



**Interregional and Regional  
Perspectives on Inclusive Education:  
Follow-up of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the  
International Conference on Education**

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## Preface

It was a great honour for the Spanish Ministry of Education to prepare and participate in the “Inclusive Education: A Way of Promoting Social Cohesion” conference (Madrid, March 2010), as part of the six-month Spanish presidency of the European Union. This conference built upon the discussions of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education on “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future” (Geneva, November 2008) with broad and diverse contributions to stimulate informed debates and valuable insights on the urgent agenda of a broadened concept of inclusive education. We were extremely proud to see these discussions later reflected in the European Council of Ministers’ “Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Education and Training” (May 2010).

As was stated at the Madrid conference, the Spanish government believes that,

*education embodies the major European values of freedom, equity and cohesion. In line with this, inclusive education is of paramount significance. It implies pursuing excellence without sacrificing integration, offering all students equal opportunities regardless of the difficulties encountered at home, expecting the best of each student, developing their full potential, while taking special needs into account.*

*Inclusive education involves the conversion of schools into true learning communities, which could foster a sense of inclusion and mutual support. Schools have to recognize all talents (whether of students with disabilities or with high skills) and conditions [...] every person is a valued member of the community, with a role to play in ensuring the success of all its components. This does not only refer to students but also teachers, parents, school staff and members of civil society with whom they interact [...]*

*Inclusive schools integrate, enrich and celebrate diversity and intercultural difference. Quality without equity, without inclusion in education is elitism and discrimination. Inclusive education has to be developed in close cooperation with all authorities, institutions, associations and civil society, as well as embedded into all policy areas. Participation is essential [...] it is a matter of rights, but also a matter of necessity, essential to our progress [...]*

*Education needs to reach out to the entire human capital of a country and must not reject any talent, no matter how hard it is to encourage and no matter how peripheral it may seem. Unequal access to the education system is an incalculable loss of human potential that generates enormous costs and threatens social cohesion. Universal, quality and equitable education is now the best social policy, in addition to the best insurance against unemployment. It is a determining factor of equity, as well as social and personal advancement [...] the social dimension of education, and within this specifically inclusion, is crucial to ensure the process of European economic recovery, to legitimize the community-building process and, in particular, to consolidate what lies at the heart of Europe, its legal and rights-based nature.*

ÁNGEL GABILONDO  
MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF SPAIN

# Introduction

Focusing on the theme “Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future”, the Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48<sup>th</sup> UNESCO International Conference on Education (ICE) (Geneva, 2008) refer to a broadened conceptualization of inclusive education as a way for addressing and responding to the needs of all learners. UNESCO has also defined inclusive education as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education [...]”.<sup>1</sup> Crucially, this definition moved away from strong previous understandings of inclusive education as the sum of initiatives and efforts in favour of specific groups or targeted categories, towards the progressive understanding of inclusive education as the provision on quality learning opportunities for all learners.

The consensus that formed around a broadened conceptualization of inclusive education can be understood as an effective way to deepen the policy responses to the startling high numbers of excluded learners existing in the world today. While progress is being made towards the Education for All (EFA) goals, there are still an estimated 67 million children of primary school age who are not enrolled in school and about 796 million adults lacking literacy skills.<sup>2</sup> There is also concern that if this situation could certainly get worse, as important global issues are not sufficiently addressed, such as climate change financial crises, as well as economic and social inequities.

At the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, it was underlined that inclusive education was a key strategy for achieving the EFA goals, as a way to achieve quality and equitable learning opportunities for all learners, and build more inclusive societies; “a broadened concept of inclusive education can be viewed as a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for all and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities”<sup>3</sup>. A broadened vision of inclusive education was emphasized as a way to overcome a narrow and piece-meal conceptualization and implementation of EFA that focused on access to primary school education and considering equity and quality as “separate dimensions”. Inclusive education allows for a broader understanding of how the concepts of equality, equity and quality interact.<sup>4</sup>

The outcomes of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE also underscored the need for a holistic approach to the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of educational policies for the attainment of the EFA agenda.<sup>5</sup> This builds upon the UNESCO definition of inclusive education, which “[...] 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

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris, UNESCO, 2005, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011— The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education*, UNESCO and Oxford University Press, Paris and Oxford, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education*, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/5, Geneva, 28 November 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Acedo, C. Inclusive education: pushing the boundaries. *Prospects*, 145(1), 2008, pp. 5–13.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO IBE, *op. cit.*, 2008.

all children”.<sup>6</sup> Inclusive education is now progressively seen as an overall principle that should guide all educational policies and practices, with implications for policy-making and curricula at all levels of the education system, as well as in schools and classrooms. Based on the belief that education is a fundamental human right and the foundation for a more just society, inclusive education can be seen as a process of strengthening the capacity of an education system to reach out to all learners as part of the process of recognizing and engaging them as participants in communities and society.

At the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, UNESCO’s strong stance on inclusive education was recognized and supported by the various State representatives, encouraging UNESCO to involve multiple stakeholders in the policy discussion, and specifically in the dissemination activities of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE.<sup>7</sup> Along these lines, UNESCO IBE organized and/or participated in numerous follow-up activities of the conference, involving over 3900 participants, representing over 180 countries while taking advantage of the diverse backgrounds and expertise represented. These in-depth, global discussions were highly successful in forging open, productive and plural spaces towards advancing the dialogue around inclusive education at the interregional, regional and national levels and contributing to the refinement of policy frameworks and capacity development. In Europe, the European Council recently stated that

*systems which uphold high standards of quality for all and strengthen accountability, which foster personalized, inclusive approaches, which support early intervention and which target disadvantaged learners in particular, can be powerful drivers in fostering social inclusion.*<sup>8</sup>

The contributions in this publication intend to elaborate upon this process of dialogue generated by the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, with a view to identifying emerging consensus and debates in terms of inclusive education and curricula at the theoretical and practical levels, from interregional and regional perspectives. Benefiting from a rich diversity of fields, organizations and regions, these contributions encompass a broad range of perspectives, approaches and practices. In particular, this publication comprises of six regional articles, preceded by two interregional perspectives of the discussions that have emerged around inclusive education and inclusive curricula in the framework of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE follow-up activities. These initial interregional articles offer key insights into the role of inclusive curricula and inclusive assessment for democratizing learning opportunities, from an international comparative perspective. The following articles then adopt a regional perspective on some of the key issues and challenges with respect to inclusive education. Finally, in the conclusion, the regional and thematic lessons are drawn upon in order to consider the prospective outlook.

Indeed, through these expert analyses, priority areas are clearly evident within and across the regions, particularly related to the understandings about inclusion, inclusive policies, curriculum and systems, as well as the diverse stakeholders which are crucial

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<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, *op. cit.*, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO IBE, *op. cit.*, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Council of the European Union, *Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Education and Training, 3013th Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting, Brussels, 11 May 2010, OJ C 298, 8.12.2006, p. 3.*

to inclusive processes. For example, within the African regional perspective, curriculum-related reforms are highlighted as an integral part of inclusive education, to support stakeholders in developing inclusive products, processes, and outcomes. Meanwhile, in Asia, localized school-based management approaches are highlighted, in light of recent inclusive policy reforms. The European contribution, meanwhile, sheds light on the issues and challenges which have emerged from the monitoring and evaluation of data in order to promote inclusive education. Interestingly, this echoes a call from Arab colleagues for better monitoring mechanisms, along with a greater focus on school and evidence-based practices, to achieve inclusive societies in the region. Meanwhile, in the former Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a crucial challenge remains for developing policies to support diversity, namely how to move away from long-standing approaches of streaming and segregation. Finally, looking at Latin American trends, an increasing and extensive consensus appears to be forming in relation to the need for universal public policies, from a comprehensive and holistic perspective of an inclusive education system.

As a whole, these interregional and regional contributions thus provide a strong foundation to build upon the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, elaborating upon the common understanding of a broadened concept of inclusive education, which the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE has clearly contributed to. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all the authors for their generous support, and also to express my hopes that such exchange may continue towards making inclusive education the way of the present and the future, both in dialogue and in practice, towards democratizing learning opportunities and achieving the EFA goals.

CLEMENTINA ACEDO  
DIRECTOR OF THE IBE

# **Inclusive Education: The Interregional Perspectives**

# Interregional Discussions around Inclusive Curricula in light of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

*Curriculum is without a doubt one major area that can foster development of inclusive education or, in the worst case, can be a barrier for inclusion.*<sup>2</sup>

The causes for exclusion vary across the world and are both multi-dimensional and highly contextual, related to negative attitudes around diversity, a legacy of segregated educational facilities and settings, and the inadequacy of general educational provision, amongst other factors. However, in all contexts, the lack of a robust, motivated, relevant and flexible curriculum is often a common concern, playing a significant role in systemic exclusion and making education systems unable to effectively address all learners' needs. This article aims to elaborate upon the interregional discussions that have emerged in light of the 48<sup>th</sup> UNESCO International Conference on Education (ICE) around the key role of inclusive curricula for democratizing learning opportunities. At the same time, it seeks to identify certain emerging consensus and ongoing debates in terms of inclusive education and curricula at both a theoretical and practical level across different regions.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, UNESCO has defined inclusive education as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education [...]”<sup>3</sup>. The ICE outcomes broaden this conceptualization of inclusive education with a view to achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals as “a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for all and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities”<sup>4</sup>. This broadened understanding is grounded in the belief that education is a fundamental human right and this process involves learning how to engage with and value diversity, and how diversity can foster learning, as well as strengthen education systems, communities and societies towards the attainment of more inclusive and cohesive societies.

The ICE outcomes also underscore the need for a holistic approach to the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of educational policies for the attainment of the EFA agenda.<sup>5</sup> Inclusive education guides all educational policies and practices, intertwining different dimensions (access, processes, participation and learning outcomes), levels (formal, non-formal, adult education) and units (national frameworks,

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by R. Operti, J. Brady & L. Duncombe, UNESCO IBE.

<sup>2</sup> Halinen, I., & Savolainen, H. *E-forum Discussion Paper on Inclusive Education and Inclusive Curriculum*, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2009.ww

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris, UNESCO, 2005, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education*, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/5, Geneva, 28 November 2008.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

curricula, schools, classrooms, teachers and learners)<sup>6</sup>. While this article intends to shed light on the role and implications of inclusive curriculum in the development of inclusive education, the interdependence of these strategies must clearly be taken into account, and will be addressed briefly in the section on supporting the implementation of the curriculum. Inclusive curricula can only be efficiently developed and implemented within systemic approaches that provide schools, teachers and other staff, with the orientation and necessary supporting conditions to progress from vision to practice.

### **Defining inclusive curricula in light of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE**

UNESCO IBE perceives the curriculum as a mirror of the complex interfaces of society, politics and education<sup>7</sup>. It is broadly defined as a reflection of the kind of society to which we aspire. The curriculum plays a crucial role as: (a) a definition of the outcomes and guiding principles for education; (b) an operationalization of pedagogical and administrative action plans at the core of the education system; (c) a means to ensure the coherence and consistency of educational and administrative action plans and those of educational activities in relation to the intended educational aims and purposes; (d) a way to facilitate the development and training of people within their context; and (e) an adaptation of the education system in relation to an educational project, as well as with respect to society and the world<sup>8</sup>.

In light of the complex feedback relationships between curricula and the achievement of both equity and quality, the curriculum has also been put forward as a way of contributing to the development of more inclusive societies<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, the curriculum has been identified as a crucial tool to promote a broadened concept of inclusive education and to ensure the implementation of holistic educational policies from a long-term perspective. The latest UNESCO guidelines on inclusion, for example, have identified the curriculum as the central means by which the principle of inclusion could be put into action within an education system, respectful of cultural, religious, gender and other differences in line with common shared values<sup>10</sup>.

The ICE outcomes describe a curriculum that is flexible, relevant and adjustable to the diverse characteristics and needs of lifelong learners, reflecting an inclusive society which ensures more equitable distribution of opportunities and the elimination of poverty and marginality<sup>11</sup>. This conceptualization of an inclusive curriculum strongly supports an understanding of student diversities as enhancing and democratizing learning opportunities. It combines the density and strength of core universal concepts (e.g. the

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<sup>6</sup> Operti, R., Brady J., & Duncombe, L. Moving forward: Inclusive education as the core of Education for All. *Prospects*, 39(3), pp. 205–214, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Braslavsky, C. Los conceptos estelares de la agenda educativa en el cambio de siglo [Key concepts on the educational agenda at the turn of the century], in C. Braslavsky, *Re-haciendo escuelas: Un nuevo paradigma en la educación latinoamericana* [Remaking schools: Towards a new paradigm in Latin American education]. Buenos Aires, Santillana, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Jonnaert, Ph., Ettayebi, M., Defise, R., *Curriculum et compétences : un cadre opérationnel*. [Curriculum and competencies : an operational framework], De Boeck Université, Bruxelles, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Recommendations from the UNESCO IBE Council Forum on Inclusive Education and Inclusive Curricula*, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO, *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris, UNESCO, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO IBE, *op. cit.*, 2008.

value of diversity, the right to lifelong learning, comprehensive citizenship education) with options, flexibility and consideration of all learners within schools and classrooms, thereby addressing and guaranteeing their individual right to education.

It is essential to ensure that curricular processes, provisions, settings and content share common frameworks while at the same time providing tailored approaches to the personal needs of all learners. As Rosa Blanco states, “the key element of inclusion is not the individualization but the diversification of the educational provision and the personalization of common learning experiences [...] This implies advancing towards universal design, where the teaching-learning process and the curriculum consider from the very beginning the diversity of needs of all students, instead of planning on the basis of an average student and then carry out individualized actions to respond to the needs of specific students or groups who were not taken into consideration by an education proposal based on a logic of homogeneity instead of diversity”<sup>12</sup>.

Indeed, traditional curricular challenges have implied fitting special needs curriculum within existing school structures and syllabus, which are organized in ways that reinforce the idea of students as fitting into separate categories. Contrary to this vision, inclusive educational provisions mean respecting learners’ individual and unique characteristics, while extending what is ordinarily available to all learners within the general educational provision<sup>13</sup>.

### **Inclusive curricula from an interregional perspective**

When conceptualizing an inclusive curriculum in light of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, the interregional discourse has tended to concentrate on four main concerns, namely: the focus of the curriculum; the purpose of the curriculum; the relationship between national, local and school interests; and the question of how to effectively support the development of the curriculum. This article will address these concerns in turn, with reference to various regional perspectives and examples.

#### *The focus of the curriculum*

The focus of the curriculum can be broadly understood as relating to curricular objectives, goals and contents, defining competencies, understanding and supporting the learning process of every pupil and how this can be combined in a coherent way throughout the curricular framework. The common threads in this delicate balancing act are the fundamental objectives of an inclusive curriculum, education system and society.

#### 1. Curricular objectives, goals and contents

In terms of curricular objectives, goals and contents, it is important to note that, traditionally, subjects have played a key role in education systems. In fact, the mindsets

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<sup>12</sup> Blanco, R., “Conceptual Framework of Inclusive Education”, in C. Acedo, M. Amadio , & R. Operti, (Eds.). *Defining an Inclusive Education Agenda: Reflections around the 48th session of the International Conference on Education*, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Florian. L., “The Concept of Inclusive Pedagogy”, in G. Hallett & F. Hallett (Eds.), *Transforming the role of the SENCO*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 2010, pp. 61–72.

and practices of education systems have typically been constructed around the study of knowledge and subject areas, within relatively stable epistemological definitions and boundaries of knowledge areas. Often, content has taken on a leading role compared to other dimensions of the curriculum, such as the curricular objectives (which may refer to good citizenship; healthy and balanced development of a person, etc).

It is interesting to understand and compare how innovative school models have attempted to move away from this content-based approach in order to improve educational achievement in difficult social surroundings, as in the case of France. “Opening up the school to this culture radically transforms the elitist conception of knowledge as the instrument whereby power is exercised by the privileged social classes”<sup>14</sup>. It also means that under-performing children are not isolated or given special “treatment”; instead, the aim is to cater for them without singling them out in the collective learning process<sup>15</sup>. Underpinning these reforms, the concept of knowledge has been broadened to reflect a combination of facts, understanding, skills and accumulated experiences. The reforms have also aimed to clarify and simplify the structure in terms of curricular and syllabi objectives, so that they are more clearly conveyed to students, as well as provide a broader scope of what is considered to be a learning achievement.

Too much emphasis on academic content has been identified as a key challenge across all regions in terms of the narrow definition of learning and learning outcomes, as well as restricting teaching practices, amongst other things<sup>16</sup>. In many regions, skills and knowledge learned in school may have very little relevance for the out-of-school lives of many students, especially those that come from socio-cultural backgrounds that differ from the predominant societal view embedded in the school’s culture. Moreover, this also risks alienating parents from their children’s learning as they cannot offer as much support. Similarly, in all regions, many areas of curricula “bear little relation to the skills sought by employers and lack uniform standards”<sup>17</sup>. Research also suggests that an over-emphasis on academic content or an over-burdening of academic content within a curriculum also tends to create time pressures for teaching staff<sup>18</sup>. In addition, teachers tend to hold a strong disciplinary ethos, which may hinder coordination with colleagues from other disciplines.

Another key challenge is to expand access and democratize education while ensuring quality learning opportunities through relevant curricula. In Sub-Saharan Africa, access to secondary education is lower than in any other region of the world and highly biased against the poor, with girls at a particular disadvantage<sup>19</sup>. A growing number of countries—including South Africa, Rwanda and Tunisia—are moving away from over-loaded

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<sup>14</sup> Pagoni, M., *Autorité éducative, savoir, socialisation démocratique* [Educational Authority, Knowledge, Democratic Socialization], presented at the CERFEE colloquium, organized by the IUFM de Montpellier, Montpellier, France, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Govinda, R., *Towards Inclusive Schools and Enhanced Learning: A Synthesis of Case Study Findings from Different Countries*, Paris, UNESCO, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Halinen, I., & Savolainen, H., *op cit.*, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010—Reaching the Marginalized*, UNESCO and Oxford University Press, Paris and Oxford, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Halinen, I., & Savolainen, H., *op. cit.*, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010—Reaching the Marginalized*, *op. cit.*, 2009.

and out-dated content and are forging stronger links between technical and academic streams under common curricular frameworks. Others—including Gambia, Ethiopia and Tanzania—have started the process of developing curricula that focus on selected competencies in key knowledge areas and skills. Ethiopia, for example, has introduced an “alternative basic education” programme using low-cost community centres in remote areas aimed at helping 7-14-year-old children of pastoralists who may have missed out on primary school<sup>20</sup>.

Sweden has also recently embarked on a series of curriculum reforms, motivated by concerns that pupils are not prepared enough for higher education and working life. It seems too many pupils leave school with low-level qualifications, while more and more qualifications are required by the skilled labour market due to rapid technical development, international competition, as well as demographic changes. In response, there is now increased collaboration between school governing bodies, higher education partners and the world of work at national and local levels, as well as with local programme councils for TVET programmes. Key changes are also taking place in upper secondary education, including higher eligibility requirements, more time for vocational studies and less for core subjects, and an introduction to apprenticeship training<sup>21</sup>. Similarly, in the Middle East, a region marked by high youth unemployment and high dropout rates in secondary education<sup>22</sup>, governments are trying to prioritize the development of technical and vocational education within the framework of restructuring secondary education<sup>23</sup>.

At the same time, rethinking the relationships between education and the labour market may entail a greater focus on the necessary qualifications for responding to local realities and opportunities. This is particularly pertinent when we take into account the growing need for more sustainable development initiatives, as well as more environmentally-friendly production and consumption alternatives, which both address and harmonize global, national and local expectations and realities.

Relevant curricular content should also help to develop knowledge, attitudes, and values as well as teaching-learning methods that support a genuinely inclusive society, with a focus on non-discrimination, human rights, removing stereotypes, and respecting diversity. For this purpose, a comprehensive review of existing curricula and materials through an inclusive education lens has been recommended. In particular, this should consider to what extent inclusive education ideals are currently being promoted and whether, in fact, stereotypes exist in regard to, for example, gender, ethnicity, rural origin, and disability.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, it may also be worth considering whether curricular objectives are set too high; universal requirements which are rigidly defined and not contextualized cannot match

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<sup>20</sup> BREDA UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *The Basic Education in Africa Programme. A Policy Paper—Responding to Demands for Access, Quality, Relevance and Equity*, Dakar, Senegal, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Mission Report of Presentations given at the Chinese-European Conference on Curriculum Development*, organized by the Chinese National Centre for School Curriculum and Textbook Development, Beijing Education Academy, Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development, Beijing, China, 12–16 April 2010.

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010—Reaching the Marginalized*, *op. cit.*, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> BREDA, UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Asian Development Bank, *Strengthening Inclusive Education*, Mandaluyong City, Philippines, Asian Development Bank, 2010.

the learning needs of all. Having high-level objectives can of course help teachers and learners reach good results, but only when teaching and learning processes can be organized flexibly according to the needs of individual learners and when learners are strongly supported in their learning. Finland is an example of a country where practically 100% of pupils in basic education (grades 1-9, years 7 to 16) complete their studies and reach the same (relatively high) goals<sup>25</sup>.

## 2. Defining competencies

With respect to defining competencies, it is important to consider that “There is a growing sense that ‘what you know’ is less important than ‘what you are able to learn’”, yet many education systems continue to follow rigid curricula based on traditional disciplines<sup>26</sup>. Along these lines, competency-based approaches have been put forth as particularly useful for developing and implementing an inclusive curriculum, to address the diversity of all learners and increase curricular relevance<sup>27</sup>. Indeed, educational and curriculum reforms around the world are increasingly guided by competency-based approaches<sup>28</sup>. Interest in such approaches, especially at the secondary level, can also be explained by the approach’s key objectives of quality, efficiency and usefulness of educational provision in terms of economic and social development<sup>29</sup>.

A “competence” can be defined as “knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, accompanied by the ability to use them in a certain context”<sup>30</sup>. Others have described competencies as “complex processes of achievement with qualification in certain contexts, integrating different kinds of knowledge (knowing to be, knowing to do, knowing to know and knowing to live together), in order to carry out activities and/or solve problems with the aim of contributing to personal development, construction and strengthening of the social network, the permanent search of a sustained economic-entrepreneurial development, and the concern and protection of the environment and the living species”<sup>31</sup>.

In overall terms, the following four core elements should, at least, be taken into account when adopting competency-based approaches as a principal axis of curriculum design and development:

- Developing competency-based approaches can imply the generation, mobilization and integration of resources, such as knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, in order to face

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<sup>25</sup> Halinen, I., & Savolainen, H., *op cit.*, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010—Reaching the Marginalized*, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 92.

<sup>27</sup> UNESCO IBE, *E-forum: From Inclusive Education to Inclusive Curricula*, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 26 October–13 November 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Jonnaert, P., Masciotra, D., Barrette, J., Morel D., & Yaya, M., “*Revisiting the Concept of Competence as an Organizing Principle for Programs of Study: From Competences to Competent Action*”. IBE Working Paper on Curriculum Issues, Geneva, IBE UNESCO, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> World Bank, *The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*, Washington DC, World Bank, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Halinen, I., *Developing and Implementing Inclusive Curriculum*, Presented at the UNESCO Interregional and Regional Expert Meeting on Inclusive Education and Curricula, Beirut, Lebanon, 26–28 May, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Tobon, S., *El enfoque complejo de las competencias y el diseño curricular por ciclos propedéuticos* [The Complex Approach to Competencies and Curricular Design for Propaedeutic Cycles]. Acción Pedagógica, no. 16. San Cristóbal: Gabinete de Asistencia Psicopedagógica (GAPSIFE), 2007.

diverse types of learning situations and their links to real-life situations; it is not solely a matter of applying knowledge and capacities, or developing skills.

- The different types of situations are the criteria to conceptualize and define the exit (graduation) profile as well as to orientate the selection and prioritization of disciplinary contents (the syllabi) and to set up the assessment criteria and tools. The situations should reflect what is expected from the curriculum with regards to societal demands and needs.
- Competencies are socio-historical constructions developed through diverse situations. General life and/or citizenship competencies should be conceived and developed in different types of situations.
- There are different ways of developing competency-based approaches at the school and classroom levels, but for any of them to be truly effective, competencies should be selected and prioritized based on gathering, interpreting and prioritizing the demands and needs of societies.<sup>32</sup>

One of the main advantages of competency-based approaches lies in their inherent adaptability to a multitude of real-life settings for a range of learners and schools, providing an optimal combination of content and contexts<sup>33</sup>. For example, in several countries, a competency-based approach has helped diversify learning objectives and strategies based on a more flexible and relevant exit profile<sup>34</sup>. Competency-based approaches may also help teachers better understand their own role as facilitators who are empowered to adapt their learning strategies to the diversity of learners<sup>35</sup>.

At the same time, several elements of competency-based reforms must be contextualized; key questions remain about how to define and select core competencies, taking differing contexts and needs into account. Indeed, a main concern relates to how to integrate and connect competency-based approaches to curricula and syllabi, which are mainly grounded on knowledge. Roegiers, for example, distinguishes between two approaches to implementing a competency-based curriculum<sup>36</sup>. The first one is based on the development of transversal competencies at school. It promotes interdisciplinarity and introduces life competencies by inviting students to resolve problems and situations through active learning. Along these lines, the curriculum does not prescribe competencies, but rather provides the ingredients to allow for their development<sup>37</sup>. This approach implies serious changes to study programmes in terms of their content, design and presentation, as well as well-trained and effectively supported teachers, for its adequate and sustainable implementation.

The second approach—named by Roegiers as the “pedagogy of integration”—does not exclude the first approach, but proposes another way of considering the needs of learners

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<sup>32</sup> Operti, R., *Moving Forward with Secondary Education Reform: Issues, Challenges and Proposals*, UNESCO IBE Diploma on Curriculum Design and Development Hand-out, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Cox, C., *Inclusion Educativa: Conceptos, etapas, dilemas de implementación*, [Inclusive Education: Concepts, Stages, Problems of Implementation], Presented at UNESCO International Workshop on Inclusive Education, Andean and Southern Cone Regions, 12–14 September, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> BREDA, UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009

<sup>35</sup> Jonnaert, P., *Le concept de compétence revisité* [The Concept of Competency Revisited], Observatoire des réformes en éducation (ORE), University of Quebec, Montreal, September 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Roegiers, X., *Two Notions of the Approach by Competencies*, Louvain-la-Neuve, BIEF, 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Jonnaert, P., Ettayebi, M., & Defise, R., *Curriculum et compétences : un cadre opérationnel*. [Curriculum and competencies : an operational framework], Brussels, De Boeck University, 2009.

in a way which may be more accessible to a wider profile of teachers and their contexts. It distinguishes between two levels of curricular design—a first level to develop basic competencies geared towards a general exit profile and a second level to develop more complex competencies, which provide for a specific exit profile<sup>38</sup>. This approach is based on a definition of competency that entails “the spontaneous mobilization of a set of resources in order to apprehend a situation and respond to it in a more or less relevant way”<sup>39</sup>. Addressing complex problem situations may encompass, for example: (1) school experiences: knowledge, skills and behaviour; (2) situations of everyday life; and (3) the relevant mobilization of competencies. This approach has been developed in several European and African countries with apparently positive results<sup>40</sup>.

Another useful perspective is to view competencies as the bridges to pre-existing subjects within a new competency-based curriculum, i.e. a “curriculum organizer”. Viewed as such, competencies can: (a) enhance the relevance of content by encouraging the application of knowledge to simulated life situations; (b) facilitate the formulation of expected student outcomes in concrete and practical statements; (c) integrate subject content that is traditionally separate in the curriculum; and (d) provide a mechanism for gathering accurate and meaningful data on student performance and achievement for assessment.<sup>41</sup> For example, Belgium has established curricular cycles based on a set of standards in order to address both general and specific competencies relevant to everyday life, work and learning situations: the “foundation competencies”, which are developed during the first eight years of compulsory education; and the “diploma-level competencies”, which students are expected to have by the end of secondary school<sup>42</sup>.

Other concerns, which have been raised with regard to competency-based approaches, relate to their implications for assessment. Across many regions, there is often a clear tension between innovative competency-based curricula and pre-existing techniques of assessment, e.g. traditional written tests which determine students’ transition to higher grades. According to some, competencies are not taught “for the sole purpose of testing them; following the progress of each student is just as important and depends on the teacher’s ability to use diverse observation and diagnostic techniques”.<sup>43</sup>

### 3. Understanding and supporting the learning process of every pupil

It is important to consider how the curriculum supports learners. The curriculum needs to understand how learners learn in different ways and have different needs with regard

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<sup>38</sup> Roegiers, X., *Une pédagogie de l’intégration*. [A pedagogy of integration], Brussels, DeBoeck University, 2000; Roegiers, X., *Des situations pour intégrer les acquis scolaires* [Situations for integrating school learning acquisition], Brussels, De Boeck University, 2003; Roegiers, X., *L’école et l’évaluation* [The school and evaluation], Brussels, De Boeck University, 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Roegiers X., *Pedagogy of Integration. Education and Training Systems at the Heart of our Societies*. Brussels, De Boeck University, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Stabback, P., *Guidelines for Constructing a Curriculum Framework for Basic Education*. Geneva, IBE UNESCO, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Scallon, G. *L’évaluation des apprentissages dans une approche par compétences* [Assessing learning using a competency-based approach], Montréal, Renouveau pédagogique, 2004.

to curricular goals, contents, time, methods, materials, learning environments, as well as supports, and assessment, amongst other things. In particular, it is crucial to reflect on increasing *participation* in learning processes—not just *who* gets to be included, but *how*—and *what is recognized as achievement* in a learning community. Participation should relate to the quality and meaningfulness of learners’ experiences, incorporating the views of the learners themselves. Achievement should relate to outcomes of learning across the curriculum, not solely test or examination results, and should not be restricted to academic attainment.

In China, for example, the new school-based curriculum reform is attempting to better stimulate the active engagement of learners through collaboration and peer coaching, while encouraging students to address and resolve problems through open discussion. It also aims to develop more democratic relationships between teachers and students, with teachers playing a more facilitative role. The reform also provides for alternative assessment criteria and techniques to the traditional exam-oriented system<sup>44</sup>.

It is also important to understand, identify and remove barriers to participation and learning within school communities. As part of this process, consideration should be given to those groups of learners that are most vulnerable to marginalization, exclusion and underachievement. This means recognizing the fact that, because of the systematic use of categorization, some learners may currently be excluded from participating in education (e.g. in the classroom, school activities, etc). This prioritization of policies and programmes towards certain learners should be done in a way that is conscientious of not perpetuating isolation and segregation once participants are involved within mainstream educational provision.

For example, across many regions, the way curriculum frameworks are structured has been shown to be a huge barrier to participation and learning within school communities. Indeed, a strong hierarchical separation between primary and secondary education, between lower and upper secondary education, and between general and TVET disciplines create interruptions and discontinuities in learning<sup>45</sup>. Separated and segregated institutional, curricular and pedagogical provisions have also been linked to inequalities in terms of access and achievement, as well as student dropout, while many learners are also excluded from the education system due to early tracking and academic selection<sup>46</sup>. Similarly, disconnected assessment standards and techniques may present a key challenge in terms of inclusive curricular processes to avoid stigmatization and exclusion.

Furthermore, most of the standardized or other traditional tests can measure only certain types of academic learning outcomes, leaving little value to other types of knowledge (e.g. forms of informal knowledge and so-called “non-curricular” subjects) and skills in school. Many tests are also time-bound, which creates more pressures for both teachers

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<sup>44</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Mission Report of Presentations given at the Chinese-European Conference on Curriculum Development*, *op cit.*, 2010.

<sup>45</sup> UNESCO IBE, *E-forum: From Inclusive Education to Inclusive Curricula* *op cit.*, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> OECD, *Knowledge and Skills for Life. First results from PISA 2000*, Paris, OECD, 2001; OECD, *Literacy Skills for the World of Tomorrow. Further results from PISA 2000*, Paris, OECD, 2003; OECD, *Where immigrant students succeed—A comparative review of performance and engagement in PISA 2003*, Paris, OECD, 2006; OECD, *Education at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators*, Paris, OECD, 2009.

and students. Time limited tests further fail to measure the true knowledge of students for whom, for some reason (for instance dyslexia, intellectual disability, teaching language proficiency), reading and writing and completion of exams take more time than for average students. Assessment must be utilized for supporting learning and not for penalizing learners, especially those learners who are most disadvantaged<sup>47</sup>.

This implies, amongst other things, avoiding the temptation to over-emphasize the importance of standardized outcomes in relation to pre-established targets of content knowledge relying on narrow assessment methods, often used for comparing students. This kind of information does not necessarily correlate with adult success in social, vocational or other indicators of quality of life<sup>48</sup>. This is especially the case when summative assessment is the only means of evaluation. In contrast, formative assessment techniques *for* learning (personalized, multi-faceted feedback), have been shown in Europe to work as a much more effective tool to give feedback on the participation and achievement of learners, to allow teachers to identify areas for development and to plan their lessons, to motivate learners, and to develop pupils' skills of reflection<sup>49</sup>.

In fact, the basic education system in Finland does not include national testing at all. In China, there are reforms aimed at taking students' well-being and healthy development into account in assessments, instead of just academic credits alone. However, the examination system is seen by different internal and external stakeholders as a way to ensure equity by enabling successful students to get better job opportunities. In the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries, it has been noted that information about students' marks was not confidential, creating competition between student.

#### 4. Ensuring coherence throughout the curriculum framework

It is clear that the components of curricula and education systems are highly interrelated and dynamic. For this reason, it is essential that an inclusive curriculum reform be developed from a holistic perspective and in a sound and coherent way, taking into account the entire curriculum framework. In this context, a curriculum framework may be described as “documents that provide general orientations on what knowledge, competencies, values and attitudes should be incorporated into school programs and how this should be done, by stipulating the parameters to be considered when setting curriculum goals and contents, when choosing learning methods and materials and for assessment of the attainment of education standards”<sup>50</sup>.

