



Education Community



Solution Exchange for the Education Community Consolidated Reply

***Query: Inclusive Education and Child Friendly Schools, from
UNESCO, New Delhi (Advice)***

Compiled by [Amit Kaushik](#), Resource Person; additional research provided by
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31 October 2006

**Original Query: Huma Masood, UNESCO, New Delhi
Posted: 3 October 2006**

I have been working with UNESCO for some years now, and have been associated with several policy initiatives aimed at including all children in school, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. UNESCO defines inclusion as a developmental approach seeking to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. However, while postulating a "zero rejection" policy for such children, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Framework defines children with special needs as only those with disabilities. While ideally schools must accommodate, and indeed welcome, all types of diversity within the classroom, it would seem that the concept of inclusive education in India has tended to be limited to the inclusion of differently abled children.

Even within this limited definition, there are several issues when one looks at the practice of inclusion in the classroom. Despite the sterling efforts of programmes like SSA, overcrowded classrooms and teacher shortages remain problems with which many States have to contend. In such classrooms, the benefits of inclusion to children with moderate to severe disabilities are often unclear. The creation and maintenance of child-friendly classrooms, and sustaining improved quality of learning for all children, including those who are differently abled, are often rendered difficult in the face of these challenges.

The Ministry of HRD, UNESCO, UNICEF and Save the Children are jointly organising a Regional Workshop on "Inclusive Education and Child-Friendly Schools" in New Delhi from 21st-23rd November 2006, during which we expect to have discussions around this subject with a wide range of practitioners, academics and policy makers. I would be grateful if members could indicate their views on the following

1. Should inclusion always be the strategy of choice, regardless of the conditions in which it is to be practiced?

2. Does too much emphasis on inclusion result in reducing the focus (and sometimes investment) on creation of special school infrastructure targeted for the more severely disabled children?
3. How does one ensure that special children are afforded suitable learning opportunities after enrolment in mainstream schools without compromising their own development as individuals in their own right?

Any examples of successful inclusion interventions in child-friendly schools that members might care to share would be gratefully received.

Responses received with thanks from:

1. [Amit Kaushik](#), UNESCO, New Delhi
2. [Sudesh Mukhopadhyay](#), NIEPA, New Delhi
3. [Renu Singh](#), Action for Ability Development and Inclusion (AADI), New Delhi
4. [Rukmini Banerjee](#), Pratham, New Delhi
5. M. V. Ananthakrishnan, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
6. [Sunita Chugh](#), NIEPA, New Delhi
7. [Anjela Taneja](#), ActionAid, Madhya Pradesh
8. [G. Misra](#), Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Port Blair
9. [B. L. Kaul](#), Progressive Educational Society and Society for Popularization of Science, Jammu
10. [Saurav Banerjee](#), USAID, New Delhi
11. [Suhail Md Ali](#), Centre for Youth and Social Development-PRAYAS, Bhubaneswar
12. [Archana Mehendale](#), Independent Researcher, Bangalore
13. [Niraj Seth](#), ActionAid International, New Delhi
14. [Mithu Alur](#), National Resource centre For Inclusion, Mumbai
15. [Nilay Ranjan](#), OneWorld South Asia, New Delhi

Further contributions are welcome!

[Summary of Responses](#)

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Summary of Responses

The query raised the issue of inclusive education as a policy and a practice in the background of a forthcoming regional workshop on "Inclusive Education and Child-Friendly Schools". Responding to the query, members discussed the importance of inclusive education, practical issues related to implementing this policy and different strategies for achieving truly inclusive education.

Respondents agreed that under various educational programmes, including the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), "inclusion" has primarily been limited to children with physical disabilities. The focus has tended to be on providing aids and appliances to enable disabled children to attend school, with limited follow-up to determine actual

utility and utilisation of the devices. Moreover, members noted that the definition used in the [Persons with Disabilities \(Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights & Full Participation\) Act, 1995](#), has perpetuated the “medical model” of inclusion. Inclusive education needs to be understood, members contended, as a developmental approach, designed to ensure all children (including differently-abled children, ethnic and linguistic minorities, etc.) have access to the educational and social opportunities offered by schools.

Members argued that inclusion is the right of all and not the privilege of a special few. The draft UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities strongly advocates inclusion in the general education system extending up to the tertiary level, vocational training and lifelong learning without discrimination. India has approximately 1.6 million children with special needs, however only about 1.1 million attend school. Thus, members stressed that there is a clear and urgent need to examine the problem, to ensure that all children are appropriately included in mainstream education. This is possible, they emphasised with appropriate support from trained professionals, relevant curriculum, adequate aids and child-friendly environments. The participation and support of parents, teachers and communities are also critical, especially in view of the additional time and effort that they need to contribute. Simultaneous improvement of the quality and service of the existing government schools is required as well.

Respondents highlighted government initiatives designed to make education more inclusive. SSA’s “zero rejection policy,” supported by the provision of aids or assistive devices, has ensured that a large number of children with special needs have enrolled in schools over the five years. DPEP and SSA are carrying the philosophy of programmes like Project Inclusive Education for the Disabled (PIED) and Inclusive Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) forward, to encourage States to enrol and teach differently-abled children with non-disabled children in the same classroom/school.

In addition to government programs, respondents shared information on NGOs active in this field. [Enabling Dimensions](#) has initiated an online portal to provide specialised e-learning courses for visually impaired children. The [National Resource Centre on Inclusion](#) (NRCI) has been promoting inclusive education beginning with pre-primary classes where able and differently-abled students learn together in an environment that encourages and enhances every child’s overall development according to his/her own abilities. NRCI believes that a “continuum of support” is indispensable for successful inclusion.

