the development of distance learning for teachers and pupils using information and communications technology or ICT (Jamtsho & Bullen, 2007). SIPs are a powerful way of engaging teachers, parents, children and other school community members in thinking about how to support learners who have difficulty accessing and participating in education. Where SIPs attract funding, this can enable schools to be responsive to the specific needs of excluded learners. ICT can be invaluable in giving teachers up-to-date and interesting practice information (including videos, text and audio), and in supplementing learning for children who cannot at present attend school.

### **b. Schools and teachers linked to resources and expertise on special educational needs**

There is good potential in Bhutan to link schools and teachers with expertise on disability and special educational needs. Special schools already exist in small numbers, and SEN specialist

***There is strong commitment in the Constitution of Bhutan to supporting people with disabilities to access their rights. There also appears to be a supportive general attitude towards disability among the public, with high recognition of the need to care for and support people affected by disability.***

teacher training courses are available. A key focus of the country visit was to find out what these training courses involved, and whether their focus was compatible with an inclusive approach.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE), formerly the Education for All Fast Track Initiative, commitments and MoE funding policy state that each integrated school will receive adequate support to meet the needs of children with disabilities and special educational needs. At the same time, every school is expected to meet the needs of children with mild to moderate disabilities (MoE 2012d). Does this mean that every local school will receive adequate funding support to meet the needs of children with disabilities? No clear funding targets or budget allocation lines have been identified at this stage.

The country visit to Bhutan aimed to ascertain what type and level of funding is intended to flow to which schools for supporting additional disability-related education costs. However, it does appear at present as if extra funding is only intended for special educational units or segregated schools. The only disability-specific budget identified in the review is the SEN budget, a very miniscule 0.4 percent of the basic education budget (MoE 2009).

### **c. A clear accountability framework for ensuring access to inclusive education**

There is no clear legislative framework for entitlements to education for children with disabilities at present. Bhutan has signed, but not ratified, the UNCPRD, which means it is not yet possible to hold the government to account for practical progress against the Convention.

There is strong commitment in the Constitution of Bhutan to supporting people with disabilities to access their rights. There also appears to be a supportive general attitude towards disability among the public, with high recognition of the need to care for and support people affected by disability (Dorj, 2012). On the other hand, there are indications that disability is generally seen as leading to vulnerability, with people affected by disability not having their own autonomy or the potential to be productive citizens (NSB, 2012). The implication of this type of social attitude towards disability is that people may not see the rationale for including children with disabilities in the society of their local school, as a basis for them becoming active citizens in adult life. Additionally, a pervasive belief, particularly in the more remote, rural areas of Bhutan that disability is a result of 'karma' (i.e. disability is a result of misdeeds done in a past life and is a 'burden' which must be stoically endured) perpetuates negative attitudes on disability, and works to prevent parents seeking support services for their disabled children.

It will be helpful to determine where the thinking of education decision makers is on this issue, as it will make a significant difference to whether education policy intends to give children with disabilities access to the same skills and knowledge as children without disabilities. One indication is already apparent in the MoE SEN policy (MoE 2012d), which states that children with disabilities should have access to a special needs curriculum. This suggests that it is not intended to give children with disabilities access to the full curriculum.

No information was found on the attitude of teachers in local schools towards children with disabilities, and to what extent they are willing to work with children with disabilities to help them achieve comparable learning outcomes to other students. This will be an important area for the country visit to investigate.

Perhaps linked to a lack of urgency to see people with disabilities as economically or socially productive, there is no specific legal framework to express what children with disabilities are entitled to in terms of access to education, or what type of education they can have. There is no clear authority which can be appealed to if a child with disabilities is denied access to school.

Looking one level below legislation, at policy statements, it is clear that there is strong government intent to offer some form of education for children with disabilities in Bhutan. However, policy documents are at present unclear and contain several contradictions. Terminology relating to disability, SEN and IE are used interchangeably throughout the policy documents, as if the differences between them are not fully understood. For example, SEN is used to refer to disability and vice versa, even though these are not the same - **a disability may lead to SEN, and SEN may be caused by many other factors than disability.**

From the policy documents as they stand, it appears that there is no clarity on the part of policy makers what type of education they wish to provide for children with disabilities, and how they wish to progress towards delivering it. Several different types of schools are described in the Ministry of Education draft Policy on Special Educational Needs (MoE 2012d) as being intended for children with disabilities: integrated schools, special educational units, mainstream schools. Other policy documentation outlines the strong inclusive values attached to the 'green schools' movement (MoE, guide to school management). There is no clarity on how these schools are expected to work together, and exactly which students they are each expected to serve.

Delivering SEN education to children with disabilities may be done in a segregated education setting or an inclusive local school, and it is not clear from the policy which is intended, or whether a mix is being aimed for. On the other hand, the MoE's policy statement (MoE 2012d) indicates that education for children with disabilities is intended to take place 'in an inclusive context'. Does this mean that the aim is to move towards inclusive education with local mainstream schools supporting children with disabilities? If not, what is this statement intended to mean in practice?

It is unclear whether all children with disabilities are to be covered by the SEN policy, or only children who receive certification as having a certain level of disability leading to specific SEN. At present, children with a certain level of diagnosis of disability and SEN should receive an ID entitling them to a new government disability allowance (MoE 2012d). If only children with a certified level of disability and SEN are expected to receive targeted support from special education units in integrated schools, this would fit with the idea of some additional funding flowing to SEN units.

It must be noted that if each school is expected to have a SEN unit, which would receive SEN funding, that would imply a large expansion in costs of SEN education. No indications have been found so far in the literature review that funding has been allocated to support such an expansion of SEN units.

This idea of two levels of education for children with less severe and more severe levels of disability would also fit with the MoE SEN policy commitment to establish inclusive schools which can cater for mild to moderate disabilities, and to train all teachers to respond to mild to moderate disabilities. Local schools are incentivised in policy to become inclusive schools (MoE 2012d). However, at present it is not possible to tell from the policy documents what practical arrangements are actually intended, due to the lack of clarity in wording.

This lack of clarity makes it difficult to see whether there is any commitment to progress towards an inclusive education system, or whether only a segregated education approach is proposed for children with disabilities. Difficulties with English translation may be at the root of these issues, but it will be important to investigate further what policy makers' and educators' understanding of key concepts relating to disability, education and inclusion is.

Broader education policy documentation does refer to disability and exclusion, mentioning disability as a cause of the 2 percent exclusion rate in enrolment, and referring to recent and future plans to expand special schools (MoE, 2012b). This indicates that disability is a genuine priority in education policy, albeit from a SEN perspective. Similarly, The SEN policy (MoE 2012d) also highlights the things other ministries such as health and information need to do to support the learning of children with disabilities, recognising the need for coordination across government departments as a priority.

#### **d. An assessment system which promotes flexible assessment and testing**

Bhutan is undertaking efforts to strengthen its assessment system. Attempts to introduce continuous assessment, which would be supportive of an inclusive approach, have been revealing conflicts with the formal assessment system - students often do much worse in formal assessments than in continuous assessment (MoE, 2012c). This points to a need to investigate which assessment system (or other issue) may be at fault.

The main disability in education policy states that moves are already planned by the Bhutan Council for School Examination and Assessment to make testing more accessible for students with disabilities (MoE, 2012d). Examples include large print documents, Braille, extra time, and so on. This is very encouraging, and the needs assessment visit should look into how far such moves have progressed in practice.

In the policy document there is a further indication that some children with disabilities will be following a different curriculum than others: "Create avenues for adjustable assessment

strategies for the candidates with special educational needs who have been following adaptive curriculum in their schools” (MoE, 2012d). Along with the other areas of uncertainty in interpreting the national policy, this needs to be investigated during the assessment visit. Who will be studying a different curriculum; on what basis; and how will this curriculum enable them to get qualifications to support their economic and social participation?

## 5.2 Early identification of disability

Little has been known about the nature of childhood disabilities in Bhutan, preventing provision of early treatment and rehabilitation that can significantly reduce impairments. In 2010-11 Bhutan’s National Statistics Bureau (NSB) worked with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health with support from UNICEF to produce a two-stage study designed to estimate the prevalence of childhood disabilities among children aged 2-9 years in Bhutan.

Rapid Neurodevelopmental Assessment (RNDA) and Rapid Functional Assessment (RFA) tools were integrated into the Bhutan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). This provided a first stage screening of the children based on the knowledge of mothers or caregivers, initially using a screening instrument involving ten simple questions. The second stage involved a follow-up assessment of children identified under the first stage, to confirm disability status. This was implemented by the Special Education Section under the MoE (NSB, 2012).

The findings of the report have helped to initiate discussions on the need for children to be referred for treatment through the action of NGOs and the health service. The increased understanding of disability prevalence has helped health services plan better treatment and rehabilitation options. The parents of children identified as having a disability are now in a position to request support from schools. There is commitment to use RNDA and RFA on an ongoing basis to shape health and education provision and planning.