The curriculum framework has also been defined as a foundational basis and constitution for the education system, by combining: (i) the main regulatory framework for decisions that incorporate the broad orientations of why, what, how and how well students should

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<sup>47</sup> Black, P., & Wiliam, D., Lessons from around the world: How policies, politics and cultures constrain and afford assessment practices. *Curriculum Journal*, 16(2), (2005), pp. 249–261; Wiliam, D., The meanings and consequences of educational assessments. *Critical Quarterly*, 42(1), (2000) 105.

<sup>48</sup> Peters, S., *Inclusive Education: an EFA strategy for All Children*, Washington DC, World Bank, 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Watkins, A. (Ed.), *Assessment in Inclusive Settings: Key Issues for Policy and Practice*. Odense, Denmark, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2007.

<sup>50</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Training Tools for Curriculum Development: A Worldwide Resource Pack*, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2009.

learn; and (ii) a quality reference in the form of standards-setting documents<sup>51</sup>. In particular, these broad orientations consider: (i) why students should learn, by defining the aims and goals of general education and learning, as well as the specific learning objectives; (ii) what students learn, by establishing the content of learning, including the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired and developed as well, as the learning areas, objectives and issues; (iii) how students learn, by deciding on the concept of learning e.g. how time is allocated, how learning is developed, how extra-curricular activities are considered; and (iv) how well students should learn by setting the performance levels, the learning outcomes, as well as the means of assessment<sup>52</sup>.

Several countries, especially in Northern Europe, are now aiming to provide more holistic, coherent and flexible curriculum frameworks as tools for inclusion. They are attempting to provide a more diverse, common and combined range of formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities through multiple and connected pathways, settings, provisions and processes while attempting to move away from segmented institutions, pedagogical specializations and strict time constraints. This is based on the fundamental principle of lifelong learning across all educational pathways and provisions, in terms of access, processes, and outcomes, and starting (crucially) from early childhood care and education. Moreover, these frameworks are strengthened by combining both centralized and decentralized components in this process<sup>53</sup>.

The Netherlands, for example, has identified some key guiding criteria for developing coherent, high-quality curricula, namely relevance (based on a shared and convincing need), consistency (designed in a logical and integral way), practicality (usable in practical settings), effectiveness (achieving desired outcomes) and scalability. In China, various challenges have been identified with respect to curricular reform: (a) the new curriculum encourages innovation and diversity, but the majority of innovations are still in a formative stage and are yet to achieve maturity at the systematic and professional level; (b) teachers' training and professional development in line with the curricula still lack policy support; and (c) intense competition in entrance examinations remains a major obstacle in promoting the new curriculum policy<sup>54</sup>.

### *The purposes of the curriculum*

When conceptualizing an inclusive curriculum in light of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, the second main concern that the interregional discourse has tended to focus on are the fundamental purposes underlying an inclusive curriculum as a tool for inclusion. The national vision of the curriculum and its expression in an appropriate framework informs critical decisions with respect to other levels and dimensions of the system. Therefore, there is a permanent

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<sup>51</sup> Acedo, C., *Developing Curriculum Frameworks in Post-conflict Settings to Establish Standards of Quality*, Presentation given at the 2011 World Comparative Education Societies Annual Conference on "Measuring Quality Education in Crisis Contexts", Montreal, Canada, May, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Halinen, I., & Jaervinen, R. "Towards inclusive education: the case of Finland". *Prospects*, UNESCO IBE, 38(1), 2008, pp. 77–98.

<sup>54</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Mission Report of Presentations given at the Chinese-European Conference on Curriculum Development*, *op cit.*, 2010.

need for a close and careful look at how curricula are conceptualized and organized. This allows for a sound way of designing and developing reforms linked to core definitions of the kind of society which is sought and the expected role of education in society. At the macro level, curriculum change has been seen across many regions as a key foundation of educational concerns and reforms, in terms of policies, curriculum philosophy and content, classroom methodology and teacher education and professional development<sup>55</sup>.

High-quality curricula are seen as reinforcing education as an instrument for social mobility and change, combating poverty and inequity. An inclusive curriculum may be seen as a tool to encourage both equity and quality, and to support competencies for citizenship education and personal development, as well as a crucial factor in the improvement of the welfare of the poorest population by supporting key social and economic policies with a view to attaining social cohesion and inclusion. In the Arab States, “curriculum development and reform has been noted as a key engineering endeavour during all periods of reform, to reflect the new political and social realities”<sup>56</sup>.

At the classroom level, one perspective of an inclusive curriculum is that of a common learning process and an empowering pedagogical tool for teachers<sup>57</sup>. This view perceives an inclusive curriculum as one which provides the scope for teachers to ensure that the opportunities provided for learning are relevant to all learners within the community of a class or school. From this perspective, an inclusive curriculum aims to bridge all dimensions and levels of learning, while also providing access to lifelong learning opportunities from a rights-based perspective for achieving EFA goals. It also aims to support the diversification of teaching methods and learning materials to address the cultural, social and individual diversities of all learners. More broadly, it creates an essential tool for putting inclusive education into practice at the classroom level, while incorporating the multiple levels (i.e. global, national, local and school levels) and dimensions involved in the process.

### *The relationship between national, local and school interests*

When conceptualizing an inclusive curriculum in light of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, the third main concern which the interregional discourse has tended to consider is the appropriate relationship between national, local and school interests, with a particular focus on school-based curriculum.

Across all regions, there is a pressing need to develop curriculum content and pedagogical practices that recognize how everyone brings different prior learning and life experiences to the classroom. A “glo-local” curriculum can help create an effective learning environment that fosters such content and practices by respecting and integrating global, national and local realities, expectations and needs, as well as understanding and recognizing the relevance of individual learners’ experience as they participate in the community and culture of a school.

With this in mind, there are currently two main prototypes of curricular reform that stand out across the regions. The first model of reform focuses on the processes of curriculum

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<sup>55</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Training Tools for Curriculum Development: A Worldwide Resource Pack*, op cit., 2009.

<sup>56</sup> World Bank, op cit., 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Halinen, op cit., 2010.

development and implementation through phases of adoption, implementation and then generalization. This model generally takes a top-down approach, which is adopted by education authorities. It usually entails assuming a centralized planning approach, which may create tensions between the prescriptive, implemented and attained curriculum. The resulting gap has been described as the “hidden curriculum”<sup>58</sup>. Another concern is that this model risks creating a perception of isolation between the different actors involved, and, therefore, resistance to change.

The second model of reform focuses more on the dynamic of actors in terms of phases of appropriation, the generalization of practices and the integration of the reform within pedagogical routines. This interactive and dynamic relationship between teachers, schools and communities is increasingly understood as critical to all inclusive transformative curricular processes, moving away from previous perceptions of the school and its stakeholders as “non-controversial recipients” of curricular reform. In a review of sixteen different national contexts, it was concluded that efforts for making school management participatory and consultative, involving teachers, parents and other stakeholders, was crucial to promote inclusive schools<sup>59</sup>. In contrast, in one study of the introduction of inclusive assessment approaches, it was found that professional development had little effect if participating teachers were later hindered by the context of the teaching environment and by beliefs about teaching and learning<sup>60</sup>.

Various combinations of these two models have also been put forward. For example, in Morocco, a vast national initiative of curriculum reform is taking place at all learning levels of compulsory schooling engaging diverse actors of the educational system<sup>61</sup>.

Likewise, in the Asian context, it has been suggested that a limited national core curriculum of essential knowledge, goals, and values should be defined, while the delivery of this standard curriculum should be adapted through the promotion of teaching processes such as differentiated instruction, multilevel instruction, teaching to multiple intelligences, etc<sup>62</sup>. Such curriculum differentiation intends to help teachers respond to the diversity among learners in any one classroom by using student characteristics such as student background, experiences, interests, learning modalities, abilities, and needs. In other words, different content can be used in different ways, with different materials and methods, through innovation, flexibility and adaptation, in order to teach the required curriculum<sup>63</sup>. Along these lines, flexibility acts as a strong tool to democratize learning opportunities within robust conceptual frameworks, guidelines and follow-up mechanisms implemented by the

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<sup>58</sup> INRP, *Observations des pratiques d'évaluations et des curricula* (OPEC) [Observations on assessment practices and curricula], Consultative Committee Meeting at the National Institute for Pedagogical Research (INRP), 1 June 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Govinda, R., *op. cit.*, 2009.

<sup>60</sup> Lock, C., & Munby, H., *Changing the Practice of Student Assessment: One Teacher's Challenge*, *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 46(3), 2000.

<sup>61</sup> Roegiers X., *op. cit.*, 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Asian Development Bank, *op. cit.*, 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Ahuja, A., *Staring Down the Curriculum Monster: Using Curriculum Differentiation to Respond to Students' Diversity*, *EENET Enabling Education Asia Newsletter*, (1), 2005, pp. 18–19.

government at the central level, precisely with a view to ensuring equity at large (in terms of access, processes, participation and outcomes).

It is clearly necessary to achieve a sound combination of national strategies, school-based curricula and local concerns, while facilitating genuine dialogue and cooperation among the different actors at national, local and school levels and across multiple sectors. In particular, it is crucial for teachers, parents and students to work together actively. Indeed, cooperation and interdisciplinary teamwork appears essential for extending and enhancing the educational provision in ways necessary to address the increasing diversity amongst learners in schools (e.g. collaborative teaching), making an asset of the expertise of people with different perspectives from their own.

In Latin America and several Asian countries, for example, education systems are now beginning to implement some of these approaches, e.g. by allowing a certain percentage of the standard curriculum in basic education to be adapted to the local context<sup>64</sup>. In the Arab region, some decentralization of curricular development and reform of content has taken place, although curricula are generally more centralized, e.g. content, disciplines and school class times are prescribed at the national level<sup>65</sup>. In some European countries, a core curriculum with complementary provisions that provide room for flexibility and/or guidance on various contents has been developed. In other European contexts, a common national core curriculum has been implemented, outlining common goals as foundations upon which local curricula are built<sup>66</sup>.

In China, curricular reforms aim to diversify schools through school-based curriculum within the national framework for basic education policies. This involves giving schools and teachers the opportunities to decide their own curricular contents, and allowing students to select subjects, design their own future and develop their personalities. The reforms have also entailed the provision of comprehensive fieldwork activities (research-oriented learning, community service, etc.) and new innovations in senior high school curriculum systems, such as compulsory common modules complemented by elective ones. As such, a school-based curriculum allows schools, teachers and students to familiarize themselves with their own local conditions, traditions and social development. It is also motivating for schools and teachers to participate in the reform and develop a richer and more diverse curriculum. From this perspective, teachers are seen more as co-learners as well as co-developers of the curriculum, and schools are perceived as learning communities<sup>67</sup>.

Taking another example, the Irish National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) activities are based on three complementary levels: the learning environment (early childhood settings, schools and classrooms); the committee level (specialist representative committees, who develop aims, objectives and learning outcomes, as well as design assessments and build consensus) and; the knowledge and research level (research and knowledge networks). These three levels work together on developing

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<sup>64</sup> UNESCO IBE, *E-forum: From inclusive education to inclusive curricula*, op cit., 2009.

<sup>65</sup> World Bank, op cit., 2008.

<sup>66</sup> UNESCO IBE, *E-forum on "From inclusive education to inclusive curricula"*, op cit., 2009.

<sup>67</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Mission Report of Presentations given at the Chinese-European Conference on Curriculum Development*, op cit., 2010.

curriculum policies both *across* and *within* the traditional interactions among national, local and school interests. Implementing this approach has apparently allowed teachers to have access to evidence and also generate evidence, has given students room to actively participate in the process, made curriculum discussion a public concern, and allowed schools and classrooms to lead the change rather than respond to change. As a consequence, this has also allowed more risks to be taken and achieved a greater balance between the national and the local levels<sup>68</sup>.

Numerous international research studies have identified the advantages of an interactive curriculum planning and implementation process. For example, dialogue and cooperation has been shown to create commitment and willingness to act according to common guidelines, while also providing enough time and clear, local school structures for discussing the basic values, attitudes and practical arrangements for responding to the different needs of students. It has been suggested that it allows schools to make better use of the collective knowledge, expertise and creativity present within their community; e.g. “effective practices” of inclusive education can be effectively recognized and shared<sup>69</sup>.

However, many limitations have also been identified, even with a combination of the two prototypes. For example, without the local openness, competencies and skills to adapt and develop curricula to local and more inclusive contexts, curriculum differentiation can have a limited effect in practice. Indeed, the building of teachers’ capacity to be curriculum co-developers is seen as an important part of this process<sup>70</sup>. Similarly, it has proven difficult to adapt a curriculum if it is undermined by a rigid assessment system that does not take into account curricular adaptations. In China, other challenges in terms of implementation have also been identified, e.g. gathering organizational support at the different administrative levels, while implementing capacity development activities around the new curriculum policy, in terms of funds for training and research programmes at national and local levels, setting up of resources centres at the local levels, etc<sup>71</sup>.

### *Supporting the development of the curriculum*

A fourth main concern that emerges from the international discourse is the importance of understanding how the curriculum interacts with other elements of the education system, and how, as a consequence, an inclusive curriculum must be supported and empowered by education systems as a whole. Some of the key areas of these discussions, i.e. those most regularly featured in interregional discussions, are highlighted below, namely legislation, public policies, and teacher education.

Legislation is seen as playing an essential part in the efforts towards inclusion. In particular, it can provide: the combining of principles and rights in order to create a framework for inclusion (e.g. legislation for inclusion, alongside anti-discrimination

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Ainscow, M., & Miles, S. (2008). Making Education for All inclusive: Where next? *Prospects*, 145(1), pp. 15–34.

<sup>70</sup> Asian Development Bank, *op cit.*, 2010.

<sup>71</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Mission Report of Presentations given at the Chinese-European Conference on Curriculum Development, op cit.*, 2010.

legislation, in schools and the workplace); the reform of elements in the existing system, which constitute major barriers to inclusion (e.g. policies preventing specific groups to attend their local school); the mandating of fundamental inclusive practices (e.g. schools should educate all local children); and the establishment of procedures and practices to facilitate inclusion (e.g. a flexible curriculum, community governance)<sup>72</sup>.

For example, article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is seen as a significant step in binding governments to guaranteeing free, high-quality and inclusive education systems for all. Moreover, this legal obligation, which encompasses, among other key elements, inclusive policies, systems and legal remedies, aims to achieve high-quality education, not only for learners with disabilities, but for all learners.<sup>73</sup> This represents an important paradigm shift from focusing on the problems of learners (the so-called medical model or defectology approach) to placing the focus on the provision of equitable learning opportunities for all learners, taking into account their specific needs and existing barriers.

It is also commonly agreed that an inclusive education system requires a high-level and visible policy commitment to inclusive education, promoting diversity as a way to enhance learning opportunities<sup>74</sup>. This commitment does not only have a symbolic significance but it also helps to orient all actors around a common goal of inclusion and supports a change in attitudes and culture towards inclusion. According to interregional research, a crucial step towards inclusion is to convince stakeholders that diversity is not a hindrance to the attainment of good learning outcomes by all students.<sup>75</sup>

It has been suggested that a policy commitment should take the form of a comprehensive, intersectoral National Action Plan, with immediate, transitional and long-term targets. These targets should be meaningful and measurable, with a clear timeline and statement of resources. For example, a clear plan of action could be constructed to enable the progressive transformation of specialized institutions into resource centres and to develop close collaboration between specialized and general education systems. Along these lines, policies should be backed up with adequate financial and human resources and a comprehensive needs analysis (based on statistical and qualitative tools) in order to enable strategic planning.

Another area of interregional consensus is that planning should be done by the government in active consultation with key partners; the curriculum is both a policy and technical issue involving multiple stakeholders from inside and outside the education system, as well as a continuous and dynamic development of processes and outcomes. "Understanding the articulation between the system's overall policies and school and classroom policies may allow the whole education sector to break the vicious circle of reciprocal demands made by governments on teachers and by teachers on governments"<sup>76</sup>. Along these lines,

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<sup>72</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Inclusive Education the Way of the Future: Reference Document*, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/3, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2008.

<sup>73</sup> UNESCO IBE, *E-forum on "From inclusive education to inclusive curricula"*, *op cit.*, 2009.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development]. *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge*, Paris, OECD, 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Braslavsky, C., *La prise en compte de l'interculturel dans les curricula* [Taking the intercultural into account in the curricula], Geneva, Switzerland, UNESCO IBE, 2001.

some Latin American experts have emphasized the development and implementation of “subjective policies”, i.e. the consideration and sharing of teachers’ personal and social narratives in order to better understand what they are thinking and doing as well as for developing a culture of trust within and outside the education system<sup>77</sup>.

The OECD has also recommended that teachers should be active agents in analysing their own practices and their own students’ progress, and should be involved in policy formulation<sup>78</sup>. Indeed, recognizing teachers as co-developers of an inclusive curriculum can support their ownership of a curriculum reform within their own local, national and regional context. It can foster greater respect for teachers and the teaching profession, and can ensure sustainable investment in the learning competencies of teachers within teachers’ professional development strategies<sup>79</sup>.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that in some European countries, certain level of policy-making autonomy was granted to schools and teachers in the past. However, trends seem to be now moving back towards more specification and prescription at the national level, especially in domains such as literacy and numeracy, and attention to continuous learning standards. These reforms aim to make the education system more focused and accountable, by creating structure, transparency and continuity, as well as providing more orientation and evidence. They also aim to provide a conceptual and methodological framework as well as strengthen public, professional and political debates about priorities for curriculum improvement and renewal<sup>80</sup>.

According to Roegiers, greater attention should be given to curriculum engineering as a basis for curriculum design, and more specifically, as a guideline for selecting curricular approaches that can make positive and lasting differences in learning processes and outcomes.<sup>81</sup> Within this vision, curricular approaches emerge as a cross-cutting dimension to syllabi development. In particular, curricular approaches also encompass pedagogies and assessment, which have been traditionally addressed outside the domain of curriculum. For example: are the assessment criteria and tools co-existing outside of the curriculum and presenting entrenched learning barriers to attain inclusion?; how do they contribute to the democratization of learning opportunities bearing in mind the diversity of cultural and social contexts, as well as learning profiles?

Across all regions, research findings show that the key factor for good learning outcomes is not only *what* is taught but *how* it is taught. For example, the quality of teaching can have a much more significant role in determining the learning outcomes of students than other often-mentioned challenges for quality, like class-size or class heterogeneity<sup>82</sup>. Teachers play a considerable role in creating inclusive environments for learning and will

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<sup>77</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Recommendations from the UNESCO IBE Council Forum on Inclusive Education and Inclusive Curricula*, *op cit.*, 2010.

<sup>78</sup> OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], *Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers—Final Report: Teachers Matter*, Paris, OECD, 2005.

<sup>79</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Recommendations from the UNESCO IBE Council Forum on Inclusive Education and Inclusive Curricula*, *op cit.*, 2010.

<sup>80</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Mission report of presentations given at the Chinese-European Conference on Curriculum Development*, *op cit.*, 12–16 April 2010.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Halinen, I., Savolainen, H., *op cit.*, 2009.

have a direct impact on how new curricula are implemented and how knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are shared and assessed.

It is also important to highlight that expectations with regard to teachers' roles have evolved across different interregional contexts, particularly in connection with issues of diversity and inclusion; "teachers are now expected to have much broader roles, taking into account the individual development of children and young people, the management of learning processes in the classroom, the development of the entire school as a "learning community" and connection with the local community and the wider world"<sup>83</sup>. Indeed, in China, the Netherlands and South Africa, effective professional development now aims to educate teachers to develop curricula as well as knowledge, skills and teaching approaches for diverse learners (e.g. skills for critical self-reflection, using individual learning plans to support students' welfare and development), build teacher communities and leaders, as well as create links back to research and other policies in terms of feedback and evaluation, amongst other things<sup>84</sup>.

It has been recommended that teachers should feel supported as well as challenged in relation to their responsibilities to keep exploring and developing effective ways of enhancing the learning of all students. In particular, teachers need to be recognized, engaged and supported to be professional curriculum co-developers, whose confidence, competencies, knowledge and positive attitudes can invaluablely reinforce the principles of inclusion and inclusive curricula<sup>85</sup>.

In contrast, in most regions of the world, many teachers are still under-trained, under-paid and work in difficult conditions. There have been numerous calls for governments to value and support the teaching profession through teacher education for inclusion and improve their working conditions<sup>86</sup>. Many of the new expectations and recommendations about inclusive teachers have not necessarily been considered in the principles of curricular reform, e.g. in school curricular content and timings, which can put pressure on teachers, as well as on their relationship with learners. For example, this could be the case in countries where teachers are not free to creatively adapt the curriculum based on local or individual needs, due to a strict curriculum that dictates the content of teaching and learning up to the everyday work in the classrooms. In some contexts, such creativity is even directly forbidden and differentiation from the expected is sanctioned by inspectors, even if it seems evident that the national level curriculum does not fit well with the local culture and conditions<sup>87</sup>.

Similarly, there is often a mismatch between basic and secondary curricular reforms and teacher education curricula. In most countries, preparation of a national curriculum is the task of the Ministry of Education, whereas the responsibility for designing teacher education curriculum may be left with academic institutions or different departments.

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<sup>83</sup> OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], *op cit.*, 2005.

<sup>84</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Mission Report of Presentations given at the Chinese-European Conference on Curriculum Development*, *op cit.*, 2010.

<sup>85</sup> Operti, R., Brady J., & Duncombe, L. Moving forward: Inclusive education as the core of Education for All. *Prospects*, 39(3), 2009, pp. 205–214.

<sup>86</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005—Education for All: The Quality Imperative*, UNESCO and Oxford University Press, Paris and Oxford, 2004; UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010*, *op cit.*, 2009.

<sup>87</sup> Halinen, I., & Savolainen, H., *op cit.*, 2009.

One example can be found in the current emphasis on wider competencies instead of solely focusing on subject-based knowledge. This view can be very new to many teachers compared to how they have been trained in relation to subject-based knowledge and how learning outcomes are defined<sup>88</sup>.

Taking this into account, the OECD have recommended that “teacher profiles need to encompass strong subjective matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, the capacity to work effectively with a wide range of students and colleagues, to contribute to the school and profession and the capacities to continue developing”<sup>89</sup>. These profiles should guide both pre- and in-service training, as well as continuous professional development.

### **Forging the agenda with respect to an inclusive curriculum**

In conclusion, despite a general consensus on a broadened concept of inclusive education and the key role of inclusive curricula in its attainment, developing and implementing inclusive curricula remains a significant challenge across all regions. A re-conceptualization of an inclusive curriculum in light of a broadened understanding of inclusive education may help stakeholders reflect upon various core curricular dimensions, connecting it to other efforts towards inclusion within the entire education system and related to other social sectors, as well as help find new ways of working together, across different dimensions, levels, regions, etc.

These reflections should aim to include key stakeholders from inside and outside the education system, be informed by evidence as well as bear in mind ideological considerations, and contribute to the clarification of concepts and strategies, as well as alternatives. Indeed, curriculum reform represents a concrete opportunity for developing a consensual and comprehensive vision of the education system. It should be seen as a major national undertaking, requiring, above all, strong political leadership, extensive consultation with stakeholders, technical expertise and the development of the capacity of civil servants and teachers.<sup>90</sup>

The following questions represent some of the major open debates in this regard:

- What do we consider an inclusive curriculum? In particular, what are its main rationale, objectives, strategies and contents? Who are the main stakeholders?
- Are key stakeholders willing to re-consider the role, objectives and scope of education? Are key stakeholders also ready to consider in more depth how teachers and students position themselves, and how they respond to processes of curricular reform? What are the incentives to do so in terms of access, retention and achievement?
- Are the “conventional” subjects of curricula relevant to the skills and competencies that young people need today? How should education face future cultural, social and economic challenges and opportunities, such as citizenship education and education for sustainable development?
- Do key stakeholders agree on the need for developing an inclusive curriculum from childhood to adult education, based on a perspective of education as a human right and a pillar of personal and social development? Have the following key dimensions been

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], *op cit.*, 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Acedo, C., *op. cit.*, 2011.

considered: developing a common conceptual framework, addressing gaps in curricula, establishing common core competencies, facilitating the navigability between the different tracks and promoting diverse strategies and options for students' learning and assessment?

- How much are policy-makers, supervisors and teachers moving away from the objective-based tradition and engaging in more competency-based approaches? Can bridges and links be established between different approaches?

# Inclusive Assessment for Promoting the Development of Students' Competencies<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Since 2005, UNESCO IBE's Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (COP)<sup>2</sup> has held an annual e-forum on key themes of curriculum development, providing a unique opportunity amongst the COP members for interregional, multi-lingual and open discourse, with the support and facilitation of international experts. In recent years, the topics of competency-based approaches, inclusive education and curricula, and the role of teachers have been actively discussed by COP members, moderated by UNESCO IBE and experts.

The 2010 E-forum took place between 22 November–10 December 2010, focusing on the relevant and contested theme of “The Role of Assessment in the Development of Students' Competencies”. In particular, it aimed to facilitate the production and sharing of related curricular documents and materials, as well as the exchange of different regional and interregional perspectives on the discussion topic. There were many interesting messages and exchanges posted on the forum web-page, which are available online to view.<sup>3</sup> The forum was organized around a discussion paper, prepared by Hugo Labate, from which extracts have been provided below.

## The role of assessment

Braslavsky has argued that individuals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will need to walk into the unknown, to embrace uncertainty instead of holding on to certainties, and that to build themselves as subjects they will need to develop their competency and identity<sup>4</sup>. All over the world, educators have taken notice of these needs and efforts are now being made to build up the students' competency by updating curricula and promoting new teaching practices and materials. However, a dimension that is often overlooked in this process is assessment.

What is the role of assessment in developing competency? To assess competencies we have to look at evidence of students' ability to choose and combine learnt procedures in order to solve a new problem in an appropriate way. The following discussion will highlight some of the challenges and present some suggestions for finding and putting in

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: H. Labate, *Discussion Paper: The Role of Assessment in the Development of Students' Competencies*, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The Community of Practice in Curriculum Development is a platform where the issues of curriculum change can be jointly discussed and implemented within the framework of a holistic approach for determining and implementing the goals of Education for All (EFA). It was set up in July 2005 by the IBE in conjunction with curriculum specialists from different regions of the world.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO IBE, *E-forum: The Role of Assessment in the Development of Students' Competencies*, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Braslavsky, C., *Re—haciendo escuelas: hacia un nuevo paradigma en la educación latinoamericana*. [Reshaping Schools: Towards a New Paradigm in Latin American Education], Aula XXI Santillana—Convenio Andrés Bello, Buenos Aires, Bogotá, 1999.

place assessment models that can foster the development of competencies and intellectual autonomy.

In dealing with the issue of assessment, however, it is important to consider as well that it is an influential component of a comprehensive curriculum vision. As aptly put by Boud, students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching; however, they cannot escape the effects of poor assessment<sup>5</sup>. He goes on to state that assessment can often have more impact on learning than teaching materials. Crossouard reminds us that certain research suggests that educational assessment is powerful in shaping individuals' identities because feedback given by schools as well-established social institutions helps to build (or not) our own self-esteem and to strengthen (or not) our self concept in the direction of social inclusion<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, the impact on practices and initiatives linked with assessment is determined at least as much by culture and politics as it is by educational evidence and values. Black and Wilian argue that these practices depend strongly on the cultural context of a country<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, to start a discussion about assessment and competencies means to open debates that go beyond the scope of technical decisions at the level of education ministries. Paraphrasing Perrenoud, the problem about assessment is whether it has a formative intention or a selective (and potentially exclusive) intention, and that is a highly political issue, not a technical one<sup>8</sup>.

### *Inclusive curricula and assessment for promoting the development of students' competencies*

An inclusive curriculum accommodates the needs of all learners and aims to successfully educate all learners while celebrating the resulting diversity<sup>9</sup>. Above all, the curriculum has to achieve these purposes for all learners equally. Consequently, the curriculum should be:

- Structured and yet capable of being taught in such a way as to allow the participation of all learners.
- Underpinned by a model of learning that is in itself inclusive; it needs to accommodate a range of learning styles and to emphasize skills and knowledge that are relevant to students.
- Sufficiently flexible to respond to the needs of particular learners, communities and cultural and linguistic groups.

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<sup>5</sup> Boud, D., *Assessment and Learning: Contradictory or Complementary?* in P. Knight, (Ed.) *Assessment for Learning in Higher Education*, London, Kogan Page, 1995, pp. 35–48.

<sup>6</sup> Crossouard, B., *A Sociocultural Reflection on Formative Assessment and Collaborative Challenges in the states of Jersey*. *Research Papers in Education*, 24(1), March 2009, pp. 77–93.

<sup>7</sup> Black, P., & Wilian, D., *Lessons from Around The World: How Policies, Politics and Cultures Constrain and Afford Assessment Practices*. *The Curriculum Journal*, 16(2), June 2005, pp. 249–261.

<sup>8</sup> Perrenoud, P., *L'évaluation des élèves. De la fabrication de l'excellence à la régulation des apprentissages* [Student evaluation: From the making of excellence to the regulation of learning], Brussels, De Boeck University, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Operti, R., & Duncombe, L., *Inclusive education and inclusive curriculum: Moving the EFA agenda forward*, Paper presented at the colloquium on "Écoles en mouvement et réformes: enjeux, défis et perspectives—États des lieux et questions curriculaires", organized by the UNESCO Chair on Curriculum Development, Montreal, Canada, 14–16 April 2010.

- Structured around varying levels of entry skills, so that progress can be assessed in ways that allow all learners to experience success<sup>10</sup>.

As a possible assessment vision that could sustain the development of competencies in the individuals, Moss and Godinho propose that an “authentic” assessment is:

- culturally and socially *inclusive* and developmentally appropriate;
- *rich*, because it values different facets of student learning, e.g. social competences, thinking etc.—facets which are difficult to assess, especially through traditional means.
- *relevant* as it connects with students’ learning and life experiences.
- *useful*, because it assists to make valid, reliable judgments; informs and reflects the teaching program, and
- *integrated* with the other processes happening in classroom contexts<sup>11</sup>.

The search for an inclusive assessment that can promote the development of competencies may be seen to contrast with the selective rationale that has informed traditional practices of assessment to date. The progress for more inclusive assessment practices may require changes at several levels, including the development of new professional relationships amongst teachers, between them and the schools, and with students. At the same time, the community at large will need to revise what kind of assessment is considered acceptable. [...]

*Assessment is usually a naturalized curriculum practice, and changing it is a challenge for policymakers*

Teachers, as well as the wider community, have implicit theories and assumptions on what counts as a “good assessment”, and these mental models have developed all along their own history as students, making the ideas “natural” and resistant to change.

Pajares has argued that teachers’ conceptions are a product of their educational experiences as students, suggesting strongly that similar conceptions might be found in both teachers and students<sup>12</sup>. For example, teachers (and also students) usually think that testing is equivalent to authentic assessment. Changing the norms [and habitual practices] that exist within a school is difficult to achieve, particularly where there are many competing pressures and practitioners tend to work alone in addressing problems.

The idea that authentic or formative assessment is performance-based and mindful of the students’ learning modalities, styles and intelligences is quite challenging<sup>13</sup>. Moves

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<sup>10</sup> UNESCO IBE. *Inclusive Education the Way of the Future: Reference Document*, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/3, UNESCO IBE, Geneva, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Moss, J., & Godinho, S. *From profiles to rich tasks: the situated nature of “authenticity” in the context of reforming curriculum and assessment practices*, Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Glamorgan, 14–17 September 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Pajares, M.F., Teachers’ beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research* 62(3), 1992, pp. 307–332, in G. Brown, G. Hirschfeld, Students’ Conceptions of Assessment: Links to Outcomes. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 15(1), March 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Coil, C. “Tools for Teaching and Learning in Integrated Classrooms”, in J. Moss, & S. Godinho, *From profiles to rich tasks: the situated nature of “authenticity” in the context of reforming curriculum and assessment practices*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Glamorgan, 14–17 September 2005.

towards inclusion may not always be understood or welcomed where people are used to segregated systems, or where educators are fearful of their ability to cope with diversity. Government agencies and civil society organizations need to work together to promote inclusive education—it is not only a matter for educationalists, but for advocacy organizations, families and communities, professional associations, researchers, teacher educators and service providers. It is necessary to mobilize opinion in favour of inclusion and to begin a process of consensus-building at an early stage<sup>14</sup>.

A distinction can be made between assessment practices that seek to compare individuals with each other (assessment with reference to a normal distribution or norm-referenced) and those that seek to collect evidence and make judgment on the extent and nature of progress towards the performance requirements set out in a standard (assessment with reference to a standard or criterion-referenced)<sup>15</sup>. The first kind (norm-referenced) is associated with the assumption that there will “always” be a proportion of students that fail, no matter how good the teaching received has been, and regardless of the diverse starting points of the students. Carrying out assessment under the weight of this assumption helps to sustain exclusion.

Assessment formats and grading scales are examples of curriculum mechanisms stabilized by social conventions. If a society does not understand a new policy, even a well-intended reform cannot be sustained.

Students’ parents interact with the information produced in assessment through aggregated indicators expressing the outcomes of their children in a scale, whether in number grades or letter grades. The grades condensate the global judgment of the teacher; as the teacher expects to be consulted or challenged about the grade that s/he has given each student, s/he dedicates a lot of time and energy to provide enough evidence to issue the grade (summative assessment, or assessment for certification). A formative assessment requires instead to gather evidence of the students’ performance to change teaching in a way to satisfy the learning needs of students, to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there. In this sense, to practice formative assessment means to dedicate time and energy to give students a feedback that is helpful for them in advancing learning. However, Perrenoud proposes that the opposition between summative and formative assessment is a false dilemma, as in fact the question is how to use the same data for different purposes<sup>16</sup>. While the course is happening, data are re-invested in the teaching strategies, and when the course finishes, a global appreciation of the work done can be determined.

