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‘National Report on the Development of Education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines’

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Overview

UNESCO is holding its 48 International Conference on Education (ICE) in Geneva, Switzerland on 25-28 November 2008. The conference would be held under the theme: Inclusive education: the way of the future and would be held in collaboration with member governments, development partners and other stakeholders.

The concept of inclusion in education assumes that all children should have equal learning opportunities regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds or differences in abilities and capacities. Inclusive education is an increasingly growing concern that informs the processes of educational reform in both developing and developed regions. Traditionally, the concept of inclusive education has been confined to the group of students with special education needs and predominantly those with physical and/or mentally disabilities and refugees. However, inclusive education goes beyond special education needs and refers to all learners who, for different reasons, may find themselves at risk of marginalisation or exclusion.

The principle of inclusive education was adopted in the World Conference on Special Needs Education: access and quality which was held in Salamanca in 1994. The outcome of the conference states that 'all schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, cultural or social conditions, including disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities or children from disadvantaged or marginalized areas'.

UNESCO defines inclusive education as the:

Process of addressing and responding to the diversity of the needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modification in content, approaches, structures and strategies with a common vision which covers all children of appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

The 48 Conference on Education is viewed as a major international forum to promote dialogue on education policies among Ministers of Education and relevant stakeholders such as researchers, education professionals, inter-governmental organisations and NGOs. It is organised by the international Bureau of Education (IBE).

For the purpose of the Conference, inclusive education is based on a reference framework structured around four (4) sub-themes.

These are:

- it is essentially a process of looking for the most appropriate ways of responding to diversity as well as trying to learn from the differences
- It is linked to stimulating through multiple strategies the creativity and the capacity of addressing and resolving problems by students.

- Comprises the right of the child to attend school, express higher opinion, have quality learning experiences and attain significant learning outcomes and
- It implies a moral responsibility of prioritising those students who are at risk of being marginalised and excluded from school and obtaining low learning outcomes.

A series of symposiums were held in the designated UNESCO regions. The goal of the Caribbean Regional Symposium was to provide a regional input to the International Conference on Education 2008, while at the same time generating sub-regional debate on the diverse experiences and knowledge of the conference participants.

The objectives of the regional symposium were:

- Sharing of vision, strategies and practices with regards to the progress of inclusive education at the regional and national levels.
- Identification of common concerns and discussions on political proposals related to inclusive education
- The shaping of significant regional debates of the 48 UNESCO Conference, which generate proposals and establish tendencies around inclusive education.

The Ministry of Education of St Vincent and the Grenadines participated in the Regional Symposium. The government of St Vincent and the Grenadines views inclusion in Education as evolving towards the notion that all children should have equal learning opportunities regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds or differences in abilities and capacities.

Concept and philosophy of Inclusive Education in St Vincent and the Grenadines

In St Vincent and the Grenadines, the concept of Inclusive Education is linked to the discussion on the type of society and well-being the country wants to pursue. This concept is based on the consideration of education as a central social policy model, which lays the foundation for the development of a sustainable and harmonised society in the future.

Government has broadened its perspectives on inclusive education to include some central issues and specific aspects such as:

- The education of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties;
- The struggles against poverty, marginalization, gender based segregation and HIV and AIDS related exclusion;
- The consideration of cultural diversity and multiculturalism as both a right and a learning context;
- The protection of the rights of minorities, migrants and indigenous populations;

- The effects of natural disasters and conflicts on populations; and
- Bridging the existing digital divide among groups.

The mission of the Education sector is:

To provide all persons of the state, especially the Youth, with opportunities appropriate to their development needs, through the provision of quality education - academic, technical-vocational, moral, physical and Sports which will equip them with the values, attitude, knowledge and skills necessary for creating and maintaining a productive, innovative and harmonious society.

Philosophy of Education

Education is viewed as a social institution essential for quality production, order, progress, poverty reduction and development of individuals and society. The emphasis of the education system in St Vincent and the Grenadines is to develop a system that supports national development processes and programmes which promotes productivity and economic growth and enhance the quality of life of the Vincentian people.

The tenets of the philosophy of education include:

- Education is a fundamental human right and all citizens should be enabled to achieve a basic required minimum.
- Education should not be limited by age, time and place but should be a lifelong process which goes beyond formal schooling.
- Maturation and social development in the formative years of the life of the individual should be directed by the combined influence of the school, home and society.
- Given the role of education in social life, both universal and compulsory education is necessary at certain periods in the life of every citizen.
- All forms of education, whatever the content, should be developed to meet the varying learning needs of the population.
- A morally sound concept of the equality of educational opportunity should be central to the thought and practice of education.

Hon Dr Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines, described the activities to improve education in his address to the 34th Session of the General Conference as an ‘Education Revolution’.

The Prime Minister declared that:

My government is committed to eliminating poverty, improving living standards, helping our young men and women find employment, fighting

drug trafficking and abuse.... and we see quality education as central to this,...indeed, UNESCO's focus on education for sustainable development, not subsistence equilibrium, mirrors my government's mantra that education is for living and production.

He emphasised the point that the functional illiteracy rates have reduced in the country, and universal access to secondary education was achieved in 2005. He also identified the goals of enhancing education and tackling the problems of climate change as key to his country's cooperation with UNESCO.

Education is seen in St Vincent and the Grenadines as an important development vehicle which is critical to enhancing the social, political and economic sustainable development. It is also an important mechanism for enabling people to cope with the changes and challenges of the 21st century.

The Evolution of the Education System in St Vincent and the Grenadines

The education system in St Vincent and the Grenadines mirrors the colonial era. It consists of pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The government of St Vincent and the Grenadines regards education as a social development institution essential for quality production, order, progress, reduction of poverty and development of individuals and society (St Vincent and the Grenadines Education Sector Development plan 2002-2007). The Ministry of Education manages the education sector. St Vincent is currently implementing the OECS Education Reform Strategy 2010 (Miller, Jules & Thomas, 2000). The overall goal of the Education sector is:

To develop St Vincent and the Grenadines as a diversified, competitive and knowledge-based economy through maximising the potential of its human resources, particularly in areas that support poverty alleviation, job creation and national production.

The public education system was established in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 1849. Presently, the government supports all public schools by providing full funding to schools without religious affiliation and partial funding to schools that are affiliated to churches. All schools throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines follow a common curriculum determined by the government. Primary and Secondary education in the country is free, but not compulsory. Public school lasts for seven years. Due to poverty and other development challenges approximately 25% of children do not complete elementary school because they are required to work on the banana and cottage industries as a means of enhancing their family's income. This is seen as the major factor for the mounting illiteracy problem which is facing the country.

For many years, education was influenced by the British system. Textbooks and lessons presented a European perspective on history and culture. Standardised exams were set and marked in England. The English Language was used exclusively in schools, creating a barrier for students who were more comfortable speaking Vincentian Creole. The curriculum also

emphasized academic rather than practical subjects. Education reforms have been introduced in recent years. Creole has become accepted in school skits and public speeches, and students can study Caribbean history and literature. The curriculum also offers practical courses such as carpentry and agricultural skills.

Secondary school offers a five year programme, followed by a more advanced two year programme which prepares students for tertiary level training. Less than one half of the country's children attend secondary school. This is of great concern given the high rate of unemployment among youths.

The Department of Education in the Ministry of Education and Sports is the executive body with responsibility for planning, executing and evaluating the educational policy of the state. The formal system of education is stipulated under the *Education Act* of 2005. This *Act* is the main instrument that governs, organizes, administers and regulates education in the state. Under this new act, provision for compulsory education and education for children with special needs was made for the first time. The mission of the Ministry of Education focuses on "Life long education for all". This concept emphasizes the right of all learners to gain access to an education which has equity; with high quality teaching within well-resourced and managed institutions (ESDP, 1999).

Socio Economic overview of St Vincent and the Grenadines

Geography and Socio Economic Perspective of SVG

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is an independent plural Caribbean state located in the Caribbean archipelago and comprises one main-island (St Vincent) and thirty-two small islands and cays (The Grenadines), (see **Appendix 1**). The island is located in the South eastern corner of the Caribbean archipelago, north of Grenada and south of St. Lucia and lies approximately 1,600 miles (100 km) South-east of Miami, USA. It is some 389 square kilometres and has a population of about one hundred and ten thousand people mainly of African descent with about 10% of mixed East Indian, European and indigenous people (the Caribs).

St. Vincent and the Grenadines obtained its independence from Great Britain on the 27th October, 1979. Like most former British Colonies, inherited a Westminster Parliamentary system of Government. Currently, a Constitutional Review Commission was established and has implemented a process of consultation and education on the reform of the Constitution. St. Vincent and the Grenadines holds membership in a number of regional and international organizations. It is a member of the region's economic and political sub-grouping the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) comprising the Windward and Leeward Islands; and also a larger regional grouping the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The country is in the forefront of the movement for closer political and economic integration of the Caribbean region.

Table 1: Population by board Age Group and Sex:

AGE	TOTAL POP	% OF TOTAL POP	MALE	FEMALE
Under 15	32,575	30.7	16,517	16,058
15-29	29,523	27.8	15,001	14,522
30-44	22,436	21.1	11,659	10,777
45-64	13,979	13.2	7,056	6,923
65+	7,740	7.3	3,393	4,347
TOTAL	106,253	100	53,626	52,627

Source: Population and Housing Census, Statistical Office, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development, 2001

The above data provides information for basic planning for all the components of the work of the Ministry. It underscores the youthfulness of the Vincentian population, establishing that 58.5% of the population of the country is under the age of twenty-nine and of that figure, the majority are under fifteen with a fairly equal distribution between males and females.

From a global economic perspective, the international community defines St Vincent and the Grenadines as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). Small island states are particularly vulnerable due to the absence of critical mass and subsequent reliance on export to sustain their economies. Many of the products exported have been dependent on preferential trade arrangements extended by developed countries (under the EU Lome Convention and US Caribbean Basin Initiative). St. Vincent and the Grenadines was subjected to unwanted vulnerabilities from the erosion of the trade preferences by multilateral trade liberalization under the GATT/WTO and unilateral trade liberalization in emerging market countries worldwide (ITC, 2004).

The economy of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is fuelled by agriculture and tourism. Developments in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and trade liberalization have severely reduced income from the banana industry which was regarded as the mainstay of the economy. In 1989, export of earnings from bananas amounted to EC\$89.9 million. The uncertainty of the market and adverse weather conditions over the last ten or so years has resulted in a very significant decline in export earnings from bananas. In 2000, earnings dropped to EC\$49.49 million. In fact, the agricultural sector recorded a decline of 7.2 per cent in 2001 and its share of GDP fell to 11.2 per cent from 12.5 in 2000. Although there has been a decline in the contribution of agriculture to GDP in recent years, it is still the most important productive sector in terms of its contribution to employment and the government's fight against poverty, particularly in rural areas.

The Tourism sector experienced a 0.8 per cent decline in visitor arrivals in 2001. This was mainly due to the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Centre which discouraged many North Americans and Europeans from travelling. However, estimated tourism expenditure expanded by 8.55 per cent in 2001 or EC\$217.2 million from EC\$205.5 million in 2000 (Digest of Statistics, 2003). The resulting impact of such economic difficulties resulted in decrease in economic growth from 5% to 1% in 2000-02. The effect of this was an increase in poverty in communities that were once prosperous during the banana era.

