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“INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE WAY OF THE FUTURE”



**A BRIEF LOOK AT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ISSUES:
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORKSHOPS' DISCUSSIONS**

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION¹

Why do we talk about inclusion in education?

Educational and social exclusion are growing phenomena both in developed and developing countries. One of the strongest tendencies of the new economy is the increasing inequality, spatial segmentation and cultural fragmentation of the population.² Social exclusion goes beyond poverty as it is linked to the increasing number of people, who do not participate in society nor have access to basic goods and social welfare networks. This situation leads these people being “excluded from society” and living below the levels of dignity and equality which we all have the right to enjoy.

Today, there are certain phenomena that denote a serious crisis in the social relationships; the inequality among and within the countries, the rootlessness resulting from migration, the rural exodus, dispersed families, disorganized urbanization as well as the rupture of traditional solidarity. These phenomena have led many individuals and groups to become isolated.³ This explains the special importance currently given to cohesion and social justice, as well as to the re-conceptualization of institutions – like schools – which are intended to address social issues.

The pace of growth in today’s knowledge society is increasingly dependent on the value added to production and global exchange systems. Access to more productive jobs requires more and more years of study, only possible for the highest socio-economic classes. Many people have become excluded from the benefits of development. As a consequence, it is necessary to significantly increase the educational level of the new generations, as well as the level of effective and updated learning of every individual to break the reproduction of the inter-generational cycle of inequality.

Social inclusion is necessarily, although not exclusively, linked to more inclusive practices in education, that is, to the development of schools or learning environments that cater for the needs of all the individuals of a community and respond to the diversity of learning needs, regardless of their social origin, culture or individual characteristics. An inclusive school has no selection mechanisms or discrimination of any kind. Instead, it transforms its pedagogical proposal into ways of integrating the diversity of students, thus fostering social cohesion, which is one of the main goals of education. However, it is important to ask ourselves if education is really contributing to the development of more inclusive societies or if, on the contrary, it is reproducing the social exclusion and generating different forms of discrimination within education systems.

In spite of the efforts made by different countries, evidence shows that education tends to reproduce, and even increase, the social and cultural segmentation. It provides the most economically deprived sectors with low quality education, which is different from the high quality education made available to middle and high social classes. The traditional role of

¹ Document prepared by Rosa Blanco Guijarro, Interim Director of the Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-OREALC-)

² J.C. Tedesco, “Igualdad de oportunidades y política educativa” [“Equal Opportunities and Educational Policy”], en *Políticas Educativas y Equidad. Reflexiones del Seminario Internacional*, p. 59-68. Fundación Ford, Universidad Padre Hurtado, UNICEF y UNESCO. Santiago de Chile, octubre de 2004.

³ UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within*. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors. Paris, UNESCO, 1996.

education as a means to promote cohesion and social mobility has become weakened in the current economic and social settings. There is a dialectic relationship between educational inclusion and social inclusion because, even though education can contribute to promoting equality of opportunities among people to insert them into society, a minimum level of social equity is also necessary to achieve democratization in the access to knowledge. This would allow all people to acquire the competencies required to participate in the different areas of social life.

Most countries adopt the principles of Education for All (EFA) in their policies and laws, but in practice, education is for “almost all” or for “most people” and the people excluded are precisely those who need it most, in order to compensate their disadvantaged social and educational situation. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, there are still 72 million of children in the world who have no access to primary education and 774 million of young people and adults who are illiterate, 64% of which are women. Access to early childhood care and education, necessary to guarantee equal opportunities, is quite limited in the three first years, and children from the most disadvantaged socio-economic contexts and from rural areas hardly benefit from these services. Access to secondary education has increased by 5%, from 2000 to 2005, reaching 66%. Nevertheless, a greater effort should be made since nowadays primary education is not enough for being included into the knowledge society and emerging from poverty.

Education quality and equality are unresolved matters even in those countries with high schooling rates. There are large disparities among and within countries as regards the access to the different educational levels and the distribution of knowledge. Only 63% of countries with available data have reached gender parity in primary education, decreasing to 37% at the secondary level. Students from economically disadvantaged sectors, rural areas or minorities are those who, due to a structural situation, show higher repetition and drop-out rates and achieve lower learning outcomes. Moreover, segregated schools and programs exist, which are aimed at people with special educational needs, of different ethnic origin, or migrant families. Many of these students are not treated with human dignity; their culture is not respected and they are victims of physical or psychological violence.

Therefore, educational exclusion is an important phenomenon which is not restricted to those who do not attend school because of a denial of access, or because they dropped out of school due to repetition, the lack of relevance of the education, economic obstacles or the students' life circumstances. Exclusion also affects those who attend school but are segregated or discriminated against because of their ethnic origin, gender, social condition, of other individual characteristics or capacities, as well as those who cannot learn due to the low quality of the education they receive.¹ (Blanco, in press).

What do we mean by inclusive education?

The term *inclusion* has different interpretations in various countries. It is sometimes associated with those students living in marginalized or poor contexts, but frequently it is related to the participation of the disabled or those with special educational needs in mainstream schools. In this way inclusion is considered to be almost the same as integration, when they are in fact two different approaches with different visions and perspectives. As a

¹ R. Blanco, “Construyendo las bases de la inclusión y la calidad de la educación en la primera infancia” [“Building the fundamentals of inclusion and quality education in early childhood”], en *Revista de Educación* (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), Monográfico nº 347 sobre ‘Atención socioeducativa a la primera infancia’, coordinado por la M^a Paz Lebrero Baena (en prensa).]

consequence of this misconception, inclusive policies are regarded as a responsibility of special education, restricting the analysis of all the common forms of exclusion and discrimination that take place within education systems.

UNESCO¹ defines inclusive education as a process intended to respond to students' diversity by increasing their participation and reducing exclusion within and from education. It is related to the attendance, participation and achievement of all students, especially those who, due to different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalized. It constitutes an essential element to advance on the EFA agenda. The concept of Education for All does not imply the concept of inclusion. Even though both are intended to ensure access to education, inclusion involves access to high-quality education without discrimination of any kind, whether within or outside the school system. This requires an in-depth transformation of the education systems. Without inclusion, certain groups of students are likely to be excluded. Inclusion should be a guiding principle for educational policies and programs so that education can be for all and not only for the majority, therefore.

Attendance refers to access and continuation in school or other non-formal settings. Participation means that the curriculum and the educational activities address all students' needs, and that students' opinions about decisions affecting their lives and the school are taken into account. Achievements make reference to the need that all students learn, according to their abilities, what is established in the school curriculum and what is required for their personal development and socialization. Real inclusion goes beyond access; it implies learning at the highest level and developing the potential of each individual.

Understood in this way, inclusion represents a progress compared with the integration movement. The aim of inclusion is wider than the aim of integration. The latter seeks to ensure the right of the disabled to study in mainstream schools, whereas inclusion is intended to realize the right of all people to a high quality education, focusing on *those who, due to differing reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalized*. These groups vary depending on the country but, in general, include the disabled, those belonging to an ethnic or linguistic minority, those from isolated or poor areas, children from migrant families or without a birth certificate, those affected by HIV and AIDS, armed conflict or violence. As regards gender, girls are the most excluded in many countries, however in some other countries, the boys are more excluded.

