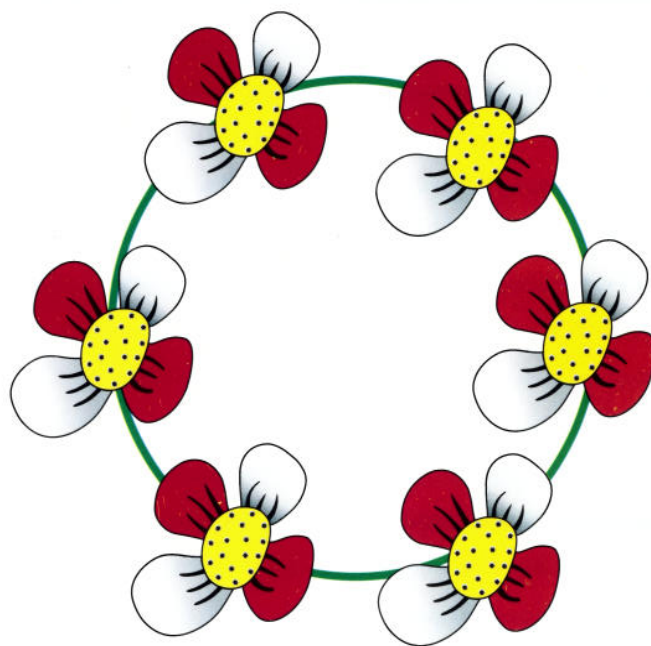


# CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

**TOWARDS  
INCLUSIVE  
EDUCATION  
IN  
SOUTH  
ASIA**



## CONSOLIDATED REPORT

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## FOREWORD

The obstacles to a good education faced by millions of children in South Asia are daunting enough. For the 10 per cent of the region's young people who are estimated to have some kind of disability, the barriers are compounded. The UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia has looked at examples in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka of how such children are given schooling, and whether this is the type of education they have the right to expect. The result is a very mixed bag indeed.

Overall it is clear that large numbers of children who struggle daily with additional hardships are not getting the chance to improve their lives through education. This means, of course, that they are caught in a spiral of low expectation, low esteem and low income.

The minority of children with disabilities who do get places are often not sitting in the same classroom as other girls and boys because of a sense that they need to be separated and treated differently. Globally it is estimated that 70 per cent of children with disabilities, including those with mild mental retardation, can attend regular schools provided the environment is designed to be accessible and the institution is willing to accommodate them.

UNICEF believes that the goal should be to enable all children to have full participation in the development of their community. Meeting this goal of inclusion requires all structures and community-based services to be accessible to all members of the community without discrimination.

By pulling together the initiatives being undertaken by governments, I/NGOs, and UN agencies, the examples of practices that have proved effective in addressing education of children with disabilities, and ideas captured in the five country documents, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia hopes that this document will be the starting point for policies and practices, both nationally and as a region, that will enable more children with disabilities to receive schooling.

As we work to fulfil the Millennium Development Goal of 'Education for All', I would urge that the exclusion of the challenged child be specifically addressed with initiatives aimed at ending prejudice and isolation.

Cecilia Lotse  
UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia

# CONTENTS

ACRONYMS .....	i
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	ii
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Objectives of the study.....	2
1.3 Methodology .....	3
2. CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN SOUTH ASIA.....	5
2.1 School enrolments of children with disabilities .....	5
2.2 Societal attitudes towards disability .....	6
3. POLICY INITIATIVES AND LEGISLATION ON DISABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA.....	9
3.1 Global commitments to the rights of children with disabilities .....	9
3.2 Legislations and policies on disability in South Asia .....	12
4. RESOURCE ALLOCATION FOR EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES .....	14
5. EVOLUTION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES .....	16
6. KEY FINDINGS.....	22
6.1 Early childhood development programmes.....	22
6.2 Community-based rehabilitation programmes .....	24
6.3 Teacher development initiatives .....	26
6.4 Inclusive schools.....	28
7. LESSONS LEARNED .....	37
7.1 Developing a clear understanding about inclusive practice .....	37
7.2 Inadequate policies for sustainable implementation.....	37
7.3 Starting inclusive education initiatives and managing change in schools .....	38
7.4 Strengthening school–parent–community links.....	40
8. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	41
8.1 Establishing policies.....	41
8.2 Coordination among ministries .....	41

8.3 Regular surveys .....	42
8.4 Redirecting functioning of special schools .....	42
8.5 Creating positive attitudes.....	42
8.6 Forging meaningful partnerships .....	43
8.7 Supportive curriculum and teaching–learning materials.....	43
8.8 Training of teachers .....	43
8.9 Alternative support mechanisms .....	44
8.10 Orientation programmes for key persons.....	44
8.11 Identification and assessment of learning outcomes.....	44
8.12 Developing appropriate tools for evaluation.....	44
8.13 Role of parents’ organizations in teaching–learning processes .....	45
8.14 Government, NGO and donor equation .....	45
8.15 Managing resources .....	46
REFERENCES .....	47

