

Enabling Education Review

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Inclusive Education Advocacy




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Editorial

Ian Kaplan

Introducing this special edition on inclusive education advocacy

There is an increasing focus among non-governmental organisation (NGOs), UN agencies and other inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) on advocacy around inclusive education, yet there are relatively few documented examples of 'inclusive education advocacy in action'.

With support from Open Society Foundations, therefore, EENET has sought to investigate and document inclusive education advocacy initiatives. We hope that the case studies published in this special edition of Enabling Education Review will help to fill the information gap and provide advocates with practical examples that will motivate and inspire.

Inclusive education advocacy

Advocacy is fundamental to the on-going effort to make education more inclusive for all. It is not just a process through which awareness is raised, but through which attitudes and practices are changed.

Advocacy for inclusive education takes place wherever education is being discussed, planned and experienced: in family homes; community meetings; schools and classrooms; teacher education institutions; government ministries;

civil society, NGO and IGO offices; national and international conferences; and many other forums. It involves all education stakeholders in moving towards a more inclusive education system and ultimately a more inclusive society.

Often when inclusive education advocacy is discussed, there is more of a focus on the advocacy messages than on the process of doing advocacy. Of course the messages are important, but equally important is the 'nitty gritty' detail of the advocacy process – the strategies that advocates use to get their messages across, and the way they address the challenges faced in doing advocacy work.

This special edition should help those working in education to better understand how to turn advocacy ideas and theories into appropriate practical action.

Defining advocacy

Not everyone shares the same understanding of what advocacy means.

In a recent publication for UNESCO on advocacy for inclusion in teacher education (see page 11), we drew on the work of EENET and other organisations to define advocacy in relation to inclusive education in the following way:

“Advocacy is: ‘...a set of organized activities designed to influence the policies and actions of governments, international institutions, the private sector and civil society to achieve positive changes for children’s lives’.¹

Breaking this down, we can further explain advocacy as:

- a deliberate process of influencing those who make decisions;
- making a case in favour of a cause and getting others to support that cause;
- seeking to raise awareness among decision-makers and the public at the same time, if possible, so that policy and attitude change reinforce each other;
- a tool to help us push for developments, reforms and/or implementation of policies;
- a way of supporting or enhancing programme strategies for solving problems or making changes.”²

To further unpack the term ‘advocacy’ we highlighted several key principles:

“Advocacy is change-oriented

Advocacy seeks to bring about clear and specific changes in a particular context and/or for particular stakeholders. It is not a process of complaining about an undesired situation, but of raising awareness about how and why the situation is unfair or unacceptable, and pushing for clearly defined changes that would make the situation fair or acceptable.

Advocacy is about engaging constructively with those we seek to influence

Because advocacy seeks to make changes rather than just to voice concerns, we need to have a constructive relationship with those who have the power to bring about our desired changes. Advocacy is therefore built on notions of diplomacy and negotiation, and involves dialogue, not just demands. Effective advocacy emphasizes the positive (as well as pointing out problems) and seeks to be constructive when engaging with decision-makers. Advocates need to highlight promising practices and outline possible ‘ways forward’.

Advocacy is evidence-based

We cannot highlight an unacceptable situation and expect our calls for change to be taken seriously unless we have sound evidence to illustrate that situation and back up our analysis of how and why it is unacceptable. For instance, if we want to point out that teachers are currently receiving an inadequate education to effectively address the diverse needs of learners, and advocate for them to receive better programmes and courses on inclusive education, we need evidence that shows what the existing training is like, and a clear analysis of why this is not providing teachers with the skills and knowledge they need. We also need evidence that shows the validity and potential of the alternatives or solutions we are proposing. This might mean, for instance, gathering examples of promising practices that can be used to back up advocacy messages.

Advocacy is built on partnerships

In most situations, one person speaking out on their own is unlikely to have the power to effect major change. Advocacy therefore is a collaborative process involving the mobilization of partners – e.g. individuals may come together as a group to call for change; organizations may come together as a consortium or network to pool their evidence base and strengthen their voice in discussion with decision-makers. Collaboration not only enhances the (collective) voice of advocates, but is important for ensuring coherent, consistent messages. Partnerships in advocacy ensure that calls for change are not undermined by multiple/conflicting messages that confuse decision-makers or give them an excuse to discredit the advocates. Collaboration also ensures that different stakeholders’ perspectives are taken into consideration when developing the advocacy objectives, activities and messages.”³

¹ Definition used by Save the Children: www.savethechildren.net/advocacy.

² IPPF. 2007. Taking Action to End Child Marriage: A Guide for Programmers and Activists. London, International Planned Parenthood Federation, p. 19.

³ Kaplan, I. & Lewis, I. (2013) ‘Introduction’ - Promoting Inclusive Teacher Education – Advocacy Guide. Bangkok: UNESCO (pp 8-9).

The advocacy case studies

The six advocacy case studies in this special edition tell stories from a range of different perspectives and stakeholders – from the level of schools and classrooms, civil society organisations, government ministries and beyond.

Some of the advocacy examples offer a broad focus on education systems and access to quality education for all children, while others have a more specific focus on issues such as gender and disability. Collectively, these stories go beyond a narrow understanding of advocacy as being limited to media campaigns. They demonstrate a wider range of advocacy dimensions (as mentioned above) and show that advocacy is change-oriented, involves constructive engagement, is evidence-based and built on partnerships.

The six case studies broadly fall into two categories:

1. advocacy work done with IGOs and governments
2. advocacy work done directly with school communities.

Advocacy work with IGOs and governments

- Bridge of Hope has written about their involvement in advocating with a consortium of NGOs and government ministries on the creation of new legislation and budgeting processes in Armenia to support a move from special schooling to inclusive education.
- Open Societies Institute's story looks at their advocacy with government officials and civil society organisations in Tajikistan to facilitate a shared understanding of inclusive education, better planning and budgeting, and a co-ordinated effort towards developing inclusive education in the country.
- The article from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education describes their work to gather evidence to inform advocacy with ministries of education across Europe to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. It also summarises key 'asks' for policy-makers.

Advocacy work with school communities

- The Norwegian Refugee Council and UNESCO tell the story of their work in Gaza, Palestine, with teachers, school managers, children and parents. The work focuses on raising awareness about inclusive education and demonstrating the practical (and advocacy) benefits of active, child-led, project-based learning approaches.
- Dante Rigmalia's story from Indonesia is about the process of advocacy in ensuring an individual child's right to participate in regular schooling with his peers.
- The Norwegian Afghanistan Committee's story focuses on their advocacy work with school communities to change attitudes and practices around girls' education in Afghanistan.

Doing good inclusive education advocacy is, in itself, a way of practising inclusive education. It is not just about telling people what to do, it is about working with people to establish a common and practically grounded understanding of what inclusive education means. In this way, advocacy should support people in challenging stereotypes and addressing their own barriers to inclusion. It follows that advocacy is a process of supporting people to be reflective in making the connections between inclusive education concepts and practice in their own lives.

The case studies shared in this booklet draw out important aspects of the process of doing advocacy work, by sharing the strategies and solutions that advocates have used to affect change.