Moreover, the focus of inclusion is different from the focus of integration. In the case of integration, students enrolled in school have to adapt themselves to the existing school environment (curriculum, methods, values and rules), regardless of their mother tongue, culture or abilities. Education systems maintain their "status quo", and actions are more centred on catering for the needs of every particular student (individual programs, differentiated strategies and materials, special education teachers, etc.), rather than modifying those factors of the learning and teaching environment that are barriers to the participation and learning of all.

In the case of inclusion, on the contrary, the focus is on the *transformation of education systems and schools so that they can cater for the diversity of students' learning needs resulting from their social and cultural background and their individual characteristics as regards learning motivations, abilities, styles and rhythm*. According to this perspective, it is not the students enrolled in school that must adapt to the existing educational provision, but

¹ UNESCO, *Guidelines for inclusion. Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris, UNESCO, 2005.

rather the school that should be adapted to the needs of every student, since all students are different.

The key element of inclusion is not individualization but the diversification of the educational provision and the personalization of common learning experiences in order to achieve the highest degree of participation of all students, taking into account their individual needs. This implies advancing towards *universal design*, where the teaching-learning process and the curriculum consider from the very beginning the diversity of needs of all students, instead of planning on the basis of an “average” student and then carry out individualized actions to respond to the needs of specific students or groups who were not taken into consideration by an education proposal based on a logic of homogeneity instead of diversity.

The response to diversity – an essential condition to achieve high quality education – is probably the main challenge currently faced by schools and teachers, as it involves substantive changes in the existing conceptions, attitudes, curricula, pedagogical practices, teacher training, evaluation systems and school organization.

Inclusion is characterized by the following aspects:

- It implies a *different vision of education based on diversity* and not on homogeneity. The old tradition of conceiving differences from normative criteria, what is absent or far from “normality”, has led to the creation of options segregated for those categorized as different. According to an inclusive education perspective, the differences are inherent in human nature – each child is unique and unrepeatable – and they are conceived as an opportunity to enrich the learning process, which means that they should be part of education for all rather than the subject of differentiated programs or modalities.

The education system as a whole is responsible for responding to diversity which means that it is necessary to shift from homogenous approaches, where all are offered the same, to education models that consider the diversity of needs, abilities and identities so that education can be pertinent for all people and not only for specific groups of society. To achieve pertinence, the educational provision, the curriculum and the teaching-learning process have to be flexible so that they can be adapted to the needs and characteristics of all students and the diverse contexts in which they develop and learn.

The curriculum should achieve the difficult balance between responding to commonality and to diversity, offering universal learning opportunities to all students. This should ensure equal opportunities for all but at the same time give sufficient freedom to schools for defining the learning contents necessary to address the requirements of the local context and the educational needs of their students. Relevance also implies developing an intercultural curriculum which promotes the respect for different cultures and the appreciation of differences, and considers in a balanced way the development of different capacities, multiple intelligences and talents of people.

- It is intended to *identify and minimize the barriers encountered by students* to access and stay in school, participate and learn. These barriers arise from the interaction between students and different contexts: people, policies, institutions, cultures and socio-economic circumstances affecting their lives. In this respect, actions should be mainly aimed at eliminating the physical, personal and institutional barriers that restrict

learning opportunities, as well as at ensuring the full access and participation in all the educational activities for all students¹.

- It is a *never-ending process* as it implies a profound change in the education systems and the school culture. The educational institutions should constantly review their values, organization and educational practices so as to identify and minimize the barriers encountered by students to participate and succeed in learning, seeking more appropriate strategies to respond to diversity and learn from differences².
- Inclusion also entails support systems which collaborate with teachers in addressing students' diversity, paying special attention to those who need it most in order to optimize their development and improve their learning. This support implies all the resources to complement or reinforce the pedagogical activity of teachers, additional teachers, students who support students, families, specialized teachers, as well as professionals from other sectors³.

Why is inclusive education important?

Inclusive education is based on ethical, social, educational and economic principles.

It is a means to realize the right to high quality education without discrimination and having equal opportunities

Education is a public good and an essential human right from which nobody can be excluded since it contributes to the development of people and society. The right to education in its broadest sense goes beyond the access to free and compulsory education. In order to fully enjoy this right, a high quality education must be provided, promoting the highest development of the multiple abilities of each individual, that is to say, the right to education is the right to lifelong learning⁴. To conceive education as a right and not as a mere service or product, implies that the State is obliged to respect, guarantee, protect and promote this right. The infringement of this right also affects the exercise of other human rights.

The right to high quality education has to be equitably enjoyed, protecting in a special way the rights of minorities and groups with little power within society. Non-discrimination in education implies ensuring that all individuals and groups can have access to all education levels and receive an education with similar quality standards, eliminating separated education systems and institutions aimed at certain individuals or groups, as well as treating all people with human dignity (Convention against Discrimination in Education, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in December 1960).

Moving towards more inclusive education systems requires a strong political will reflected in the development of long-term policies involving different sectors of government and civil society. It also requires the definition of legal frameworks which would establish the

¹ T. Booth and M. Ainscow, *Index for Inclusion. Developing learning and participation in schools*. London, CSIE, 2000.

² UNESCO, *Guidelines for inclusion Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris, UNESCO, 2005.

³ UNESCO, *Open File on Inclusive education. Support materials for managers and administrators*. Paris, UNESCO, 2001.

⁴ UNESCO-OREALC, *Educación de calidad para todos: un asunto de derechos humanos. [Quality Education for All: a human rights issue.] Documento de discusión sobre políticas educativas en el marco de la II Reunión Intergubernamental del Proyecto Regional de Educación para América Latina y el Caribe (EPT/PRELAC)*, Santiago de Chile, 2007

rights and responsibilities, as well as the provision of the necessary resources, in order to strengthen the existing systems for guaranteeing the right to education.

It is a means to advance towards more democratic and fair societies

Quality education for all and the development of schools which receive students from different socio-cultural contexts and with different capacities are powerful tools to contribute to social cohesion. Nevertheless, the development of more inclusive and egalitarian schools and societies cannot only be achieved by means of education, as social equity is necessary to guarantee the basic conditions leading to learning.¹ Therefore, it is necessary to develop inter-sectoral policies addressing in an integral way the factors within and outside the education systems that generate exclusion, discrimination and inequality.

Quality education, from an inclusive perspective, implies a balance between excellence and equity. This means that it is not possible to talk about quality education if just a few students learn what is required to participate in society and develop their life projects. Equity involves providing every individual with the support and the resources required to be in an equal condition. Benefiting from educational opportunities and learning to reach levels of excellence, such education would not reproduce the students' inequalities or determine their future options.² The personalization of this support is a key aspect because equity policies are commonly characterized by the provision of equal opportunity for all people, restricting the potential to promote the highest development of individuals.