## ACRONYMS

AID	Action in Development (Bangladesh)
CBR	Community-Based Rehabilitation
CDD	Centre for Disability in Development (Bangladesh)
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme (India)
DRC	District Rehabilitation Centre (India)
DRG	District Resource Group (India)
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services (India)
IE	Inclusive Education
IEDC	Integrated Education for Disabled Children (India)
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MTSP	Medium Term Strategic Plan (UNICEF)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPRPD	National Programme for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disability (India)
PIED	Project for Integrated Education for Disabled (India)
SE	Special Education
SPO	State Project Office (India)
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan ('Movement to Educate All'; India)
UCEP	Underprivileged Children's Education Programme (Bangladesh)
UEE	Universalization of Elementary Education (India)
UPE	Universalization of Primary Education
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFFC	World Fit for Children

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Children with disabilities are often the most marginalized within society in general and in education systems in particular. They face challenges of prejudice, social isolation and discrimination in society and are deprived of full social and economic participation. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) declares the rights of disabled children to enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions that promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. The limitations on the educational opportunities available to these children are one of the considerations underpinning the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The Salamanca Declaration (1994) emphasizes that the regular classroom is the best place to safeguard the right of education for children with special educational needs. The process of including children with disabilities in mainstream classes as a way of addressing and responding to individual learning needs has been accepted as the preferred method for providing education for the majority of children with disabilities.

The right to education and access to quality education, which are key components of CRC and several other international agreements, are also affirmed by all South Asian countries. The UNICEF Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) for the period 2002–2005, in line with the CRC, spells out that a long-term goal of UNICEF is that 'all children have access to and complete an education of good quality'. While progress has been made in providing access to education for most children in virtually all countries in the South Asia region within the goal of Education for All, overall enrolments of children with disabilities have not enjoyed a comparable increase.

Inclusive education (IE) initiatives in the South Asia region have been promoted recently on a relatively small scale, with some examples of practices showing success. With the belief that a comprehensive review and analysis of these initiatives would serve as an advocacy tool for promoting inclusive education, this report draws on a series of examples of special needs and inclusive education initiatives in five countries in South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). The models include initiatives in inclusive schooling, community-based programmes, teacher development programmes and early childhood development interventions promoting inclusive education.

This report has been prepared based on the information provided in the country reports. An attempt is made to analyse the status of special and inclusive education in South Asian countries in terms of social realities of disabilities, national legislation and policies related to meeting the educational needs of children with disabilities, and educational practices for disabled children over the years. The synthesis of the country examples includes the mechanisms and strategies that have been critical to the successful implementation of inclusive

education initiatives. The concerns and constraints in the implementation of inclusive education have also been identified. Based on the lessons learned, recommendations are made from policy and practice perspectives to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities in an inclusive education environment.

The analysis of policies and practices on education for children with special educational needs reveals that although 'special education' has been well defined in South Asia, inclusive education has been adopted more 'in principle', with limited implications and practice. The lack of clear policies and guidelines for inclusive education, and the scepticism and debates concerning its implementation, has resulted in very slow progress in the region. One of the common features of inclusive education has been the concentration of the existing limited services for children with disabilities in cities or district headquarters. The majority of children with disabilities who live in rural areas therefore do not benefit from these services. At the same time, those regular schools that have accommodated children with disabilities have done so by setting up special units and resource rooms, posing barriers to inclusive practice. The need for a clearer understanding of, and policies for, inclusive education is therefore apparent.

The role of NGOs in responding to the educational needs of children with disabilities and in initiating practices of inclusive education has been established much earlier and been more pronounced than that of governments. The fact that children with disabilities have been under the responsibility of more than one ministry in many of the South Asian countries has negatively affected the early response to address the educational needs of disabled children. It has also resulted in limitations in planning, resource allocation and implementation of special educational practices. The country reports point to the need for improved coordination between the different ministries as well as NGOs and other agencies for the effective implementation of inclusive education, and for the education of disabled children to be mainly the responsibility of education departments/ministries. This effective coordination needs to extend to sub-national levels with the local government agencies encouraging the formation of partnerships between schools, parent groups, community leaders, NGOs and professional groups.

The country reports point to a lack of consistent data on the numbers and educational status of children with disabilities and on their types of disability, making it difficult to understand the nature of the problem and make realistic interventions. There is, therefore, a need to carry out comprehensive surveys, on a regular basis, with the help of trained personnel to identify how many children with disabilities there are, both in and out of school, and to understand the nature of their disabilities and their needs. Care should also be taken to ensure that there is flexibility in policy implementation wherever possible so that the special needs of children with different types of disability can be addressed.



Inclusive education is more successfully implemented if complemented by two other main initiatives. Preparing disabled children through early childhood development centres on the one hand provides the means for early detection and identification of the disability and thus interventions, and on the other hand increases their chance to be mainstreamed into regular schools with learning outcomes close to their non-disabled peers. Similarly, linking inclusive education with community-based rehabilitation programmes expands the scope of inclusive education by enabling early identification of disability, creating awareness, encouraging accessibility, mobilizing support from parents and community, and enabling provision of support to teachers through training and teaching–learning materials.

Practice in the region also suggests that adequate attention has to be paid to infrastructure development, enabling accessibility to a child-friendly environment, professional training of the teaching staff and use of appropriate teaching–learning methods. The teaching–learning processes in the countries have addressed the individual learning needs of children in only a limited way due to constraints of time and financial resources and lack of training in multiple disabilities.

Curriculum, which is central to the process of inclusion, is often prescribed at the national or central level in the countries of South Asia. There is a need to find ways to ensure that the curriculum is flexible and responsive so that the school or the individual teacher can make modifications to suit the local context and accommodate the needs of the individual. The school curriculum is also a good place to include issues related to disabilities, to remove any negative attitudes towards children with disabilities from the early years.