Tourism also declined marginally in 2003 for the third consecutive year. Total arrival declined by 2.3% to 241,748 from 247,458 in 2002. The number of stay-over and

same-day visitors increased by 1,538 or 1.6%, while yacht and cruise ship visitors fell by 5,710 or 2.3% during the year.

In an effort to attract tourists from North America and Europe, the Government has embarked on the development and expansion of a robust security system at its multi island ports of entry (7 airports and 20 seaports) in order to reduce any incidence of terrorism. This project has diverted scarce resources that normally would be allocated to social development programmes such as education and health.

Growth in construction sector activity increased sharply to 9.4% following a contraction of 2.9% in 2002. Activity in the sector was largely private sector-driven and centred on the construction of commercial office space in the capital, Kingstown, and private dwellings. Public sector activity comprised maintenance of public roads and buildings and the initial phase of a low-cost housing programme.

Manufacturing sector activity expanded by 0.7% in 2003. The sector had declined by 0.9% in 1999 and worsened in 2000 when activity further contracted by 9.4%. Some recovery was evident in the following year when growth of 5.6% return to the sector. However, activity subsequently suffered another year of contraction, falling by 2.9% in 2002. The main manufacturer, producing flour, rice, animal feed and polypropylene bags, suffered further cutbacks in sales in the domestics and regional market as a result of increased competition. Manufacturing of flour experienced some set back due to contraction of domestic and regional market because of continuing competition from regional and non-regional sources.

Within the context of strong real income growth, Central Government was able to raise fiscal savings to 4% of GDP, up from 1.4% of GDP in 2001 and 3.1% of GDP in 2002, as a result of improved performance in the telecommunications sector resulting from its partial liberalisation.

1: The Education system - facing the challenges of the twenty-first century:
an overview

Major reforms and innovations introduced in the education system, in particular concerning organisation, structure and management of the education system

The Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines has begun an 'Education revolution'. The emphasis of this revolution is based on the notion of universal access to primary and secondary education.

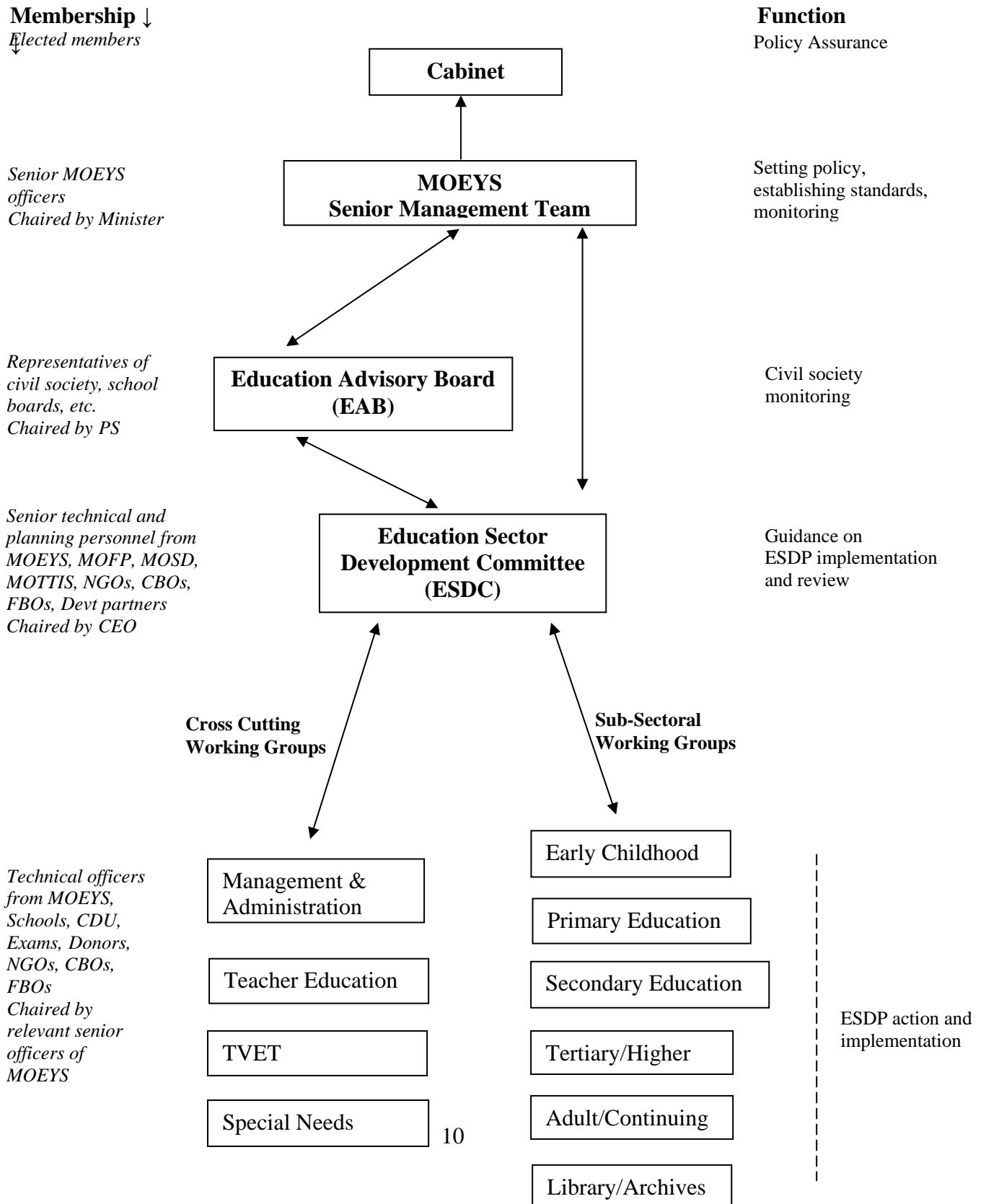
Management Structure of the Education Sector Development Programme.

An Education Sector Plan was developed for the period 2002-2007 by the government of St Vincent and the Grenadines in 2002. The overall goal of the education sector is to develop St Vincent and the Grenadines as a diversified, competitive and knowledge-based economy through maximising the potential of its human resources,

particularly in areas that support poverty alleviation, job creation and national production.

The plan sets out the mechanism for managing the education sector through utilising a participatory management development approach. The management structure of the education sector is as follows:

Chart : Organogram - ESDP Operationalisation/Implementation
(*Education Sector Development Plan Volume 1, 2002*)



The Ministry of Education is responsible for policy formulation and overall management of schools and the components of the sector. The management structure of the Ministry is centralised. The Ministry of Education has sole responsibility for decision-making with regards to material and human resource management. However, the 1992 Education Act makes provision for an Education Advisory Board to advise the Minister of Education on the overall effort, policy and direction of educational services and oversee the management of the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDC).

Members of the ESDC comprise representatives from the following stakeholder groups:

- SVG Teachers' Union
- Denominational Boards of Management
- The Education Advisory Board
- Private sector/NGO/Community-based Organisations
- School Boards and/or Parents Teachers Association
- Ministries of Social Development (MOSD); Telecommunications, Technology, Industry and Science (MOTTIS); Health (MOH), Finance (MOFP) and MOEYS
- Development partners, including external funding agencies

The ESDC is responsible for initiating and following through on all proposals in the plan such as:

- a) Establishing the sub-sectoral and cross-cutting Working Groups;
- b) Approve Terms of Reference for these Working Groups;
- c) Request work-plans and budget break down from each Working Group;
- d) Preparing a co-ordinated implementation programme of the plan.

Each Working Group is responsible for producing a fully operational, prioritised annual work plan with costs for their overall programme proposals. The work plans consist of the development of more detailed activities on the programming areas outlined in the Action Plan. The work of these groups consists of informing the ministry's annual planning and budget process.

Management of the school plant is the responsibility of the Principal who is required to make day-to-day decisions on the quality of instruction. MEYS sees the School Performance Review under OERS as a potentially effective tool for improving school management team, and community support that determine the extent to which the boards fulfil their functions. Indeed, there appears to be role conflict between church and GOSVG on the various managerial responsibilities, e.g. supervision by SEOs and other EOs and maintenance of facilities, particularly since these schools receive annual grants from the public purse and are obligated to adhere to certain aspects of public policy.

The aim and purpose of education at each level

The rationale of the Education sector in St Vincent and the Grenadines is:

- To produce a learning society by ensuring that there are human resource development opportunities for meaningful and successful participation in the education process.
- To provide the population with a range of skills and knowledge required for personal and national economic and social development.

The table/matrix below provides an analysis of the progress and achievement of the various levels of the education sector in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Educational level	Objective/purpose	Outputs	Progress and Achievements
Early Childhood	<p>Introduce statutory regulations for ECE, including the licensing of ECE schools</p> <p>Increase access to 50% of the cohort by 2005 and 100% by 2010</p> <p>Improve quality of provision</p> <p>Create mini-resource centres in strategic locations</p> <p>Established an Early Years Unit in the Ministry</p> <p>Establish a National Association of Early Childhood Education</p> <p>Develop consultation procedures with stakeholders on child development, parenting and children's programmes</p>	<p>Regulated licensed ECE system; society protected</p> <p>Improved learning opportunities for more children</p> <p>Good quality ECE provision</p> <p>Improved ECE materials provision</p> <p>Efficient monitoring of ECE</p> <p>Stakeholder involvement in ECE</p> <p>Stakeholder consultation in ECE</p>	<p>Provision of stipend to pre-school facilities and provision of learning materials</p> <p>Implementing a programme which would enhance the physical infrastructure and learning outcomes of preschools</p> <p>Training of pre-school teachers</p> <p>Development of curriculum for Early Childhood Education</p> <p>Devising national standards for Early Childhood Education.</p> <p>Developing a national curriculum resource guide</p> <p>Widening of the age range of Early Childhood Education (0 - 8 years) (This range now includes Kindergarten to Grade 2 and as such should facilitate cumulative growth and help to eliminate disability problems in literacy and numeracy).</p> <p>Improving teaching/learning mechanisms and environment through the training of</p>

			<p>teachers, upgrading of classrooms and monitoring of the curriculum.</p> <p>Establishing a National Council of Early Childhood Education.</p>
Primary Education	<p>Increase substantially literacy and numeracy above the current baseline</p> <p>Review and revise the primary curriculum, making it relevant</p> <p>Increase the provision of books and learning materials, including ICT</p> <p>Establish a subsidised text book scheme Reduce the number of open classrooms and upgrade others</p> <p>Ensure that all primary teachers are trained and qualified</p> <p>Increase management efficiency by encouraging home-school partnerships through the establishment of School Boards</p> <p>Restructure the transition to secondary education</p> <p>Reduce and eventually eliminate inequity of provision (whether on the basis of gender, location, special needs, poverty)</p>	<p>Needy students have books; cost recovery</p> <p>Conducive learning environment for primary children</p> <p>Effective teaching; improved pupil learning</p> <p>11 years universal Secondary education; less wastage</p> <p>An inclusive equitable education system</p>	<p>Improvement and expansion of physical facilities</p> <p>Continuous improvement of learning environment in areas of curriculum development, material and supplies and management and leadership.</p> <p>Constant improvement in curriculum to ensure relevance and applicability specifically in Maths, language and science</p> <p>Over 20% improvements in performance of students in the 11 plus proficiency examination (Common Entrance Examination) in 2007 when compared with their performance over the previous year.</p> <p>Provision of training of more primary school teachers at degree level through the Distance Education.</p> <p>Integrating ICT in the education process</p> <p>Provision of ICT facilities within institutions</p>
Secondary Education	<p>Provide universal access to 5 years to comprehensive secondary education, including upgrading provision in the Grenadines</p>	<p>11 years universal education; less wastage; an inclusive equitable education system</p> <p>Effective secondary</p>	<p>Implementation of Universal Secondary Education.</p> <p>Improved training of more secondary school teachers at degree level through Distance Education.</p>

