

CONFERENCE ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

3 – 4 JULY 2013
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

DISMANTLING EXCLUSION TO ENABLE INCLUSION

Introduction

Delegates from Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe met to discuss inclusive education in the Southern African Development Community on 3 and 4 July 2013 in Johannesburg, South Africa. In attendance were also the Ministers of Education from Zimbabwe and Malawi, as well as the Deputy Ministers of Education from Mozambique and South Africa.

International and regional treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, places an obligations on States Parties to these treaties to develop and implement inclusive education systems that would benefit all children and learners, including children with disabilities. The World Report on Disability of 2011 estimates that approximately 15% of the world's population live with impairment.

Preamble:

Recalling our commitment to ensure that children in Africa are able to enjoy their rights in full;

Recalling further the commitment by all the Millennium Development Goals and especially the goal in relation to the Education For All by 2015;



Recalling further the Ezulwini, Swaziland Call to Action Statement on Education for Children with Disabilities agreed upon during 2012;

Recognising that despite the various challenges, inclusive education should be pursued and implemented;

Acknowledging that children and youth with disabilities are over-represented in the out of school population, as well as over-representation in poverty and under-development of rural areas; and

Emphasising the importance of inclusive education in the cognitive as well as psychosocial development, quality of life and upholding the human dignity of persons with disabilities;

We the participants at this conference recommend:

1. To the Southern African Development Community (SADC)

- Develop a position paper on the role of inclusive education as part of SADC's regional integration strategy;
- Propose the adoption of a strong and well-consulted Southern Africa Regional Inclusive Education Strategy, together with a blueprint on the implementation of inclusive education at the next SADC Meeting of Education Ministers;
- Act as a coordinating body that would communicate and discuss good practice and challenges in the implementation of inclusive education by Member States in the region;
- Develop a regional database of disaggregated statistics and information with accurate and up-to-date information that is easily accessible (by type of disability, age and gender); and
- Ensure that the SADC Parliamentary Forum act as an effective oversight mechanism in the implementation of a strong regional strategy on inclusive education.



2. To Member States of SADC

- Allocate sufficient and sustainable financial and other resources to the implementation of inclusive education and in this regard place a moratorium on the creation of new segregated schools and redirect resources to the creation of inclusive schools and/ or strengthening existing inclusive schools;
- Raise the proportion of GDP expenditure in relation to education to cater for learners with disabilities within the mainstream school system to ensure inclusivity;
- Support non-governmental organisations, disabled-persons' organisations and parents of children with disabilities to deliver essential services in providing support to inclusive education systems;
- Implement training of school leaders, teachers and support staff through accredited, on-going in-service and pre-service training on inclusive education and training of teachers in Sign Language and Braille, and the introduction of sign language interpreters in mainstream schools and inclusive schools;
- Put mechanisms in place to address the high drop-out rate of learners and out of school children and youth with disabilities;
- Develop, implement and support country plans and performance indicators on inclusive education that are based on SMART principles; and
- Conduct effective oversight on the implementation of inclusive education by national and regional Parliaments, human rights commissions and non-governmental organisations.
- Provide Early Childhood Development services to ensure that children with disabilities are included at an early stage of education and to detect and diagnose any disability that a child might have at an early stage.



3. Communities and Families

- Respect the rights and dignity of all children within a community. In this regard, communities and families need to realise the importance of education for all children, which includes children with disabilities;
- Acknowledge and address the myths and traditional belief systems that would encroach on the rights and livelihood of children with disabilities;
- There is a need for communities and families to dispel all negative attitudes, such as low or no expectations of education for children with disabilities, as these attitudes serve as barriers to accessing education; and
- Families should be empowered to advocates for their children with disabilities and should be at the forefront of lobbying for the inclusion of all children into neighbourhood mainstream schools.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is not an entirely new concept in Africa, as it has its roots in the principles of Ubuntu. It is also codified in the provisions of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the African Union Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended during 2012 that all States Parties to the Charter should develop and implement policy frameworks to realise inclusive education.

The implementation of inclusive education is initially costly, while dual systems are in place. However, once the transition from dual to one system has taken place, it will bring costs down. Evidence also exists of cost-effective ways in which one can implement inclusive education.

It is for these reasons that we recommend that Members States of SADC prioritise the development and implementation of inclusive education as the only ethical option for appropriate schooling for all children.