International experience in including children with disabilities in ordinary schools

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# Summary

This paper will try to summarise the experience of a number of developing countries in moving towards more inclusive practice at the level of the classroom, the school and the education system as a whole. It is complementary to a parallel paper which discusses definitions of inclusion and sets developments in the global context of United Nations initiatives, such as Education for All and the Salamanca Declaration and Framework for Action (Mittler 2002).

The first section draws on a series of national reports from developing countries with experience of moving towards inclusion. Because some of the most innovative and radical developments are now taking place in the poorest countries of the world, examples are taken from Uganda, Lesotho, Vietnam, Lao, Jordan, Palestine, Morocco, Egypt and Yemen. With the exception of Uganda which is in some respects unique, the other countries are chosen because their experience may be of particular interest to Tunisia.

Although none of these countries would claim to have developed fully inclusive systems, some have made striking progress not only in formulating new policies but also in implementing them on the ground. Their achievements indicate that economically impoverished countries with overcrowded classes can make significant progress in moving towards inclusive practice under certain conditions. Some of these conditions and distinctive features will be highlighted at various points and italicised in the text.

The second section summarises some of the outcomes of a series of UNESCO's own projects and programmes and discusses some general issues arising from the experiences of participating countries. The final section provides an overview of some of the key issues and decision points facing any country contemplating a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to the education of disabled children and young people and indicates some of the ways forward suggested by experience in a range of different countries.

# 1: Examples of country reports

## Uganda (see UNESCO 2001 for a country report)

In rebuilding the social and economic fabric of a country ravaged first by civil war and more recently by HIV/AIDS, the Ugandan government is giving first priority to the education of its children. To this end, it is rapidly implementing a guarantee to provide free primary education to four children in every family, with first priority going to any child with a disability and also to girls - a truly inclusive policy. The number of children enrolled in primary schools has risen from 2.5 million in 1996 to 6.5 million in 1999, while the number of teachers increased from 38,000 in 1980 to over 90,000 in 1998. Despite this, teacher pupil ratios are still 1:110 for the first three grades and 1:55 for middle and upper primary pupils.

The national School Mapping Census of 1999 reported a total of 150,559 children with disabilities attending primary schools - 40,972 with hearing impairments, 28,668 with visual impairments, 42,325 with intellectual disabilities and 38,624 with physical and motor disabilities. This is 2.3% of the total population of 6.5 million children registered at primary school - a figure which compares favourably with many other countries. The needs of new groups of children are beginning to be addressed - eg those with autism, deaf-blindness and cerebral palsy.

This commitment to universal primary education (UPE) has been made within the framework of the United Nations Education for All initiative, first launched at Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and re-affirmed and strengthened by the Salamanca (1994) and Dakar (2000) Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO 2000) and by the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 1993). Uganda was also one of the first countries to apply for debt relief under the UN Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, in return for a commitment to invest the money thus saved in health and education. In addition, several international NGOs have entered into partnership agreements and grants have been provided by the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Union, the UN Development Programme and UNICEF.

The government took a number of steps to ensure that the needs of disabled children were given priority, in line with national legislation. For example, a Department of Special Needs Education and Careers Guidance has been created within the Ministry of Education and Sports; each of the 45 administrative districts has at least one staff member who is responsible for ensuring that disabled children are admitted to school and do not drop out prematurely. The Uganda National Institute of Special Education (UNISE) in Makerere University, Kampala is developing teacher training programmes at every level in line with the government's commitment to Education for All and offers support to the 45 district services ([unise@imul.com](mailto:unise@imul.com))

The Ugandan authorities are very open about their difficulties in implementing the new legislation but are clearly determined to do so. For example, many people are unaware of the new policies - not only families but government officials and some of the major disability organisations themselves. Increasing numbers of children emigrate from rural areas to the cities, where they swell the ranks of street children; HIV/AIDS creates tens of thousands of orphans or families headed by children. Many poor parents have reservations about the relevance of education for their children, particularly in the case of girls. 53% of adult women and 27% of men are illiterate. Reform of the school curriculum is a slow process.

We can note at the outset some of the distinctive positive features of Uganda's policy because these will be mirrored in the experience of other countries.

* Working within United Nations programmes and initiatives (eg EFA, debt relief)
* First priority to universal primary education as the key to national regeneration
* Disabled children explicitly included as one of several marginalised groups (eg nomads, street children, orphans, war victims)
* Strong government leadership and central monitoring
* The creation of new mechanisms and agencies (eg within the Ministry of Education)
* Decentralisation to 45 districts
* Delegation of budgets to schools, with clear accountability mechanisms
* Development of a national programme of teacher training and support
* Collaboration with international and national NGOs, especially organisations of disabled persons
* Networking with other agencies - eg Health, Labour, Gender, CBR
* Strong involvement of parents and community.