## 5.3 Conclusion

Bhutan is committed to maintaining its unique approach to society and not being unnecessarily influenced by ‘the West’. It has instituted many improvements to the general quality and responsiveness of mainstream education, which, with further support and focus on excluded groups, could lay very positive foundations for inclusive education which delivers quality learning and participation to children with disabilities.

However, paradoxically Bhutan seems to have created a SEN policy that has taken Western ideas and brought them into Bhutan’s policy documentation. This policy process has not apparently given due consideration to how existing Bhutanese approaches to education could have been built on to enable the inclusive education of children with disabilities, and children with other special needs, who may previously have been excluded from or within schools. This imported model



seems to be requiring a complex web of special schools, special units, mainstream schools, integrated schools, etc. to make it work. Some moves to boost numbers of special schools have been undertaken, but it is difficult to understand how they will fit with the rest of the system. It is not clear how the various types of schools are or will be funded, how they will link together, and where the human capacity can come from to staff and run them, given the challenges involved in getting well qualified teachers into the expanding general schooling system.

Bhutan seems to have, inherently, a solid foundation for an inclusive education system. The Gross National Happiness and Green Schools approach further cements this, with its focus on enhancing social interactions as well as environment and learning. There are strong drives towards using learner-centred approaches and commitments to improving education quality, although these have a long way to go in some areas.

Yet despite this it appears to have been decided that in order to bring children with disabilities into the education picture, a separate complex solution of extra and 'special' provision is needed rather than a solution of gradual change to the existing system to make it – bit by bit – more supportive of all learners. This seems to be underpinned by a conception of disability which is at odds with the idea of disabled people as productive members of society and economy, which may undermine attempts to give children with disabilities the education which they need to become these productive citizens. Potentially there is an interpretation that SEN is for disabled people and IE is for including everyone else. Clarifying policy intent and financing backing for disability-focused educational support is urgently needed.

This is not to say that there is no need for specific support for disabled learners – there is of course need for more expert assessment, equipment, and building the confidence of teachers. But a more holistic "twin-track" inclusion approach could be used rather than the potentially segregationist special needs approach which seems to be stated in the current policy. There could be a vision of every child being educated within the mainstream system (with perhaps a very few exceptions among those with severe disabilities), within one track of overall educational improvement; plus another track of targeted specialist support on disability (but in a much simpler way than seems to be envisaged with the complex structure of integrated schools/special units, etc.).

If such an approach could be pursued, focusing on updating the training and motivation system for teachers may deliver the key to more inclusive local schooling. The key focus of the country field visit will need to be on whether this understanding of current policy is correct; and what the potential might be to move towards a simpler, more context-appropriate approach to building inclusive schooling for children with disabilities.

# 06

## Country visit findings: Bhutan

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### 6.1 Introduction

The 'education and disability needs assessment' visit was conducted in Bhutan by Ian Kaplan from 25 August to 6 September 2013. The needs assessment visit was conducted in order to support UNICEF Bhutan, the Ministry of Education, Paro College of Education and other education stakeholders in identifying challenges and gaps towards delivering quality education for children with disabilities; to help key stakeholders develop plans for reducing these challenges; and to identify where external technical support is most needed to deliver these plans. In addition, the visit aimed to capture promising practice for sharing across the region. The country literature review was reviewed and discussed during the needs assessment visit.

### 6.2 Country visit activities

#### *Meetings/discussions*

Meetings/discussions took the form of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and covered a range of issues related to the inclusion of children with disabilities in Bhutan, specifically, and inclusive education and social inclusion more widely. As well as serving as interviews, meetings also had a focus on 'two-way' information sharing with input elicited from participating stakeholders and support/advice provided by the EENET consultant. The key priorities during the meetings were to discuss: barriers and challenges to inclusion of children with disabilities in education and inclusion more generally; current practices (with a focus on promising practices) in relation to inclusive education; and, further strategies and solutions to implementing inclusive education (with a focus on children with disabilities).

Meetings/discussions involved:

- A range of education, ECCD and child protection staff from UNICEF Bhutan
- Representatives from the MoE SEN and Curriculum Development divisions and the Director of the Department of School Education

- Paro College of Education: Senior management, tutors on the SEN module and teacher education students who have taken the SEN module
- Staff at Drugkyel Lower Secondary School and Drugkyel Deaf Unit
- Staff at Changangka Lower Secondary school
- Staff and parents at Draktsho Vocational Training Institute

Time limitations meant it was not possible to meet Ability Bhutan, a key NGO working with families affected by disability in Bhutan.

### *Observations*

Brief observations were conducted in order to get a sense of the practice of education in the two schools and vocational training institute visited. Observations took place in:

- Drugkyel Lower Secondary School and Drugkyel Deaf Unit
- Changangka Lower Secondary school
- Draktsho Vocational Training Institute

### *An inclusive education workshop*

Education stakeholders were invited to attend a workshop conducted by the EENET consultant with the support of UNICEF Bhutan. The workshop provided participants with an opportunity to meet, network and discuss inclusive education concepts, policies and practices as well as to begin strategizing about further inclusive education advocacy opportunities. The workshop involved the following participants:

- Representatives from the MoE SEN Division
- UNICEF Bhutan staff
- Members of local/international NGOs dealing with SEN and inclusion (e.g. Draktsho Vocational Training Institute, the Bhutan Foundation)

### *A meeting at the MoE to discuss initial findings of the needs assessment*

This meeting served as the culmination of the needs assessment visit and an opportunity to present and discuss preliminary findings from the visit. Participants were also supported to develop further strategies and collaborative efforts in order to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in Bhutan and inclusive education more generally. The meeting was attended by:

- The Director of the Department of School Education
- Representatives from the Ministry of Education
- Representatives from Paro College of Education
- The principal of Changangka Lower Secondary school
- UNICEF Bhutan staff

It is important to note the high level of support provided by the MoE SEN Division – a representative(s) from the Ministry accompanied and took part in all activities including field visits to schools during the needs assessment.

## 6.3 Country visit findings and recommendations

### 6.3.1 Policy and legal accountability

Bhutan has some excellent policy aspirations and much work and broad stakeholder consultation has gone into preparing the draft SEN policy. However, as of the completion of the needs assessment visit, the SEN policy had not yet been approved although it had been submitted to the Gross National Happiness Commission, which was seen by the MoE SEN Division as being a positive sign.

Discussing Bhutan's positive work on inclusive education policy, one stakeholder explained: "At a national level we already see a political will to embrace diversity in schools and promoting IE practices. Although Bhutan has not ratified the UNCRPD, Bhutan has at least become a signatory to this convention. There is at least a willingness to change the mindset and look at inclusion from a more holistic lens. Besides the government's will, there are private NGO initiatives happening and private entrepreneurs that recognize this need to respect people with disabilities not just in education but as part of society, who should not be isolated within families or society. This in itself is a strong and positive indication. Also the individual people working within the system are making a huge difference. Much has happened. There has been a lot of passion and energy in the last few years."

The lack of an approved SEN policy was seen by many in the MoE, Paro College and in the schools visited during the needs assessment as being a serious barrier to inclusive education. Such a policy, once approved, offers the potential of being a catalyst to including children with disabilities in education. As one stakeholder expressed: "A special education policy would be so instrumental in terms of implementation of the plan for the next five years. Once this is done it would make things much, much easier."

It is clear and understandable that a having an SEN policy in place will be important to implementing inclusive education in Bhutan, especially, as it was noted that Bhutanese people still expect practices to be dictated from above before they are implemented on the ground. However, a suggestion that emerged from the needs assessment was that although a nationally approved policy is important for a variety of reasons, it is also important to understand that inclusion does not need to wait for policy approval to begin. Indeed, it is already happening in many different small (and a few larger) ways and education stakeholders need to be encouraged and supported to continue building a more inclusive education system with or without policy ratification.

Along similar lines, it was noted that IE should proceed making best use of available resources (human and material) and not be dependent on the provision of resources, although having more resources available to support the implementation of inclusion can certainly be a benefit and an aspiration.

“ Although the magnitude of this problem [of exclusion] is very small in Bhutan in comparison with India and Nepal, it still exists. ”



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Materials at the Changangka Lower Secondary School Resource Centre in Thimpu, Bhutan

Another policy issue, which is a barrier to educational inclusion in Bhutan, is the lack of a compulsory education act in the country. As schooling is still not compulsory, parents can refuse to send their children to school (this has implications in terms of child labour as well as exclusion more generally). As one stakeholder expressed: “Although the magnitude of this problem [exclusion] is very small in Bhutan in comparison with India and Nepal, it still exists.” The Bhutanese government does provide free schooling (including tuition fees, school supplies, school meals) until Grade 10. Free education till Grade 10 is a right, although, it was pointed out that some parents are not aware of this right. It was also noted that because children receive this free education, some parents feel it would be ungrateful to question anything about the education system. This is a potential barrier to active parental participation in education.