The countries of the region do not have adequate numbers of skilled and trained personnel for supporting inclusive practice to meet the needs of different types of disabilities. The existing handful of teachers lacks the necessary competency to work with children with disabilities, and in particular with children with mental retardation and multiple disabilities, at school level because of the necessity to modify the teaching methodology and learning materials to make them more child-friendly. In addition to specialized teachers being trained, regular teachers at pre-service and in-service levels should also be trained to address the issue of education of children with disabilities so that they can be better equipped to work in an inclusive environment. Similarly, the small number of teacher trainers cannot reach the vast number of teachers working with children with disabilities in rural/remote areas. There is thus a need to explore alternatives such as training of para-teachers, and to invest in pilot studies to develop tele-rehabilitation programmes and use the strategies of distance education. Development of resource centres and sharing of inclusive education materials among schools could also be explored. Training programmes for teachers and other key persons also need to go beyond special teaching techniques and cover

issues of planning, management, organization, implementation and evaluation of special education programmes.

It is important that teachers learn how to assess the needs and abilities of children and about specific methods and interventions for increasing the learning and abilities of each child. The focus on evaluation for children with disabilities needs to go beyond academic achievement. As the practices in the region suggest, children's strengths should be assessed not by standard tests but by continuous assessment through a wide variety of methods and feedback processes. This form of assessment helps teachers to adapt their planning and instruction to the needs of the learners so that all will have the chance to learn and succeed.

Practice in the region suggests that support for children with disabilities should also include addressing barriers outside the school. Support provided only to schools is insufficient – attention must also be given to the economic status of families, the health and self-sufficiency of children with disabilities, and physical and emotional barriers outside the school such as transportation, parental/societal attitudes, etc. Better cooperation from outside the education sector helps in identifying problems, providing necessary support services and instilling a sense of confidence among the parents of children with disabilities.

It is found from the practices in South Asia that school-based training aimed at supporting school-based development can be particularly powerful in the early stages of the move towards more inclusive education. In order to meet the needs of children with disabilities using existing resources, 'core teams' consisting of trained special education teachers and other key members in the community attached to the school can contribute towards access of children, orientation of teachers, preparing and collecting teaching–learning materials and mobilizing other resources. Child-to-child methods have also proved to be effective in involving children in the process of promoting inclusive classrooms. Children find their own ways of overcoming existing barriers to inclusion and often take responsibility for including other children both inside and outside the classroom.

With limited work on the ground, there is an urgent need for organizations and state institutions to collaborate, network and build on collective experiences to bring about large-scale change by shaping policies and through advocacy initiatives. The separation between special and mainstream funding needs to be overcome and alternative systems of allocation of funding need to be developed. In order to strengthen the impact of inclusive education, action research should be undertaken on the practices of inclusion and the research findings widely disseminated.

Inclusive education can only take place in schools which meet the needs of all learners, and requires a process of ongoing change based on a clearly articulated set of principles which needs financial, human and intellectual

resources. It is important to identify these resources and build partnerships with stakeholders, non-governmental organizations and international organizations. Initiating change towards inclusive practice involves mobilizing opinion, building consensus, carrying out a situation analysis, reforming legislation and supporting local projects. The journey is long with many challenges. Inclusive education needs to be seen not as an alternative but the only way forward for meeting the needs of the 'forgotten' children in South Asia.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

The 2002–2005 Medium-Term Strategic Plan of UNICEF, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the World Fit for Children (WFFC), prioritizes improved protection of children from violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination, and envisions ‘**all** children to have access to and complete an education of good quality’. Furthermore, the principle of non-discrimination (CRC-Article 2) requires governments to respect the equal rights of all children and also imposes obligations on them to ensure that children are not discriminated against. Accordingly, the principle of non-discrimination emphasizes the rights-based approach with priority given to the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups of children. Marginalized children may include the girl child, those with disabilities, those belonging to low castes, those living in remote areas, refugees/internally displaced children or returnees, children affected by armed conflict, and those who are subjected to abuse and exploitation.

‘We will take all measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including equal access to health, education and recreational services, by children with disabilities and children with special needs, to ensure the recognition of their dignity, to promote their self-reliance, and to facilitate their active participation in the community.’

*A World Fit for Children*

Among the vulnerable groups, children with disabilities and special educational needs are particularly prone to discrimination from the very individuals and institutions with an obligation to protect them, including families, communities, health and education services and the state. This discrimination often leads to reduced access to basic social services, especially education. Traditionally, they have been placed in separate classes

and schools or have been denied access to education altogether. They are, therefore, often silent and invisible members of most communities. These children, however, are in special need of and deserve educational opportunities, as they face the challenges of prejudice, social isolation and discrimination in society and are deprived of full social and economic participation.

Article 23 of the CRC specifically declares the rights of disabled children to enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions that promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community. The limitations on the educational opportunities available to these children are also one of the considerations underpinning the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The Rules point to the link between an inclusive education system and wider community-based programmes for persons with disabilities. The Salamanca Declaration (1994), signed by countries during the World Conference on Special Needs Education, emphasizes that the regular

classroom is the best place to safeguard the right of education for children with special educational needs.