Members acknowledged these inclusion programs are important; however, they were concerned that many States do not fully address the needs of severely impaired children, because they have not made use of the provision of Home Based Education (HBE) due to the relatively higher cost and effort involved. Even in places where HBE is imparted, poorly trained volunteers rarely offer more than three hours of teaching per child per week, which is clearly inadequate. Some respondents opined therefore, that alongside inclusion and Home Based Education (HBE), there was also a space for special schools, especially for those with very severe disabilities, and therefore investment in the former should not be at the cost of the latter.

The government and other organisations have initiated many excellent programmes for children with special needs; however, members emphasised that inclusive education is still at a nascent stage in the country. Serious challenges remain, especially in the areas of quality assurance and sustaining institutional structures. Members expressed the view that most teachers have not received adequate training, and that there is often a lack of regular or scientific assessment of children to determine their educational needs according to their level or magnitude of impairment/disability. In the absence of such scientific assessments, the rudimentary methods presently adopted by teachers may actually prove to be counterproductive. Respondents also

felt that the development of teaching-learning material (TLM) usually does not take into account the needs of special children.

Respondents offered several suggestions to improve the existing state of inclusive education, including the following:

- Noting that a two-day training module on inclusive education is included as a part of the 20-day in-service training organised under SSA for elementary school teachers, members felt that teachers needed further sensitisation to meet the requirements of special children.
- Enhancing the capacities of the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) to meet the training needs of teachers in this area.
- Using Information Communication Technology (ICT) in schools and teacher training, along with timely, appropriate and free aids (as provided under SSA and IEDC) to improve education quality and help include differently-abled children.
- Make schools more child-friendly by improving the space, lighting, teaching-learning process aids and providing for essential facilities like toilets and drinking water. However, members noted that sensitive and innovative teachers are equally crucial to making schools attractive and happy places.

In addition, all children need to be sensitised to get a sense and feel of the difficulties faced by children with special needs—as for instance, by blindfolding seeing children for a short while so that they have an appreciation of what it is like to be visually deprived. Members also advised collecting and making available disaggregated data on the number of trained teachers in each region and identifying key factors affecting the learning environment and process (i.e. facilities, teaching aids, etc.) in order to improve the planning process.

Members concluded that in a country where large dropout rates and teacher absenteeism persist, inclusive education could be a step in embracing all marginalised groups in the educational system. However, society and educational planners will have to address problems of attitudes and quality of learning in order to ensure that inclusive educational policies are effectively implemented.

Related Resources

Recommended Documentation

From Amit Kaushik, Resource Person

National Policy for Persons with Disabilities

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment; 2006

<http://socialjustice.nic.in/disabled/welcome.htm>

Paper sets out the national policy for providing opportunities for the development of persons with disabilities, including in the education sector.

Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights & Full Participation) Act, 1995

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment; 2006

<http://www.ccdisabilities.nic.in/Act%201.htm>

Act gives effect to the Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of the People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region.

Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities

Ministry of Human Resource Development; 2005

<http://education.nic.in/inclusive.asp>

Document outlines the national priorities in education of children and youth with disabilities.

Responding to Children with Special Needs- A Manual for Planning and Implementation of Inclusive Education in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

Ministry of Human Resource Development; 2003

http://ssa.nic.in/childspl/ssa_plan_manual.pdf (Size: 1.1 MB)

Manual, prepared for State SSA Societies, describes various measures for planning and implementing inclusive education programmes.

Discovering New Paths in Inclusion: A Documentation of Home Based Education Practices for Children with Special Needs in SSA

Ministry of Human Resource Development; 2006

Document describes various types of home-based educational programmes undertaken by States and NGOs for children who cannot be mainstreamed through inclusive education,

From Sagarika Gnanaolivu, Research Associate

Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) and Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED)

<http://www.ncpedp.org/eductn/ed-scheme02.htm>

IEDC and PIED are Government programmes for differently abled children, which were the forerunners of many initiatives supported by DPEP and SSA.

Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); 2005

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001402/140224e.pdf> (Size: 519 KB)

Guidelines provide a historical perspective on the origins of inclusion, theoretical framework, the human rights approach of inclusion.

Including Children and Youth with disabilities in Education: A Guide for Practitioners

By Anita Julka, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT); 2005

http://ncert.nic.in/sites/inclusiveeducation/Draft%20manual_DEGSN.pdf (Size: 1.2 MB)

Manual emphasizes appropriate practices and culturally responsive teaching-learning environment for differently abled children.

Historical and Theoretical Basis of Inclusive Education

By Joseph Kisanji, Workshop on "Inclusive Education in Namibia: The Challenge for Teacher Education"; 1999

http://www.eenet.org.uk/theory_practice/hist_theoretic.doc

Paper shows how the inclusive education movement was born and questions whether the inclusive education approach can ensure the right to an appropriate education.

Provision for Children with Special Educational Needs in the Asia Region

By James Lynch, The World Bank; 1994

Click [here](#) to view PDF (Size: 7.23 MB)

Paper describes some of the policies and operational practices implemented in a number of countries responding to primary school children with special educational needs.

Inclusive Education: Achieving Education for All by Including Those with Disabilities and Special Education Needs

By Susan J. Peters; The World Bank; April 2003

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DISABILITY/Resources/Education/Inclusive_Education_En.pdf

(Size: 432 KB)

Paper examines research on inclusive educational policies and practices at the micro, meso and macro levels across the world.