	<p>Raise achievement levels of all students</p> <p>Review and renew the secondary curriculum</p> <p>Ensure that all secondary teachers are trained and qualified</p> <p>Ensure that all schools are managed effectively and efficiently</p>	<p>education for all</p> <p>A relevant curriculum delivered by modern methods</p> <p>Effective teaching; improved student learning</p>	<p>Expansion of existing school facilities and construction of new school facilities to accommodate new students in learner friendly environment.</p> <p>Implementation of TVET programmes in Secondary Schools.</p> <p>Integrating ICT in the education process.</p> <p>Provision of ICT facilities within institutions.</p>
Tertiary	<p>Increase access and upgrade TVET provision</p> <p>Review and implement the Master Plan for a fully integrated SVG Community College</p> <p>Improve quality and relevance of course provision in tertiary education</p> <p>Initiate a national co-ordination mechanism for TVET provision linked to SVG Community College development</p>	<p>Youths & adults able to access suitable skills training</p> <p>An integrated semi-autonomous tertiary system with additional facilities</p> <p>TVET and other courses acceptable to employers</p> <p>An independent sustainable NTA working in collaboration with the private sector</p>	<p>Implementation of TVET programmes</p> <p>Integration of SVG Community Colleges implemented which enhanced the overall management and delivery of tertiary education in SVG.</p> <p>Integrating ICT in the education process</p> <p>Provision of ICT facilities within institutions</p>
Special Education	<p>Increase access for children with SENs by making provision for them in mainstream schools wherever feasible</p> <p>Increase government responsibility for special education</p> <p>Establish a national PORTAGE system to identify SENs at an early stage</p> <p>Provide specialist ICT in special schools</p> <p>Provide vocational training and skills</p>	<p>Better access for SENs children; equitable, effective teaching and learning</p> <p>National care for children with SENs</p> <p>Support to parents and provision targeted to best effect</p> <p>Equitable access to modern forms of learning</p> <p>People with SENs prepared for the world of work &</p>	<p>In process of integrating special education within the formal education system.</p> <p>Integrating ICT in the education of SENs children</p> <p>Implementation of a process for identification of children with SENs at an early stage.</p>

	<p>opportunities for children with SENs</p> <p>Establish a National Education Access Fund for needy children and parents</p> <p>Recruit and appoint specialist support staff</p> <p>Develop partnership links with co-ministries (e.g. MOH)</p>	<p>vice versa</p> <p>Children and parents not disadvantaged by poverty</p> <p>Specialist support and advice available to parents, schools and MOEYS</p> <p>Consistent support to children/parents</p>	
<p>Adult and Continuing Education</p>	<p>Provide adequate numbers of well-trained teachers</p> <p>Review and develop teacher training programmes</p> <p>Review entry requirements to the teaching profession</p> <p>Revise policy on the recruitment and retention of teachers</p> <p>Reclassify staff grades with the teaching service.</p> <p>Improve the physical facilities and the environment at SVGTTC</p> <p>Provide and maintain basic equipment resources at SVGTTC.</p> <p>Build capacity in Teacher Education through HRD following appropriate research</p> <p>Improve management and administrative process and procedures</p> <p>Improve the professional capacity of teachers through an established Teaching Service Commission</p>	<p>A trained teaching profession; effective teaching in schools</p> <p>A modern relevant Teacher Education curriculum.</p> <p>Increased numbers of trainee teachers</p> <p>An efficient and effective teacher retention scheme</p> <p>Job satisfaction and teacher retention</p> <p>Decent environment for Teacher Training programmes</p> <p>Improved Teacher Training programme delivery</p> <p>Effective trainers of teachers with research capacity</p> <p>More effective management of Teacher Education</p> <p>A professional teaching force supported by central tracking systems</p>	<p>Integrating ICT in the education process</p> <p>Provision of ICT facilities through Learning Resource Centres at Community level</p> <p>Provision of teacher training facilities and improvements in curriculum, delivery and content</p> <p>Over 10,000 participated in the literacy crusade resulted in over 6000 learners becoming literate</p> <p>Utilising mass media (radio, television and newspaper) for delivery of content to illiterates.</p> <p>Delivery of skills and vocation training modules to learners which enhanced their employability thus reducing the impact of poverty and social challenges</p> <p>Creation of the Adult and Continuing Education Division which puts the Skills Training Unit and the Adult Education Unit under one umbrella thus improving the overall management and delivery of programmes.</p>

Technical and Vocational Education and Training	<p>Strengthen the administrative, management and development functions and structure of the TVET sub-sector within the Ministry</p> <p>Promote TVET partnerships with industry and commerce and decentralise operating approaches</p> <p>Review and revise the TVET curriculum</p> <p>Increase access to and upgrade TVET provision in the State</p>	<p>National focus on TVET; raised prominence for TVET in public eye</p> <p>Sustained partnership between TVET and national initiatives</p> <p>Students able to benefit from TVET</p> <p>Improved profile for TVET; increased career and labour market opportunities</p>	<p>Implementation of new Technical Vocational Education (TVET) Curriculum which is an integration of the following curriculum models: a) Conservative liberal arts design, b) Educational technology design, c) Vocational design, d) Social reconstruction design and De-schooling design.</p> <p>Reintroduced the curriculum at the Teachers' Training College for primary school teachers</p>
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Table/matrix 2: On the progress and achievements of the various levels of the education sector of in St Vincent and the Grenadines

Although there are many challenges facing the education sector of St Vincent and the Grenadines including limited HR resources and finances, the level and quality of success achieved during the period under review are quite noteworthy. Most outstanding were improvements of over 20% of the performance of students during the 2006 period when compared to performance of students completing their primary level education in 2007. At the secondary level the implementation of universal secondary education i.e. ensuring that school places are provided for all students who are within the secondary school age is another important achievement. Government has embarked on the implementation of rapid expansion of school facilities across the state to ensure that students are housed in comfortable learning environment.

At the tertiary level, government has created an integrated management facility to manage the Community Colleges. This network consists of the Community College, School of Nursing, the St Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' College and the St Vincent and the Grenadines Technical College. This management facility is geared towards enhancing the overall management of these institutions.

Curricular policies, education content and teaching and learning strategies

The legal framework of education sector (in particular, new legal provisions)

The Legislative and policy environment governing the Ministry of Education in St Vincent and the Grenadines is quite favourable, supportive and progressive. The Department of Education in the Ministry of Education and Sports is the executive body with responsibility for planning, executing and evaluating the educational policy of the state.

The formal system of education is stipulated under the Education Act of 2005 or the Education Bill 2005, ACT No. of 2005. This Act is the main instrument that governs, organizes, administers and regulates education in the state. Under this new act, provision for compulsory education both at primary and secondary and education for children with special needs was made for the first time.

The aim of the act is:

To make provision for the delivery of educational services in St Vincent and the Grenadines by both the public and the private sectors and for matters connected therewith and incidental thereto.

The Act states that the Minister shall be solely responsible for the management of the education sector within the state. Its goals and objectives are to:

- Establish a varied, adequate and comprehensive education system that is characterised by excellence;
- Promote the education of the people of St Vincent and the Grenadines by establishing educational institutions which will foster the spiritual, cultural, moral, intellectual, physical, social and economic development of the community;
- Frame all educational policy so as to provide a more valid, comprehensive and relevant educational service directly related to the changing needs of St Vincent and the Grenadines;
- Effect the execution of the educational policy of the Government; and establish a co-ordinated education system organised in accordance with this Act.

Chief Education Officer

The act highlights the fact that the Chief Education Officer, who is accountable to the Minister of Education and subject to his/her directions, is responsible for the day to day administration of this Act. The main role of the Chief Education Officer is to ensure that all educational institutions are administered in a proper and efficient manner.

The Education Advisory Board

The act specifies the establishment of an Education Advisory Board as the main mechanism responsible for the management of the Education sector. The act indicates that resources would be provided by the Ministry out of public funds at the Minister's disposal, and shall be adequate for the Advisory Board to perform its functions under this Act. It identifies the functions of the Advisory Board as:

- to advise on the making of regulations;
- to advise on the training of teachers, lists of text books, curricula and other matters on which this Act requires the Minister to obtain the advice of the Advisory Board;
- to advise on any other matter on which the Minister requests the Advisory Board's advice.

The Education Advisory Board is an integrated development and democratic mechanism which involves government departments and institutions, private sector agencies, civil society and other development institutions involved in education and development. The decision making process adheres to consensus.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities

An important component of the act is the adherence of the rights and responsibilities of students. The act states all persons in St Vincent and the Grenadines are entitled to receive an education appropriate to their needs. It continues by claiming that the Chief Education Officer shall provide for every person of compulsory school age who resides in St Vincent and the Grenadines. The Chief Education Officer shall:

- Enrol the student in an educational programme offered by a public school or an assisted private school;
- Direct the student to enrol in an educational programme offered by a private school;
- provide special education for the student; or
- permit the student to undertake a home education program.

Parents' Rights and Responsibilities

The Act also specifies the role and responsibility of parents within the Education System. These include a) parents of children of compulsory school age may choose for their children education in a public school, a private school or an assisted private school, or home education in accordance with section b) parents to be informed of the progress, behaviour and attendance of their child; c) parents shall upon reasonable notice to the principal and teacher be allowed to observe the instruction of the child if the visit does not impede the instruction of other children; d) parents may appeal against any decision under this Act that significantly affects the education, health or safety of the child; and e) parents must be consulted on the development of any special educational programme for the child.

The Act is very strong on the issues of inclusion. It states that a person who is eligible for admission to an educational institution as a student shall not be refused admission on any discriminatory ground relating to that student or a parent of that student. It continues by stating that a person who or a body which refuses to admit any student to an educational institution, or expels any student from an educational institution on any discriminatory ground relating to the student or a parent of the student commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of five thousand dollars. It defines discriminatory ground' as any ground based on race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed, physical handicap and in the case of mixed gender schools, sex.

Compulsory School Attendance

The Act embraces compulsory education as a fundamental principle and practice of the education system. It states that it shall be the duty of the parent of every child of compulsory school age to cause the child to attend school regularly. A student is excused from school attendance if (a) the school is closed for any reason; (b) the student is excluded from attendance at school under any provision of this Act or the regulations; (c) the student is unable to attend school because of sickness, danger of infection, infirmity, sudden or serious illness of a parent or other related cause; and

(d) the student is suffering from a physical or mental disability that, in the opinion of a medical practitioner, makes the student incapable of being educated by ordinary methods of instruction.