Assessment is usually restricted to what is easy to test and grade. This practice sends “hidden messages” to students that lead them to adopt learning approaches useful to pass exams, but not to achieve deeper understanding.

Some assessment formats, such as multiple-choice or short-answer exams, are chosen for practical reasons, e.g. they are considered statistically sound and therefore deemed fair and reliable. However, this may not mean that they are valid as evidence of deep

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<sup>14</sup> UNESCO IBE, *op cit.*, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Hagar, P., Athanasou, J., & Gonczi, A., “Assessment Technical Manual” in McDonald, R. et al, *New Perspectives on Assessment. Studies in Technical and Vocational Education*, Paris, UNESCO, 1995, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Perrenoud, P., *op cit.*, 1998.

and sustainable learning. For Scallon, a competency cannot be inferred from an exam made up of a lot of short-answer or multiple choice questions<sup>17</sup>. A competency can only be demonstrated if the individuals have to make a concrete production where they themselves have to give it a structure. A “production” is a generic term covering writing compositions, gym routines, musical performance, oral presentation, etc. The demonstration of competency is a complex phenomenon that has to be looked at from different angles (dimensions, criteria). Teachers have to mark the strong and weak spots of the performance, and follow over time the progression of each individual. This poses a problem for certification purposes: how to express in a concise form the judgment about a complex performance in such a way to give it a grade.

*Assessment used as a quality-assurance device poses particular challenges to practices that foster competencies and inclusion*

Broad scale testing has practical and symbolical effects, some of them negative, such as leaving particular students excluded from further education, branding negatively some schools as “bad” or inclining teachers to “teach toward testing” rather than teaching the curriculum, and also some positive effects, such as a demonstration of public commitment through high expectations for all students or incentives for school improvement.

When the outcomes of a test have a high level of impact on educational actors, students often feel the impulse to do whatever it takes to succeed; this does not always mean learning. Black and Wilian report that in the US, following the “No Child Left Behind” Act, each school is judged to be making “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) towards the goals if the proportion of students being judged as “proficient” on annual state produced tests exceeds the target percentage for the state for that year<sup>18</sup>. Failure to make AYP has severe consequences for schools and, as a result, many schools and districts have invested both time and money in setting up systems for monitoring what the teachers are teaching and what students are learning. In order to ensure that teachers cover the curriculum, most districts have devised “curriculum pacing guides” that specify which pages of the set texts are to be covered every week (and sometimes each day).

Harlen states that the use of high-stakes testing is found to be associated with teachers focusing on the content of the tests, administering repeated practice tests, training students in the answers to specific questions or types of question, and adopting transmission styles of teaching<sup>19</sup>. In such circumstances, teachers make little use of formative assessment to help the learning process. The result of this focus on passing tests is that test scores rise—at least as long as the tests for which students are trained are being used—but this rise in scores is not necessarily a rise in achievement.

When a country or state carries out a policy of standardized examinations, there are frequent gaps between the agencies respectively in charge of curriculum design and national examinations, each of them pursuing different objectives and responding to

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<sup>17</sup> Scallon G., *L'évaluation des apprentissages dans une approche par compétences*. [Assessing learning using a competency-based approach ], Brussels, De Boeck University, 2<sup>e</sup> ed. 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Black, P., & Wilian, D., *op cit.*, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Harlen, W., Teachers’ Summative Practices and Assessment for Learning—Tensions and Synergies, *The Curriculum Journal*, 16(2), June 2005, pp. 207–223.

different logic frameworks (curriculum relevance vs. assessment validity). Curriculum experts usually take a one-sided view of assessment as a part of the curriculum process, as seen in the many recommendations present in curriculum materials directed towards assessment practices. These recommendations are usually in line with a constructivist theory of learning, advocating for “authentic” assessments that should be performance-based, and used for formative purposes. However, it is harder to find instances of a reversed, “upstream” flow of information, where curriculum designers make good use of exam outcomes to review and renovate the curriculum, and examples of explicit policies to feed national exam outcomes back into the process of improving curriculum documents and teaching materials are rather scarce. On the other hand, standardized exams do produce high, direct impacts on instructional practices, acting in fact as a “second curriculum”.

*Assessment for promoting competency means assessment of complex performances of students, and that means a challenge especially for teacher training policies.*

Assessment formats are rarely based on the observation of performance in quasi-authentic settings and could thus be too far-removed for providing evidence of competencies.

#### **Micro case—Algeria: Teachers’ ideas on competency-based assessment**

A group of teachers in Algeria had to discuss the following situation: in a written test, four students have to complete the missing parts of a dialogue. They had to read the expressions of one of the two speakers, and to supply the expressions of the other speaker in a blank line left for that purpose. The students A, B, C and D did the following:

- Student A replied in correct French, without spelling mistakes, but his answers did not make sense with the supplied parts of the dialogue.
- Student B provided adequate responses to the phrases in the dialogue, using well structured sentences, but with a lot of spelling mistakes.
- Student C also replied adequately to the given phrases, without spelling mistakes, but the sentences were not well formed.
- Student D did not write any answer on the blank lines; she instead produced a complete text below, where she rebuilt the whole dialogue in indirect speech, using very good French.

When teachers were asked about the score they would give each of the four students, they diverged most when grading student D: some of them gave her a 0, others a 10 (out of 10), but in general, for student D, the scores were consistently the lowest. However, when teachers were asked, “in what student would you have more confidence that he/she will be able to do tasks requiring language mastery?” they all pointed out student D. Therefore, they were giving the lowest score to the most competent student!<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Roegiers, X., *La refonte de la pédagogie en Algérie—Défis et enjeux d’une société en mutation* [The rewriting of pedagogy in Algeria—Challenges and stakes in an evolving society], Alger, UNESCO ONPS, 2005, pp. 107–124.

The example shows the gap existing between the understanding of competency at schools and in society at large, because when teachers were assessing the outcomes, they gave more importance to students doing what they were asked to do, rather than to the real ability of the student. The current assessment practices can therefore lead to the following contradiction: students go through 6 to 8 years of primary schooling, and when they meet in their everyday life a situation where they have to use reading, writing or numbers, they fail to do so, a situation sometimes called “functional illiteracy”.

Teachers have different levels of knowledge and expertise in the development and use of assessment instruments and practices that could enable them to implement more inclusive approaches when assessing the competency of their students, and the reliability and cost of these practices is a disputed issue.

The tools for assessing complex productions or to infer the degree of competency development can be looked at from two complementary perspectives: a) the form and content (rubrics, checklists, and descriptive scales) and b) the kind of outcome that will be communicated (analytical profile, global result, grade). As a result, formative assessment tools include a very broad set of strategies and schemes for gathering information, some of which can be seen in Table 1:<sup>21</sup>

**Table 1. Strategies and record-keeping practices for assessing competency**

<b>Type of Assessment</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Record Keeping</b>
Observations	Group work, problem solving, learning centres, excursions, incursions, developmental play, learning stories	Anecdotal notes, skills checklists, marking criteria, photography, video/audio/ digital recordings
Works Samples	Individual work items: concept mapping, drawings, activity sheets, writing tasks, reflections, visual representations, surveys, position papers	Portfolios (digital and hard copy) student profiles, scrapbooks, files
Performances	Dramatic enactments, debates, interviews, operas, raps, poetry, songs, dance, panel discussions	Marking criteria, rubrics, peer and self assessment, descriptive feedback—oral & written
Products	Models, Murals, collages, written projects, community projects, presentations, design briefs, PowerPoints	Marking criteria, rubrics, peer and self assessment, descriptive feedback—oral & written

<sup>21</sup> Moss, J., & Godinho, S., *op cit.*, 2005.

Knowledge, know-how and some cognitive skills can be verified in concrete particular situations and assessed in an atomistic way, but from the point of view of Jonnaert et al<sup>22</sup>, a competency has to be inferred from students' performance in problematic situations or complex tasks that require them to mobilize many of their resources. As put by Perrenoud, the situation does not need to be exceptional or overly difficult, but it should include a judgment, for example to decide if usual rules are applicable or if they have to be abandoned or adapted to the particular case at hand<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, competency assessment cannot replicate the traditional model of knowledge examination; the school has to implement more assessments based in contextualized situations.

To help (especially novice) teachers to conduct a variety of observations of the student performance and production, assessment criteria in user-friendly formats would require to be produced by teachers in collaboration with experts, paying attention particularly to the labour conditions of teachers and to practical aspects of time and classroom management. Much of the training teachers need in relation to inclusive practice can take place in their ordinary initial training, or through short in-service training events.

Using assessment situations in a formative way to foster deep learning and achieve competencies may question current teaching practices and the teachers' role; some competencies could even be related to group performances, making it difficult to give individual grades. By selecting a formative assessment, a teacher is positioning him/herself as a learning partner with his/her students. This would entail that the teacher has to navigate between situations where s/he is a collaborator who shares her/his practice with learners (in a symmetric power relation) and other situations where s/he will be a judge of students' performances (a highly asymmetric power relation). To make assessment practices more inclusive, new ways of working with special educators, psychologists, social workers and medical professionals have to be identified and accepted by all stakeholders; however, the most important partners of all will be colleagues, parents and students themselves.

## Conclusion<sup>24</sup>

The discussions held during the E-forum revealed many interesting aspects of the complexity and multi-varied nature of the assessment process. The technical and conceptual issues in the design of instruments are no less important than the mindsets and assumptions about what counts as "good assessment". They show that the tension between assessing for selection and assessing for promoting learning is far from being solved.

Much of the exchange included information on particular contexts that can be used to draw an international picture of the different scales of assessment, and the relations between

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<sup>22</sup> Jonnaert, P., Ettayebi, M., & Defise, R., *Curriculum et compétences : un cadre opérationnel*. Brussels, De Boeck University, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Perrenoud, P., D'une métaphore à l'autre : transférer ou mobiliser ses connaissances ? [From one Metaphor to Another : Transferring or Mobilizing Knowledge?], in J. Dolz, & G. Wiggins, *A true test : Toward more authentic and equitable assessment*, Phi Delta Kappa, (70), 1989, pp. 703-714.

<sup>24</sup> Labate, H., *Final Digest: The Role of Assessment in the Development of Students' Competencies*, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2010.

assessment and the rest of the components of curriculum. These exchanges foster the development of a solid knowledge base to help national experts make decisions with a view to what is working or not working in other situations. In the words of one E-forum participant,

*[...] education systems whose pillars would be based on harmonization of educational content as well as teaching and assessment methods among a group of countries [...] would be the short-term solution to overcome the socio-economic constraints which hinder the development of future generations. Such a strategy relies on concerted actions [for example] the concerted creation of a resource bank available to all member countries.— Gombila Pierre Claver Tapsoba, Burkina Faso.<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

# **Inclusive Education: Regional Perspectives**

# The Basic Education in Africa Programme from the perspective of Inclusive Education<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Long associated with the integration of disabled students in regular classrooms, inclusive education has now a much wider significance. Toward a refined Education for All (EFA) agenda focused on achieving quality education for all, UNESCO defines inclusive education as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education.”<sup>2</sup> Aware of the challenges in education and the importance of inclusive education, 153 Member States have recognized the importance of a broadened concept of inclusive education that addresses the diverse needs of all learners and have been called upon to “adopt an inclusive education approach in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of education policies as a way to further accelerate the attainment of Education for All (EFA) goals as well as to contribute to building more inclusive societies.”<sup>3</sup>

Since the 48<sup>th</sup> UNESCO International Conference on Education (ICE) (Geneva, 2008), UNESCO—in particular, the International Bureau of Education (IBE) in coordination with field offices and other key partners in the field—has undertaken many initiatives to support the development of inclusive education in different regions of the world. This article demonstrates how the UNESCO-backed Basic Education in Africa Programme (BEAP), through its key features—principles, activities and initial outcomes—, contributes to enhancing inclusion, equity and quality in education in Africa. In particular, this article aims to demonstrate how the BEAP’s main implementation strategies, as well as various actions initiated under the BEAP have contributed to improve inclusion, equity and quality in education in the African region.

## Context

The foundations of the BEAP are rooted in the historical background of educational reform agendas in Africa. In 1990, at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, delegates from 155 countries agreed to universalize primary education before the end of the decade. In 1994, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the Conference of Ministers of Education of French-speaking Countries (CONFEMEN) highlighted the need to review curricula using a more competency-based approach. In 2000, in Dakar, 180 countries adopted the Education for All goals, including the objective to ensure access to all children to free and compulsory primary education by 2015. In the same year, at the Millennium Summit, 189 countries committed themselves to ensuring that all children complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. In 2000, at the 49<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Session in Bamako, Mali,

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by L. Ji, & O. Bégin-Caouette, UNESCO IBE.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris, UNESCO, 2005, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education*, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/5, Geneva, 28 November 2008.

the CONFEMEN proposed a major reform of basic education curricula, which would enhance the integration of societal issues and interdisciplinarity of curricula.

The unprecedented commitment to primary education has led to significant progress. For example, the number of out-of-school children has dropped by 33 million since 1999 and the share of girls who are not in school has declined from 58% to 54%<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, in sub-Saharan Africa, more than 15 countries are still far from achieving universal primary education<sup>5</sup>, with enrolment rates below 70%. It has been noted that there is a pressing need to initiate comprehensive curriculum programmes to accelerate the achievement of EFA goals, but also to anticipate and sustain the continuous development of human capital after the completion of primary education, in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

In 2009, the BEAP was established as a UNESCO-backed African programme based on the recommendations of various regional seminars.<sup>6</sup> The BEAP promotes the following main strategic objectives, among others: more coherent, equitable and inclusive basic education of a minimum duration of 9 to 10 years, the delivery of higher quality and relevant education to meet the needs of the African societies, as well as the adoption of a holistic and systemic approach to changing educational systems<sup>7</sup>.

Through the efforts and collaboration between many UNESCO entities, especially BRENDA and the International Bureau of Education (IBE), as well as national governments, various sister agencies and development partners, the BEAP was launched in The Gambia, Ethiopia and Cote d'Ivoire in 2008, in Tanzania, The Seychelles and Djibouti in 2009, in Burkina Faso and Mauritius in 2010, as well as in Uganda in 2011. The ongoing implementation of the Programme has already generated positive outcomes. In the participating countries, the BEAP has upgraded key educational actors' understanding of quality education issues and current trends, by providing them with capacity development, technical support, training tools and intensive courses on curriculum processes. One main strength of the BEAP lies in its implementation strategies, which include: partnerships, adaptation to and ownership by the country, leadership by the country core teams, and mobilization of global expertise and research findings.

### **Inclusion at the heart of the BEAP**

Social inclusion is linked to inclusive education, that is, the increased presence, participation and achievement of learners in curricula, culture and school organization,

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<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010—Reaching the Marginalized*, UNESCO and Oxford University Press, Paris and Oxford, 2009, p. 525.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008—Education For All by 2015, Will We Make It?* UNESCO and Oxford University Press, Paris and Oxford, 2007, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Seminars on Reforming Secondary Education in Africa in 2005 and 2007, organized by UNESCO's Regional Office for Education in Africa (BRENDA, 2005) and the World Bank (2007); the African Union's Second Decade for Education for Africa (2006); the High Level Seminar on Basic Education leading to the Kigali Call for Action (2007), as well as the Biennale of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) on Post-Primary Education (2008).

<sup>7</sup> BRENDA, UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *The Basic Education in Africa Programme. A Policy Paper—Responding to Demands for Access, Quality, Relevance and Equity*, Dakar, Senegal, 2009, p. 53.

as well as the restructuring of school practices in order to respond to the diverse needs of students, with special attention to those at risk of being marginalized<sup>8</sup>.

The BEAP Policy Paper states that “inclusion here means that all children and young people have equal opportunities of learning in the same school or in different types of schools, independent of their cultural and social backgrounds”<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, the BEAP “takes the most inclusive and comprehensive view of education”<sup>10</sup>. It further states that “a democratized vision for education [is] based on the principles of social justice, equity and social inclusion”<sup>11</sup>. Making these multiple references to inclusive education, the BEAP aims to contribute to a paradigm shift and enable various stakeholders to consider their actions in favour of inclusive education.

In light of this, inclusive education has been one of the main topics of discussion throughout the BEAP’s implementation. Indeed, in most countries where the BEAP has been launched, country core teams have been trained on how to develop more inclusive visions and practices of education. For example, the entry point of the BEAP in the Seychelles was “Developing policy and curriculum frameworks for inclusive education”, at the country’s request.

### *Equity in Education*

The recent OECD PISA Results show that, in countries where there are fewer disparities within the education system, students tend to have better learning achievements<sup>12</sup>. From this point of view, equity is a key concept to inclusion because, as asserted by Schleicher<sup>13</sup>, inclusive education requires a fair and equitable education system, teaching practices and resourcing that go beyond equal opportunities in a strict sense. It implies providing students who are at risk of being marginalized with more adapted support.

Aimed at providing all learners in Africa with quality basic education, the BEAP actively promotes equity in education. According to the BEAP Policy Paper “equitable diversity” is one of the underlying principles of the BEAP: “all learners should have equitable access to the same broad-based national basic education curriculum, and equal chances to complete the cycle and achieve core learning outcomes”<sup>14</sup>. Based on this principle, the BEAP has offered many opportunities for Member States to plan for the more equitable delivery of education. For example, at the BEAP launch in Mauritius, co-organized by UNESCO, UNDP, ADEA and the Ministry of Education of Mauritius in March 2010, inadequate educational practices “pushing out” children from schools were highlighted as a major issue. On this occasion, taking into account the reality lived by orphans, poor children, displaced children, children with special needs and those suffering from

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<sup>8</sup> Ainscow, M., & Miles, S., Making Education for All inclusive: Where next? *Prospects* 38(1), (2008), pp. 15–34.

<sup>9</sup> BREDA, UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> OECD, “Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes”, *PISA 2009 Results*, Vol. 2, 2009, p. 220.

<sup>13</sup> Schleicher, A., Securing quality and equity in education: Lessons from PISA, *Prospects*, 39(3), 2009, pp. 251–263.

<sup>14</sup> BREDA UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 21.

HIV/AIDS, participants from the small islands of East Africa recommended that a fund be created to support and retain marginalized/excluded children in schools. They also recommended that self-help structures should be put in place to provide child-to-child solidarity.

### *Extended basic education*

The BEAP's core aim is to extend and democratize basic education towards a minimum of 9 to 10 years, including 1 or 2 years of early childhood education<sup>15</sup>. It is considered that extended basic education contributes to enhancing equity, as it promotes a smoother transition between primary and lower secondary education and enables citizens to develop their full potential by catering for each learner's learning pace and needs<sup>16</sup>. The BEAP calls for African countries to learn lessons from other countries where there is a 9 or 10-year flexible and diversified basic education cycle ensuring that all children can acquire the essential competencies for their life as citizens<sup>17</sup>. In Africa, some countries have initiated such reforms. For example, Burkina Faso has developed a 10-Year Basic Education Development Plan (PDDEB) in order to raise the general level of education, increase the enrolment rate to 70% in basic education, reduce inequalities and improve relevance, quality and effectiveness of basic education<sup>18</sup>. Results are considered to be encouraging: between 2001 and 2005, the gross enrolment rate increased from 42% to 56%, the repetition rate dropped from 15% to 10% and literacy rate increased from 50 to 58%.

In all countries where the BEAP has been launched, capacity development has been provided on how to extend basic education in Africa. All of the BEAP countries have expressed their engagement towards reviewing school systems and curricula to offer more comprehensive basic education. In line with the BEAP's vision, in September 2010, the Malian government decided to implement a continuous 10-year primary cycle. In the long run, this reform will imply ongoing adaptation of curriculum, teacher education, student assessment and other improvements.

### *Early childhood care and education*

Encompassing the period of human development from prenatal through the transition into early primary grades<sup>19</sup>, early childhood development (ECD) or early childhood care and education (ECCE) is "the socialization, education and readiness for school, as well as the provision of basic health care and adequate nutrition, nurturing and stimulation within a

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Botswana Ministry of Education, *Curriculum Blueprint: Ten Years Basic Education Programme*, 2000. [http://www.moe.gov.bw/fileadmin/templates/docs/Blueprint\\_-\\_primary1.pdf](http://www.moe.gov.bw/fileadmin/templates/docs/Blueprint_-_primary1.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Halinen, I., & Järvinen, R, Towards inclusive education: the case of Finland, *Prospects*, 38(1), 2008, pp. 77–97.

<sup>18</sup> Ki, B.J., & Ouedraogo, L. H., Negotiating With Development Partners: Ten-Year Plan for the Development of Basic Education in Burkina Faso, *Prospects*, 36(2), 2006, pp. 205–221.

<sup>19</sup> The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, *Four Cornerstones to Secure a Strong Foundation for Young Children*, 2007. <http://www.ecdgroup.com/pdfs/2008-FLYR-E-CLR-SEP08.pdf>

caring environment for children<sup>20</sup>. Because the connections made in the brain at an early age affect the brain's capacity in the long term<sup>21</sup>, research shows that ECCE increases the chance of a child to participate and succeed in school and life. It also enhances health and nutrition, as well as reduces gender disparities and narrows socio-economic inequalities<sup>22</sup>. ECCE can greatly contribute to more equitable education in Africa. Considering that ECCE leads to better health, better employment, less dropout and less crime, education systems “must understand the fundamental need to start early with ECCE as the foundation for inclusion through its ability to offset family disadvantage and social inequality, and foster successful learning”<sup>23</sup>.

Less than half of the Sub-Saharan Africa countries have programmes for children under the age of 3, of which most are offered by private institutions<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, the BEAP suggests that, in a comprehensive basic education curriculum framework, countries should include at least one year of early childhood education<sup>25</sup>. Countries are developing ECCE at a various pace. For example, in Mauritius and in the Seychelles, all children have access to ECCE programmes. The Gambia has introduced a strategy to ensure access to ECCE services for the most vulnerable children. Still in its early stage, this strategy includes a child-friendly school initiative (CFSI), an ECCE school readiness project, a parental education programme, as well as training support for school authorities and ECCE model centre facilitators<sup>26</sup>. Mauritius, meanwhile, has been active for many years in early childhood education with its blue print for “A Republic fit for Children” in 2002, the setting up of an ECCE Authority in 2007, and its Eradication of Poverty program in 2008<sup>27</sup>.

### *The “Knowledge Hub” in Mauritius*

In the 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report on “Strong Foundations: ECCE”, it was suggested that Mauritius be the “hub” of an ECCE programme in Africa. In this context, the BEAP was launched in Mauritius in parallel with the Mauritius Africa Initiative on Early Childhood Care, Education and Development (MAI) by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, in partnership with UNESCO, UNDP, the ADEA Working Group on Early Childhood Development, and the Mauritian Regional Multidisciplinary

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<sup>20</sup> Gertsch, L., *Getting the basic right: contribution of Early Childhood Development to quality, equity and efficiency in education*. GTZ, Eschborn, Germany, 2009, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Mustard, F., “Experience-based Brain Development: Scientific Underpinning of the Importance of Early Child Development in a Global World”. in M.E. Young, *Early Child Development from Measurement to Action: A Priority for Growth and Equity*, Washington, World Bank, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Heckman, J., et al., “A New Cost-Benefit and Rate of Return Analysis for the Perry Preschool Program: A Summary”. in Reynolds, A., et al., *Cost-Effective Programs in Children's First Decade: A Human Capital Integration*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Asian Development Bank, *Strengthening Inclusive Education*, Philippines, Asian Development Bank, 2010, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO WCECCE, *Early Childhood Care and Education Report—Africa*, Paris, UNESCO, 2010, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> BREDA UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> UNESCO WCECCE, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 42.

<sup>27</sup> Bunwaree, V.K., *Speech at the opening ceremony of the Launching Workshop of the Mauritius-Africa Initiative/ Basic Education in Africa Programme*, Balaclava, Mauritius, 2010. [www.docstoc.com/docs/43516318/Highlights-for-Ministers-speech-22-March-2010](http://www.docstoc.com/docs/43516318/Highlights-for-Ministers-speech-22-March-2010)

Centre of Excellence<sup>28</sup>. This programme aims to enhance capacities of institutions and professionals to improve ECCE, and to provide evidence for policy dialogue. Based on a peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and on South-South/North-South cooperation approaches, this initiative will contribute to implementing inclusive, effective and comprehensive ECCE in Africa, addressing some specific issues such as gender equity<sup>29</sup>.

The coordination of the BEAP alongside the MAI clearly supports the role of ECCE in inclusive social and human development. It also illustrates the implementation principles of the BEAP: ensuring programme ownership at the national level; supplementing existing capacities, structures and initiatives; and coordinating international joint efforts among multiple stakeholders.

### *Community involvement*

Increasing the inclusiveness of education implies “mobilizing opinion in favour of inclusion and to begin a process of consensus-building at an early stage”<sup>30</sup>. For example, Soresi, Nota and Wehmeyer<sup>31</sup> show that in the case of disabled children, the collaboration and the involvement of families, teachers, peers, health services providers and volunteers can enhance participation and self-determination of disabled people in the school or work context. In the process of curriculum development, the participation and support of all beneficiaries and stakeholders is also necessary. The BEAP Policy Paper states that “the democratization of basic education requires optimal participation of different stakeholders in overall decision-making as well as in curriculum development and implementation”<sup>32</sup>. In the countries where the BEAP is being implemented, policy dialogue and technical cooperation have been carried out with multiple stakeholders. In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Education has initiated the Education Sector Development Program III (ESDP III) focusing on quality in education and the empowerment of the community. In other countries, the BEAP follow-up work plans include educational programme design, management and evaluation using a bottom-up approach, and community-based innovative fund mobilization strategies.

### *Mother tongue instruction*

Language being a barrier to education in many world regions, mother tongue instruction has proved helpful to improve the quality of learning outcomes, especially by facilitating parental support and communication between parents and school. From an individual

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<sup>28</sup> Mauritius Ministry of Education Culture and Human Resources, UNDP, UNESCO & ADEA, *Workshop Document for BEAP Launch in Mauritius*, 2010.  
[http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/COPs/News\\_documents/2010/1003BEAP\\_Mauritius/EN\\_P\\_03-10BEAP\\_Mauritius.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/COPs/News_documents/2010/1003BEAP_Mauritius/EN_P_03-10BEAP_Mauritius.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> UNDP, *Gender Dimension in Education Systems*, 2010.  
[http://un.intnet.mu/undp/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&catid=57&id=130&Itemid=124](http://un.intnet.mu/undp/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&catid=57&id=130&Itemid=124)

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Inclusive Education the Way of the Future: Reference Document*, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/3, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2008, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Soresi, S., Nota, L., & Wehmeyer, L., Community involvement in promoting inclusion, participation and self-determination, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(1), pp. 15–28.

<sup>32</sup> BREDA UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 25.

perspective, mother tongue instruction has a positive impact on cognitive abilities<sup>33</sup>. Children who receive instruction in their mother tongue live a smoother elementary school experience by understanding and adapting better to the school environment<sup>34</sup>. From a social perspective, mother tongue instruction bridges the gap between the education system and society<sup>35</sup>; it contributes to strengthening social and political harmony<sup>36</sup>.

In the African context, several experiences have shown that even if reforms are proposed, the implementation of mother tongue instruction may be extremely complex, especially if the public is not sensitized, and teachers and teaching materials are lacking<sup>37</sup>. Therefore, the BEAP encourages schools and families to exchange more frequently and also promotes the recognition of local and indigenous knowledge. These will contribute to improving the inclusiveness and equity of education in Africa.

### **The quality and relevance of education**

Inclusion is not merely about providing all children with equal access to education, but also meeting the need of every child for receiving more relevant and better quality education. In Africa, the insufficient quality of educational processes and outcomes causes many young people to leave school prematurely<sup>38</sup>. This key issue has prompted the development of the BEAP. There is a mismatch between the subjects taught in schools and the requirements of the world of work or higher education<sup>39</sup>. The BEAP has chosen to help enhance the quality and relevance of education by promoting “the development of an integrated and broad curriculum, which is outcome-oriented and covers a wider variety of skills and competencies, as an essential preparation of young people for life, for work, and for further learning”<sup>40</sup>. In Ethiopia, for example, the BEAP supported the promotion of Entrepreneurship Education (EE) as one of the top strategies that the Ethiopian government is pushing forward to meet the needs of the sizeable young population for better preparation for employment.

#### *Competency-based approaches*

The Education for All (EFA) goals, especially Goals 3 and 6, refer to the role of education in equipping learners with necessary competencies. In a growing knowledge society, students need to learn meaningfully how to put into action the knowledge they acquire.

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<sup>33</sup> Adetunberu, J.O., Oluwafoise, E.A, Implications of the teaching of social studies in the mother-tongue in the lower grades of Nigerian schools for teacher, *Ekiadolor Journal of Education*, 2(1), 1992, pp. 63–69.

<sup>34</sup> Iyamu, E.O.S., & Ogiegbaen, S.E.A., *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 103.

<sup>35</sup> Blake, T.M., Exploring the language of schooling, *Journal of Education*, 14(1), 2004, pp. 63–69.

<sup>36</sup> Enabling Education Network. “Language as an inclusive education issue”, *Newsletter*, No. 12, 2008. [http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/eenet\\_newsletter/news12/page8.php](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/eenet_newsletter/news12/page8.php)

<sup>37</sup> Kamwendo, G.H., “The Bumpy Road to Mother Tongue Instruction in Malawi”, *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development*, 29(5), 2008, pp. 353–363.

<sup>38</sup> BREDA UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Gakusi, A. E., “African Education Challenges and Policy Responses: Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the African Development Bank’s Assistance”, *African Development Review*, 22(1), 2010, pp. 208–264.

<sup>40</sup> BREDA, UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 18.

According to a number of experiences and studies carried out in Africa<sup>41</sup>, the use of a problem-solving approach and the integration of real life situations in learning have led to positive results, such as better and more equal performance of pupils. A competency-based approach can also serve to innovate curriculum vision, including reducing curriculum overload, connecting subjects and transforming the roles of teachers and learners<sup>42</sup>. In Europe, for example, the development of competencies—improved literacy and basic skills, more personalized and motivated learning—is considered to be fundamental to lifelong learning<sup>43</sup>.

The BEAP considers that “competencies include cognitive abilities, life and social abilities, and are defined within the context of countries reality”<sup>44</sup>. Acquiring these competencies aims at enabling students to face diverse types of real-life situations through the generation, mobilization and integration of diverse resources, such as knowledge, skills, attitudes and values and at increasing graduates’ chance of being included in society.<sup>45</sup>

Within this framework, the IBE led a 10-day sub-regional capacity development workshop in July 2009 at the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The IBE Training Tools for Curriculum Development were mobilized, including resources and learning activities on various approaches to curriculum design. Representatives from the BEAP countries are further aware of the need for considering more competency-oriented approaches in educational policy, planning and provision. At present, under the joint coordination of the BEAP partners—IBE, the UNESCO’s Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (BREDA) and Teacher Education Section (TED), the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) and the Open University of Tanzania (OUT)—, a Postgraduate Diploma in Curriculum Design and Development is set to be offered at TIE from the academic year 2011-2012 onwards. This Diploma, intended to develop professionals’ capacities to address curriculum issues, will include a specific module on the assets and risks of different approaches to curriculum design and development.

### *Curriculum reforms: the case of the Gambia*

The Gambia is ranked among the poorest countries in the world, where 45% of the population is young and most of them unskilled<sup>46</sup>. Since 1988, the Gambia has been engaged in a process of developing comprehensive basic education to include lower

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<sup>41</sup> See: Roegiers, X., Curriculum Reforms Guide Schools: But, Where to?, *Prospects*, 37(2), 2007, pp. 155–186; Bipouput, J.C., “The Contribution of The Competency-Based Approach to Education for All in Cameroon”, *Prospects*, 37(2), 2007, p. 216.

<sup>42</sup> Jonnaert, P., Masciotra, D., Barrette, J., Morel, D., & Mane, Y, Curriculum change and competency-based approaches: a worldwide perspective, *Prospects*, 37(2), 2007, pp. 187–204.

<sup>43</sup> Council of the European Union. Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States: Meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008 on Preparing Young People for the 21st century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools, *Official Journal of the European Union*, 2008. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:319:0020:0022:EN:PDF>

<sup>44</sup> BREDA UNESCO IBE, GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> R. Operti, (Ed.), *Open File: Curriculum change and competency-based approaches: a worldwide perspective*. *Prospects*, 37(2), June 2007.

<sup>46</sup> The Gambian Ministry of Education, *Curriculum Framework for Basic Education (Grades 1–9)*, Gambia, 2010, p. 65.

secondary education<sup>47</sup>. In addition, following the EFA goals, the Millennium Development Goals, the recommendations of the African Union and the Economical Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Gambia has initiated a major curriculum reform aimed at enhancing the quality and inclusiveness of teaching and learning. The BEAP has been committed to supporting this curriculum reform process through comprehensive capacity development for curriculum change<sup>48</sup>. Within this framework, in December 2008, the IBE provided the Gambian national curriculum core team with technical assistance in elaborating the country's first national curriculum framework for basic education. In December 2010, IBE and BREDA jointly contributed with technical inputs to the validation of this curriculum framework, which is ready for implementation.

With this reform, new educational structures, contents and practices will be established in order to enhance the quality of education. Basic education will be uninterrupted, including at least 1 year of early childhood education and a 9-year schooling period. Secondary education shall be available to all children who have the interest and need to pursue their studies. The new curriculum framework values approaches such as competency-based, outcome-based, and inquiry-based, as well as entrepreneurship education. They also emphasize the learning of mother tongues, English, French, Science, Mathematics, Social and Environmental Studies, Technology and Life Skills, as subjects which are relevant to learners' future studies or work<sup>49</sup>.

The reform also stressed the importance of meeting students' diverse learning needs by correcting the level of difficulty in learning. Statements such as "learning is a process that involves construction and the de-construction of knowledge and learners should be provided opportunity to actively take part in that process"<sup>50</sup> illustrate a student-centred approach. The framework calls for the mobilization of hands-on activities and real-life situations to increase the meaningfulness of learning. It also encourages teachers to work in a developmental perspective and vary their activities to cater for students' individual differences. The validation of the Gambian curriculum framework is a remarkable step forward towards more inclusiveness and enhanced quality in education.

