



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: RATIONALE AND DEVELOPMENTS

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I.1 Introduction

I.1.1 Context

In today's increasingly globalized world, with its rising disparities in income distribution, where 60 per cent of the world's population live on only 6 per cent of the world's income, half of the world's population lives on two dollars a day and over 1 billion people live on less than one dollar a day, 'poverty is a threat to peace'.⁴ Poverty and other factors contributing to exclusion seriously affect education. While progress is being made towards the Education for All (EFA) goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as demonstrated by the drop in numbers of out-of-school children and increasing enrolment rates, there is now a stronger focus on those learners who are still out of school or are hard to reach.⁵ More attention is also being paid to the many children and young people who attend school but who are excluded from learning, who may not complete the full cycle of primary education or who do not receive an education of good quality. Today, 75 million children of primary school age are not enrolled in school; more than half of these are girls. Seven out of ten live in sub-Saharan Africa or in South and West Asia. Poverty and marginalization are the major causes of exclusion in most parts of the world (see Fig. 1). Households in rural or remote communities and children in urban slums have less access to education than others. Some 37 per cent of out-of-school children live in 35 states defined as fragile by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development,⁶ but these do not include all places facing conflict, post-conflict and post-disaster situations. In each case, children and young people are at enormous risk of missing out on an education.⁷ Children with disabilities are still combating blatant educational exclusion – they account for one third of all out-of school children. Working children, those belonging to indigenous groups, rural populations and linguistic minorities, nomadic children and those affected by HIV/AIDS are

among other vulnerable groups (see Fig. 2). In all cases, the issue of gender plays a significant role.

I.1.2 Objectives and rationale

The objectives of these Guidelines are to assist countries in strengthening the focus on inclusion in their strategies and plans for education, to introduce the broadened concept of inclusive education and to highlight the areas that need particular attention to promote inclusive education and strengthen policy development. The Dakar Framework for Action⁹ clearly paves the way for inclusive education as one of the main strategies to address the challenges of marginalization and exclusion in response to the fundamental principle of EFA, namely that all

children, youth and adults should have the opportunity to learn. In both developed and developing regions, there is a common challenge: how to attain high-quality equitable education

for all learners. Exclusion can start very early in life. A holistic lifelong vision of education is therefore imperative, including acknowledging the importance of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes to improve children's well-being, prepare them for primary school and give them a better chance of succeeding once they are in school. If children do not have the opportunity to develop their potential through education, their own and future families are also at risk of staying poor or of sliding into more chronic poverty. Subsequently, linking inclusion to broader development goals contributes to the development and reform of education systems, to poverty alleviation and to the achievement of all Millennium Development Goals.

I.1.3 Structure

This document is divided into two parts. Part I explains the relevance of inclusive education in today's context and describes how inclusion is linked to Education for All. Part II outlines the key elements in the shift towards inclusion with a particular focus on teaching for inclusion and the role of teachers, other educators, non-teaching support staff, communities and parents. It also provides some simple tools for policy-makers and education planners for hands-on analysis of education plans in view of inclusive education.¹⁰

I.2 Inclusion in education

I.2.1 What is inclusive education?

The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtien, Thailand (1990), sets out an overall vision: universalizing access to education for all children, youth and adults, and promoting equity. This means being proactive in identifying the barriers that

many encounter in accessing educational opportunities and identifying the resources needed to overcome those barriers. Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve EFA. As an overall principle, it should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society. The major impetus for inclusive education was given at the World Conference on Special Needs Education:

Access and Quality, held in Salamanca, Spain, June 1994. More than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations considered the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education, thereby enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs. Although the immediate focus of the Salamanca Conference was on special needs education, its conclusion was that: 'Special needs education – an issue of equal concern to countries of the North and of the South – cannot advance in isolation. It has to form part of an overall educational strategy and, indeed, of new social and economic policies. It calls for major reform of the ordinary school'.¹¹ An 'inclusive' education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive – in other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities. The Conference proclaimed that: 'regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system' (p. ix). This vision was reaffirmed by the World Education Forum meeting in Dakar, April 2000, held to review the progress made since 1990. The Forum declared that Education for All must take account of the needs of the poor and the

disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV and AIDS, hunger and poor health, and those with disabilities or special learning needs. It also emphasized the special focus on girls and women. Inclusion is thus seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to

educate all children.¹² There are several justifications for this. First, there is an *educational justification*: the requirement for inclusive schools to educate all children together means that they have to develop ways of teaching that respond to individual differences and that therefore benefit all children. Second, there is a *social justification*: inclusive schools are able to change attitudes toward diversity by educating all children together, and form the basis for a just and non-discriminatory society. Thirdly, there is an *economic justification*: it is less costly to establish and maintain schools that educate all children together than to set up a complex system of different types of schools specializing in different groups of children. Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006, which advocates for inclusive education, and recent legislation to protect indigenous languages,¹³ both provide further international support for inclusive education. Annex 3 contains a selection of the most relevant standard-setting instruments (conventions, declarations and recommendations) that form the basis for the development of inclusive policies and approaches. They set out the central elements that need to be addressed in order to ensure the right to *access* to education, the right to *quality* education and the right to *respect* in the learning environment. An overview of the legal frameworks related to inclusive education appears in Box 1.