Objectives and principle characteristics of current and forthcoming reforms

As stated earlier, Education in St Vincent and the Grenadines is viewed as a social institution essential for quality production, order, progress, poverty reduction and development of individuals and society. The emphasis of the education reform is to develop a system that supports national development processes and programmes and promotes productivity and economic growth which would in turn enhance the quality of life of the people.

The Education Sector plan specifies key principles for the reform of the education process. These include:

Achievement - the prime function of the Education reform process is to raise the standard of achievement in all aspects of education, in particular, in literacy and numeracy to support the government life long education philosophy.

Excellence will be promoted and rewarded throughout the system. It is believed that this would lead to raising the educational standards within all levels of the education system.

Quality will be improved through the extension of teacher training, constant upgrading of the curriculum and related materials, leading to more stimulating and challenging learning environments.

Efficiency will be improved through restructuring and reforming of the education system to focus on delivery and monitoring of the progress, and in effecting changes within each teaching/learning situation to optimise resources utilisation and efficiency.

Effectiveness will be increased through measures to motivate teachers, provision of incentives, training of principals/Zonal Coordinators and closer supervision of learning institutions by education officers/Adult Education Field Officers.

Relevance will be assured by reviewing and revising the curriculum offered to students/learners of all ages so that it more closely matches the development needs of individuals and the country as a whole, in keeping with the principles of life-long learning.

Creativity will be encouraged through the delivery of programmes across all range and levels of the education system.

New technologies will be adopted as tools to continue to improve teaching and learning, curriculum development, and delivery of content and also to ensure that

learners in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are technologically literate to enhance economic and social development models.

Environments will be improved so that they are more conducive to effective teaching and learning.

Partnership principles

Partnerships will be fostered with civil society, private sector and the regional and international community to create greater national involvement in educational development and ownership by these stakeholders.

Consultation and dialogue between the Ministry of Education, key stakeholders and other partners will ensure that the plan is constantly reviewed and updated on a rolling programme to meet new and emerging development needs in the education sector and across the country as a whole.

Teamwork will be developed within the Ministry of Education and among ministries/departments including civil society and the private sector to solve problems/challenges as they emerge and to keep the Education Sector Development Plan on track.

Management principles

Capacity building will be pursued to assist the Ministry of Education and the learning institutions to implement ESDP efficiently and effectively.

Sustainability will continue to be a guiding principle in making decisions about actions and the resources to be utilised to ensure the long-term success of the ESDP and educational reform.

From a philosophical stand point it shows that no one strategy could serve as an exclusive guide for decision-making with respect to reforming the education system /process in St Vincent and the Grenadines. However, from the current practice, one can deduced that the education reform is guided by a combination of traditional and contemporary philosophies.

The current best practice shows that traditional classroom approaches/methodologies are combined with the contemporary philosophies of Progressivism and Reconstructivism. These philosophies propose an education for change, democratic social living and democratic reform. The emphasis of the Education reform process is on providing opportunities for empowering students to take control of their own learning. Overall, instruction is tilted towards a more outcome-based, learner-centred, activity-based education system.

The Education reform process is fuelled and linked to the OECS Reform Strategy. The strategy consists of sub-regional cooperation in the development and

harmonization of education sector. This cooperation takes place at all levels within the education system.

One of the principal innovations in the education process is the introduction of Information and Telecommunication Technology (ICT) in the school system in St. Vincent.

The CARICOM policy states that:

If children are to explore and experiment with ideas, they need to have access to learning resources such as high quality textbooks, good library facilities, computer-assisted instruction, education television and radio...self instructional and activity-oriented materials also need to be used on a wider scale to teach children how to learn on their own and to make it possible for them to learn at their own pace, wherever they can and whenever it is possible. (p. 12)

The Ministry is currently exploring the possibility of providing instructions to schools through the internet and web based technology. ICT would allow the ministry to develop Library Information Centres in all schools throughout the state to strengthen the information base and also to facilitate the teaching of basic computer skills to students. This is being done through the implementation of the Basic Education Project. Through this project all schools would be electronically linked so that they will access curriculum guides and other resources easily.

Main policies, achievements and lessons learned as regards to:

Access to education (focusing on actions being taken to reach children, youth and adults that are currently excluded);

Recent policy development in education can be summarised in two phases. The first, beginning in 1984, was concerned with the reduction of illiteracy and the expansion of educational opportunities. The second, dating from 1995 and continuing, is concerned with the further extension of access to educational opportunity and improving the quality of education.

The Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines has realised universal primary access for over a decade. This policy has resulted in the successful implementation of Universal Secondary Education. The government has made significant gains in enrolment of students at the secondary level.

Table 3: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL BY AGE GROUP AND SEX

AGE GROUP	MALES %	FEMALES %	BOTH SEXES %
0-4	33	33.9	33.4
5-9	96.2	96.3	96.2
10-14	93.4	95	94.2
15-19	41.3	53.2	47.2
20-24	2.9	5.3	4.1
25-29	1.5	1.8	1.6

Source: Population and Housing Census, Statistical Office, Ministry of Finance, Planning and development, 2001

The critical task now facing the education sector is to expand access to pre-primary education and tertiary education, and at the same time fully realize universal secondary enrolment i.e. achieving 100% of all children of secondary school age, being enrolled in a five-year secondary education programme. The Universal Secondary Education policy is done within the context of raising the quality of education at all levels of the system. The system is currently faced with difficulties, because in order to advance these objectives, the country will need to register significant improvements in addressing the following major issues:

1. deficient teacher quality;
2. inadequate curriculum;
3. low student performance;
4. limited access to Pre-primary, Secondary and Post-secondary education
5. high repetition and dropout rates;
6. sub-standard physical facilities and inadequate equipment and learning materials; and maintenance of school facilities.

There is a concerted effort from government to ensure that schools and other educational facilities are located in all rural and urban communities/centres irrespective of the socio economic and development challenges faced by these communities. Early in 1999, ten (10) schools and three (3) multi-purpose centres were chosen by the Ministry of Education to be part of a pilot project. These schools were sampled from all geographic regions of the country. Targeting of the multi-purpose centres was in an effort to provide the necessary skills for out-of-school young people and adults in the communities surrounding these centres.

The emphasis was placed on the:

- Training of trainers
- Refurbishment and preparation of the physical environment
- Purchase of computers

The training focus was on:

- Mastery of computers using a methodology requiring a definition and analysis of computer skills.
- Establishment of computer competence relative to age levels of the children.
- Creation of a curriculum that will cover requisite skills set at all levels.

Although there is improvement in the performance of children at the primary level of schooling over the past three years, research indicates that there may be structural and institutional weaknesses that particularly marginalise children from the most disadvantaged groups.

Physical accessibility to education has improved through the establishment of more geographically accessible schools and through the provision of more facilities for non-formal education programmes. Access to early childhood education has been restricted by an uncoordinated programme of private nursery/early childhood education system which denies about two-thirds of pre-school children access to early childhood development programmes. In addition, access at secondary level has improved through the introduction of free universal basic education.

At the Adult and Continuing level, the government has created a network of Learning Centres in communities which provide training in literacy and numeracy, employment and vocational/live skills and ICT. There are 400 trained facilitators who are responsible for the delivery of content to over 6000 adult learners utilising a number of media and methodologies.

Early childhood intervention as a means to support children's development, transition to primary education and learning);

When compared to the other sectors of the education system namely primary, secondary and tertiary the major difficulty facing Early Childhood Education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is limited resources (human, financial and material. The Education Sector consumes approximately 23% of the government's recurrent spending, of which primary education absorbs 55% and secondary education 25%. Only a limited amount of this budget would go towards supporting the Early Childhood Development sector. This sub sector is mainly supported by private providers who would receive government subvention totalling EC \$ 240,000 per annum (US\$88,888).

The government of St Vincent and the Grenadines recognizes the importance and the benefits that parental involvement can bring to Early Childhood Education. It has therefore devised strategies to improve the quality and participation of parents in the development of the Early Childhood Education through the establishment of parent teacher associations. Parents are also involved through the provision of donations and raising funds to support these facilities. The Literacy Crusade provided opportunities for parents' with low levels of education and those from lower socio-economic standings to enhance their literacy and numeracy skills and participate in the Early Childhood Education setting.

The changing role of parents is reflected at the official level in many countries. Through the Education Acts, parents are now given more opportunities to actively participate in their children's education. In St Vincent and the Grenadines parents of children at the primary and secondary levels have equal representation on the school's

Parent/Teacher Association and can influence schools significantly through their right to choose schools for their children.

However, there is no government legislation regarding Early Childhood Education as all settings are privately owned and managed. The relationship that presently exists between parents and teachers can be described using the *protective* and to a lesser extent the *transmission* models highlighted by Swap (1993). These models do not ascribe to parents their rights as the child's first and enduring educator and as such need to work in partnership with teachers. Government is now seeking to change the way in which early childhood services are managed by instituting the necessary legislations and associated financial support including the licensing of schools, increase access to 100% of the cohorts, improve quality of provision, create mini-resource centres in strategic location and establishing a National Association for Early Childhood Education.

Government is progressing rapidly to implement a model that would enable the Early Childhood sector to embrace the concept of partnership with parents and would also place responsibilities on parents to exercise their rights as *consumers* (Hornby, 2000). This model is in line with the participatory process implemented in the broader education system. This participatory model of education as propounded by Hornby, 2000, allows teachers to be much more relaxed and open to other stakeholders.

Learning outcomes, particularly concerning the efforts to improve learning achievement (how well are students performing at various levels?) and reduce inequalities (how have disparities in achievement been reduced?)

The government of St Vincent and the Grenadines has implemented a series of strategies to improve the performance of students at all levels of the education system.

Although there has been marked improvement in the performance of children at all stage of the primary level of schooling, indications are that there may be structural and institutional weaknesses that particularly marginalise children from the most disadvantaged groups.

In St Vincent and the Grenadines, advancement to higher levels/stages of learning has not been uniform. This is evident in increases in poverty in urban and rural communities over the years.

Poverty and other development barriers prevent young people from taking up education and job opportunities. These can be summarised in the current school data as:

- i) At the pre-primary level (Grade K), approximately a third of pre school children, particularly those in the rural areas and from disadvantaged families, are not accessing early childhood educational programmes. The ministry is implementing measures to provide places for more half of the children within the pre-school age. These measures include training for teachers and exploring the possibility of providing more places in primary schools and community centres.