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Moving from special schools to inclusive schooling: Bridge of Hope's advocacy in Armenia

Susanna Tadevosyan and Hasmik Ghukasyan

Since 2001, Bridge of Hope, an Armenian NGO working for the rights of people with disabilities, has been conducting advocacy to generate a nationwide switch from segregated education for children with disabilities and special educational needs towards inclusive education. The latest stage of advocacy, from 2009 to 2014, resulted in a new legal and budgetary framework to roll out inclusive education and transfer funding from special schools to inclusive mainstream schools and special educational needs support centres. This article describes the advocacy work done by Bridge of Hope during this process.

The need for a fully inclusive education system

Bridge of Hope's work piloting the transfer of children with disabilities from special boarding schools to mainstream schools had already led to changes in the law to support schools in becoming inclusive. However, only a stand-

alone law allowing inclusive education for children with disabilities had been produced. This meant that overall budgets for education were not affected, and only pilot schemes to promote inclusion remained. One of the problems this caused was that existing budget lines for children's accommodation and care in special boarding schools could not be reallocated effectively towards the costs of extra teaching support in inclusive mainstream schools.

Objectives and targets

In 2009 Bridge of Hope came to the conclusion that separate laws could not support inclusive education in Armenia. They realised that the 'mother law' for education should be revised to promote inclusion of all children, including those with disabilities and special needs. Bridge of Hope started working to get a new overall law for education which would promote inclusive education as a central concept. This law should require a reallocation of funds



away from boarding school costs and towards the costs of supporting children with special educational needs in local mainstream schools. Achieving this would involve targeting all parts of government involved with law-making and education.

Advocacy strategies and strengths

Bridge of Hope used many of the strong relationships it had built up. Some of the principals from Bridge of Hope's initial inclusive mainstream school pilots had become parliamentarians; one had become the head of the mainstream education department in the Ministry of Education; and one had become Head of the Education Department for Yerevan Municipality. These individuals helped to encourage discussion of the need for a new law behind the scenes. Susanna, the President of Bridge of Hope, was also very well regarded and had good relationships of trust with key people in government, including the Minister of Education.

At the same time, the coalition of disability-focused civil society organisations in Armenia was campaigning for government ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which added

pressure on the government to increase progress on inclusive education by reworking the legal framework.

Once demand for a review of the law had built up in this way, the Minister of Education ordered a group of experts to work with Bridge of Hope to conduct a situation analysis, investigating: the limitations of the current special educational needs law and mother law; funding issues for special schools and inclusive mainstream schools; and capacity needs for widening inclusive education.

Activities in detail

The expert group conducted many interviews with teachers and students from the 40 inclusive mainstream schools then operating. Every point in the consultation process was shared with the disability advocacy coalition, to maximise input from teachers, parents and young people affected by disability and inclusion issues. Bridge of Hope's ongoing relationship with UNICEF and Danish Mission East was used to bring in technical support from external experts to develop recommendations for legal change, referencing the UNCRPD and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).



The expert group developed recommendations from the situation analysis, producing a package of documents which was sent to the Minister of Education. The package contained proposals for existing articles of the main education law to be changed, or for new articles to be inserted, to enable it to promote inclusive education.

The Minister agreed that the documents be disseminated to various departments within the Ministry of Education and to other key ministries involved with disability and inclusion. These ministries responded with amendments, and the Minister of Education prepared a consolidated document for national government, which approved the draft and sent it to the National Assembly for adoption.

There was then a campaigning process to get the law taken up by the National Assembly. Bridge of Hope organised a documentary which followed up on the first four children to have been moved from special school into mainstream school in 2001. The film was broadcast on national TV, and showed how these young people's lives had benefited from their inclusion in mainstream education and society. This was very influential, as there had been some resistance to examples from other countries; local examples were needed to convince people that this campaign was relevant to Armenia.

The minister of education asked the National Assembly's education steering committee to set up a co-ordinating group for the revised law, involving Bridge of Hope and other experts and organisations. This co-ordinating group organised public hearings of the draft law. As part of this process, Bridge of Hope arranged for young people with disabilities to speak at hearings and to address Parliament. Some of these were among the first disabled graduates of inclusive mainstream schools, and their testimony was very powerful in convincing parliamentarians of the need for a clear new law to promote inclusive schooling.

Then, once the National Assembly had been convinced of the need for a new law, there were three or four consultative meetings to prepare the first draft of the law for its first hearing

in parliament. After this hearing, in 2011, parliamentarians requested further reworking.

It was hoped the law would pass in 2012. However, in 2012 and 2013, other urgent developments postponed this. Major political protests due to pension reforms took the government's attention. Shifts in customs and trading union arrangements required the redrafting of many laws. Then a new government was set up, with many personnel changes. Bridge of Hope and its partners needed to start at the beginning again, raising the awareness of new members of government. The Minister of Education (who stayed in post) was also influential, and made a powerful speech in support of inclusive education. After all the legislation for other priority areas was completed, the inclusive education law moved up the queue.

Results: new inclusive education law and financial framework

The new education law and policy was approved on 1 December 2014. It declares that the Republic of Armenia's system of mainstream education is inclusive and recognises inclusive education as the way to protect the rights of all children to education. The policy describes inclusive education, and gives examples of children who need special support in education.

The policy provides for special boarding schools to be transitioned into support centres for inclusive mainstream schools. Children with special educational needs will receive pedagogical and psychological support through their local mainstream schools, which should receive funding to bring in teacher assistants and specialist teachers. Schools will also be supported by experts from the support centre who will visit their schools, work with children and advise or train teachers. These support centres will register children with special educational needs in order to secure additional funding down to school level for their support. At national level, a co-ordination centre will be set up to oversee support centres and provide training.

Children identified as having special educational needs will receive pedagogical

and psychological support from 3 levels: at the mainstream school; through specialists from the support centres; and at national level to ensure supervision of quality support to all children.

By 2022 all mainstream schools in Armenia will become inclusive. All special schools will become support centres, except schools for children with visual and hearing impairments, and institutions for young offenders. The new law requires changes to the special schools budget line, to enable them to work as support centres, and to use any surplus to fund direct support to mainstream schools.

Next steps

The Ministry of Education will now form a working group to prepare action plans for implementing each section of the new law. Bridge of Hope will take part in this process. Donor support will then be sought to implement the action plans. The Ministry will make it clear to donors that only support which is complementary to these plans will be accepted.

Once the planned training of 20 special schools in inclusive education and mainstream school support is completed, their budget will change and they will become pedagogical/psychological support centres.

Bridge of Hope has trained one special school and will train 10 more with support from UNICEF. The Ministry of Education has

not budgeted for training, so international organisations and donors will be asked for funds.

The government will need to establish new support centres in more remote areas, using the support centre budget line. Now special educational needs funding will be based on the number of children in each region, using a projection that 10% will need support.

It will be important to re-allocate the full special school budget to the new model of special educational needs support, so that the budget is not reduced in future years. New financial procedures have been drafted, and Bridge of Hope will keep advocating to ensure that they are implemented.

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Speeding up progress towards inclusive education in Tajikistan

Nazarkhudo Dastambuev

In 2011, the Tajikistan Open Society Institute (OSI) team realised that there was a need to achieve a clearer understanding of inclusive education among government officials, so they set up an advocacy initiative to make this happen. This article outlines the advocacy process and results.

Background

There was already increased awareness of inclusive education, as the Minister of Education and Science had attended a UNESCO International Bureau of Education conference on inclusive education in 2008. There was also government interest in keeping up with neighbouring countries on education reform, and OSI and other partners had promoted inclusive education through successful pilot projects. But there were many misunderstandings and misconceptions about what inclusive education looks like, and what the inclusion of people with disabilities involves in practice. The difficulty of translating inclusion concepts into the Tajik language exacerbated the problem. Key figures in government admitted they did not understand essential concepts underpinning inclusion and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). This prevented ratification of the UNCPRD, because there was not enough understanding about what implementation would involve.