Box 1: Legal frameworks in support of inclusion 1948-2007

2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity in Cultural Expressions

1999 Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child

1989 Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries

1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education

1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

I.2.2 Inclusion and quality are reciprocal

In order to realize the right to education as outlined above, the EFA movement is increasingly concerned with linking inclusive education with quality education. While there is

no single universally accepted definition of quality education, most conceptual frameworks incorporate two important components – the cognitive development of the learner on the one hand and the role of education in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and/or creative and emotional development on the other. In reference to the quality of basic education, the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) was emphatic about the necessity of providing education for all children, youth and adults that is responsive to their needs and relevant to their lives, thus paving the way for a concept of quality expressed in terms of needs-based criteria. The World Declaration further stipulated that these needs consist of both basic learning tools and basic learning content required by all human beings to be able to survive, develop their full capacities, live and work in dignity, participate fully in development, improve the quality of their lives, make informed decisions and continue learning.¹⁴

The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005* stresses that learning should be based on the clear understanding that learners are individuals with diverse characteristics and backgrounds, and the strategies to improve quality should therefore draw on learners' knowledge and strength. From this perspective, the report suggests five dimensions to influence the teaching and learning processes in order to understand, monitor and improve the quality of education:

- (1) learner characteristics;
- (2) contexts;
- (3) enabling inputs;
- (4) teaching and learning; and
- (5) outcomes.

These dimensions are interrelated and interdependent and need to be addressed in an integrated manner. Access and quality are linked and are mutually reinforcing. In the short term, quality may suffer when faced with large numbers of children attending school; however, long-term strategies for improving their learning can succeed in restoring the balance. Enhancing cognitive development, basic skills, physical health and emotional growth are normally considered part of the affective domain of a learner. However, these factors are equally important in the learning process and in reinforcing the quality of a learning experience. Planning, implementing and monitoring the progress of these interventions, however, present an enormous challenge.

The quality of education is of central concern in virtually all countries, largely because both national and international assessments of learning outcomes continue to reveal alarmingly weak and uneven levels of achievement in many countries worldwide.

Furthermore, there is a risk that assessments of learning only describe outputs or aspects of learning that are relatively easy to measure and ignore aspects that are more important but difficult to measure. Numeracy and literacy skills are often measured, which is not the case for social skills and the societal impact of education. The focus must be on supporting education and teachers' education aligned to inclusive approaches to support societal development, thereby ensuring that each citizen is able to participate effectively in society. Most assessments fail to measure emotional growth of learners or their development in terms of values and attitudes, generally agreed-upon indicators of the quality of learning processes and the environment. Even in countries where there have been significant increases in primary school enrolment, studies show that few children actually complete their basic education, having achieved minimal competencies in literacy and numeracy. The combination of weak performance and high drop-out rates is attributed to a wide range of external and internal factors that directly affect the quality of learning processes. Quality and equity are thus central to ensuring inclusive education.

I.2.3 Inclusion and cost effectiveness

It is difficult to speak about inclusion without considering issues of costs. National budgets are often limited, official development assistance is lacking and parents often cannot afford the direct and indirect costs of education. Families often have to prioritize between sending a child to school or having him/her bring in revenues to feed the family. There is a risk, therefore, that inclusive education is considered too costly for governments, agencies and even parents, although the amount estimated to reach EFA (US \$11 billion) is exceedingly small viewed on a global scale (Box 2). Box 2: Estimated additional costs to reach EFA According to estimates by Oxfam, the financial support needed to reach EFA corresponds to:

- four days' worth of global military spending
- half of what is spent on toys in the United States every year
- less than what Europeans spend on computer games or mineral water per year
- less than 0.1 per cent of the world's annual gross national product

However, much could be recuperated through developing a more cost-efficient education system. The institutional context in which public spending takes place requires more attention than it has so far received.¹⁷ This includes optimizing the use of resources in order to achieve a higher cost-benefit relationship between inputs and results. In OECD countries between 5 per cent and 40 per cent of students drop out, finishing with low skills and high rates of unemployment.¹⁸ Among those who drop out from schools are many pupils

with negative learning experiences and a history of having to repeat years because of poor performance.

The financial resources aimed at the students who repeat¹⁹ could be better spent on improving the quality of education for all, especially if we consider the low impact of repetition on the level of students' outcomes and its negative effect on students' self-esteem. Such investment would include teachers' training, supply of material, ICTs and the provision of additional support for students who experience difficulties in the education process. Furthermore, interventions to promote inclusion do not need to be costly. Several cost-effective measures to promote inclusive quality education have been developed in countries with scarce resources. These include multi-grade, multi-age and multi-ability classrooms, initial literacy in mother tongues, training-of-trainer models for professional development, linking students in pre-service teacher training with schools, peer teaching and converting special schools into resource centers that provide expertise and support to clusters of regular schools. An example from Jamaica on Education is often said to play a key role in determining how one spends one's adult life – a higher level of education often translates into higher earnings, better health, and a longer life. The long-term social and financial costs of educational failure are therefore indisputably high, since those without the skills to participate socially and economically generate higher costs for health, income support, child welfare and social security systems, where they exist. Figure 3 shows the production loss of gross domestic product (GDP) by not including persons with disabilities.