### Recommendations

Despite the good work that has been done on Bhutan’s SEN policy, some of the use of terminology/language within the SEN policy needs further consideration, as it is confusing in places (this was noted in the initial literature review and discussed during the needs assessment). Some of the confusion in language between special, integrated and inclusive provisions should be clarified. SEN provisions (in policy and practice) and inclusion provisions are not necessarily the same thing. SEN provision should fit under a broader ‘umbrella’ of inclusion.

Terminology/language in this area is challenging globally, not just in Bhutan. It is recommended that the language and terminology around SEN and inclusion be discussed openly during meetings/ workshops/trainings so that common understandings can be reached. This is also part of the awareness raising/advocacy that needs to be done to further develop inclusive education.

The façade of the Drugkyel Lower Secondary School in Paro, Bhutan which is considered as a model school for special education needs.



In future, the MoE is interested in working more closely with the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (e.g. in relation to providing enough well trained teachers to support inclusion). This is essential and it is recommended that such collaborative work be developed further with support from UNICEF.

Another aspect of policy discussed during the needs assessment was the importation of foreign models of education. It is recommended that although foreign models of inclusion can be of value, they need to be examined critically – the Bhutanese version of inclusion should draw on what's useful from outside Bhutan, but pay greatest attention to what is locally available (e.g. GNH, existing networks of community support, etc.).

It is also recommended that existing policy in Bhutan be reviewed and changed/adapted if necessary using an 'inclusive lens', that is, making sure that policy addresses educational inclusion, not just integration or specialist education provision. In the process of such a review, it is important that the language and terminology around inclusion be made as clear and explicit as possible in the light of national discussions.

### 6.3.2 Model schools – scaling up inclusion in Bhutan

As Bhutan currently has initial plans to develop model inclusive schools in each Dzongkhag (district), an aspect of the needs assessment was to consider what such inclusive schools would be modelled on in regards to existing practice.

The two model schools visited during the needs assessment, Drugkyel and Changangka, are both doing some excellent work, but there are challenges and pressures on/for both schools. (Due to the limited time available and distances involved it was not possible to visit Mongor

school in the east of Bhutan which has a special unit for children with visual impairments. Mongor is also being considered as a potential model school.)

Drugkyel, which is a lower secondary school in Paro with a deaf unit attached, has been a pioneer in the country in regards to educating deaf students. Drugkyel is in many ways a school of two halves consisting of a 'mainstream' school, which is currently including children with learning difficulties/disabilities and a separate deaf unit, which is educating children who are profoundly deaf. Although the needs assessment noted good practices in both the 'mainstream' part of the school and the deaf unit, there is relatively little integration between the two. As one teacher educator noted, having spent time working with Drugkyel: "What I found was that there are no inclusive practices as such, it's a unit attached to the school and everything happens in isolation except at the social level away from the classroom hours. But when it comes to the teaching, there is no inclusion."

However, the needs assessment noted that teaching staff in the 'mainstream' part of the school were learning more about inclusion as they worked to include children with learning disabilities in their classrooms. They also showed an openness and willingness to work together more with children and staff in the deaf unit, moving towards inclusion beyond the current practice of social integration between children from the 'mainstream' school and deaf unit during breaks/assemblies/sporting events. It was also noted that the children themselves had developed positive relationships between the two parts of the school and these could be built on towards more inclusive practice.

Rather unfortunately, staff in the deaf unit expressed less willingness to work with staff and children in the 'mainstream' part of the school. This must be understood in the context of the many challenges facing staff and children in the deaf unit, which undoubtedly have led to staff feeling particularly protective of their students and resources. Still, there is a sense that opportunities to collaborate and actually implement inclusion are being missed out as the two parts of Drugkyel remain relatively divided from one another.

One of the biggest challenges facing Changangka Lower Secondary School is the pressure of a large and growing number of students (a particular issue for this school as its reputation as an inclusive school grows and increasing numbers of parents from all over Bhutan want to send their children to the school) coupled with a school grounds that has limited room for expansion. It was noticeable during the needs assessment visit to the school that class sizes were very large (40+), making inclusive teaching/learning very challenging. For example, in several classrooms it was noted that although children were engaged in group work in table clusters, the class size was so large and classroom so small that teachers struggled to move around the classrooms to support the groups.

## NOTEWORTHY PRACTICE: An inclusive school with a SEN resource centre



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Changangka Lower Secondary School in Thimphu provides a different model for schooling as it is an 'inclusive school' with a resource centre within the school that educates children with relatively severe impairments. Changangka School also includes children with less severe disabilities (mostly learning disabilities) in regular classes and offers the provision of 'pull out' classes for additional support.

In terms of inclusive model schools, Changangka School shows good potential and has seemed to develop a culture of support for inclusion with strong links between staff who teach in the resource centre and staff who teach elsewhere in the school. The SEN teacher in charge of the resource centre has worked over a number of years to develop the resource centre and educate other teachers and children in the school about inclusion and the value of including children with disabilities.

### *Recommendations*

It is important to recognise the promising practices that are happening at both Drugkyel and Changangka and support the nascent but growing inclusion work taking place in these schools. However, although Drugkyel does provide a model of a deaf unit it is important to make a distinction between this and a model for an inclusive school, which it is not.

There are several key issues/questions that it will be important for Bhutan to consider as it continues to develop inclusive education in the country. These include:

- What is the vision for rolling out 20 further model schools? What will be the relationship between these schools and other local schools and school communities and other social services (e.g. health)?

## NOTEWORTHY PRACTICE: Working across ministries for early identification of disability

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- What of the other schools currently trying inclusion? What do we know about their experiences (e.g. challenges/needs/barriers, successes/strategies/solutions)? – gathering research on this is particularly important as it will support a necessary culture of promoting inclusive education based on existing resources
- Some care needs to be given towards promoting some schools over others (e.g. school ranking can work against inclusion).
- Inclusion needs the broadest, deepest network of support possible.

### 6.3.3 Collaborative practice

In terms of realising inclusive education aspirations in Bhutan, the Ministry of Education, with support from UNICEF has been clever and strategic in regards to bringing other key ministries on board. In particular, it was noted that the MoE had been successful in collaborating with the Ministry of Health (e.g. in regards to Early Childhood Care and Development and early detection of disabilities).

A high degree of persistence and the pointing out of shared interests and common goals was seen as a particularly useful strategy in promoting collaboration between the Ministry of

Education and Ministry of Health. As one stakeholder explained: “Originally the Health Ministry didn’t want to come on board, but we told them that if you do this report it will contribute to your work, to your income and outcomes because people come to you first then go to the school. The first three years of a child’s life they come to the hospital. You are the first entry point.”

The relatively small size of the country may be a factor here, but the openness and willingness of stakeholders to listen to each other and work together is certainly one of the most important factors in supporting collaboration.

In particular, there are already positive links and networks of support, both within the MoE and between the MoE and other education stakeholders. UNICEF in Bhutan has a close and positive working relationship with the MoE and has been credited with supporting collaborative

There are many examples of good, collaborative practice between education stakeholders in Bhutan which can be supportive of the country’s inclusive education aspirations. Particularly strong among these is the collaboration between the health and education ministries that enabled the integration of disability assessment into the 2010 MICS. Health experts worked on assessment tools and training of survey teams, while the Special Education division of the MoE conducted follow-up assessments to establish disability status. Records of children identified as having disabilities were kept for local follow-up.

Subsequently, the two ministries have worked together to build capacity to respond to the needs of children identified as disabled during the survey and follow-up assessment. Links with NGOs who can provide rehabilitation or assist parents with access to services have also been fostered. As a result, Bhutan has very quickly set up the foundations of an early childhood disability service, where previously little or nothing existed.

efforts around inclusive education. This was very evident during the needs assessment visit during which UNICEF took a very pro-active role in supporting the MoE, NGOs and schools to meet and work together. However, there are still challenges, particularly around different understandings of SEN and the potential to support children with disabilities.

### *Recommendations*

There remain questions as to how to further support and develop collaboration around inclusive education in the country. For example, more work should be done in considering the strategic linkages (e.g. how 'informal' school exchanges can be recognised, supported and more formalised in connection with the Educational Monitoring and Support Division of the MoE, and with other Divisions in the MoE) and how these can be further developed. It will be especially valuable to develop better links between the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance in order to support the proper resourcing of inclusive education.

If the current form of school provision - in which model special schools are meant to support mainstream schools in the same local area to become more inclusive - is to be continued in Bhutan, the relationship between special and inclusive schools needs to be looked at carefully. It is important that such relationships be mutually beneficial, drawing on the strengths of both the inclusive and special schools. The expertise of the special schools should be used in a resource capacity to support nascent inclusive schools to include, not just integrate, children with disabilities (see Annex 2).