### *The postgraduate diploma in curriculum design and development in Tanzania*

Capacity development for teacher training and curriculum development is a challenge for many African countries. The BEAP has been in favour of supporting the institutional development of centres for sub-regional curriculum change and capacity development. As UNESCO's institute specialized in curriculum issues, the IBE has started the implementation of long-term, sustainable, tailored and accredited capacity development programmes in curriculum design and development. A Postgraduate Diploma in Curriculum Design and Development (PGDCDD) has been successfully launched in August 2010 by the IBE, the

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<sup>47</sup> UNESCO IBE, *The Gambia*, World Data on Education, 2011. [www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/dans-le-monde/regions-de-lunesco/afrique/gambie/profile-of-education.html](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/dans-le-monde/regions-de-lunesco/afrique/gambie/profile-of-education.html)

<sup>48</sup> UNESCO IBE, "Technical validation of curriculum framework in The Gambia", UNESCO IBE, 2010. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/worldwide/countries-single-news-page/news/technical-validation-of-curriculum-framework-in-gambia-2/1457.html>

<sup>49</sup> The Gambian Ministry of Education, *op. cit.*, 2010.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Catholic University of Uruguay (UCU), the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC) as a yearly programme<sup>51</sup>.

In Africa, Tanzania's proposal of hosting an equivalent postgraduate diploma has been selected because of the country's leading role in curriculum reforms in East Africa and the long-term and in-depth involvement in the BEAP. The launch of the first PGDCDD in Tanzania is being planned for the academic year 2011-2012 as a joint initiative between the IBE, BRENDA, TED, TIE and OUT, supported by the Tanzania Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MOEVT). The PGDCDDs in Latin America and Africa target policy makers, experts from the national Ministry of Education teams (from numerous departments/areas/curriculum divisions), international civil servants, teachers, professors, managers, supervisors, educators and researchers.

The Diploma aims to enhance trainees' capacities to lead curriculum development and change by analysing educational contexts, promoting stakeholder consultation and participation, as well as implementing and monitoring curriculum strategies and processes. Participants will have access to the IBE Training Tools for Curriculum Development, which contain the following modules: Curriculum Change; Policy Dialogue and Formulation; Curriculum Design; System Management and Governance; Textbook and Material Development; Capacity Building for Curriculum Implementation; Processes of Curriculum Implementation; Curriculum Evaluation and Student Assessment; Inclusive Education; and Thematic Issues of Education for Sustainable Development, School-based Curriculum, Competency-based Approach and Pedagogy of Integration. In particular, the PGDCDD will stress the significant interrelations and dynamics between educational policies, curriculum development, teacher education and professional development, as well as student assessment/quality assurance, which should be aligned and harmonized for achieving effective quality improvement.

### *Teacher training*

Worldwide studies have shown that one of the most important factors of student achievement is the quality of teachers, which is visible through teacher education, licensing, hiring and professional development.<sup>52</sup> The participation of teachers is key to the design and implementation of educational reforms.<sup>53</sup> In particular, systemic approaches have been seen to improve teacher quality and effectiveness, for example in countries where policies for the professional development of teachers considered a range of implementation levels, while engaging various actors within the education system.<sup>54</sup>

Acknowledging these findings, the BEAP Policy Paper highlights that there is a need for teachers who can handle innovative approaches to learning and that education policies

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<sup>51</sup> See: UNESCO-IBE website, <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/areas-of-action/what-we-do/capacity-development/training-courses.html>; Catholic University of Uruguay's website, [www.ucu.edu.uy/Home/FacultadesyAreas/CienciasHumanas/Departamentos/Educacion/tabid/433/Default.aspx](http://www.ucu.edu.uy/Home/FacultadesyAreas/CienciasHumanas/Departamentos/Educacion/tabid/433/Default.aspx)

<sup>52</sup> McKinsey et al., *How the World's best performing school systems come out on top*, 2007.

[http://www.mckinsey.com/locations/UK\\_Ireland/~media/Reports/UKI/Education\\_report.ashx](http://www.mckinsey.com/locations/UK_Ireland/~media/Reports/UKI/Education_report.ashx)

<sup>53</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Final Report of the Regional Seminar on Building the capacities of curriculum specialists for educational reform*, Vientiane, Lao PDR, 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Acedo, C., Teacher Education and Accountability Policies for Improving Teaching Effectiveness in the Philippines, in M., Teresa Tatto, *Reforming Teaching Globally: Oxford Studies in Comparative Education*, Symposium Books, U.K., 2007, pp. 215–244.

should include “an integrated frame for teacher education, development and support”<sup>55</sup>. Throughout the BEAP process, the needs of countries for curriculum support, teacher development, school improvement and capacity development have been systematically assessed in order to inform national sector plans.<sup>56</sup> The results of such assessment confirm the needs for enhanced teacher qualification, strengthened teacher professional bodies, better reward of good teaching practices, etc. Therefore, the BEAP supports pre-service and in-service teacher training as a key component, recommending that teacher training institutes develop new working approaches and methodologies in order to accompany the in-country development processes.

### *Ongoing research processes*

The idea of a teacher performing research tasks is clearly beneficial to teachers’ continuous adaptation to innovative practices.<sup>57</sup> In particular, concrete support through school-university partnerships, school-based sharing of expertise or research can help teachers to become proactive actors in the process of change.<sup>58</sup>

By recognizing the relevance of research to the understanding of teaching-learning mechanisms and the development of related methods and tools—even in countries lacking resources—, the BEAP aims to “incorporate within the curriculum design up-dated curriculum-related initiatives and research”<sup>59</sup>. In this regard, the BEAP has included the sharing of online resources and research techniques when providing countries with capacity development support. One of the strong assets of the BEAP lies in its capacity to mobilize South-South-North cooperation and the sharing of expertise, case studies and research findings. The context-sensitive knowledge production and diffusion will inform ongoing reform processes with deep impacts on the quality and inclusiveness of education in Africa.

### **Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated how the BEAP is targeting the quality dimensions of education in Africa—relevance, equity and inclusiveness—through the Programme’s visions, foundations, strategies and activities; this includes the introduction and exploration of topical themes and approaches, as well as the progress that has already been made, for example the setting up of the ECCE Knowledge Hub in Mauritius, the revision of the curriculum framework in The Gambia, and the planning of the Postgraduate Diploma in Curriculum Design and Development in Tanzania.

2015 is nearly on our doorstep and tremendous efforts are still needed for achieving the EFA goals while keeping clear sight of quality and inclusiveness. The BEAP will continue

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<sup>55</sup> BREDA IBE UNESCO & GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 39.

<sup>56</sup> UNESCO, *Mid-term Strategy 2008–2013*, Paris: UNESCO, p. 43. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/bfc/regional-bureaux/>.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, M.L., “Put to the test: the effects of external testing on teachers”, *Educational Researcher*, 20(5), 1991, pp. 8–11.

<sup>58</sup> Sandholtz, J.H., “In-service training or professional development: contrasting opportunities in a school/university partnership”, *Educational Management Abstracts*, 18(7), 2002, pp. 815–830.

<sup>59</sup> BREDA IBE UNESCO & GTZ, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 13.

assisting countries in addressing the challenges they face, including inadequate needs identification and analysis, insufficient coordination of expertise, priority areas for action and responsibilities towards education, limited collaboration between countries and the need for more systemic curriculum frameworks for basic education reform<sup>60</sup>. The BEAP is clearly aligned with the vision that curriculum is a key foundation of quality education for all.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

# Inclusive Schools as a Vehicle for Change in the Arab States<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

*“The quality indices in a number of countries in the region are worrying; this calls for co-operation to tackle them and to meet the aspirations of our society and students.”<sup>2</sup>*

In light of the recent political developments in the Arab States, it is highly relevant to consider the region’s education systems from an inclusive perspective, with a view to democratizing learning opportunities and creating inclusive societies. While there have been numerous signs of improvement across the Arab region towards the Education for All goals over the last few decades,<sup>3</sup> many latent concerns still remain to be addressed by governments, in close coordination with a range of diverse educational stakeholders. In this context, discussions around inclusive education are becoming increasingly important for the region and there are growing calls for cooperation amongst the Arab States and also at the international level, where inclusive schools are envisioned as a vehicle for change in the community and societies at large.

In positive terms, many countries in the region have advanced towards universal primary enrolment and there has been a considerable reduction in gender disparity in primary education.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, in several of the Arab States, free education is provided from primary to tertiary level. In fact, access to secondary education has increased almost three fold and there were five times more Arab students in higher education in 2007 than in 1970.

Nonetheless, serious questions around the overall equity, quality and efficiency of education systems remain a key issue for many Arab governments; the quality of achievement in Arab states tends to be lower than other countries with similar income levels and statistics show that there are still a large number of out-of-school learners.<sup>5</sup> Low transition rates from basic to secondary education also reveal serious problems in terms of quality.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the lack of available employment for qualified graduates suggests that education provided at the secondary and tertiary levels is not sufficiently

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by J. Brady, N. Harb, UNESCO IBE, & A. Bubshait, Gulf Arab States’ Educational Research Centre, Bahrain.

<sup>2</sup> Al Jardani, M., Omani Under-secretary for Education & Curriculum, *Presentation at the Regional Expert Meeting on Reform of Post Basic Education (Secondary Education) in the Arab Region*, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, 26–28 April 2009.

<sup>3</sup> For example: between 1999 and 2007, the average net enrolment ratio (NER) in primary education in the Arab States increased from 78% to 84%; enrolment in pre-primary education in the Arab States increased by 26% since 1999. UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011— Conflict in Education*, UNESCO and Oxford University Press, Paris and Oxford, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> The region has moved slighter closer towards gender parity, reporting an increase in the regional GPI (Gender parity index) of the secondary GER from 0.88 in 1999 to 0.92 in 2008. *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> 4.6 million adolescents are still out of education as of 2008. *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Secondary education continues to increase (more than one-third since 1999, reaching almost 30 million in 2008). The Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in Secondary Education was 68% in 2008. 4.6 million adolescents were still outside the education system. An estimated 29% of the adult population in the Arab States, or 58 million adults, lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed in everyday life. *Ibid.*

relevant to national economic and social development within the emerging knowledge economy.

In this context, UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (IBE) in close collaboration with the UNESCO Regional Beirut office, the Gulf Arab States' Educational Research Centre (GASERC), Ministries of Education and civil society institutions, organized a series of workshops on inclusive education in the Arab States region around the 48<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Education (ICE) (UAE, 2007; Lebanon, 2008, Lebanon, 2009). In parallel to these multi-stakeholder discussions, various Arab governments directly communicated important information about their education systems from an inclusive education perspective to the ICE Secretariat in the form of national reports and "Messages from the Ministers."

This document aims to highlight the key discussions around inclusive education in the Arab States region, looking at the preparatory meetings, the information gathered from governments, as well as the follow-up meetings to the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE. Finally, it concludes by exploring some possible perspectives of the emerging agenda around inclusive education in the Arab region.

### **Discussions in the Arab regional preparatory meetings**

Between 2007 and 2008, through the IBE Community of Practice (COP) in Curriculum Development<sup>7</sup> and in close cooperation with UNESCO offices, GASERC and United Nations sister organisations, Ministries of Education and civil society institutions, nine preparatory workshops and four regional preparatory conferences on inclusive education were organized as a preparatory phase for the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE. These meetings were held in all regions of the world and were characterized by the active participation of governments, civil society institutions and international organizations, involving over 900 participants from 128 countries. In the Arab region, two preparatory meetings took place, organized in conjunction with the regional UNESCO Beirut office and the Gulf Arab States' Educational Research Centre (GASERC) (UAE, 2007; Lebanon, 2008).<sup>8</sup>

At the first preparatory meeting, countries presented and compared their inclusive education policies and practices around four sub-themes: Approaches, Scope and Content; Public Policies; Systems, Links and Transitions; Learners and Teachers (U.A.E, 2007).<sup>9</sup> At the second preparatory meeting, entitled "Quality Education for All: No Exclusion and No Marginalization", conference participants also identified numerous challenges in policy, practice and culture around inclusive education, as well as the richness of diverse

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<sup>7</sup> The COP in Curricular Development is an initiative coordinated by UNESCO IBE with the purpose of supporting different regions and countries in the design and implementation of curricular changes and reforms within the EFA goals framework. For more information about COP, see: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/communities/community-of-practice-cop/about-the-community-of-practice.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Operti, R., & Belalcazar, C., Trends in Inclusive Education at Regional and Interregional Levels: Issues and challenges. *Prospects*, 38(1), 2008, pp. 149–179. Final reports of workshops and conferences are available at: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/themes/curricular-themes/inclusive-education/meetings-and-workshops.html>

<sup>9</sup> IBE UNESCO, *Regional Preparatory Workshop on Inclusive Education: The Gulf Arab States*, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2007.

strategies to foster inclusive education in the context of the Arab States (Lebanon, 2008).<sup>10</sup> Some of the key findings and recommendations of these meetings are outlined below.

### *Approaches, scope and content*

In the Arab region, like elsewhere, inclusive education has been traditionally associated with efforts targeted at supporting learners with special educational needs. More recently, the regional basis for a broader understanding of the term inclusive education was evidenced in the “Dubai Declaration on Urban Children and Youth”, established at a regional conference in May 2005. This declaration referred to inclusive education for all children and youth as the first priority and stated that: “the conference participants stress the importance of inclusive education and reaffirm their commitment to improve the well being and quality of life for all children and youth, regardless of their age, gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, or social background.”<sup>11</sup>

While there may be no single regional understanding of inclusive education, participants in the Dubai workshop reported that there is a common tendency to move towards broadening the idea of inclusive education towards the inclusion of all learners. For example, for most Gulf Arab States governments, the major challenge in terms of inclusive education is assuring education for all, only Bahrain being close to achieving this goal.<sup>12</sup> This is seen to imply the inclusion of all children into the formal education system, despite obstacles that may stem from development levels, poverty, the situation in rural areas, the gender gap, etc.

In general terms, these discussions on inclusive education reflected both a heightened awareness of the importance of supporting special education needs in the Arab States and also an evolution towards a global concern for all learners. The broadening of the concept of inclusive education has been closely linked to the broader processes of holistic educational reform in the region, for example the strengthening of basic education (primary and secondary), the development of competency-based approaches in curriculum, and the improvement in the provision of learning resources (e.g. textbooks).

Crucially, it was suggested that the traditional philosophy of education in most of the Arab States, which blamed pupils and schools for academic difficulties, is now being reconsidered.<sup>13</sup> As a result, a collective momentum for governments and other stakeholders has formed, which reconsiders the inclusive education agenda as a new alternative for achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals.

At the regional conference in 2008, participants clearly underlined that inclusive education is a guiding principle to further accelerate the attainment of EFA goals under a holistic

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<sup>10</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Outcomes and Trends in Inclusive Education at regional and interregional Levels: Issues and Challenges*, Geneva, Switzerland, UNESCO IBE, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/Inf.3., 2008.

<sup>11</sup> *Dubai Declaration on Urban Children and Youth*, Urban Children and Youth in the MENA Region: Addressing Priorities in Education conference, 2005.  
[http://www.araburban.org/employee/menacpi/uploadfiles/Dubai\\_Declaration\\_-\\_English.pdf](http://www.araburban.org/employee/menacpi/uploadfiles/Dubai_Declaration_-_English.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011— Conflict in Education*, op. cit., 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Idris, H., UNESCO Beirut office, *Presentation at the Regional Follow-up Workshop A Broadened Concept of Inclusive Education, Inclusive Classroom-based Practices and Implications for Policy Making, Implementation and Follow-Up in the Arab States Region*, Beirut, Lebanon, July 2009.

perspective, moving beyond its narrow conceptualization as special needs education. The participants also identified the following priorities:

- Clarifying the concept (meaning and content) of inclusive education, not only to be associated to students with special needs.
- Investing more in infrastructure and equipment so that regular schools can accommodate the needs of students with special needs.

### *Public policies*

The participants of the Dubai preparatory meeting reported numerous legislative initiatives in their countries that incorporated the principles of inclusive education. In the Arab States, it was reported that inclusive education is broadly classified and referred to in the constitutions within the right to education. In some countries, there is an explicit constitutional right related to special education.

However, it was also reported that, despite a number of legislative actions, the enactment of laws has still not been fully implemented in practice. It was seen as essential to develop a renewed agenda around equity policies in the region, supported by a social commitment to scale up good practices. In light of this, the Beirut conference identified the following priorities:

- Raising social awareness about the need to foster a broadened concept of inclusive education.
- Encouraging participatory policy making.
- Promoting and enacting legislation for all categories of students (free compulsory education) and reflecting them in national strategic plans.
- Providing adequate funds to education (more financial and human resources), particularly for guaranteeing free compulsory education for all learners including students with special needs and those who are marginalized.
- Investing more in school facilities and equipment for all learners.
- Facilitating the access to ICT in schools and its incorporation into curricula.
- Strengthening the links and partnerships among governments, civil society and international organizations, in order to carry out inclusive education policies and programmes.

### *Systems, links and transitions*

Whilst significant progress has been made in integrating students with special needs into mainstream schools, countries in this region reported serious challenges with regard to designing and implementing more inclusive education systems that address the diverse needs of all learners, especially those who are subject to forms of exclusion other than disabilities, e.g. economic, social, cultural, gender, etc.

Participants also underlined that specialized schools still play an important role in the region, but suggested that they should be integrated into the mainstream education system. This process, principally entailing the provision of physical facilities and

diversified learning strategies, still needs to be further consolidated and extended to other marginalized groups.

Nevertheless, some effective practices of education systems were highlighted, which aimed to meet the diverse needs of all categories of learners, in particular the adaptation of school curricula and support (Oman, Qatar and United Arab Emirates), for example, the provision of special supplementary materials and additional or alternative teaching activities. Some representatives also highlighted initiatives for early intervention and preparation, and preferential practices for the disabled (Kuwait).

The Beirut conference also identified the following priorities:

- Developing more flexible curricula to accommodate all learners, including non-formal curricula.
- Strengthening the role of citizenship education, Maths and Science, and ICT.
- Achieving non-discriminatory, gender-sensitive curricula.
- Encouraging and empowering parents, students and communities to get involved at the school level, especially for non-formal education programmes.
- Diversifying assessment criteria and methods, for example, by changing the exam-oriented assessment criteria, and putting more emphasis on the formative component of evaluation.

### *Learners and teachers*

Serious challenges were also reported with regard to designing and implementing more inclusive educational practices. However, again, some effective practices at the school and classroom levels were highlighted, which aimed to meet the diverse needs of all categories of learners. These included the adaptation of teaching methods and strategies to meet all students' needs, peer instruction, teacher and educational staff incentives and training (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia) as well as the promotion of awareness and positive attitudes (Kuwait, Qatar and Yemen).

The key elements of effective practices were seen as: ideas of awareness; flexibility and diversity both in terms of the offer and demand for education; and a coherent transition between the different levels of the educational system. Adapted teacher training, cross-sectoral cooperation (political, social, and economic) and involvement of students, parents and the community at the international, national and local levels were also seen as crucial.

In light of these discussions, various recommendations emerged from the Dubai workshop, namely: a gradual strategy of awareness-raising among different stakeholders; the dissemination of the UNESCO vision on inclusive education in the region; the sensitization and training of professionals and the strengthening of cooperation, especially communication, between countries in order to promote the sharing of lessons learnt, and setting up regional agendas. The Beirut conference also identified the following priorities:

- Providing mobile (specialized) teachers to support teachers in regular schools to address diversity (i.e. using the “Teachers’ Manual on Differentiating Instruction in the Classroom” elaborated by the Beirut Office).

- Diversifying instruction methods and teaching styles to effectively respond to all learners' diversities, taking into account the many ways students learn and their different capacities (e.g. multiple intelligences).

### **Key issues according to Arab regional policy-makers**

Aside from the regional preparatory meetings that took place in 2007 and 2008, the various governments of the Arab region were also highly engaged in providing support documentation and information about their education systems from an inclusive perspective. In particular, national reports on the development of education were provided, as well as “Messages from the Ministers” i.e. a brief personal message Ministers of Education were invited to send to the ICE focusing on inclusive education. Based on this information, a general regional analysis of the Arab states is presented below, following the ICE sub-themes, providing an overview of the main issues, challenges, policies, strategies and practices around inclusive education and curricula, as identified by policy-makers.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Approaches, scope and content*

Most Arab governments have adopted a rights-based approach to inclusive education, referring to education as a constitutional right for all, guaranteed by the State. It is usually free and compulsory for all, at least at the level of basic education. It is apparent that the Ministries of Education (MOE) generally encourage a broader concept of inclusive education that does not only concern disabilities but also considers other vulnerable groups that have been excluded from education. The most common vulnerable groups identified are children with special needs, girls/women, the poor, ethnic, language, social and religious minorities, working children, children affected by conflict, and children living in rural areas.

Inclusive education approaches in the region are largely informed by the key objectives of quality, efficiency and usefulness of educational provision in terms of economic and social development, as well as the need to equitably meet the needs of all learners across all parts of the country. Key indicators of quality that are regularly mentioned include low repetition and dropout rates, increased completion rates and the improved allocation of resources. Academic achievement is also measured according to certain pedagogical objectives set by the education system.

Many governments highlighted a general lack of societal understanding about inclusion and its implications for society and local values, e.g. with respect to religious education and teachings. There was also some concern that the values that underlie inclusion represent foreign universal values, which pose a threat to local, traditional, and religious values.

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<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise stated: *National Reports on the Development of Education*, 48<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education; UNESCO IBE, 2008. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/ice/48th-ice-2008/national-reports.html>] *Message from the Ministers*, UNESCO IBE, 2008. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/ice/48th-ice-2008/messages-of-the-ministers.html>

## *Public policies*

Educational public policies in the region reflect the following objectives: increasing enrolment and reducing the dropout rate (especially for vulnerable groups); making education more relevant for society and the economy; guaranteeing universal literacy, especially for adults through non-formal education; and ensuring social awareness on inclusive education as a means for societal progress. There is also an important emphasis upon the role of religious principles to inform educational, social, economic, and political values, as well as education systems and educational objectives. Along these lines, governments recognize that inclusive education values should be aligned with local traditional, cultural and religious interpretations of education and educational objectives.

The main focus of policies in the region has been on the development of infrastructure and teachers, e.g. an increase in the number of schools, teachers and materials, better teacher training, increased use of ICT for learners and teachers. As a result, teacher enrolment across the region has increased in recent years by 26% to reach about 2 million in 2007<sup>15</sup>. There is also an important emphasis on special programmes focusing on certain groups, e.g. the integration of children with disabilities within regular schools through specialized teacher training and the coordination of specialized teachers and schools within mainstream schools. Similarly, “girl-friendly” educational environments have been developed at compulsory education levels. Other measures have also aimed to improve the education system as a whole: increased financial resource allocation, decentralization, curriculum reform, etc; for example, the average share of education in government budgets increased by ten percentage points since 1999 across the region.<sup>16</sup>

Significant progress was highlighted, especially in terms of enrolment in basic education and literacy. Many diverse challenges remain for the region, reflecting the diverse national economic and social situations of the region; for example, post-conflict countries or countries with weaker economies have found it more difficult to invest in educational infrastructure and secure the necessary quantitative and qualitative teacher quotas and criteria.

The main barriers identified by governments included poor infrastructure and materials, lack of trained personnel, lack of data on education systems, negative social attitudes, geographical distances between schools, situations of emergency in post- and/or current conflict areas, where there is a general lack of security, as well as economic and societal pressures (necessitating child labour and reinforced societal conservatism with regard to gender roles).

## *Systems, links and transitions*

Most Arab countries are reported as having a highly centralized education system with the government assuming all key functions in terms of legislation, policy making, financing,

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<sup>15</sup> World Bank, *The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*, Washington DC, World Bank, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

and service delivery, regulated by governmental inspectors. Arab Ministries of Education are also responsible for designing curricula, producing textbooks, as well as developing national exams.<sup>17</sup>

In this context, extensive curriculum reform has been implemented in some countries, informed by inclusive education principles. For example, integrated curricular frameworks and continuous evaluation techniques have been introduced, while governments are developing more relevant content to cater for all learners. In particular, textbooks, teaching guides, didactic supports and pedagogical equipment have also been revised to be more gender neutral. Arab education systems have also attempted to become more inclusive through the increased provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes and distance education, innovative uses of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for teachers and learners, better linkages to non-formal education and the provision of targeted literacy programmes.

Arab governments are working with a broad range of international, national and local organizations and experts in order to implement specific projects or programmes for inclusive education. In some cases, parents and communities have also been involved in educational reform planning and implementation. Some innovative school models were highlighted, which provide exemplary good practice of inclusive education.

### *Learners and teachers*

Arab governments clearly agree upon the importance of training teachers and specialists of IE. There is a shortage of trained teachers, especially in rural areas. Teacher training facilities for primary and secondary teachers have been established in many countries with accelerated programmes to prepare teachers quickly.

Many governments reported that innovative pre-service and in-service inclusive teacher training content is being provided to teachers, e.g. about electronic training tools and about the inclusion of children with disabilities in learning. Inclusive teaching and learning practices in the Arab States are also being promoted in training, which focus on how to best address the needs of all students, e.g. student-focused classrooms, peer instruction techniques, self-assessment, and cooperative teaching.

### **Post-ICE debates in the Arab region**

In light of the consensus of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, the IBE launched an intensive follow-up strategy in 2009. The first phase focused on raising awareness and building consensus amongst diverse stakeholders around the policy implications of a broadened concept of inclusive education. The second phase has focused on progressively promoting and developing inclusive curriculum as a tool for inclusion through reinforced policy dialogue and capacity development activities.

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<sup>17</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Mission Report of the Regional Follow-up Workshop A Broadened Concept of Inclusive Education, Inclusive Classroom-based Practices and Implications for Policy Making, Implementation and Follow-Up in the Arab States Region*, Beirut, Lebanon, July 2009.

As a part thereof, UNESCO Beirut and UNESCO IBE co-organized a regional ICE follow-up workshop in Beirut in July 2009 entitled “A Broadened Concept of Inclusive Education: Inclusive Classroom-based Practices and Implications for Policy Making, Implementation and Follow-Up in the Arab States Region”. In light of the recommendations of this meeting, UNESCO Beirut and UNESCO IBE also co-organized an Arab regional expert meeting on creating tools on inclusive education and curricula in Beirut, Lebanon in May 2010. Some of the key findings of both meetings are outlined below.<sup>18</sup>

### *Moving towards broader understandings of inclusion*

At both meetings, participants recognized the broadened concept of IE as a process intended to respond to student’ diversity by increasing participation and reducing exclusion within and from education. In 2010, inclusive education was specifically underlined as a means to achieve EFA by the Minister of Education of Lebanon, with its emphasis on quality education and also as a process of education reform.<sup>19</sup> As such, inclusive education is now understood to refer to a wide range of excluded learners and not just those with disabilities.

Nonetheless, the conceptual advances and the collective commitment towards the future agenda still strongly contrasts with the practice of inclusion throughout education systems, as in other regions.<sup>20</sup> There has not yet been systematic acceptance of the crucial interdependency between inclusion, equity and quality to ensure the democratization of learning opportunities in terms of access, participation, processes and results. As such, the implementation of inclusive education is still restricted to a traditional concept of inclusion as a synonym of integration of certain categories of excluded learners from mainstream schooling. Institutional and curricular proposals aimed at meeting needs are generally organized by means of separation and segregation and by teaching practices structured around the specific category of the “average” student.

### *Governance and decision-making in the Arab States*

Participants in the 2010 meeting identified some key challenges for the region in terms of governance and decision-making, including the highly centralized nature of the education system and the exclusion of parents and other stakeholders from decision-making processes. While high-level commitments to inclusive education are reflected in numerous public policies and plans, these are not necessarily implemented. Policy implementation may also contradict inclusive education principles, due to a lack of common conceptual understanding amongst all stakeholders. It was therefore seen as crucial that, with the support of leaders, the roles and relationships of key stakeholders should be re-conceptualized to better balance central and local interests and that there should be greater emphasis on collaboration.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; UNESCO IBE, *Mission Report of the Arab Regional Expert Meeting on Creating Tools on Inclusive Education and Curricula*, Beirut, Lebanon, May 2010.

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO IBE, *op cit.*, 2010

<sup>20</sup> See: Amadio, M., & Operti, R., *Inclusive Education, Paradigm Shifts and Renewed Agendas in Latin America*, below, 2011.

### *Policies and legislation for inclusion*

It was noted that some harmony exists in the region, for example a common language and strong legislative and political frameworks in place to support inclusion. However, this is contrasted with major national disparities and a lack of efficient policy implementation at the school and classroom levels. It was highlighted that some quantitative progress has been achieved in the region in terms of enrolment and pupil-teacher ratios, but serious questions remain on how to include those who are still excluded and also how to ensure qualitative progress in education through IE.

Policy-makers have few implementation strategies and require more evidence before moving forward with such strategies. In this regard, it was suggested that there should be a more effective use of both human and financial resources and better data collection and monitoring mechanisms to support policy-makers.

### *Inclusive curricular, school and classrooms practices*

Traditionally in the Arab States, curricular change is viewed as a top-down prescription, rather than a long-term, comprehensive development process originating at the school and classroom levels. Moreover, curriculum innovations for marginalized groups are often sporadic and developed outside of the frameworks of the organization of formal education systems, without fostering, generating or achieving the restructuring of the mainstream education system.

It was suggested that more consideration could be given to the implementation of the curriculum at the school and classroom levels and that a more holistic, integrated approach could be taken. At present, it was reported that there is a general lack of information and knowledge sharing on concrete curricular and pedagogical proposals which may positively impact on educational institutions and in the classrooms in terms of inclusion. There is also insufficient information on the main daily practices of schools and teachers.

### *Paying more attention to diversity, flexibility and relevance in education systems*

Curricula and evaluation in the region is seen as outdated to meet the new challenges of diverse learners, lacks relevance, segregates learners and relies on rote-learning pedagogies. For example, the curriculum does not develop the required values, skills, competencies and qualifications for diverse students to find employment upon graduation, so school and learners are disconnected from economic and social realities.

In the 2010 meeting, flexible, active and relevant curricula were put forward as part of the dynamic processes of paying more attention to diversity in regional education systems. Some existing effective practices were highlighted in this regard, including adapted and formative assessment practices with responsive mechanisms, student and learner-centred approaches, more inclusive learning materials, as well as flexible non-formal models/equivalency programmes for dropouts to get back into school. ECCE, ICTs and distance education programmes were also highlighted as potential diversified teaching strategies that understand the diversity of learners.

### *Developing inclusive teachers*

Participants in the 2010 meeting highlighted that teaching practices in the region were strict and that many teachers were not motivated or felt powerless in terms of promoting inclusive change. In this respect, participants recognized the need to invest in teachers to strengthen education institutions as critical in bridging the gap between inclusion theories and practices. In particular, it was seen as important to provide training on diversified teaching strategies and assessment systems which understand the diversity of learners, to promote positive attitudes to diversity and cooperation amongst teachers, and to develop policies that support and motivate teachers.

### *Inclusive schools as a vehicle for change in the community*

Throughout the discussions of both meetings, one central point of discussion was the lack of accessibility and the sense of isolation surrounding schools in the region. Crucially, inclusive education was seen as a key strategy for developing schools as open environments, and positive attitudes in society at large. As in other regions, schools are seen as an important axis and convergence of social policies, as well as a space where multiple dimensions of life converge, within economic, social, cultural, demographic, productive and environmental areas, for example.<sup>21</sup>

Along these lines, it was recommended that “the instigation and promotion of IE practices in schools and classrooms across the Arab States requires change in policy, practice and culture.”<sup>22</sup> It was also suggested that the gathering of information at the school level could assist in developing top priorities concerning educational policy, curriculum design, school administration and functioning, school services, lesson planning and other related issues.

### **The emerging agenda of inclusive education in the Arab region**

Today, inclusive education is regarded as “a growing universal concern that informs and challenges the processes of educational reform in both developing and developed regions”.<sup>23</sup> Inclusive education stands on the recognition of education as a human right that supports a wider view and more comprehensive strategy for achieving Education for All.<sup>24</sup>

The analysis of the Arab States shows a good degree of consensus about this conceptualization of inclusive education; in particular: (i) inclusive education as the right to quality and equal educational opportunities for all, for promoting social integration and facilitating economic efficiency; (ii) inclusive education as a guiding principle and framework which can serve to orientate educational policies and programmes from the policy to the classroom level; and (iii) the importance of addressing the diversity

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO IBE, *op cit.*, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Operti, R., & Belalcazar, C., *op cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>24</sup> Acedo, C. (2008). Introduction—Inclusive education: pushing the boundaries. *Prospects*, 38(1), pp. 5–13.

of learners' expectations and needs through a vast repertoire of innovative teaching and learning strategies.

In terms of regional emphases and priority issues, it is clear that a common range of vulnerable groups have been targeted in special policy programmes and also in general educational reform, e.g. illiterate adults, girls, children with special learning needs. Along these lines, key common practices and priority action areas can be identified as: the provision of further infrastructure; teacher training; school and curriculum reform; developing social awareness; developing closer linkages between education, society and the labour market. In terms of regional barriers to education, however, more divergences are visible; this relates to the range of different issues and challenges at the national level resulting from respective economic, historical and cultural contexts.

Some progress has been made in the region toward securing greater access to education; however, statistics also suggest that the Arab States still have a lot to accomplish to ensure all learners are actually learning in schools. Looking to the future, a focus on implementation at the school and classroom levels is necessary to support and monitor the effectiveness of education systems. Indeed, very little information emerged out of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE process about the daily practices of schools, or the interaction between teachers and learners in the Arab States. Such monitoring is not only important to establish reform priorities for the education systems but also to identify and better disseminate the effective practices that clearly already exist in many schools and institutions.

