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**WORKING DOCUMENT**

**VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS BY COUNTRIES**

**CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION**

**WORKSHOP 2**

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: PUBLIC POLICIES**

Geneva, 7 November 2008

# **THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>**

## **1. Public policy for inclusive education is the primary instrument for building a world of inclusion, where diversity is recognized and respected.**

UNESCO defines inclusion as “a 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.” (1) This definition involves changes and modifications at the public policy level aimed at transforming education systems and other learning environments in order to respond to the diversity of learners.

In thinking about public policy the main question to consider is the crucial interdependence that exists between education and society. The need for the role of government can then be seen clearly through the allocation of resources and provisions of direction to the education system as a whole. It also means the coordination of related systems through enacting parallel and complementary legislation to support the changes planned for the education system. Therefore the role of governments is to facilitate consensus and put in place enabling legislation in the development and implementation of an increasingly stronger inclusive education system. A comprehensive legal framework with a clear plan of action constitutes an essential leverage for translating policies into effective and sustainable practices at all levels of the system. (2) When examining public policy, it is necessary to consider whose interests are being served by that policy and why? Public policy and regulations once enacted by a legislative body (provincial, territorial, federal or nation) will have to be adopted by local decision making bodies at school board and individual school levels as well as at the university and college levels responsible for teacher education, to give just two examples.

*Discussion: Public policy development for inclusive education is a long-term, dynamic process. What achievements have you made at the normative level, at the institutional level and in developing special instruments towards this end? What (Who) are the main drivers and enablers of change towards increased levels of inclusive education? What are some of the benefits of existing legislation? What are some of the barriers at the different levels of action and implementation? Lessons learned?*

## **2. Public policy for inclusive education should follow an inclusive process and be supported with inclusive policies in other areas of the social system.**

Public policy for an inclusive education system is difficult to implement where other related social systems remain exclusive. It is also easier to mobilize important actors and participants in related systems when the inclusive education policy is seen as a vehicle to bring about a more inclusive society through a more effective network of related and inter-dependent systems. Therefore all possible actors, stakeholders and communities should be included in the consultations for establishing public policy: different ministries and government departments (health, economy, justice, youth and social development, immigration to international relations to name a few) and teacher associations and unions, university professors associations and unions, various education professionals and their

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associations and unions , advocacy organisations, professional associations, researchers, administrators of educational systems, universities, communicators, the mass media and service providers.

*Discussion:* Does your policy-making process take into account the impact on and/or meets the needs of all people directly or indirectly affected by the policy? Do you involve key stakeholders directly? Is your approach holistic in looking beyond education authority boundaries to the government's strategic objectives for society as a whole? Have you established ethical, moral and legal bases for the policy process? Is there consideration of the appropriate management and organisational structures needed to deliver cross-cutting objectives? Lessons learned?

### **3. Basic to any society is upholding the rights of the citizen as a reflection of a just government.**

The education system is the primary instrument towards this end. Much of this is evidenced in the process of setting curriculum as well as the education program for the selection of teachers. Human Right to Education is at the core of inclusive education. On the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, research and practice inform us that a rights-based approach establishes the rules against all grounds for discrimination in education such as gender, disability, caste, ethnicity religion, race, economic status, refugee status, language etc. Such an approach is founded upon three principles: a) Access to free and compulsory education; b) equality, inclusion and non-discrimination; c) the right to quality education supported by concrete conditions, inputs, processes and outcomes. (3)

*Discussion:* What are some of the achievements at the policy level in ensuring the three principles mentioned above? What are the drivers, enablers and barriers in each case? What are the benefits of successful implementation? Lessons learned?

### **4. Resource allocation by government and provision of new knowledge by universities.**

By way of its resource allocation, the government assumes a controlling role in the results planned for the system. In turn, the education system at the post secondary level exercises a degree of autonomy from government and influences government. Thus universities are creators and disseminators of new knowledge and skills essential to the continued survival and well being of the state. They analyze and examine the effectiveness of implementation of policies and they monitor societal changes and impacts related to inclusive education while providing new directions through curriculum research and teacher education programs.

*Discussion:* In general, senior service personnel in governments exercise the role of the prime source of policy advice. Other sources are universities and research institutes. Who are other controlling forces in your experience? Lessons learned?