It must be recognized that individual children learn and develop in different ways and at different paces. It is therefore important to create a learning environment that responds to the needs of every child, including those with disabilities. The growing consensus among professionals and disability rights organizations is that inclusion in mainstream schooling is the appropriate way to provide education for all children. Inclusive education (IE) is about restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools in order to respond to the diversity of students in their locality. It acknowledges and respects differences in children, be it age, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, HIV/AIDS and TB status, etc., and enables education structures, systems and methodologies to be flexible to meet the needs of all children. Promoting IE, therefore, means that the school and the education system need to change in order to meet the individual needs of all learners, with and without disabilities, rather than forcing the child to change. Unfortunately, inclusive education is still at little more than a conceptual stage in South Asia.

Although governments, NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies and others have taken initiatives in addressing the special educational needs of children with disabilities in an inclusive school environment in South Asian countries, they have been able to make only a limited impact. A comprehensive analysis of these initiatives has also not been undertaken. This regional report is a reflection on and synthesis of examples of special needs and inclusive education initiatives studied in five countries of South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) to increase the knowledge base and strengthen the capacity to develop or improve existing programmes in this area. It is also expected to serve as an advocacy tool for promoting IE. The studies focus on policies and practices in education for children with disabilities in the respective countries. They also document good examples in each country related to inclusive schools, early intervention programmes, community-based rehabilitation programmes and training initiatives.

In addition, the report reflects on the inter-country experts' consultation held on IE for children with disabilities in Lahore, Pakistan, in January 2004, to discuss the findings of the country studies. The key interventions that were decided upon, as a result of lengthy discussions on various issues with respect to implementation of IE in the region, are included in the recommendations of this report.

## **1.2 Objectives of the study**

The overall objectives of the country studies initiated by UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia in response to the need to increase the knowledge base were as follows:

- To assess the state of special needs and inclusive education in the country in terms of policies, resources and practices and emphasize the main implications of the lessons learned with respect to policy reform.
- To identify and document model practices in the area of inclusive education and to highlight the mechanisms and strategies that have proved effective, the areas of concern, and the constraints on successful inclusion of children with disabilities.
- To provide recommendations based on the lessons learned in order to strengthen the capacity of UNICEF staff, the government and other partners in the country to bring about policy reforms, ensure adequate resource allocation, and promote programming that supports inclusive education.

### **1.3 Methodology**

The country studies were undertaken as a phased process starting with a review of the magnitude of disability in the country, coupled with information collected on policies, provisions and practices on inclusive education, using secondary data sources. These included existing government documents and a literature survey based on empirical studies.

This was followed up with the identification and selection of inclusive education practices through government officials and academic experts dealing directly or indirectly with inclusive education, since there were no published databases to refer to. The selection was also based on important parameters such as accessibility, school environment, supportive services, equal opportunity and participation, teacher expertise, parental involvement and community participation. The 'good practice examples' were drawn from the following four areas:

- Community-based programmes that promote inclusive education.
- Teacher development initiatives that assist primary school teachers to identify, assess and support the needs of children with disabilities in the classroom.
- Early childhood development interventions focusing on early detection and prevention of disability and preparing children to enter mainstream schools.
- Inclusive schools where children with disabilities are being educated.

An in-depth study into the examples selected resulted in both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data included magnitude and variations of disability in the country, number of students and teachers, availability of support services at the institutional level, students' outcome, etc. Qualitative data, obtained using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observation methods, related to use of special services, teacher competency, the teaching-learning process, social processes in and out of the classroom, experiences of disabled children and teachers, and opinions and suggestions of teachers, parents, community members, voluntary workers and government officials.

## TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA

The methods of data collection, however, were not uniformly used in all the case studies of the five countries. The main aim was to explore contextual approaches and ways of working on issues central to IE for children with disabilities. With multiple dimensions in inclusive education, it called for openness, rigour, optimum use of existing human and material resources and collective reflection for wider application.

The final stage of the process was the production of this regional consolidation, aiming to provide an analysis of the status of special needs and inclusive education practices in South Asia, and present recommendations based on lessons learned.

## 2. CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN SOUTH ASIA

### 2.1 School enrolments of children with disabilities

Although South Asia is the world's second most populous region with an estimated population of over 1.4 billion in 2002 (UNICEF, 2003), it is in the lead in the annual number of births with over 37 million newborns a year, with an annual growth rate of around 2.7 per cent. The region has shown some improvements in its adult literacy rate over the past few years. However, excluding Sri Lanka and Maldives, the rate is still very low at 54 per cent (2000). A similar trend exists with the number of children enrolled in primary school. The increase in net enrolment rate in the region from 65 per cent to 74 per cent in the period 1990–2002 still leaves 45 million school-age children out of school, especially in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal. Another striking fact is the high gender gap in enrolment, with only 65 per cent of primary school age girls enrolled in school compared with 80 per cent of boys in the region. Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan are among the countries with the highest gender gap not only in the South Asia region but in the world.

**SA countries' net primary school enrolment ratios for girls and boys 1997–2000\***

Country	Girls	Boys
Afghanistan	15**	42**
Bangladesh	90	88
Bhutan	47	58
India	64	78
Maldives	99	99
Nepal	67	77
Pakistan	48	83
Sri Lanka	97	97
<b>South Asia</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>80</b>

*State of the World's Children 2004 (UNICEF, 2003)*

\* Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading

\*\* Indicates data that refer to years or periods other than those specified in the column heading, differ from the standard definition or refer to only part of a country

'The term "disabled children" refers to all children with sensory, physical and intellectual impairments, emotional and behavioural disorders, mental health difficulties, and multiple disabilities.'