Recommended Organizations

Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), New Delhi (from Amit Kaushik, UNESCO, New Delhi)

B-22, Qutab Institutional Area, 110016 New Delhi; <http://rehabcouncil.nic.in>

RCI is a statutory body set up to regulate and standardise training policies for professionals and personnel working on rehabilitation and special education.

**Offline Contribution*

National Resource Centre for Inclusion (NRCI), Mumbai (from [Mithu Alur](#))

<http://www.nrcissi.org>

NRCI conducts research and projects on inclusive education and is working towards a macro level change in policy for inclusion.

Enabling Dimensions, Gurgaon (from Nilay Ranjan, OneWorld South Asia, New Delhi)*

Tel: 91-124-404-6726; info@enablingdimensions.com; <http://www.enablingdimensions.com/>

Organisation developing commercial and not-for-profit digital solutions to empower people with disabilities achieve their educational and career goals.

Seva In Action, Bangalore (from [Archana Mehendale](#), Independent Researcher, Bangalore)

NGO working for children with special needs in various ways, including multi-category teacher training.

From Sagarika Gnanaolivu, Research Associate

National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi

<http://ncert.nic.in/welcome.htm>

NCERT's Department of Education of Groups with Special Needs deals with the development of modules and material for training teachers at different levels.

**Offline Contribution*

Recommended Websites

Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development (from Amit Kaushik, Resource Person)

<http://ssa.nic.in/ssasplneeds.asp>

Website provides information on planning and implementation of various measures for children with special needs initiated under SSA.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (from

Sagarika Gnanaolivu, Research Associate)

Click [here](#) to view site

Website details the concept of Inclusive Education, UNESCO's action areas, Education For All flagships and other educational material.

Responses in Full

Amit Kaushik, UNESCO, New Delhi

It saddens me to observe that an important issue like inclusion in schools has not drawn many responses from the community. But perhaps this is symbolic of the general Indian indifference towards those less fortunate than themselves, and of the particular lack of consideration that we seem to show those with disabilities. The recent insensitivity displayed by CISF staff at an airport in refusing to let an autistic child, Ahed, board an aircraft is a case in point. People who are differently abled are often singled out and mistreated, often because those without disabilities are unsure of how to deal with them. And this is an attitude displayed by many Indians, including those who are ostensibly "educated". Words like "*lula*", "*langda*", "*kaana*", and so many others, are used freely and liberally by many, without any thought to the impact they have on those who have to live with such disabilities. On the other side of the spectrum are those who, in trying to display their "compassion", end up articulating awkward expressions of pity. Quite clearly, neither of these should be an acceptable manner of interaction with those who are differently abled.

In this background, I wonder sometimes how relevant policies of inclusion in school in India really are. To start with, Huma has rightly pointed out that in the Indian context, inclusion has largely remained confined to a focus on children with disabilities, rather than a wider, more comprehensive ideal. When we refer to inclusion in this context then, we are limiting ourselves to enrolling children with disabilities only, rather than considering other groups of children with special needs such as street children, tribals, working children and the like. Each policy pronouncement in recent years, including the Minister for Human Resource Development's Statement in the Rajya Sabha on 21.3.05, while being positive about children and youth with disabilities, has remained restricted to this area only.

Programmes like Project Inclusive Education for the Disabled (PIED) and Inclusive Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) were started with the intention of making government schools responsive to the requirements of children with disabilities. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) have followed the same philosophy, encouraging States to ensure that such children are enrolled and taught with non-disabled children in the same classroom/school. Indeed, SSA follows what is described as a "zero-rejection" policy, implying that all children should be included in school, regardless of whether they are non-disabled or not. To some extent, this approach appears to have borne fruit, with more than 1.5 million children with special needs enrolled all over India in the last 4-5 years. However, these children tend to be either those with locomotor disabilities, or those with hearing or visual problems, since these are relatively easy to identify. In many cases, the provision of spectacles, hearing aids or other assistive devices can address the problem faced by the child, enabling her to attend and participate in school activities like any other. To this extent therefore, the provision of aids and appliances under SSA has been extremely successful.

However, more severe disabilities are not so easily addressed. And although the programme does refer to home-based tuition for such children, not very many States have actually made use of this provision given the relatively higher level of effort and expenditure involved. Enrolling such children in mainstream schools without adequate preparation of the school system, teachers, administrators, and others becomes a gratuitously cruel exercise in insensitivity towards children with special needs. For instance, although the overall pupil teacher ratio in government schools in India is around 40:1, this varies significantly from State to State, in some schools even

going up to 100:1 or more. In many instances, the same teacher handles more than one grade within the same classroom. In addition, she has to deal with many miscellaneous duties such as overseeing the mid-day meal, gathering data, etc. With so many competing demands on her time, it is extremely unlikely that she would be able to deal sensitively with any children with special needs who may have been enrolled in her classroom.

Teacher training and sensitisation are of course essential prerequisites for successful inclusion in any context, and there have been several training programmes aimed at sensitising teachers towards the needs of differently abled children. Under SSA, all elementary school teachers are required to undergo 20 in-service training each year, and States have been requested to include at least 2 days sensitisation training for inclusive education. However a great deal more needs to be done before teachers can be truly said to be sensitive and responsive to such children in their classrooms.

The physical school environment itself needs substantial modification in order to make it friendly for children with special needs. This includes the creation of a barrier-free environment, provision of signages, etc. However, efforts in this direction so far have tended to be limited to the provision of ramps, and while these are usually included at the time of construction of new schools now, the backlog of providing them in existing schools is substantial. Separate toilets that are suitable for persons with disability are rare, and appropriate signages and aids for the visually disabled are virtually non-existent. Thus unless there are considerable investments and a concerted plan for action in this direction, schools will continue to discourage children with special needs from attending.