Equity policies based on remedial, compensatory and focalized approaches have not proved effective to achieve more social and educational inclusion. It is necessary to advance towards equity policies that place people at the centre of a sustainable process of human development, improving their capacities and their options to live with dignity, valuing diversity and respecting all people's rights. Social policies should guarantee the minimum benefits for all people to build more equitable societies in a permanent way, since lengthy focalized policies can end up establishing a segmented system in the quality of social benefits, e.g. education for the poor and for the rest of society, health for the poor and for the rest of society³.

Achieving quality education without exclusion requires an increase in the investments on education and the equitable allocation of the human, material, technological and financial resources, considering the cost of providing quality education to different people in different contexts. Equity must be at the centre of general policy decisions and not limited to peripheral policies oriented to correct the effects of general policies that are not in tune with a logic of justice or prevention⁴.

An equity policy should have a strong preventive nature, instead of solving existing problems. Therefore, it is essential to invest more in policies aimed at early childhood

¹ J.C. Tedesco 2004, *cit.*

² UNESCO-OREALC 2007, *cit.*

³ Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), *Panorama social de América Latina. [Social Overview of Latin America.]* Santiago de Chile, CEPAL, 2005.

⁴ J. E. García Huidobro, *La igualdad en educación como bien democrático y de desarrollo.* Ponencia presentada en la Reunión del Comité Intergubernamental del PRELAC, organizada por la UNESCO-OREALC, Santiago de Chile, 6 y 7 de diciembre de 2005. [*Equality in Education as a democratic good for development.* Paper submitted in the Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of PRELAC, organized by UNESCO- OREALC, Santiago de Chile, December 6 and 7, 2005]

education and care and parents' education, because children start formal education in conditions of extreme inequality.

It is a means to improve the quality of education and the professional development of teachers

Ensuring that all students can learn reaching levels of excellence requires adapting teaching practices and pedagogical support to the needs and characteristics of every student. Inclusive education and the consideration of diversity involve a greater professional competence for teachers, collaboration among teachers, families and students, and more comprehensive and flexible educational projects which favour the participation and learning of all. It also requires the development of a pertinent curriculum which should be balanced with respect to the type of learning it promotes, a variety of learning situations and activities, a wide range of teaching strategies and a school environment in which all are received and valued as equals, particularly supporting those who need it most. In short, the challenge of inclusion is to advance towards education for all, with all and for each individual.

Addressing and integrating diversity in the classroom is a complex task which involves enhancing teachers' motivations and competencies, transforming teachers' training and creating good working conditions. Teachers have to take risks and be open to change, seek new ways of teaching and reflect critically on their practice in order to transform it, value differences as an element of professional enrichment, and be able to work together with other teachers, professionals and families. Teachers should know their pupils very well, be sensitive to students' needs and emotions, offer multiple opportunities and have high expectations as regards all students' learning¹.

It is a means to learn to live together and build our own identity

Inclusive education is based on a series of conceptions and values regarding the type of society to be built and the ideal of person to be developed. If we want to have more inclusive societies, which are more peaceful and respectful of differences, it is essential that students have the opportunity to develop and experience these values in their education, whether in schools or non-formal settings.

Educating "in and for diversity" is an essential means to learn to live together, developing new ways of doing so based on pluralism, mutual understanding and respect, democratic relationships and the development of values that promote cooperation, solidarity and justice. Moreover, the perception and the experience of diversity enable us to build and reaffirm our own identity and distinguish ourselves from others, that is to say, make it possible to "learn to be"². The inclusion of any individual or group could not be possible if his/her personal or cultural identity were disregarded, as no real participation or effective learning would be achieved.

It is a means to improve the efficiency and cost-benefit relationship of the education systems

¹ R. Blanco, "Los docentes y el desarrollo de escuelas inclusivas" en *Revista PRELAC* (UNESCO-OREALC, Santiago de Chile) n° 1, julio de 2005, p. 174-178. ["Teachers and the Development of Inclusive Schools" in *Journal PRELAC* (UNESCO-OREALC, Santiago de Chile) no.1, July 2005, pages 174-178.]

² UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 1996.

It is less expensive to have schools where all students are educated together than a complex system of different kinds of schools specialized in different groups of students. If inclusive schools offer an effective education to all their students, there will be a higher cost-benefit relationship when providing Education for All¹. A study carried out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1994 showed that the inclusion of students with special educational needs into regular schools can be from seven to nine times less costly than their education in special schools². Furthermore, various studies have showed that an inclusive education approach is not only less costly but also more efficient as it improves school performance and the results obtained by all children.

It is also necessary to optimize the use of resources in order to achieve a higher cost-benefit relationship. High repetition rates registered in many countries as a consequence of not adopting preventive measures, have led to a waste of resources and inefficiency. The financial resources aimed at the students who repeat³ could be quite useful to improve the quality of education for all, especially if we consider the minimal impact of repetition on the level of students' learning outcomes and its negative effect on students' self-esteem. The expenses resulting from repetition could be invested in teacher training, supply of materials and computers and the provision of additional support for students who have difficulties in their education, contributing to the improvement of the quality of education.

Moving towards more inclusive schools and education systems involves a series of conditions both at the macro and the school level, as well as at the level of pedagogical practices. Some important aspects to be considered in the educational agenda of all countries are the following:

- Debating and building a broad approach of inclusive education, shared by all the stakeholders, enable the identification in each country of the main barriers against guaranteeing the right to a quality education for all citizens, as well as the identification of those who faces such barriers.
- Defining long-term educational policies based on human rights and social participation and strengthening the existing systems for guaranteeing the right to education without any discrimination.
- Developing policies which articulate expansion with quality and equity, fostering a debate on the real meaning of quality education without exclusion.
- Developing inter-sectoral policies which address in a comprehensive way the factors that generate exclusion from and within education and define strategies of inter-sectoral and inter-institutional articulation at the local level.
- Shifting from standardized strategies where all are offered the same towards approaches which consider the diversity of needs and identities with social cohesion.

¹ UNESCO, *Open File on Inclusive education*, 2001.

² S. Peters, *Educación integrada: lograr una educación para todos, incluidos aquellos con discapacidad y necesidades educativas especiales*. [*Inclusive Education: achieving Education for All, including disabled people and people with special educational needs*.] Documento preparado para el grupo de discapacidad del Banco Mundial, Washington, Banco Mundial, 2003.

³For example, in Latin America repetition implies a cost of US\$5.6 billion in primary education and US\$5.5 billion in secondary education at the exchange rate of the year 2000 (UNESCO-OREALC 2007).