There was also a lack of awareness within the government that inclusion of people with disabilities needed collaboration between several ministries in order to be successful. There was a perception that inclusion was a health matter only, and that people with disabilities only needed medical support. Within the Ministry of Education and Science there was a feeling that teachers should be the main actors in inclusive education, but there wasn't a systematic drive for whole-school development in order to support an inclusive education approach.

This situation led to insufficient and inappropriate budgetary arrangements for



inclusive education, and a lack of progress in scaling up pilot initiatives. The Ministry of Finance's budget formula for supporting children with special educational needs was focused on children in special boarding schools, rather than mainstream schools, and bore no relation to real needs. Provincial level governments were able to provide extra funding for particular schools so they could better support students with disabilities on an ad hoc basis. However, there was very little overall provision for supporting schools to meet the learning and participation needs of such students.

Objective and targets

OSI started working to build a stronger understanding of inclusive education within national government. The objective was to get officials in key ministries working together on the issues around inclusive education, both to foster future collaboration and to build an in-depth understanding of inclusive education in practice.

OSI had a good relationship with the head of the parliamentary education committee. As a result of discussions with OSI, she raised the issue that the law did not support inclusive education, and that legal change was therefore needed. OSI supported the committee to take this issue further, and built the capacity of the deputy head of the education committee to lead on an initiative to strengthen the legal basis for inclusive education. OSI enabled him to attend Index for Inclusion¹ training in Turkey, boosting his exposure to good practice. These efforts led to OSI being asked by Parliament to help develop a national concept of inclusive education, as a basis for legal changes. OSI suggested that a cross-ministry working group on inclusive education would be the best way to deliver this.

OSI used its strong relationship with the Ministry of Education and Science, developed through technical support of a range of education policies, to ask the Ministry to set up the working group. The Minister did this because he realised that it was in the Ministry's interests to pursue collaboration with other ministries, to get better support for bringing the education system up to date. The Minister sent out a formal request for representatives from three other ministries to join the working group. This was crucial in getting other Ministries to allocate staff time to the group.

The ministries chosen were the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and the Ministry of Finance. These ministries were seen as having the biggest potential impact on the inclusion of people with disabilities. The Ministry of Finance was particularly important, as it set the budgetary instruments to deliver other ministries' work.

Activities in detail

The working group was tasked with investigating practice around inclusive education. It involved disabled people's and parents' organisations as well as Ministry staff. The group met 12-13 times during 2011 and 2012. As well as linking the group up with civil society, OSI supported the group with technical advice and exposure to good practice.

¹ The Index for Inclusion is a set of materials to guide schools through a process of inclusive school development. See: www.csie.org.uk/resources/inclusion-index-explained.shtml

OSI provided a consultant from Belarus to share experience of how inclusive education has been adopted in a similar education system, and arranged for the group to go on study visits to similar countries and to inclusive education pilots within Tajikistan. The study visits were particularly useful in giving members of the group positive exposure to inclusive education in practice. OSI also linked up the working group with the coalition platform for international donors and agencies, encouraging them to share information from other countries which are already implementing inclusive education.

The working group, with the support of an OSI consultant, then produced a draft national concept statement on inclusive education, shaped by their improved knowledge on how inclusive education works in practice. The national inclusive education concept was ratified by Parliament in 2012, and is now shaping legislative reform for education. In 2013 it was used to direct the revision of the early childhood law, and in 2015 the national concept will be used to shape a revision of the basic education law.

During this period the working group was also given exposure to ideas on better budgeting for inclusive education. A Ministry of Finance official involved in budget projections and monitoring was a key member of the working group. Initially he was unconcerned about inclusive education issues, but as his exposure to good practice grew, he became more engaged in disability issues in his local area and worked to promote inclusive education in budget discussions.

At the same time, OSI helped the process of influencing the Ministry of Finance by commissioning a national NGO to produce an additional capitation formula for inclusive education, with an emphasis on mainstream schools. The NGO undertook research to record the actual costs of meeting disabled children's needs in pilot inclusive schools. The NGO's report was shared with the working group, and was used by Ministry of Finance officials in helping to develop a better capitation method for children with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

Results

Having seen what inclusive education looks like in practice, and having had information on the real costs of making it work, the 2014 education budget contained a national increase of 5% for inclusive education support for pre-schools and primary schools. In 2015, the increase is expected to be higher. This figure is likely to be further increased at province and district levels, as more support will be provided based on specific needs presented to local budget holders.

Next steps and wider impact

OSI has been working to increase the flow of funds for inclusive education by helping local government to identify funds available for teacher training on inclusive education. In 2015 OSI plans to bring these local finance units together with central level Ministry of Finance

staff to improve central Ministry understanding of inclusive education funding needs.

Since the working group took place, OSI has seen representatives from the four ministries become more involved in national forums around inclusion. More coherent messages on disability and inclusion are also apparent in the speeches of the President, which are informed by input from Ministry officials.

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This article was compiled from an interview in January 2015 with Nazarkhudo Dastambuev, Open Society Institute's Director for Tajikistan.

Promoting Inclusive Teacher Education: Advocacy Guides

This is a set of 5 booklets from UNESCO Bangkok, written in collaboration with EENET. The guides discuss challenges and barriers to inclusive education in different areas of teacher education and offer related strategies and solutions for effective advocacy towards more inclusive practice. The guides are aimed at anyone working on advocacy to improve pre-service teacher education, including: policy-makers, managers and staff in teacher education institutions, NGOs, teachers and student teachers, learner and their communities.

Guide 1: Introduction

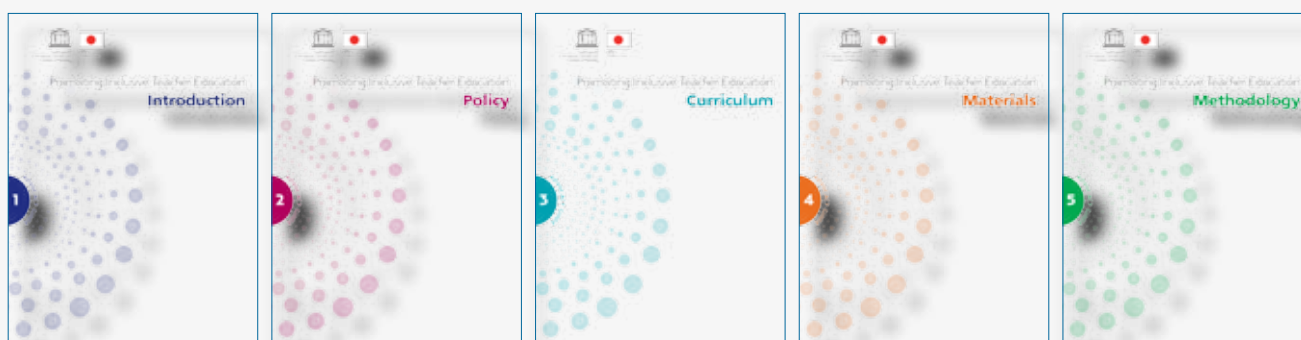
Guide 2: Policy

Guide 3: Curriculum

Guide 4: Materials

Guide 5: Methodology

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Research to inform policy-makers and advocates

Verity Donnelly

Local and large-scale advocacy needs to be based on evidence and experience. It can be more effective when advocates share information and learn from each other's contexts. Here, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education describe a research project, the findings of which provide clear suggestions for the focus that inclusive education policy and advocacy needs to take in Europe.