- ii) At the primary level (Grades 1 - 6), about three-fifths of the enrolled student population do not satisfy the minimum assessment requirements to enable them to proceed to the first stage of basic secondary schooling. Consequently, government is putting measures in place to improve the quality of education delivered at primary level. It has improved the quality of teacher training and physical infra structure, create conducive learning environments for children and improvement in curriculum. The government's aim is to increase student attainment levels to ensure the development of a literate numerate society. It has achieved 100% enrollment regardless of psycho-socio-and economic position and geographic location.
- About 7200 students meet the CEE age criteria using the Ministry of Education and Sports requirements.
 - 3-level cohort classification system (ranging between 10½ and 13½ years).
 - Previously only 36% of those who are eligible would write the Common Entrance examination. Government has expanded the physical infra structure to ensure that school places are provided to all students who are within the secondary grouping.
 - Approximately two thirds of the cohort sitting the CEE achieved a pass grade to attend secondary school.
- iii) At the basic secondary level (1st stage), about 35% of students complete Grades 7 and 8 in the all age schools and wrote the School Leaving Examination (SLE).
- 5% of the primary school children drop out of schooling and do not complete the full primary cycle.
 - Because of their age, 15-20% of the primary enrolment are promoted to Grades 7 and 8 without completing primary Grades 5 and 6.
- iv) At the secondary level (2nd stage, 3rd level) approximately 15-20% of the cohort leave school before reaching Form 5:
- About 80-85% of the secondary school cohort complete the full 5-year secondary school cycle.
- v) Both primary and secondary levels of schooling are characterised by absenteeism, repetition and drop out rates.

Pre-service teacher training, recruitment, deployment, working conditions and in-service professional development.

To address these challenges at secondary level the government has implemented the follow strategies a) a programme of training of secondary teachers to enhance competence, qualification and delivery of quality education, b) review of curriculum to make it more relevant to the development needs of the country, expansion of school places by building new schools and/or expanding existing schools and enhancing the effective management of secondary schools.

At the tertiary and high education level, the government has as its aim the development of an integrated effective post secondary education system. Work is progressing rapidly on enhancing mechanisms for strengthening and integrating the St Vincent and the Grenadines Community Colleges. It is also working with stakeholder institutions to improve access and up-grade TVET provisions, improve quality and relevance of course provision in tertiary education and initiate the establishment of coordinating mechanism for the provision of TVET.

The government has put measures in place to augment the delivery of education provision to increase access to children with SENs by making provision for them in mainstream education schools where feasible. As this programme is still in its early stage its impact on the education system cannot be assessed. The government has also established a national PORTAGE system to identify children with SENs at an early stage. This programme is supported by a) provision of specialist ICT in special schools, b) provision of vocational training and skills opportunity for children with SENs and c) developing partnership links with co-ministries and civil society.

The role of education system in combating poverty as well as other forms of social exclusion and cultural marginalization (how is it envisaged? What kind of contribution is expected? What kind of strategies should be implemented?)

Poverty is not just economic, although the right to work and have an adequate income is an important dimension of poverty. Poverty is also social, political and cultural... experience has shown that efforts to reduce it in developing country context yield disappointing results unless they are located within a coherent social policy framework and are driven by national commitment to promote sustainable development (Professor Clive Thomas, St Vincent and the Grenadines Social Policy for Poverty Reduction and Social Development, OECS Secretariat, 2001 page 1). He also contented that:

Indicators also show striking improvement in education...for a developing country, public expenditure is quite good, staff-pupil ratios satisfactory, and gross combined enrollment in primary, secondary and tertiary education is 68 percent.

St Vincent and the Grenadines, like other Small Developing Island States, is faced with numerous development challenges. The data revealed persistent and widening social and technological gaps; the emergence of new social groups and forces; a slowing down of productivity and economic growth in important sectors; difficulties in reconciling macro economic policies with equity; demographic changes; and intrinsic pressures on the domestic welfare system. It is worthy to note that these internal pressures have emerged within the context of globalization and liberalization.

The 1995 Country Poverty Assessment (CPA), which measures the ability of households to consume basic food and non-food requirements and is currently being reviewed, indicated that almost 38% of the population was determined to be poor and 26% was indigent. The report also suggested a strong correlation between level of education and poverty. Less

than 3% of heads of households in the lowest socio-economic group have had more than a primary level education. On the whole, the poor were significantly underrepresented in the higher levels of education and training. Eighty-two percent (82%) of persons in the poorest group has achieved only a primary level of education and of the remainder, only 17% were educated at the secondary level (Project implementation under the EPMU, 2003 p. 3).

The report further stated that a greater percentage of men achieved secondary education than women...education level also seems to contribute to the rural-urban difference in levels of poverty. Approximately 35% of urban residents were educated above primary level. It is recognized that the adverse effects of the shocks to the banana industry since 1996, the events September 11, 2001 and the increase in fuel and commodity prices in 2008, might have resulted in worsening the poverty situation in St Vincent and the Grenadines

GOSVG has prepared an Interim Poverty Strategy Paper (IPRSP) in order to address these challenges. IPRSP, which incorporates the Government's development vision along with inputs from the private sector, parasitical agencies, trade unions, Non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and other civil society organisations, enunciates the primary poverty reduction objectives for the country to be elaborated in a full poverty reduction strategy (PRS). As stated earlier, the government views education as a fundamental strategy for achieving its educational goals and reduce poverty.

The main components of the proposed PRS are:

1. the implementation of policies to stimulate growth, trade and investment;
2. increasing/generating employment opportunities
3. promoting greater and better investments in human capital;
4. improving social and physical infrastructure; and
5. strengthening civil society participation.

Approaches, scope and content

The Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines has developed a comprehensive policy on poverty reduction. It is currently implementing an integrated development strategy to address poverty reduction across all sectors. This approach is based on the premises that:

1. The population of the SVG both male and female are actors, owners, and initiators of social policy. They are expected therefore, to have (and demand) increasing agency over the domains of society, economy, polity, and culture.
2. Due to underlying economic, political, social and cultural constraints, weaknesses and gaps, it is imperative that poverty reduction, social reform and change are widely shared values among the population and is not the singular property of the elites, whether political, social, or economic.
3. To be successful, poverty reduction is best located in the context of social change, which refers to the nature and quality of the social relations, interconnections, and shared values among the population of SVG.
4. The reduction of poverty and fostering of social development are 'public goods', in that they are part of the 'commons' or common heritage of all

citizens of the SVG and therefore the responsibility for their provision is collectively shared by all members of the society.

Overall objective

While poverty reduction may be seen as an end in itself, the overall objective of the policy framework goes beyond that and seeks to create in SVG:

More secure and functional social relations (or as it is also termed social capital). This would not only reduce poverty but enlarge the capability of the population, both men and women (and in particular the poor and vulnerable groups) to meet their needs and interests through effective participation in the activities of the four central institutions, (state, market, community, and household).

The overall objective emphasises ‘**shared values**’ among the population. It also stresses the systematic development of their **rights** and **entitlements** to social development of which education is an important component.

Strategic Objective of the approach

There are two strategic objectives to address poverty reduction. The development objective is to enable the population as a whole, men and women, including specifically the poor and vulnerable groups to:

- 1) Address their needs and interest,
- 2) Secure greater ‘livelihood security’, and
- 3) Strengthen social relations (social capital).

Government approach to poverty reduction and enhanced access to educational provisions is through ‘investment in peoples and communities’, as they seek to promote what is sometimes termed as ‘high-quality’ economic growth, and avoid over emphasizing large scale transfers of a primarily social type protection. Critical components of this approach concern a) building social capital; b) securing family/household relations; c) gender equity; d) participation/empowerment; e) institutional sustainability; f) environmental sustainability; g) international competitiveness; and h) macroeconomic stability and balance.

Given the relationship between poverty reduction and education, the strategy to enhance the human capital in particular is even more critical for sustainable poverty reduction. This strategy would be perused in conjunction with efforts to promote public participation and community empowerment, strengthen social protection for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, promote and strengthen social capital, improve social responsibility and promote gender equity. Monitoring mechanisms would be put in place to ensure that the programmes and projects are properly targeted and their effectiveness monitored and evaluated.

HIV/AIDS

Young people between the ages of ten (10) to twenty (10-24) are estimated to account for up to 60% of all new cases of HIV/AIDS infections in the Caribbean. The education system provides the best opportunity for reaching children and young people in St Vincent and the Grenadines. Persons who are HIV/AIDS positive are discriminated against in the society. In an effort to reduce discrimination, the government has developed and implemented a HIV/AIDS policy. It is evident that the practice of discrimination and stigma undoubtedly retards any meaningful efforts for prevention, care, treatment and support.

The goal of the policy is to provide up to date information in order to provide effective prevention and care within the context of the education system. The objectives of the policy are:

- Provide guidelines for institutions on the treatment of students and school personnel infected with HIV/AIDS.
- Support and spearhead customized training to keep abreast of current development with regards to the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS.
- Promote the use of universal precautions in all potential infection situations.
- Ensure the provision of necessary resources including adequately equipped first aid kits in all institutions.
- Address issues of discrimination, privacy and confidentially and sensitive topics.
- Reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS infection.

The policy is based on the premise of decent work ethics as a mechanism for addressing non-discrimination and reduction of stigma. It is also imperative that there be due recognition of the rights to any of the stakeholders who has, is perceived to have, or who is affected by HIV/AIDS. This understanding would create a workplace free of discrimination and foster a work environment where all people feel comfortable and respected.

Healthy and caring environment

One the tenet of the policy is to minimize the impact of HIV infection within schools and communities as a whole. It focuses on the access to treatment, care and support for employees and students alike who are infected with and affected by the disease. The objective of the policy and practice is to ensure that all the stakeholders have access to affordable treatment for HIV/AIDS, including such services as anti-retroviral drugs, treatment for relief of HIV related systems, nutrition counselling and supplements, stress reduction and treatment for more common opportunistic infections, including STDs and tuberculosis.

Recruitment, selection and promotion

Irrespective of whether the person is infected, the policy is committed to equal opportunity and education in all aspects of employment for all employees and applicants. No HIV screening would be required of job applicants, students who wish

to enroll, or current employees or students. The person's qualifications and performance would be the primary basis for employment decisions.

Gender Parity

HIV/AIDS has no respect regarding gender. Therefore, both sexes are accorded equal opportunities where access to health services, education and statutory or occupational benefits are concerned. Females more often than males are affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic due to biological, socio-cultural and economic reasons. The policy seeks to address this disparity.

Rights

On the issues of employee rights, a person who is HIV/AIDS positive has the right to be protected against discrimination or harassment on the work place and all grievance and disciplinary procedures should be applied equally to all employees. He/she also has the right to all training, promotion and other employment opportunities and should not suffer adverse consequences as a result of HIV infections. He/she is also responsible to conduct him/her self in a manner that will not create or risk HIV/AIDS transmission and adhere to the rules aimed at promoting and preventing behaviours which may risk HIV transmission.

Approach to implement the model

The government has trained a cadre of peer educators to work within the system. These peer educators are knowledgeable on the HIV/AIDS issues and challenges and are available to provide information as needed. The peer educators comprise groups of facilitators including (i) employees and (ii) students.

In addition to the areas mentioned above, counsellors are offered the opportunity to become VCT trained. Counselling is carried out in the school setting in areas that allows for privacy and confidentiality.

All employees of the Ministry of Education are given the opportunity to participate in planned HIV/AIDS education programmes during working hours. This programme addresses employees concerns relating to coping strategies with regards to risks, care, treatment and support of HIV/AIDS positive persons. In addition employees are encouraged and given the time to access voluntary testing and counselling.

How is inclusive education conceptualized? What is the current vision of inclusive education in your country?