## Lesotho (Khatleli et al 1995; www.eenet.org.uk)

Lesotho, with a landlocked population of less than 2 million, offers points of contrast, as well as similarity with Uganda. The national movement of disabled persons took the initiative in pressing the government to open its schools to disabled children. In addition, a strong national parents' organisation initially developed with support from a Norwegian NGO, has helped to achieve dissemination and sustainability and has also provided high quality empowerment, support and training to parents in rural areas, strongly encouraged partnerships between parents and teachers at local level and has played a leading role in the training and support of teachers at all levels.

Lesotho adopted a policy of identifying ten pilot schools (eight primary and two secondary, mostly in rural areas) and providing intensive three week training workshops to nearly all the teachers in these schools. The teachers from these schools then went into neighbouring villages and, working through local chiefs, announced that their schools were now open to disabled children and tried to persuade parents to allow their children to attend.

Valued support was provided by trained itinerant special needs inspectors (eg for sensory and intellectual disabilities) and by local district inspectors. It was decided at the outset not to appoint a specialist resource teacher or teachers specialising in a particular disability to the pilot schools because this might reduce the sense of ownership of the other teachers in the school.

An evaluation of the work of these pilot schools emphasised that despite large classes and an absence of basic resources, the teachers were already teaching inclusively - by ensuring that all children were participating, understanding instructions or getting support from other children.

The additional training received by these teachers resulted in the development of positive attitudes to disabled children, often under-pinned by a strong religious as well as professional commitment. It also provided them with basic information about sensory impairments and gave them the confidence to refer children to local health workers for treatment of eye and ear infections which were interfering with learning. However, children with severe intellectual disabilities still appear to be excluded.

The success of the pilot schools encouraged the government to adopt inclusion of disabled children as a national policy and to increase the number of schools involved. Additional staff were appointed to its national teacher training college and more information about the education of disabled children was included in the basic and post-experience training of teachers. A video-based training course was produced by the Ministry of Education.

## Vietnam (UNESCO 2002; Trang Ton Hai and Nguyen Thu Nan, 1995)

The National Institute of Educational Sciences launched a pilot project in two very poor communities in Hue Province, using one pre-school and one primary school in each district to implement new policies. The policy was adopted at national level in 1996. By the year 2000, approximately 5,000 moderately and mildly impaired students were attending regular classes in over 1000 pre-primary and primary schools and 60 special schools, catering for a total of 4000 to 5000 students, mainly in the two principal cities.

The success of this project owes much to a series of strategically planned workshops and training programmes - eg for national and local government officials, community leaders in the pilot areas, including personnel from education, health, Red Cross, social work, women's unions and youth groups, as well as parents. Training courses were also provided for head teachers and teachers on the use of improved methods of teaching and curriculum access intended for all children, not just those with disabilities. At a later stage, training was provided for members of community support teams who included volunteers, such as retired persons, parents and grandparents, as well as educational, health and social service staff.

## Lao People's Democratic Republic (UNESCO 1999)

Lao's Integrated Education Project began in 1993 in one primary school in the capital city, Vientiane. By 1997, 273 children were attending regular classes in 36 schools, training in inclusive education was incorporated in the training of all primary teachers and a national decree guaranteed the right of all disabled children to attend regular schools.

As in Vietnam, priority was given to a series of carefully planned training programmes and study visits to neighbouring countries. The aim was to improve capacity building and sustainability, especially at local level. A particular concern has been to support teachers and parents in working more collaboratively through a process of improved communication and attitude change.

## Jordan (UNESCO 1999)

In 1993, the government ofJordan set up a Directorate for Special Education within the Ministry of Education, working closely with the Ministry of Social Development and a range of NGOs, some of which were providing services in segregated centres. Initially, the government established special resource rooms in 40 primary schools, catering for students with mild and moderate disabilities, as well as some 900 school counsellors and support teachers.