Introduction

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is an independent, self-governing organisation established by member countries to act as their platform for collaboration regarding the development of provision for learners with special educational needs. Member countries can learn from each other through knowledge and experience exchange.

The Agency is not an NGO. It works primarily with policy-makers to identify priorities and develop resources for policy-making. Its programmes reflect both these priorities and agreed EU policies regarding learners with special educational needs and the promotion of their full participation within mainstream education and training.

The Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education (OoP) project, was conducted by the Agency from 2011 to 2013. It examined, with member countries: **how are systems of provision organised to meet the needs of learners identified as having disabilities (under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCRPD, 2006) in inclusive settings within the compulsory school sector?** The findings offer insights to guide policy-makers and those advocates seeking to influence policy-makers.

Project activities

Various activities were used to collect, discuss and share information:

- 1. Literature review:** set out the project's conceptual framework and reviewed research literature post-2000, including past Agency work.
- 2. Information and examples of practice from member countries** on how they organise and evaluate provision for learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.
- 3. Country visits:**
 - Sweden – explore ways to strengthen the capacity of mainstream schools
 - Austria – look at a collaborative approach to quality management
 - Germany – investigate collaboration and networking to support the needs of learners with disabilities
 - Slovenia – look at developing the role of special schools to provide a resource to support mainstream
 - Malta – study in-class support and the roles of different personnel in schools/communities.
- 4. Thematic seminars** in these countries: policy-makers and national and local representatives explored the factors that influence the success of inclusive education.
- 5. Project outputs:** A final report provides recommendations (for policy-makers and those who advocate with them) for improving support systems for learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.

A web-based resource (due mid-2015) will support collaborative policy development. It will highlight project resources and key publications to encourage dialogue around:

- How can we embed UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UNCRPD principles in national/local policy to ensure the rights of all learners to a quality education?
- What do we understand by inclusive education?
- How can we identify and overcome barriers to participation and learning for all?

- How can we organise provision to meet the needs of all our school community?
- How can we collaborate with key stakeholders to secure a commitment to change and improve?

Key policy / advocacy messages

Thematic seminar discussions and other project research activities revealed the need for:

- Conceptual clarity regarding inclusive education
- Strong politicians who think long-term
- Legislation and policy that recognises the synergy between the UNCRC and UNCRPD in prioritising the rights of children with disabilities and ensuring consistent policy and practice
- Understanding inclusion as integral to school improvement
- A systemic view: developing the ‘inclusive capability’ of the whole education system
- Effective co-ordination between agencies at all levels
- Leaders who engage in self and peer review and use data/evidence to inform improvements
- Leaders and teachers who take responsibility
- Teachers who value heterogeneity and do not label learners
- A view of support as the norm for all learners
- A flexible curriculum framework to meet all needs
- Schools/teachers who use diverse teaching and assessment approaches.
- Inclusive accountability that involves all stakeholders and informs policy decisions
- Teacher education and continuing professional development for inclusion so that teachers develop positive attitudes and take responsibility
- A clear role for specialist settings to develop as resource centres to increase the capability of mainstream schools and ensure quality provision and well-qualified professional support
- School organisation, teaching approaches, curriculum and assessment that support ‘equivalent’ learning opportunities for all
- Efficient use of resources through co-operation, developing a flexible continuum of support rather than allocating funding to specific groups.

The following are recommendations to policy-makers (and those who advocate with them):

Child rights and participation

Policy-makers should:

- Review national legislation and education policy to ensure that they are consistent with and actively support UNCRC and UNCRPD and uphold the right of all learners to full participation in their local school.

Conceptual clarity and coherence

Policy-makers should:

- Clarify the concept of inclusion across and between levels of the system – be clear that it increases quality and equity for all learners. All education policy-makers need to take responsibility for all learners.
- Consider the links between system levels (i.e. between national/local policy-makers, local education/school leaders, teachers, other professionals and learners and their families) and enhance these links through collaboration and coherent partnerships.
- Provide incentives for schools to take all learners from the local community and ensure that methods of assessment, inspections and other accountability measures support inclusive practice and inform further improvement.

Continuum of support

Policy-makers should:

- Develop a ‘continuum of support’ for teachers, support staff and in particular for school leaders through use of research, networking and links to universities.
- Develop the role of special schools as a resource to increase the capability of mainstream schools and improve support for learners. Maintain and further develop the specialist knowledge and skills of resource centre personnel to enable them to support school staff and provide a specialist network that will enhance support for learners.
- Develop more accessible curriculum and assessment frameworks and support greater flexibility in pedagogy, school organisation and resource allocation so that schools can work in innovative ways rather than fitting them into an existing system.

For more information, see:

<http://bit.ly/EERADV-ea>

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Linking advocacy and inclusive pedagogy: An example from Gaza

Suha Surour and Asad Ashour

Advocacy takes many different forms. This article illustrates how one project in Gaza, Palestine, combined efforts to advocate for the development of more learner-centred inclusive teaching practices, with opportunities for children to advocate on issues that are important to them.

Introduction

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has been working in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to support the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA), and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) in Palestine. The specific programme described in this case study has been funded by the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID).

This work is part of the overall Education for All (EFA) Package for Palestine on inclusive and child-friendly education and early childhood development, jointly designed and implemented by the MoEHE and nine UN agencies* since 2011. The overall objective of the EFA Package is to strengthen the capacities of the Ministry and education personnel to promote quality basic education for all children, regardless of their gender, abilities, disabilities, backgrounds and circumstances. This Package is responding to the MoEHE's goals to increase access to education for school-aged children, to retain those children in the education system and to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

* FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNRWA, UNSCO, WFP and WHO, co-ordinated by UNESCO

In Gaza, children grow up in very difficult conditions, frequently surrounded by poverty and violence. Schools provide them with a place to learn the skills for a better future. Partly due to the pressures of a large population and relative lack of space in Gaza, many schools are operating on a double-shift basis, hosting

one 'school' of students in the morning and a second 'school' in the afternoon. A few schools even have three shifts per day, due to the last war in 2014. Additionally, many schools are used as shelters for internally displaced people who have lost their houses due to the last war.

These challenging environmental and social conditions make it very difficult to provide a comprehensive and inclusive system of education for Gaza's children and young people. Educators have little control over such conditions and little capacity or opportunity to change them directly. However, educators do have influence over the way education is organised in Gaza and, as such, can make changes towards greater inclusion.

Overview of activities

Through the capacity development programme NRC, UNESCO, MoEHE and UNRWA have sought to raise awareness among supervisors, school principals, teachers and education specialists about inclusive education, and to help them incorporate inclusive practices into schools and classrooms.

Both UNRWA and the MoEHE run their own schools in Palestine, but work collaboratively to support the education needs of Palestinian children.

Counsellors and supervisors are employees of the MoEHE and UNRWA. They work directly with schools and teachers in a support capacity. 'Subject supervisors' in particular can play a significant role in changing teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and supporting them to meet their students' needs. Subject supervisors are able to spread inclusive education messages to all teachers across Gaza, as they have access to multiple schools. They have the remit to coach teachers, so if the supervisors embrace new approaches, they can influence teachers to do the same.