It cannot be taken for granted that special schools will necessarily be able to support inclusive schools to be more inclusive of children with disabilities (or support mainstream schools to become inclusive schools) without on-going support from the government, NGOs, UNICEF and Community Based Organisations (CBOs). This necessitates a coordinated effort between governmental, non-governmental and CBOs, and the careful monitoring and planning of activities (e.g. exchange visits for teachers, organised training, collaborative activities for teachers, children and parents).

It was noted during the needs assessment that more work should be done to further build on existing networks (formal and informal) involving the Teacher Education Board, the Consultative Group For Inclusive Education established with support from UNICEF, but also other (nascent) networks between the MoE, UNICEF and NGOs to ensure that there is proper time and space for such collaborative relationships to develop. This needs to be mandated in policy and driven and supported in practice.

### **6.3.4 Training and teacher education**

The issue of educating/training teachers to implement inclusive education is absolutely essential in Bhutan, as elsewhere, given that inclusion is not possible without properly trained and supported teachers.

“*In the colleges of education that are preparing teachers for the education system, we are aware of inclusive education practices and we see the need to prepare teachers who have the competence to deal with different kinds of learners.*”

The needs assessment noted some examples of ‘promising practices’ at both pre- and in-service levels. However, challenges still exist in educating/training, and supporting high quality teachers.

### **Pre-service teacher training**

Pre-service teacher education in Bhutan is currently unable to comprehensively educate teachers to deal with inclusion of children with special educational needs. Despite this problem, there are some promising practices. As a stakeholder from Paro College explained: “In the colleges of education that are preparing teachers for the education system, we are aware of inclusive education practices and we see the need to prepare teachers who have the competence to deal with different kinds of learners and I think that a country that advocates for happiness (Gross National Happiness) can use this to fit within an inclusive approach to education.”

Paro College of Education has developed a standalone module for pre-teacher education entitled ‘Teaching Children With Special Needs’ although the module deals with broader inclusion issues beyond just children with special needs. This module has been credited by both tutors and students at Paro, and aims to be meaningful and useful for preparing future teachers to appreciate diversity (especially in regards to disability) and to be able to include children with disabilities in schools and classrooms.

An important issue for Paro College (as well as other pre-service teacher education institutions in Bhutan) is how to improve this module, scale it up and make it compulsory for both primary and secondary teacher education students.

Challenges in relation to the module were highlighted by tutors and students:

- The module was sometimes seen as being too abstract and difficult for students to connect theory to practice
- Some stakeholders commented that the module did not have enough focus on SEN and there was some overall questioning about whether the objective of the module should be on general inclusion or more specialized support.

Despite the challenges identified here, the student group interviewed during the needs assessment were overwhelmingly positive about the module. They expressed that it was one of the most important aspects of their teacher education experience and felt it was one of the best preparations for teaching they encountered. They particularly valued the fieldwork (practicum) aspect of the module. Both tutors and students credited the module with raising their awareness of the challenges/strategies and solutions around including children with disabilities in schooling, but also the benefits and value of doing so.

Additional challenges in relation to pre-service teacher education were discussed. The quality of pre-service teacher educators is sometimes in question and this relates to recruitment and promotion. A combination of poorly motivated/poor quality teacher educators and poorly motivated students can sometimes perpetuate a negative cycle.

As one stakeholder explained: “The problem here is that the issue becomes very cyclical. From the pool of teachers in the education system, we recruit the teacher educators but sometimes it so happens that people end up in teaching because they can’t do anything else. And then after sometime they are in the system long enough to get a scholarship to study abroad and then when they come back, in the eyes of the people, they are a good teacher because they have a degree from abroad. And then they may be recruited as teacher educators, but sometimes they are not good examples of teachers and make poor teacher trainers. And when student teachers themselves are not very interested in teaching and they see their own teacher educators as being not very motivated they became the same. This just perpetuates the cycle.”

### **In-service teacher training**

There are various types of in-service teacher training in Bhutan. In regards to inclusion of children with disabilities, and inclusion more generally, the current provision of in-service teacher education often involves support from international NGOs (such as the Bhutan Foundation which sends teachers from the US to train Bhutanese teachers in Bhutan) and UN agencies and development partners (e.g. UNICEF). Additionally, some teachers have had access to government scholarships to study abroad (often in India, the US, UK and Australia). In any case, much of the in-service training is currently ad-hoc and there is no standardised or systematic approach to this.

As mentioned above, there are many educators who have received government support to be trained abroad. This has both positive and negative implications. On the negative side it seems that a number of such trained professionals are leaving the field of education and there is a potential that investing large sums in external/foreign training, diverts money (and interest) from developing local training solutions. As a positive, Bhutanese educators who have been trained abroad are exposed to different cultures, contexts and practices, which can be useful to them in developing and implementing inclusive practice in Bhutan.

### **Recommendations**

It is important for pre-service teacher training to offer a more comprehensive programme of education in inclusion to all teacher education students in order for this to be understood as being about education as a right and not just a specialty/specialism area. Different opportunities for doing so exist alongside the potential for developing more specialised modules (e.g. electives) to accompany a broad programme on inclusion.

In regard to in-service training, it will be important for Bhutan to work to align pre- and in-service training in inclusive education and essential for the country to develop a high quality programme of local in-service training which utilises local resources instead of relying on sending teachers abroad. Given the cost of sending teachers abroad for specialised training, it would seem valuable to use at least part of that expenditure to develop local in-service teacher education programmes.

The quality of in-service training provided by local and international NGOs seems to be generally quite good, but there are some issues with imported models (e.g. which suggest that including children with disabilities is dependent on expensive material resources). A better system of monitoring and support for existing in-service teacher education programmes is recommended, although it is understood that this will be difficult and take time to develop as the MoE SEN division is currently stretched to capacity in their work.

Additional questions which need to be considered in regards to teacher education (pre- and in- service) include:

- Although there is much training to be had abroad, what about local training? What exists? What can be further developed tapping into existing networks of support?
- What are the core teacher competencies that need to be promoted and supported through teacher education as a basis for all inclusion (e.g. teacher research/reflection, child-centred teaching and learning, positive discipline, differentiated approaches to teaching/learning, etc.)?

### 6.3.5 Teacher motivation and support

The issue of teacher motivation and support (e.g. remuneration, ongoing professional development) is another key area that was explored during the needs assessment visit.

Teaching in Bhutan is a civil service position and it is still very difficult to recruit teachers, particularly to work in the more remote, rural schools. Additionally, Bhutan faces a problem of teacher attrition. As one stakeholder explained: “The good, motivated teachers, the Ministry [MoE] often loses them quite quickly. This is about the loss of teachers to become administrators, politicians, etc.”

Teachers are deployed centrally and initially have to work in relatively remote areas for a few years and then have an option to get posted to more urban areas. Teachers are required to be in one post for at least three years, except under special circumstances.

Challenges were noted in regards to what motivates people to join the teaching profession. As one stakeholder explained: “At this point many student teachers are entering the profession not because they are interested in teaching, but for their livelihoods. This has been a serious issue. I think our policy makers know this one but because the MoE has been experiencing a shortage of teachers for many years, the government could not develop a good screening school to pick up the best people with the right kind of attitudes into the teaching force.”

It should be noted, that a passion and commitment to children and to the inclusion of children with disabilities in education was evident in the education professionals met during the needs assessment. However, it can be difficult to motivate teachers who do not already share such a passion/commitment and teacher motivation can be especially tricky when it comes to

encouraging teachers to embrace inclusion (and in particular of children with special education needs) and deal with the challenges inclusion engenders.

The importance of awareness raising and advocacy in the area of inclusion (for all school community members, not just teachers/prospective teachers) was highlighted as being central to teacher motivation.

The MoE has been considering, developing and beginning to implement a variety of strategies related to motivating and supporting teachers. These include: recognition and reward for service (e.g. with ceremonies to reward long-serving teachers; providing opportunities for promotion; financial incentives to work in challenging schools/areas; exposure trips and exchange visits; and, other professional development opportunities.

However one stakeholder from the MoE pointed out a constraint: “We are looking at ways to try and retain teachers and get good teachers by increasing their benefits. But every time the MoE submits a proposal, the Ministry of Finance doesn’t understand the need. But, there is a plan to increase teachers’ remuneration and provide extra incentives for those who teach in remote posts.”

Another important aspect of support for teachers and school management is support with implementing inclusion in schools/classrooms. This support may take the form of in-service training and actual hands-on support in the classroom.

One strategy for support in this area is to bring the student-teacher ratio down by recruiting more teachers. The MoE SEN division has started working in close coordination with the human resource division in providing additional teachers to schools that are beginning to implement inclusion. As a stakeholder from the MoE explained: “The teacher student ratio initially was 1:32, but now it has come down to 1:27 or 26. But in our special schools it is 1:22. It is not possible for us to provide enough teachers, but we are at least giving some additional teachers to those schools.”