As a result of UNESCO's Inclusive Schools and Community Support Programme initiative, the Ministry established a technical team, and administrative team and a support services group, as well as a team of trainers from both government and NGOs. A training of trainers framework was adopted, using two pilot schools (one for boys and one for girls) to provide real life settings for practice and implementation. Two 'training of trainers' workshops were held for staff of ten different Education Directorates, to prepare them to identify students with additional needs and develop skills in preparing appropriate teaching resources and materials. These trainees then trained school teams in newly designated pilot schools in eight localities. The Ministry provided open resource rooms in the pilot schools, staffed by qualified teachers, as well as a school counsellor to the school as a whole. Nevertheless, teachers continued to express reservations about the ability of the schools to meet the needs of children who might disturb the work of other children.

## Palestinian Authority (UNESCO 1999)

Soon after its establishment in 1994, the Ministry of Education identified a core team of 31 resource staff specifically to work with students with special educational needs already attending government schools. A Ministry project leader and 5 district supervisors formed a core resource group to implement a national dissemination strategy in all 12 Education Directorates and to work closely with other agencies, including NGOs.

An early report indicated that some 350 teachers from 30 pilot elementary schools had received training from the core resource group, using the UNESCO Teacher Training Resource Pack (UNESCO 1993, Ainscow 1994 and below). The success of this programme has led to contributions from other donors, resulting in the provision of learning materials and a screening and early identification service for young children with disabilities.

## Morocco (UNESCO 1999)

A distinctive feature of developments in Morocco is the pivotal role of existing Community Based Rehabilitation programmes. Building on these, a pilot programme involved 28 children in each of three communities, 18 teachers in 8 pilot schools, parents of disabled and non-disabled children and key personnel such as head teachers, inspectors and government officers.

A first level workshop was aimed at teachers working directly with children with disabilities. Training was provided by Ministry officials, as well as by NGOs with specialist knowledge of specific impairments. These teachers also undertook a study visit to France. Similar courses were provided for teachers working in areas with active CBR programmes. Further workshops were held for school inspectors and directors by two UNESCO consultants, as well as practical courses in Braille, sign language and adaptation of equipment and learning materials.

Difficulties and delays were experienced because a number of parents were not convinced that their children would benefit and hesitated to enrol their children in the project. Negative attitudes were also encountered at other levels, including some participating NGOs.

## Egypt (UNESCO 2002)

Egypt has a long history of separate systems of special and regular schools, with little or no previous involvement from the Ministry of Education. The project was undertaken by Caritas, through its SETI Centre for Advice, Studies and Training in Mental Retardation, with the support of the Ministry of Education and other NGOs. SETI already had a commitment to inclusion and a major programme of awareness raising through the media.

An in-house training programme was undertaken to prepare for the education of children with disabilities in their neighbourhood schools and a technical support team was recruited to work with the six schools participating in the pilot. School staff were taken to schools already including disabled children and workshops were provided for social workers, school doctors and parents of children without disabilities. Special attention was given to the training and confidence-building of support teams, school principals and teachers.

The project encountered major difficulties. These included negative attitudes on the part of many of the participating teachers in ordinary schools, the loss of key project workers to other jobs, the transfer of government officials to other work and some head teachers refusing to release their staff for training. Above all, some of the participating children were withdrawn from their local schools because of large classes and poor facilities.

One positive outcome was the possibility that the Ministry of Education became more favourably disposed to inclusive education and might assume a more positive leadership role in the future.

## Yemen (UNESCO 2002)

As in Morocco, pilot programmes in inclusive education were launched in 14 schools in three different areas where there was already an active CBR programmes. In 1999, the government officially recognised the right of disabled children to attend regular schools. The government's Five Year plan priorities the education of girls and children with disabilities. By early 2001, 149 boys and 331 girls with special needs were attending the designated pilot schools and reported feeling welcomed.

All the teachers in these 14 schools were trained with the UNESCO Teacher Education Resource Pack (UNESCO 1993) some of whom were given further preparation to become 'trainers of trainers'. 120 teachers were trained in 1999 and a further 175 in 2000. The training (see below) involved participants in changing their teaching and learning approaches, developing group work, peer support and active participation by all children in their learning.

The success of the work in Yemen owes much to the development of active partnerships between local agencies, including NGOs, UNESCO, UNICEF and a parallel World Bank project which was supporting curriculum reform for all children.

# 2: UNESCO Resources

The national country reports presented above derive to varying degrees from a range of UNESCO programmes and initiatives. These include:

Inclusive Schools and Community Programmes

(Phase 1: 1996-1997) Benin, Burkina Faso, China, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Lao PDR, Malawi, Morocco, Palestine, Tanzania and Zambia (see UNESCO 1999, available in French)

(Phase 2: 1998-2001) Cameroon, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ghana, Madagascar, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Paraguay, South Africa, Vietnam, Yemen (see UNESCO 2002)

In addition to accounts of developments from individual participating countries, the UNESCO reports (especially for Phase 2) include attempts to identify common elements and draw interim conclusions about the lessons that can be learned from their experiences.

