



## CHALLENGES FOR POLICY-MAKERS

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### Moving policy forward

The success of creating inclusive education as a key to establishing inclusive societies depends on agreement among all relevant partners on a common vision supported by a number of specific steps to be taken to put this vision into practice. The move towards inclusion is a gradual one that should be based on clearly articulated principles that address system-wide development and multi- sectoral approaches involving all levels of society. The barriers to inclusion can be reduced through active collaboration between policy-makers, education personnel and other stakeholders, including the active involvement of members of the local community, such as political and religious leaders, local education officials and the media. Some important steps include:

- Carrying out local situation analyses on the scope of the issue, available resources and their utilization in support of inclusion and inclusive education
- Mobilizing opinion on the right to education for everybody
- Building consensus around the concepts of inclusive and quality education
- Reforming legislation to support inclusive education in line with international conventions, declarations and recommendations
- Supporting local capacity-building to promote development towards inclusive education
- Developing ways to measure the impact of inclusive and quality education
- Developing school- and community-based mechanisms to identify children not in school and find ways to help them enter school and remain there
- Helping teachers to understand their role in education and that inclusion of diversity in the classroom is an opportunity, not a problem

## **1 Developing inclusive education systems**

Looking at education through an inclusive lens (Fig, 4) implies a shift from seeing the child as the problem to seeing the education system as the problem. Initial views emphasized that the source of difficulties in learning comes from within the learner and ignored the environmental influences on learning. It is now strongly argued that reorganizing ordinary schools within the community, through school improvement and a focus on quality, ensures that all children can learn effectively, including those categorized as having special needs. Learning begins before children get to school and, therefore, ECCE is particularly important as an instrument to build inclusive societies. New evidence linking mental health, early stimulation of children through activities such as creative play, music and physical activity, and nutrition to necessary stimulation of the brain, further indicates the importance of a focus on ECCE. An inclusive school must offer possibilities and opportunities for a range of working methods and individual treatment to ensure that no child is excluded from companionship and participation in the school. This implies the development of rights-based, child-friendly schools. A rights-based education helps children realize their rights. It is not only academically effective but also inclusive, healthy and protective of all children, gender-responsive, and encourages the participation of the learners themselves, their families and their communities. Support from the teachers and headteachers is essential, but support from the communities close to the school is also vital. All must be able and willing to ensure inclusion in the classroom and in learning for all children regardless of their differences. Thus, as noted earlier, seeing education through the inclusion lens implies a shift from seeing the child as a problem to seeing the education system as the problem that can be solved through inclusive approaches. Inclusive education of good quality is the best means to overcome future learning deficiencies among youth and adults. In today's situation, however, special efforts must also be made to ensure appropriate education and training programmes using different modalities for those youth and adults who have so far been deprived. When communities can hold teachers, administrators and government officials accountable for the inclusion of all children through formal institutional mechanisms, community members become more interested in school improvement and more willing to commit their own resources to the task. This commitment may include forming partnerships with outside contributors such as the private sector. According to the World Bank, programmes that expand the access of excluded groups to education have led to important shifts in mindsets among community members and government leaders regarding the contributions that these groups can make to society. In this way, change processes and

empowerment go hand in hand to move towards inclusion for all learners. It often involves developing alternative and non-formal dimensions of learning within a holistic education system in order to promote inclusion at all levels

## **2 Challenges for policy-makers**

In preparation of the 48th International Conference on Education (ICE) on Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future, UNESCO's International Bureau of Education along with UNESCO Headquarters, National Commissions, field offices and members of the Community of Practice (COP) in Curriculum Development as well as other civil society partners, organized 13 regional preparatory workshops with 914 participants from 128 countries. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss existing perceptions of inclusive education and to identify best practices for use in its implementation. The meetings revealed both subtle and more overt differences in the understanding of the concept of inclusive education among countries and across regions, as well as important common elements, in particular concerning the need to provide equal access to quality education for all. The major concerns and concrete areas of action identified in these regional preparatory meetings are presented in Box 4. They are further explored in the detailed descriptions in the remaining part of the document. In addition, a number of simple checklist boxes have been developed to help policy-makers explore the key questions to be addressed under each of the core elements. The policy matrix at the end of the document pulls together in a more global sense the areas that need to be addressed in order to develop inclusive education in a full policy cycle.