Another form of hands-on support is the training and provision of teaching assistants. In some schools (e.g. Changangka Lower Secondary School) teachers who are not teaching their own classes sometimes help out other teachers, especially in larger classes. But teachers are overstretched as it is and have limited capacity to work as assistants in other teachers’ classrooms. There is currently no official programme which supports parents to work as teaching assistants in schools, however this does happen in some schools (e.g. some parents of children with disabilities support their own children in school).

The MoE is currently recruiting teaching assistants and carers to support children in boarding schools in Bhutan.

### *Recommendations*

It is recommended that the MoE in consultation with other education stakeholders (including the ministries of Labour and Finance) continue to develop strategies for recruiting, motivating and supporting teachers and ultimately retaining high-quality teachers in the profession. Flexibility is key and the more (and varied) opportunities teachers have for professional development, the greater the likelihood of retaining them in the profession. Support also needs to be considered for school management.

In regards to practical support in schools and classrooms, it is recommended that work on recruiting, training and placing teaching assistants in classrooms be pursued (parents should also be considered for these positions).

### **6.3.6 Research**

The need for high-quality research to underpin inclusive education policy and practice in Bhutan was continually a recurring theme during the needs assessment visit.

There has generally been expressed a high degree of willingness and openness to developing a stronger educational research focus and culture within Bhutan. Several promising practices have been developed in recent years by the MoE. The SEN division of the MoE participated enthusiastically during this gap analysis research, and the Curriculum Development Division has also described their research in schools. Paro College is developing new teacher action research and hosted an international research seminar on inclusive education in December 2013, with support from UNICEF and the Australian government. At school level, there is some evidence that action research is happening through SEN teams in their schools and classrooms and with researchers who are supported by the MoE and UNICEF to work within special units.

A stakeholder from Paro College detailed Paro's interest in and willingness to conduct research with teachers: "If there are any teachers in the school who would like to carry out research but they are not feeling confident on the methodology part, we have people in the colleges who are willing to partner. In Paro, we've initiated a research seminar series where we bring in school teachers and faculty members to share completed research. This is to excite and stimulate people to do research. We ask the teachers to gather the data...do the data collection part so we won't have to travel to the schools. When it comes to data analysis we'll work together, even if our people in the college do most of the analysis part. Whenever there is a possibility to bring schoolteachers together and discuss how data analysis has been done, the procedures, the steps, we want to share this thereby building up school teachers as researchers."

### *Recommendations*

- Some excellent examples of research exist in Bhutan, but these may be disconnected, inaccessible and have limited impact on policy and practice. More work on sharing, collaborating, coordinating and documenting research is recommended.

- More work should be done on mapping existing strengths, resources and connections that will support inclusion, as well as the barriers and challenges preventing inclusion (particularly for children with special education needs). This should involve meetings and consultations with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, including from: the MoE, teacher education sector (e.g. Paro College), school management and teachers, UNICEF, local/international NGOs supporting inclusive practices, children and adults with and without SEN; parents and other school community members.
- There needs to be a consideration of which stakeholders can help organise and 'drive' research initiatives (e.g. Royal Education Council, RUB, the MoE, others?).
- Research funding should be prioritized at all levels.
- More funding and greater incentives for educational research should be provided specifically at the level of higher education.
- Quantitative and qualitative research are both important here. What counts as research should be as broad as possible (e.g. surveys/questionnaires, action research/teacher action research, different forms of assessment, community based participatory research, etc.). Research also needs to be made accessible to different stakeholder groups.
- Research, training and advocacy should be developed and practiced as being intrinsically linked as this will work towards changing attitudes and opening up spaces and opportunities for inclusion as well as supporting and furthering existing inclusive practices.
- More support for action research at the school community level and greater efforts to account for such research within policy and practice planning.

## 6.4 Additional barriers, strategies and solutions to inclusive education in Bhutan

This section details additional information picked up during the needs assessment but not covered earlier.

### 6.4.1 MoE SEN Division – a new division in the Ministry

As the SEN division in the MoE is a new division, they are facing pressures in several areas under their remit, ECCD and SEN in particular, and their capacity is severely stretched. As one stakeholder from the MoE explained: "This is a national priority, but because it is a new division we have few programme officers working in the office and we are not able to reach everyone we want to. It is very difficult. We cannot simply recruit additional people because it has to depend on the approved number of posts which has already been approved by the civil service division."

However, the SEN division is upbeat and positive about its work. The stakeholder quoted previously continued: "But the good thing is that even with these limitations we feel that we are really doing so much. We are trying to reach as far as possible, as much as possible. We



***Generally, all the teachers involved in the special needs programme have this compassion coming from the heart...they want to work and help and serve the student and have done so voluntarily, based on their own interest, not by being pushed into it.***



have a number of stakeholders spread across the ministry. Also the NGOs are strong and there is funding from UNICEF and from other small pockets. We also have the Ministry of Health and for both ECCD and Special Education, this is the next most important ministry on board. Then we have the Ministry of Labor and Human Resources when we need the labor for Special Education.’

#### **6.4.2 Advocacy and attitudinal barriers**

The linked issues of advocacy and attitude are central to any efforts to implement inclusive education. Indeed, people’s attitudes impact all areas of inclusion and attitudinal barriers are arguably the most challenging and pervasive barriers to inclusion.

It was noted that in Bhutan one of the big barriers to including children with disabilities is a belief that some parents have (especially in rural areas) that their children’s disability is a result of bad karma and must be accepted. It is to some extent accepted that disabled children cannot be included in schooling or society. This belief is being challenged by inclusion advocates and one constructive strategy for doing so involves showing parents examples of children and adults with disabilities who are learning and achieving in school and wider society (e.g. employment). As one stakeholder expressed: “The role of advocacy is very important and people with disabilities and those with children/family members with disabilities, can be very strong and important advocates for inclusive education.”

A positive, attitudinal, aspect of Bhutanese culture which can be used to support inclusion is compassion. As one stakeholder explained: “In the schools, the teachers involved in this initiative are really showing their passion. Bhutan, as a mostly Buddhist and a Hindu nation has this compassion mentality. Generally, all the teachers involved in the special needs programme have this compassion coming from the heart...they want to work and help and serve the student and have done so voluntarily, based on their own interest, not by being pushed into it.”

Along similar lines, a teacher in Drugkyel used the term ‘empathy’ to describe her growing belief in inclusion. She explained that as she began including children with disabilities in her classroom: “My feelings about them went from sympathy to empathy.”

Non-formal education may also provide opportunities to raise awareness about inclusive education more generally. Many parents take literacy and other non-formal education classes in which awareness raising about inclusive education can be integrated. As one stakeholder explained: “In Bhutan non-formal education is targeted differently than in other places. Here it is towards those that have missed the first opportunity for education. So, it is often for adults and the curriculum is targeted to fit their needs and we weave in disaster risk preparedness and parenting education and a whole range of topics.”

There are good strategies being tried to support political advocacy, as a UNICEF stakeholder explained: “Sometimes in UNICEF we call this work ‘Upstreaming’. It’s challenging. Influencing policies, trying to move people ‘up there’ is difficult. But what we have been telling the ministry is that if you want to start creating demand, then start showing some results and then go and talk to the parliamentarians and advocate and they will believe that work.”

### 6.4.3 School rationalisation

Bhutan is implementing a school ‘rationalisation’ programme in which smaller schools will be closed/consolidated and children in the more remote areas will be sent to boarding schools when they reach eight years of age. Rationalisation is a threat to inclusion, but at this stage UNICEF has gotten behind this programme, as it now seems inevitable. And UNICEF wants to support residential schools to be as comprehensive as possible with clear mechanisms for child protection and safety. Although support for small, rural schools can be challenging, it should be noted that school rationalisation poses challenges to inclusion because it works against local communities as it removes children from these communities and distances parents/families from direct involvement with schools. All children, regardless of their geographic location, have a right to education.

### 6.4.4 Privatisation

Bhutan is experiencing an increase in privatised schooling although this is still a small sector within education. Perhaps Bhutan, with its Gross National Happiness, is better placed and prepared than many other countries to critically consider the dangers and opportunities privatization may provide. This is an issue which is currently being discussed within the MoE.

It should be noted that experience from other countries suggests that although the private sector can be involved meaningfully in education, often the most marginalised children lose out when public resources are directed towards private education initiatives.

### 6.4.5 Geographical barriers

Because Bhutan is a rural, mountainous country, geography can be a challenge to inclusion. As one stakeholder explained: “Children in urban environments, in terms of learning and educational outcomes, are doing better than the children in rural areas. There is an inverse correlation between distance from the capital, Thimphu, and quality of education.”

### 6.4.6 Large class sizes

The issue of large class sizes was discussed previously in the report, but it deserves further mention here as this has implications in regards to the provision of individualised support for children with SEN. As a stakeholder explained: “Due to relatively large class sizes, individualized attention is still fairly limited. Differentiated learning is difficult and therefore there are issues of exclusion within the classroom.”