Countries taking part in these programmes committed themselves to a number of essential requirements:

* Preparation of clear plans, including the sustainability of the project beyond its two year term
* Appointment of a national coordinator
* Convocation of a national task force
* Regular reporting at all levels
* Clear means of disseminating findings and expanding project

*Developing Sustainable Inclusion Policies and Practices*, 1998-2002 (UNESCO 2002) (Brazil, South Africa, India)

This project, sometimes known as the Four Nation Study (including England) is making a particularly close study of obstacles to inclusion and how these might be overcome. All of them were concerned with marginalised and excluded children, mostly living in areas of extreme poverty and deprivation. The project is still ongoing but an interim summary is available (UNESCO 2002).

The obstacles identified in these three countries can be found to varying degrees in all parts of the world. Some of them are located within the school (eg inaccessible buildings and curricula, hostile teachers) but many others are embedded in the very fabric of society - endemic poverty, family disharmony, a lack of trust between parents and teachers, negative community attitudes, political priorities. It follows that schools and local communities must work in partnership to create better learning environments for all and that teachers and parents need to find new ways of working together. Some schools have begun to do this, with impressive results.

## Brazil

Although the government has been committed to the development of inclusive education since the early 1990s, Brazil has a well established segregated special school sector for disabled children which is provided by a national federation of parent societies (APAEs) and supported by government funding as well as private donations. The existence of two parallel systems can be found in a number of countries, though the extent of government financial support varies from the generous (eg payment of teachers' salaries, pupils' fees, equipment) to the almost invisible.

The needs of the wider group of marginalised children are being addressed at a number of levels. For example, in the State of Rio de Janeiro the assessment and grading of students is now done on a three year cycle, rather than the traditional year by year pass-fail system leading to grade repetition or exclusion for those who fail. Many schools benefit from supplementary grants - eg to enable children to eat three meals a day in school, to have free school books and for the school to use a special development fund to link with local churches, NGOs and community initiatives.

## India

Although, as in Brazil, the government of India now has a strong body of legislation designed to promote the inclusion disabled children and adults into society, this has been described at local level as "without mechanisms to claim and without obligation to provide" (UNESCO 2002, p. 80). Although 98% of disabled children are still excluded from state services, (especially those with intellectual disabilities), India has innumerable NGOs at state and community level, many of them providing innovative and forward-looking services. There is also a wide variety of CBR programmes, some of which are working with teachers to facilitate the access of disabled children to local schools and provide back-up support in case of difficulties (eg Thomas and Thomas 2002).

Examples of innovations include the desegregation of existing services; for example, special schools run by the Spastics Society were opened to non-disabled children living in nearby slum areas. Community workers without previous experience of disabled children have been recruited to make educational aids and toys from recycled materials. In another slum area, local people working in nurseries have been trained to identify children with disabilities at an early stage by conducting house to house surveys, using a simple screening instrument first developed under UNICEF auspices (WHO 1992).

Project plans for the future include: further work with families; links with local communities to identify existing resources (eg clinics, hospitals, leisure and sport centres, pre-school centres, business and industry). There have been earlier reports of special schools helping parents to find work or set up their own businesses and ensuring that brothers and sisters also attend school, on the grounds that there was little point in teaching the child in school if the rest of the family was living below the poverty line.

## South Africa

South Africa embarked on a radical restructuring of its entire education system, with the aim of removing barriers to learning and ending the deep divisions created by generations of apartheid. The inclusion of children with disabilities has been built into the foundations of this policy and is beginning to be implemented, despite limited resources.

Barriers to learning and participation identified by the government include poverty and under-development, lack of access to basic services, factors putting children at risk, such as physical, social, emotional and sexual abuse, HIV/AIDS, political violence, inaccessible and unsafe physical environments, absence of support services, lack of parental recognition of disability, domestic violence, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy. In one of the project sites (Kwazulu Natal Province), 222 of the 701 schools are without water, 384 without power, 400 without telephones; 124 out of 184 secondary schools do not have a library.

Disabled children are therefore one of many groups of marginalised children who need to be much more fully included in schools and in society. Project schools prioritised the need to break down barriers between home and school, to prevent drug and sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy and to identify and support children with learning difficulties at an early stage. South Africa is also launching a new national curriculum which has been planned to promote access to the curriculum for all children.