### **5. Inclusive education policies for life long learning serve to complement inclusive education policies at the school level.**

In order to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive education policies, governments should enact policies guaranteeing life-long inclusive education for all

individuals, professionals practicing in the field of education and most importantly for those students who are preparing to enter the teaching profession. For any educational policy to be effective the support of the social system including all actors in all sectors is essential.

*Discussion: Are different levels of formal and informal education linked through your policy process to provide continuity and facilitate life long learning opportunities towards the effective implementation of inclusive education policies? Do you ensure the collaboration of citizens, stakeholders, and decision makers at all levels? Lessons learned?*

## **6. Inclusive education is a “public good” to be protected by an irreplaceable government mission and responsibility against regulations by market forces in a globalized world.**

The Dakar Forum asserted that “Education is everyone’s business”. The legal framework under which this can be realized in a cohesive manner is the business of the government authority responsible for education in each member state. Education ministries and competent authorities have to display strong leadership because society entrusts education systems with socialization and transformation roles. Even where radical legislative reform is not desirable or practicable, guidelines and statements of principles at the government level can generate debate, raise awareness and bring about consensus based changes in structures and practices leading towards a strengthened system of inclusive education. (4)

Cultural and linguistic diversity are integral building blocks of inclusive education policies. The role of governments is to help maintain such diversity and the rich legacies of local communities. At the very minimum, the role of government is to develop legislative and regulatory instruments to guarantee the right to quality education for all (with or without private funding and for both public and private-not-for-profit contexts.) The value of a society and its image as a just society are reflected in the way it treats its minorities and marginalized populations and guarantees them equal and equitable access to all its resources: economic, social, political and cultural, including education.

*Discussion: To what extent does the policy process in place in your country ensure the protection and the flourishing of cultural and linguistic diversity? What specific measures have been taken to protect the public good from market forces in a globalized world for your citizens?*

*Lessons learned?*

## **7. Choosing a public policy process for inclusive education means valuing diversity and opting to build and strengthen an inclusive society.**

Inclusion means adopting a broad vision of “Human Rights Based Quality Education for All” in systemic and systematic efforts to build sustainable communities and societies. Valuing diversity does not mean sacrificing human rights or accepting cultural relativism arguments in honouring these rights. Several international conventions have advanced this philosophy through the leadership of UNESCO and can serve as solid bases for guiding policy and related strategies for practice.

*Discussion: By signing international conventions and treaties related to the right to education, governments acquire a legal obligation to provide, promote and protect the right*

*to education for all. These obligations should ensure that education is available, accessible, of quality and adaptable while ensuring the indivisibility of human rights as guidance to enhance all human rights through education. What are the success stories? What are the next steps towards this aim? Lessons learned?*

## **8. Inclusive education and five main international instruments:**

- These instruments provide valuable policy guidelines and application strategies:
- The convention against discrimination in Education (1960)
  - The convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)
  - The convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
  - The Dakar Framework for Action (2000)
  - United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

*Discussion: Are all of the above international instruments integrated in your policy making process? If not, why not? Have you integrated other international instruments leading to full inclusion for all? Which ones? Lessons learned?*

## **9. Public policy is developed in complex contexts to facilitate responding to and finding consensus based solutions to quite diverse and difficult problems.**

In principle, public policy seeks to effect compromise between basic social values in tension. Maintaining a healthy diversity in society is a challenging mandate. The main threat is one of polarization and misunderstandings which perpetuate such polarizations in society. Public Policy should therefore strive to establish and strengthen genuine communication. An inclusive education vision requires action in community and with different communities making up the systems governing society.

In order to learn to live together, to learn to live with others, we should respect “the other”. Research results document that fear, guilt and scapegoating are among the most common causes leading to hostile reaction and exclusion. Fear takes the form of insecurity about oneself when confronted with disability of one kind or another. Guilt may be another reason – many in the majority or the power holding group feel guilty towards certain groups and their suffering and they refuse to even acknowledge their existence. Or having acknowledged such diversity, resort to a network of private schools (or residential schools) isolating themselves from these groups who are part of the same society. This is the situation with many members of mainstream society towards different ethnic groups and aboriginal groups. Scapegoating is another source for exclusion especially in recent ethnic cleansing situations. (5)

Public policy for inclusive education involves recognizing, defining and analyzing the complex interplay between individuals and groups of individuals and well ingrained belief systems and values. Usually there are very well established hierarchical structures that sustain the system to be changed at all levels, and in particular at the level of the school boards and schools administrations. These structures have to be transformed through a

reformed system of shared responsibility and cooperation supported by strong enabling legislation and policy.