It is factors like these which account for the high drop out rate of differently abled children from school, even after initial enrolment under the auspices of programmes like IEDC or SSA. Physical barriers to participation in school, inadequate support facilities and a lack of trained teachers combine to ensure that children with special needs often remain deprived of opportunities of mainstream education. There are of course, several encouraging examples of these issues having been successfully addressed, but these are largely in the domain of the private sector. Considering that nearly 90% of children in the age group of 6-14 years are enrolled in government or government-aided schools, it is here that our efforts need to increase.

In this context, Huma raises another interesting issue, viz., whether our emphasis on inclusion (in this limited manner) has led to a reduction of emphasis on creation of special infrastructure for more severely disabled children. This is certainly a subject that would repay further examination and research, but since SSA does not support the establishment of special schools for differently abled children, it would seem to be a more than likely hypothesis. Thus, while we are unable to enrol and retain these children in mainstream schools, we are also unable to provide for them elsewhere—ensuring therefore, that they lose out in both places.

Our Constitutional commitment of providing free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years as a fundamental right, as well as our international commitments to ensure Education For All, can become reality only if we can ensure that all children, regardless of their background, sex, ability, etc., have equal opportunities to receive the education that is their right. Any measure that fails to include everyone is a denial of this right.

Sudesh Mukhopadhyay, NIEPA, New Delhi

For the first time, a Working Group has been set up that cuts across all disadvantages that can impact the education of an individual, right from early to adult years, and covering all levels of

education—preschool, school, higher education, technical education; so inclusion as an approach, a philosophy, and a way of doing things is taking root.

However, some groups would still merit specific attention to overcome gaps created over centuries and long years. The need is to keep the child/ person in the centre—that is what education, welfare and all activities and programmes are about; but it is the system that must be geared up to respond! The airport incident (involving Ahd) and many more unreported incidents hit this nerve. Training, exposure, media etc., all can have an impact in increasing the sensitivity of the system and society. But we must gear up on implementation and monitoring of our programmes and activities.

The Nation Action Plan on Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities is an important example to indicate how much is already in our hands to be responsive; the need is to accept the role that we will be inclusive, and will facilitate making available opportunities to all.

Renu Singh, Action for Ability Development and Inclusion (AADI), New Delhi

It is true that "inclusive education" in India is seen as only pertaining to students with disabilities. Even this is further straitjacketed into the disability categories as given by the PWD Act 1995, which follows the criterion of 40% and above disability. This by itself is perpetuation of the medical model of disability, wherein the disability is seen as "centered within the child", thus provisions are made for aids and appliances to be distributed. As Mr. Kaushik points out a fair amount of money is spent in distribution of aids and appliances in various States- but no research exists to check whether these have actually impacted the quality of lives of children concerned. Often wheelchairs don't work in rugged terrain; hearing aids are given without auditory training etc.

Dr. Masood has asked what "inclusive education" means in a country where large drop-out population and teacher absenteeism plagues the country. I do believe the first step is to see "inclusive education" as a process for increasing participation of ALL marginalized groups of children, including children with disabilities, since they are the silent voices amongst the out-of-school population. This of course demands nothing short of a paradigm shift in the present day education system, which must limit the classroom population to not more than 40 students and ensure that this class has a teacher who is trained with teaching techniques to address diversity in the classroom.

A tall order indeed for the country entering the XI Plan! However, I do believe that the right decisions taken at this very opportune time in our history will ensure that there remain no more children on the fringes still waiting to be let into the domain of education and a brighter tomorrow.

Rukmini Banerjee, Pratham, New Delhi

Inclusive education is a very important area and I am sure all members of the education community believe this to be case. But silence may be due to many reasons. For example in our case, we are aware of the broad range of issues but have not done anything on any scale or any depth or effectiveness to make the lives of children with special needs better.

We do not have experience in working with children who have specific special needs but have been working in basic remedial education in many locations across the country both in school and in the community. I am always struck by how a child who has not made adequate academic progress is blamed for the lack of his or her own progress. When working with such children in

our programs we find that many make progress quickly and solidly but there remain a small fraction that are unable to move ahead. Often these children remain "invisible", their needs further hidden by the fact that their attendance in school or in the education program is low. Such children need to be understood better. They need to be provided the help that they need, and in the form that is best suitable for their growth and development.

Over the years, especially when we were running a large number of "bridge courses" in urban slums we would find children with physical disabilities in our classes - mainly because the classes were close to the house. When other children were "mainstreamed", these children could not because of difficulties of distance or inability of family members to take the extra time, cost and so on. A volunteer visiting such children at home and trying to teach them was not effective as children enjoyed being with other children and in a "class-like" group environment!

We would welcome suggestions, thoughts.

M. V. Ananthkrishnan, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (*response 1*)

Inclusive Education needs to be looked at from a totally new perspective. Not merely in terms of finding ways and means to include "special" children with non-disabled children by providing aids to supposedly help integration. We need to look afresh as to how "special" children can be integrated as they are.

To understand and get a sense of the difficulties faced by special children, non-disabled children should be afforded opportunities to experience similar situations. For instance, non-disabled children in school could be blindfolded to give them an idea of visual deprivation. If combined with a description of places, people and events by special children based on their sense of touch, smell and hearing, it becomes a powerful lesson in the manner in which the differently abled function.

We have, unfortunately, been trying strategies aimed at making special children achieve the prowess of non-disabled children. But the focus has to change to capitalizing on the strengths of special children and using them to teach/interact with non-disabled children.

