



Executive summary

East Asia Workshop on Inclusive Education (Hangzhou, China, 2-5 November 2007)

Governmental representatives, policy makers, researchers and educators from China, Mongolia, Japan and Republic of Korea as well as representatives of the organizers, UNESCO Headquarters and UNICEF Beijing, regional experts invited by UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF Beijing attended the workshop (25 participants). There were also about 20 local elementary and secondary school principals participating as observers. It was co-organized by IBE-UNESCO, UNESCO Bangkok, UNESCO Beijing, UNESCO National Commission of China, and the Department of Education, Provincial Government of Zhejiang.

The discussions mainly focused on the definition of the term of “inclusive education” and the necessity of such a term. Until now, “inclusive education” has been limited to the domain of the traditional special needs education. There are also language barriers for widening the use of the term. All participants agreed that measures should be taken so that the new meaning of inclusive education can be disseminated. It is also suggested that a new term, such as “new inclusive education”, be created so that it will not be in conflict with the traditional meaning of inclusive education. Participants pointed out that in terms of equality, more social policy should be implemented to reduce social inequality and poverty levels at the regional and national levels. Cases of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) in Mongolia, Thailand and China, advocated by UNICEF, were presented during the workshop as a good means of implementing the ideas of Inclusive Education. It is unanimously agreed that CFS is indeed a good means for IE.

The main challenges appear to be related to: (i) the concept of inclusive education being alien to Asia and thus difficult to adapt to the local conditions and its policy framework; (ii) misgivings of this new term seen as creating a completely new education system, which will cause uncertainty and disorder among the various stakeholders; (iii) some questioned the necessity of so many new terms and the confusion it might cause; (iv) the cost of inclusive education being major fear as it is deemed that including severely impaired children in different mainstream schools is more costly than concentrating them in a special institution; (v) the argument that under certain conditions, a special school can provide a better service; (vi) the fact that teachers should be given more training and incentive to training in Special Education Needs to better satisfy the needs of different groups of children with special needs, such as children with severe impairment, with single parent, etc.

A regional roadmap was constructed during the last session of the workshop, combining the inputs of participants, particularly the representatives from the four countries. The roadmap, as a regional strategy, encompassing the above mentioned challenges and proposals, addresses operational aspects of inclusive education in relation to curriculum development; improvement of teacher training (and particularly the training of head teachers) and schools as educational and social institutions; inter-sectoral legislation and inter-departmental cooperation covering all aspects of inclusive education; reallocation of public resources towards more equitable goals of social justice, such as tax-reduction for donations to education; and the role of UNESCO supporting the right for a quality education for all, life-long learning with the necessary skills to exercise freedom and increasing individuals' capacities to choose.

The workshop outcomes will be shared through the National Commissions with Ministers. It is proposed that national preparatory workshops be held to better prepare for the contribution to the 48th ICE.