Such evidence may also help address one considerable regional challenge, that of creating a common societal culture and understanding around the inclusion of all learners into the education systems. This implies converging diverse values, principles, definitions and perspectives of different stakeholders, while building upon the traditional perspectives and rich history, knowledge and experience that characterize the region. In turn, such consensus may well lead to greater receptiveness, application, and a sense of ownership of inclusive education in the Arab states. In this sense, inclusive schools may act as a vehicle for change in the Arab community towards more inclusion of learners, as well as towards more inclusive societies.

# Moving towards Inclusive Education Systems in the Asia-Pacific Region<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

*Inclusive education can be interpreted as an on-going process, in an ever-evolving education system, focusing on those currently excluded from accessing education as well as those in school but not learning. By applying a right-based approach towards achieving an inclusive education system, the process puts emphasis on those who are most marginalized and vulnerable, thus identifying those who are still excluded. It also leads to the identification of the underlying causes of exclusion and helps redress unequal power relations based on factors such as poverty and social injustice[...] Applying a human rights-based approach to education, focusing on inclusive education practices, requires the development of a comprehensive model addressing all aspects and levels of the education system.*<sup>2</sup>

A rights-based approach to inclusive education, where education is guaranteed as a right for all learners, is generally promoted across the Asia-Pacific region. This is evidenced by numerous ratifications of international conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as national legislation across the region. Inclusive Education has also been highlighted as an essential element for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All agenda. This represents an essential part of the process of moving towards inclusive education systems in the region.

At the same time, this process also implies the development of a comprehensive model addressing all aspects and levels of the education system based on principles of non-discrimination and inclusion. The following article considers in more detail what has been done towards these concrete objectives, with close reference to the preparation stage of the 48<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education (ICE) on “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future”, the regional priorities related to inclusive education in the Asia-Pacific region, a selection of government model-school initiatives for promoting inclusive education, as well as new developments occurring in light of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE.

## Issues and challenges raised in the preparation for the 48<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education (ICE)

This section will provide an overview of the main issues raised during the two preparation meetings around the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE organized in November 2008 in Geneva. The purpose of those meetings was to explore the development of inclusive education in the region and

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by S. Shaeffer, Former Director of UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Regional Office & J. Lindeberg, Former Programme Specialist of UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Regional Office, with special thanks to A. Hauschild, T. Watterdal, & A. Ahuja for the preparation of relevant background information.

<sup>2</sup> Shaeffer, S., *Realizing Inclusive Education through Applying a Right-based Approach to Education*, in C. Acedo, M. Amadio, & R. Operti (Eds.), *Defining an Inclusive Education Agenda: Reflections around the 48th session of the International Conference on Education*, Geneva, UNESCO IBE, 2010.

to gather input for the ICE. The preparation workshop for the Asia region was held in Hangzhou, China (November 2007) while the Asia-Pacific Regional ICE preparatory conference took place in Bali, Indonesia (May 2008).

In both workshops, inclusive education was seen as the means to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals. Furthermore, it was understood that inclusive education seeks to address the needs of each individual learner with special focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion.

Aside from this general consensus, the participants of the Hangzhou workshop<sup>3</sup> organized their input according to the four themes of the ICE. Building on this workshop, the participants of the Bali conference then chose to focus upon eight regional topics relevant to inclusive education.<sup>4</sup> These sub-themes and key regional topics are outlined below.

### *Approaches, scope and content*

In Hangzhou, it was agreed that inclusive education, as part of a human rights-based approach to education, should be at the core of education systems and embedded into the framework of Education for All (EFA). Since it promotes active citizenship, social justice and collective well-being, inclusive education was seen as a means for social inclusion. The goal of the process towards inclusion was seen as not only limited to an inclusive education system, but also towards holistic social inclusion and therefore social justice with societies featuring equity, equality and democracy.

### *Public policies*

Several recommendations concerning the role of governments and policy makers were also made in Hangzhou, namely that they should promote advocacy, design coherent and sustainable policies, provide guarantees of financial sustainability, enable relevant institutions access to capacity building programmes and encourage stakeholders from different sectors to get involved as well as cooperate in the process toward inclusive education. These policies were not seen as a sum of initiatives for certain groups in society but rather as focusing on providing friendly and effective learning environments in regular schools for every child with respect to his or her abilities.

### *Systems, links and transitions*

Participants at the Hangzhou workshop also suggested that the whole education system should reflect the principle of flexibility in order to embrace the diversity of learners and respond to their individual needs. Practical examples where flexibility and diversity are

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<sup>3</sup> UNESCO IBE Preparatory Report for the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE on Inclusive Education: Regional Preparatory Workshops on Inclusive Education—East Asia, Hangzhou, China, 2007. [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/COPs/News\\_documents/2007/0711Hangzhou/Final\\_Report\\_of\\_ICE\\_Workshop\\_East\\_Asia.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/COPs/News_documents/2007/0711Hangzhou/Final_Report_of_ICE_Workshop_East_Asia.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Final Report of the Regional Preparatory Conference on “Inclusive Education: Major Policy Issues in the Asia Pacific Region”, Bali, Indonesia, 2008. [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/COPs/News\\_documents/2008/0805Bali/Bali\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/COPs/News_documents/2008/0805Bali/Bali_Report.pdf)

necessary included school attendance, learning opportunities, learning content, learning environments, teaching practices and the use of technology.

Furthermore, focus was placed on the transition between the different levels of education to improve transition rates and prevent children from dropping out of the education system. In this respect, early intervention programmes were seen to be crucial.

### *Learners and teachers*

Participants at the Hangzhou workshop emphasized inclusive education as a child-centred approach and a synonym for quality education, which promotes the best interest of the child and supports children to reach their potential.

It was also strongly suggested that teachers should be provided with clear directions and guidelines, in addition to the general curriculum, to be able to teach children with diverse abilities and backgrounds; teachers must be able to develop tailored curricula, for example. More resources for pre- and in-service teacher training and up-grading programmes on inclusive education must also be made available.

### *Children with disabilities*

The participants of the Bali conference were aware of the fact that children with disabilities were one of the largest groups of children in the region that are denied access to regular schools even though education for children with disabilities has been on the agenda in most Asian countries for many years. They urged governments to formulate policies that pronounce the need for including children with disabilities in regular classrooms and preventing segregation within regular classrooms.

They also recommended that policies should consider current barriers such as class size and examinations, promote child-centred learning and guarantee inclusive education at all educational levels. Furthermore, the availability of capacity building programmes for teachers and parents, and supportive devices and equipment were seen as important. The future role of special schools with a focus on how they can support the process towards inclusion in regular schools was also considered. A database of children, both in school and out of school, was seen as a necessary tool to monitor the progress of these efforts as well as collaboration among different government agencies and departments.

### *HIV and AIDS*

Discrimination and stigma towards children affected and/or infected with HIV was noted as still wide-spread in Asian societies. Yet, like all other children, children affected and/or infected by HIV must have access to the nearest school in their home community.

In light of this, it was recommended that policy makers should issue anti-discrimination laws and urge the ministries concerned to strengthen their cooperation. Health services for children must also be provided in a child-friendly way and offer voluntary testing, counselling and treatment for HIV and related illnesses. Children must also have access to

quality HIV prevention and response education—in formal and non-formal education—that includes topics such as reproductive health, sexuality, sex education and drug prevention. Confidentiality in all aspects related to HIV was seen as crucial, as was the media’s role in the promotion of HIV prevention and response.

### *Minorities*

Participants also noted that thousands of ethno-linguistic groups are living in the Asia and Pacific region and that the issue of language as a barrier to education must be addressed, as interlinked with issues such as culture and religion. They suggested that governments should allow more flexibility in adapting curricula in order to increase the relevance of education for all communities. This should also include the use of the mother tongue in the early years of elementary education leading to better mastery of the national language, as well as respect for other ethnic and religious groups.

### *Migrant children*

The main issue addressed here was the status of children of illegal migrant workers who are usually denied the right to education.

### *Refugee children*

The recommendations made here were divided for children going to “camp schools” and those going to regular schools in their host countries. Children going to camp schools were seen as being in need of psychosocial support to be able to adapt to their new environment and living conditions. Education offered in these schools should be in the mother tongue of the children with the opportunity to learn the host country’s national language. Children enrolled in regular schools must be given equal opportunities in accessing education, and bullying and discrimination directed at them must be addressed by teachers, parents and fellow students.

### *Social inclusion*

It was recommended by participants that governments should address the issue of social exclusion within education and society. Special attention should be paid to children affected by war, civil strife and natural disaster. National policies should be reviewed so that provisions for marginalized groups are made and so that special support for marginalized groups reaches the target group. Established faith-based educational institutes should teach topics and develop competencies within their students that are coherent with the national development goals.

### *Gender*

Gender-related barriers to education are still widespread in the Asia and Pacific region. The goal of inclusive education on gender issues was seen as both equality in terms

of enrolment, retention, survival, and achievement and the removal of stereotypes and discriminatory content in curricula. It was thus recommended that governments must ensure that policies support protection against gender-based discrimination and that gender awareness becomes mandatory in pre- and in-service education as well as education material.

#### *Disaster risk reduction education*

It was highlighted that children displaced as a result of natural disaster must be guaranteed equal access to education, and/or effective temporary schools must be made available for them. Governments must furthermore increase their efforts in providing children with knowledge about disaster risk reduction and their vulnerability during and after natural disasters. An effective way to achieve this was seen as the inclusion of disaster risk reduction education in non-formal and formal curricula. School safety must further be ensured through building regulations towards safe and secure facilities.

### **Regional priorities related to inclusive education in the Asia-Pacific region**

#### *Early childhood care and education*

At the UNESCO World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Moscow in 2010, it was clearly agreed that governments should focus on developing ECCE programmes that will help them to fulfil their commitments to provide quality education for all and prepare children for school in order to increase enrolment and retention rates. Building inclusive environments from the early years is critical to ensuring social justice and equity, which will go a long way to creating societies that are fair and humane. The evidence continues to mount that good quality ECCE programmes are not only essential for young children (leading to better health and nutrition and stronger cognitive development) and their role as future adults (e.g. better employment, less dependence on social welfare systems, and less involvement in criminal activities), but also good for children as future learners. Children with ECCE experiences enrol more, dropout and repeat less, achieve better, and move farther up the educational ladder than children without such experiences. Good quality ECCE experience is therefore an essential driver of a more inclusive education system.

In many countries, children start much too early with formal education, especially those from middle to higher income backgrounds. Meanwhile other segments of the population remain excluded from pre-primary and primary education all together. The majority of ECCE programmes in Asia are too focused on the education side of early childhood development and tend to neglect a more holistic approach to child development.

Pre-elementary schools educators are also rarely considered as being part of the national teacher workforce. Education and training for preschool teachers are therefore not offered at institutions of higher education in many countries. This trend seems to be maintained by governments despite the fact that research has shown and proven the importance of early childhood care programmes for the development of children.

## *Primary education*

Most countries in Asia have made tremendous progress with regard to enrolment and retention rates. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010, net primary school enrolment for the region is high, at 94% (although the absolute number of out-of-school children has increased in the last few years). This is matched by high gender parity levels and high average levels of adult literacy.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, dropout and repetition are common across all levels of education, while large gaps in learning achievement across countries are apparent; e.g., the poor and children in remote regions perform far worse than their richer and more urban classmates.<sup>6</sup> There are many groups of children throughout the region that are systematically excluded from and within the education system. For example, three years after the passing of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the majority of children with disabilities in most countries throughout the region remain out of school. One set of statistics relating to the Philippines suggests that the average number of primary children who are out of school increases from 9% for learners without disabilities to 21% for learners with disabilities and 28% for learners with disabilities in the poorest socio-economic quintile.<sup>7</sup> Girls are still disadvantaged in large parts of Asia, while children from ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities often suffer from discrimination and exclusion within the education system. The security situation in parts of the region, especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the impact of natural disasters also prevent millions of children from starting or completing primary education.

## *Lower and upper secondary education*

Transitions rates between primary and lower secondary schools remain low in large parts of South Asia, as well as in many other parts of the region. The groups that are excluded from primary education are even more vulnerable to exclusion from lower and upper secondary education. In many countries, girls are frequently taken out of school by their parents after completing their primary education. The reasons for the increased gender disparity in education are many and complex and include, among others, the lack of secondary schools for girls, a lack of female teachers, early marriage traditions and practices, and girls having to take on a greater share of household chores when they reach puberty or having to work outside their homes to support their families.

Inclusive education programmes that are quite successful in primary education suffer from the increased academic competition often experienced by children in secondary education, which leads to increased exclusion of children with disabilities and children from minority backgrounds. Many families live too far away from the nearest secondary school to be able to send their children to school and at the same time be able to maintain their safety and security. The lack of relevance of secondary education to the lives of

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010—Reaching the Marginalized*, UNESCO and Oxford University Press, Paris and Oxford, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

children, families and communities is another contributing factor to poor transition, attendance and completion rates, as well as the increased cost of education when children reach secondary levels.

In Nepal, for example, the government plans to provide free secondary education by 2015, including free admission and tuition fees and textbooks, expand alternative learning programmes, including distance learning and vocational education, and provide financial support for students who are vulnerable to drop out of the education system.<sup>8</sup>

### *Technical and vocational education*

The same challenges faced by youth in secondary schools are also faced by youth in technical and vocational programmes, and the stakes are possibly even higher. Technical and vocational education programmes are mainly available in urban areas. There is limited availability of programmes for girls, especially if they should choose a vocational path that is not common for girls in their culture and tradition, and youth with disabilities and from minority backgrounds are often completely excluded. The programmes offered in technical and vocational education are often not designed to meet the needs of the labour market.

In Tajikistan and other parts of Central Asia, many young boys travel abroad, mainly to Russia for work; the skills they learn in school are not sufficient to provide them with middle- to high-paying jobs. The challenges are the same for many young people from South and Southeast Asia who migrate to West Asia and end up with poor paying jobs, due to a lack of relevant skills. Technical and vocational programmes in most parts of Asia struggle to keep pace with the development of the needs of the global economy. Flexible and effective technical and vocational programmes are pre-requisites for economic growth and development.

### *Non-formal education*

Children from groups vulnerable to exclusion from and within education are often over-represented in non-formal education programmes in the Asia-Pacific region.

On the one hand, non-formal education programmes can be an important tool for including children who have been excluded from education and providing quality Education for All. On the other hand, the rigidity of most formal education systems often creates barriers for children from non-formal education programmes to transfer to more formal programmes so that ultimately non-formal education programmes can become another tool of discrimination and exclusion. For example, certificates from non-formal programmes are often not recognized by formal education programmes or employers, which leads to additional marginalization of already vulnerable groups and thereby prevents their transition into secondary and tertiary education programmes.

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<sup>8</sup> Nepalese School Sector Reform Plan, Government of Nepal, Nepal, 2009. [http://moe.gov.np/new/filedownload.php?download=resume&file=download\\_1212505198.pdf&option=download](http://moe.gov.np/new/filedownload.php?download=resume&file=download_1212505198.pdf&option=download)

Myanmar, for example, has decided to intensify its non-formal education programmes for elementary (5 years) and middle school education (4 years lower middle school and 2 years higher middle school). This includes a special programme for over-aged children in primary classes with an accelerated curriculum, a post-primary school programme which adds middle-level classes to primary schools, as well as opening more schools in remote, border and mountainous areas.

In Malaysia, a Curriculum Development Centre has been developed by the Ministry of Education for children with special needs, which has developed an alternative curriculum designated as the “Integrative Curriculum” that focuses more on life skills.<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Education has also designed for children from indigenous communities an alternative curriculum for a new primary school syllabus which better incorporates their culture.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Individual Education Plans (IEP) are used to provide a written plan that specifies the education goals and the method to obtain these goals, while Individual Transition Plans (ITP) have been introduced to provide continuity towards post-secondary education and the development of career and vocational skills.

### *Teacher training*<sup>11</sup>

In many countries, universities and colleges are under a separate Ministry (e.g. the Ministry of Higher Education) with little or no cooperation with the Ministry of Education. In teacher education universities and teacher training colleges, therefore, teachers are often being educated for “yesterday’s schools”. Student teachers are also too often poorly prepared for life as a teacher in school with children from diverse backgrounds and with different abilities and disabilities.

Furthermore, in all countries in the Asia region, several government agencies, NGOs, resource centres, and universities have influence on the organization of pre-service and in-service teacher education. The fragmentation of teacher training, as a result, proves to be a challenge for a reform towards teaching more inclusive approaches. Furthermore, due to the fragmentation of pre- and in-service training providers, universities might be cut off from contact with practitioners, while in-service training providers might fail to update themselves with the latest research and developments.

Governments are therefore being called to reform their teacher education and training programmes as a key priority. Systemic reform in pre-primary, primary and secondary education should also be reflected in tertiary education programmes. It is essential that schools, teacher education and training institutions and education authorities work closely together in planning, implementing and evaluating reform and innovation within the education sector.

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<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Education of Malaysia, Country Report: Indonesia, Indonesian Public Policies on Inclusive Education, Malaysia, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Status of Teacher Education in the Asia-Pacific Region, International Reading Association, 2008.  
<http://www.unescobkk.org/education/teacher-education-and-training/status-of-teacher-education-in-the-asia-pacific-region/>

Within the public system, almost all countries also report challenges in deploying and retaining teachers equally to ensure quality education for all students, leading to differing quality of teachers in rural and urban regions, disparities in the ratios of female and male teachers, as well as a lack of teachers' competence in their students' mother tongues and/or the national language. To overcome the challenges, governments have developed different schemes of forced deployment, teacher rotation, salary incentives, as well as diversification in the teacher education workforce. For example, in Cambodia's Education Strategic Plan for 2006-2010, the government focused on an increase in teacher remuneration, the development of teacher training programmes and materials and more accountability for teachers' performance.<sup>12</sup> In the Nepalese School Sector Reform Plan 2009-2015, meanwhile, the government is aiming to recruit teachers and management personnel from excluded groups, ensure better hygienic and sanitary conditions for female teachers and provide for maternity and paternity leave, as well as implement an assessment of teachers' attitudes.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, several countries have insufficient standards for the education of future teachers, the upgrading of teachers and the accreditation of teachers, leading to low quality teaching programmes. In 2003, the Indonesian University of Education launched its newly developed Masters Degree Programme on Inclusion and Special Needs Education, developed in cooperation with the University of Oslo.<sup>14</sup> Today, this programme is the most popular among students at the university. In some countries, the lack of quality teachers in government schools has given rise to private schools that are outside the government system.

In almost all Asian countries, NGOs and teacher-parent networks do not have great influence on pre-service teacher education. It is also unclear for almost all Asian countries how new research and developments influence the teacher training programmes at universities. A lot of Asian countries have their own government qualitative and quantitative research institutes. Some countries have developed clear structures on how the research institutes and universities cooperate and how universities should incorporate new developments, while others lack such structures.

## **A selection of initiatives for promoting inclusive education**

### *Afghanistan*

The first pilot school for inclusive education was started in 2008 by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNESCO, UNICEF and the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan. Since 2008, more than 400 children with disabilities and other special educational needs have been enrolled in neighbourhood schools. Ten master trainers have been trained over the past two years. More than 100 class teachers have received training and more than 350 parents of children with disabilities and other special

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<sup>12</sup> Education Strategic Plan 2006-2010, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Kingdom of Cambodia, Cambodia, 2005. <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/Downloads/Publications/essp06-10.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Nepalese School Sector Reform Plan, *op cit.*, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Skjørten, M.D., *Master Degree Programme in Inclusion and Special Needs Education*. <http://www.idp-europe.org/eenet-asia/eenet-asia-1-EN/page22.php>

educational needs have received training on how they can support their children to succeed in school.

Following the success of the pilot schools on inclusive education in Kabul, the Afghan National Association of the Deaf (ANAD), Roshan Foundation, SERVE, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) and a number of other Afghan and international non-governmental organizations have now initiated inclusive education programmes throughout Afghanistan.

The level of awareness that has been reached around inclusive education within the Government can be attributed both to the effective efforts of UNESCO and the other member organizations of the Inclusive Education Coordination Working Group (IECWG) as well as the successful implementation of inclusive education in schools throughout Kabul and Afghanistan.

### *Brunei Darussalam*<sup>15</sup>

In coordination with the Ministry of Education, the University of Brunei Darussalam plays an important role in the preparation of primary and secondary school teachers and educational administrators by providing initial teacher training as well as in-service teacher training programmes. A core introductory course in IE for all students, a certificate in Special Education to equip regular trained teachers to become special education needs assistance (SENA) teachers and an in-service teacher training programme for the continuing professional upgrading of SENAs are all now available.

These initiatives adopt a whole-school based approach to providing learning assistance to students who have learning difficulties. For example, SENAs are trained to identify pupils with special needs; prepare individual educational plans (IEP) or remedial education plans (REP) in collaboration with the classroom teachers and parents; submit the IEP and REP to the school-based team (SBT) for approval; and implement, monitor and evaluate the IEP and REP. IEPs are supported by members of a SBT, who act as a problem-solving group at the school level. The SBT comprises school heads, SENAs, class/subject teachers, parents and/or specialists if necessary.

### *China*<sup>16</sup>

In 1997, the regional government of Hong Kong started to encourage schools to adopt a whole school approach to respond to the diversity of students (Child-Friendly Schools). The Hong Kong whole school approach experience shows that inclusive education encourages acceptance of differences and a culture of wider cooperation between teachers and students. This led to innovative teaching-learning processes that respond to the needs

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<sup>15</sup> UNESCO IBE, *National Report on the Provision of Inclusive Quality Primary and Secondary Education: Brunei Darussalam*, Sub-regional Workshop on “Building Inclusive Education Systems to Respond to the Diverse Needs of Disabled Children”, Jakarta, Indonesia, November 2009.

<sup>16</sup> EENET Asia, *A Whole-School Approach to Inclusion in Hong Kong*, Newsletter 1. <http://www.idp-europe.org/eenet-asia/eenet-asia-1-EN/page15.php>; UNESCO IBE, *Preparatory Report for the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE on Inclusive Education: Regional Preparatory Workshops on Inclusive Education—East Asia*, *op cit.*, 2007.

of the pupils. Schools set up annual development plans on how they want to cater for students' diversity. Student support teams are set up to monitor the development of early identifications schemes for students' individual needs, the empowerment of teachers, peer support, cooperative learning, curriculum adaptation and parent involvement.

### *Indonesia*<sup>17</sup>

In Bandung, the capital of the province of West-Java, the first inclusive elementary school was piloted in 2002. Cooperation between the headmaster, teachers and the West Java Inclusive Education Task Force under the authority of the provincial education authority opened the doors for children with special needs at this school. Necessary tools to achieve acceptance among teachers and parents included awareness workshops. During these workshops, teachers received knowledge on how to accommodate and teach children with disabilities. Parents, afraid that children with special needs in the classroom would lower the quality of teaching, were informed about teaching-learning procedures. As a result, teachers felt confident to welcome children with special needs in their classrooms and parents of the other students saw the positive effects of inclusive education for their children, as well. Today, the province of West Java has widened its inclusive education programme to cover the whole province, with model schools in each district.

In addition to this, the Ministry of Education has launched innovative "one-roof school" models, which integrate primary and junior schools; students are also given the option to do self-study modules and then go to specific learning places to discuss what they have learned with tutors.<sup>18</sup>

### *Pakistan*

In 2007, the first pilot schools for inclusive education were started in the province of Balochistan and in the Islamabad Capital Territory jointly by the Provincial Education Department, the Federal Directorate of Education, IDP Norway and Sightsavers International. Soon after, Save the Children Sweden initiated inclusive education programmes in the Northern Areas (FATA) and parts of the Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The principals, head-teachers and 10 teachers from each of these schools went through extensive re-orientation and upgrading programmes.

During these pilot experiences, there was a focus on finding and enrolling children from various groups of children vulnerable to exclusion from and within education, especially children from low-income families, from religious and language minorities, and from internally displaced families. In addition to increasing enrolment and reducing dropout rates, the child-friendly teaching and learning methodologies implemented in the pilot schools have led to an improvement of the average academic performance of all students, both those with and without special educational needs.

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<sup>17</sup> EENET Asia, *Inclusion and the Right to Education: A Case Study from Bandung*, West Java, Newsletter 3, 2006. <http://www.idp-europe.org/eenet-asia/eenet-asia-3-EN/page8.php>

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Education of Indonesia, *Country Report: Indonesia, Indonesian Public Policies on Inclusive Education*, 2008.

The successful implementation in the field combined with targeted national and provincial awareness programmes resulted in the drafting and passing of the National Education Policy in 2009. In 2010, the Federal Minister of Education and the Secretaries of Education in all provinces and areas signed the Islamabad Commitment on Inclusive- and Child-Friendly Education, an initiative sponsored by UNICEF and UNESCO. As a result, more than 3000 child-friendly and inclusive schools are planned by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF in the next few years—this in addition to provincial initiatives in the Punjab and in Sindh covering thousands of new and existing schools.

## **New developments in light of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE**

### *Sub- regional coordination*

Following the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, there was a follow-up sub-regional meeting on “Building Inclusive Education Systems to Respond to the Diverse Needs of Disabled Children” in Jakarta, Indonesia, co-organized by the IBE and the UNESCO Office in Jakarta in November 2009. This meeting considered the means for removing the barriers that exclude disabled children from free and compulsory primary and junior secondary education, and for providing inclusive primary and junior secondary education systems that take into account the varied needs of disabled children.

In preparation for the workshop, the participating countries (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Timor-Leste) each prepared a national report, which was shared and discussed with senior ministerial officials and international experts in inclusive education. The national reports provided in-depth situational analyses on the provision of inclusive quality education for disabled children at the primary and junior secondary levels.<sup>19</sup> In particular, the workshop identified and built consensus on tailored applicable recommendations for addressing the current situation/conditions in each and all of the participating countries, namely: (i) raising awareness/advocacy around the broadened concepts and practices of inclusive education; (ii) restructuring policy frameworks on inclusive education and the links with EFA; (iii) capacity development workshops on various dimensions of inclusive education; and (iv) learning tools to support the development of inclusion mainly at the school and classroom levels.

### *Afghanistan*

Since the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, the Afghan government has introduced a number of inclusive education initiatives. These include a needs and rights assessment on inclusive education as well as a road map towards inclusive education in 2009; the adaptation and introduction of the UNESCO Bangkok Embracing Diversity Toolkit for Inclusive, Learning-Friendly

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<sup>19</sup> All reports are available at:  
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/themes/themes-curriculaires/education-pour-linclusion/ressources/rapports/asia-et-pacifique.html>

Environments (ILFE Toolkit)<sup>20</sup> into a number of universities, colleges and schools; and the introduction of inclusive education in teacher education and training programmes. The government has also revised the National Education Strategic Plan (with stronger emphasis on inclusive education in 2010) and committed itself to a Declaration on Inclusive and Child-Friendly Education. There has also been a revision of the administrative structure of the Ministry of Education with an increased focus on inclusive and child-friendly schools. Meanwhile, there has been an increase in the number of inclusive and child-friendly schools in Kabul as well as the development of a number of inclusive preschools.

### *China*

The Child-Friendly schools initiative in Hong Kong was initiated before the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE; however, it has received additional attention and support from both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders through increased national and international focus on inclusive education.

The Chinese government is currently introducing a decentralized support system for children with a wide range of special educational needs. This will enable more children with disabilities to learn together with their non-disabled peers in regular neighbourhood schools with support from itinerant resource teachers. The state has also committed itself to providing free textbooks for children with disabilities as well as financial subsidies for poor families who have a child with a disability.

### *Indonesia*<sup>21</sup>

In 2009, the Ministry of National Education launched the Ministerial Regulation 70/2009 on Inclusive Education. The regulation states, amongst other items, that every student with physical, emotional and mental disabilities as well as social difficulties has the right to get access to education through inclusive education; that education must respect diversity and must be non-discriminative; that every sub-district must have at least one inclusive school that must accept students with special educational needs; that education should be in accordance with the abilities and needs of the student; that the curriculum can be adapted for students with special educational needs; that schools must have at least one qualified special teacher; and that all students take the same final examinations. Should a student with special educational needs not achieve minimum results, he/she will get a certificate for the education level he/she has completed.

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<sup>20</sup> This toolkit contains an introductory booklet and nine Booklets (including three specialized booklets), each of which contains tools and activities for self-study to start creating an inclusive, learning-friendly environment (ILFE). Some of these activities ask the reader to reflect on what his/her school is doing now in terms of creating on ILFE, while others actively guide the reader in improving his/her skills as a teacher in a diverse classroom. <http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/032revised/index.htm>

<sup>21</sup> IDP Norway, Braillo Norway, IDPN Norway, UNESCO Jakarta, PLAN Indonesia, *Indonesia Compendium on Agreement of Laws and Regulations Guaranteeing All Children Equal Rights to Quality Education in an Inclusive Setting—4<sup>th</sup> Edition*, Indonesian Version, April 2010. [http://www.idp-europe.org/docs/Compendium\\_Indonesia\\_indonesia\\_4.pdf](http://www.idp-europe.org/docs/Compendium_Indonesia_indonesia_4.pdf)

## *Laos DPR*<sup>22</sup>

In Laos PDR, a national policy was written and officially approved by the Minister of Education and endorsed by the Prime Minister in 2010 coordinated by the Inclusive Education Centre of the Ministry of Education and supported by UNESCO and UNICEF. The policy lays out the general rationale, the causes of exclusion from education, as well as the policy's objectives, goals, and general strategies for implementation. This policy will serve as the framework for a detailed set of strategies and plans of action covering the next five years.

In particular, this document describes the current situation of education in Laos, discusses in detail current barriers to schooling and to learning, defines specific targets to be achieved by 2015, lays out guiding principles for implementing the policy, and defines core strategies and priority areas of intervention. It also assigns specific responsibility for implementation not only to every relevant Ministry department but also to a range of other stakeholders such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the National Council for the Advancement of Women, the Lao Women's Union and Youth Union, and the National Commission for People with Disabilities. These plans also link closely to the desired outcomes of the Education Sector Development Framework which governs development agency and NGO support to education.

## *Malaysia*

In 2009, the National University of Malaysia organized a regional conference on inclusive education as a follow-up to the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE and as part of its long-standing cooperation with IDP Norway and the University of Oslo. During a number of post-conference seminars held at the university, it was decided to translate the ILFE Toolkit and adapt it to better suit a Malaysian context. The Malaysian adapted version of the ILFE Toolkit will be used in teacher education programmes throughout Malaysia starting in 2011.

## *Pakistan*<sup>23</sup>

The National Education Policy of 2009 emphasizes that inclusive education is necessary to overcome social exclusion in Pakistan. The Federal Ministry of Education, assisted by UNICEF and UNESCO, has opted to strengthen the inclusive component of its current programme of Child-Friendly Schools by promoting a framework for developing a detailed set of standards, objectives, and activities to promote inclusive, child-friendly education. This framework analyses each of the major dimensions of Child-Friendly Schools (i.e. inclusive; academically effective; healthy, safe, and protective; and participatory of students, families, and communities) and lays out the domains/objectives of each dimension, the standards relevant to each domain, and the specific strategies required to achieve each standard. In the newly decentralized context of education in Pakistan, these

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<sup>22</sup> *Education Sector Development Framework 2009–2015*, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Laos, 2009. [http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Lao%20PDR/Lao\\_PDR\\_ESDF\\_2009\\_2015\\_Lao\\_Eng.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Lao%20PDR/Lao_PDR_ESDF_2009_2015_Lao_Eng.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> *National Education Policy 2009*, Government of Pakistan, Pakistan, 2009. [http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Pakistan/Pakistan\\_National\\_education\\_policy\\_2009.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Pakistan/Pakistan_National_education_policy_2009.pdf)

will soon be rolled out at the provincial level; part of this process will be the development of specific actions required at that level and at lower levels in order to create inclusive, child-friendly schools throughout the country.

### *Philippines<sup>24</sup>*

In 2009, the Department of Education of the Republic of the Philippines issued Order No. 72/2009 on Inclusive Education as a strategy for increasing the participation rate of children. The Order included an inclusive education programme for children with special needs, with the following strategies, amongst others: locating children through mapping, local health workers, advocacy campaigns; assessment; curriculum modifications and parental involvement.

### *Timor-Leste*

In Timor Leste, the Centre for Inclusive Education of the Ministry of Education, with support from UNICEF, has developed a national policy on inclusive education in consultation with a range of Ministry departments, NGOs, donors, and disabled persons' organizations. This policy uses the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE's definition of inclusive education as its basis for action and lays out general and specific objectives of the policy, with a special focus on those groups of learners most excluded from the system, and the general strategies required to achieve these objectives. Once approved by the Minister, the policy will be accompanied by a detailed matrix of desired purposes, expected results, and specific strategies and activities to achieve these results, each set in a timetable from 2011-2015 and each assigned to a particular unit of the Ministry. This matrix is currently being drafted in collaboration with the Ministry's departments.

## **Concluding remarks**

The vision of the education system differs greatly among Asian countries. Some countries are still coping with implementing universal compulsory elementary education for all students, while others have achieved twelve-year compulsory education and are coping very well with developing the tertiary education sector. However, common among all Asian countries is the vision that more children from marginalized groups in society need to get access to education.

As a prerequisite for reaching the goals of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), many countries have adopted inclusive teaching and learning practices into their regular pre-service teacher training programmes to create sustainable inclusive education programmes. It is of vital importance that each country spends time in defining inclusive and child-friendly education based on their own situations and circumstances, as in Afghanistan and Pakistan for example.

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<sup>24</sup> *Inclusive Education as a Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children*, Philippines Department of Education, Philippines, 2009.  
<http://www.deped.gov.ph/cpanel/uploads/issuanceImg/DO%20No.%2072,%20s.%202009%20.pdf>

In general, the term “inclusive education” is still mainly understood as an effort to enrol children with disabilities in school by most governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. The wider and more holistic concept of inclusive education is still lost on many stakeholders; they generally believe that inclusive education is about disabilities, while child-friendly schools are about school improvement. The linkage between the two concepts is not well understood even though considerable efforts are being made to raise awareness that “a school cannot be inclusive unless it is child-friendly and that a school cannot be child-friendly unless it is inclusive.”