*Discussion: What are the main factors creating tension and polarization in the process of implementing inclusive education policies? What are effective communication and consensus building strategies and instruments in your experience? Lessons learned?*

#### **10. Another important role of the competent government authorities is to monitor the impact of public policy and related strategies and action plans on inclusive education.**

In this process, it is important to ensure the necessary human resources and adequate budgets attached to recommendations of the policy action plan and each subsequent change brought to this plan. The role of government authorities (Country, State, Province, Region, local, school boards or school administration or other competent entity) responsible for education policy is to ensure that the public policy process, its action plan and the choices made at each level in the system guarantee the right of every individual under their area of authority to have support for just and equal access, participation and success at all levels of education: from basic education to post secondary education to life long learning in formal, informal and non-formal settings. The successful public policy process should mobilise the collaboration of all related systems and groups of actors in the networks covered. Such choices should benefit from extensive public debate and evidence-based strategic research to inform policy.

*Discussion: Is systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of policy built into the policy making process? Are there success criteria defined and means of evaluation built into the policy making process from the outset? Have you encountered any problems in this area of the policy process for inclusive education? Lessons learned?*

#### **11. Strategic evidence-based research responsive to policy needs for inclusive education.**

If the purpose of policy is to bring about change and transformation, then the central task becomes one of finding and influencing those variables and actors which have transformative properties and virtues. “Policy research is the process of conducting research on, or analysis of, a fundamental social problem in order to provide policymakers with pragmatic, action-oriented recommendations for alleviating the problem.” (6) Policy oriented action research is a process which requires the identification of different stakeholders and actors at different levels of government and related education systems, the construction of a shared understanding and vision of the problem under consideration, appropriate communication strategies, wide-ranging partnerships and dialogue, consultation and negotiation among different levels and actors involved in the problem area or related systems. This means conducting action research targeted to problem areas in the implementation of the action plan for inclusive education. It is based on the production of evidence through research in collaboration with wider society, including parents, pupils, teachers, practitioners, professionals and policy makers. In the area of curriculum for example, it goes beyond centralized curriculum imposition to mobilizing local resources, expertise and strategies in order to achieve common learning outcomes specified by an inclusive education policy and supporting legislation for building and strengthening an inclusive society.

Public Policy related to inclusive education is a most dynamic process. With changes in different systems of society, reform and transformation of existing legal frameworks for ensuring a strong inclusive education become necessary. The legal framework for inclusive education addresses the spectrum of all learners, including those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion based on physical, social, economic, political and other considerations. It includes anticipation and planning to meet new needs which may arise due to changes in inter-related systems. This is why a holistic approach is necessary.

*Discussion: Do policy makers have access to available research results? Do you normally commission new research before planning new changes? Do you consult experts, stakeholders and internal and external consultants, national, regional and international consultants? Public policy is a most dynamic process. How much are you influenced by research results? What are other important drivers for change? Lessons learned?*

## **12. Indicators and data used to inform inclusive education policies.**

The research literature highlights the increasingly global scope of the inclusive education approach. The UNESCO /IBE regional workshops and conferences have provided a world map of inclusive education: In general awareness is high in the United States, Canada and Western Europe and the practice is most comprehensive and well established and supported in Scandinavian countries. It is increasingly discussed in Latin America and in Sub-Saharan Africa where adapted models are emerging. Its potential is increasingly recognized (with some reservations) in Asia, Eurasia and the Community of Independent States (CIS), the Arab States and Eastern Europe. Academic research (produced by universities and Research Institutes) in this area is slow in development. Most articles emanating from academic circles tend to focus on educational activities and pedagogies at the level of the school system and issues related to cognitive and social development of the participants in these types of schools. Research linking national policy to local policy can make important contributions for identifying strategies that produce positive results. For example, inclusive education has been combined with educational planning through the use of participative budgets in Brazil and in India and in some North American cities. (7)

There is general support in the research literature for the importance of early childhood education and a better articulation between primary and secondary level schooling. Further research is needed for identifying factors creating transition problems from primary education to secondary education. Comparative research on the implementation of inclusive education around the world is also needed to better understand the factors that stimulate awareness raising debate in many countries and reluctance in others. Some serious reservations are expressed about increased standardized testing (Caribbean region); categorization of those who are excluded which may result in the stigmatization of the groups belonging to these categories (Latin America, Southern and Andean Region); and how schools are now moulded and defined according to a demand for schooling instead of responding to social and knowledge needs. There is a general observation as well that the education systems have opened access to previously excluded groups but the outcome gaps are wider and exacerbate the reality of exclusion. Further comparative research, by academics and UNESCO and its institutes and IBE, is needed to raise awareness internationally of the important influences on the development and applications of inclusive education at all levels of the system. This comparative perspective may constitute the incentive needed for adopting inclusive education programmes in many countries. Research results linking inclusive education impacts to inclusive practices in the realm of taxation,

employment, urbanization, rural policies, social security and elimination of child labour may raise awareness levels and provide further incentives for implementation of inclusive education.