Sunita Chugh, NIEPA, New Delhi

In the field of education, inclusion involves a process of reform and restructuring of the school as a whole, with the aim of ensuring that all children can have access to the whole range of educational and social opportunities offered by the school. The aim is to avoid segregation and isolation. Inclusion is a right and not a privilege for selected few. Such a policy is designed to benefit all pupils including those from ethnic or linguistic minorities, those with disabilities or learning difficulties and children who are frequently absent or those at risk of exclusion. In a nutshell inclusive education implies an education system that includes a large diversity of pupils.

The term "Inclusion" can be defined as:

- I Integration
- N Networking
- C Collaboration and Child-Centered
- L Living, learning, loving
- U Utilizing all available resources
- S Support and Social services
- I Implementation of appropriate programmes

- O Organization of appropriate services
- N Non- stop services to all children with special needs

Inclusion does not imply the mere physical presence of pupils with special educational needs. They should be able to access the mainstream curriculum successfully, which may need supporting, individualizing or differentiation in some way. To make exclusion possible besides community the teachers dealing with the divergent groups need special training and orientation.

Anjela Taneja, ActionAid, Madhya Pradesh

Huma has raised three specific questions, to which my responses are as follows:

- 1. Should inclusion always be the strategy of choice, regardless of the conditions in which it is to be practiced?**
- 2. How does one ensure that special children are afforded suitable learning opportunities after enrolment in mainstream schools without compromising their own development as individuals in their own right?**

Both questions are actually related in my mind and there isn't a short answer to them. It is a fact that the very basic ground reality needed for successful (or even unsuccessful!) inclusive education is absent in 99% of cases. Undoubtedly, on paper there are provisions under SSA for disabled learners. It is also an undeniable fact that in a State like MP (to which I belong), most of the EGS (roughly 40% of the schools of the State) teachers have received little or no inputs on integration. It is a fact that the existing system seems to be failing this large group of children.

The question, however, is whether we are ready to accept the fact that integrated education is a generally good thing, and therefore, something to fight for, or resign ourselves to the view that integrated education in government schools is a pipe dream. I strongly feel that the advantages of integrated education are well documented and we SHOULD strive to achieve them. Establishing special schools on the scale needed for this country is unaffordable (quite apart from the social benefits that integration brings).

Now the question is how to achieve it? In my view, the best results are likely to be obtained if the questions of inadequate facilities are addressed jointly with all learners through the prism of education for all. When addressing the question of high pupil teacher ratios or overcrowded classrooms, the plight of disabled learners should be highlighted. When discussing the lack of individual attention of teachers, one should bring out the needs of children with borderline disability. Problems that impact children with special needs are also problems for the so-called non-disabled learners. As pointed out in the original post, all kinds of diversity need to be highlighted, and disability is just one of the aspects of perceived normal.

- 3. Does too much emphasis on inclusion result in reducing the focus (and sometimes investment) on creation of special school infrastructure targeted for the more severely disabled children?**

In my opinion, this argument doesn't really hold water. If the government has a commitment for the education of ALL then that means provision of appropriate facilities for ALL pupils. Admitted, again, that provisions for special schools DO decline when one emphasises integration. But that is because education for disabled learners isn't usually anywhere on top of any political agenda and is often a neglected aspect of the debate on universalisation of education. Unfortunately, the presence of special schools has served as an excuse for many to ignore their responsibility for ensuring the needs of 3-5% of the student body, on the basis of the view that disabled learners

should study in special schools, and therefore there is no need for even basic investment in providing materials or teacher training for inclusion.

To summarise:

Q1. Join the struggle to change the conditions in schools; the current reality is not a given.

Q2. Fight for adequate budget for the education of ALL.

Q3. Sensitization of social movements working on EFA and addressing it within a more inclusive definition of inclusion (but remembering the focus on disabled learners) would gather more proponents for the idea and therefore greater possibility of action.

G. Misra, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Port Blair

The Alternative & Innovative Education (AIE) model under the ambit of SSA could also be used to provide education to differentially-abled children. Since States prepare annual plans outlining the activities for each year under SSA, they could exercise this option to establish AIE centers to cater to the needs of differentially-abled children and bring them back to school.

B. L. Kaul, Progressive Educational Society and Society for Popularization of Science, Jammu

By its very definition, inclusive education is for reducing barriers of learning and participation of all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorised as having 'special needs'. So it has to be practised regardless of conditions and has to be implemented without preconditions.

I do not think that an emphasis on disability should necessarily reduce the focus of inclusion. It depends on the implementing agencies to remain or not to remain in focus and keep in view needs of all types (severely as well as less severely disabled children). Inclusive education should lead to disabled and non-disabled children and young people learning together in regular preschools, schools, colleges and universities, with appropriate networks of support. Inclusion means enabling pupils to participate in life and the work of mainstream institutions to the best of their abilities, whatever their needs.

For inclusion education to be effective, special and ordinary schools have to adapt their approach to:

1. The curriculum
2. Teaching support
3. Funding mechanisms
4. The physical environment

Whatever their disability or learning difficulty children have a part to play in society after school. An early start in mainstream playgroups or nursery schools, followed by education in ordinary schools and colleges, is the best preparation for an integrated life. Education is part of, not separate from, the rest of children's lives. I believe that disabled children can be educated in mainstream schools with appropriate support.

Sourav Banerjee, USAID, New Delhi

Just as there are various ways to interpret "inclusive education", the 'child-friendliness' of a school can also be seen in various ways. Although conceptually a child-friendly school would be one that is able to attract and retain a child, the ways and means through which this is done can be many. What makes a child like her school? Is it the physical infrastructure, the basic amenities and facilities provided, the teachers or the teaching learning process? Probably a bit of them all. A child-friendly school should provide a learning environment that is essentially motivating and inclusive and caters to the development and learning needs of all children.