*Inter-Country Experts' Consultation, 2004, Lahore, Pakistan*

High levels of illiteracy, gender disparity and inequality, poverty and child labour constitute the socio-economic context of the region – factors that also contribute to and increase the risk of disabilities. The World Health Organization estimates that about 10 per cent of the world's population suffers from some form of disability. Based on this

estimate, the region may have 140 million disabled people of all ages, with 42 million (30%) being children. Unfortunately, countries in the region lack reliable data in the area of disabilities and reflect an underestimation of the situation, due to the absence of clear standards and adequate skills to identify invisible disabilities and the definition of disability, focusing on severe levels and leaving out mild and moderate forms. The estimates based on results of studies and censuses carried out in the countries, therefore, range from 1.5 per cent to 10.6 per cent national prevalence of disabilities. In Nepal, for example, the recent Situation Analysis of Disability (NPC/UNICEF/New Era, 2001), which did not take



into consideration all the disability types, estimates the national prevalence to be at 1.63 per cent. In Sri Lanka, on the other hand, the country report on special education indicates that 10.6 per cent of school-aged children are disabled (APEID, 1994).

Each country shows significant regional disparities, with the number of disabled children being higher in the most disadvantaged situations – in remote rural areas, urban slums and conflict-affected areas. It is also important to note the consistent pattern of gender disparity in disability throughout the region: there are more disabled boys than girls. One reason for this gender disparity may be the higher rates of injuries boys face due to their mobility. However, in South Asia it appears also to be a consequence of the widespread and deep-rooted gender discrimination girls face in the region that extends to limited access to health care and treatment leading to higher mortality rate of the girl child with disability.

Over the years, provisions for special and integrated education have been made for children with disabilities. Recent years have seen an increased emphasis on the adoption of inclusive education. However, the proportion of disabled children benefiting from any type of education is at a dismal and alarming rate of around two per cent of the disabled population. In India, for example, while the national gross enrolment is 90 per cent, fewer than five per cent of children with disabilities are in school. Around two per cent of disabled children attend formal or non-formal schools in Nepal and Pakistan, and 4.6 per cent in Sri Lanka. Bangladesh with eight per cent of disabled children enrolled in various educational institutions ranks highest in the region. Once again, girls in the region are at a disadvantage and have lower access to schooling compared with boys.

Thus, with regard to the right of every child to education, a great inequality of opportunity is displayed in the region with 39.4 million (24 of each 25 children) children with disabilities being denied access to education. This clearly shows that the children with disabilities are the most marginalized group in having access to education in the region, deserving urgent and sustained efforts by all concerned.

## **2.2 Societal attitudes towards disability**

Disability is both a complex and a controversial concept – a condition that has medical, economic and social dimensions<sup>1</sup> intertwined in a complex array of outcomes, which primarily result in lost opportunities for equal participation in life. The social nature of disability is quite complicated and deeply embedded within the structure of a society and is evident in the current environmental, legal and attitudinal barriers. These barriers are at times the hardest to overcome, as they

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<sup>1</sup> A UN Report of 1981 listed the main contributory factors as poverty, malnutrition, hunger, illiteracy, poor hygienic conditions, unemployment, and lack of financial resources, equipment, trained personnel, information and good communication systems.

have historical and cultural roots, which give rise to prejudice and discrimination. These unarguably make disability a social construct, which is shaped by the context and the culture of a country.

Historically the concept of disability has moved from a moral model of being associated with sin and shame by cultures to one that regards disability to be a normal aspect of life and not a deviance, rejecting the notion that persons with disabilities are in some inherent way 'defective'. However, over the ages, and across national boundaries in the South Asia region, the attitude towards disability remains that of callous disregard, fear, avoidance or ridicule of the disabled person by the general public, and shame, embarrassment and concealment on the part of the families. Disability in most cases is seen as a curse or punishment from God for the sins of the family or the individual. As reported in Nepal and Pakistan, a significant percentage of the parents who had children with disabilities felt that it was their 'bad fate'. Some people believe that disability is the result of sins committed by the parents. Some have superstitious beliefs regarding the causes of disability. This religious fervour also results in the attitude of 'care' and protection, where it is seen as a matter of fulfilling personal responsibilities rather than according people their 'rights' (Miles and Hossain, 2000).

Most people are not aware of the causes of disabilities. Many individuals are born with a disability, while others acquire one later in life due to a variety of factors, including infectious diseases, accidents and violence such as wars, conflict or landmines. This, coupled with lack of knowledge about disabilities, often leads such individuals to be treated with less priority with respect to fulfilment of their rights as members of the society. As a result, children with disabilities face prejudice, social isolation and discrimination and are often marginalized within the society – and more so in the education systems. While children with disabilities who are also poor and are from lower caste communities face further discrimination, girls experience lowest priority in receiving education or health care services, as has been indicated by studies from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal. While, on the one hand, it appears that the disadvantage disabled girls are facing is based on parents using their limited resources on educating their sons rather than daughters, it is also the case, on the other hand, that they are afraid of stigmatization and abuse their disabled daughters may face in school and thus keep them at home to 'protect' them. A study conducted in Bangladesh (CSID, 2001) suggests that 92 per cent of disabled young girls and women were subjected to some type of physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

Perceptions and attitudes towards different types of disability also vary among different stakeholders, such as children, teachers and media, as was shown by studies in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. While children with disabilities prefer to be with other children and receive education in regular classrooms/schools, they are at the same time unsure of their capabilities and fear the reactions of other

## TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA

children (Hayat, 1994). Parents have mixed opinions as to whether they should support special education or inclusive education. Similarly, teachers reveal mixed opinions towards including children with disabilities in regular classrooms, which further varies with the type of disability. The concerns about supporting inclusion include the lack of readiness of the schools, and lack of skills training, time for planning and commitment. Accordingly, many professionals are sceptical of the idea of inclusion, preferring to provide education to disabled children separately from the regular classroom.