As a first step, NRC and UNESCO conducted several **training sessions for 'Master Trainers'** among the counsellors and



(Umm Al-Qura Co- Basic School, West Gaza, June 2014, © UNESCO/Bilal Al Hamaydah)

Grade 4 student writing a slogan about protecting the environment

supervisors to prepare a group of Master Trainers as a key resource to support the implementation of inclusive and child-friendly education in Palestine. The Master Trainers then led awareness-raising sessions and training at MoEHE and UNRWA target schools in different areas of the Gaza strip.

Six schools from among the 26 target schools in the Gaza strip were then chosen to participate in **action research projects**. Twelve teachers and special education specialists learned about the action research cycle, and then started to implement this approach to solve some of the problems they face in their schools and classrooms.

NRC, UNESCO, UNRWA and the MoEHE later implemented a pilot activity in four Grade 4 classes, at two UNRWA and two MoEHE schools. The MoEHE and UNRWA nominated outstanding teachers, supervisors and school principals to be trained in, and then oversee, **child-led activities** at the schools for two weeks during the summer.

A fourth step is to **prepare an activities guide** for Grades 1-4. This has been undertaken by

subject supervisors with NRC and UNESCO's support. The guide includes various curriculum activities suitable for all children, particularly in Mathematics and Arabic. The activities have been designed to help teachers engage children in learning, regardless of their differences and abilities. This guide is still being developed, but is close to completion.

Currently, the activities of action research and child-led activities are being expanded to other schools.

This case study focuses specifically on the child-led activities component of the programme.

Aims of the child-led activities

The implementation of child-led activities sought to make education more inclusive, through demonstrating and advocating the use of child-led active learning techniques which would be integrated with the existing curriculum through a project-based learning approach. The learning projects would also have a focus on advocacy, enabling children to raise awareness about an issue that concerned them.

As well as benefitting children, teachers and parents, the programme was designed to actively engage with school principals. The programme sought to support schools in:

- improving their planning for inclusive activities
- embracing diversity and maintaining high expectations for all students
- providing access to knowledge, skills and information for all students
- tailoring learning to meet individual needs
- encouraging co-teaching and collaboration among general and special educators
- collaborating with families and community members
- thinking 'outside the box' in terms of school structures, policies and finance
- promoting and supporting inclusive communities within the school and beyond.

School community members (teachers, children, parents and school administrators, and the counsellors and subject supervisors who support schools) were key targets for this programme.

Engaging school communities in child-led activities

The child-led activities manual has been developed and subject supervisors have been trained in how to use it and how to train and support teachers to use it inside their classes.

Teachers, school principals and subject supervisors from four target schools received

one week's training in using the child-led activities manual. One Grade 4 class per school then tried out some child-led activities. Each class had more than 30 children with diverse backgrounds and disabilities.

The activities took place during a two-week period, under the supervision of school principals and subject supervisors. Teachers in each school worked as facilitators. They allowed children to choose their favourite topics to work on: two schools chose 'nutrition' as their main topic, while the other two chose 'environment'.

Children collected information on their topics. They expressed their feelings and shared their learning about the topics by making drawings and stories related to these topics. Some children wrote songs. Others wrote slogans and advocacy messages on issues including their right to a balanced diet and an appropriate living and learning environment. Some children used drama and role-play to express their feelings about healthy food and environmental issues.

The children also prepared short and simple surveys, under their teachers' supervision, and distributed these to their parents and neighbours. They analysed the results using charts and tables. Teachers (the facilitators) used presentations, short videos and brought in external visitors to further develop and stimulate children's learning on their chosen topics. Throughout the activities, children worked in groups and sometimes individually.



(Umm Al-Qura Co- Basic School, West Gaza, June 2014, © UNESCO/Bilal Al Hamaydah)

Grade 4 students with their teachers and school principal

At the end, the children agreed on a commitment which they named the 'Olive Tree Commitment'. This included points on how children can protect their environment and how they can help themselves in eating healthy food, with support from their parents.

On the last day, participating children organised an advocacy campaign/event. They invited UNRWA and MoEHE education management, their parents, and some local institutes. The results of the children's survey were presented and the invited guests were given an opportunity to see the children's advocacy materials (drawings, stories, slogans, etc). The children signed the 'Olive Tree Commitment' with their parents, in front of their visitors. They took copies home and agreed to follow the points outlined in the commitment.

Issues and challenges

One of the main challenges that we faced was to convince schools about the importance and value of such child-led activities. In particular, it was difficult to convince school principals to try these activities in their schools. Principals are often overloaded with initiatives, but without their support we knew it could be difficult to get teachers on board.

One principal in particular doubted that fourth grade students in her school could lead activities, launch a campaign or advocate in any other way. She recommended that we start with older students. She also thought that parents would be too busy looking for jobs and trying to meet their families' basic needs, and would not be available to come to school or work with their children at home. Often schools arrange meetings for parents that the latter do not find useful, but rarely invite them to actively participate, so inevitably they become reluctant to engage with the school or their child's education. The principal suggested we should choose a school in a different area. However, we reassured her that this activity would suit her school and promised her it would have a positive impact on students, teachers and parents. The school participated.

Timing was also a big challenge. The only time available for us to conduct the activities was in the summer, when schools are closed. But this

is also teachers' annual leave period, so we offered teachers a small amount of money to facilitate their movement to school during their leave.

Many students were of course planning to join their communities' summer activities, which their parents felt were more suitable than our activities. We overcame this by arranging a meeting with parents to clarify the importance and expected impacts of our activities.

Results

The child-led activities proved to be the most successful part of NRC's overall advocacy initiative. It showed school principals, subject supervisors and parents (and the children themselves) that children could do much more than people had previously believed. Children had the chance to discover their strengths. They also had the chance to lead and to advocate. The child-led activities helped change attitudes among all who participated, particularly subject supervisors and teachers.

Subject supervisors began to advocate about the benefits of child-led activities during regular visits to schools. They have briefed other teachers on the activities and their potentials. As a result teachers have begun changing their attitudes towards children, which is also positively impacting children's performance in class.

Some parents previously thought their children were failures, who could not do anything. But after their involvement in child-led activities, parents realised that their children could do a lot. Their children were bringing books and other work home. Parents said that for the first time their children were eager to go to school, and talk about the academic day.

"I can't believe that my child has the ability to do such work in just two weeks. I am a very lucky mother" one parent declared. "I am really glad that this little child can make decisions and force all of us to be committed to his very useful suggestions, like reducing the amount of plastic bags used and reusing some items".