***Community members are often reluctant to get involved with schools because they tend to feel that the teachers in the school are really the best placed to make decisions about teaching and learning.***



#### **6.4.7 Curriculum**

As Bhutan has a nationally prescribed curriculum, it was noted that for indigenous communities, sometimes the national curriculum doesn't address their contexts/needs and this is an issue which should be addressed further as it is a barrier in terms of IE.

Another issue in regards to the curriculum is consultation. The Curriculum Development Division of the MoE has tried to make the curriculum more inclusive by inviting teachers from the field to contribute to the curriculum, but it was noted that there are still issues in regards to who is consulted and how consultation affects curriculum.

#### **6.4.8 Language of instruction**

English and Dzongka are the two languages of instruction in schools. There are 24 different indigenous languages/dialects recorded in Bhutan (Ethnologue, 2007). Stakeholders explained that language of instruction in schools has not been an issue which has been debated much in the country, but that language can be an inclusion issue for some children who come from linguistic minority groups, particularly those who have other issues (e.g. learning disabilities).

#### **6.4.9 Community involvement in schooling**

There are different mechanisms for community involvement in Bhutanese schools. One of the main means for community involvement in schools is through the school management board. As one stakeholder explained: "All the schools, whether they are primary or high schools have a school management board...it is like the upper house and if there are any problems or issues they are discussed by this board. And if there is a need for district or ministry intervention it comes through the board. It is quite helpful and supportive in some cases, but in other cases those board members take advantage of the situation by trying to get their children admitted early. Also sometimes the issues discussed by the board can be limited to administrative issues and not really teaching and learning quality."

In more remote areas of the country, community involvement in schooling is fairly minimal. This is because, as one stakeholder explained: "Community members are often reluctant to get involved with schools because they tend to feel that the teachers in the school are really the best placed to make decisions about teaching and learning."

Specifically in regards to parental involvement in schooling, it was noted that parent-teacher meetings in Bhutan are often very one-sided. As one stakeholder explained: "Most often the head teacher or teacher in charge are the ones telling parents what to do and sometimes sit there and openly insult the parents."

There clearly needs to be more work done in empowering and supporting parents and other school community members in getting involved in education. A stakeholder from Paro

College explained his approach with teacher education students: “I tell my teacher education students that these parent-teacher meetings should be information sharing meetings, not lectures to parents.”

Another issue noted that works against parents, families or community members being involved in schooling is economic constraints which mean that communities have to spend much of their time working to support their families.

A positive form of community involvement with schooling was also noted in regards to supporting less advantaged members of school communities. As one stakeholder explained: “Some parents give money (anonymously or at least confidentially) to schools or school principals to support more disadvantaged children/families in the school communities.”

## 6.5 Summary of key recommendations

1. *Research, training and advocacy* should be developed and practiced as being intrinsically linked as this will work towards changing attitudes and opening up spaces and opportunities for inclusion as well as supporting and furthering existing inclusive practices.
2. *Social cohesiveness*. The fact that Bhutan is relatively small and that informal networks are vibrant and important is a strength but there needs to be vigilance that such networks are as open as possible or else there is a risk of exclusion. This could build on some of the recent efforts to overcome ethnic divisions, inequities and tensions.
3. *Quality teaching and learning underpins everything*. The inclusion of children with SEN and inclusion more generally are ultimately dependent on the same solid foundations of quality teaching and learning, which should be a core function of all educators. These foundational aspects of quality teaching include some areas which are focused more on the classroom, such as:
  - Child-centred practices (e.g. differentiated approaches to teaching/learning, positive discipline, etc.);
  - teacher research and reflection;
  - the ability to develop and adapt curricular materials/resources to fit local contexts;
  - formative, summative, continuous and authentic assessment which taken together can be considered *inclusive assessment*;

Other areas foundational to quality and inclusive education are broader, encompassing whole schools and groups of actors:

- continuous professional development opportunities for teachers and school managers;
- collaborative working within and between schools - across subject areas/disciplines, institutional settings (i.e. special units and mainstream schools) and also geographical areas (i.e. linking schools together in regional networks of support);

- the active involvement in schooling of parents/families and communities;
- recognising that teachers (and other members of school communities) must be advocates for inclusion.

Undertaking these endeavours to strengthen education quality will ultimately strengthen inclusion generally, as well as supporting the development of a strong base from which more specific approaches to including children with SEN (e.g. a ‘twin-track’ approach) can happen.

## 6.6 Immediate next steps: Bhutan action plan resulting from the Sub-Regional Needs Assessment Workshop, December 2013

### Objective 1. IE in pre- and in-service teacher training

#### What is happening now?

- IE/SEN offered in the final year of the Bachelor’s in Education programme
- Sensitisation materials on IE available
- All principals of Thimphu/DEOs sensitised on IE
- Differentiated instruction accepted as a strategy at Paro College of Education

#### What opportunities are there in 2014?

- Review all modules in pre-service teacher training courses through IE lens
- Summer programmes with Bhutan Foundation at the Paro College of Education
- Develop a standard in-service training programme on IE
- Regular forum for collaboration between MoE and the Paro College of Education on all IE initiatives

### Objective 2. Attitude change through advocacy for IE

#### What is happening now?

- Observing international day of persons with disabilities and other days/events
- Training on UNCPRD through the Rights, Education and Protection (REAP) project for children with disabilities
- SEN module/practicum in place for pre-service teacher training
- Seminar on IE organized
- Media events
- Launching of UNICEF’s State of the World’s Children Report 2013 focusing on disabilities
- In-country trainings and workshops including RNDA training
- More schools accepting children with disabilities
- NGOs playing active role

#### What opportunities are there in 2014?

- Link ECCD and NFE providers and ministries, and facilitate training on IE
- Partner with CSOs to mobilise youth volunteers as change agents
- Develop radio programme targeting districts and sub-districts involving disabled people as role models
- Build on Buddhist values to promote compassion for inclusion
- Negotiate for primetime coverage in media on inclusion
- Target lawmakers and parliamentarians, using the NC/NA members from IE seminar

### **Objective 3. Curriculum adapted to suit the needs of all learners**

#### What is happening now?

- Curriculum adaptation being undertaken at classroom level
- Braille production unit is adapting the curriculum for Grades 5 and 6
- Assessment modification taking place
- Development of Bhutan Sign Language
- Some CSOs offering vocational training to children with disabilities

#### What opportunities are there in 2014?

- Expand vocational training to IE schools
- Take forward curriculum adaptation, assessment modification within teacher training

#### **Detailed action plan for 2014**

- At the next stakeholders meeting planned for March 2014, share the first recommendations of the IE regional seminar and the action plan of the country working group.
- Form a core group of technical experts and hire technical expertise where necessary. This group should review the existing SEN teacher training module to align with IE principles.
- Continue with PD in-service training and other relevant IE training for teachers and other key stakeholders.
- Develop a communication for development strategy for IE.

#### **After 2014**

- Demonstrate cost-benefit analysis of different IE models.
- Develop a pre-service teacher training course for IE for mainstream teachers.

# 07

## Conclusion

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Rated against the initial framework of four characteristics for a supportive education system, the needs assessment found that both the Maldives and Bhutan had taken committed steps to set up the foundations of inclusive education, and were moving to strengthen these foundations.

The assessment found that there are strong policy intentions and significant good practice in each country. There were many examples of good, collaborative practice between education stakeholders which were supportive of each country's inclusive education aspirations. While budget constraints around inclusion were an issue, particularly in Bhutan, financial challenges appeared to be more located in political will, and understanding of what investments are needed, rather than in lack of resources.

The openness and willingness of stakeholders to listen to each other and work together appeared to be one of the most important factors in making change happen. The relatively small size of both countries may be a factor in such positive collaboration. In particular, there are already positive links and networks of support within the MoE, and between the MoE, other education stakeholders and other government departments. UNICEF has a close and positive working relationship with MoEs and has been credited with supporting collaborative efforts around inclusive education.

The range of good practices and collaboration seen during the country visits, and the inventiveness with which some stakeholders had tackled inclusion problems, indicated that both countries had made good progress in adapting principles of inclusion to their own context. The commitment and innovation shown by individuals within schools, Ministries, and NGOs was impressive, particularly in the Maldives, and indicated that national capacity to solve remaining challenges is good in both countries. In fact, findings from this research provided less of a gap analysis than a list of opportunities where recent progress could be built on to expand inclusive education across the school system.

Challenges which need to be overcome include a lack of clear steps to strengthen schools so that the child-friendly, learner-centred approaches which underpin inclusive education become normal. There is also an urgent need to show more clearly what the future for disabled young people can be like after school.