The government of St Vincent and the Grenadines embraces UNESCO definition of Inclusion Education which sees it as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of the needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education...involves changes and modification in content, approaches, structures and strategies with a common vision which covers all children

of appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

The government of St Vincent and the Grenadines commitment to inclusive education is stated in the St Vincent and the Grenadines Education Act. It is also highlighted in the Education Sector Development Plan 2002-2007 which defines the mission of the Ministry of Education as:

To provide all persons of the state, specifically the youths, the opportunities appropriate to their development needs, through the provision of quality education –academic, technical-vocational, moral, physical-and sports which will equip them with the values, necessary for creating and maintaining a productive, innovative and harmonious society.

Access and **equity** are the key principles of inclusive education in St Vincent and the Grenadines. In fact, the plan states that **access** will be increased to pre-primary, secondary, special, tertiary, and adult and continuing education while universal access to basic education will be maintained. It also emphasises the increase in access to students and the community at local libraries.

What are seen as the most important challenges for ensuring educational and social inclusion? How have these challenges changed in recent years?

There are major challenges to ensure educational and social inclusion in the education sector in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Although the Ministry has an excellent five (5) year development plan with clearly defined strategic goals, the implementation of the plan is affected by a) availability of resources (financial and human), b) the absence of regulations to govern the 2005 Education Act, and c) the fall in education standards. Government continues to invest in resources in teacher training, curriculum development and expansion of existing education institutions and building of new ones. These responses are met with varying levels and degrees of success.

What specific legal or regulatory frameworks refer to inclusive education issues? What groups are considered as excluded in these frameworks and how are they categorized?

The Education Act of 2005 is the principal regulatory framework which refers to compulsory education in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

On the rights and responsibilities of students, the Act states that subject to available resources all persons in St Vincent and the Grenadines are entitled to receive an education appropriate to their needs. The Chief Education Officer shall provide access to education for every person of compulsory school age who resides in St Vincent and the Grenadines. For the purposes of meeting the obligations under subsection (1), the Chief Education Officer shall -

- Enrol the student in an educational programme offered by a public school or an assisted private school;
- Direct the student to enrol in an educational programme offered by a private school;
- Provide special education for the student.

On the issues of admission and attendance of students, the Act states that a person who is eligible for admission to an educational institution as a student shall not be refused admission on any discriminatory ground relating to that student or a parent of that student. It also states that a person who or a body which refuses to admit any student to an educational institution, or expels any student from an educational institution on any discriminatory ground relating to the student or a parent of the student commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of five thousand dollars.

A student can be excluded from school on disciplinary or medical grounds. On the issues of medical ground, the Act states that if the principal of an educational institution discovers or has reason to suspect the presence of a contagious disease in the institution, the principal shall immediately report the same to the parents of the students concerned, the Chief Educational Officer and the Chief Medical Officer. A student who has been refused admission to an educational institution on the ground that the student is suffering from or exposed to a contagious disease may be readmitted upon production of a medical certificate from a medical practitioner to the effect that the student is free from such disease and is unlikely to be a source of infection to other persons in the institution.

On the issue of admittance, the Act states that a) a child may only be admitted to and retained in a public or assisted private pre-primary school if the child has attained the age of three years at the start of the academic year, or will attain that age by the following April 30th, and has not attained the age of five years and b) a child may only be admitted to and be retained in a public or assisted private primary or all age school if the child has attained the age of five years at the start of the academic year, or will attain that age by the following April 30th, and has not attained the age of sixteen years.

What are the current dimensions of the phenomenon of exclusion from and within education? What kind of indicators and data are used to inform inclusive education policies?

The government recognised that the increase in poverty is still the major challenge facing the education of students. Although the ministry has put mechanisms in place to lessen the impact of this phenomenon on students by providing school uniforms, books and in some circumstance cover transportation costs to students attending secondary schools, poverty is still the main cause for exclusion of students.

The ministry has developed and implemented indicators to enable the government to determine the extent of challenges facing the education sector in St Vincent and the

Grenadines. These are some of the indicators government is instituting in 2008 to determine the success of the inclusion programmes:

- Recruit, deploy and retain adequate numbers of suitable personnel for all sectors of the education system.
- Provide programmes for continuing professional development at all levels.
- Implement policies for the management of Early Childhood Sector.
- Establish new Early Childhood Education centres in under-served areas and converting available excess space in the primary schools into Early Childhood Education Centres.
- Involvement of community and community organisations in shaping curriculum, management of schools and provision of resources.
- Strengthen the mechanism for monitoring Early Childhood centres to ensure that they meet minimum national standards.
- Create an education access fund for needy parents.
- Establish necessary mechanisms to ensure that all teachers are held accountable for each child's learning and development.
- Introduce Performance Management Development Systems
- Provide training to enable teachers to identify students with learning challenges.
- Established an institution to provide an alternative programme for the 'socially challenged' adolescents whose needs are not served/met by the mainstream/conventional curriculum/education.
- Continuous improvement of the working conditions of teachers and the quality of the teaching-learning environment in secondary schools.
- Expose at least 1500 adults to basic education programmes.
- Establish at least 10 centres round the country for academic up-grading programmes.
- Establish a protocol for evaluating and transferring children from special to mainstream schools and vice versa.

Which inclusive education issues have been, are, or are going to be relevant for educational policies in your country?

From an inclusive perspective, the educational response to diversity and equity in the education system is one of the most important challenges currently faced by policy makers and educational practitioners. These goals require theoretical changes in the educational practices, conceptions, aptitude and attitudes so as to make them possible for all students, without exception, have the same learning opportunities, develop their capacities and capabilities to the full and participate in educational situations on equal terms.

From a social perspective, there are two (2) major factors that possess the potential to have devastating impact on the implementation of inclusive education in St Vincent and the Grenadines. These are a) the struggle against poverty, marginality,

segregation, exclusion and HIV-AIDS and b) the consideration of cultural diversity and multiculturalism as both a right and a learning context.

The government of St Vincent and the Grenadines is committed to a human rights based approach to education delivery and practice. This approach implies exercising and enjoying the right to education. The government is committed to the view that education is a public good and has therefore put measures in place to incorporate these principles in its broader development goal. This is the main thread for strengthening its mission and responsibility, as well as its commitment to providing appropriate funds, conditions and opportunities. Over the years the government has developed a clear and comprehensive agenda of educational change and policy reform tied to promoting and facilitating the right to access and to obtain a high quality equitable education, not driven by the agendas, demands and the corporate interests of the suppliers.

What groups are considered to be most vulnerable to various forms of exclusion from and within education? Who are the excluded groups that current policies have yet to take into account?

Although numerous measures have been instituted to reduce the vulnerability of specific groups of students from exclusion, students with disability, those whose families are living in the lowest socio economic levels (poverty stricken) and those who are HIV and AIDS positive are deemed most vulnerable to exclusion.

Children with SENs represent an especially vulnerable class of citizens and special laws and policies have been instituted to promote their full participation and integration in the education system. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) of which St Vincent and the Grenadines is a signatory and the UN standard rule on equalization (1993) are international agreements which support the principle of inclusive education.

Although there has been an injection in resources supported by appropriate policies, students who are HIV/AIDS positive are still deemed the most vulnerable group in the education system. In 2005 the Government invested US\$7 million to undertake the following activities: the development of a health information system; the beefing up of the care and treatment system; a massive programme to educate the population about the dangers of the disease; a programme to encourage behaviour change and modification, research and surveillance enhancement (Dr the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, 2005 Budget Address, December, 2004). Yet the society is still very uncomfortable working with persons who are infected with the disease.

In what ways do current educational reforms address inclusive education?

The strategic objective of the government is to attain high levels of sustainable growth and development, while at the same time reducing high levels of poverty, raising

social consciousness and increasing the levels of employment (Dr the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, 2005 Budget Address, December, 2004).

The current reform in education addresses the following:

The Curriculum

Government has implemented a series of reforms and innovations in the curriculum. These innovations are based on the notion that the curriculum is a living entity subjected to change to meet the needs of students. It is not a static mechanism (additional information provided under section on Curriculum).

Expansion of Physical Infrastructure

The Government has implemented a programme of construction of new school and replacement schools in areas where there are necessary and desirable. It is also redesign these schools to accommodate disabled students. It is also implementing a programme to retrofit existing schools to accommodate children with disability. This infra structural programme is costly and government is implementing it on an incremental basis.

ICT

ICT is viewed by the government as an important component of its revolution in education strategic programme. Governments has implemented a programme to computerise all schools and educational institution in St Vincent and the Grenadines. This project has the potential to contribute to enhancing the knowledge base of all students in St Vincent and the Grenadines as well as linking them to other students and networks internationally.

Universal secondary education

This is one of the most recent innovations in education in St Vincent and the Grenadines. Government has implemented it universal education strategy which provides opportunities for all students irrespective of social, economic and geographic background to acquire quality secondary education.

Teacher training

The teachers are key drivers of the inclusive education strategy. The government is investing a tremendous amount of resources to ensure that a cadre of well trained professional teachers are available to provide high quality education at all levels of the education system to diverse groups of student.

What are the main barriers (e.g. economic, political, and social) to inclusive education?

There are numerous barriers to inclusive education in St Vincent and the Grenadines. These barriers include:

The physical environment

Much work was not done on redesigning the school and education facilities in St Vincent and the Grenadines to make them more Inclusive Education 'friendly' i.e. amendments to door, passageways, installation of elevators and ramps, adjustment of bath rooms and washroom facilities and recreational facilities. Due to lack of resources to carry out these redesigns to these educational facilities, the government would be implementing these changes on an incremental basis. The Ministry of Education is working closely with the Ministry of Works to ensure that new facilities are design to provide adequate access to children and youths with SENs. Accessibility to recreational facilities by all students is also very critical. Access to recreational facilities in most schools, specifically in rural areas, is inadequate.

Intentional attitudinal

Children with disabilities, HIV positive children and other minority groups often encounter periods of isolation and bullying within the school setting. Due to the lack of data, it is very difficult to determine the severity of these problems. However, bullying is viewed as another barrier to inclusion in the education system.

Although government has embarked on the implementation of inclusive education over the past five (5) years, the society still lacks knowledge and awareness on the importance of inclusive education to national development and the processes for implementing the concept.

Inadequate funding

St Vincent and the Grenadines lacks the economic strength and machinery to effectively implement all the aspects of inclusive education simultaneously. As stated above the government is implementing these changes on an incremental basis.

Classroom practices

Some practices within the class room act as barriers to inclusive education. These include a) the methods used by teaches in the delivery of content and b) the processes of interaction between teacher and students and c) students and students interaction within the classroom.

Teacher training

The area of special education provision requires more trained teachers within the Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary levels. The current crop of specialists is not adequate to support this new initiative. Consequently the Ministry needs to urgently redesign the Teachers College programme of study to support its inclusive education policy.

What are the most important facilitators of inclusive education?

The most important facilitators within the inclusive education process are the educators themselves. These are persons who do more than teach children with SENs. They perform the role as collaborative team leaders and agent of changes in the education system. They also advocate for change in schools and communities, sparking a passion for inclusion in teachers, administrators, and families and giving them the practical guidance they need to make it work.