### **2.1 Attitudinal Change as the Precursor to Effective Policy Development**

Inclusion often requires a shift in people's attitudes and values. Such change takes time and involves significant reassessment of conceptions and role behavior. Awareness raising should involve both better understanding of inclusive education and that societies become more tolerant and understanding. National policies on inclusion, local support systems and appropriate forms of curriculum and assessment are important to create the necessary context for the development of inclusion. Educational institutions should not see themselves as the only experts on education. Expertise need not always be available in every school, but it is important to secure access to specific competences when needed. This is reflected in the gradual transition in some countries of special schools into resource centers with outreach services to support the regular school system and offer guidance to families in their efforts to support their children. Teachers, other educators, non-teaching support staff, parents, communities, school authorities, curriculum developers, educational planners, the

private sector and training institutes are all among the actors that can serve as valuable resources in support of inclusion. Some (teachers, parents and communities) are more than just a valuable resource; they are the key to supporting all aspects of the inclusion process. This must be based on a willingness to accept and welcome diversity and to take an active role in the lives of students, both in and out of school.

## **2.2 Creating an inclusive curriculum**

An inclusive curriculum addresses the child's cognitive, emotional, social and creative development. It is based on

the four pillars of education for the twenty-first century – learning to know, to do, to be and to live together.<sup>22</sup> It has an instrumental role to play in fostering tolerance and promoting human rights, and is a powerful tool for transcending cultural, religious, gender and other differences. An inclusive curriculum takes gender, cultural identity and language background into consideration. It involves breaking negative stereotypes not only in textbooks but also, and more importantly, in teacher's attitudes and expectations. Multilingual approaches in education, in which language is recognized as an integral part of a student's cultural identity, can act as a source of inclusion. Furthermore, mother tongue instruction in the initial years of school has a positive impact on learning outcomes. An inclusive approach to curriculum policy has built-in flexibility and can be adjusted to different needs so that everyone benefits from a commonly accepted basic level of quality education. This ranges from varying the time that students devote to particular subjects, to giving teachers greater freedom to choose their working methods, and to allowing more time for guided classroom-based work. According to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005*, one way to move towards a relevant, balanced set of aims is to analyze the curriculum in terms of inclusion. An inclusive approach to curriculum policy recognizes that while each learner has multiple needs – even more so in situations of vulnerability and disadvantage – everyone should benefit from a commonly accepted basic level of quality education. This underlines the need for a common core curriculum that is relevant for the learner while being taught according to flexible methods.<sup>23</sup> Accessible and flexible curricula, textbooks and learning materials can serve as the key to creating schools for all. Many curricula expect all pupils to learn the same things, at the same time and by the same means and methods. But enough to provide possibilities for adjustment to individual needs and to stimulate teachers to seek solutions that can be matched with the needs, abilities and learning styles of each and every pupil.<sup>24</sup> This is particularly important in the development and practice of learning activities for youth and adults. Some of the issues to consider in developing inclusive curricula appear in Box 6. The concept of

inclusive education questions a large part of the traditional school's way of organizing and arranging teaching. While schools must have general or common goals for what is appropriate and desirable for pupils to achieve in school, the demands related to different school subjects must be seen in the context of the individual pupil's opportunities and needs.

The social composition of schools and classrooms is changing in many developing countries with more learners entering schools. Multi-grade, multi-age and multi-ability classrooms are the reality in most places. It is essential that alternate frameworks for imparting learning in varying contexts be analyzed and better understood. Greater attentions also needed to investigate unique contexts and settings – schools that promote active learning and inclusion, provide multicultural settings, and function in refugee and emergency situations.