## 7.1 Lynchpins and levers

If we consider inclusion to be an endless and disconnected list of problems, challenges, or obligations, then inclusion will seem to be overwhelming and ultimately unachievable. However, if we look for the 'lynchpins' (the key elements which can link multiple smaller aspects of the education system together) and the 'levers' (particular areas/actions which can be understood to have multiple and far-reaching impacts), then instead of an endless series of disconnected obligations, inclusion can be seen as being more interconnected, cohesive and achievable based on a pragmatic and strategic use of time, resources and efforts.

Both countries are at the point where efforts to increase children with disabilities' participation in education need to dovetail with efforts to upgrade general teaching practice: the same behaviours involved in good quality, child-centred teaching will go a long way to help disabled children to achieve well in education. Therefore, such 'lynchpin' efforts to improve curricula and teaching practice will need to be carried out in full collaboration between 'mainstream' teaching bodies and departments, and SEN/inclusion/disability experts and stakeholders.

## 7.2 UNICEF's role

The gap analysis indicated many opportunities for UNICEF to promote attitude change, demonstrate inclusive school communities and support the professional development of teachers. UNICEF should take a lead role in sharing noteworthy practices between countries, promoting inclusive school development standards, and supporting efforts to address disability in early childhood.

The workshop in Paro in December 2013 organized to follow up from the gap analysis and needs assessment produced clear plans for practitioners and policy makers to collaborate on making inclusive education a reality (UNICEF ROSA, 2014). UNICEF country teams committed to work with Ministry of Education staff and other agencies to take forward detailed plans for 2014 and beyond. These action plans are in the country sections for Bhutan and the Maldives, and in Annex 1 for Bangladesh.

It was clear from the gap analysis research and the workshop that, while both countries have relied on training and advice from Europe, Australia and the US, there are very strong examples of good practice now available in each country and in nearby countries. Sri Lanka and India have already provided technical support to the Maldives, but there is good scope for far greater sharing, not only of practice but of approaches to problem solving around education for disabled

children. Sharing ideas on how to scale up new systems and methods, and how to spread inclusion techniques and principles among teachers, should be a priority for the network of inclusive education champions formed through the Paro workshop.

UNICEF ROSA should support and encourage this network to have regular contact, but should also develop detailed plans with HQ and other regional offices on how UNICEF can proactively support collaboration and information sharing between those working on education for children with disabilities. One option could be to attach conditions to grants which ensure detailed planning of collaboration, aimed at facilitating scale-up.

In general, UNICEF's support to inclusive education efforts in South Asia during 2014-15 should prove critical in the long term. Given the strong progress found in the Maldives, Bhutan and other countries in the region to take pilot inclusive education efforts towards sustainability and scale-up, this is an important time for support to ensure that momentum is not lost.



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Students from Tendu attending the Inclusive Education Seminar in Paro, Bhutan in December 2013.

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# ANNEX 1: Bangladesh situation analysis and action plan developed at the Sub-regional Needs Assessment Workshop, Paro, Bhutan, December 2013

## Situation analysis

### *Government legislation and policy on Inclusive Education and Disability*

- Government of Bangladesh among first countries to ratify CRC and CRPD
- Legislation and Policies to nationalize the Conventions in place or pending
- Policies establish clear administrative structures for implementation, but
- Some laws require amendment in order to fully address the rights of children with disabilities, for example: Inheritance Laws, and Prevention of Cruelty Against Women and Children Act 2000-2003

The government's broad perspective on Inclusive Education under the 3<sup>rd</sup> education sector plan has four pillars, focusing on children from tribal areas, ethnic minorities, children with learning and physical disabilities.

### *UNICEF's Strategic Support on Inclusive Education*

- Under 2<sup>nd</sup> education sector plan (Primary Education Development Plan-2 or PEDP 2,) UNICEF supported the development of the Gender and Inclusive Education Strategy.
- Under the 3<sup>rd</sup> education sector plan (PEDP 3), UNICEF supports the implementation of a Gender and Inclusive Education Strategy that includes action plans, guidelines for local level planning, teacher professional development, diagnostic tools and materials, and decentralized training of teachers.
- Support to strategy on primary education in urban slums
- Communication for development materials
- UNICEF Bangladesh has conducted a Situation Analysis for Children with Disabilities.

### *Challenges as Identified in the Situation Analysis*

- Increased inclusion, however discrimination remains
- Discrimination against children with disabilities exist in the family, community and school (based on cultural beliefs that disability is negative, a curse):
  - Children with disability are often discriminated against in terms of family inheritance;
  - Limited opportunity to attend school;
  - Inadequate health care, nutrition and protection
  - Treatment at home is not always supportive - children with disabilities are seen as a burden, treated like "slaves", experience physical, sexual and emotional abuse)
- Limited data on children with disabilities and not reliable
  - Some children with disabilities still remain invisible
- Teachers' professional development does not adequately cover Inclusive Education
- Teachers' attitudes and motivation
- Poor school infrastructure (not disability friendly)
- "Safe Homes" and "Child Development Centres" (detention) do not have adequate care and support for development of children with disabilities
- Government has broad perspective on Inclusive Education – UNICEF to help focus more on disabilities

### *Where do we go from here?*

- Mobilization of donor consortium (under the Sector Wide Approach or SWAp) for a more sustained approach to planning inclusive education support
- Development of a road map for implementation of IE
- Capacity development to implement inclusive education
- Communication for development to address social practices and norms
- Strengthening partnerships for Inclusive Education
- A child friendly school (CFS) framework – working with School Improvement Plans.

## Bangladesh action plan and objectives (all include ECCD)

### **Objective 1. Demonstrate new inclusive model of child-friendly schools (CFS)**

#### What is happening now?

- 150 pilot schools are using CFS (not full model)

#### What opportunities are there for 2014?

- UNICEF to update CFS model

### **Objective 2. Teachers and education officers trained in IE**

#### What is happening now?

- 20,000 primary government school teachers (1-2) per school have had 6-day in-service training on IE under PEDP2, and are now IE focal person in their schools.

#### What opportunities are there for 2014?

- UNICEF to support improvement of training content; training rollout continues

### **Objective 3. Communication for development conducted so that parents send children to school and support IE**

#### What is happening now?

- UNICEF has developed ten 15-minute videos on (broad) inclusion, broadcast in Sept

#### What opportunities are there for 2014?

- 2-3 episodes to be made per year: UNICEF team ask colleagues to focus on disability
- Upcoming government workshop to finalise communication strategy for PEDP3

### **Objective 4. Assistive devices and rehabilitation reach children with disabilities**

#### What is happening now?

- Budget exists at Upazilla level since 2012 to support purchase of devices
- Small scale services are operating in some areas.
- Government is considering BRAC's Braille package for replication across schools.

#### What opportunities are there for 2014?

- Another 10m Taka or more is likely to be allocated to more Upazillas

### **Objective 5. Good practice in IE selected and scaled up under PEDP3 and PEDP4**

#### What is happening now?

- Local mobilisation to support inclusive access can be replicated from mid-day meal process

#### What opportunities are there for 2014?

- UNICEF start meetings and discussion to review and select good/noteworthy practices
- UNICEF start demonstration of local mobilisation process in UNDAF (UN Development Assistance Framework) priority districts

#### **Objective 6. A percentage of each school improvement grant to focus on disability**

##### What is happening now?

- Funding is being rolled out but there is currently no disability focus

##### What opportunities are there for 2014?

- Influence grant authorities to focus on disability: a government circular will be issued after this workshop

#### **Objective 7. IE is placed on allowed school expenditure list**

- Address through coordination

##### *Areas of challenge remaining:*

- Need for coordination between education departments
- Need to get teacher mentoring in place to support practice change (address both through UNICEF coordination/EENET visit).

### **Bangladesh: Detailed UNICEF and MOPME action plan for 2014**

1. March 2014 Workshop with key stakeholders to get unified commitment on coordination and resourcing for IE.
2. Roll out teacher training on IE in UNDAF priority districts.
3. Review existing in-service teacher training modules from an IE perspective.
4. Communication for development: develop materials on IE to raise awareness and address discrimination.
5. Finalise development of inclusive CFS standards, and modelling of these in UNDAF priority districts.
6. Integration of IE into Directorate of Primary Education (DPED) curriculum content
7. Feed household survey data on people with disability into education planning.

### **After 2014**

- Teacher training based on revised IE package: led by Directors of Policy & Operations, Directorate of Primary Education, supported by UNICEF.
- Communication for development covering specific IE issues: led by Directors of Policy & Operations, Directorate of Primary Education, supported by UNICEF.
- DPED training in PTIs on revised IE package: Led by Director of Programme Division, supported by UNICEF
- Strengthen community and resource base for services to disabled people (such as rehabilitation, assistive devices, early assessment): Led by MOPME, Department of Primary education (Director General, DPE), and NGOs; supported by UNICEF.