In one of the development areas (Kwazulu-Natal) the Department of Health and an NGO began an inclusive education programme but this was not sustained because of lack of involvement from the Ministry of Education. In the second area (Gauteng), eight schools and two Early Child Care Centres were involved, including two schools previously restricted to white children who opened their doors to all local children, including some with Down Syndrome. Schools in both areas were well supported by their own parents and by the local community - in one school, 600 parents attended parents' meetings twice a year and raised funds for building and equipment.

## Welcoming Schools (UNESCO 1999a)

This report and video (also available in French and Arabic) provide brief, first hand accounts of how 15 schools in different countries adapted their schools to include one or more children with significant disabilities. The stories emphasise everyday practice in key aspects of inclusion under the following headings.

* Ensuring access
* Developing supportive school environments
* Working together and in teams
* Preparing for teaching and learning
* Constructing the curriculum

The report includes suggestions for workshops and practical activities which aim to support and empower teachers in each of these areas.

## Inclusive Education and National Development (UNESCO 2002)

This ongoing programme addresses the key issue of ensuring that inclusive education is an integral element of national development and planning. It draws on the experience of five countries - Uganda, Romania, Brazil, Morocco and Philippines. The present paper has drawn heavily on the report from Uganda and a second report from Romania has also been published.

The work was initially conceived in the context of the Dakar World Education Forum; its aim is to provide detailed examples of countries that have envisaged Education for All as an instrument of national growth and regeneration, as well an opportunity for the restructuring and reform of the education system along inclusive lines.

## Open File on Inclusive Education: Support Materials for Managers and Administrators (UNESCO 2001a)

"The Open File reflects a distillation of experience from a wide range of countries across five continents. It is intended to support all those who are concerned with promoting inclusive education in their countries....

It begins at the point where a policy commitment to the principle of inclusive education has already been made. In some cases, this will be an unequivocal commitment on the part of national government which may already be embodied in formal policy statements or even in legislation. In other cases, the commitment will be less formalised, or will exist only at local level in particular communities or will come in the first instance from NGOs rather than from the state.

Whatever the source and strength of that commitment, the Open File asks how it can be nurtured and developed, so that, over time, it can lead to a fully functioning inclusive system" (UNESCO 2001, p. 11).

The Open File discusses the process of implementation as a series of 9 topics:

1. Managing the transition to inclusive education
2. Professional development for inclusive education
3. Assessment in inclusive settings
4. Organising support
5. Families and communities
6. Developing an inclusive curriculum
7. Resourcing and funding inclusive schools
8. Managing transitions
9. Working with schools

Key issues under each of these topic headings are succinctly summarised over ten pages of text, followed by a series of Implications and Questions which are intended to be interpreted by decision makers in the light of their own unique circumstances. Teacher Education Resource Pack: Special Needs in the Classroom (UNESCO 1993; Ainscow 1994).

This pack of teacher training materials was originally piloted in eight countries but has now been used and adapted in over 80 countries and translated into more than 20 languages. The materials can be used flexibly and adapted for initial or post-experience training in workshop form and have also been used with middle and senior management staff.

The aim of the pack is to help teachers and others to plan their classrooms in such a way as to include all learners in the classroom, as well as those currently excluded by reason of drop-out, poverty or disability. The aim is to benefit all children by making changes to the total environment in which learning takes place. Promoting learning and removing obstacles to learning is the educational counterpart of measures to make buildings and the physical environment accessible to people with mobility difficulties.

Examples include: children learning in small groups, working at tables rather than desks but with the active support and supervision of the teacher; peer tutoring and child-to-child approaches, collaborative teaching, with two adults planning systematically to share roles and responsibilities in a given period of time.

The pack includes study materials consisting of readings, stimulus sheets and classroom activities; a course leader's guide with detailed information on organising courses and practical sessions, two demonstration videos on methods of training and examples of inclusive practice in schools (Ainscow 1994). The pattern used for training is in two stages: a demonstration workshop led by members of an international UNESCO resource team with experience of the use of this approach in different countries. This is followed by a supervised practice workshop in which future facilitators are trained to act as coordinators with a group of teachers.