The objective of the senior teachers/inclusive facilitators is to create classrooms, schools, and communities where all students experience a sense of belonging. This role is essentially new in the schools in St Vincent and the Grenadines. Government has appointed a cadre of senior teachers to perform this role. Their role is to support and prepare staff for the challenges of facilitating full inclusion within the school system.

Although it is quite early to assess the performance of these facilitators, they are achieving varying degrees of success. As stated above the Inclusion Facilitator's Role is mainly that of a Collaborative Team Leader. These senior teachers are still trying to define their role in the schools and grapple with the expectations of their colleagues, community and the Ministry as a whole.

These educators are also undergoing a series of training to enable them to understand this multifaceted role, as real-life inclusion facilitators. The ministry is creating opportunities for them to share their diverse experiences and views on how best to carry out their roles and function. An important part of the exercise is centred on how to evaluate their own school practice and learning from the progress made in other schools.

A critical component of the role of the senior teachers is to transform the hearts and minds of those who are sceptical of the reform process by learning specific communication and mobilisation skills and recognizing the values, concerns, and personality types of persons who may be critical and supportive of the inclusion in education model. The Ministry is still in the process of working out strategies and approaches to assist the facilitator to function effectively as a collaborative team leader and a source of information and support to the inclusive process in the school and community. Also of critical importance is for the facilitators to develop skills and competencies on strategies for supporting students to be full participants and learners within the general education curriculum and classroom. The Ministry will be providing training to assist the senior teachers/facilitators to press forward organizational changes within the schools in specific areas such as scheduling and technology.

What specific approaches and measures have been adopted to make the education system more inclusive?

The government has implemented strategies, processes and programmes at all levels of the education system to make it more inclusive. These are as follows:

Primary Level

To achieve the above objective the government continues to modernise existing school plants and construct new and replacement schools. To support its high enrolment rate (close to 100%) at the primary level it has implemented measures to ensure high attainment and attendance rates. The

government is continuing its ongoing work in curriculum development, teacher training both formal and informal and the provision of adequate resources/material to ensure the delivery of high quality education. Government has invested US\$56 million in loans and grants (CDB, EU and World Bank) to implement the Education Sector Development Plan/ Programme. In 2007 the pass rate at the 11 plus proficiency examination, the Common Entrance Examination has increased to 61% from 48% the previous year.

Secondary Tertiary levels

At secondary and tertiary levels, the government has established an integrated community college programme bringing together the School of Nursing, Technical College, Teachers' College and the 'A' Level College under one umbrella organisation. These institutions have witnessed an increase in enrolment. This is as a result of the new policy adopted to increase access to all persons qualified for entry. The Technical College and Multi-Purpose Centre are under going reforms through the STATVET project financed by the European Union (EU) to enhance learning environment and provide certification for persons pursuing technical skills and competencies. It is estimated that the drop out rate at the new Multi-Purpose Centre is 10% thus putting further pressures on The Adult and Continuing Education Division to meet such an expanding demand. It is anticipated that the drop out rate at these centres would reduce as soon as reform measures are fully implemented.

Tertiary level (over seas training)

The government has provided scholarships to persons who are academically inclined to pursue studies in the Republic of Cuba, Mexico, Republic of China, Taiwan and the European Union. Through the National Insurance Scheme, the government has facilitated the provision of over US\$2 million in loans to finance a National Student Loans programme. Over 20% of these resources are allocated to assist students who are economically disadvantaged.

Early Childhood Education

At the Early Childhood Education level, the government continues to support private pre-schools that are registered with the Ministry of Education and meet the standards set by the ministry. This area of education is mainly provided by private individuals/agencies. It costs between \$25- \$250 per month for a space for a preschooler to attend private preschool in St Vincent and the Grenadines. Although government provides a basic stipend to the facilities to assist with their operation, the quality of instruction, material and physical facilities may vary significantly. Work is progressing rapidly to harmonise the quality of content, instruction and facilities provided and establish pre-school facilities in primary schools across the country to enable pre-school aged children from rural communities and disadvantaged sectors of the society to attend these programmes.

ICT

On the issue of computerisation and ICT, the government has embarked on a programme of computerisation of schools and other public training spaces, specifically the Learning Resource Centres. At the Learning Resource Centres, the internet provides access and opportunities for learners to enhance their knowledge and competencies. Nationally, there was an increase in mobile phones between 2002 and 2004. For example in 2002 the customer base for mobile phones was 20,000 and 26,000 for fixed lines. However, at the end of September 2004 there were 61,000 mobile phones and 18,000 fixed lines users.

Teacher Training

Teacher training is a critical factor in improving the quality and delivery of education at all levels. The St Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' College provide approximately 40 places annually along with over 150 teachers who participate in vocational training workshops and symposiums to up-grade their competencies and skills. The Government has mobilised substantial amount of resources to provide additional training for its teachers. The objective of this innovative training is to strengthen the knowledge and content of the trainee teachers, thus enabling them to teach at all levels of the secondary curriculum with greater confidence and effectiveness. This would also improve the graduate-to-pupil ratio, especially in the schools outside of Kingstown, the capital, where there are fewer graduate teachers practicing. Government is currently financing fellowship training to the Bachelor's degree for 34 secondary teachers in critical subject areas such as English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Spanish and French, Physical Education, Geography, Music, Computer Science and Special Education.

The Ministry is also providing training to an additional 15 untrained graduate teachers through the Distant Education (DE) mode leading to the professional qualification of Bachelor of Education degree. This DE training has the advantage of enabling the teachers to pursue their professional training while at the same time continue to deliver enhanced instructions to students in the classroom.

The advantages of this type of training are a) it enables teachers to make strong direct linkage between education theory and practice, b) undertake action research on current educational issues, and c) effectively reduce the costs of the training since there will be less need to hire substitute teachers as is required when teachers are given training leave to pursue full-time training overseas.

Resources will also be provided for four teacher trainers to pursue post graduate training abroad. The training would strengthen the teacher-training capacity at the SVG Teachers' Training College which is the institution designated with the responsibility to deliver quality teacher education.

Curriculum

Government is working vigorously to implement its curriculum review and renewable process at the primary, senior primary and lower secondary levels of the system. It is ensuring that ICT is effectively incorporated into the curriculum. As a component of such improvement, the ministry is ensuring that teaching strategies and approaches are improved to support the curriculum development. This approach is

compounded by heightened motivation and engagement of pupils, reduced repetition and dropout rates thus resulting in an overall increase in levels of literacy and numeracy. The curriculum is expanded to include special programmes for the democratization of education such as peace, civic education and values. These strategies also target more carefully those children with special education needs and those who are living in special circumstances. It is hoped that the innovative strategies/approaches and teaching styles the ministry is implementing in the classroom would address learning difficulties, physical or emotional challenges, or the exceptionally gifted and talented child.

Adult and Continuing education

The Adult and Continuing Education Division encompasses the Adult Education Unit and the Skills Training Unit. In 2002, the Adult Education Unit conducted a national literacy survey which revealed that approximately 20% of the adult population of St Vincent and the Grenadines i.e. approximately seventeen thousand persons were seriously challenged relative to their literacy and numeracy skills. The Division work focuses on three areas a) literacy, b) academic upgrading and c) special programmes.

Literacy

As a response to this serious problem, the Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines launched the National Literacy Crusade in January, 2005. The programmes lasted for two years. The official records show that approximately three thousand and fifteen (3015) persons regularly attended the programmes across the country. However, unofficial figures show that over 6000 persons participated in the programmes (including those who dropped out at some point during the programme).

Academic Upgrading

During the implementation phase of the National Literacy Crusade it was observed that there were many individuals who were literate and numerate, but desired academic upgrading which enabled them to successfully sit CXC/CSEC and GCE O' Level Examinations. This need was also forcefully expressed during the various consultations held throughout the state during the first three months of 2007.

Through the Learning Resource Centres and other facilities, the division is carrying out programmes in the following areas to respond to the needs of learners. Subjects most popularly requested are:

- English Language
- Mathematics
- Social Studies
- Business Subjects
- French

Special Programmes

Apart from the regular programmes of Basic Literacy and Academic Upgrading, the division was approached by businesses, statutory corporations and other development institutions to provide training for particular groups and sectors. For example, the Fair Trade groups have indicated the need to assist banana farmers with training relative to keeping proper records as part of the Euro-gap standards.

Other persons who need special training to enhance their competencies to enable them to access specific occupation were trained by the division. The division has utilised a number of strategies and media to assist in delivering quality training to a range of participants.

At the Early Childhood Education level, the government continues to support private pre-schools that are registered with the Ministry of Education and meet the standards set by the ministry. It is in the process of establishing pre-schools in primary schools to enable pre-school aged children from rural communities and disadvantaged sectors of the society to attend these programmes.

What specific approaches and measures have been adopted to make the education system more flexible in order to offer additional educational opportunities to those who have dropped out or have not attained an appropriate level of qualifications?

The government has created the Adult and Continuing Education Division to provide opportunities for young people and adults specifically those who dropped out of the formal school system. The Division work focuses on three areas a) literacy, b) Academic upgrading and c) Special programmes. In the area of literacy and numeracy, the Government instituted a literacy Crusade in 2005. Over 6000 persons participated in the programmes (including those who dropped out of the programme).

The division offers academic upgrading training to persons who need basic refresher courses to enable them to successfully sit CXC/CSEC and GCE O' level Examinations. A series of Learning Resource Centres and other facilities were developed by the division to train adults and adolescents in academic and employment creation skills.

Specific courses in the Arts and other regular programmes of Basic Literacy and Academic Upgrading were implemented by the division to acquire certification. These courses were implemented in collaboration with two private and public sector agencies.

Young women who had to leave secondary school due to pregnancy are provided with opportunities to continue their education after giving birth.

The SVG Technical College and Multi-Purpose Centre are under going reforms through the STATVET project financed by the European Union (EU) to enhance learning environment and provide certification for persons pursuing technical skills and competencies. These institutions provide places to persons who are disabled. SVG Technical College also provides training opportunities for students who are unable to access secondary education. The College is now offering 1 year programmes at NVQ Level 2 (craft level) and will shortly be offering 2 year programmes at NVQ level 3 (technician level) for the first time in SVG.

The Multi Purpose Centers (MPC) were created to provide technical and vocational programmes to full-time students of all ages, those from secondary schools and also to serve the training needs of out-of-school youths and adults.

The Department of Libraries, Archives and Documentation Services provide an important national resource in areas of education, culture, information and personal life-long development. The Libraries offer opportunities to adults and children for self-education and are important resources in the development and strengthening of reading habits in children and adults.

2.1 Learners and teachers:

What new approaches to teaching and learning are being implemented to increase educational opportunities for all, improve student learning outcomes and reduce disparities?

Enhancing the quality of teaching is at heart of any effective strategy to improve student learning and the general outcomes of the education system. There are a number of factors in the education system which are undermining teacher quality and effectiveness. The government has worked considerable hard to reduce the ratio of pupils to trained teacher from 68:1 in 1991 to 27:1 in 2002. There was still a backlog of 271 uncertified primary teachers by October 2003, a significant number of whom received training but did not satisfy all the requirements for certification. The Ministry is catering for 78 teacher trainees per annum for the next 3 to 5 years to meet existing demand and attrition rates.