## ANNEX 2: What should all teachers be trained to do?

All teachers need training in learner-centred pedagogy, to the extent of using differentiated teaching methods for different learners with different learning needs and styles. However, this is often not considered enough for teachers to work with children with disabilities. This section discusses some advice for setting expectations for supporting mainstream teachers to work with disabled children, based on literature review and EENET's experience.

A concern often raised when discussing teachers' support of children with disabilities is, 'how is a teacher to decide whether a child needs assistance (such as glasses or specialist seating)?' Assuming that a teacher is responsible for setting up all the conditions for children with disabilities to learn can stem from an over-broad understanding of a teacher's role. Diagnosing and recommending physical learning aids, if any, should be where medical assessment and SEN expertise come in: most teachers should not be expected to diagnose impairments or provide disability aids by themselves.

The necessary role of any good mainstream teacher when they identify a child who is not participating actively in learning is to look for reasons why problems might be occurring; discuss possibilities with a range of stakeholders; and seek appropriate support. This applies to any child, whether they are experiencing issues to do with disability, difficult home circumstances, or simply not coping well with the current style of teaching.

Below is a suggested example of an **'inclusive thought process'** which teachers could be encouraged to adopt:

- 1. I have noticed a child who is not doing well in school. What can I observe about the ways in which they are not doing well; how they behave in school; how they get to school; and how others interact with them? How do I interact with them? Might any of these factors have a bearing on their problems?*
- 2. I have observed the child, spoken to the child, spoken to his/her parents, and identified that disability may be a factor in this child's difficulties in engaging with education. Is there anyone I, or my principal, can ask to conduct an expert assessment?*
- 3. Expert assessment has not been available/is delayed/has not produced helpful information to support the child in learning. I have asked my principal to take the matter further. In the meantime, what can I do to make this child's time in school easier, more engaging, and more productive? (Recognising that I can make big improvements to this child's experience of education, but that I may not be able to remove all their barriers to learning on my own.) Is there anyone I can ask to help me with planning teaching and learning activities?*

4. *I have spoken to other teachers (including special educational needs experts if available), spoken to the child, and spoken to the parents. Based on my knowledge of this child's preferences, their character, and the resources available to me, I have selected a list of strategies which I will try to make the child's experience of education easier. I will now try these approaches one by one, and I will record what I have tried and what changes I notice in the child's behaviour, confidence, and learning achievement, compared to where they were at the beginning. I will use this information to agree a set of strategies to support this child, and I will keep monitoring to see if their needs change (this is where individual education plans can be helpful).*
5. *I will share my experiences with other teachers, so that when another child with similar issues comes along, we will be more prepared to help.*
6. *In the process of trying out strategies to improve this child's experience of education, I have realised that with a few small material improvements, some barriers to their education could be reduced. I have therefore asked the PTA/school management council and the principal to pursue funding for these things.*
7. *I am trying the above approach with all children in my class, particularly those who are struggling most with the school experience and with learning. It can be time-consuming, but it is wonderfully rewarding to see children happier and more productive in school. I will keep looking for ways to improve learning and participation for the children in my class who are having problems.*

Following such a process should really be all that teachers are expected to do in terms of inclusion (leaving aside for the moment formal assessment issues, which require more context-specific advice). However, this can be a demanding expectation, if teachers have not been trained to expect that such an 'action research' role is central to being a good teacher. It can take time to establish this approach as normal for teachers, but it is the logical conclusion of all efforts to introduce learner-centred teaching. The education systems with the best and most equitable learning outcomes (such as Finland) have established this type of teacher behaviour as the norm (UNESCO, 2009).

Teachers need to be given clear messages that spending time on this type of reflection and decision making is a central part of their role; and that they will not be disadvantaged for taking on children who may not, for example, pass exams. This is a wider issue covered in the operation of the school system.

Where teachers have identified that a physical impairment may be a factor in a child's difficulties with school, they should know who to approach for more assessment and information. That is not an issue for teacher training, but for the management of the school system. It is often the case that these supports to teachers are not in place; there may not be any medical service available which the teacher can approach for advice. But this gap should not be filled by placing unrealistic expectations on teachers: it should be acknowledged as a gap, and raised from bottom to top through the education system and any other fora.

Nevertheless, how can teachers ascertain whether a child might be affected by a physical impairment, if other support is not currently available? Once a teacher has thought to ask

whether impairment may be an issue, a number of lines of inquiry present themselves. These are: ask the child whether they have difficulty with anything; see how the child responds to classroom situations; ask parents what they have observed.

So what should happen when teachers cannot find ways to meet the material support needs of children with disabilities, or do not have access to medical expertise to identify these needs in the first place? One important message to convey in teacher training is that teachers should report this upwards. At the same time, teachers' pre-and in-service training should focus on boosting their resourcefulness in meeting the needs of children with SEN or disabilities despite limited support.

If issues of concern for children with more severe impairments are around getting to school, these issues relate less to teacher training and more to school management and community engagement with education. For example, if a child cannot walk at all, and a teacher is following the learner-centred reflective thought process outlined above, it should be possible to organise parental, community and PTA/SMC support to bring the child to school. Most learning activities do not require the ability to walk. However, if a child with no ability to walk lives in an area away from roads and there is no capacity in the community to bring that child to school, other strategies will have to be developed. Can the teacher visit the child every few weeks with exercises for them to complete, for example? These are not complex issues, and yet they concern a child with moderate to severe levels of disability. There is no reason why mainstream teachers should not engage with such children.

In a different example, a child with severe learning disabilities (such as with a much lower mental age than their physical age) may require more support to come to school (because they might, for example, get lost). Again, with someone organised to bring the child to school and appropriate expectations, that child can have a very positive experience of education. In such an example, a child could be placed in a lower class. If a teacher is following the above thought process, one issue which will come up is safety of the child - will they leave school unsupervised? But continuing with that process, the answer is to encourage other students to look after the child and make sure that someone is always with him or her. The child may or may not be likely to pass complex examinations, but if they are included in learning and social activities, their physical and cognitive skills will develop much faster than if they were left at home with little stimulation; and their life will be far more enjoyable.

There are very severe impairments or health conditions which mean that children are so unwell they cannot significantly move or concentrate enough to take part in standard learning activities. However, these cases are extremely rare and are unlikely to come to the attention of most teachers. Following a clear learner-centred thought process will, again, result in the best possible solution for the child. If the issue is 'child cannot move from bed and has very few hours of energy every day', one response would be, 'encourage groups of children and teachers to visit the child to provide interaction and some learning materials; or 'support a sibling to do learning activities with the child'.

What happens when a child's behaviour is disruptive to the extent that it affects other children's learning? This sometimes happens with conditions such as autism (as well as being caused by a whole range of other issues). Simple, local solutions based on understanding the child are key. If a child is upset by lots of people and lots of noise, gradually introducing him or her to the class for increasing periods may help. Training the rest of the class not to make sudden noises whenever possible will help. Encouraging parents to do supervised learning activities in a quiet place with the child while the rest of the class do noisier activities may be useful. If a child consistently cannot cope with the school environment, teacher visits and distance learning materials may be a good idea. Even if a child with behavioural problems can only cope with an hour or so of school each day at first, this is a vast improvement on no school at all. The important point is for local teachers to continually look for opportunities to make further improvements.

All these suggestions are simple examples of what good teachers, asked to take a problem-solving approach, have come up with on their own in countries including Bangladesh, India, Mongolia, China and Kyrgyzstan. None are costly. While documenting and sharing such practices through teacher training and professional development will be very helpful, the sheer variety of issues and challenges experienced by a whole range of learners, disabled and non-disabled, is such that it is more effective to train teachers to become problem-solvers than to train each one to become a disability expert.

A key recommendation from UNICEF's recent REAP research into teacher education around disability (UNICEF, 2013) was the importance of 'embedding' IE into all teacher training activities from the beginning of their training (i.e. not through separate modules only, but through ensuring that they learn about inclusion issues in every training topic, whether they are learning for instance about effective play with children, or learning how to handle maths lessons – inclusion messages and advice can be embedded into these). This would help to fill gaps on disability and inclusion in teacher training.

## Useful sources of practical advice for teachers and trainers

INEE (2010) INEE Pocket Guide to Supporting Learners with Disabilities. Manchester: Interagency Network on Education in Emergencies & Chronic Crisis. [www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/INEE\\_Supporting\\_Learners\\_with\\_Disabilities.pdf](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/INEE_Supporting_Learners_with_Disabilities.pdf)

Save the Children in Sri Lanka (2006) Children who have disability in Early Childhood Care and Development Centres: A resource book for teachers. Colombo: Save the Children [www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/ECCD\\_Disability\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/ECCD_Disability_Manual.pdf)

UNESCO Bangkok (2002-2009) Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments. Bangkok: UNESCO (available in multiple languages) [www.unescobkk.org/education/inclusive-education/resources/ilfe-toolkit/](http://www.unescobkk.org/education/inclusive-education/resources/ilfe-toolkit/)