The child-led activities included making booklets. All of the children had the chance to



(Rudolph Feltar Co- Basic School, Middle of Gaza, September 2014, © UNESCO/ Bilal Al Hamaydah)

Taking a break from the child-led activities

Feedback from teachers and subject supervisors

“The children... were tasked to make many products in just two weeks. They made a small survey, they drafted and signed the Olive Tree Commitment (a commitment on what they as children could do to protect the environment), they wrote and illustrated a book about the environment for Grade 1 children, and they made an exhibition/awareness campaign for their parents and the community. This was an enormous challenge, but at the end all the children completed their tasks and the results were impressive.” (subject supervisor)

“I couldn’t believe that children who were just ten years old had the ability to work in such a huge, complex and amazing project. I am very proud of my students.” (teacher)

“Implementing project-based learning was the best thing that happened to me all summer. Soon after we completed the summer camp, war came to Gaza. I was thinking back at the time I had with my pupils and longed for peace.” (teacher)

“I’ve been teaching for a long time. I used to complain about my students all the time – they drove me crazy. Some of them only followed my instructions, while the majority of them never accomplished any of my well-planned activities... After these two weeks (with child-led activities/project-based learning) I saw the amazing products and achievements of my students and I recognised that if teachers want their students to be involved in any activity, they should give them the opportunity to participate actively in the planning, design and evaluation of the activity. I learned how important it is to cultivate an academic environment in any classroom by having high expectation of my students and to do a “gut-check” from time to time about my own beliefs concerning their abilities.” (teacher)

write short stories with illustrations. The stories/ booklets will be used when teaching Grade 1 students. This activity left every participating child feeling proud that they had made a product that will be useful for others.

The principal who had initially been reluctant to have child-led activities in her school started to realise that students, especially those who previously had been considered ‘low achievers’, can do a lot. She encouraged parents to sign the ‘Olive Tree Commitment’, and motivated them to follow their children’s progress at home. She also asked the participating teachers to train all of their colleagues and began to advocate for child-led activities in all MoEHE schools.

Lessons learned

This experience highlighted the importance of involving the school principals if we want to make a change at school level. Advocacy and awareness activities therefore have to target education senior management and policy-makers.

We learned that changing attitudes takes time, so facilitators need to be patient. Using success stories from other countries (as well as our own) can help in this regard. Working as a team on new initiatives like this is also important, as is ensuring that parents and the local community

are actively involved in inclusive education advocacy activities.

We should ensure that there are regular meetings for school principals and teachers to exchange ideas and experiences, or find other ways to share learning.

Feedback from NRC staff

“Before working with the NRC, I worked with UNRWA for 12 years as a science teacher. Actually, I wished that I had been aware of such initiatives to use them with my students at that time.”

“This advocacy work means a lot to me. It confirmed to me that when a leader is ready, well prepared, s/he can do a lot. A true leader can encourage his/her employees and lead them towards better practices.”

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Performance about protecting the environment

Local-level advocacy: Enabling Johan to stay in mainstream education in Indonesia

Dante Rigmalia

In this article, Dante shares the story of one student, Johan,¹ who had challenges with his learning. Dante, Johan's primary school teacher, and his parents wanted him to stay in mainstream school when he moved to high school, rather than go to a special school. This article highlights the successes and challenges in one teacher's advocacy efforts to convince the education department to allow Johan to stay in mainstream education. Dante's story also shows how important it is to combine advocacy with practical action and support.

Introduction

I am a primary school teacher with the additional responsibility of being a co-ordinator for the implementation of inclusive education in a primary school in Bandung, Indonesia.

Johan is the youngest child from a modest family. His father is a sport education teacher at a junior high school and his mother is a housewife. Johan had trouble concentrating while studying; he could only sit for a relatively short time, always moved and got up from his seat. He often got angry and was unable to control himself when he didn't get what he wanted.

Johan had challenges with his learning and I realised that he needed some special assistance. I tried to find different ways to help him learn better, both inside and outside the classroom. With approval from the principal, his classroom teachers and parents, I also looked for a volunteer to support this process. I found a student from the Indonesia University of Education who was then assigned to accompany Johan. Through this assistance finally Johan could learn better.

The learning process ran smoothly until the time came for the primary level final exam – our national examination. I convinced the principal and classroom teacher that Johan could join the national exam alongside the other students. I also explained that academically Johan had

been able to follow the learning, but he just needed guidance when reading the questions and writing down the answers.

I managed to convince the school supervisor, principals, classroom teachers and parents to give him the same opportunities as his friends for the national exam. During the exam Johan was put in a classroom with some students and I was there too, to assist him. Johan passed with adequate scores, so he could attend a regular school, as opposed to a special school.

His parents wanted to send him to a higher grade, but I knew there were not many regular junior high schools in the area willing to accept children with special needs.

Finding a school for Johan

I recommended to Johan's parents that he attend the junior high school next to my school. Johan is familiar with the neighborhood and the school is not far from his house. I strongly agree with the Salamanca Statement which highlights "that every child has the right to attend the school closest to their homes" and "the child should learn together with other students in the regular classroom". I notice that going to school far from their homes is challenging for students, because physically they are not ready to make the long journey like adults. Children who learn in their neighbourhood school are learning in a context they know well. Having children study together in regular classes also has a positive impact on their development. Placing Johan in the regular class in his local school would help him to develop gradually, especially his social skills, and he would be better able to communicate and understand social situations.

I went to the junior high school, met the principal and started the conversation by introducing myself and expressing my purpose. The principal told me that personally he wanted to accept Johan at his school, but the decision could not be taken by him alone. He needed approval from the school's teachers, because they would be responsible for supporting Johan in the learning process. He also

¹ Name has been changed

needed permission from the district education department.

The principal suggested that I should visit the head of the district education department. He explained that he did not have the authority to accept children with special needs in his school because the school didn't have a decree from the district education department to be an 'inclusive school' - at this time only two schools in the district were officially designated as being 'inclusive schools'. The principal was worried that he could be sanctioned for such a decision. Such a top-down, bureaucratic culture works against implementing inclusive education in this country.

The implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia, especially in West Java Province, follows certain steps. First, the education department provides a decree for schools which are appointed as 'inclusive education schools'. Although this decree supports the implementation of inclusive education in some schools, it means that access to schools remains limited because many schools do not have such a decree.

I believe inclusive education should become a strategy to improve the quality of education generally. The presence of the students with special needs in school encourages teachers to learn and innovate continuously so they better meet the learning needs of all students.

Meeting to the district education department

I went to district education department. I eventually met the head of the department, although this took a long time as I was referred to many different people first, both inside and outside the education department. But I didn't give up.

The head of the district education department and I had a long discussion about Johan and his education. The head asked me, "Why are Johan's parents reluctant to send their child to a special school, are they ashamed?" I explained that Johan's parents were not ashamed, but they (and I) felt that Johan would develop better if he studied together with his friends in a regular school. He would have an opportunity to learn to interact and socialise with a wide range

of children, and his special needs could be accommodated.

At the end of our discussion, the district education department head referred to the Ministry of Education regulation on the implementation of inclusive education, which states that: "A school which implements inclusive schooling must have at least one teacher with a special needs education background". He stated that almost all schools aren't ready for this.

The selection of a school for Johan

The junior high school we had originally chosen for Johan (we'll call it school X) does not have any teachers with a special educational needs background, I offered my support to work with the school if they accepted Johan as a student. However, the head of district education suggested Johan should go to a different school (we'll call it school Y) which was officially assigned as an 'inclusive school'.

I was disappointed, and so were the principal of school X and Johan's parents. However, our efforts were not totally in vain. At least I had been able to raise the issues of the lack of opportunities, need for justice and education rights for children with special needs in attending regular schools. And at least Johan was not being told to go to a special school.

School Y is a good school, but it far from where Johan lives. I had previously worked with school Y to support them in accepting a student with a visual impairment. This had been a long and difficult process, but I saw that over time the school learned much from including a child with special needs. As the proverb says, "Experience is the most valuable teacher".

Johan's parents and I finally, reluctantly, agreed to register him at school Y, but I knew my role could not stop there – after the advocacy stage I needed to be available to offer practical support, if Johan's case was to have a successful outcome.