Every year, statistics of net and gross enrolment rates around exclusion are being published, which often have little or no relevance or basis in the facts on the ground. Instead, governments should focus more on finding and counting children who are out of school, indentifying reasons for why they do not go to school (why they never enrolled or why they dropped out or were pushed out of education), and finding suitable solutions. Without accurate data and monitoring mechanisms, it is not always clear where the real bottlenecks lie in terms of the implementation of educational reform. A focus on the school and classroom levels is necessary to support and monitor the effectiveness of education systems and to develop priorities for the future.

At present, inclusive education initiatives are mainly implemented in primary schools, while the role of pre-primary education is often ignored. It is important to realize that in order to succeed with inclusive education, more attention must be given to school readiness programmes for groups of children vulnerable to exclusion from and within education. This will improve enrolment rates, reduce dropout rates and thus improve transition rates from primary to secondary education programmes. For example, there are still many countries that neglect or only minimally address students with special educational needs. Even where countries have developed special education systems with special schools, teachers for these education systems are trained in separate study courses.

At the same time, the recent policy developments in Laos PDR, Timor Leste and Pakistan represent a major step forward for supporting holistic educational reform towards inclusive education systems from vision to practice. These policies provide detailed strategies and plans with sets of standards, objectives, and activities to promote inclusive, child-friendly education. Crucially, the process of policy development and implementation has effectively engaged both ministerial staff and a range of other stakeholders in a collective sense of responsibility towards inclusion.

In this context, it is clear that national, regional and international conferences on education can potentially play a crucial role in inspiring new and innovative policies to ensure equal access to quality education for all. Their main role is to inspire to action and help motivate governments to initiate reforms and sustain successful efforts towards Education for All in inclusive and child-friendly settings. However, the direct benefit of conferences and meetings are often hard to measure. Senior education officials often run from conference to conference without having any opportunity to implement decisions and act on commitments. It is therefore essential that more is done in selecting participants who will promote and implement change in their ministries and home countries, developing agendas that are inspiring and participatory, and ensuring that commitments presented to participants for approval are both relevant and implementable.

There is a clear call for more international coordination. However, this must be rooted in local, national and regional initiatives and based on successful experiences in countries facing different challenges and opportunities. Solutions to problems will be found if stakeholders are inspired by the successes of others and when they feel that their voices are heard, their opinions respected and their concerns are being responded to with practical suggestions and ideas from the international community.

# Broadening the Concept of Inclusive Education in the Commonwealth of Independent States<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

This article intends to highlight common regional issues, approaches, and effective practices regarding inclusive education in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region, while taking into account that inclusive education in many countries must be contextualized according to their respective cultural, economic and political situation. The countries mentioned here are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

This article is based on the following sources: the National Reports on the Development of Education, which countries presented at the 48<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education (ICE) in November 2008, focusing on the topic of inclusive education<sup>2</sup>; the messages from the Ministers of Education sent to the ICE<sup>3</sup>; the presentations made by the National Focal Points of the Commonwealth of Independent States Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (CIS COP)<sup>4</sup> at the third and fourth CIS COP regional workshops (Belarus, 2007; 2008); the presentations made at the International Conference “Inclusive Education: Improving Education Policies and Systems” (Russia, 2008); and the fifth CIS COP Regional Workshop and Education for All Regional Conference on Enhancement of Quality of Education and Curriculum Development (Armenia, 2009)<sup>5</sup>. The Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the ICE are also referred to here, as guidelines to orientate the monitoring of the progress made in promoting inclusive education in the CIS countries.

## Context

Prior to the 48<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education (ICE), two preparatory meetings on inclusive education issues were held in the CIS region: the third CIS COP Regional Workshop “Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future” (Minsk, Belarus, 2007) and the International Conference “Inclusive Education: Improving Education Policies and Systems” (Saint Petersburg, Russia, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by I. Zagoumenov, UNESCO IBE Community of Practice’s Regional Focal Point for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region.

<sup>2</sup> National Reports submitted to the 48<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education (ICE) from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, UNESCO IBE. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/services/online-materials/national-reports.html>

<sup>3</sup> “Ministers’ Messages” submitted to the 48<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education (ICE) from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/ice/48th-ice-2008/messages-of-the-ministers.html>

<sup>4</sup> The Community of Practice in Curriculum Development is a platform where the issues of curriculum change can be jointly discussed and implemented within the framework of a holistic approach for determining and implementing the goals of Education for All (EFA). It was set up in July 2005 by the IBE in conjunction with curriculum specialists from different regions of the world.

<sup>5</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

At the first preparatory meeting, the CIS countries presented and compared inclusive education policies and practices. A series of questions around inclusive education were discussed by a group of policy makers, educators and curriculum specialists from CIS countries as well as representatives from various UNESCO Offices, Latvia and Finland. Participants developed, presented and discussed country reports on inclusive education, as well as identified challenges, good practices, and shared visions and challenges. They clarified, prioritized and provided regional inputs to the formation of a regional roadmap on inclusive education.

In particular, this first meeting revealed the prevalent understanding of inclusive education in the CIS region as: (i) special needs education based on a “defectology” approach (this was referred to as the narrow conception of inclusive education)<sup>6</sup>; (ii) educational integration without implying a systemic change of education structural components; and (iii) a concept that has been mainly circumscribed to students categorized as having physical and/or mental disabilities. At the same time, it is important to highlight that, during the workshop, participants revised the above approaches to inclusive education with a refined definition presented in a final regional statement. Inclusive education was addressed in terms of social inclusion, quality education and a revised defectology approach in the context of UNESCO’s definition of inclusive education.<sup>7</sup>

The participants stated that inclusive education is one of the main focuses of the development of national educational systems in the CIS region. This is based on its understanding within a broad interpretation, as the engagement of all students in the educational process, regardless of their age, gender, ethnic and religious background, previous achievements, differences in abilities and capacities, or their social and economic status. Though inclusion in its broad meaning is not widely used in official documents, the ideas of inclusive education are being reflected more and more in the CIS countries educational policies. For example, the right to education as a human right is guaranteed by national constitutions and one key strength of the region is having achieved an almost 100% levels of literacy and attendance.

In this context, the main regional challenges identified were as follows:

- the need for creating awareness both in the education system and society about the importance and value of inclusive education.
- the need to create awareness that inclusive education implies not only a reform of special schools but of all schools.
- fostering teacher training at all levels with regard to inclusive education practices.

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<sup>6</sup> “Defectology—literally “the study of defect”—is a science unique to the region, based on the idea that special education is the best way to offset limitations associated with disability. It was developed in the USSR in the 1920s by L. S. Vygotsky and still drives much of the thinking and action related to children with disabilities in the region. The theory says that intellectual capacity has endless potential and, if helped by proper educative methods, personal contact and stimulation, it can correct or circumvent impairments in lesser bodily functions. In practice, special education has been carried out in residential schools and institutions, segregating children from society, community and family.” UNICEF, *Innocenti Insight: Children and Disability in Transition*, 2011. [http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/media\\_3020.html](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/media_3020.html)

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris, UNESCO, 2005, p. 13.

- diversification of education to address multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and migration changes in the population, in relation to the aim of a right to education for all (e.g. Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Uzbekistan).
- economic levels of the countries, which do not allow for the provision of all the necessary facilities and professional staff training in relation to children with special needs (thus, as a default, they are in some cases integrated into mainstream schools).
- the importance of providing and further developing early childhood education with attention to preschool education (preschool institutions in the region were described as being in very poor condition).
- the need for commitment from and coordinated involvement of other public sectors involved in social policies addressing children's development and welfare.
- understanding inclusive education as a flexible paradigm, not a limited and unique model.

A regional roadmap was presented after three days of discussion and group work, combining the inputs of all CIS country representatives. The roadmap, encompassing the above mentioned challenges and proposals, became a final statement of actions and goals set in the context of a revised understanding of inclusive education.

The second preparatory meeting “Inclusive Education: Improving Education Policies and Systems” (Russia, 2008) was attended by representatives from several CIS countries as well as from Finland and Germany. The participants of the Conference noted positive tendencies in meeting the challenges of inclusive education in the CIS countries. Participants also highlighted the need to develop a complex approach to solving the problems of inclusive education, taking into account specific features of the national education systems, socio-cultural practices, the possibility of a broader understanding of inclusive education and the importance of creating the legal space in which the questions of education for all can be successfully resolved. Conference participants also underscored the particular significance of training the next generation of educators to ensure that the personality of each student grows in harmony and that society grows “in spirit”.

Participants also examined examples of the implementation of inclusive education programmes, questions regarding the theory and practice of innovative training, the quality and continuity of in-school and out-of-school programmes in inclusive education, as well as the use of innovative approaches and information technologies for inclusive education. Participants also highlighted the necessity to increase public awareness about the problems of inclusive education.

In 2009, the combined 5<sup>th</sup> CIS COP Workshop and regional ICE follow-up Education for All Regional Conference on the Enhancement of Quality of Education and Curriculum Development took place in Tsakhkadzor, Armenia. This meeting involved delegates from the Republic of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia Federation, Tajikistan and Ukraine, alongside representatives of intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, foundations and other institutions of civil society.

At this meeting, the participants agreed to support the Conclusions and Recommendations of the 47<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> sessions of the International Conference on Education, particularly that governments, as well as all other social actors, play an important role in providing quality

education for all and, in doing so, should recognize the importance of a broadened concept of inclusive education that addresses the diverse needs of all learners and that is relevant, equitable and effective. In addition, they agreed that a broadened concept of inclusive education could be viewed as a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for all and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities so as to implement the principles of inclusive education.<sup>8</sup>

Participants also acknowledged that clear advances had been made in the region with respect to the provision of quality and inclusive education mainly in terms of policies, programmes, strategies and practices with a view to guaranteeing the learning and participation of all. Nevertheless, the dilemma of special needs education and integration approaches was considered still highly relevant, necessitating further progress towards a broadened concept and approach towards inclusive education in the region.

In the next section of this article, some concrete examples of the issues raised through the discussions, as well as some effective inclusive education practices and experiences in the region, are provided, structured around the four sub-themes of the ICE.

### *Approaches, scope and content*

Traditionally, in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the concept and practice of inclusive education amongst policy-makers and society have been mainly limited to students categorized as having special needs, meaning those with physical and/or mental disabilities. Approaches and responses given to students' needs have mostly been remedial and corrective, for instance setting up special schools and curricular tracks and increasing the number of special education teachers.

However, Ministries of Education (MOE) in the CIS region are generally moving towards a broader concept of IE that does not only concern disabilities, but also other vulnerable groups excluded from education. For example, in Armenia, inclusive education has been conceived mainly as a means to involve the education of children with special physical needs and, later on, as the provision of alternative education through schools with all types of advanced study. At present, the concept of inclusion is being reviewed, shifting towards a new approach described as the inclusion of various forms of education, as well as the provision of equal access to quality education for all children. Along those lines, compulsory and accessible secondary education, as well as professional education, is a key goal of inclusive education in Armenia. At the same time, the Armenian education system is reconsidering its policy towards the education of children with special physical needs, by implementing instruction based on the right to choose an educational establishment with an adequate curriculum and the right to benefit from pedagogical, medical, psychological and other services, irrespective of the type of educational establishment chosen.

The major focus of inclusive education in the CIS region is on excluded groups, including children with special needs, orphans, girls/women, the poor, ethnic, language, social and religious minorities, working children, children affected by conflict, and children living in

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<sup>8</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education*, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/5, Geneva, 28 November 2008.

rural areas. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, whilst acknowledging the right of all children to have access to education, various reasons have been considered in determining why certain children do not have access to education in Kazakhstan. In this regard, certain social groups who are more likely to be excluded have been categorized. For example, economic factors, including poverty and unemployment can be identified. Similarly, social factors, such as children from broken homes, children from “risk groups”, and social orphans may often be excluded from accessing education. Demographic factors, such as migration, the arrival of new groups of population, such as oralmans and refugees, can also play a role in the limited access to education. Finally, psychosocial, behavioural and physical factors have been presented as a reason for the lack of training of children who actually attend school, for instance, children with deviant behaviours, with special needs and limited capabilities.

### *Public policies*

The CIS governments pursue education in the public interest and are strengthening their capacity to orientate, promote and follow up on the development of equitable education of high quality. They regularly collect and use relevant data on all categories of the excluded to better develop education policies and reforms for their inclusion, as well as to develop national monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These policies have led to high rates of student enrolment. For example, the Republic of Belarus has reported adult literacy rates of 97%, youth literacy (aged 15-24) of 99.8% and 94% of children are enrolled in primary education.

There have been considerable legislative efforts by the governments in CIS countries to promote school cultures and environments that are child-friendly, conducive to effective learning and encourage the active role and the participation of the learners themselves, their families and their communities. For example, in national legislation, the CIS countries address social inequity and poverty levels. Internationally, only Azerbaijan (28 January 2009) and Ukraine (4 February 2010) have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in December 2006, although eight CIS countries—Armenia (30 March 2007), Azerbaijan (9 January 2008), Kazakhstan (11 December 2008), Republic of Moldova (30 March 2007), Russian Federation (24 September 2008), Turkmenistan (4 September 2008), Ukraine (24 September 2008), Uzbekistan (27 February 2009)—have signed the Convention.

The CIS countries are also developing policies that provide educational support for different categories of learners in order to facilitate their development in regular schools. A special focus is placed on children with special educational needs through their integration within regular schools. This is mainly achieved through specialized teacher training and the coordination of specialized teachers and schools with mainstream schools.

The CIS countries also view linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom as a valuable resource and promote the use of the mother tongue in the early years of instruction. For example, in Kazakhstan, the government assists small minorities to organize child-raising and instruction in their native language, and pursues a policy for the safeguarding and restoration of the culture and national distinctiveness of small minorities and ethnic

groups.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science has arranged for ethnic groups, such as Russians, Greeks and Kurds, to have the opportunity to study in national schools in the areas they live in and to study their native language and culture, according to an individualized curriculum during extra school hours. Ethnic minorities also have the chance to choose to learn in either in Armenian or Russian. Mainstream schools also provide the opportunity to include extra languages into the curriculum. This kind of legislation, catering for the linguistic needs of minorities or indigenous groups, exists in most of the other CIS countries.

A major challenge for the region is to develop and implement an approach to respond to students' diverse abilities and health and to move away from a system which streams and segregates students based on their differences. In the CIS countries, streaming and tracking of students based on their abilities and health are still the major pedagogical methods adopted in elementary, intermediate and high school. In the Republic of Belarus, for example, "even at the very first stage of education, a differentiated approach is followed in teaching and raising children. This differentiation is essentially achieved by varying the actual teaching process: the syllabus is covered at different speeds for different children; children are given a wide range of options in their subjects and activities; set work is adapted to individual capabilities; classes and groups are streamed on the basis of recommendations by psychologists and medical workers."<sup>10</sup>

### *Systems, links and transitions*

In their efforts towards inclusion, the CIS Ministries of Education are working closely with a number of key actors, including other government agencies, civil society and the private sector. For example, in Russia, government agencies work closely with the NGO "Perspective" that provides legal support for the education of persons with disabilities, including free legal advice on education, rehabilitation and the creation of accessible learning environments (including online learning). The activities are also aimed at changing public attitudes towards people with disabilities, preparing young people with disabilities for adult life, protecting the rights of persons with disabilities to education and creating accessible environments for people with disabilities.

In Tajikistan, the education and well-being of students with special needs are supported through joint programmes by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Protection. The Ministries also have a broad range of international, national and local organizations and experts as partners, in order to implement specific projects and programmes for inclusive education. In Moldova, the Ministry of Education closely collaborates with the National Alliance of Civil Society Organizations, focusing on children with disabilities. In Ukraine, the Ministry of Education is implementing the

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<sup>9</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention: Kazakhstan*, CRC/C/41/Add.13, 24 September 2002.  
[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/317ab54d16e0e6aac1256bdd0026bd27/0ff2b6028a87cd52c1256c6b0033d31d/\\$FILE/G0244605.doc](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/317ab54d16e0e6aac1256bdd0026bd27/0ff2b6028a87cd52c1256c6b0033d31d/$FILE/G0244605.doc)

<sup>10</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention: Belarus*, CRC/C/65/Add.15, 26 September 2001.  
[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/21212db5e9c1e6bcc1256bb80049b76e/\\$FILE/G0144853.doc](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/21212db5e9c1e6bcc1256bb80049b76e/$FILE/G0144853.doc)

national inclusive education project through the support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Armenia's efforts in promoting inclusive education are supported by UNESCO, UNICEF, the Danish organization Mission East, Open Society Institute in Armenia, World Vision and a local NGO called "Bridge of Hope".

In many cases, parents and communities have also been involved in educational reform planning and implementation. At the school level, local school councils involving parents, students and other educational stakeholders in educational decision making have been established in Belarus, Russia and most of the other CIS countries.

From a thematic perspective, the CIS Ministries of Education have prioritized the development of early childhood care and education (ECCE) within a lifelong learning framework. The development of vocational training for students with special needs, as well as the provision of consequent employment opportunities, are also key challenges for most of the region. Indeed, it is still a challenge for most of the CIS countries to provide high quality inclusive vocational and university training for disadvantaged youth and also, non-formal educational opportunities that offer the possibilities for formal recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal settings.

Governments also aim to strengthen the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in order to ensure greater access to learning opportunities, in particular in rural, remote and disadvantaged areas. For example, in Ukraine, distance learning takes advantage of the use of the scientific and academic potential of universities, academies, institutes, centres of in-service training and other educational foundations elsewhere. In addition, an experimental "Distance Education for Secondary School" is being conducted by the Kharkov Polytechnical Institute, which aims at testing and improving methods of distance education and elaborating teachers' guidelines on how to use such courses.

### *Learners and teachers*

CIS governments seem to agree on the importance of training teachers and specialists on inclusive education. Both pre-service and in-service training in inclusive education is being provided. The main focus is on capacity building of existing structures responsible for teachers' pre-service and in-service training and the implementation of innovative techniques. Teacher training methods are also being diversified; they now include electronic training tools, as well as the provision of specialized courses on children with disabilities.

Similarly, an innovative cascade module in teachers' inclusive education in-service training has also been introduced in the Republic of Armenia where the training of staff from new schools takes place in the already trained schools, providing trainees with the opportunity to have training sessions, see practice at schools and hold discussions on observed lessons. Trained teachers go back to their school and practice their knowledge under the supervision of resource schools until they are approved as trainers. When the schools finish the comprehensive course of inclusive education (concept, philosophy, practice, curricula and class management), they are officially recognized by the Ministries of Education as inclusive schools. The schools identify children with special education

needs in their communities and enrol them in education. They get funds from the state budget for inclusive education to keep extra staff and provide extra special education services.

In Russia, meanwhile, learning materials entitled “Russian ABC Book for Migrants”—the first book for children who do not speak Russian—have been produced by teachers of the Intercultural Communication Department at Herzen University with the support of the UNESCO Chair on Sciences of Education. The department trains teachers of Russian as a second language and has a great experience in working in the multi-ethnic schools of Saint Petersburg. The package can also be used as a supplementary course for migrants groups in preparing them for Russian schools. Training seminars are also held to train teachers to use the ABC book and related methodology.

Another example of development of inclusive education in Russia is the integration of educational technologies, encouraging the training of professional psychologists for visually impaired students. The proposed educational technologies are also incorporated into the undergraduate “Psychology” programme and the graduate “Psychology in informational systems” programme at the State Pedagogical University of Russia in Saint Petersburg. The main goals of this initiative were to give students a psychological understanding for the inclusion of the visually challenged into society for social engagement and interaction, to master working with informational technologies, and to provide educational and occupational access to learners with physical-sensory disabilities. This has encouraged positive attitudes, and led to the engagement of trainees in personal and professional interaction with these learners, and the increase in the professionalism and competence in terms of their support.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of inclusion in the CIS countries has recently evolved towards the idea that all children should have equal learning opportunities, regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds or their differences in abilities and capacities. The meaning of the term “students with special educational needs” has been adapted to include more than just students with disabilities; it now also considers those who are in some way different e.g. gifted and talented students, students with behavioural disorders, as well as those with socio-economic and cultural disadvantages.

On the one hand, the law acknowledges the right of every child to education regardless of capabilities. However, on the other hand, the normative provisions for public education do not offer any clear direction for action, nor show how this process can be implemented at the school level. Along these lines, CIS governments are developing policies that provide educational support for different categories of excluded learners in order to facilitate their development in regular schools. However, there is no comprehensive educational policy document in the region that has directly elaborated upon inclusion in its broad meaning. It is crucial that CIS governments develop a framework of intersectoral policies to incorporate concerns about social inequity and poverty levels.

While developing appropriate legislation and policies remains a priority, a key challenge for the CIS region remains identifying and implementing the most appropriate pedagogical

ways of responding to diversity, particularly in basic and general secondary education. In their search for effective political and pedagogical ways of responding to diversity, with a view to developing more inclusive education systems, the CIS countries are in need of international cooperation. It is believed that UNESCO and other international organizations will continue to provide this much needed support to the region to enable its full integration in the global inclusive education agenda.

# Inclusive Education

## Diversity across European Countries<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The European Union (EU) is arguably one of the most diverse formal alliances of countries in the world—the EU has 27 member states and there are 4 additional countries within the European Free Trade Association (EFTA): Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Within this alliance, there are over 25 official languages, plus a number of unofficial ones. Each of the member states has its own laws, policies and systems for all aspects of society—most notably education. Within countries, at least five—Belgium, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom—can be described as federal. They are composed of smaller regions, or even “countries” which to different degrees have their own legislative and decision making powers.

The present education systems (both policies and practice) in European countries have evolved over a relatively long period of time, within very specific contexts and are therefore highly individual<sup>2</sup>. These systems are very much embedded within national traditions, debates and discourses relating to education generally, and inclusive education specifically.

In considering policy and practice for inclusive education across countries, it needs to be recognized that European policy makers and practitioners may not always be talking about the same thing<sup>3</sup>. A number of key issues should be highlighted here:

- Systems for inclusive education are directed to greater or lesser degrees by both the general and special education frameworks of provision that exist in individual countries<sup>4</sup>. There is a need to examine issues impacting upon inclusive education within both general and special education legislation and policy to fully understand inclusive education in individual countries.
- Inclusive education in all countries is not a static phenomenon—it has been developing in different ways and continues to develop<sup>5</sup>. Conceptions of, policies for and practice in inclusive education across European countries are constantly undergoing change and any examination of inclusive education and “current” practice in any country needs to be considered within the context of wider educational reforms occurring in that country.

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by V. Donnelly, C. Meijer, & A. Watkins, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

<sup>2</sup> Meijer, C.J.W. (Ed.), *Financing of Special Needs Education*. Middelfart, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 1999; Meijer, C.J.W. (Ed.), *Inclusive Education and Effective Classroom Practices*. Middelfart, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Watkins, A., & D’Alessio, S., International Comparisons of Inclusive Policy and Practice: are we talking about the same thing? *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 4(3), 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Watkins, A. (Ed.), *Assessment in inclusive settings: Key issues for policy and practice*. Odense, Denmark, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Barton, L., & Armstrong, F. (Eds.), *Policy, Experience and Change: Cross-Cultural Reflections on Inclusive Education*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2007.

- Interpretations and an understanding of what is meant by inclusion and inclusive education vary greatly between countries<sup>6</sup>. These interpretations often reflect underlying attitudes towards or understandings of disability and special educational needs. The use of terms and words—for example, handicap or its translation—can be seen to reflect particular models or approaches for understanding disability, especially medical as opposed to social models of disability.
- There is no agreed interpretation of terms such as special need or disability across countries. The fact that some countries “identify” more pupils as having a special need or disability than other countries, is linked to administrative, financial and procedural regulations, rather than reflecting variations in the incidence and the types of special educational needs in countries<sup>7</sup>.

This final issue is linked to the problem of different national language usage, especially within a European context. There is a real risk that professionals working at the international level may not be referring to the same thing—in terms of words, concepts, or procedures—when talking about inclusive education and related ideas. Certain words—including inclusion—do not always have a direct translation from English into other European languages and vice versa. An example of this is the concept of “assessment”. In some languages, the terms “evaluation” and “assessment” are almost synonymous. In other languages the terms are used to mean quite specific—and very different—things<sup>8</sup>.

These differences in understanding of terminology and core concepts relating to inclusion are clearly evident between European countries. However, within a global context, it should be emphasized that European level debates regarding inclusive education have most often focused upon meeting the needs of learners with special educational needs (SEN), which occur as a result of learning difficulty or disability. Inclusive education has—until relatively recently—been most often interpreted and understood as primarily concerned with efforts to meet the needs of this group of learners within mainstream and not separate educational contexts. In most European countries, the conceptualization of educational inclusion has grown out of discussions surrounding specialist segregated provision, integration and mainstreaming.<sup>9</sup>

The broader interpretation of inclusive education as an educational approach for all learners—within a single system of education for all—that is: *an on-going a process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination*<sup>10</sup>—is beginning to be the focus of more policy level debates in European countries. This can be seen in changes and development in

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<sup>6</sup> D’Alessio, S., Made in Italy: Integrazione scolastica and the new vision of Inclusive Education, in L. Barton and F. Armstrong (Eds.), *Policy, Experience and Change: Cross Cultural Reflections on Inclusive Education*, Dordrecht, Boston, London, Springer, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Meijer, C.J.W. (Ed.), *op. cit.*, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Watkins, A. (Ed.), *op. cit.*, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Donnelly, V.J. (Ed.), *Inclusive Education in Action: Project Framework and Rationale*. Odense, Denmark, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future*, International Conference on Education, 48<sup>th</sup> Session, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/5. Geneva, 2008.

country level legislation.<sup>11</sup> Inclusive education is increasingly being seen as an approach for all disadvantaged groups, as well as migrants and minorities and even pupils who are identified as gifted and talented.

However, due to national political priorities, the more limited interpretation of inclusive education as an approach for meeting SEN within mainstream settings is still mainly predominant in countries. Some of the possible factors impacting on this situation are outlined in the remainder of this paper and the more limited interpretation of inclusive education, as primarily focussing upon pupils with special educational needs should be borne in mind when considering the information presented here.

## **European and international guiding principles**

Despite the clear differences in European countries' systems for special and inclusive education, there are similarities in approaches and aims<sup>12</sup>. Many of these similarities are reflected in different ways in European and internationally agreed guiding principles and statements with which most European countries are aligned.

### *European level guiding principles*

At the European level, there are a number of documents that outline European countries' objectives in relation to supporting learners with special educational needs that imply a degree of commitment on the part of EU countries to implementing agreed priorities. Many of these are statements of the European Council of Ministers' priorities relating to education generally—for example the Report from the Education Council to the European Council *The concrete future objectives of education and training systems* (2001)<sup>13</sup> and the Communication from the Commission *A coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training* (2007)<sup>14</sup>.

There are also a number of key documents that focus specifically on learners with special educational needs and their inclusion in mainstream education dating as far back as 1990<sup>15</sup>. In 2007, the European Council of Education Ministers identified special needs education as being one of the 16 priority objectives to be considered within the

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<sup>11</sup> For more information, please refer to the “National Overviews” section of the Agency website: <http://www.european-agency.org/country-information/austria/national-overview>

<sup>12</sup> Ainscow, M., & Booth, T. (Eds.), *From Them to Us: An International Study of Inclusion in Education*, London: Routledge, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> European Council. Report from the Education Council to the European Council, *The Concrete Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems*, February 2001.

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission A coherent Framework of Indicators and Benchmarks for Monitoring Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training*, February 2007.

<sup>15</sup> The key documents include: European Council Resolution: *Rights of Disabled People (1996)*; European Parliament Resolution: *Towards a Barrier-free Europe for People with Disabilities (2001)*; European Parliament Resolution: *Towards a United Nations Legally Binding Instrument to Promote and Protect the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities (2003)*; Council Resolution: *Promoting the Employment and Social Integration of People with Disabilities (2003)*; Council Resolution *Equal Opportunities for Pupils and Students with Disabilities in Education and Training (2003)*.

Lisbon 2010 Objectives work<sup>16</sup>. Within the proposals for the 2020 European Community objectives for education and training (called ET 2020), learners with special educational needs are again seen as a priority<sup>17</sup>).

The focus of the majority of these resolutions has been upon increased equality of opportunity and quality provision for learners with special educational needs. However, the recent Council Conclusions on the social dimension of education and training<sup>18</sup> indicates a shift away from a focus upon inclusion as an approach for a limited group of learners. The conclusions emphasize that education and training systems across the EU need to ensure both equity and excellence, and recognize that improving educational attainment and key competences for all are crucial not only to economic growth and competitiveness, but also to reducing poverty and fostering social inclusion:

*Creating the conditions required for the successful inclusion of pupils with special needs in mainstream settings benefits all learners. Increasing the use of personalized approaches, including individualized learning plans and harnessing assessment to support the learning process, providing teachers with skills to manage and benefit from diversity, promoting the use of co-operative teaching and learning, and widening access and participation, are ways of increasing quality for all<sup>19</sup>.*

### *International guiding principles*

At the international level, the key legal frameworks impacting on special needs and inclusive education also tend to reflect a conceptual shift from a focus on meeting SEN to inclusion as an approach to educating all learners. Most European countries have ratified the *UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948)<sup>20</sup>, the *UN Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960)<sup>21</sup>, the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989)<sup>22</sup>, the *UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity in Cultural Expressions* (2005)<sup>23</sup> and the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006)<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> European Commission, *op. cit.*, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> European Council, *Council Conclusions on a Strategic Framework for European Co-operation in Education and Training* ("ET 2020"), Brussels, May 2009. See also: European Council, *Delivering Lifelong Learning for Knowledge, Creativity and Innovation. Brussels: Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme*, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

<sup>21</sup> United Nations, *Convention against Discrimination in Education*, 1960. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/education.htm>

<sup>22</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989. <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

<sup>23</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity in Cultural Expression*, 2005. [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-RL\\_ID=31038&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-RL_ID=31038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, *Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities*, 2006.

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>. See also: United Nations *Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, 2003. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/dissre00.htm>

All European countries have ratified UNESCO's *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in Special Needs Education* (1994)<sup>25</sup>. This collective statement is a major focal point for special needs education work in Europe—it is still a key element in the conceptual framework of many countries' policies. All European countries agree that the principles encompassed in the Salamanca Statement should underpin all education policies—not just those specifically dealing with special needs education. These principles relate to equal opportunities in terms of genuine access to learning experiences, respect for individual differences and quality education for all, and focusing upon personal strengths rather than weaknesses.

More recently, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006), specifically Article 24, is highlighted as being crucial as it advocates inclusive education: “*States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning [...]*”<sup>26</sup> Most European countries have signed the Convention and the majority of these have also signed the optional protocol and are in the process of ratifying both the Convention and protocol.<sup>27</sup>

The UNESCO Policy Guidelines also suggest that: *Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners [...]* 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<sup>28</sup> (p. 8). The Policy Guidelines highlight the following propositions regarding inclusive education:

- Inclusive education and quality are reciprocal;
- Access and quality are linked and are mutually reinforcing;
- Quality and equity are central to ensuring inclusive education.

It is argued that these and other international documents: [...] *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* (Policy Guidelines, p. 10). These propositions highlight principles that policy makers in European countries are aiming to make a reality. However, policy makers can also be seen to be taking different approaches towards these goals, depending upon their individual country situations.

## **Mapping trends in the implementation of policy for inclusive education**

At both national and European levels, there are calls for countries to track the implementation of new educational policies and legislation. The justifications and pressures for mapping such developments are very clear at the international, European and

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<sup>25</sup> UNESCO, *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*, Paris: UNESCO, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Article 24.1, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> For updated information: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/countries.asp?navid=17&pid=16>

<sup>28</sup> UNESCO, *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris, UNESCO, 2005, p. 13.

national level, e.g. Article 31 of the *UN 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* calls for data collection and monitoring at State level; the European Lisbon objectives 2010<sup>29</sup> and also the European Council priorities and targets as outlined in the ET 2020<sup>30</sup>, as well as on-going Agency work involving Ministerial representatives from 27 European countries.<sup>31</sup>

The goal of strengthening educational capacity through monitoring policy developments is outlined in the Lisbon Objectives work of the European Union agreed upon by all member States' Ministers in 2000. Two aspects of the approach taken in this programme for education and training should be highlighted as being of particular significance:

- Member States set specific targets for improving education in the form of indicators and benchmarks. The Council of Ministers' agreement to use such an approach has emphasized the need for systematic data collection for monitoring and mapping developments within education systems.
- Four out of five benchmarks identified by Ministers relate to school education and within the 16 core indicators for progress towards Lisbon Objectives, Special Needs Education is highlighted as an indicator requiring specific data collection and monitoring.

The new strategic framework for Education and Training (ET 2020) maintains the approach of using benchmarks and indicators for education. The third strategic objective focuses upon promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship:

*Educational disadvantage should be addressed by providing high quality early childhood education and targeted support, and by promoting inclusive education. Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners—including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants—complete their education [...] equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds.*<sup>32</sup>

The pressures on policy makers to demonstrate how policies are leading towards greater educational inclusion results in the need for the systematic collection of qualitative and quantitative information, in order to answer key questions being faced in individual countries relating to developments in policy and practice. Such mapping information can be used longitudinally by countries to track their own developments and comparatively across countries to highlight relative developments.