- Developing equity policies based on the development of individuals, paying special attention to preventive measures, as well as early childhood education and care and also parents' education.
- Making education systems flexible so as to offer different options with equal quality to access or complete studies in any stage of life, both in formal and non-formal settings. Ensuring articulation between the different educational levels and modalities to facilitate the transition, coherence and continuity of educational processes.
- Strengthening public education and improving its quality in accordance with its historical role of ensuring equal opportunities for all and promoting integration and social cohesion.
- Revising students' admission policies in order to avoid the situation where certain schools (generally public schools located in the most vulnerable areas) mainly enrol students excluded from other schools.
- Developing curricula, teaching strategies and evaluation systems which take social, cultural and individual diversity into consideration.
- Analyzing financing policies and models to identify and modify the economic obstacles which are restricting the right to education and allocating resources in an equitable way.
- Revising the decentralization models in order to avoid inequality and strengthening the participation of the different local stakeholders and the families in the processes of inclusion.
- Developing comprehensive policies related to teachers and other educators to provide them with the competencies, incentives and conditions necessary to address the diversity of learning needs.
- Establishing support systems to collaborate with schools and teachers in addressing students' diversity.
- Paying special attention to the emotional factors which are very important for the development of inclusive schools and have a great impact on students' learning.
- Promoting studies and research in order to identify strategies and practices that promote the development of inclusive schools.

Some questions for reflection

What is the relationship between educational inclusion and social inclusion? What factors within and outside of education systems generate exclusion in your country? Who are the most excluded from educational opportunities in your country?

How is inclusion conceptualized in your country? What are the main arguments for and against inclusion?

How is the right to education conceived in your country? How are rights made explicit in the legislation and policies of your country? What should be the role of the State and civil society in order to guarantee the right to quality education without exclusion?

What is the approach to quality education in your country? How can inclusive education contribute to the quality and equity of education?

What are the main implications of inclusion for educational policies and practices? What factors contribute to the development of more inclusive education systems and schools?

POLICIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION¹

Brief consideration on the concept of inclusive education

Today, the concept of inclusive education can be understood as a general principle used to reinforce the conditions for achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals according to a comprehensive or holistic perspective. It implies overcoming those conceptualizations that restrict the concept to special educational needs or social needs, such as refugees.

Due to the nature of the formation of these concepts, there is sometimes little difference between the conceptualization of inclusion and integration. Integration represented the progress which enabled the rejection of the idea of different types of schools for different types of students, by enrolling all students in the same school. Despite the unquestionable good intentions, in practice this has often not produced changes in the curriculum or in the pedagogical approach since, according to these models, it is quite common that students have to *adapt themselves* to the rules, styles, habits and practices of the traditional education system, instead of all these elements adapting to the students' needs. Thus, it is not surprising that drop-out rates of students with special needs increase when they are integrated into schools which have not implemented a serious and comprehensive curricular and pedagogical change.

Inclusion, however, can be understood either as a guiding principle to achieve reasonable levels of school integration for all students or, in a broader context, as the conception and implementation of a wide range of learning strategies aimed at responding to the diversity of students.

In this respect, education systems are bound to respond to the needs and expectations of all children and young people, taking into account that, within the integration scheme, the capacity of providing effective learning opportunities is in fact limited.

Within this framework, the debate between inclusive education and integration is not focused on a dichotomy between policies and models of integration or inclusion (as if integration without inclusion or inclusion without integration could be possible), but it is based on the fact that it is necessary to identify to what extent each school has made progress towards understanding its moral responsibility for the inclusion of all. This obligation becomes more urgent for those education systems that still have to solve some basic educational problems, such as non-attendance to school, repetition, over-age, drop-out, or the low learning achievement that negatively affect the objectives and the operation of education all around the world.

The real inclusion is access to knowledge

Beyond the differences between integration and inclusion, the main challenge to be incorporated into a new policy agenda for education for discussion by the ministries of education and the society as a whole, is the need to overcome the idea of inclusion as *incorporation into the education system* and conceive it as *access to knowledge*. Today,

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quality education means an education system which allows everyone to access valid knowledge.

The traditional role of education as a means to promote cohesion and social mobility has become weakened in the current economic and social setting. Education systems may maintain their historic capacity of counteracting the tendencies towards inequity, currently stressed as a result of the new globalized capitalism, provided that they are able to distribute the type of education and the knowledge competencies required by the information society and the knowledge society.

As long as there is a new vision, the school as an institution and the new emerging learning environments can offer more integration in an unequal world. The knowledge valid for modernity is not the knowledge valid for the knowledge society. Education systems were organized to spread the rational knowledge model of enlightenment among society and they succeeded. However, this model is also outdated in the present world that generates knowledge as a part of social progress.

In this context, the focus should rest on the *transformation of the education systems and the schools so that they can cater for the diversity* of students' learning needs (resulting from their social and cultural origin and their individual characteristics as regards learning motivations, abilities, styles and rhythm). Building on these differences, they can ensure that all students have access to knowledge.

Policies on inclusion

Within the framework of the globalized processes of economy, technology and communication, the State is still an essential element of economic regulation, political representation and social solidarity, but within important structural and cultural limits and acting in a historically new way. There is a wide range of possible State interventions in the economy, in the processes of democracy and in the increase of social solidarity. The State can lose sovereignty as understood by the classical canon, but it does not lose its capacity of action if it changes in order to manage complex processes in a complex world.

The role of the State is extremely relevant with respect to education as a public good, since these transformations, as well as educational development, can only be possible with strong State intervention. Even though society also has an important role to play, it only collaborates with the State to generate policies in tune with these challenges.

Educational policies dealing with inclusion should go beyond the dichotomy mentioned above. They should also overcome the remedial and corrective approaches and responses, as well as those solutions focusing on the establishment or increase of the number of special education schools, curricula and teachers, as these solutions often mean the increase of segregation and the isolation of those students with different characteristics.

Policies must focus on generating inclusive environments, which basically implies two perspectives. On the one hand, it means respecting, understanding and recognizing cultural, social and individual diversity (both at the education system level and as regards the schools' and teachers' response to students' expectations and needs); and on the other hand, providing equal access to quality education.

A broader concept of inclusion, as understood in this Conference, makes it possible to overcome the mere remedial or compensatory policies and open the way to the emergence of new educational responses aimed at a knowledge society capable of integrating all people. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly define the responsibility of educational institutions as regards the multiple existing needs, especially in the case of the most deprived populations, and ensure an effective coordination with other social policies. This should involve the expectations and needs of the community and other social actors.

The State must be able to understand the development of inclusive education programmes within the framework of education as a public good, therefore. It should also have the planning and management capacity and be able to articulate co-design and co-implementation strategies together with civil society as a whole.

Questions to orientate the discussion

The discussions which took place in the preparatory regional workshops on inclusive education focus on the concern that educational policies should foster a deeper reflection and discussion regarding what kind of society we desire, overcoming exclusion within the framework of social justice, and leading to a social consensus on what kind of education we need.

What are the strategies applied in your country in this respect? How is the idea of inclusion used to support, justify or encourage innovations oriented to quality? How are social representations analyzed so that the community can accept these new definitions? To what extent can the shift from inclusion viewed as *incorporation to the education system* to the idea of *inclusion as access to knowledge* can be accepted?

The need to revise national legislation in order to incorporate notions of inclusive education (such as in the case of the Convention on the Rights of the Child or the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) was another matter of concern pointed out in the regional meetings.