### **2.3 Teachers and the learning environment**

The way teachers teach is of critical importance in any reform designed to improve inclusion. Teachers must make sure that each pupil understands the instructions and expected working modalities. Similarly, the teacher him/herself must understand the pupil's reaction to what is being taught since teaching only has meaning and relevance if the pupil acquires its content. Teachers thus need to be educated in alignment with these expectations. Teachers as well as school leaders must be encouraged to discuss learning and teaching as well as methods and possibilities for development. They must be given a chance to reflect together on their practice, and to influence the

methods and strategies used in their classes and schools. Teachers must also be familiarized with new curricula and

trained in addressing student performances. A child-centered curriculum is characterized by a move away from rote

learning and towards greater emphasis on hands-on, experience-based, active and cooperative learning. Introducing inclusion as a guiding principle has implications for teachers' practices and attitudes – be it towards girls, slow learners, children with special needs or those from diverse backgrounds (cognitive, ethnic and socio-economic).

Teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusion depend strongly on their experience with learners who are perceived as 'challenging'. Teacher education, the availability of support within the classroom, class size and overall workload are all factors which influence teachers' attitudes. Negative attitudes of head-teachers, inspectors of education, teachers and adults (parents and other family members) are major barriers to inclusion. Thus, empowering all of these individuals, equipping them with new confidence and skills in the process of introducing inclusion as a guiding principle, will have implications for teachers' attitudes and

performances. Teachers, other educators and non-teaching support staff need to be trained and ready to assist children, youth and adults in their development and learning processes on a daily basis. Flexible teaching-learning methodologies necessitate shifting away from long theoretical, pre-service-based teacher training to continuous in-service development of teachers. It must be noted that all specific knowledge and competence cannot be given to the same individual. Several specializations are needed to cooperate with and support ordinary school staff. Moreover, national policies must address the status of teachers, their welfare and professional development. The severe teacher shortage and lack of trained teachers, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia, has highly unfortunate consequences for the quality of learning. It is important to focus on creating an optimum learning environment so that all children can learn well and achieve

#### **2.4 Supporting the policy cycle**

Inclusive education systems and societies can only be realized if governments are aware of the nature of the problem and are committed to solving it. This must be reflected in the willingness to undertake in-depth analysis of the size and character of the out-of-school populations and ensure their integration into quality school and other kinds of education and training programmes. Such analysis would frequently require improved data systems and data collection methods. Government commitment would also express itself in appropriate legal frameworks established in accordance with relevant international conventions and recommendations ensuring that inclusive education is appropriately understood and interpreted as a rights issue. Its priority in national policy, planning and implementation should be reflected in the comparative allocation in national budgets and in requests for development assistance from international partners and

#### **22 Policy guidelines on inclusion in education**

the private sector. Appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be put in place to evaluate the impact of inclusive education policies as regards the learner, the education system and wider societal development.

Assessment approaches that promote a development towards inclusion need to be elaborated.

The European Agency

for Development in Special needs education has as one example developed outline indicators stressing that:

all pupils should be entitled to be involved in all assessment procedures as long as they are relevant and adapted to

accommodate their needs initial identify action of pupils' needs should not be the only mechanism for resource allocation legal defy nations and subsequent assessment procedures based on medical/deficit approaches lead to labeling and categorization that often reinforces segregation and separate approaches to provision curriculum, program reform should be centered upon learning needs and not be content lead/driven. presents some of the many issues that need to be addressed to appropriately position inclusive education in the policy cycle. The numbers of suggested actions are many and please note that it might be necessary to identify a few activities that you think lies within your competency and possibility to deal with during the coming planning period. Your selection must be based on the actual needs of your country, its infrastructure and what you estimate should be the most strategic activity within the closest period of planning. The suggested actions presents a holistic approach to bring about change in the entire education system and it takes a lot of cooperation among many actors to make this happen. A coordinated action plan would be the ultimate solution but it is however also important to emphasize that there is no need to wait for such a plan. Every initiative and action that stimulates more inclusive education systems is valuable and may constitute an important turning point in support of its further development.