### **3. POLICY INITIATIVES AND LEGISLATION ON DISABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA**

#### **3.1 Global commitments to the rights of children with disabilities**

During the 1980s and 1990s, a strong international movement surfaced under the flagship of the UN to lobby for the rights of children with disabilities. This movement had a far-reaching impact on the government policies of member states. The United Nations Decade of the Disabled Persons (1983–1992), prompting a series of national and international legislative initiatives to identify and articulate more firmly the rights of individuals with disabilities, resulted in an increased awareness about protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in the region. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (1990), the Salamanca Declaration (1994), the Framework for Actions on Special Needs Education and the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All formulated a clear agenda for action for the member states in the region to provide basic education to children with disabilities through inclusive education.

About 40 years after the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), the United Nations granted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 to facilitate equal education for all children, including children with disabilities. The Convention highlights the survival, protection, development and participation rights of all children, without exception or exclusion. Articles 2, 23, 28 and 29 are particularly relevant to the rights of disabled children.

The UNESCO framework for applying a rights-based approach to education as a conceptual, analytical and methodological framework for identifying, planning, designing and monitoring development activities is based on internal human rights standards and is operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It follows the principles of ‘accountability, empowerment, participation, non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups’, applied to the education sector. It also encompasses the right to good quality education for all, with concerns about the quality of learning, the content, the teaching–learning process and the learning environment.

The right to education involves three key actors: the government as a provider of public education, the child as the bearer of the right to be educated and duty to comply with compulsory requirements, and the child’s parents. This perspective empowers the individual to challenge the state and demand that the state meet its obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education. The operationalization of EFA goals and policies at the national level thus reaches beyond the sector of education, as does a rights-based approach to education. No right could exist without corresponding governmental obligations. Those

related to right to education are therefore structured into a scheme involving **availability, access, acceptability and adaptability**.

- *Availability* embodies two different governmental obligations. The right to education as a civil and political right requires the government to permit the establishment of schools respecting freedom of and in education, while the right to education as a social and economic right requires the government to ensure that free and compulsory education is available to all school-age children. The right to education as a cultural right requires respect of diversity, outlined in particular through minority and indigenous rights.
- *Access* requires that the government is obliged to secure access to free education for all children in the compulsory education age-range, but not for secondary and higher education. The right to education should be realized progressively, ensuring all-encompassing free and compulsory education as soon as possible, and facilitating access to post-compulsory education as circumstances permit.
- *Acceptability* requires minimum guarantees for the quality of education. The emergence of children as subjects of the right to education and rights in education extends the boundaries of acceptability to the contents of educational curricula and textbooks. This means respect of diversity and ensuring inclusion and equal opportunities, irrespective of race, sex, language, religion, disability, social status, etc.
- *Adaptability* requires schools to adapt to children, following the yardstick of the best interests of each child as laid down in the CRC. It ensures that educational content, method and scheduling are relevant and respond to differing circumstances and needs. As human rights are indivisible, adaptability requires safeguards for all human rights within education, as well as enhancing human rights through education. This necessitates cross-sectoral analysis of the impact and relevance of education on other human rights and quality learning outcomes. It should promote good quality teaching–learning processes appropriate to the child’s level, abilities and learning style.

To turn the rights of the child to education into reality, the movement for EFA was launched at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, in 1990. It culminated in the World Declaration on Education for All, known as the **Jomtien Declaration**. This historical conference presented EFA as an attainable goal to the international community. Furthermore, it affirmed that the envisioned goal went beyond achievement of universal enrolment to aim for provision of quality education for all, and that the education provided must be such that would allow the learners to reach their fullest potential. Thus, the Declaration points out that the universal goal of EFA must be measured against the actual learning acquisition and outcome rather than exclusively on enrolment, continued participation in organized programmes and completion of certification requirements. For extending basic educational opportunities to all learners as a right, it was concluded that ‘what is needed is an “expanded vision” that surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula, and conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices.’

The **Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993)** provide a basis for international cooperation and an instrument for policy making and actions for persons with disabilities. Rule 6 of the UN Standard Rules for Persons with Disabilities states that ‘States should recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system. General education authorities are responsible for the education of persons with disabilities in integrated settings. Education for persons with disabilities should form an integral part of national educational planning, curriculum development and school organization.’

The major impetus for the inclusive education approach was given by the World Conference on Special Needs Education (**Salamanca Conference, 1994**) by considering the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach, namely enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs. It concluded that 'Special needs education cannot advance in isolation. It has to form part of an overall educational strategy and, indeed, of new social and economic policies.' It called for major reform of the ordinary school.