*Discussion:* What is the role of UNESCO and IBE research and training in helping along with the development of inclusive education policies and their advancement in your country? Do you have recommendations for improving the impact of this role? Lessons learned?

### **13. Current dimensions of the phenomenon of exclusion from and within education.**

UNESCO and research institutes of member countries have produced, over the past fifty years, documents which present in detail the past history and the current dimensions of the phenomenon of exclusion from and within education. These include people living in poverty, extreme poverty, in rural and remote areas, nomads, ethnic and linguistic minorities, working children, abandoned children, young people and adults affected by conflict, natural and man induced emergency and post traumatic situations, prisoners, working children, societal members of all ages with special learning needs, those in poor health, affected by HIV and AIDS, in chronic care situations and the hungry. There is a rich discussion in the research literature about the use of diversified and inclusive indicators and data to inform inclusive education policies. Once again, the outcomes aimed for are agreed upon. The delicate balance between the vision and what is possible is very much grounded in the realities and opportunities available in the context of each government. Exclusion within education is perpetuated by lack of needed competencies by teachers, attitudes, resource limitations, heavy reliance on standardized testing and accountability based on these, lack of qualified professionals in related areas. It is increasingly understood that involving universities and teacher education institutions and colleges is of utmost importance. This rapprochement through action research may facilitate extending the reach of inclusive education to PSE institutions.

*Discussion:* In what area is the gap the widest between the political will, the research and the implementation of effective policies for inclusive education? Lessons learned and recommendations?

### **14. Inclusive education issues that have been, are, or are going to be relevant for educational policies in different countries**

Themes and reports emerging from the regional preparatory conferences leading to the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE conference in November 2008 are a good reflection of the diversity of inclusive education issues that are and will become the focus for educational policies in each member country and each region. There is a general consensus emerging that education is a human right and a facilitator for social cohesion. Nevertheless there are questions related to the inclusion of children with disabilities in East Asia and some CIS and African countries. Some of the questions are related to pedagogical and quality education issues, other questions are related to lack of financial resources or proper teacher education for effective functioning and management of inclusive classrooms. But once again financial restraints prevent the effective implementation of such plans.

a) All countries will face inclusive education issues created by the proliferation of private, for profit and not-for-profit educational enterprises competing with the national/local authorities competent in the provision of public education. Cross-border, distance education services

that are purely market products are threats to the reinforcement of cultural and linguistic diversity and social cohesion to build an inclusive society as illustrated in the “Appeal” launched by the May 23, 2008 seminar held in Brussels, Belgium. (8)

b) Influx of large numbers of economic, political and environmental refugees will further tax educational systems of member countries and will become increasingly the focus of special attention by education authorities in order to maintain societal cohesion and inclusion.

c) HIV/AIDS and general health problems, the female child and related gender issues including diverse sexual orientations, children with disabilities, amputees in the aftermath of war and conflict, orphans and survivors of ethnic cleansing, minorities (ethnic, language, religion), migrant children and refugees, are at the forefront of the preoccupations in the Asia Pacific Region as well as the Commonwealth of Independent Republics (CIS)

d) Many countries still face serious challenges for attaining education for all. Awareness campaigns are giving results but because the necessary financial resources as well as teachers, curricula and textbooks are not available making progress towards inclusive education remains a distant and elusive vision. Common barriers of exclusion include among others: lack of resources and data, lack of trained teachers and staff, lack of clear educational/curricular guidelines addressing diversity, insufficient family involvement, gender inequalities, financial burdens of educational reforms, geographical remoteness, regional disparities, on-going or post-conflict problems in many regions etc.

e) Even in those countries where inclusive education is a reality in general, there are still children and young people who do not have access to education. Other excluded children are those who drop out of the system early without having attained a school leaving diploma. Most often a great number of children with special needs (physical and mental handicaps) are excluded due to lack of human resources and a large number of children and adolescents at risk or for whom teaching and learning do not meet their needs and their hopes. To give an example from a North American context, aboriginal students, students with physical, emotional, mental and learning challenges, newly-arrived immigrant students, visible minority students and students from lower socio-economic groups are most at risk of exclusion.