What is the situation of your country as regards the ratification of international conventions in this respect? Are long-term policies with a right-based approach and a high degree of social participation defined? Have the existing systems guaranteeing the right to education without any kind of discrimination been strengthened? How can the design of new legal frameworks be oriented towards more open inclusion policies? Does the Ministry of Education promote instances of legislative work in this respect?

It is evident that, in most cases, there is a significant distance between the laws and their effective fulfilment, which entails the risk that inclusive education has only a rhetorical space in educational reforms. The workshops in all regions made reference to this situation as regards inclusive education.

What level of real implementation do the laws and the political strategies as regards inclusive education have in the different countries?

The impact of poverty on education is more evident in some areas than in others, especially in rural areas or in the marginalized urban zones surrounding the big cities. All the

preparatory regional workshops pointed out the importance of inclusive education as a tool to fight against poverty, adopting a wide range of institutional and pedagogical practices that make it possible to cater for the different needs of each population.

Within what framework are strategies and policies on inclusive education established? Is the provision of differential equipment and financial resources, as well as specific policies aimed at the most deprived populations, taken into account?

As poverty is a complex syndrome where many other elements apart from education are to be considered, the regional workshops suggested taking into consideration the needs of children and young people through a multi-sectoral comprehensive approach. These policy strategies, commonly used to cater for early childhood, should also be present in the education policy as a whole. Different social sectors can collaborate in activities, share funds and make a coordinated and comprehensive effort. The private sector can also take part in this shared action.

Are there forums of public discussion on the needs of social and educational inclusion for the knowledge society? What is the effort made to learn about successful experiences in other countries as regards inclusion strategies? Are there inter-sectoral policies addressing the factors that generate exclusion from and within the education systems in an integral way? Are strategies of inter-sectoral and inter-institutional articulation at the local level defined? Do civil society, social actors, community groups and the representatives of the excluded participate in the design and implementation of these policies?

CREATING EDUCATION SYSTEMS WHICH OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING¹

One of the greatest problems faced by the world today is the growing number of the excluded. These are people who are excluded from participating in the economy, in society and in life as a whole. Such unjust and inequitable societies are neither efficient nor safe. More far-reaching policy measures and broader socio-economic and cultural investments are called for, and education is one of the means to address such issues. In landmark documents such as the Faure Report² and the Delors Report³, UNESCO has acknowledged lifelong learning as one of the guiding and organizing principles of educational action and reform, as well as a concept which is integral to a meaningful human life and capable of equipping people to tackle and anticipate whatever challenges they face throughout their lives. This document will attempt to prompt a discussion on a broader understanding of the features and characteristics of various learning systems addressing different facets of exclusion with a focus on non-formal and informal approaches. It stresses that lifelong learning is by nature and design a system that leads to organic and broad inclusion.

How can we achieve an understanding of a broader concept of inclusion and what are the main barriers to inclusive education?

For many years, the notion of inclusive education was associated with the provision of education for children with special needs.⁴ (e.g. the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education of 1994). However, it is misleading to think that inclusion mainly concerns the disabled. The concept has moved far beyond the narrow perception of inclusion as a means of understanding and overcoming a deficit (*defectology*). Today, it is defined much more broadly and encompasses issues of universal involvement, access, participation and achievement. UNESCO now defines inclusion as the “process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all [...] and a conviction that is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all.”⁵

Inclusion thus emphasizes those groups of learners who are at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement. It is now widely accepted that inclusion also concerns issues of gender, ethnicity, class, social conditions, health, and human rights. This means that inclusion policies must ensure that all citizens, whatever their social or economic background, have opportunities to access knowledge and facilities as fully and freely as possible in school and society as a whole, to participate completely, to achieve at the highest level and to enjoy a high quality of life. Inclusion is the full manifestation of the effective exercise of the right to education and learning. It is about learning to live with diversity and learning to learn from

¹ Document prepared by Adama Ouane, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO-UIL).

² E. Faure, *Learning to Be*. Paris, UNESCO, 1972.

³ UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within*. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors. Paris, UNESCO, 1996.

⁴ UNESCO, *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. Adopted by the ‘World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality’, Salamanca (Spain), 7-10 June 1994. Paris, UNESCO.

⁵ UNESCO, *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris, UNESCO, 2005, p. 13.

difference, not only in a certain period but throughout the entire lifecycle in a variety of contexts. Thus, inclusive education opens the path to inclusion in society.

Several measures are required to achieve inclusion for all:

- The needs of *all* learners (infants, children, adolescents, young people and adults) must be catered for.
- Gender disparities must be addressed, and education and learning adapted to the needs, interests and expectations of boys, girls, women and men.
- Socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and racial discriminations and privileges having incidence on access and participation must be combated.
- Learning must be articulated and integrated organically into the different levels of the education system from early childhood education right through to higher education.
- All forms, types and styles of learning must be integrated (informal, non-formal and formal, face-to-face, self-directed, open and distance education), as must the different learning objectives (general, artistic, technical and vocational).

Each individual and every group has different learning needs and demands, interests, strategies and styles, all of which can be hampered by various obstacles, exclusion being among the most severe. In order to overcome such barriers, it is therefore important to identify these needs and interests, and adopt the most appropriate strategies, content and modalities to address them.

Lifelong learning for all: an important facilitator for social inclusion

Lifelong learning or learning throughout life is now recognized and actively pursued as the key to education and human development in the twenty-first century. Current social and economic realities in both developed and developing countries demand new, wider and more complex competencies in order to understand anticipate and deal with both the enormous potentials and the growing risks that accompany globalization and the fast-changing new social and economic order.

Lifelong learning has increasingly been acknowledged as an important element in the response to social exclusion as it has a range of benefits to offer both individuals and society. However, the role of lifelong learning in solving the problem of social exclusion is complicated because those who are most likely to experience social exclusion are also those who are least likely to participate in education. Hence, “different forms of exclusion seem to question the capacity of the educational systems to provide effective learning opportunities based on a restricted concept of integration. Exclusion can also come from within the mainstream educational system. Repetition, over-age and dropout intermingle, so as to perpetuate exclusion—empirical evidence clearly indicates that a student who repeats the first school years has a strong probability of dropping out in secondary education—, based many times on pervasive and regressive institutional and pedagogical practices.”¹

Lifelong learning is not a fiction, a utopian idea or a mere piece of rhetoric. Lifelong learning is a continuous process, present in all cultures, societies and religions, which takes place throughout life. It offers opportunities to communities, individuals and organizations

¹ UNESCO-IBE, *Background Note*, Preparatory meeting of the forty-eighth session of the International Conference on Education, Nairobi, Kenya. July 2007.

capable of handling and using knowledge, values and competencies confidently and effectively, and of contributing to their creation and transformation, and provides these opportunities throughout their respective life spans.

The idea of lifelong learning for all, really applies to *all*, irrespective of age, gender, social conditions, or phases and modalities of learning. It centres on combining learning and living both (a) *vertically*, i.e. over an individual's whole life from birth to death, and (b) *horizontally*, i.e. to involve all aspects of a person's life, including his or her general and vocational education. Lifelong learning for all also integrates all learning environments—family, community, study, work and leisure—and cuts across all levels of the *educational stages* through which an individual passes, i.e. early childhood, primary education, secondary education and higher education. It is horizontal also in the sense of taking place within all the *modalities* of learning systems—formal, non-formal and informal—and using all *means* of learning—face to face, self-learning, open and distance media, etc.

