ST. LUCIA

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St. Lucia Country Report  
(ICE Presentation 1st Draft for your perusal)  
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St Lucia is a small island state in the Eastern Caribbean. It is 256 square miles, with a population of (160,000) one hundred and sixty thousand people. The 2005 – 2006 statistical data from the Ministry of Education and culture of St. Lucia shows a total school population of 39,804. Of these, 253 students attend Special schools, 23,969 Primary and Senior Primary schools, 12,965 at public secondary schools, and 2617 students attending the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College.

Special schools are strategically located in the north, south, and western parts of the island. These schools cater for the students who are developmentally challenged, hearing impaired, and have mixed disabilities. Although there is no school for the blind, children who are blind or have low vision are mainstreamed at all levels, with support from the St Lucia Blind Welfare Association. Currently there are thirty-nine students that are being supported through out the mainstream education system.

One student, Jessica Jacobie, is the first blind student from St Lucia to graduate with a degree from UWI St Augustine Campus. Her degree, which she obtained at the end of the 2006-2007 academic year, was in the area of Human Resource Management. This student was educated from the pre-school through to tertiary level in the mainstream of the education system. The St Lucia Blind Welfare Association is the leading proponents of the Inclusive Education Concept in St. Lucia. Students who are blind/low vision constitute the only group of students with special educational needs who are educated from pre-school to tertiary level together with their 'non-disabled' peers.

Inclusive Education: Approaches, scope and content.  
Limited resources and lack of professional support personnel have made it challenging to embrace the Inclusive Education Concept in its totality. For the most part, children with disabilities are educated in Special school settings. One would appreciate that for the Inclusive Education concept to be successful there must be a support structure in place to ensure that the varied needs of students are successfully met. Furthermore, principals and staff of receiving schools must be trained in the area of special needs, so that they can make informed decisions about students with Special Needs and the programs that are appropriate for them. It is recommended that governments, of necessity, engage in long-term planning, with a target date for implementing the Inclusive concept in small island states as ours. Extensive planning and training of support personnel must be top priority if successful implementation will be realized.

The Ministry of Education, however, has increasingly attempted to broaden the scope of delivery of Special Education services, by establishing the Student Support Services Unit, which includes

- the Special Education Unit, catering for children in Special Schools, as well as supporting children with learning disabilities at Infant and Primary schools.
- student welfare services
- counseling services
• school feeding program,
• HIV/AIDS focal point, catering to the children and youth with HIV/AIDS in the education system.

A cadre of 40 teachers at the elementary school level has been trained to support children with learning difficulties. This training in the area of Special Education was conducted by personnel from Lynchburg College with funding from the World Bank. In addition, twenty-one teachers have been deployed at elementary Schools around the island to specifically serve children with special educational needs. Approximately 1,500 students are being supported at that level.

The fear of not being able to manage children with severe to profound disabilities has deterred school principals from readily accepting and enrolling children with disabilities into the general education system. There are very few cases of schools with children with disabilities enrolled in any community. Even in the rare case where this is permitted, the learning environment is not appropriately adapted to cater to the children’s needs. That children are physically at the school is insufficient to be correctly called “Inclusion.” Therefore, while the Inclusion Concept advocates that the learning environment adjust to meet the needs of the children, in most cases the children have to adjust to the learning environment.

The concept of Inclusive Education is not fully understood by the state actors. This understanding needs to be of paramount importance at the highest governmental level if it is to be adequately implemented. There is need for a paradigm shift in the thinking of policymakers and policy-executors in government, if the Inclusive Education concept must be given due priority. Structures which do not now exist will have to be in place for the successful implementation of the concept.

**Inclusive Education: Public policies:**

The concept of Inclusive Education is not a government priority due to the perceived budgetary constraints of developing countries such as ours. The government continues to provide support to programs of the Special Education Unit, but there are no long-term initiatives in favor of the expansion of Inclusive Education.

A draft policy on Special Education is in its final stages to be submitted for discussion. This policy will provide an operational framework for Special Education practices.

**Inclusive Education: Systems, links and transitions:**

The introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in St Lucia in 2006 has given every child the opportunity of gaining a place at a secondary school. This initiative brings with it a number of challenges and concerns. The transition process for children at the lower end of the functional continuum, or who may have learning disabilities, brings to the fore the need for curriculum reform that will respond to this diversity of functional abilities and educational needs among secondary school students. However, this has not yet happened.

What has happened is that students who would not have ordinarily qualified for secondary school are being overwhelmed and cannot handle the transition effectively. This situation is compounded by the fact that there is limited professional support, since there has been no adequate preparation of secondary school teachers to teach to the special needs of such students. Hence, a significant number of students are dropping out of school.
Students with Special needs are currently receiving support from school counselors, and special educational needs teachers. The support of the Special needs teacher is critical in order to help the student to make that transition from elementary to secondary.

We continue to establish and maintain partnerships and links with regional and international agencies, with regards to training of personnel for the support program.

In St Lucia, children with Special Needs are traditionally educated at Special Schools. These include a school for children with developmental disabilities, a school for the Deaf, and two education and rehabilitation centres in the west and south of the island. Principals and staff of general education schools are very apprehensive about children with disabilities attending any educational institution other than these special facilities. A substantive campaign of public awareness and sensitization will be required for the effective implementation of the Inclusion Concept.

Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers:
There are 253 learners with Special Needs who are presently attending Special education schools. This represents only 0.64% of the total school population. That being so does not negate the fact that these children reserve the right to be educated in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Despite this small number, there is a broad range of disabilities within that cohort of students. As before, the most significant challenge currently is the lack of professional personnel, both to correctly assess/diagnose the presenting disabilities and to provide adequate support post-diagnosis. The Ministry of Education has made a first gesture toward alleviating this situation by assigning Special Educational Needs Teachers to all Infant and Primary schools in the island.

In conclusion I am elated that the persons at the higher level of the education system from our various territories are present here today. The message needs to be heard at the level of the policy makers and managers, for, we who are in the field are already the converted. The policy makers now need to reflect this same conversion in their work, so that policies, structures and training can be given priority at the highest level.