The physical environment of the school, including the school building, also plays a significant role in making a school "child-friendly" and "inclusive". A school can be 'designed' to be child-friendly. This can be done by providing adequate space (sufficient number of classrooms, space for group activities, corridor and external learning spaces), essential facilities (toilets, drinking water facilities, playground, boundary wall, kitchen, play elements like see-saw or a swing etc), small elements that can support effective teaching learning processes (provision of chalkboards, cupboards, display spaces), and features that help different-abled children (walkway, ramp, grab-rails, proper acoustics, colour and texture, eye-charts, etc.). Even small elements like a mirror or a scale in the wall, a sun-dial, a shoe rack (or an umbrella rack in high rainfall areas) or a sand pit can enrich a child's learning experience.

While it is desirable and cost-effective to have such elements/facilities incorporated when a school building is constructed, these can also be added on subsequently over a period of time, subject to the availability of resources. A number of such low cost elements have been demonstrated in school buildings constructed under DPEP and SSA. The NGO *Vinyas* has been involved in some very interesting experiments of using the school building as a learning aid in the government schools of Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat and Jammu-Kashmir.

However, mere provisioning of such infrastructure does not necessarily make a school interesting. While some features like clean toilets, working hand pumps, a green playground, boundary walls, ramps and play elements (seesaw, swing, sand-pit) can go a long way in making a school "child-friendly", a sensitive and innovative teacher is required to take full advantage of the various elements of a building and use them as teaching aids.

It would be helpful if the forthcoming UNESCO workshop allows for discussion on the following:

1. Various factors that contribute to making of a child-friendly school.
2. Various physical modifications that are required in a school building to make them accessible to, and usable by, differently abled children.

Suhail Md Ali, Center for Youth and Social Development- PRAYAS, Bhubaneswar

It is a pleasure to learn that UNESCO is taking the initiative to address a very important issue that impacts upon our ability to ensure quality primary education. However, while I don't think that there is any need for separate schools for differently abled children, the implementation of SSA, especially in the tribal dominated districts of Orissa, still has certain weaknesses which need to be addressed, before we can think of inclusive education in the true sense. Merely increasing enrolment in schools is not enough unless these gaps are addressed.

Archana Mehendale, Independent Researcher, Bangalore

Karnataka is one of the states that has been at the forefront on Inclusive Education. Following observations are from two studies that I was engaged in, one of which was conducted with Seva in Action, Bangalore.

We find there is very little clarity and consensus about the meaning of “inclusive education” among the stakeholders. Ideas about what exactly constitutes “special needs” are radically different (at times even conflicting) among those responsible for providing for them.

Firstly, there is a need to know the exact magnitude of children with various impairments. This requires a uniformity in definition, expansion of categories to include cases such as multiple impairments, and evolution of innovative methods for enumeration which will ensure that children with impairments are recognised as individuals in their own right and enumerated with full respect. This process needs to overcome difficulties of particularly documenting the magnitude of learning disabilities, autism, and other categories such as mental illness among children, which is covered by the Persons with Disabilities Act.

Children with learning disabilities are not tested scientifically. The implications of this flawed exercise is not only having unreliable statistical data, but also labelling the child. Even during our observation visits, it was obvious that regular teachers and even ‘trained’ resource teachers resorted to unscientific and informal ways to identify particular impairments within children. We saw a teacher identifying a child as a “mentally retarded” child while the resource teacher identified him as a visually impaired child. These rudimentary methods adopted based on half or no information can actually prove to be counter-productive in a classroom situation and go against the very principles of inclusion.

There is a lack of regular and systematic medical assessments of children that can help to determine the specific educational needs of the children with impairments and guide the design of appropriate solutions. Assessment also suffers because of

1. lack of trained and committed professionals who can visit remote rural areas and participate in medical assessment camps for very low honoraria
2. and because functional assessment of children is very often considered adequate for educational planning purposes. However, in reality, these assessments are not carried out periodically and educational plans are not necessarily revised accordingly.

The availability of aids and appliances is crucial if children are to benefit completely and effectively from the learning experience of the school. However, distribution of appliances continues to be dependent on the private contributions. The government needs to ensure regular and continuous assessment of children as well as timely provision of aids and appliances, preferably free of cost to the children, which is guaranteed under the Persons with Disabilities Act.

The resource rooms at the cluster level (under the IEDC Scheme) are not being effectively used by resource teachers, very often because the monetary limit of Rs. 30,000 becomes the deciding factor while equipping the resource room, than the actual needs of the children. Some material (such as the Speech Trainer) is available only in cities, requires electricity and also regular maintenance.

Home Based Education (HBE) of the severely impaired relies on volunteers who are not always trained. In most cases while selecting the volunteers, preference is given to local female youth who may have studied up to Class 12. But we found that there have been difficulties in getting trained and eligible volunteers to run the HBE at the village level. While the volunteers are expected to provide three hours of “teaching” per child per week with three children under her charge (for which they are compensated with an honorarium of Rs. 1000 per month), it is not clear what the children themselves do for the rest of the week. In addition, the criteria for assigning children for HBE are not clear and hence there is a danger of HBE being used to

encourage separation and further alienation, not to mention dilution of standards on teacher qualifications for a group, which requires the most specialised skills.