The principal asked to see Johan's parents and asked for his previous learning records. I had prepared the records before the registration process began, so was able to provide

everything needed. I convinced the principal that I was ready to support and assist with Johan's education, as well as education for other children with special needs in this school, and the principal was happy and welcoming.

The school asked me to assist in making a learning programme and recommendations for Johan's inclusion. I told them that for the effectiveness of Johan's learning, I would also prepare a teaching assistant to collaborate with the homeroom teacher, and the subject teachers, so that the classroom can be space that is conducive for everyone's learning.

Preparing to support Johan in a regular school

Preparing everything before Johan started attending school Y was a challenge. My first step was to discuss his situation with my friend, a psychologist who helps me with developmental screenings and making learning recommendations for students at my own school. My relationship with the psychologist is a non-formal relationship (but non-formal relationships (allies) can be a valuable resource in doing advocacy work).

The second step was designing the individual learning programme with Johan's previous teaching assistant. The third step was to choose a new teaching assistant and discuss Johan's assistance needs with them. The final step was to meet Johan's new homeroom teacher, some subject teachers, the curriculum advisor, and the school academic department to discuss Johan's individual learning programme. We made sure this was a friendly, informal meeting.

With support from many parties, Johan finally could fully participate in the learning process, but there were many challenges during his first days in the new school. He got angry a few times, and made his classmates panic with his aggressive behaviour. And one teacher refused to teach him. The role of the teaching assistant is very important in dealing with such situations. The teaching assistant maintained continuous communication with the teachers, parents, and other students to build awareness and foster good relationships. The teaching assistant and I discussed how to best support Johan and encourage an atmosphere that ensured the

whole school community would benefit from Johan's presence at the school.

The advocacy efforts didn't stop. We approached the vocational school, before Johan moved to the third grade in junior high school. We did this so that when it was time for him to leave junior high, he would be accepted in the vocational school. This worked out well and Johan is now studying at the vocational school.

Lessons learned

I learned many things from Johan. He taught me how to be patient, and kept me thinking constantly about how to improve my support strategies – an understanding which enriches my experience in dealing with all other students.

Meeting the various parties in my advocacy effort to find a school for Johan helped me to learn about the characters of different people and how to communicate effectively and efficiently. I realised that my personal approach determines others' responses, requiring me to become more professional. I also became more familiar with education bureaucracy, which will help me in any similar advocacy challenges in future.

Wider advocacy

Of course, it is not effective for me simply to be advocating for inclusive education on a case-by-case basis. There needs to be wider efforts to bring about change too. Awareness about inclusive education should be raised among all education departments, and government officials should have a clear and common vision for quality inclusive education that supports all children. We need to lobby for teacher training that prepares every teacher for working in diverse, inclusive settings. We also need to push for the ideas, experiences and perspectives of all stakeholders to be considered in education decisions – at the individual level up to the national level.

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Girls' education in Afghanistan

This article describes the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee's Girls' Education Project, which has used a range of different advocacy approaches to raise awareness of girls' right to education. The project has had a particular focus on ensuring that advocacy messages were contextually and culturally sensitive, and has succeeded in getting many girls back into school.

Background

The Girls' Education Project has been conducted by the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) with support of GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) in two districts (Dawlatabad and Khulm) in Balkh Province, Northern Afghanistan. The project sought to mobilise communities and raise awareness about the need for girls' education and the importance of female teachers.

Even when girls have access to primary education, it is common for parents to stop them going to school when they reach 12 or 13 years of age. Part of the problem is that there are not enough female teachers. Of roughly 220,000 teachers in Afghanistan, only 30% are female. When girls reach puberty, it is typically forbidden for them to be taught by male teachers.

Negative attitudes are perhaps the biggest barrier to girls' education in Afghanistan. Attitudes are influenced by a lack of knowledge and understanding about the benefits of educating girls – people often fear what they don't know or understand. Some families and communities fear that schooling will promote foreign values and ideas. Some think that girls' education is wrong or inappropriate because they think it goes against their culture and traditions. There is a lack of awareness in many communities about girls' right to education and the opportunities that education can bring for girls and their families.



Gender awareness workshop for a PTA, Balkh Province, Dawlatabad District

These challenges are faced all over Afghanistan, not just in Balkh province.

Advocacy objectives

Our project sought to:

- raise awareness in school communities about the importance of girls' education, gender equality and human rights
- ensure girls are supported to attend school and complete their education through secondary and high school levels (preventing drop-outs)
- enable female students to go to teacher training colleges so they can become teachers.

Raising awareness about girls' education was addressed both from an Islamic perspective and in relation to international norms and frameworks. We discussed the importance of Education For All (EFA) in general and specifically for girls. We also addressed education in emergencies – how can people cope during an emergency situation (e.g. floods)?

Target groups

Our target groups for the Girls' Education Project included:

- religious leaders and other community leaders
- Community Development Councils (CDCs) – CDCs are also known colloquially in Afghanistan as Shuras. Shuras are usually made up of seven people and they are responsible for making decisions about the development of the communities they represent
- Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) – also known as school Shuras. PTAs generally have 15 members including teachers, parents and community/religious leaders
- students
- teachers and school managers (e.g. principals/head teachers)
- parents.

School Shuras and religious leaders (e.g. Mullahs, religious volunteers, and religious studies teachers) were selected as a target group because they have a very important role in motivating and encouraging people in their communities. Involving them was a key

advocacy strategy. People tend to follow what religious leaders say. They have a lot of power and influence. When we work with teachers, they have influence over their students and over parents.

Advocacy activities

Our work with school communities was done in several steps. We planned activities that addressed the issue of girls' education from various perspectives, using a range of different methods and entry points. This included facilitating small and large-scale meetings to raise awareness, holding more detailed and professional discussions with significant stakeholders, using role models, and developing an action research approach to identify and address challenges.

Preparations

To start with we liaised with the district education departments in Dawlatabad and Khulm districts to select six school communities in each district to work with. We then gauged their level of understanding of the issues. We sought their perspectives and tried to identify their challenges and problems. We used focus group discussions to do this.

Meetings with key stakeholders

A training session for PTAs/school Shuras helped them understand their roles and responsibilities, and enabled them to discuss girls' education and gender issues. We discussed gender norms in Afghan society to help them determine why it is valuable for women to have more active roles in society, beyond their traditional domestic roles. We also worked with them to make school development plans.

Through workshops, 60 religious leaders from 12 areas across the two districts were made more aware of gender issues and girls' education. We encouraged them to discuss the importance of girls' education with their communities during Friday prayers and through other community interactions (such as meetings with parents in their homes).

A large-scale girls' education awareness-raising meeting involved more than 200 people, including the district governor and district

education officer. We shared our key messages about girls' education. We were also invited to visit the communities and people's homes to share our messages.

We organised a 'round table' discussion for district education officers, the governor and religious leaders, staff from the Department of Rural Affairs (DRA), members of the media and other people involved in education. Everybody was given an opportunity to discuss any relevant ideas.

Using role models

'Job fair' workshops in schools were used to motivate female students. We invited students from grades 9-12. We also invited female teachers, doctors and engineers, along with other successful women. Guest speakers shared their own stories about education and encouraged the female students to continue their studies.



Participant in project-based learning programme, Badakhshan Province, Argo District

Community action

Community action teams were established – consisting of the district education departments, school Shuras, CDCs and religious leaders – to monitor our activities and advocate for girls' education. We further engaged school communities in a reflective cycle – supporting them to identify their own challenges and problems and then develop and implement strategies for addressing them.