The **Inter-Country Experts' Consultation\*** adopted the definition of Inclusive Education developed in Salamanca, 1994 that: '... schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions. They should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote and nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups' and believing that the children with disabilities are one of the most marginalized groups in the South Asia region, resolved to focus particularly on inclusive education for children with disabilities.  
\* Lahore, Pakistan, January 2004

The Salamanca Conference asserted that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions (Article 3). These inclusive schools 'must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodate both different styles and rates of learning and ensure quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with communities.' The conference argued that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. Moreover, they provide effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficacy and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

The 'vision' of Jomtien was reaffirmed by the World Education Forum meeting in Dakar, convened to review the progress made towards EFA thus far (**World Education Forum, 2000**). The Forum (**Dakar Framework**) asserted that 'education is a fundamental right' and drew attention to the exclusionary processes which disadvantaged groups continued to experience and called for positive action to overcome them. The Forum declared that Education for All, '...must take account of the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, including ... those with special learning needs.' It further committed to ensuring that all children have access to complete, free and compulsory quality education by 2015.

The need for inclusive education has been repeated in the Notes on the Dakar Framework for Action, which mentions '... in order to attract and retain children from marginalized and excluded groups, education systems should respond flexibly. Education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out children who

are enrolled and responding in a flexible way to the circumstances and needs of all learners.'

The **E-9 Declaration (2000)** also highlights the goal that 'all children with special needs will be integrated in mainstream schools.'

The **Beijing Declaration (2001)** on the rights of people with disabilities calls for commitment of concerned organizations to work for a legally binding international convention on the rights of all people with disabilities to full participation and equality in society.

### **3.2 Legislations and policies on disability in South Asia**

Education of children with disabilities has become a priority issue in South Asia not only because of the commitments to international declarations and resolutions, and constitutional commitment to achieve the goal of 'education for all', but also because education of the disabled has taken on increased importance as the main tool for their empowerment. With the aim of developing the required knowledge and skills among children with disabilities and preparing them for life, professionals from various disciplines have examined the challenges from different perspectives. Various options in the field of education have been developed and have influenced policy and legislation provisions for these children. Although the first national education policies addressing issues of access and participation by all, including children with disabilities, were developed in Sri Lanka and India as early as the 1960s, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan have developed national policies only in the late 1980s and in the 1990s. These policies have been developed further over the years, making provisions for free and compulsory education for all children in all the countries in the study. However, these early constitutional provisions did not explicitly address the issue of education of children with disabilities.

In Sri Lanka's early initiatives in this area, provisions were made for free and compulsory education for all children with the adoption of a special education programme for visually handicapped children, with a move towards inclusive education as the accepted concept for educating children with special educational needs (1992). India, on the other hand, in 1986 revised its national policy to stress the 'removal of all disparities' in education through integration of physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, further modifying the policy in 1992 with an ambitious commitment to universal enrolment for both categories of disabled children. However, even these policy developments do not discuss the issue of disability with the required focus on the specific needs of different types of disability.

The policy provisions indicate a gradual progression from special to integrated education, with Sri Lanka starting as early as 1966, and Nepal and Bangladesh suggesting the provision for integrated education in their recent National

Education Policies (1997–98). Pakistan, on the other hand, with its 1988 Special Education policy created a segregated system for children with special needs, with integration not being regarded as a realistic goal.

Thus, although individual countries have had policy approaches for the education of the disabled, often guided by charity and welfare paradigms without recognizing the right to education of children with disabilities, it was only after 1981, with the UN Declaration of the Year of the Disabled, that issues of education for children with disabilities received due attention. The World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien Declaration, 1990) and the Salamanca Declaration (1994) have influenced national governments' approach for the adoption of the concept of inclusion to meet the educational needs of all children. This shift in emphasis towards inclusive education has been a part of the wider movement towards a more 'just society' for all citizens.

Since the global declarations, however, the countries in the South Asia region have adopted inclusion more 'in principle' than in practice. Formulation of national policies on inclusive education has been taken up at a much slower pace, or not at all by the countries. Pakistan, in its 2002 National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, while providing a more generalized policy for the disabled, has not articulated inclusive education. Moreover, the emphasis put on adopting 'inclusive practice' in these policies shows variations between countries. Sri Lanka appears to be the leading country in South Asia in implementing programmes to advance inclusive education in government schools.

The policies on special, integrated and inclusive education often seem to overlap. While implementing (Sri Lanka) or advocating (Pakistan, Bangladesh) inclusion, the policies neither fully reject nor accept the earlier concept of integration (Bangladesh, India) and isolation or segregation. A focus on special units and resource classes in regular schools is seen in the policies. Special education has become a synonym for education of children with disabilities (Nepal, Pakistan).

The policies, furthermore, do not provide the required emphasis on the role of parents, community and NGOs in the education of children with disabilities. Networking of institutions and agencies at different levels has not been adequately focused upon.

It is pertinent to note also that, with the exception of Sri Lanka, the responsibility for providing education to children with disabilities has not been assigned to the Ministry of Education, where education is perceived as a basic right of the child. Instead, this responsibility is generally given to the Ministry of Social Welfare or similar ministries, where education may not be seen as a right of the child, leading to fragmentation of the educational services provided by the governments. Thus, a charity paradigm prevails in which maximum efforts are made to extend charity for the relief of a grievance or difficulty, rather than a paradigm of right to education for all children.



