

## SYNTHESIS REPORT OF WORKSHOPS 2

### **Sub-theme: Inclusive Education: Public Policies**

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### Different Perspectives

- Public policies addressing issues of poverty, marginality, inequality and child labour
- Implementation of public policies on inclusive education from an international comparative perspective
- Interfaces and synergies between policies on social inclusion, social protection and inclusive education, with special focus on the attainment of EFA goals
- The role of government and its partnerships with civil society and the private sector in implementing long-term public policies to broaden the concept of inclusive education

### Key Messages

- Public policy on inclusive education should go hand in hand with policies on social services, culture, language, health etc. Inclusion is not confined only to education. It should cut across other policies.
- While public policies should recognise the role of government as the main provider, parents and civil society should also be empowered to play the role.
- Inclusion should be grounded on human rights, supported by appropriate legislation that should recognise diversity both in the formal and non-formal sectors. We should work simultaneously on different levels on education and guarantee good legislation and national policy guidelines for inclusive education but at the same time take care of their implementation at regional, local and school level.

- Policies on inclusive education are not static or time-bound; they should be formulated and legislated within a comprehensive, holistic and long-term perspective. Moving towards inclusive education is a gradual process that will take its time both in developed and in developing countries. This process must be based on a sound and consistent policy. The way forward for inclusive education should be directed towards a rights based approach and a clear and strong vision. The rights based approach should include at least six principles:
  - social protection;
  - accessibility, not only physical accessibility but social awareness;
  - participatory decision making;
  - capacity building;
  - accountability: two-way accountability including school and society.
- Policies should recognise that diversity and respect for differences can and should improve quality of education. Policies should provide a basis for building the capacity of schools and educational institutions to be able to adapt to the range of learning needs, motivation and styles of all learners. Public policies should also provide for quality assurance in both public and private schools and learning institutions.
- Inclusion needs to be grounded in basic education and start as early as possible in the life of the child, especially in the context of increasing child labour. But we need to take care of the continuity of education at different levels as well.
- Attitudes are often the prime barrier, not resources. Public policies on inclusive education need wide support and input from all sectors of society – government, civil society, private sector, universities and research institutions, stakeholders and partners in development. These policies should be formulated through broad consultation processes and consensus-building engaging multi-sectoral/multi-stakeholder dialogue and participation. We also need to mobilise parent to parent network, teacher to teacher network and student to student network. We should foster a culture of dialogue in all our societies, thus creating more and better partnerships in the formulation and implementation of responsive inclusive education policies.
- While local control over financing education is considered desirable, there is a need to balance it by national policy that guarantees basic rights. The issue of competition, privatisation and decentralisation can be challenging. The impact of market-based education was discussed and challenging issues such as competition and tracking were raised.
- Public policies on inclusive education should commit the resources required to prepare and professionally support teachers and other education professionals who are key to quality education. Public policies on inclusive education should focus on common abilities and cognitive similarities, realistic ways of measuring achievement. This is especially important in poorer countries where teachers are in short supply, class sizes are large, school facilities and conditions lacking.
- Disaster risk reduction should be recognised as a crucial component of inclusive systems in that disasters are a main cause of exclusion, and disrupt the education process.

### Elements critical in promoting inclusion at the country level

- Legislation and policy
- Flexible systems and structures that cater for the most vulnerable
- Suitable infrastructure
- Curricula that promote multiple competencies and diversity
- Adapted pedagogy which includes customised teaching and tutoring
- Professional development of teachers
- Sufficient resources

### Issues of poverty, marginality, inequality and child labour as excluding factors to inclusive education

As we face a new world, that is emerging gradually with the present economic crisis, a better hope of a new society is also emerging as a result of our ability to be resilient in the face of new challenges and in the face of the enormous damage that a non-inclusive education can cause.

### Implementation of public policies on inclusive education from an international comparative perspective

Public policies on inclusive education should respect and embrace human rights and diversity of individuals, groups and communities; these policies should provide foundation and structure for meeting the learning needs of all learners at all ages irrespective of race, indigenous, ethnic, linguistic, or religious origins, gender, health, social or economic status. Schools and learning institutions should welcome all learners and be places where values, respect, tolerance and solidarity are shaped.

### Interfaces and synergies between policies on social inclusion, social protection and inclusive education

There is evidence in research and practice that there is no tension between equity and quality; inclusive education is not a threat to quality education. Research studies consistently show that inclusion does not have negative impact on learning and intervention methods for children with special needs will benefit all children. Experiences of countries like Finland prove the same too. Research has also shown that teacher is crucial for inclusive education; Teacher effectiveness is more important than other factors, such as class size, in achieving quality inclusive education.

### The role of government and its partnerships with civil society and the private sector in implementing long-term public policies to broaden the concept of inclusive education

The interventions highlighted the central role of the state in the promotion of inclusive education. It was emphasised that governments should maintain or pursue their regulatory function, with clear articulation of the responsibilities of the various stakeholders. Many participants expressed dissatisfaction over the current trend to commercialise educational

services, and stressed that education is a public good and therefore should not be considered as any other sector of the economy. It was also noted that education has a fundamental cultural role that helps shape national and local identities, and thus cannot be regarded as a mere transactional good. There were doubts on the potential of unregulated decentralisation and privatisation in increasing equal access to education, particularly having regard to the poorest and most vulnerable groups. Massification does not necessarily ensure democratisation of education: access does not always lead to success.

Inclusive education systems entail a paradigm shift that, while led by a strong government leadership, calls for broad participation and involvement of all stakeholders- including civil society and the private sector- at all stages of the process.

Public policies on inclusive education should be shared widely to create a global society committed to inclusive education, and supporting educators, schools and educational institutions in creating more effective education systems in more inclusive and democratic societies.

UNESCO has a leading role in developing better structured ways of addressing partnerships between the rich and poor countries, of its role of providing a clearing house for the different research papers and documents, for EFA to address the needs of education for all, including those that have special needs.