School Shuras worked on their own gender projects, engaging within their communities to identify challenges, solutions and the people who would be responsible for implementing these solutions. One school Shura used this reflective process to work with parents to bring 18 girls back into school.

Advocacy messages

Our advocacy work stressed the following key messages:

- We sought to discuss girls' education from an Islamic perspective. Islam does not prevent anyone from achieving an education. There are many verses from the Koran and hadiths (commentary from Islamic scholars on the Koran) which speak about the importance of education for both females and males.
- We stressed that girls should attend school and complete their primary and secondary education, and that we need more female teachers in Afghanistan to enable this to happen. We need more girls to be educated because we need female teachers, doctors, engineers and other professionals.
- We also shared messages highlighting that girls need safe and accessible schools if we are to increase the rates of girls' educational enrolment and completion.

Results

Before we met with them, some religious leaders thought we were sharing un-Islamic ideas. Once we had spoken with them they understood that what we were advocating is not against Islam. This is why we start such meetings by discussing girls' education from an Islamic perspective and only later do we discuss international norms and frameworks. Now most religious leaders really support us while in the past they would not talk with our staff.

At one meeting with religious leaders, government officials and other community members, we invited a group of female students to sing an educational song. Participants began to clap at the end of the song, but one Mullah objected and stated that such clapping for the girls was not permissible in Islam. The district governor countered that we should not consider this behaviour to be against Islamic rules; it was showing support for the girls, who should not be discouraged from learning. The district governor highlighted that there is no verse in the holy Koran against clapping. His challenge to the Mullah was important, as it showed publicly that it was not just NAC upholding views in favour of girls' education.

The district education officer in Dawlatabad became proactive in advocating on behalf of girls' education, encouraging parents to send their girls to school.

In the past, many school Shuras did not have regular meetings. The project helped to give school Shuras a purpose by defining their roles and responsibilities. Now they have monthly meetings and we have been following these up. Teachers are also becoming more engaged in our activities. We have seen a drop in the number of out-of-school girls since the project started.

Crucially the project has helped to boost girls' confidence and given them a stronger voice. For example, girls aged 16-18 years performed a drama at our large awareness event and sang a national song. Girls had previously not been that visible.

Not all of the educational exclusion issues dealt with through the project have been specifically affecting girls. In one community the families identified that their school did not have drinking water, so they considered how to solve this. They went to the CDC and head of the village and raised the issue. The head of the village said he did not have enough money to dig a well, but offered donkeys to bring water from other sites to the school. This was a temporary solution, although the community decided to raise money to build a well as a longer-term solution.

Challenges

We know education is a long-term process and it will take more time and effort to make this project sustainable and bring more positive changes.

We held only one to three training workshops with the school Shuras. This has given us time to get to know each other, share some information and support them, but the impact of the workshops has not been as significant as we would like.

Community members' awareness about education is very low generally, so some parents find it very difficult to understanding the benefits of education for both their daughters and sons. They feel their children could be earning money for the household now, and struggle to see the wider, longer-term benefits that education could bring.

The security situation has been a problem at times. We have not always been able to organise our workshops when we wanted to.

Unfortunately, there are not always jobs available when male and female students graduate from teacher training colleges or higher education. This is a particular problem for female teacher training graduates. An increasing number of young women are entering teacher training, but many find it difficult to secure teaching jobs. Jobs are still primarily held by men, and most women do not have the freedom to move to places where there are job vacancies, away from their home community. Such graduates become demoralised. For some families, vocational training/skills seem more relevant and valuable than further or higher education, although we try to share examples of people who have graduated and gone on to be successful.

There are also ongoing resource challenges. Many families struggle to provide clothing and other support for their children to go to school. Many children work, and boys may have to fetch firewood rather than go to school. For some communities, the nearest schools are far away; it may not be safe or practical for children, especially girls, to travel so far to school.

Lessons learned

In addition to relating stories of positive role models, we also use our own life stories when families question the relevance and value of education for their girls (and boys). One member of our team is a widow. She shares her experience of using her education to get a good job which means she now supports her family.

In order to be respectful of culture, especially when we are dealing with sensitive issues like gender and girls' education, we are careful not to go directly to the point. If we jump straight in to gender discussions, the first reaction is often that these are Western ideas. Instead we think carefully about the language we use. We keep things simple and go step by step so that people accept what we are sharing and understand them in relation to their own culture and context.

Recommendations and next steps

We have highlighted several things that we need to focus on, and advocate for, in future:

- More time is needed for further work with school communities/Shuras.
- More focus is needed in rural areas.
- There is a need for infrastructure development to support girls' enrolment (e.g. more classrooms and toilets).

- Education and literacy opportunities are needed for young women who are already too old to start school.
- Teaching methods generally need improving and diversifying, so that teachers can respond more flexibly to diversity in their classrooms.
- Stronger links should be made with our other projects on health and sustainable agriculture, so that we are working more effectively towards integrated rural development and poverty reduction.
- We need to keep developing a greater sense of community ownership over the girls' education work.

The Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) is member-based organisation founded 35 years ago, with the fundamental belief in the principles of freedom, independence and a better life for the Afghan people. NAC aims to support the long-term interests of Afghanistan and to strengthen the basis for development and self-sufficiency through knowledge, democracy and human rights, sustainable management of natural resources, and improved health for all.

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Omida's story

Omida is a 17-year-old girl. She studied in school until the grade 10, but then her family prevented her from studying further.

Omida says, that her father told her not to go school. He said "Now you can read and write, it is enough for you. Just sit home and help your mother".

She explained: "One day, after three months, my father was called by the school Shura to participate in the PTA meetings. The PTA motivated him and talked about the benefits of education. The Mullah also talked about girls' education with an Islamic perspective and encouraged the community. When my father came home after the meeting he sent me back to school and now I am learning my lessons well and I am never absent.

I know that there are problems in my community, and people do not let their daughters go to school when the girls reach 12, due to a lack of female teachers. Now that I go to school again, I will continue my education. I want to become a teacher in the future to solve the community's problems and support my family. I thank NAC for the girls' education project that brings these changes in our lives."



Opening ceremony of a new school for girls, Ghazni Province, Malistan District

Using action research

Ten years ago few girls attended classes. The sharp rise in the number of girls enrolled in school is one of Afghanistan's most powerful symbols of change. But disparities in girls' enrolment still exist.

In the first phase of NAC's Girls' Education Project, NAC's education team from Kabul, Badakhshan, Balkh and Ghazni provinces gathered for a five-day workshop about girls' education, gender issues, education in emergencies and inclusive education. The workshop was facilitated by EENET, and one of the main tools we discussed was action research.

When I returned to Balkh, I shared the topics of the workshop with my colleagues, and then we developed some advocacy materials for the project in Balkh and Badakhshan. Alongside this we adapted the action research cycle to use with communities to support girls' education.

After discussing the importance of girls' education, we introduced community members to the action research cycle. We worked with them to look at their community to find out what challenges to girls' education exist. They listed the challenges, then started to think about possible solutions. After the solutions had been discussed in more detail, the community started to act to solve the problems. Community members told us that they were not only using this cycle in terms of girls' education issues, but also with their families. They said it was helping with solving family disputes, conflicts and problems.

Abdul Bashir, Project Manager, Balkh Province