*Discussion: Which of the above five areas presents a priority concern and focus of attention for you and why? Are there other areas of greater concern than the five mentioned here? Have you adopted proactive policy measures to mitigate the negative impacts? Lessons learned?*

### **15. Groups that are considered to be most vulnerable to various forms of exclusion from and within education and some excluded groups that current policies have yet to take into account.**

Females – child and adult – as well as children and adults with disabilities continue to be the most vulnerable and represent the highest percentage in almost all groups affected by the different forms of exclusion from and within education. How societies and legislations construct and respond to disability, gender, race and cultural differences is of major importance. There is also the situation of HIV/AIDS infected children, orphans and displaced persons in zones of war and armed conflict, amputees, genocide and ethnic cleansing (recent or historical) survivors. Increasingly governments will be faced with urgent demands for providing quality education for those afflicted by emergencies caused by environmental degradation and breaking down of social ties and networks. Tomasevski, in research published in 2003 lists 44 categories of excluded children in an itemized list from A to W. (9)

*Discussion: Have you made major advances in ensuring equal rights to education for female children and for children with disabilities? What are the results you can illustrate? What are obstacles? Lessons learned?*

## **16. Ways in which current educational reforms address inclusive education**

Issues related to curriculum reform and teacher education are the focus of attention in many countries through their recent efforts for Quality Education. (Reports from the 47<sup>th</sup> ICE on the theme of Quality Education on the UNESCO/IBE/ICE website). This approach is concerned with the need to ensure that learning opportunities contribute to effective inclusion of individual and groups into the wider fabric of society. It is about seeing differences as opportunities for learning in a context of diversity of approaches, flexibility of teachers, and textbooks promoting inclusive values, among others. It is about providing equal learning opportunities to all children in the regular education system. It also means equal access for all participants in the system to the four pillars advanced by the Delors Report (10): Learning to know, 2) learning to do, 3) learning to live together, learning to live with others and 4) learning to be. In working towards the dream for which UNESCO was created 60 years ago, it is important that we conceive education in a more encompassing, inclusive fashion for valuing diversity and cohesive societies locally and globally living in peace. The Delors report shows us the new pathways to inform and guide future educational reforms and policy, in relation both to contents and to methods. It points to the importance of lifelong learning starting from the acquisition of reading, writing and arithmetic, and developing new insights through the arts, the social sciences, the pure and applied sciences and better cultural communications rich with diversity and building peace locally and globally.

Furthermore, current educational reforms related to Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) continue to provide great opportunities to advance the Inclusive Education agenda at the policy and practice level. Inclusion involves adopting a broad vision of EFA by addressing the spectrum of needs of all learners, including those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. The development of child friendly learning environments is an essential part of the overall efforts by countries round the world to increase access to, and improve the quality of their schools. Furthermore, this approach has raised awareness about the importance of making education inclusive on a life long basis to give a chance to adult parents to participate in the process. It has also raised awareness of the importance of increased collaboration with and participation in the higher education institutions, colleges, technical institutes and universities.

Exclusion from meaningful participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of communities is one of the greatest problems facing individuals in society today. Knowledge and education are increasingly considered as key factors in sustainable development and economic growth. Inclusive Education is therefore very central in the process towards achieving the MDGs. For the MDG process inclusive education is a vehicle in providing conceptual and empirical foundations for a just society and active citizenship, a key to advance the economic and social policy process, a main factor to reduce poverty and marginality under a long-term vision, a way of contributing to establish a solid basis of cultural and social integration in a country and a region as well as a crucial factor for facilitating an intelligent, authentic and productive integration of national societies in a globalized world.

*Discussion: In your area of authority, does the policy process towards inclusive education establish links with sustainable development goals? Do you establish clear links with the Millennium Development Goals? Lessons learned and recommendations?*

### **References :**

*Please note that the text is heavily rooted in the preparatory documents for the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE on the theme of Inclusive Education as appearing on the UNESCO/IBE/ICE web-sites. With this note, I am opting to omit the listing of the documents to save time and paper. Below, please find references that are specific to the paper:*

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