However, in the area of inclusive education, it is an extremely complex task to develop monitoring tools and engage in information collection<sup>33</sup>. Many countries are in the process of reviewing and changing their policies and legislation for inclusive education, based upon knowledge and experiences from ongoing pilot projects. These involve either

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<sup>29</sup> European Commission, *op. cit.*, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> European Council, *op. cit.*, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> For example, European Agency. *Lisbon Declaration: Young People's Views on Inclusive Education*, 2007. <http://www.european-agency.org/publications/flyers/lisbon-declaration-young-people2019s-views-on-inclusive-education>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Kyriazopoulou, M., & Weber, H. (Eds), *Development of a set of indicators—for inclusive education in Europe*, Odense, Denmark, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2009.

introducing new financing strategies for special needs education, or implementing new policies/laws regarding quality systems and monitoring for education.<sup>34</sup>

Within all European countries, it is recognized that one critical area of information required by policy makers for monitoring and considering policy relates to quantitative data on pupils in the school system<sup>35</sup>. In particular, information on the placement and provision of pupils identified as having special educational needs is highlighted within countries and at the European Union level as being important for tracking policy developments in education.

Various sources of quantitative information relating to mainstream education are already available to policy makers from international organizations such as Eurydice, Eurostat and OECD. In addition, there are initiatives being taken at European level (coordinated by Eurostat) to explore specific quantitative data collection relating to special needs education. However, the Agency's work with policy makers in 27 European countries indicates that, in relation to quantitative information on pupils identified as having different forms of special educational needs, there are major gaps in the information that is currently available at national and European levels: the approaches taken by the organizations working in the field and the type of information they provide differ greatly and crucially; there is no agreed approach at the European level to information collection that can be used to map the implementation of policy for inclusive (as opposed to special needs) education.<sup>36</sup>

In the next section, the important, but problematic, task for policy makers of gathering and analysing information is considered in detail as one key example of the issues and difficulties apparent in making inclusive education a reality in European countries.

### **Data available for European policy makers**

For many policy makers, practitioners and researchers, information provided through qualitative research provides a rich source of inspiration and guidance. However, policy makers in particular, both at the national as well as international levels, demand comparative information that includes quantitative data.

As has previously been mentioned, in 2007, as part of the Lisbon Objectives process, the European Council of Ministers for Education identified pupils with SEN as one of the 16 indicators for monitoring annual progress across EU member states<sup>37</sup>. This high level demand for comparable quantitative data from the field has raised the awareness with many key decision makers in European countries of the debates and difficulties that researchers in the field of inclusive education have recognized and grappled with for a number of years. These difficulties are all apparent as the result of a fact, which

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<sup>34</sup> European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, *Indicators for Inclusive Education*. <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/indicators-for-inclusive-education>

<sup>35</sup> Kyriazopoulou, M., & Weber, H. *op. cit.*, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> For more information about the European Agency's work with policy makers in 27 European countries in relation to quantitative information on pupils identified as having different forms of special educational needs: [www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, *op. cit.*, 2007.

has already been discussed in this paper, namely that there are no accepted definitions of inclusion, special needs education, disability and/or special educational needs available to use comparatively across European countries.

Collecting data relating to pupils with SEN presents methodological problems at the individual country as well as international levels. These problems mean that there is no agreed method for collecting data that is universally accepted as being reliable and valid for cross-country comparisons—at national, European or international levels.

The field of Special Needs Education does not deal with “absolutes”—policy makers, practitioners, researchers and the wider community do not always agree on who does and does not have a disability, impairment or special need. The reason for this fact is that a person’s special need essentially arises from two possible sources: factors within a person (some form of impairment) and factors within their environment (the environment is either minimizing or exacerbating the effect of the impairment).

The International Classification of Functioning develops this concept at the international level<sup>38</sup>. It provides a standard framework for considering disability and how environmental factors interact with different functional capabilities of people with special needs. The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) discussion of special educational needs highlights the fact that SEN is a broader term than disability; it covers more “types” of educational need—for example social, emotional and behavioural difficulties—and is clearly a context bound definition: [...] *the concept of ‘children with special educational needs’ extends beyond those who may be included in handicapped categories to cover those who are failing in school for a wide variety of other reasons that are known to be likely to impede a child’s optimal progress. Whether or not this more broadly defined group of children are in need of additional support depends on the extent to which schools need to adapt their curriculum, teaching and organization and/or to provide additional human or material resources so as to stimulate efficient and effective learning for these pupils.*<sup>39</sup>

Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a “construct” that countries define within their legislation and then go on to identify, assess and make provision for in different ways. As there are no accepted definitions of disability and/or SEN available to use comparatively across European countries, some countries are currently considering incorporating different aspects or elements of international definitions within their legislation. At present, countries mainly use internally generated definitions within their educational legislation and policymaking (and therefore any subsequent data collection).

The imposition of “external” definitions of disability or SEN to country based data collection is recognized as having significant methodological difficulties in practice. For most countries, policies have a clear focus on what special needs provision a learner may require rather than solely in learner factors, such as a type of disability or impairment. However, whilst there is a movement in all countries away from medically-

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<sup>38</sup> World Health Organisation, *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*. 2001. <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/site/icftemplate.cfm?myurl=introduction.html%20&mytitle=Introduction>

<sup>39</sup> UNESCO, *International Standard Classification of Education—ISCED*. Paris, UNESCO, 1997. [http://www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/doc/isced\\_1997.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/doc/isced_1997.htm)

based models of identification and assessment of learning needs, towards educational and “interactionist” approaches, there is no agreement on which pupils should receive what types of provision<sup>40</sup>.

It is for this reason that the member countries of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (the Agency) have agreed that the most useful approach to collecting any form of data on special needs education is to take a “bottom-up” approach that uses the country’s own legal definition of SEN as the basis for data collection.

However, using country definitions of SEN as the basis of data collection also presents a number of methodological difficulties that need to be clarified:

- Countries include different “categories” of learners within their definitions of SEN. Different “categories” of special needs may or may not be covered: for example, disability (sensory, physical, psychological); learning difficulties; behaviour problems; health problems; socially disadvantaged etc.<sup>41</sup>
- Some countries define only one or two types of special needs. Others categorize pupils with special needs into more than ten categories. Most countries that specify categories of need distinguish 6–10 types of special needs. “Typologies” of SEN are outlined in one form or another in the legislation of many European countries, and are clearly related to administrative, financial and procedural regulations. They do not reflect variations in the actual incidence of SEN between these countries.
- Country legislation and policy may or may not include a “definition” of what is meant by inclusive education and a segregated setting.
- The age range of compulsory school education is not the same in all countries. Alongside this, some countries “count” pupils outside the compulsory age range if they are enrolled in compulsory sector education.
- Some countries provide official recognition of a pupil’s SEN in the form of a decision, certificate, statement or other legal document. However, not all countries collect data relating to pupils with an official recognition of SEN.
- In line with the point above, many countries do not collect data on the numbers of pupils in fully inclusive settings that receive some form of SEN support. A number of countries make it clear that official figures relate only to pupils receiving extensive support, but that other pupils also receive support.

These points lead to the conclusion that it is not useful to compare the overall numbers and/or percentages of pupils officially recognized as having SEN (as different definitions are being applied), or to compare the numbers or percentages of pupils with SEN in fully inclusive settings, as accurate data is not always available and data that is available is not directly comparable between countries.

The only comparable set of data is *the percentage of pupils who are educated in segregated settings*. In using such an indicator, the factor that is being compared is placement in a segregated setting—a concept that most countries are able to agree upon and use in

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* For details of what is covered in each country, readers may also consult the legal definitions of SEN presented here: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, *Special Needs Education—Country Data 2010*. Odense, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010.

data collection. The Agency data collection applies an agreed operational definition of a segregated setting: *Segregation refers to education where the pupil with special needs follows education in separate special classes or special schools for the largest part (80% or more) of the school day.*

It is felt that data on pupils with SEN in segregated settings is comparable across countries and that this quantitative data alone can be used in indicating trends in provision and movements towards inclusion.

However this statement requires qualification—whilst it is argued that this is useful quantitative data, it cannot provide any indication of the quality, suitability or appropriateness of the education provided for pupils with SEN.

It should be clearly recognized that other qualitative indicators must be considered in relation to statistical data if trends in provision and movement towards inclusion are to be fully understood<sup>42</sup>.

### **Agency data collection—emerging trends?**

The Agency SNE data collection is a biennial exercise with data provided by the Ministerial Representatives of the Agency. In all cases, this data is from official Ministerial sources. All data refers to pupils officially identified as having SEN as defined in the country in question. The data uses the country-based legal definitions of SEN as there are no accepted definitions of SEN available to use comparatively.

Data provided by countries covers eight agreed questions—five are statistical and relate to the numbers of pupils placed in different settings; the three remaining questions provide contextual information with notes and clarifications, particularly referring to legal definitions of special needs<sup>43</sup>.

Using the data provided from Agency member countries in 2010<sup>44</sup>, the following is apparent: Across all countries in total, 3.9% of the agreed compulsory school population is officially identified as having some form of SEN as defined by legislation in the participating countries. However, this overall figure hides great differences in countries as is shown in Table 1, which indicates the percentage of pupils in the compulsory school sector recognized as having SEN (in all educational settings).

Some countries identify less than 2% of pupils as having SEN, while others more than 10%.

In relation to pupils with SEN being educated in separate, segregated settings, across all countries in total, 2.3% of pupils within compulsory schooling are educated either in a

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<sup>42</sup> Kyriazopoulou, M., & Weber, H., *op. cit.*, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> The Agency has collected this data since 2004 and complete data sets: [www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)

<sup>44</sup> Data collected in 2010 is available from the following Agency member countries: Austria, Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Belgium (French speaking community), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK (England), UK (Northern Ireland), UK (Scotland) and UK (Wales).

**Table 1. Percentage of pupils in the compulsory school sector recognised as having SEN (in all educational settings)**

0–2%	2.1%–4%	4.1%–6%	6.1%–10%	10.1% and above
Sweden	Austria	Belgium (Fr.)	Belgium (Fl.)	Iceland
	France	Cyprus	Czech rep.	Lithuania
	Greece	Denmark	Estonia	
	Luxembourg	Germany	Finland	
	Poland	Hungary	Norway	
	Portugal	Ireland	Slovenia	
	Spain	Latvia	UK (Scotland)	
	UK (England)	Malta		
	UK (Wales)	Netherlands		
		Switzerland		
	(Italy *)	UK (Northern Ireland)		

\* Italy = based on 2008 data

special school or a separate class in a mainstream school. However, this overall figure again hides differences between countries with some countries placing less than 1% of pupils in separate settings, while others place over 4% of students in separate settings (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Percentage of pupils recognized as having SEN segregated settings**

Up to 1.0%	1.01%–2.0%	2.01%–4.0%	4.01% and above
Cyprus	Austria	Finland	Belgium (Fl.)
Luxembourg	France	Greece	Belgium (Fr.)
Malta	Iceland	Hungary	Czech Republic
Portugal	Ireland	Netherlands	Denmark
Spain	Lithuania		Estonia
	Norway		Germany
	Poland		Latvia
	Slovenia		Switzerland
	Sweden		
	UK (England)		
	UK (Northern Ireland)		
	UK (Scotland)		
(Italy *)	UK (Wales)		

\* Italy = based on 2008 data

It is possible to look across the datasets of information collected in European Agency member countries. Between 2004 and 2010 very few changes in terms of increased or decreased segregation are evident within countries. Since 2008, the overall percentage of pupils in segregated settings has increased slightly—from 1.96% to 2.3%. However this change could be mainly due to different data collection procedures in some countries.

A consideration of statistical data relating to pupils with SEN leads to two conclusions being drawn:

- Country data on pupils with SEN is not directly comparable without consideration of changes in procedures for data collection and a clear understanding of which groups of pupils are included in data collection procedures.
- Detailed exploration of qualitative factors for changes in placements, percentages and figures is needed in order to understand the reasons for developments or changes.

The increasing pressures at national, European and also international levels (i.e. via the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006) on policy makers to demonstrate how policies are leading towards greater educational inclusion are very evident in European countries. This results in calls for the systematic collection of qualitative and quantitative information that answers key questions and can be used longitudinally by countries to map their own developments and comparatively across countries.

While statistical data is necessary for European policy makers in considering trends and developments in inclusive education, the Ministerial Representatives of the Agency member countries feel that the best way of considering progress towards educational inclusion in European countries is to identify significant changes and developments in policy as well as practice. It is therefore suggested that even though statistical data provides some indications of current situations in countries, it is not detailed or specific enough to indicate changes in practice, or to explain the reasons for possible changes or developments.

A more detailed examination of qualitative information that puts the quantitative information into a wider context is required if an understanding of positive developments in countries is to be achieved. Qualitative analyses on key topics that impact on inclusive education are available at both the national and European level, conducted by individual, or groups of countries, as well as the Agency member countries collectively. The aim of such analyses is to facilitate a deeper understanding at the national and European levels of the changes required within policy and practice for the successful educational inclusion of pupils with SEN, within the broader context of meeting diversity in education.

### **Reflections on the current situation in European countries**

Despite the reservations about the available statistical data outlined above, the relatively static state with regards to placement of pupils with SEN in inclusive settings across Europe is apparent. To a greater or lesser degree, inclusive education within most European countries leads to a debate focusing upon the merging and/or re-shaping of distinct systems of educational provision that have evolved over decades. These systems

are often based on vested interests of different groups of stakeholders, and changes to these systems often become high-stakes political questions, not just educational policy issues. Inclusion within European countries is necessarily focused upon bringing two—or sometimes more—existing systems together.

The UNESCO 2005 EFA monitoring report on quality in education highlights the need to respect “indigenous” views of quality. Similarly, as Mitchell states: *Since there is no one model of inclusive education that suits every country’s circumstances, caution must be exercised in exporting and importing a particular model. While countries can learn from others’ experiences, it is important that they give due consideration to their own social-economic-political-cultural-historical singularities*<sup>45</sup>. The pressures to maintain local regional and national level “social-economic-political-cultural-historical singularities” is extremely strong and this often makes rapid movement towards removing barriers to participation and learning for all disadvantaged groups difficult.

At the same time, the European region also presents many opportunities in terms of inclusive education systems. For example, the more “international” vision of inclusive education as being: [...] *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*<sup>46</sup> is one most policy makers within European countries would align themselves to<sup>47</sup>. There is recognition of the need for longer term planning based on a vision of a holistic, systemic change approach to overcoming the barriers presented by an established dual system. Evidence across Europe has also shown policy makers that a move to a wider definition of inclusion focusing on all learners rather than on meeting different categories of needs, may be helpful in developing the capacity of mainstream schools to meet increasingly diverse pupil needs.

The objectives identified by the Council of Ministers as priorities for the ET 2020 programme highlight a number of areas for development across all European countries:

- Strengthening the social dimension of education.
- Social inclusion to promote equal opportunities in education;
- Pre-primary education for children with SEN.
- Support systems for mainstream schools.
- Personalization of learning to meet diverse needs in mainstream classrooms.
- Coordination of support services and inter-disciplinary teamwork.
- Provision for learners with SEN in post compulsory education.
- Raising achievements of all pupils in inclusive settings.

These shared priorities will be the focus of educational policy at the European and national levels in the next decade. Each of these priorities can be seen to be an important aspect of ensuring European countries systems of education are more inclusive.

While making inclusive education a practical reality within individual contexts represents a challenge, it is being addressed in a variety of ways across Europe. Diversity within

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<sup>45</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All: The Quality Imperative*. Paris, UNESCO, 2004.

<sup>46</sup> UNESCO, *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education*, Paris, UNESCO, 2009.

<sup>47</sup> European Council, *op cit.*, 2009.

European countries' educational policies presents a challenge, but also has very obvious strengths—learning from others' experiences is something European countries are undeniably open to. The formal structures established within the European Union, as well as the working practice of organizations such as the European Agency are indications of ongoing and mutually beneficial cooperation in education between European countries that will take policy and practice for inclusive education—in all its forms and interpretations—forward in varied and perhaps unpredicted and innovative ways.

# Inclusive education, paradigm shifts and renewed agendas in Latin America<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Over the last ten years, the theories and practices around educational agendas have been discussed in Latin America. The review process of the approaches and results attained during the 1980s and the 1990s is leading to renewed educational agendas marked by, among other relevant aspects: (i) the strengthening of a vision of education as a universal right and social public good, as well as the state's leadership role in guiding, co-implementing and evaluating change processes; (ii) the imperative of democratising educational opportunities (as regards access, processes and outcomes) with a particular emphasis on early childhood education and secondary education; (iii) a special attention paid to the respect and care for cultural, linguistic, social and individual diversities, for example, by means of intercultural bilingual education; and (iv) the search for links and synergies among development models, equal opportunities distribution and the understanding of education as a cultural, social and economic policy.

However, these conceptual changes—which vary at the national level in terms of objectives, content and scope—have not materialised in a paradigm shift in the way education is understood and managed, despite the problems that have been identified. Reform processes are still atomised and carried out within sub-systems. Education is not yet conceived as a societal matter involving a wide range of institutions and stakeholders. There is still the belief in the “magic” of the changes generated by decentralization and privatization policies disconnected from universal educational aims and objectives. A vision of curricular change as a top-down prescription, rather than a development process originating at the school and classroom level, still predominates. Innovations are being introduced outside of the organizational frameworks of the education systems, without facilitating, generating or achieving a comprehensive restructuring.

Ongoing conceptual changes focus on at least three core aspects: (i) the ‘cumbersome and hybrid’ coexistence of current and previous decades’ educational agendas, concepts and instruments that have piled up without being subject to a comprehensive review and constructive discussion; (ii) the evident gap between elaborate statements on social and educational change, often grounded upon relevant regulatory frameworks, and their actual realization as curricular and pedagogical proposals that may positively impact educational institutions and classrooms<sup>2</sup>; and (iii) the difficulties encountered in trying to envisage and entwine a holistic vision of educational changes. This implies overcoming a traditional analysis of educational issues from a fragmented perspective, divided by level or sub-system. Without a comprehensive vision that encompasses both short and long-term perspectives (and which requires targets to be met for the education system as a whole),

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by M. Amadio, & R. Operti, UNESCO IBE. This article has been adapted from an original Spanish text, published in Davila, P., Naya, L. (Eds.), *Infancia, Derechos y Educación en América Latina* [Childhood, Rights and Education in Latin America], Donostia, EREIN, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Amadio, M., “Inclusive Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: Exploratory analysis of the national reports presented at the 2008 International Conference of Education”. *Prospects*, 39(3), 2009, p. 303.

the discussion will continue to revolve around means, contextual answers, rhetorical statements with unrealistic foundations, and be entwined in a corporate struggle; worse still, the achieved outcomes will continue to be disappointing.

Faced with the challenge of supporting reform processes, we intend to present herein some elements which may contribute to the discussion about a possible paradigm shift<sup>3</sup> based upon the concept of inclusive education as the guiding principle for transforming education systems in a holistic, comprehensive and profound way.<sup>4</sup>

In order to sustain and account for educational change, the concept of inclusive education is a valuable input as: (i) it enables revisiting the concepts of equity and quality, i.e. in terms of a dynamic and complex synthesis where they go hand-in-hand<sup>5</sup> (the PISA reports show that it is possible to attain high quality and equity levels in learning outcomes and in the acquisition of basic life skills); (ii) it contributes to reinforcing the development of universal public policies effectively aimed at *all* learners within a framework of attention to diversity in education; (iii) it repositions the debate around political dichotomies which have strongly permeated the regional and national agendas (as for example, the case of centralization/decentralization, state control/privatization, autonomy/lack of autonomy of educational institutions<sup>6</sup>) by emphasising the need of developing inclusive education systems characterized by a diversity of educational provisions, processes and institutions within a framework of universal policies; and (iv) it is an overarching principle encompassing the planning of policies and the allocation of resources within a framework of social and educational development plans, the relationship between social and educational inclusion, and the development of inclusive curricula, schools, practices and classrooms.

The scope of a broadened vision of inclusive education as a potential pivot for conceptual change has been highlighted by the reflections and discussions held before, during and after the 48<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education (ICE). In this article, we specifically refer to the preparatory sub-regional workshop held in Buenos Aires in 2007<sup>7</sup>, as well as to the follow-up regional workshop organized in Santiago de Chile in 2009.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The term paradigm refers, on the one hand, to the basic set of values, attitudes and beliefs shared and diffused by the members of a given community, and on the other hand, to all the answers and solutions which have been provided in order to tackle different kinds of problems (for example, through models).

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education*, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/5, Geneva, 28 November 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Schleicher, A., "Securing quality and equity in education: Lessons from PISA". *Prospects*, 39(3), 2009, pp. 251–263.

<sup>6</sup> López, N., Corbetta, S., "Hacia una nueva generación de políticas. Una invitación a revisar viejas tensiones en el campo de las políticas sociales y educativas" [Towards a new generation of policies. An invitation to review old tensions in the social and educational policies areas], in *De relaciones, actores y territorios. Hacia nuevas políticas para la educación en América Latina* [About Relationships, Actors and Territories. Towards New Policies for Education in Latin America], (Coordinated by N. López). Buenos Aires, Argentina, UNESCO-IIEP Buenos Aires Regional Office, 2009, pp. 305–325.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Report on the Regional Workshop on "Implementation of Inclusive Education Policies in Latin America: Progress and Pending Challenges"*, Geneva, UNESCO-IBE, 2008.  
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/themes/curricular-themes/inclusive-education/meetings-and-workshops.html>

<sup>8</sup> Information and support documentation on this workshop is available online at:  
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/themes/curricular-themes/inclusive-education/single-view/news/inclusive-education-in-latin-america-identifying-and-analyzing-progress-and-pending-challenges/3270/next/1.html>

The preparatory sub-regional workshop on Inclusive Education (12-14 September 2007) was attended by participants from ten countries of the Andean and Southern Cone regions and was co-organized by: the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Argentina; UNESCO, through its Basic Education Division (Education Sector in Paris), the Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-OREALC) and UNESCO-IBE; and the School of Education of the University of San Andrés, Argentina. The workshop gathered a highly qualified group of decision-makers (mainly vice-ministers), teachers, curriculum specialists, teacher's trainers, and academic researchers.

The regional follow-up workshop on "Implementation of Inclusive Education Policies in Latin America: Progress and Pending Challenges" (18-20 November 2009) was organized by UNESCO through its Education Sector in Paris, OREALC and the IBE, in partnership with the "Education for All (EFA) Flagship on the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion". Representatives from 16 countries attended the workshop, and, as in the case of the meeting in Buenos Aires, a highly qualified group of decision-makers, curriculum specialists, teacher's trainers, researchers and scholars participated.

This document is structured around the following: (i) issues and challenges regarding inclusive education in Latin America from an inter-regional perspective, based on the outcomes of the thirteen preparatory meetings that preceded the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE; (ii) issues to be prioritised in light of the results of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE; and (iii) the extent to which the concept of inclusive education can contribute to a paradigm shift in education at the regional level.

### **Issues and challenges identified during the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE preparatory phase**

Between 2007 and 2008, through the IBE Community of Practice (COP) in Curriculum Development<sup>9</sup>, and in close cooperation with other UNESCO offices and United Nations bodies, Ministries of Education and civil society institutions, nine workshops and four regional conferences on inclusive education were organised as a preparatory phase for the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE<sup>10</sup>. These meetings were held in all the regions of the world, with the active participation of governments, civil society institutions and international organizations within a plural and intellectual cooperation framework which involved over 900 participants from 128 countries.

This cycle of meetings was mainly aimed at initiating a consultative and collaborative process for pinpointing key issues and challenges related to inclusive education as preparations to the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE. The comparative analysis of the thirteen preparatory meetings enabled the identification of seven main issues that can be considered as part of an inter-regional agenda. In the next section these issues are briefly described with a

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<sup>9</sup> The Community of Practice in Curriculum Development is an initiative coordinated by UNESCO-IBE with the purpose of supporting the different regions and countries in the design and implementation of curricular changes and reforms within the EFA goals framework.

<sup>10</sup> Operti, R., & Belalcazar, C., Trends in Inclusive Education at Regional and Interregional Levels: Issues and challenges. *Prospects* 38(1), 2008, pp. 149–179. The final reports of workshops and conferences are available online at: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/themes/curricular-themes/inclusive-education/meetings-and-workshops.html>

special emphasis on curriculum and teacher training, jointly with a succinct presentation of the outcomes of the debates held in the Buenos Aires sub-regional workshop.

### *Special education, integration and inclusive education*

In general terms, the prevailing idea around this issue has been to overcome the integration/inclusion dichotomy and to encourage inclusive visions and practices in all kinds of schools. In other words, it is not about creating inclusive schools as opposed to other types of schools, but rather that all schools adopt an inclusive approach.

At the Buenos Aires workshop, the debate was mainly focused on social and educational inclusion rather than on the integration/inclusion axis. It was pointed out that social inequality and poverty levels affecting the region have had a significant impact on the conception and application of inclusive education in terms of social justice. High-quality education is seen as necessary to achieve greater inclusion; however, education alone cannot counteract social and economic inequalities. Students cannot effectively benefit from educational opportunities when they do not enjoy a minimum quality of life and human development (for example, in terms of health care, food, housing and shelter). Inclusive education cannot be carried out without minimum conditions of social equity. This means a dialectic relationship between social justice and inclusive education, thus further implying that diversity within social cohesion must be appreciated.

### *Complex relationships and tensions between social inclusion and inclusive education*

This issue considers whether the knowledge society creates more exclusion than inclusion. Access to education has been democratised, but deep and increasing gaps are observed in terms of learning outcomes and the acquisition of competencies necessary for labour and social inclusion.

At the Buenos Aires meeting, special emphasis was given to considering that the knowledge and information society may bring about more exclusion and inequality than an industrial society. It was also highlighted that schools are shaped and defined according to schooling demands, rather than a response to the social and knowledge needs. This can often lead to equating the debate on inclusion with facilitating access to the formal education system, rather than focusing on democratising access to knowledge using different educational modes and schemes.

It was further noticed that in the region inequalities persist in terms of access to education and particularly as regards educational outcomes. Latin American education systems have attempted to democratise school access by means of the inclusion of previously excluded groups. Yet, the gap in educational outcomes is still broad, preventing these groups from acquiring basic competencies and knowledge. Poor girls and boys, from rural areas, women and children with special needs, are the most affected by exclusion from education and knowledge.

The struggle against exclusion must involve the prioritization of the school as a core centre for justice, facilitating the combination and development of social policies. The

school is further viewed as a community centre empowered for social change. From this perspective, the school must be able to respond comprehensively to the problems of boys and girls. Therefore, schools must encourage a broad participation of the civil society and of local organizations, so as to create integrated protection and care systems.

### *Participation in the design and implementation of inclusive education*

The need for a strong political commitment at the central level is highly relevant. It may legitimise and support the empowerment of local communities so as to eradicate the obstacles preventing their participation in the educational development.

At the Buenos Aires workshop, participants stressed that political decisions must be adopted by way of an effective participative dialogue fostering social cohesion and the commitment of society as a whole. Religious groups, mass media, companies, labour unions, social movements, amongst others, must take part in the design and implementation of inclusive education and social-economic development policies. Persuading elites about the need for inclusion represents the backbone of a broadened dialogue towards greater awareness and a change in attitudes. At present, inclusive education issues are scarcely visible within society.

It was also noted that mass media can play a key role in promoting inclusive education so as to create a commitment and extend the participation to society as a whole. Policy-makers and social actors should engage in more profound reflections and debates about the society which they aspire to achieve. Particularly, this has to be considered when reconsidering the form, content and consequences of exclusion within the framework of a knowledge society. A just society requires different actors to ensure social cohesion, transparency, as well as basic integration and equity levels.

### *Role of inclusive education within the framework of a renewed commitment to the EFA goals*

How can educational quality be viewed (goal 6 of the Dakar Framework for Action<sup>11</sup>) in light of the concept of inclusive education? Is inclusion a synthesis of equity and quality?

At the Buenos Aires meeting, participants understood that inclusive education is considered a progressive search for a synthesis between equity and quality. Thus, it is essential to substantiate to Ministries of Education and other stakeholders the reasons why this concept is being used and its potential added value in conjunction with the concepts of equity and quality which continue to permeate past and present educational and curricular reform processes.

In line with the inclusive education approach in terms of social justice, it is indispensable at the policy level to consider the reduction of inequalities, as well as social fragmentation

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<sup>11</sup> "Improving all aspects of the quality of education, and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills". World Education Forum, *Dakar Framework of Action – Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments*. Paris, UNESCO, 2000, p. 17.

and poverty levels. Educational policies are still faced with the challenge of achieving universal coverage of quality education for all sectors of society, that is to say, guaranteeing universal access to competencies, knowledge, and values necessary for a successful integration into political, social and economic life. Yet, the risk of stigmatization also has to be taken into consideration. This may be posed by some policies focusing on excluded groups, which may place those groups within condescending educational patterns (for example, “since they are poor, we cannot teach them the same way we teach rich boys and girls [...]”).

To a certain extent, there have been some attempts to democratise the concept of quality as learning processes meeting the expectations and needs of all students and not just reducing quality to the provision of conditions/materials and/or the verification of learning outcomes. At the same time, there is an attempt to better associate the concept of equity to the equality of outcomes, and not just to facilitating access while offsetting inequalities.

### *Promote and guarantee the right to a quality equitable education*

This issue implies a complex balance between the rights and the responsibilities of families, communities and governments. Multiple prejudices about heterogeneous learning environments (stemming from inside and outside the education system) constitute a powerful exclusion factor of opportunities for learning and participation.

In Buenos Aires, Latin American colleagues observed that educational policies must consider the creation of welcoming and friendly environments, encouraging cooperation and democratic awareness, as well as relationships between students and teachers. As the first socialization environment outside the family, educational institutions must be heterogeneous, allowing for the socialization in all social-economic strata. However, more often than not, schools do not offer room for the “other”. In this sense, schools should promote socialization processes that entail living and learning together in diversity, as a way to recover the sense of public education and, at a more global level, as a key aspect of human development, social inclusion, and strengthening of democracy. Special attention should be given to the double imperative of reducing social and economic inequalities and countering segmentation and segregation processes.

### *Does the curriculum have an influence on achieving an inclusive education?*

Curricular concepts, structures, contents and assessment processes may be key factors in achieving inclusion or, on the contrary, in excluding learners from effective learning opportunities. The curriculum is increasingly viewed as a key means for translating a broadened concept of inclusive education into inclusive school and classrooms practices.

Three sub-topics enlighten this debate from an interregional perspective: (1) the existence of a number of problems in curriculum development processes, for example curricula that are saturated with disciplinary information and concepts and that are too academic and strongly permeated by exams. Related issues also include curricula that excessively resort to information transfer and to frontal teaching methods, and the lack of institutional, curricular and pedagogical coherence between early childhood, primary and secondary

education; (2) the challenge of overcoming the divide between primary and secondary education by means of basic education programmes which democratise training opportunities from the preschool to the secondary levels; and (3) the necessity of sharing and learning from different practices, which have proved to be successful, such as the models of comprehensive schools and the development of competency-based approaches.

An example of the comprehensive school model can be found in Finland, where the factors that can explain the good outcomes achieved include: (i) emphasis in equality of opportunities (equity and quality go hand in hand); (ii) a mandatory and non-selective nine-year comprehensive public school model; (iii) a flexible administration consistently supporting the school; (iv) trust in schools, directors, teachers and students; (v) individualized counselling and tutoring prioritizing students' learning and wellbeing; (vi) assessment methods tailored in accordance with students' progressive development (there are no exams or rankings, but rather early intervention and additional opportunities); and (vii) highly qualified and autonomous teachers who have completed quality teachers training programmes.<sup>12</sup> Competency-based approaches, on the other hand, may be considered a cross-cutting element in the educational quality improvement processes. Among other things, competencies can contribute to defining the students' graduation profile (e.g. what students are expected to learn, be able to do, and value); the curricular structure, contents and assessment systems; school management models; classroom practices, and teacher–students interactions. Through competencies, we create, mobilize and integrate resources—among others, values, attitudes, knowledge, know-how and skill—to address and respond to learning situations. It is not only about applying the acquired knowledge and abilities or to develop skills. Competencies are social-historical constructions which develop through learning situations which imply an unavoidable value-attitude dimension.<sup>13</sup>

When considering quality and equity goals, participants in the Buenos Aires workshop put forward the need to incorporate new learning and teaching approaches into curricular proposals. The curriculum must ensure that all boys and girls, youth and men/women can learn equitably, guaranteeing universal learning standards as a right. An inclusive curriculum aims to achieve quality education, and refers to participative approaches in relation to the organization of the learning process. For this purpose, the implementation of curriculum policies must take into account the participation of the different stakeholders, and especially the teachers. The curriculum must also be designed and applied with flexibility so as to better respond to the different learning expectations, needs and pace of students. Competency-based approaches represent potential models for curriculum revision, enabling each student to acquire basic competencies based on his/her own interests, expectations and ways of learning, while, at the same time, relating this to his/her local, regional and global context.

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<sup>12</sup> An example is the comprehensive school model in Finland; I. Halinen, & R. Jarvinen, "Towards inclusive education: the case of Finland". *Prospects*, 38(1), 2008, pp. 97–127.

<sup>13</sup> An analysis of the competencies approach from an inter-regional perspective can be found in: R. Operti, (Ed.), *Open File: Curriculum change and competency-based approaches: a worldwide perspective*. *Prospects*, 37(2), June 2007.

It was further pointed out that one of the areas to be promoted is that of intercultural bilingual education in primary and lower secondary education curricula. Equally important are the diverse formal and non-formal models which may help to expand and improve early childhood education (as an integral part of basic education) as well as young and adult education. Lastly, special attention was given to how current curricular assessment systems may foster exclusion, particularly those excessively focused on exams.

