

Concept Note

International Conference:

Reaching the marginalised – How to approach Inclusive Education

Düsseldorf, Germany, 10 – 11 September 2009

UNESCO IBE, the German Peter-Ustinov Foundation (PUS) and GTZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) are planning the International Conference “Reaching the marginalised – How to approach Inclusive Education” with key experts, representatives of bilateral and multilateral development partners as well as representatives from selected developing countries.

1. Background

What is the situation of marginalised children and youth?

Growing numbers of people across the world are being excluded from meaningful participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities. One major reason for this is that many children and youth lack access to high quality education, which would enable them to take an active part in societal processes.

According to UNESCO, 75 million children are still excluded from education. Seven out of ten live in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia. Sixty per cent of them are girls living in Arab States and sixty-six per cent live in South and West Asia. Of those who do enrol in primary school, large numbers drop out before completing their primary education. Fifty-six per cent of children who complete primary school in sub-Saharan Africa are not even able to read or write. While participation in post-primary education is on the rise, access remains limited for most children and youth.

The main reasons for marginalisation and exclusion are poverty, gender inequity, disability, HIV/AIDS, child labour, speaking a minority language, belonging to an indigenous group, and living a nomadic or rural lifestyle. If children and youth facing such barriers are deprived of equal access to quality learning opportunities, the attainment of the Education for All (EFA) agenda will be at risk, and the development and peace in their respective countries will be jeopardised.

What is meant by “inclusive education”?

UNESCO defines inclusive education as a process intended to respond to students’ diversity in order to increase their participation and reducing exclusion within and from education, involving changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

Inclusive education refers to the attendance, involvement and achievement of all students, especially those who, for different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalised. The right-based and holistic concept of inclusive education addresses the concerns of marginalised and excluded groups in all education activities from early childhood onwards. Understood as such, inclusiveness is highly relevant for formal and non-formal primary as well as all pre- and post-primary education settings, provisions and activities.

Why is inclusive education the right response?

The 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE), held on 25-28 November 2008 in Geneva, established a clear consensus that inclusive quality education is fundamental to achieving human, social and economic development. In particular, the ICE Conclusions and Recommendations state that the “[...] concept of inclusive education can be viewed as a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for all and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities“. They highlight the importance of inclusive education as “[...] a way to further accelerate the attainment of Education for All (EFA) goals as well as to contribute to building more inclusive societies.“

The ICE Conclusions and Recommendations also provide a solid international framework for implementing inclusive education, calling upon Member States “[...] to adopt an inclusive education approach in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of educational policies [...]“. More specifically, they refer to measures related to public policies, education systems, learners and teachers, as well as to the importance of international cooperation.

The conference outcomes built upon the previous UNESCO High-Level Group Meetings on EFA. In 2007 in Dakar, it was proposed that governments undertake a mapping exercise to accurately determine the characteristics and needs of marginalised groups to develop inclusive educational policies, thereby ensuring greater equity. Also, in 2008 in Oslo, emphasis was placed on the imperative to protect the world’s poorest children from the worst effects of the current financial crisis through increased financing for inclusive education policies.

What is the specific contribution of the international conference?

This conference aims to foster the prioritization of inclusive education as the means to attaining the EFA goals and to contributing to building more inclusive and peaceful societies. It will provide a forum to introduce and discuss visions, trends, strategies and practices in inclusive education as well as to build a consensus on the way forward with possible future activities. Findings and recommendations in terms of an action plan will be an input into the preparations for the upcoming High-Level Group Meeting on EFA in 2009.

After an overview on steps to be taken towards developing and implementing inclusive education at a political level, specific issues on educational provisions for selected marginalised groups will be presented. Those issues will be elaborated in different working sessions by mapping existing activities and necessary future action. Various overarching issues like gender, social security, health, early childhood care and education (ECCE), technical and vocational education and training (TVET) will be integrated in all presentations and working sessions. The conference will cover all levels of education from ECCE to primary to post-primary to TVET.

2. Objectives

- To disseminate and advocate the outcomes of the 48th session of the International Conference on Education, Geneva, as well as to report on and discuss the current status of approaches and activities of development partners in inclusive education in selected areas;
- To build on the results of the above conference, to develop a common action plan for future activities to move inclusive education towards achieving the EFA goals by 2015 as an input to the preparations for the next EFA High-Level Group Meeting in 2009.

3. Proposed outcomes

- Definitions of the main marginalised groups are clarified;
- Enhanced understanding of the educational needs of marginalised groups is strengthened;
- Development partners' current activities in inclusive education are shared;
- An action plan is developed for follow-up activities in terms of further accelerating the attainment of the EFA goals as well as contributing to building inclusive societies.