Lifelong learning enables individuals to lead fulfilling lives and understand themselves, their surroundings and the consequences of their actions. It helps them to take responsibility not only for themselves, but for others as well. It allows them to perform, confidently and with ease, the roles and functions required of them in different settings, so as to be able to lead full lives as family members, friends, workers, employees, and entrepreneurs, members of society, citizens of a nation and, ideally, world citizens. It enables individuals to participate and to be included.

Three broadly prevailing misconceptions should be dispelled with regard to lifelong learning:

1. Lifelong learning is neither a new concept nor a system for rich and developed countries only.
2. Lifelong learning is not limited to adult learning or higher order learning in secondary and higher education. It concerns children, youth and adults engaged in all forms of education.
3. Lifelong learning is not linked merely to academic education, vocational training, employability and the world of work; it also entails active citizenship, social participation, leisure, self-fulfilment and learning for pleasure and enlightenment.

Which education system offers opportunities for lifelong learning and inclusive education?

How can the concept of inclusive education be integrated into the curriculum structure of basic education?

Connecting learning worlds, bridging education and learning levels, integrating content and valuing all kinds of learning and training achievements—these are the essential aims of lifelong learning. The lifelong learning approach to the organization of curriculum—in particular its combination of general knowledge, practical life skills, specialist work and business-oriented skills—can be the integrative aspect that links the different forms and types of learning and creates the conditions needed to meet the learning needs of all.

The curriculum—and constituent elements such as policy, delivery, and training of personnel, monitoring and evaluation—should be designed, developed and formulated in such a way as to enable inclusion in all the dimensions mentioned above.

An inclusive school system should be a community in which excellence in learning is evident and reflects its members' lifelong learning skills. It should be flexible and adjustable to individual needs, so that everyone benefits from a commonly-accepted basic level of quality education. For example, it should allow students to vary the time that they devote to a particular subject, offer teachers greater freedom to choose their working methods and allow more time for guided classroom-based work.

Programmes targeting various marginalized and excluded groups have often functioned outside the mainstream. Many have centred on special measures, specialized institutions and specialist educators. Too often, such programmes have succeeded only in producing second-rate educational opportunities that offer few or no possibilities for further study. In these cases, the result has been exclusion. Lifelong learning, however, is by definition holistic and inclusive and offers a form of curriculum development that provides diversified contents, caters for the needs and demands of different groups and covers general, technical and vocational education and training. An inclusive curriculum addresses the individual's cognitive, emotional and creative development and should be based on the four pillars of education for the twenty-first century: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together.¹ It should also be based on an additional fifth pillar: learning to change and take risks.

Curriculum plays an instrumental role in fostering tolerance and promoting human rights. It is a powerful tool for transcending cultural, religious, linguistic and other differences. With regard to linguistic differences, one means of enabling inclusion is to adopt a multilingual educational approach, in which language is recognized as an integral part of a student's cultural identity. In Burkina Faso and in Zambia, for example, mother-tongue-based bilingual education has been promoted and shown to have a positive effect on the quality of learning and rate of participation.

Bilingual education, intercultural education and learning strategies recognizing and valuing the distinctive identity, languages, cultural specificities and norms of indigenous people and empowering them to cope with and master new challenges have been used as strategies to achieve social integration in Latin America (Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru). Although most of the countries involved have implemented broad constitutional, legal and policy frameworks to support these intercultural and bilingual approaches, the vigour and funding mechanisms to implement them are still lacking.²

Is inclusive education conceived as a way of democratizing opportunities for lifelong learning? Is the system flexible enough to allow access for all in education and developing lifelong learning? Does it reflect tolerance in order to meet the learners' differences and needs?

Facilitating access and increasing inputs are not enough. Reducing drop-out rates or increasing participation levels are also not sufficient. Improving quality can only be effective if it is translated into relevant and meaningful learning and achievement for all. Since the poor have to start from a position of greater economic and social disadvantage, which has a negative impact on learning, efforts have to be made to ensure that quality and equity gaps are

¹ UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 1996.

² UNESCO-UIL and GTZ-PACE/Guatemala, *Workshop on Literacy in Multilingual Contexts*. Guatemala City, 9-14 February 2008.

reduced. What the poor need is not remedial education, just high-quality education, tailor-made to meet their learning needs and demands.¹

The following examples show that methods of delivery, learning opportunities, pedagogic goals and achievements need to be highly diverse to reflect the diversity of learners: China, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Uganda have developed successful learning programmes to cater for the learning needs of various nomadic populations. In Uganda a curriculum has been re-designed to reach out to semi-nomadic cattle herders living in the north-eastern region. The revised curriculum has been geared to the learning and skills requirements of the children. It includes indigenous knowledge, positive cultural practices and basic skills relevant to pastoral life, such as environmental protection and early warning systems.²

In Thailand the hill tribes are among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society. Although some limited government initiatives have been taken place, the hill area development, while considered very important, has not been integrated into mainstream development policies. Currently there are eleven ministries including the Department of Non-Formal Education (DFNE) and various other organizations involved in hill area development. In order to enhance education opportunities for hill tribes, the DFNE launched a policy in 1998 aiming at developing highland non-formal education based on the community centre model (promoting literacy among the hill tribes). The hill area education project aims at providing education services responding to the needs and problems of these people. In addition, the non-governmental organization Inter-Mountain People's Education and Culture in Thailand (IMPECT) has existed since 1991 and endeavours to ensure that indigenous peoples have the freedom and the right to preserve and revitalize their cultures and customs. In promoting educational opportunities, efforts should be made to harmonize modern knowledge and technologies with local wisdom and practices.

In Brazil, *Lua Nova* is a non-governmental project, launched in 2000 in Sorocaba, which works in collaboration with community centres and local education authorities. It aims to reach out to Brazil's vulnerable and socially excluded young people, including drug users and people with HIV and AIDS. As well as providing non-formal courses in literacy, *Lua Nova* runs locally-financed training programmes in entrepreneurial skills. Another key feature of such projects is the provision of micro-credit, which can transform the lives of people who have in the past been marginalized and excluded from access to loans. These micro-credit schemes have demonstrated the value of creating a sense of ownership and the importance of community-based support in ensuring their success.³

Lifelong learning should be offered within a framework of democratic values, such as justice, independence and autonomy. It should also be underpinned by such values such as respect for the traditions of indigenous peoples, for different religions, for the environment. Lifelong learning can, in turn, help to promote and cultivate these values. It can develop people's capacity to fulfil effectively the various roles demanded of them: as social beings, as citizens, as employees, as entrepreneurs or as members of a family. It can inculcate certain key competencies such as critical thinking and critical acting. It can help to transform inequality, poor conditions of dependency and one-sided, excessive behaviour. Lifelong learning and the development of key competencies can help individuals to live and create social cohesion

¹ R.M. Torres, *Lifelong Learning: A Momentum and a New Opportunity for Adult Basic Learning and Education (ABLE) in the Developing Countries*. (Draft version), 2002, p.21.