There is very little teaching learning material developed specially keeping in mind the overall needs and capacities of children with special needs. For children with special needs, pedagogy almost entirely depends on the material that is used and yet there is a general reluctance among teachers to use such innovative methods even in their regular classroom transactions. Very few teachers actually adapt curriculum or prepare individualized teaching plans. As a result, inclusion without resource support over the years has kept several children with impairments far below the literacy level irrespective of the number of years of schooling

Although the teacher-pupil ratio for special resource teachers under the IEDC scheme is 1:8, in practice, we find that this can even go up to 1:197. The resource teachers are expected to offer specialised teaching at a very nominal salary. They rarely receive refresher course/inputs that can help them deal with the practical problems encountered in the actual classroom transactions. In single teacher schools, it is difficult to attend to the needs of special children and the resource teachers are often pulled into teaching regular classes.

There are chances of developing a segregated approach within inclusion since there is a tendency to push the concerns of children with special needs on to the shoulders of the resource teachers or the specially created cadre of Inclusive Education Resource Teachers under SSA in Karnataka

The Multi Category Teachers Training (MCTT) programme such as the one offered by Seva in Action (Bangalore) until recently equipped teachers to identify children with special needs, to adjust/adapt curriculum and instructional material to make them responsive to their needs; to provide a unique curriculum for meeting the needs of special children and to guide the general teachers in the use of aids. However, these courses have come to a closure since they are not approved by the Rehabilitation Council of India. On the other hand, the State laudably is keen on strengthening the capacities of the DIETs to become resource centres for Inclusive Education. In preparation of this, the DIET faculty are being encouraged to undergo long-term training in Inclusive Education.

A long term strategy of training all teachers in the state on Inclusive Education must be thought about. Such a strategy must essentially do four things: first, begin by collecting teacher wise disaggregated data that maps the exact teachers who have been trained, their level of training and their present location. Ideally this needs to be read along with census surveys of children with special needs conducted by SSA. Second, it must build the capacities of the DIETs to offer training courses to all these teachers depending on their training needs and past training acquired. Third, if inclusive education is going to be the preferred approach from now on, all pre-service educational training institutes must be asked to include it as a mandatory course in the syllabus and the capacities of the faculty of these institutes must be strengthened. Fourth, a mechanism should be built at the DIET level that can look into the on-going training needs such as that for refresher courses.

M. V. Ananthkrishnan, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (*response 2*)

This has reference to Mr. Suhail Md Ali's response to Huma Masood.

SSA has come in for a lot of flak in recent days, primarily because of the alleged misuse of funds and lack of control on its implementation. But we seem to be dreaming of seeing things happen overnight, as if Eureka! suddenly all children will be of one standard. This is unrealistic, but while

we cannot bring about uniformity instantly, we can definitely work towards universality. Clearly, this applies to the principle of inclusion also.

Most of our schemes are implemented, by design, through NGOs. But we sometimes overlook the fact that NGOs have their own mandates and objectives, which may very often be at odds with the objectives of SSA and other centrally-sponsored schemes.

So what is needed is the embedding of the sponsor's objectives in the very fabric of the implementation plan of NGOs. This would ensure that due justice is done to focus areas. Further, the setting up of a social audit body at the national level would help in (a) transferring good practices across projects, (b) avoiding repetition and redundancy and (c) ensuring that progress is being made towards project goals.

This of course, is valid for all projects, and not only SSA.

Niraj Seth, ActionAid International, New Delhi

There cannot be any doubt that inclusive education does not pertain only to persons with disabilities. It is as relevant to socially excluded groups as to the differently abled. In fact, all children have different needs. Having worked as a counsellor, I can say that children with emotional problems too have special needs. However, it does appear that SSA in its present form is addressing the concerns of only those with disabilities.

Most of you must be aware of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the draft of which has been prepared. This Convention provides a very progressive framework and recognizes education as one of the rights of Persons with Disabilities. This Convention, when/if ratified by India would play a significant role in the discourse of inclusive education. Its Article 24 states that 'All State Parties shall ensure an inclusive, education system **at all levels and life long learning**...'. It recognises the need to go beyond education and look at personality development, talents and creativity.

The draft Convention also states that State parties will not exclude persons with disabilities from general education on the basis of disability. They will need to make reasonable accommodation to meet individual requirement. In our context, this accommodation should not end with construction of ramps in schools. Appropriate measures need to be taken to facilitate learning of Braille, alternative scripts, augmentative and alternative modes and even attitudinal changes.

In brief, the Convention strongly advocates inclusion in the general education system that extends up to tertiary level, vocational training and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. The Convention indeed is inspirational and very welcome.

In the present state of education especially in government schools, this may seem Utopian. It has been our experience that despite serious attempts by NGOs to provide aids and appliances to students with disability, once they obtain access to schools, they are faced with several other problems. Some are attitudinal, while others relate to the quality of education being provided. The latter set of problems is faced by other students too. To my mind, there are two separate issues therefore—related but separate—first, access in the real sense that leads to inclusive education, and, second, the quality of education itself.

While inclusive education should be the goal, simultaneous efforts need to be made to strengthen government schools. It is a question of will, as may be seen from the wonderful

attempts being made by some States to make inclusive education possible. A visit to a few BRCs in Tamil Nadu showed how effectively they were supporting children and their families to study in mainstream schools. There are good examples in some other States also, but regrettably not in all.

I personally subscribe to the view that there should be space for having special schools also, especially for those with severe disabilities. There are many who disagree with this and I respect their views. I would like to believe that there will be a time when general schools would address the needs of all children, because all children have the right to equal opportunities for developing their individual potential. Till such time there would always be scope for special schools.