A useful example of regional collaboration is seen in the work of the Lebanese Down's Syndrome Association who organised a teacher training workshop using the UNESCO resource pack. This brought together 45 participants, including seven from Egypt, Morocco and Yemen. The workshop was aimed at teachers from regular schools working with children with disabilities. This was followed by a National Conference on Inclusive Education in April 1999 ([h.idris@memo.unesco.org](mailto:h.idris@memo.unesco.org))

## Understanding and Responding to Children's Needs in Inclusive Classrooms: A Guide for Teachers (UNESCO 2001b)

This new UNESCO Guide complements the above Resource Pack by focusing more explicitly on the inclusion of disabled children in regular schools. It is written in simple, accessible language and can be used as self study, open learning materials or in the context of a guided workshop led by a facilitator. So far, it is available only in English but a French translation is under way.

The Guide is arranged into four units:

Unit 1: Every child is an individual:  
Barriers to learning arising from impairments and disabilities; childhood illnesses, social disadvantage; children's rights; teachers' attitudes to disability; examples from different countries

Unit 2: Assessing Needs  
Physical, visual, hearing and intellectual impairments; warning signs; possible causes; actions that can be taken to overcome learning difficulties; a framework for adapting the curriculum

Unit 3: Responding to Diversity Nine golden rules to assist teachers to meet diverse needs; individual education plans; preparing lessons; providing one to one help; managing behaviour. Issues around examinations and special classes

Unit 4: Working Together  
Examples from around the world of working with parents, health professionals, community workers and organisations of disabled persons.

# 3: Making a start

After reviewing reports from many different countries at different stages of development, we can reasonably conclude that disabled children can be satisfactorily educated in ordinary schools, if certain conditions are met. The country reports discussed in this paper highlight a number of these key conditions which have contributed to successful outcomes. The relative importance of each of these will differ from country to country but all are important and deserve close consideration in any country.

## Key Features

* Inclusive education as a planned element of national development
* Setting inclusion in a global developmental context (eg Education for All)
* Political will and firm government leadership
* Joint planning across ministries and agencies
* Clear implementation strategies (eg use of pilot schools)
* Resource allocation - money, people, time
* Involvement of families, NGOs and local community
* A system of supports for teachers and schools, children, families and local communities.
* A national teacher training and support strategy
* Consultation and review mechanisms

## Clear policy development and implementation strategies

The starting point in any country must be a clarification of national policy, its incorporation into legislation and the setting up of a process of implementation, monitoring and review. According to UNESCO surveys, (1995), the major responsibility for the education of disabled children in most countries now lies firmly with the Ministry of Education. Ministries of Social Welfare are generally responsible for adult services and for family support, while Ministries of Health play a major role in early identification and in the provision of health services across the age range, and in some countries also take the lead in multi-disciplinary community-based rehabilitation projects.

## A joint planning mechanism

Experience from many countries since the International Year of Disabled Persons has demonstrated that success in meeting the needs of disabled people and their families depends on the setting up of a single high level national planning body, preferably responsible to the President or Head of State. In addition to senior representatives from all the relevant government departments, such coordinating bodies must include a strong NGO membership from disabled peoples organisations and parent groups. One of the tasks of such a coordinating group is to ensure continuity of services at critical points of transition - pre-school, transition from school to adult services, employment, housing, family support and community development.

In the short term, the Ministry of Education will probably need to develop a section concerned with disabled children but there is always a danger that the very existence of such sections marginalises the very people whom it is meant to help. Such a section has to work through existing sections - eg those concerned with primary, secondary, tertiary and higher education, teacher training etc - to help them to ensure that their policies take the needs of disabled children into account. Creating inclusive planning at the centre lays foundations for the work of inclusive schools.

## Local support teams

It is important to establish a multi-disciplinary team at local level, with responsibility for ensuring that disabled children and their families receive support and guidance in meeting the needs of their child and in obtaining access to services. Their task is to develop a humane and non-bureaucratic process which will identify the needs of each child in the family setting and put in place a developmental programme which is explicitly designed to meet those needs, together with a system of supports to the child, the family and the school. The starting point for assessment and decision making is that all disabled children should attend a mainstream school if appropriate supports and modifications can be put in place. Inclusion is about schools changing to accommodate children, rather than the reverse.

## Selecting pilot schools

It is usually possible to identify a few nursery and primary schools and eventually at least one secondary school in any given locality who would be well placed to accept a small number of disabled children. The staff of these schools should expect to receive preparation and continued support, some of which could come initially from the staff of existing NGOs, as well as from the local support team.

Some of the children who might be considered for a mainstream placement in such a school may already be attending an NGO day centre. In this case, there could be a joint review, together with the family, in order to identify what modifications, supports and changes (if any) might be needed to educate the child in question in the pilot school. In addition, other children in the local community who may be waiting for a place in a Centre might instead be considered for a place in an ordinary school.