At the secondary level, the ratio of students to trained teachers is less favourable than that at primary level, being as high as 50:1 in 2003. There are approximately 197 non-graduates at the secondary level and it would take ten years to train all of these teachers at the rate of 20 per year, assuming a zero attrition rate. The teacher attrition rate in St Vincent and the Grenadines is over 10% among untrained non-graduate secondary teachers, which would tend to prolong the period required for these teachers to reach a fully trained status. The Ministry of Education is developing strategies to enhance selection, recruitment and retention rates as a means of reducing reduce the attrition rate.

The quality of teaching at the Early Childhood Education level is quite varied. This sub-sector is predominantly private sector driven and is less closely monitored and supervised than the formal education levels. In an effort to add value to the Early Childhood sub-sector, minimizing learning disparities and increasing the prospects of a wider cross-section of children reaching an acceptable level of readiness as they enter the formal education system, the Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines is providing assistance in areas of materials development, teacher training and contribution to salaries of teachers in this sub-sector. The Early Childhood Education sector is being plagued by high turnover among trained teachers. Government is in the

process of reforming the sub-sector by developing a more targeted approach to strengthen and enhance the outcomes of the sub-sector.

A Study on the 'the Assessment of the Quality of Education delivered at Primary Level (with Emphasis on Grade 6) in St. Vincent & the Grenadines' (Hannif & Simmons, 2007) claimed that teaching styles contribute to deficient teacher quality in the classroom. The study revealed that teachers used the 'tell –and –show' teaching/learning procedures to a very great extent and little or no use of (for example) inductive, communicative and interactive teaching approaches. However, the frequency of the 'tell-and-show' procedures should be reduced and more high quality teaching and learning procedures be employed.

Currently, at the primary level, teaching is driven by drilling children to pass the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) and, at the secondary level it is strongly influenced by preparing students to sit the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). Teaching styles tend to be teacher-centred rather than the more modern and engaging student-centred approach. However with the introduction of Universal Secondary Education the emphasis of the CEE has changed from a proficiency examination i.e. the main source of entry to secondary school to be 'used as the assessment mechanism upon which to determine a student choice for placement at the secondary level...every child of secondary school age will be guaranteed a place in a secondary school' (Dr. The Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime minister and Minister of Finance, 2005 Budget Address, December 2004).

The Ministry has implemented a teacher centred approach to training of teachers. In this approach, the teacher provides opportunities to motivate and stimulate the student, including the provision of meaningful independent learning, group work, enquiry and problem-solving activities. In contrast, the teacher-centred approach is characterised by whole-class instructional teaching using chalkboard and textbooks, early streaming by reading ability, homogenous groupings within the classes and little celebration of student achievement. The methods implemented in the classroom should be based on preparing students to master information and communication technology (ICT) through being able to access, comprehend and organize information as well as generate new information.

In what ways is the curriculum being designed and organized to respond to the diversity of learners?

The policy of the Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines is that no child should be left behind. This policy is in line with the Salamanca Statement of UNESCO in 1994 which was adopted by governments and Non Governmental Organisations. The statement states that:

'Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions'.

The government is constantly redesigning and reorganising the curriculum to make it more relevant and responsive to the needs of the student. The aim is to make it responsive to differentiation in gender, culture, and other pertinent issues and challenges. The Ministry is focusing its efforts on the integration of the various elements and subjects in the curriculum instead of addressing each subject as a separate entity. The strategy is to integrate the different learning styles in the delivery of subject matter and content. In the areas of core subjects such as Mathematics and English, the Ministry is exploring strategies for integrating and harnessing other learning skills such as the arts into the curriculum.

The Ministry should acquire specialist instructors to work with disabled students with in the classroom to enhance their learning opportunities. For example, visually impaired student would be provided with special instructors prior to sitting his examinations. It should also provide extra time during their examinations for students with Special Education Needs.

At the secondary and adult and continuing education levels, the government has introduced a new qualification called the Caribbean Certification of Secondary Level. This certificate entitles students to pursue core subjects along with one (1) subject in TVET. This would enable them to proceed to either the vocational or academic stream of training.

The project is currently in the process of completing work on policy guidelines which would emphasise vocational qualification and education. The new qualification/certification would consist of a weighting of 50% training and 50% on professional skills development e.g. through internship and apprenticeship.

The other challenge facing the project is the lack of involvement and participation of the private sector. Presently, the programme is driven by government. Moreover, for such a project to be successful, it would require at least 75% contribution from the private sector. The project is implementing traditional skills (carpentry, masonry, building construction etc.) as well as hospitality type training to fill the gaps in the tourism and construction industries.

How can teachers be trained and better equipped to meet the learners' diverse expectations and needs?

Providing quality education for all students in inclusive settings has been identified as perhaps the most challenging, yet most important, issue in education. Government is in the process of redesigning its teacher training strategy to prepare teachers to teach in settings that are inclusive, meeting the needs of all students. This will require a different model of teacher education than what is presently implemented by the Ministry of Education.

The government is cognisant that the concept of inclusive education places the emphasis on changing the system rather than the child. The educational system therefore needs to be more structured and practices need to shift and become more

flexible, more inclusive, and more collaborative in order to better accommodate students with learning difficulties.

The government of St Vincent and the Grenadines believes that:

- Inclusive schooling is often thought of as the inclusion of all students, regardless of ability, into the same schools and classrooms with peers who are not considered to have disabilities.
- Inclusive schooling, however, extends far beyond mere physical proximity to providing students and adults the support required to belong and achieve in classroom and school communities.
- Inclusion is both a process for and outcome of understanding, acceptance, and valuing of differences among today's school children and youth. It is potentially both a process and an outcome for achieving social justice and equity in our society.

It is on this basis that the Government has placed a considerable amount of time and resources to enhance the quality of training of teachers to meet the new challenges of implementing inclusive education. In both the formal and informal environment, emphasis is being put on ensuring that a cadre of specialised teachers are trained and available within the education system. This is to ensure that teachers with specific expertise are working effectively and contributing to the development and delivery of quality education.

The government has implemented a series of in-service training programmes to enhance the competencies of teachers to implement the inclusive education model. It is also implementing programmes to improve the curriculum of the St Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' College to enable teachers to deliver quality content to students and facilitate innovations in material production, methodologies and practice. This is being done to promote differentiated teaching.

At the informal level, the government is implementing a programme of life long learning in the context of vocational training. The initiative requires a huge amount of networking and collaboration among all stakeholders to enable the participants/learners to acquire the necessary qualifications and competencies. The project also provides resources for the training of technicians in Adult Education at the certificate, diploma and degrees level to build the institutional capacity of Adult and Continuing Education Division. It has already trained 25 facilitators in Adult literacy and 25 instructors are upgrading their skills on methodologies for working with Adults.

The in service training model that the ministry is implementing provides a framework for developing and implementing a teacher education program that prepares teachers to teach in inclusive educational settings. The outcomes of the model are:

Program Outcomes

- To be effective an inclusive teacher preparation program must instil in the teacher an understanding and appreciation of diversity.
- Teacher trainers also need to mirror inclusive practices and accommodate diversity in their classrooms.
- Most teachers have a narrow range of diversity with which they feel comfortable.
- Expanding that comfort level is essential if teachers are to be successful in teaching to the wide range of diverse abilities present in today's classrooms.

How can the formal and non-formal learning environments be more effectively organized in order to ensure the inclusion of all learners?

The government of St Vincent and the Grenadines seeks to improve access, relevance, quality and efficiency of education at all levels. The Education Sector Development Plan (RSDP, 2002-2007) sets out the scope and parameter for development within the education sector. The specific goals include: increasing access to early childhood education for ages 3-5; ii) raising primary education completion rates and improving the quality of learning, iii) achieving universal secondary education enrolment and vi) improving access to and quality of post-secondary education. These goals are being achieved with increase technical efficiency and ongoing technical support from donors. These donor funds enable government to improve the learning environment to make it more responsive to the needs of the learners.

The government is ensuring that schools, recreational facilities and other physical aspects of the environment is redesigned to accommodate students with SENs. Work is progressing on retrofitting class rooms and recreational facilities with ramps etc. to allow for easy access to these facilities. Efforts are being made to change the size and space in classrooms to effectively utilise and manage; and provided with the necessary equipment and resources to enhance the learning of students.

One of the major challenges facing in the government is the limited human and material resources available to successfully implement these changes in the education sector. The current practice of one teacher per class in primary school would not be able to successfully accommodate inclusive education. Resources would have to be mobilised to enable the ministry to provide teaching assistants and special needs assistants in the classroom. This would allow more time for the classroom teacher to work along with students who need special assistance in their learning situation. It would also enable the teacher to work with small groups of students using different and varying methodologies. Officials of the Ministry are working closely with teachers and communities to ensure maximum use of these scarce resources.

There is need for the Ministry to change the physical appearance of these classrooms to make them more student friendly rather from the present model where the teacher

is still the main focus of attention (dispenser of knowledge). Furthermore the government needs to work more rapidly to develop constructivism classrooms where the methodology used would be more student focused i.e. guiding the student into their education. Emphasis should be placed on meeting the needs of the student rather than completing the specific curriculum. The curriculum in this situation would be a dynamic living entity constantly adapting to the meeting the needs of the student rather than a static mechanism.

On the issues of computerisation and ICT, the government has embarked on a programme of computerization of schools and other public training spaces, specifically the Learning Resource Centres. Students at primary and secondary schools use ICT facilities to access knowledge and information to support their research, share information with friends and colleagues and develop friendship with students from other schools across the Caribbean and globally. It is recommended that the government continue to enhance ICT operations and develop mechanisms to enhance accessibility and use by all students irrespective of their circumstances.

At the informal level, government has implemented a series of Learning Resource Centres at community level to provide access for adult learners to continue their education. Most of these centres have internet facilities which provide access and opportunities for all learners to enhance their knowledge and competencies. The Adult and Continuing Education Division is currently working with DIGICEL, a mobile service provider, to develop strategies for enhancing the delivery of content to all learners registered with the division. It is recommended that the government should continue its expansion computerisation programmes in all schools and continuing education facilities. The programmes should be supported by a) a programme of training of teachers and students/learners on how to use the internet to access knowledge expansion, b) address social economics and cultural needs for community and self and c) creation of virtual learning networks. The ministry should also implement more efficient information management systems.

The formal and informal educational system is experiencing difficulties keeping young men in education institutions in St Vincent and the Grenadines. At the informal level, the programmes are experiencing difficulty attracting young men because of stigmas and stereotypes in the society/communities. The programme has implemented an innovative strategy to ensure both males and females accessed its services. The Adult and Continuing Education Division had implemented radio and television programmes to advertise/promote the programmes at community level as well as delivering learning content. It has implemented a series of popular theatre and cultural wakes in the villages to raise the awareness of young men and the wider community on the challenges associated with illiteracy. It has also organized consultations/meetings with sports clubs, 'Youth on the Block' and in other areas where young men usually congregate. It is quite early to determine whether these innovations were successful. The Division should be congratulated and encouraged to continue to implement such innovations. Efforts should also be made to work with NGOs, churches and civil society organisations to encourage disabled persons to attend the programmes.

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