Mithu Alur, National Resource Center for Inclusion, Mumbai

With regard to schools, inclusion has now been mandated by government policy and should not be a matter of choice. However, it is important to point out that there needs to be a *reculturation of schools* where the ethos needs to change, and the policies need to be inclusive.

Positive attitudes need to filter down from the school heads to the staff and students, modifying set practices and adopting a more collaborative approach. Preparation of teachers, parents, students, and even the community, has to be carried out simultaneously. Teacher preparation is the key to sustaining inclusion in mainstream schools.

Our experience has been that most of the schools that now admit students with disability did not begin with conducive conditions nor were they overtly prepared to bring about these changes.

However, based on a continuum of support provided, orienting them to the needs of inclusion and providing them with inputs and support as required, we've seen a change not just in terms of provision of conditions, but also in the attitudes and willingness to work towards inclusion.

Inclusion is about opening one's mind and accepting that learning with one's peers is one's right and consequently creating space for different abilities. "The move to realizing the benefits of multiple intelligences does not require manifold changes in your teaching. It does require widening your view of what intelligence is, and then directing instruction to needs and abilities." (Dr. Gary Bunch, *Inclusion: How To*)

1. Does too much emphasis on inclusion result in reducing the focus (and sometimes investment) on creation of special school infrastructure targeted for the more severely disabled children?

Education, whether special or inclusive, requires adequate resources. Inclusion in India is at the nascent stage and its development warrants the emphasis. A successful inclusive society meets all the varying needs of its members, which includes children and adults with severely disabling conditions. Thus inclusive schools and special schools are required to work in tandem, playing their respective roles on parallel planes.

The holistic development of the child is what every school must address and cater to. The purpose of all schools should be to nurture every child's development to reach and optimize his/her particular spectrum of skills and individual potential. Until a point in time when this becomes a practical reality, both special schools for students with severe disabilities and inclusive schools need to be operational.

A successful model of Inclusion has been the National Resource Centre for Inclusion (NRCI), where we have experienced the holistic reach of such action. Our pre-primary sector is inclusive, where able and disabled students learn together in an environment that encourages and enhances every child's overall development according to his/ her own abilities. We also provide

resource support to students included in mainstream schools to facilitate and sustain inclusion. Simultaneously we continue to provide pre-vocational and vocational training to students with severe multiple disabilities who are presently unable to access standard regular curriculum and require individualized programs. Community support in inclusion has also begun.

2. How does one ensure that special children are afforded suitable learning opportunities after enrolment in mainstream schools without compromising their own development as individuals in their own right?

In order that special children are afforded suitable learning opportunities after enrolment in mainstream schools without compromising their own development as individuals, a continuum of support is absolutely necessary. Currently, the expertise required to meet the needs of different children is what mainstream schools seek from the resource team at NRCI. The goal of such support is to equip these schools to think "out of the box" and look towards their internal strengths and build upon them to meet every problem with satisfying solutions that develop from within these strengths.

It is this holistic approach that will sustain inclusion. We have proposed to the Planning Commission that inclusive education be addressed at three levels: child, school and district as all these require different inputs. A Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) will be required to coordinate the various requirements and ensure that the continuum of support is maintained for as long as it is required. The government, I am happy to share, is considering this model.

Once again, it is training that will be the key element that will reduce the dependence on external support through the building of capacity of the ordinary mainstream schools. Our resource material, *'Culturally Appropriate Policy and Practice' (CAPP)* focuses on the 'How' of inclusion at three levels: Policy, Community and School. CAPP III, the whole school approach to inclusive education, addresses issues in mainstream schools and gives suggestions under different sections such as 'School Heads as Educational Leaders', 'Teacher supporting teachers', 'Student supporting students' and 'Families supporting families'. These provide strategies for introducing and sustaining inclusion in mainstream schools. It is critical that a component on inclusive education is included in teacher education programmes, enabling teachers in the regular system to address diversity in the class room.

Nilay Ranjan, OneWorld South Asia, New Delhi

It has been observed that differently abled children and special education needs constitute a significant group in the monitoring of EFA and SSA targets. A number of enabling provisions have been created by way of legislation, through the role of premier institutions as well as capacity building of the government and the NGO sector to provide inputs by the way of manpower, learning materials programmes, especially at the level of pre-school and elementary level. However, there are still serious challenges which would require increased efforts and decisions for ensuring expansion of educational facilities in all parts or pockets of the country. The focus has to be on the qualitative levels to be attained by the differently abled through schooling and on sustaining the institutional and organizational structures for their educational development.

According to the current estimates, India has around 1.6 million children with special needs. Out of this, about 1.08 million children attend schools. There is a clear and urgent need to question this gap if one has to ensure the fundamental right of education for each child. Unfortunately, most Indian schools lack infrastructure and facilities for differently abled children. In such a scenario, ICT's can play an important role in engaging differently abled children in the education

network. A commendable effort in this direction has been undertaken by Enabling Dimensions, a NGO that has initiated an online portal to provide specialized e-learning courses for visually impaired children. While the government can today claim a significant role in the education of the differently abled children, it is important to acknowledge that NGOs initiated action in the field much before government support became available. A visible partnership between the two is increasing and NGO's are spreading in rural and urban areas. However, there are still gaps in terms of coverage, location, and even mutual trust. A well thought of plan rather than ad-hoc partnership may be the answer.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this query!

If you have further information to share on this topic, please send it to Solution Exchange for the Education Community in India at se-ed@solutionexchange-un.net.in with the subject reading 'RE: [se-ed] QUERY: Inclusive Education and Child Friendly Schools, from UNESCO, New Delhi (Advice): Additional Reply.'

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