² UNESCO, *Including the excluded: Meeting diversity in education. Example from Uganda*. Paris, UNESCO, 2001.

³ UNESCO, *Another Way to Learn... Case Studies*. Paris, UNESCO, 2007.

within an equal and democratic society, free from extremism. Any system of education that aims to be inclusive, and to cater for the needs of all learners, must therefore embrace lifelong learning.

What is the role of non-formal and informal education in achieving the goals of inclusive education?

Basic learning needs for human development are multifarious, complex, multidimensional and constantly changing. They concern children, youth and adults. They involve a wide range of knowledge, skills, talents, values, attitudes and practical experiences that must be further developed.¹ Consequently there must be diverse and flexible forms of provision. Lifelong learning is of a holistic nature and presupposes that learning opportunities are available outside the formal school system. Learning needs and demands cannot be fully met in one type of institution or one particular form of education. Rather, they can only be met through multiple educational modes, diverse learning situations (home, community, workplace, school, place of leisure etc.) and a variety of media (books, computers, games etc.) Non-formal and informal modalities therefore play a vital role in lifelong learning alongside more formal approaches. This naturally has implications regarding recognition and validation of learning.

How can different kinds of learning be recognized and validated?

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning have become an issue of considerable importance at the level of international educational policy. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has launched the programme 'Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning' (RNFIL) and the European Union has developed the Lifelong Programme (2007-2013), which unites the four separate programmes of formal school education (COMENIUS), higher education (ERASMUS), vocational training (LEONARDO) and non-formal adult education (*Grundtvig*). Nevertheless there is still a widespread lack of awareness of the importance, the real contribution and the pervasive nature of non-formal and informal education. A built-in mechanism of recognition, validation and certification of all kinds of formal, non-formal and informal education must be part and parcel of lifelong learning.

It is important to underline that such a system of recognition and validation would bring important benefits for society as a whole, not only in the area of economic productivity but also in terms of equity and social empowerment. Policies should recognize the plurality of educational forms, which should serve various needs in various ways, but under a common education framework involving a close co-operation between all education sectors and systems, mutually reinforcing each other as well as networking at national and international levels.

Conclusion

Inclusion properly understood is precisely about ensuring that every child receives quality and appropriate education within the school system. It is also about learning opportunities and modalities outside school and for youth and adults. Inclusion is about access

¹ R.M. Torres, *cit.*, p. 27.

to education that involves no discrimination or exclusion for any individual or group within or outside the school system. Inclusion is also about offering learners the possibility for full self expression and the fulfilment that successful achievement brings. “The key challenge is to ensure that the broad vision of Education for All as an inclusive concept is reflected in national government and funding agency policies. Education for All [...] must take account of the need of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health; and those with special learning needs [...]”¹ The EFA goals will not be achieved if these groups are excluded.

Inclusion should be the guiding principle for UNESCO and other agencies’ interaction with governments and other providers within the Education for All initiative.

Adopting lifelong learning as a new paradigm for education and learning in the twenty-first century is not adopting a slogan or opting for an abstract “*edutopia*”. It implies defining in each particular context, even for each individual learner or group of learners, the kind of learning content, modalities and goals that are called for. It is therefore linked to inclusive education.

UNESCO has not created a uniform model of lifelong learning and inclusive education, and does not advance a uniform implementation strategy to be followed by all countries. There cannot be no “common system” of lifelong learning purely because the education and learning needs and responses vary not only over time but also within and between regions, countries and different fields of study. Hence, cultural, linguistic and national diversities have to be kept in mind and be respected and reflected in tailor-made, learner-centred strategies.

Provided that lifelong learning succeeds in reaching and encompassing all sectors of life and society, its potential for transformation is immense. It can help to alleviate poverty, ensure democracy, combat inequality and extremism, promote world peace and create better balance between developed and developing countries. It equips people to address and analyze power relations and potential conflicts of interest, and thus by extension establishes and fosters conditions that encourage an achievement of a good standard of living as human and social beings in a harmonious society, understand and respect themselves and others, tolerate difference and diversity, and remain consistently open to dialogue and new perspectives. Hence, lifelong learning can ultimately help to build and sustain inclusive societies.

Elements for broad policy discussion on how to make Lifelong Learning effective

The Faure Report (1972) proposed to use lifelong learning as guiding principles for the implementation of educational reforms. Under the present circumstances, how can lifelong learning be a guiding and organizing principle of education addressing issues of inclusion and integration? How can lifelong learning be considered among the basic priorities of education?

The following main core concepts could be discussed during the forty-eighth session of the International Conference on Education:

¹ World Education Forum Drafting Committee, *Expanded Commentary on the Dakar Framework for Action*. Paris, 23 May 2000, paragraph 19.

- Lifelong learning is essential and affordable. It is not only for rich countries. It can help poor countries address their educational and developmental challenges.
- Lifelong learning should be addressed at the “foundational” level and not the higher level of education. It requires two essential notions: *globality*, and most importantly *continuity*. It is therefore important to create bridges between the different levels of education.
- Lifelong learning entails integration-articulation and complementarity between different forms of education and consequently requires a system of recognition and validation of all types of learning.

REALIZING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION THROUGH APPLYING A RIGHT-BASED APPROACH TO EDUCATION¹

The right to education

The right to education is a fundamental human right, inhabiting a central place at the core of human rights, and is vital and indispensable for the realization of other human rights. The right to education is enshrined in a number of international documents of varying legal nature.

The right to education is essential to all economic, social and cultural rights. Achieving the right to education for all is thus one of the greatest moral challenges of our times. It is therefore crucial that the right to education in its various dimensions is incorporated in the constitutions and legislation of all Member States so that it is soundly enjoyed by individual rights-holders and by society as a whole.

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) defined state obligations linked to the right to education through identifying four key dimensions—availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability:

“(a) Availability – functioning educational institutions and programmes have to be available in sufficient quantity within the jurisdiction of the State party. What they require to function depends upon numerous factors, including the developmental context within which they operate; for example, all institutions and programmes are likely to require buildings or other protection from the elements, sanitation facilities for both sexes, safe drinking water, trained teachers receiving domestically competitive salaries, teaching materials, and so on; while some will also require facilities such as a library, computer facilities and information technology;

(b) Accessibility – educational institutions and programmes have to be accessible to everyone, without discrimination, within the jurisdiction of the State party. Accessibility has three overlapping dimensions:

- Non-discrimination: education must be accessible to all, especially the most vulnerable groups, in law and fact, without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds;

- Physical accessibility: education has to be within safe physical reach, either by attendance at some reasonably convenient geographic location (e.g., a neighbourhood school) or via modern technology (e.g., access to a "distance learning" programme);

- Economic accessibility: education has to be affordable to all. This dimension of accessibility is subject to the differential wording of article 13 (2) in relation to primary, secondary and higher education: whereas primary education shall be available "free to all", States parties are required to progressively introduce free secondary and higher education;

(c) Acceptability – the form and substance of education, including curricula and teaching methods, have to be acceptable (e.g. relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality) to students and, in appropriate cases, parents; this is subject to the educational objectives

¹ Document prepared by Sheldon Schaeffer, Director of the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.

required by article 13 (1) and such minimum educational standards as may be approved by the State (see art. 13 (3) and (4));

(d) Adaptability – education has to be flexible so it can adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities and respond to the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural settings.”