*Changing the teachers' profile and role, as well as supporting their professional development*

Achieving inclusion implies, among other things, establishing the desired teacher profile and a framework for his/her role, as well as continuously supporting the teacher's work in the classroom. Four sub-topics enlighten this debate from an interregional perspective. Firstly, it is important to consider additional structural problems, such as the strong reluctance from teachers to work with diverse students' profiles and in heterogeneous classrooms, and their lack of skills and knowledge for addressing students' diversity and way of learning. Secondly, the predominance of the "deviation" concept is highly relevant. This sets forth hierarchies placing each student according to his/her cognitive competencies over the inclusive approach, which emphasises each student's learning potential that must be discovered and stimulated on a gradual basis. Thirdly, teacher training curricula may generally lack the conceptual framework and methodological instruments required to address the diversity of expectations and needs of students. Finally, the sharing of practices which seem to be efficient in different regions is essential. This includes: cross-disciplinary work in teacher teams; support to teachers in regular schools with regard to students with special needs; considering special schools as support resource centres for regular schools; tutoring, which may imply an individualised pedagogical support; cooperation networks among schools (for example, teaching practice communities) and close cooperation with social institutions (social policies design and management).

At the Buenos Aires workshop, participants highlighted three interrelated aspects, which are highly complex: (i) the devaluation of the role, profession and practice of teachers, in terms of their acknowledgement by society; from both the symbolic and material points of view; (ii) the weaknesses in teacher's training and professional development, especially reflected in the absence or narrowness of conceptual frameworks and tools to address students' diversity within a framework of multiple cultural, social and individual contexts; and (iii) the prevalence of a traditional approach of a teacher who "implements" a curriculum prescribed by others who are external to the classroom, without any room left for flexibility or adaptation.

Participants further pointed out that the alternatives to address such complex issues are still highly controversial, resulting in harsh debates and confrontation between institutions and stakeholders within and beyond the education system. Attendees further mentioned the difficulty in carrying out debates grounded on evidence, for example, in connection with the competency-based approaches as a structural axis of curricular changes.

A long-term vision better clarifies the importance of renewing teaching training curricula as a crucial element in the paradigm shift sought in inclusive education practices and

theories, i.e. from the segregationist approach of special education to a concept of quality education for all. Within such a framework, the role of the trainer's instructor was also seen as a core issue in leading change processes in educational conceptions and in disciplinary perspectives. The meeting further stressed the pedagogical qualifications and skills required by teachers in developing an individualized and inclusive response to the different skills of students in rural schools.

With a flexible curriculum in place, teachers must understand that, despite their differences, students are capable of developing their full learning potential. Student-based pedagogical strategies must be designed in a way that recognises and builds on diversity, seen as a learning and resource opportunity, rather than as a problem.

### **Post-ICE debates in Latin America**

Within the 2008 ICE Conclusions and Recommendations framework implementation, as of 2009 a follow-up plan has been implemented aimed at promoting dialogue and collective exchanges around a broadened understanding of inclusive education<sup>14</sup>. As part of this process, UNESCO organised a regional follow-up workshop in Santiago de Chile in November 2009.

One of the most relevant outcomes of the Santiago workshop was the identification, by a highly-qualified group of participants, of core themes. These highlight the need to consider inclusive education complexity within more global agendas on educational change, specifically based on the broadened and holistic vision of inclusion as agreed upon at the 2008 ICE. The choice of an inclusive education system reflects the so-called 'tailored suit, rather than a bought piece of cloth' approach; it also reflects public policy universalism rooted more in the diversity than in the cultural and social homogenization. This requires a holistic rethinking of the education system, including its organization, operations, resource allocation and management. In particular, it requires sound responses to a major challenge, namely the creation of inclusive curricula, schools and teachers. Along these lines, the following points reflect some of the most relevant issues that were discussed at the regional workshop in Santiago de Chile.

#### *Exhaustion of current policies and need to revisit them*

Cultural, linguistic and social diversity, as well as the increasing gaps in educational outcomes and in the acquisition of basic competencies for life, pose great challenges for education systems in order to ensure quality education for all citizens within an equitable framework. After recognising the exhaustion of the current policies to respond to past as well as emerging problems, renewed approaches are required in order to interpret the problems and ask new questions, for a paradigm shift, and for addressing the new regional

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<sup>14</sup> Opertti, R., "La Educación inclusiva, perspectiva internacional y retos de futuro". [Inclusive Education, international perspective and future challenges]. In: *El largo camino hacia una educación inclusiva. Aportaciones desde la historia de la educación* [The long way towards an inclusive education. Contributions from the history of education]. (Coordinated by R. Barruezo Albéniz), Vol. III. Pamplona, Universidad Pública de Navarra, 2009, pp. 117–138.

situation characterised by highly heterogeneous demands within a highly complex scenario for defining and developing public policies.

A more thorough analysis of exclusion is an essential part of renewing perspectives and approaches. Exclusion breaks learners' bonds with society, yet the need for inclusive policies has seldom been discussed. This lack of discussion especially stands out when we consider that educational exclusion has a long track record in the region and that efforts aimed at fighting such exclusion have not produced the expected results.

Exclusion is related to different members of society—it is not granted that everyone would agree with a quality education for all or with a more just and equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth. These different attitudes undermine social cohesion and integration. For example, elites are reluctant to pay more attention to exclusion and to support efforts for improving the quality of life of people affected by poverty or in a situation of vulnerability. Equally, parents may accept or reject heterogeneous learning environment for their children, or different sectors of society may be reluctant to make secondary education compulsory. Furthermore, the demands of the excluded too often compete unequally with those of the educated, thus creating a complex political scenario.

In order to consistently address the varied aspects of exclusion, a greater commitment from the political sphere and from society is needed to attain education for all. This contrasts with the current opportunities and realities of an education system for 'almost all' or for the best learners. States have a guiding and guardian role in guaranteeing the right to a quality education without exclusion.

### *Inclusion and its overlap into other themes*

The debate on inclusive education seems to rest on three directions of change within education systems: from an approach which attempts to homogenise learners towards a perspective of equality in diversity; from sector-based programmes towards inter-sectoral initiatives; and from education towards society. Along these lines, the discussion on inclusive education from a transformational perspective of education systems implies the addressing of a series of issues. These issues are essential to understanding the challenges of inclusion in terms of the democratization of education and society.

A first theme is related to the new relationship between equity and equality. The trend in Latin America has been towards the design of policies aimed at reaching equality in educational achievement—for example, a quality secondary education for all. Such equalization implies a more thorough and diversified understanding of social inequalities and diversities. It also implies the creation of learning environments which meet the expectations and needs of specific groups within the framework of universal educational policies.

Diversities are increasingly being incorporated into educational agendas through the consideration of indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, immigrants, refugees/displaced people and new youth cultures. This has contributed to rethinking the concept of equity, which appears to be no longer circumscribed to the equalization of access and/or to

counteracting actions as previously mentioned. It may also comprise of the promotion of just inequalities to effectively achieve equalities in outcomes. This has already been pointed out by Amartya Sen<sup>15</sup> (back in the 80s and the 90s, the discussion was focused on the concept of positive discrimination). As a result, equity emerges from the search for equality within the recognition of diversity<sup>16</sup>.

The reconceptualization of equity is seen as an endorsement to rethink the profile of public policies, from equalitarianism built on the formal equality of opportunities and accessibility, towards equalitarianism built on understanding and addressing diversities. Today, universalism is faced with the challenge of understanding and becoming aware of the blurry limits between embracing diversity and accepting inequality.

It is necessary to establish a renewed agenda of equity policies in the region aimed at guaranteeing equal access to knowledge, considering, at the same time, the needs, characteristics and identities of the different social groups and contexts. How can attention to diversity be compatible with social cohesion within a universal policy framework? Equity should be at the heart of general educational policies and not be limited to peripheral and unarticulated activities. These activities end up creating a segmented regime of benefits, which then contribute to perpetuating inequalities. This is far from understanding and responding to diversity.

A second issue refers to the challenges posed by inclusion in the knowledge society, which is much broader than the mere reference to the school system. Which mechanisms and procedures are required to address the need for an equitable distribution of knowledge? What is socially valid knowledge and how is the social environment organised in order to ensure lifelong opportunities?

At least three elements may be outlined to develop inclusion as the lever of the democratization of knowledge. Firstly, competencies may be useful when viewed as the result of complex thinking applied to activities and problems, combining performance with skills and values, for personal achievement, quality of life and social development. A second key element is cross-disciplinary and creativity-focused teaching strategies, when combined with a holistic vision of inclusion. Finally, new information and communication technologies (bearers of complex thinking) present a Trojan horse of innovation for the purposes of inclusion.

Another related topic is the centrality of—and yet the scarce importance of—citizenship education, notably in Latin America. Without a deeply rooted democratic culture in schools, the support for a future democracy is weakened and the cohesion and functioning foundations of political systems are not created. Three sub-themes informed the debate at the Santiago workshop. Firstly, the weakness of inclusion has been created mainly due to the unwillingness to develop equitable education. The political culture seems to have accepted this segmentation, despite the costs and increasingly noticeable consequences. This has decreased the necessary/obligatory capacity of schools for educating democratic citizens, and limited the effect of peers and school learning. It has also undermined the

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<sup>15</sup> Sen, A., *Inequality Reexamined*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992.

<sup>16</sup> López, N., Corbetta, S, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

social-emotional commitment of teachers and families and led to deep youth frustration by limiting the voice of society to express demands.

Secondly, within the curriculum the erosion of powerful benchmarks for cohesion and the relationship with the political system can be observed. Finally, a series of curricular tensions can be seen as having developed, for example the greater political community (national) against the immediate community (local); a cosmopolitan education against a patriotic education; educating in loyalty against educating in criticism of the political order (common life); and the values of liberal traditions (emphasis on rights) against communitarian values (emphasis on participation) or republican values (emphasis on duties). The strengthening of citizenship education in a broad sense implies the re-creation of relationships between the education system and the construction of democracy. This is necessary for the sustainability of social and educational inclusion, and more globally, to legitimise and strengthen the cultural basis of democracy.

Within a general framework of society's governance problems, the debate on governance of education systems can be highlighted. In this context, a key issue in the Latin American educational agenda is to reflect on the meaning of long-term changes, instead of simply discussing about the management and administration mechanisms and procedures as it was the case in the past. In order to overcome problems derived from inequalities, major changes are needed in the governance of the education system. This implies relevant adjustments in terms of power distribution and in the relationships among state, school, family and community, as well as the construction of new political, institutional, regulatory and pedagogical consensus. Failure to do so will severely jeopardise the achievement of inclusion goals.

Inclusive education systems require good governance enabling: (i) an adequate interaction between central and local levels characterised by the consistency in the regulation of the system, intermediate regulation, and centres of self-regulation; (ii) a combination of autonomy and decentralization with guidance, support and follow-up, as decentralization without checks and balances may stress exclusion and inequalities; (iii) the fostering of cross-sectoral policies, collaborative work among different stakeholders and cross-institutional coherence at the local level.

The inter-sectoral factor is one of the critical dimensions of the links between social and educational inclusion. Its conceptualization raises two key questions: on the one hand, about whether it is possible to have a just education in unjust societies, or in other words, what is the minimum level of social equity for education to be successful? As a recent report suggests, "Guaranteeing every child the exercise of his/her rights implies—as a minimum—to ensure society as a whole has adequate levels of wellbeing. Yet, this is unlikely—as shown in the region—if States do not recover their capacity to guide economies towards a more balanced and just income distribution, employment opportunities are available not only to the most favoured sectors, and where there are mechanisms neutralizing the market's own trend to intensify inequalities. Only a more profound debate on the region's prevailing model will give rise to policies enabling a growth and development scenario in which childhood rights come

true.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, how much political and/or management clarification is required to go from sectoral to inter-sectoral approaches?

Within an inter-sectoral framework, it is necessary to rethink the relationship between the school as a major axis of social policies and as a single space for the convergence of multiple dimensions of life (economic, social, cultural, demographic, productive and environmental dimensions). This *territorialization* of school should enable the development of appropriate local proposals within a shared national global vision.

### *Inclusion as a movement*

Inclusion is an evolving approach; it creates tensions and complex demands, and it is, to a certain extent, an anti-hegemonic movement, mainly as a result of three basic reasons. Firstly, the issue of inequality and segregation in societies and education systems. How much possible is it to achieve inclusion in societies and education systems that are highly unequal and segregated? School is the first environment in which different individuals meet as equals. School stratification and segmentation curtails the capacity to teach equality, democracy and the appreciation of differences and diversity. Secondly, the need for an overall transformation of education and education systems, which entails a number of highly complex changes in different areas and levels of the system; homogeneous and asymmetric systems do not favour inclusion. Thirdly, inclusive education must be understood as a way to integrate equity and quality principles and practices to ensure the democratization of educational opportunities in terms of access, processes and results.

### *Policies and legislation for inclusion*

The need to develop rights-focused, long-term educational policies supported by broad social participation (families, students, community and society as a whole), constitutes an ethical and political challenge. It means reconstructing the education’s regulatory perspective through reflective processes with the society as a whole. Changes in policies must be grounded on the revision of legislation from an inclusive perspective, attention to diversity, and the principles contained in different international conventions. Legislation alone is not enough, but is necessary to ground policies and to support resource planning and allocation; “accomplishments in national educational legislation and prescribed curricular frameworks must be accompanied by the development of mechanisms ensuring that they translate into school and classroom practices”.<sup>18</sup>

In this regard, regulatory frameworks should be more detailed and ensure changes in terms of practice, and necessary resources for their implementation. It is necessary to revise the

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<sup>17</sup> IIEP UNESCO Buenos Aires and IBE, *Primera infancia en América Latina: La situación actual y las respuestas desde el Estado. Informe sobre tendencias sociales y educativas en América Latina 2009*. [Early childhood in Latin America: the current situation and responses from the State. Report on the social and educative trends in Latin America 2009]. Buenos Aires - Madrid, IIEP UNESCO Buenos Aires and the Organization of Ibero-American States for the Education, Science and Culture, 2009, p. 167.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO OREALC, *Situación educativa de América Latina y el Caribe: Garantizando la educación de calidad para todos*. [Situation of education in Latin America and the Caribbean: Guaranteeing quality education for all]. Santiago de Chile., UNESCO OREALC, 2007, p. 148; M. Amadio, *op cit.*, 2009.

coherence among different regulatory frameworks and to set forth regulations which may eliminate all kinds of discrimination. Furthermore, it is necessary to revise admission policies and adopt legal measures to prevent any form of discrimination in the admission of students to public or state-funded schools, so as to achieve a balanced distribution in centres attended by students with greater needs. Lastly, it is imperative to strengthen the existing protection and guarantee systems for the enforceability of the right to education.

### *Inclusion from early childhood education and beyond*

In a region strongly marked by inequality, it is not surprising that emphasis is given, as in the case of the Santiago meeting, to the need to extend early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes, especially in the case of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups. These actions may contribute to reduce disadvantage, support the families and foster long-term social integration and insertion. Here, it should also be noted that: “the interpretation of the information provided by home surveys makes it possible to highlight some conclusions which help to build the early childhood educational scenario in the region. Firstly, the recurrence of the same expansion rationale observed, in the past, with primary education and, in the present, with secondary education can be observed. This expansion begins with urban medium- and high-income sectors, where figures are almost universal for 4- or 5-year-olds, and gradually extends towards the most neglected sectors, either at cities’ peripheries or towards rural areas, reaching indigenous communities usually during the last expansion stages.”<sup>19</sup>

It is also necessary to reduce inequalities in learning achievements and knowledge distribution in primary and secondary education; “[...] Latin American students have unequal learning opportunities deeply rooted in social-economic inequalities with which they enter the schooling system and which are boosted by unequal learning opportunities as a consequence of the schools they attend.”<sup>20</sup> Primary education should be capable of retaining, teaching and making learners equitable; for example, the extension of school day and full-time schools are two strategies which seem to have proved effective in terms of learning improvement. Universal access to secondary education—mainly the basic cycle (first three years or lower secondary education)—should be considered as a minimum equity floor, since it constitutes a key element to build citizenship and to fight poverty and marginality.

It is also closely related to access to more qualified and productive job opportunities; “[...] in all countries, schooling of the most integrated sectors is guaranteed. Whichever country a child is born in, if he/she is part of the most favoured sectors of society, she/he will have an adequate educational offer. On the other hand, if a child is poor, his/her educational situation will vary according to the country he/she was born in, or he/she lives in, since

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<sup>19</sup> IIEP UNESCO Buenos Aires & IBE, *op cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>20</sup> Duarte, J, Soledad Bos, M., Moreno, M, *Equidad y calidad de la educación básica en América Latina. Análisis multinivel de los resultados del Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo (SERCE) en función del nivel socioeconómico de los estudiantes*. [Equity and quality of basic education in Latin America. A Multi-tier Analysis of the Second Regional Comparative and Explicative Study (SERCE) outcomes in terms of students’ social-economic level]. Working Document n° 4, IDB Education Division, Washington, IDB, December 2009, p. 30.

not all countries can currently provide an adequate educational offer. Thus, differences in countries' average schooling rates just show the different capacity each country has to reach the most overlooked sectors through its educational offer, whereas better-off sectors are always educated".<sup>21</sup>

### *Attention to diversity*

At the Santiago meeting, participants also highlighted the importance of further advancing from uniform and homogenous strategies towards approaches which consider diversity with equality, while achieving a reasonable balance between 'the ordinary' and 'the diverse'. How is it possible to build a common identity or ethical community, which incorporates unique groups and ways of life? What is the symbolic core uniting this diversity?

Cultural diversity emerges as the core issue in educational agendas fostering inclusion: education as distinct from culture; moving from a homogeneous nation towards the plural world; going from invisibility towards visibility and the politicization of difference; from educating on an equal basis (so as to equate opportunities) towards educating in plurality (so as to promote the comprehensive development of all individuals).

Attention to diversity is increasingly becoming a pivotal part of education system reforms for a number of reasons: (i) the flexibility and diversification of educational frameworks, provisions and processes; (ii) the design of inclusive curricula as dynamic processes to meet the diversity of expectations and needs of students within the ongoing search for a balance between the global, the regional and the local; (iii) diversified teaching strategies and assessment systems which understand the diversity of cultures and languages through the socialization of values and attitudes related to some of the key issues in inclusive education agendas, e.g. tolerance, communication and open-spiritedness, interculturalism, struggle against discrimination/stigmatization, etc.

### *An integrated agenda on teachers' role and professional development*

The centrality of pedagogical processes and teachers as co-developers of curricula within a framework of strengthening education institutions are critical dimensions in trying to bridge the gap between inclusion theories and practices. Investing more in teachers and other educational staff, developing comprehensive and inter-sectoral policies to maximize their abilities and motivations, and improving their working conditions, appear to be an urgent priority. It is also necessary to focus on teachers' interpretations regarding inequality and exclusion—as well as possible ways to change these interpretations—within a framework of educational policies that are more focused on the subjective dimension of the major actors of the pedagogical process, i.e. teachers and students.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, it is imperative to strengthen the understanding and attention to diversity in teaching training programmes, by reflecting on who the current students are and on how to

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<sup>21</sup> IIEP-UNESCO Buenos Aires & IBE, *op cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>22</sup> Porter, L., "Políticas de subjetividad para la igualdad de oportunidades educativas. Un diálogo entre Juan Carlos Tedesco y Luis Porter". [Policies of subjectivity for the equality of education opportunities. A dialogue between Juan Carlos Tedesco and Luis Porter]. *Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa*, 8(1), 2006.

teach students that are diverse in increasingly more complex and uncertain contexts. This implies facilitating and supporting the development of teaching training centres which are open to diversity. Finally, within the framework of professional teaching development strategies, a welcoming and cooperation culture should be promoted in educational centres, where teachers improve learning by means of cooperation among teachers, parents and the community.

## Conclusion

In Latin America, an increasing and large consensus can be observed about the need to reform education within a comprehensive and holistic framework. This can be seen among different sectors and actors—governments, civil society and citizens in general. The reformist momentum, grounded on various combinations, synergies and conflicts between political wills and professional capacities, has enabled advances which mainly include the updating of regulatory frameworks, extending the right to education, improving conditions and aides to teach and learn, as well as paying attention to traditionally excluded populations. Despite this good news, in general terms the region has not yet found ways to align and integrate equity and quality in educational environments, provisions and processes which may democratize learning outcomes and the acquisition of basic competencies for life and citizenship.

Faced with this situation and with the multiplicity of meanings and implications around the equity and quality dimensions, the concept of inclusive education, discussed in the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE, has presented an opportunity to reconsider the need to democratize training opportunities in order to build more just and equitable societies. Inclusive education can help strengthen the relationship between equity and quality. On the one hand, it intensifies the concept of equity by emphasising the understanding and attention to cultural, linguistic, social and individual diversities as core elements in developing educational provisions. This may supplement universal approaches to achieve equality in outcomes. On the other hand, it helps to strengthen the concept of quality as multiple education improvement processes. It helps to truly understand the diversity of profiles, conditions and ways of learning of students as opportunities to develop and achieve more relevant and appropriate learning. Inclusion basically implies diversifying pedagogical environments, provisions and processes to address diversities, to reconsider differences and to guarantee equitable individual and collective development opportunities within a universal public policy framework.

A strengthened agenda in terms of inclusive education implies a revision of the ways in which education systems are organized and work in order to include *all girls and all boys* in terms of access, attendance, processes, participation and outcomes. Necessarily, a broadened vision of inclusive education, deprived from the dual axes of special education/integration and integration/inclusion, must be reflected in the strengthening of universal public policies. This universalism may, on the one hand, strongly link inclusive education issues to the development of a comprehensive citizenship education, in order to reinforce democracies and social cohesion. On the other hand, it may deviate from the traditionally equalitarian approach which combines homogeneity of proposals for all with a focus on offsetting differences. It implies moving towards a more inclusive vision by ensuring quality teaching and attention to *all girls' and all boys'* diversity.

# Conclusion<sup>1</sup>

Three years after UNESCO's 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education (ICE–Geneva, 2008), inclusive education is increasingly recognized as a fundamental concern, building upon a high-level consensus around its broadened conceptualization. Crucially, this broader understanding implies that inclusive education considers all learners' presence, participation and achievement in education; in other words, quality education for all.<sup>2</sup> It also implies an on-going process of strengthening and democratising education systems. Moving from inclusive visions towards inclusive policies and practice represents a permanent and enduring challenge. In this regard, Booth, amongst others, has highlighted the need “to move beyond democracy as political rhetoric, to making it part of the values with which we wish to shape our lives together”.<sup>3</sup>

The 48<sup>th</sup> ICE represented a significant moment for concretizing the notion of inclusion in the minds of policy makers, education professionals and society at large. Today, inclusive education is increasingly accepted as a general guiding principle to inform and challenge the processes of educational and curricular reform<sup>4</sup>. In particular, UNESCO's definition of inclusive education also sets out clear objectives to guide such reform agendas: inclusive education aims at “increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, as well as reduce exclusion within and from education [...]”<sup>5</sup>

As evidenced by the regional analyses herein, this definition is being translated into diverse concrete initiatives across different regions and at different levels of the education systems. For example, some initiatives have focused thematically on refining what inclusion means for teachers' role and professional development, for curriculum change and development, for students' assessment, and so on. Other initiatives consider the processes of inclusion and what levels are most effective for promoting inclusive schools and societies.

In all regions, transforming rhetoric into inclusive values, policies and practice is proving to be no simple feat, even where many resources and support are available. Part of the complexity of this process is the need to examine and address the conceptual and technical dimensions of inclusion as a cross-cutting dimension of the education systems, while simultaneously re-considering the mindsets and assumptions upon which education systems are currently founded. Challenges related to inclusive education highlight the often unresolved tension between what is and what should be. Traditional ideas and methods are often deeply rooted and hard to change at all levels; resistance to change is common in many countries. Such resistance is often associated with teachers on the so-called “front-line” of inclusive education, who are frequently not equipped to address the diversity of learners' expectations and needs. However, where effective examples of inclusion have emerged, it is also often thanks to decisions taken by schools, teachers and families that work together and are supported by adequate training and resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by C. Acedo, R. Operti, J. Brady, & L. Duncombe, UNESCO IBE.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO IBE, *Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future*, International Conference on Education, 48<sup>th</sup> Session, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/5, Geneva, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Booth, T., The Name of the Rose: Inclusive Values into Action in Teacher Education. *Prospects*, 159 (3), 2011.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris, UNESCO, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

From this perspective, closely connecting the decisions taken at all levels is clearly a key priority for change.

In general terms, the various initiatives towards inclusive education discussed in this publication exemplify diverse ways of addressing and implementing inclusive education. They also show diverse actors working together, in and across countries around the world, in order to make their education systems more equitable and of better quality. Valuable lessons are being learnt along the way, providing countries with the opportunity to learn from each other as well.

In the African context, for example, the UNESCO initiative for Basic Education in African Programme (BEAP) has made good progress towards inclusion in the participating countries. Countries in the region have used particular entry points, based on their identified priorities and needs, to move towards inclusive education. Indeed, a number of successful initiatives in this region highlight the importance for countries to analyse their context, evaluate their needs and expectations, and combine the process of inclusion with national priorities, such as the development of an early childhood care and education knowledge hub in Mauritius, as well as the revision of the basic curriculum framework in The Gambia. The BEAP is successfully assisting countries in aligning inclusive initiatives with their priorities. In the African context however, while current reforms are helping to address the existing gaps, the diverse challenges mean that inclusive education still remains a long-term vision.

In the Arab States, it is important to highlight the recent change in perspective around inclusive education, which is more closely in line with today's broader understanding of all learners and their diverse needs. The biggest regional challenge for the inclusion of all learners in education systems, however, is creating a common societal culture and understanding, as well as establishing core political and policy agreements. A common consensus among stakeholders is necessary for effectively and concretely transforming rhetoric into practice in the region. This implies converging diverse values, principles, definitions and perspectives, while building upon the region's traditional perspectives and rich history, knowledge and experience. Participation, cooperation and coordination are essential ingredients in these processes towards inclusion.

In Asia, successful school-based inclusive initiatives combined with targeted national and provincial awareness programmes have led the way to a broader understanding of inclusive education in some countries. Equally, the recent inclusive policy agendas in Laos PDR, Timor Leste and Pakistan represent a major step forward for supporting holistic and sustainable educational reform towards inclusive education. These countries have adopted inclusive teaching and learning practices into their regular pre-service teacher training programmes, for example. However, many countries in the region have yet to set up efficient evaluation and monitoring systems in order to collect accurate and relevant data to feed into the reform process.

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries are progressively shifting from a narrow view to a broader understanding of inclusive education where all children are entitled to equal learning opportunities, regardless of any differences in abilities and capacities. However, despite a governmental focus on developing appropriate legislation

and policies, the normative provisions for public education do not yet offer any clear direction for action, nor show the ways in which this process can be implemented at the school level. This gap between national and local levels illustrates the importance of closely connecting processes of policy and curriculum reform with the school and classroom levels.

In Europe, meanwhile, there is a general support and understanding of inclusive education in its broader sense, which aims to meet the increasingly diverse needs of learners. European policy makers have recognized the need for longer term systemic planning towards social and educational inclusion as complementary dimensions. Nonetheless, there are strong pressures to maintain local, regional and national characteristics, often making it difficult to rapidly remove barriers to participation and learning for all disadvantaged groups. In this context, strengthening cooperation is strongly recommended once again.

In Latin America, there is increasing consensus on the need to reform education from a comprehensive and holistic perspective. Reforms have enabled some positive changes in support of inclusive education. Latin American countries have reaped the benefits of a participatory process and regional cooperation, to help create a shared understanding of inclusive education, and strengthen the relationship between equity and quality. In practice however, the region still has difficulty finding ways to align and integrate both equity and quality in educational environments, provisions and processes, and generally moving from vision to practice. Like in other regions, this challenge emphasizes the need to further raise awareness and provide concrete effective practices as evidence of the complementarity of equity and quality.

What is clearly common to all regions is that there is growing political will to support inclusive education in its broader sense and as a key means for sustainable and equitable economic and social development. Nevertheless, countries continue to face general and specific challenges in efficiently and effectively transforming rhetoric into practice. For example, all regions are struggling to address deeply rooted exclusionary barriers from inside and outside the education system. Equally, some countries still refer to a narrow understanding of inclusive education, which focuses only on children with disabilities. Mobilizing and effectively using financial and human resources for inclusive education is also a common concern. Beyond this, the lack of accurate data, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms on inclusion represents a common obstacle for designing and implementing effective inclusive education systems.

In 1990, governments around the world committed to the Education for All (EFA) agenda, which aimed at achieving quality education for all learners. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of diverse institutions and actors around the world, much progress has already been made towards inclusive education. A great deal more should also be expected before 2015; inclusive education is generally perceived as a key strategy towards quality and equitable education for all, reflecting the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE consensus that “a broadened concept of inclusive education can be viewed as a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for *all* and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities”<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> UNESCO IBE, *op. cit.*, 2008.

Nonetheless, the global achievement of the EFA goals appears increasingly unlikely within the set timeframe, and the gaps between the included and the excluded are predicted to increase and pose ever more challenges for sustainable development around the world. Looking beyond 2015, therefore, it appears essential that we build upon what has been learnt from the discussions and policy developments around inclusive education and aim towards an inclusive global community where everyone has a real opportunity to participate.

## Annex

### Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education (ICE)

Meeting at the forty-eighth session of the UNESCO International Conference on Education (Geneva, 25–28 November 2008), we, the Ministers of Education, heads of delegation and delegates from 153 Member States have, alongside representatives of 20 intergovernmental organizations, 25 NGOs, foundations and other institutions of civil society, taken part in constructive and challenging debates on the theme of “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future.”

At the conclusion of our work, participants recalled Article 26 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that states that everyone has a right to education. We also affirm that inclusive quality education is fundamental to achieving human, social and economic development.

We agreed that governments as well as all the other social actors have an important role in providing a quality education for all and, in doing so, should recognize the importance of a broadened concept of inclusive education that addresses the diverse needs of all learners and that is relevant, equitable and effective.

All forecasts suggest that the global financial crisis will have a disproportionate impact on the poor—those who carry the least responsibility for these events. In this context, we reaffirm the importance of inclusive education for reducing poverty, and improving health, incomes and livelihoods. Therefore, despite the current global financial crisis, we emphasize that funding for education should be a top priority and that the financial crisis should not serve as a justification for a reduction in the allocation of resources to education at both the national and international levels.

Building on the outcomes of the nine preparatory meetings and four regional conferences on inclusive education organized by UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education, and based on the results of plenary sessions and workshop debates which took place during this Conference, we call upon Member States to adopt an inclusive education approach in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of educational policies as a way to further accelerate the attainment of Education for All (EFA) goals as well as to contribute to building more inclusive societies. To this end, a broadened concept of inclusive education can be viewed as a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for *all* and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities so as to implement the principles of inclusive education.

Therefore, we **recommend** to Member States to:

#### I. Approaches, Scope and Content

1. Acknowledge that inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities,

characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination.

2. Address social inequity and poverty levels as priorities, as these are major obstacles to the implementation of inclusive education policies and strategies, and deal with these problems within a framework of intersectoral policies.
3. Promote school cultures and environments that are child-friendly, conducive to effective learning and inclusive of all children, healthy and protective, gender-responsive, and encourage the active role and the participation of the learners themselves, their families and their communities.

## **II. Public Policies**

4. Collect and use relevant data on all categories of the excluded to better develop education policies and reforms for their inclusion, as well as to develop national monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
5. Consider as appropriate the ratification of all international conventions related to inclusion and, in particular, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in December 2006.
6. Pursue education in the public interest and strengthen the government's capacity to orientate, promote and follow up on the development of equitable education of high quality in close partnership with civil society and the private sector.
7. Develop policies that provide educational support for different categories of learners in order to facilitate their development in regular schools.
8. View linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom as a valuable resource and promote the use of the mother tongue in the early years of instruction.
9. Encourage educational stakeholders to design effective curricular frameworks from childhood onwards, while adopting a flexible approach in order to accommodate local needs and situations, as well as to diversify pedagogical practices.

## **III. Systems, Links and Transitions**

10. Provide for the participation and consultation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes, as the overall responsibility of fostering inclusion implies the active engagement of all social actors, with the government playing a leading and regulatory role in accordance with national legislation when applicable.
11. Strengthen the links between schools and society to enable families and the communities to participate in and contribute to the educational process.
12. Develop early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes that promote inclusion as well as early detection and interventions related to whole child development.

13. Strengthen the use of ICTs in order to ensure greater access to learning opportunities, in particular in rural, remote and disadvantaged areas.
14. Provide high-quality, non-formal educational opportunities that offer the possibilities for formal recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal settings.
15. Enhance efforts to reduce illiteracy as a mechanism of inclusion, bearing in mind the importance of literate parents on the education of their children.

#### **IV. Learners and Teachers**

16. Reinforce the role of teachers by working to improve their status and their working conditions, and develop mechanisms for recruiting suitable candidates, and retain qualified teachers who are sensitive to different learning requirements.
17. Train teachers by equipping them with the appropriate skills and materials to teach diverse student populations and meet the diverse learning needs of different categories of learners through methods such as professional development at the school level, pre-service training about inclusion, and instruction attentive to the development and strengths of the individual learner.
18. Support the strategic role of tertiary education in the pre-service and professional training of teachers on inclusive education practices through, *inter alia*, the provision of adequate resources.
19. Encourage innovative research in teaching and learning processes related to inclusive education.
20. Equip school administrators with the skills to respond effectively to the diverse needs of all learners and promote inclusive education in their schools.
21. Take into consideration the protection of learners, teachers and schools in times of conflict.

#### **International Cooperation**

22. Recognize UNESCO's leading role with regard to inclusive education through:
  - Promoting the exchange and dissemination of best practices.
  - Providing, upon request, advice to countries on how they can develop and implement policies on inclusive education.
  - Encouraging South-South and North-South-South cooperation for the promotion of inclusive education.
  - Encouraging efforts to increase resources for education both at national and international levels.
  - Making special efforts to assist the Least Developed Countries and countries affected by conflict in the implementation of the recommendations.

23. Request other international organizations also to support Member States in the implementation of those recommendations as appropriate.
24. Disseminate the Conclusions and Recommendations, unanimously adopted at the closing of the forty-eighth session of the ICE among the actors and partners of the international educational community so as to inspire, guide, support and develop renewed and resolutely inclusive educational policies.