## Resourced mainstream schools

Drawing on the experience gained in pilot schools for the first group of children makes it possible, at least in urban areas, to select a small number of primary schools in different districts and to provide them with additional resources and staffing to enable them to accept disabled children. In general, the children would attend ordinary classes but time and space would also be set aside for one to one tuition or for therapy sessions. Although the children concerned are not attending their nearest neighbourhood school, such resourced schools are well placed to prepare them to do so. In rural areas, the local school must carry out the functions of such a resourced school and will need to be given the necessary resources and support.

## Contacts between ordinary and special schools/centres

Every special school or centre should be in a working relationship with the ordinary schools in its neighbourhood in order to facilitate regular and frequent interchanges between staff and children.

Children attending special schools/centres should have the opportunity of attending mainstream classes, together with their own staff, at least once or twice a week. In addition, special schools should be in touch with each pupil's neighbourhood school, or with another school that has agreed to prepare for the inclusion of the child.

## Regular class or special class?

Ideally, placement in the mainstream school should be in the ordinary class but the creation of a special class within some mainstream schools is a possibility to be considered. Current thinking is in favour of direct placement in the regular class with support because this brings the child into contact with other children who can provide stimulation and support and also because it provides the stimulus and challenge of the normal curriculum. Experience suggests that even some children requiring high levels of one to one support can benefit from the mainstream classroom but others may need more time. Similarly, many teachers who are unwilling or unprepared to accept a disabled child into their class also need time and opportunities to experience inclusion at first hand. Research evidence suggests that teachers' attitudes often become more positive once they have had the opportunity to include disabled children in their classes.

## Individual inclusion plans

Even when a special class placement is considered necessary, at least as a first step, every child should have an 'individual inclusion plan' which involves increasing contact with other children in the regular class, at playtimes, mealtimes and all social and communal activities. There should be constant interchange and contact between children and staff in the special class with the rest of the school, to avoid the risk of over-protection and under-estimation often associated with a segregated placement, whether in a special school or in a special class.

## School Clusters

In some countries, groups of schools work together to share staff, resources and training. A typical cluster in an urban area includes 5-10 primary schools, a secondary school and, wherever possible, a special school. This kind of collaborative network is ideal in creating inclusive schools.

## Dual Registration

In some countries, all newly identified children are registered on the roll of a mainstream school, preferably their local school, even if they initially have to attend a special school. In this way, the local school gets to know the child and family and can begin to make plans to include the child, consistent with the inclusive aim of all children attending the school they would have attended if they did not have a disability. The child's individual inclusion plan is then drawn up in partnership between the two schools and the family.

## Developing support systems

The nature of supports required by disabled children - and also by their teachers and families - is being intensively debated at the present time because it has become clear that some children have been given more support than they actually need. For example, a classroom assistant is often employed to accompany the child in all lessons and activities, to ensure that she understands the teacher's instructions and helps her to do the work that is set for the class. Although some children do need support at this level for a time, there is now concern that the constant presence of a support worker can effectively segregate a child within the regular class and increase the perception of other children that the child is 'different'.

It is very difficult to strike a balance between offering too much and too little support. In practice, the child's need for support will vary throughout the day, depending on the nature of the demands being made on him and will certainly change over a period of time. Unfortunately, the process of negotiating support for a particular child often results in rigid and inflexible contracts which may not be in the interests of the child and which can lead to conflicts between parents and the school.

Ideally, the presence of a second adult in the classroom provides rich opportunities for improved and enriched learning for all children, even if the second adult has a clear brief to ensure positive learning experiences for one or two children with disabilities. But parents who have fought for personal support for their child are likely to resist any measures which appear to remove such one to one support.

In the longer term, it would be necessary to develop a well-trained force of support staff, consisting mainly of teachers but with access to other professionals, such as speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists and a wide range of medical specialists.

## Funding

How to pay for the education of disabled children is not only a question of finding the resources but of the best way of ensuring that money is used in the most effective way. In many European countries, additional money has been 'tied' to the child but, as we have seen, this is not necessarily the best way of promoting inclusive education. In some countries (eg parts of Canada), the total school budget incorporates an element for the inclusion of a proportion of disabled children but the school can try to secure an increase under certain circumstances.