Why a right-based approach to education is required in order to realize a truly inclusive education system

All the four dimensions of the right to education are equally important for the creation of an inclusive education system. Linked to each dimension are varying numbers of obligations of the state in order to fulfil, protect and promote the right to quality education for all. Education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable for all in order to be truly inclusive.

A right-based approach to education includes three different but closely interlinked dimensions:

- *The right to education – Education should be granted to everyone without discrimination.*
- *Rights in education – Rights of learners should be respected within the learning environment and be reflected in curricula, materials and methodologies.*
- *Rights through education – Democratic values and respect for human rights should be promoted.*

These three dimensions are equally core aspects of the concept of inclusive education, visualizing a rights-based school where diversity is respected, celebrated and utilized for the benefit of all.

The human rights imperative of a rights-based approach means that particular focus is given to the root causes of discrimination, inequality and exclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups. These groups vary contextually but can include women and girls, ethnic minorities, learners with disabilities, indigenous peoples and others. Removing the barriers for participation to and in learning for all learners is at the core of the concept of inclusive education; thus, applying a human rights-based approach becomes fundamental for the sustainable realization of an inclusive education system.

Education for All (EFA) goal number 6 clearly states the need to improve all aspects of the quality of education. This includes a strong focus on the well-being of the learner, the relevance of content, and the achievement of individual and social learning goals. It also identifies the quality of learning processes and the learning environment as essential components. In order to realize the right to quality education for all learners, therefore, a comprehensive and holistic approach is required. Thus, inclusive education requires all aspects of the education system—and of individual schools—to be redesigned and reformed if we realistically aim to achieve quality education for all.

Implications for the education system

Applying a right-based approach to education in order to move towards inclusion will require comprehensive school system reform including modification of constitutional guarantees and policies, curricula, teacher training systems, materials, learning environments, methodologies, resource allocation, etc. Above all, it will require a change in attitudes of all people, throughout the system, to welcome diversity and difference and see these as opportunities rather than problems.

Inclusive education can be interpreted as an on-going process, in an ever-evolving education system, focusing on those currently excluded from accessing education as well as those in school but not learning. By applying a right-based approach towards achieving an inclusive education system, the process puts emphasis on those who are most marginalized and vulnerable, thus identifying those who are still excluded. It also leads to the identification of the underlying causes of exclusion and helps redress unequal power relations based on factors such as poverty and social injustice. The state and the education system will have to engage the marginalized groups that are facing barriers to and within education in order to empower the excluded to effect meaningful change in their lives and become change agents in their own lives.

Applying a human rights-based approach to education, focusing on inclusive education practices, requires the development of a comprehensive model addressing all aspects and levels of the education system. Issues related to availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability don't only apply to primary education but become equally important for early childhood care and education as well as for secondary and tertiary education. Furthermore, it is crucial to apply the approach to the non-traditional and non-formal delivery of education making sure that all forms of education, for all learners, are based on principles of non-discrimination and inclusion.

Policy formulation

Developing education policies that are based on the above principles is fundamental to the realization of every one of the EFA goals. Conducive political, economic and cultural environments are absolutely crucial in order to support the implementation of inclusive and human rights-based practices. Reaching the un-reached will require targeted policies that address discrimination and inequality in all aspects of the education system. Furthermore, these policies must promote inclusive learning practices in all learning environments through support of inclusive curricula, teacher training, management, etc.

Curriculum development

The curriculum is one of the most powerful tools to direct the content and scope of education available to the state authority. The curriculum should therefore be relevant to the lives of targeted learners and inclusive in its nature in order to guarantee a higher level of quality education. Principles of learner-centred methodologies and lifelong learning are required for successful implementation of inclusive practices in the learning environment. Human rights through education should be guaranteed through the curriculum. Human rights education, preferably taught as a subject as well as being mainstreamed in all other subjects, should be seen as a mean of realizing other human rights and fundamental for the

empowerment of learners to learn, live, and promote inclusive practices based on principles of non-discrimination and equality.

Teacher training

Teachers, school managers and mentors are the single most important components in the process of making an education system more inclusive. They have the sometimes overwhelming task of translating framework, policies and directives into practice while safeguarding the best interests of the child. The initial and continuous training and support of teachers are key strategies for the realization of an inclusive and right-based education system. Teachers are both duty bearers and rights holders within the framework for the right to education, and their empowerment to be able to assist the process of promotion and protection of the right to quality education for all is therefore very important. An inclusive education system is not only child-friendly in its nature but must also be teacher-friendly.

Materials development

Even if education is available and accessible, it doesn't mean that the education is relevant or of an acceptable quality. Based on the principles of equality and participation, all learning materials need to be accessible to all learners and the content made relevant to their situation. Education materials must be free of barriers to learning for all children which means that materials must be adapted to the individual needs of each learner. Some learners might need material in Braille while others need mother-tongue materials in order for them to be able to participate. In order to avoid exclusion from learning within the education system and remove discriminatory barriers, applying a rights-based approach to material development and design is fundamental in the process of creating an inclusive education system.

Attitudes, teaching methodologies and pedagogies

Above all the realization of an inclusive education system requires a paradigm shift towards more learner-centred and inclusive methodologies and pedagogies based on human rights principles of non-discrimination, equality and the best interests of the child. Teachers as the key change agents in the process towards inclusion and non-discrimination must be empowered to be able to actively remove barriers to and within learning.

Development of rights-based, child-friendly schools

A rights-based school, which reflects and helps children realize their rights, is essentially a child-friendly school—one which is not only academically effective but also inclusive of all children, healthy and protective of children, gender-responsive, and encouraging of the participation of the learners themselves, their families, and their communities. This requires, of course, solid support from the teachers and principals, but also the communities which surround the school. All must be able and willing to ensure the inclusion in the classroom and in learning not only their own children—not only the “average” child—but also other children with very diverse characteristics arising from sex and social economic status, ability/disability, language and ethnicity, etc.

Key issues and concerns

Can education systems that are not inclusive ever be free from discrimination and inequality?

Can applying a human rights-based approach help transform an education system and individual schools to become more inclusive through the redress of underlying reasons for exclusion? Can it transform as well relationships between teachers and learners in the classroom and school?

Can the right to, rights in, and rights through education ever be universally realized without removing barriers to and within the learning environment? Are compensating actions and mechanisms enough or is addressing the root causes for exclusion the only sustainable solution?

Conclusion

A holistic approach to educational reform is the only sustainable solution in order to achieve a right-based school system where all have access to quality education—that is, a school system, and individual schools, based on the principles of non-discrimination and inclusion.