The issue of funding has to be seen in the much wider context of the needs of children already in school but who are experiencing difficulties in learning. These are not disabled children as such but children who are not benefiting from schooling. Many of these children live in families facing problems arising from poverty - unemployment, ill-health, poor housing, all of which are linked with educational under-achievement and failure. In tackling such under-achievement through prevention, early identification and appropriate teaching, schools are laying the foundations for more inclusive practice which can, if properly used, also benefit children with disabilities. This can be done by, for example, reducing class sizes, improving teacher training and support, recruiting teaching assistants and volunteers (including family members) to work with teachers in the classroom and playground, as well as by helping children with learning difficulties at an early stage (Mittler 2000).

## Learning Support Coordinators

One productive strategy is to designate one member of staff of each school as a 'learning support coordinator'. This staff member will have overall management responsibility for the needs of all pupils who are experiencing difficulties in learning or adjustment and provide advice and support to the rest of the staff in helping such pupils to learn and to achieve success. The coordinator should avoid withdrawing children into a special class or undertake one to one teaching, as this merely removes responsibility from the classroom teacher. The coordinator should also be able to call on advice from the local support team.

## Teacher Training and Support

All the information available confirms the vital importance of a clear strategy for teacher training and support (Mittler 2000). This can be considered at several levels, though it useful for some groups to be trained together

* All teachers of schools taking part in a pilot programme, and not just a selected few. The aim should be to give teachers confidence in their own competence, as well as to provide basic information on good classroom practice, curriculum access, assessment and grouping, etc. Visits to other schools and specialist centres are recommended.
* Staff of special schools and centres, with particular emphasis on outreach work with colleagues in mainstream schools, with a view to developing link arrangements
* A cadre of support staff - eg experienced teachers and (where available) speech and language therapists, psychologists, physicians
* All teachers in training need to be exposed to one or more (compulsory) modules on the inclusion of children with disabilities and learning difficulties but all areas of training need to be based on inclusive principles and practice.
* All post-experience courses should consider the implications of inclusive policies - eg in subject specialisms and also professional studies (eg child development, psychology, pedagogics).
* Head teachers, senior school staff and educational advisers and inspectors should be prepared to become change agents towards more inclusive practice.
* The training of specialist teachers needs to be radically reviewed in the light of inclusion.

## Partnership with Parents

Although the new generation of parents is more insistent on their children attending mainstream schools, and are also better organised to put pressure on the authorities to ensure that this happens, many families will still experience doubts and anxieties about the ability of an ordinary school to meet the needs of their child.

It is therefore essential to try to work more closely with parents. This process begins as soon as a child is identified as having a disability and involves providing both information and support in the first weeks and months. Parents need to contribute to assessment by sharing their expert knowledge of their child and by taking part on an equal basis in decision making on how and where the child's needs can be met both at the pre-school stage and when the time comes to consider schooling.

It is also essential to work with parent organisations, by setting up regular meetings, consulting them from an early stage on the development of new policies, including them in all decision making bodies and in monitoring and evaluation of new developments. NGOs need the active support of government at both national and local levels (Mittler 2000).

## Organisations of disabled persons

Organisations of disabled people have until recently given priority to the needs of adults but more recently some have taken the initiative in putting pressure on government to enable disabled children to attend mainstream schools (eg Lesotho). Their experience and support are essential; some have also provided expert help - eg in training teachers to use braille, learn the national sign language for the deaf and to give expert advice on physical access.

# Conclusions

There is much to learn from the experience of other countries in ensuring that children with disabilities can exercise their basic human rights to education, in company with other children in their community. The United Nations organisations have provided exemplary leadership in this field and created a framework for development though initiatives such as Education for All, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The UN has also initiated the process of putting in place an international convention to promote the rights and dignity of disabled persons. Any country wishing to move forward to create a more equitable and inclusive education system not only for children with disabilities but for all children can now draw on the experience of countries at all stages of development. Despite profound differences of history, culture, resources and structures, certain common issues and challenges are reflected in the experience of countries at very different stages of development. By sharing ideas and information, we can benefit from one another's experiences.

Each country has to determine its own starting point for inclusion, since each is unique in its history and culture and also in relation to the nature and quality of its educational provision for all children. While there are lessons to be learned from a study of other countries, even those at similar stages of development, no two countries will travel the same path in the process of evolution of its institutions.

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This paper was originally prepared for a meeting organised by UNICEF to stimulate discussion on the possibilities of inclusion in Tunisia. It was written in response to a request to provide examples of countries where inclusive policies were being implemented. Most of the examples refer to countries in the Middle East or North Africa or to other French or Arabic speaking countries. The paper draws on a wide range of UNESCO publications, drawn from the UNESCO website: [www.unesco.org/education/educprog.sne](http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog.sne)

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