## **4. RESOURCE ALLOCATION FOR EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

There are clear signs that over the years South Asian countries have increased allocation of resources for education of children with disabilities. However, these additional allocations do not appear to have been sufficient to make a significant impact, since disability in most of the South Asian countries studied continues to be a welfare issue under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Welfare or Social Justice. The funds have been spent mainly on improvement and expansion of segregated special education facilities, with an increase in the number of special schools over the last two decades. While there have been increased efforts to improve the quality of teacher training and textbooks, with pilot projects initiated on inclusive education, it is the private sector that has made a head start in the area of inclusive education by establishing inclusive schools in large cities.

In Bangladesh, although fifteen per cent of the country budget is allocated to the education sector, no allocation is made towards education of children with disabilities since the funding is given to the Ministry of Education and care and education of disabled children is under the purview of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Department of Social Services (DSS), Ministry of Social Welfare, allocated 27 per cent of its 2001–02 development budget for the education of people with disabilities. The major areas of allocation were for integrated education of children with visual impairment, and schools for children with hearing impairment. Rural rehabilitation centres, the National Centre for Special Education and training centres for the physically handicapped also benefited from this allocation.

In India, in the financial year 2002–03, while the Ministry of Human Resource Development allocated funds for the integrated education of disabled children, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment made allocations for special schools, one-third of which was given to NGOs since the majority of special schools are run by them. The central government directs the state governments to use three per cent of the poverty alleviation funds on people with disabilities; these funds are mainly used to maintain the institutions for the care of disabled people and to provide assistive devices. This shortage of allocations and the fact that education of children with disabilities remains outside the reach of primary education hinders achievement of any significant impact in this area.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–07) of Nepal aims to provide equal rights and a barrier-free environment; empower and involve people with disabilities in sports activities; provide prevention and rehabilitation centres; and provide educational opportunities from primary to post-graduate level. As a result of lobbying by the National Federation of the Disabled, the government has announced a separate

budget head for disability in its national budget. This is regarded as formal recognition of the government's intentions for its developmental plans.

In Pakistan, review of five-year plans indicates that financial allocations for the expansion and improvement of special education increased immensely between 1978 and 1998. Increased expenditure on special education has resulted in improvements in the quality of services, higher enrolment, impressive physical facilities and provision of qualified teachers. However, at the same time, it has perpetuated the segregated special education system in the country. Allocation for initiating an inclusive education pilot project has only been made under a new policy for persons with disabilities.

## **5. EVOLUTION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

The evolution of educational opportunities for children with disabilities in each of the five South Asian countries included in the study is summarized in Boxes 1–5. There are, however, some common elements that are worth noting.

Over the years, there has been an increase in the provisions for children with special educational needs organized by government agencies, private voluntary organizations, religious associations, community groups and disability advocacy organizations. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or private voluntary organizations have not only been the first to respond, but also have been somewhat more influential than the government agencies in initiating special needs education development. The philanthropists came forward for this noble cause and with their generous support special education institutions were established without any financial input from government in urban areas in each country. Similarly, in nearly all countries in South Asia, specialized services have been initiated by religious associations, mostly Christian, missionaries and concerned parents. With the later development of concepts of special, integrated and inclusive education, many countries in South Asia have introduced remedial measures to meet the needs of children with disabilities. They have addressed the quantitative and qualitative aspect of primary schooling, making provisions for various special population groups and their specific needs.

However, these five country studies show that, initially, education of children with disabilities was not given a high priority by governments. Early initiatives in this field worked outside the mainstream, resulting in the exclusion of children with disabilities from school life and later, as adults, from community, social and cultural life.

Although indications from countries currently point to the acceptance of inclusive practice as a way forward, in most of the countries there are still no systematic initiatives in the area of inclusive education by governments (India, Bangladesh and Pakistan). The work is mainly carried out by a few NGOs and the private sector (Bangladesh and Pakistan), with governments providing partial financial assistance and professional support (Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka).

Controversy among professionals over the issue of special, integrated and inclusive education is continuing, with advocates of special education perceiving inclusive education as unrealistic based on lack of readiness by professionals and society, insufficient institutional infrastructure and inadequate financial resources (Pakistan, Bangladesh).

### **Box 1: India**

The long history of special needs education dates back to pre-independent India, initiated by parents of children with disabilities through establishment of separate schools concentrated in urban areas. After independence and with the constitutional goal of universalization of elementary education (UEE), India embarked upon various supplementary initiatives aiming at indirectly influencing the enrolment and retention of *all* children at the primary level.

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) schemes aim at enhancing health, psycho-social, nutritional and educational development of children. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is one of the most widespread ECCE provisions in the country at present. There are also pre-schools and Balwadis under the Central Social Welfare Board and some state government schemes and private efforts. However, an active policy of inclusion for children with disabilities in pre-schools and development of tools for early identification is still lacking. Similarly, there are no links with primary health care, or convergence of ECCE programmes implemented by various government departments and voluntary agencies.

The Project for Integrated Education for Disabled (PIED) was launched by government with the assistance of UNICEF in 1986. The early success in the ten demonstration sites in both rural and urban areas led to the integration of children with mild and severe disabilities. Evaluation of PIED showed higher retention rate of children with disabilities and a positive change in teacher attitudes and classroom practice. The success of this project resulted in the centrally sponsored scheme Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) in 1992. The objective of the scheme (under revision) is to provide educational opportunities to children with disabilities in ordinary schools so as to facilitate their retention in the school system. The launching of IEDC provided a focus on the pedagogical approaches adopted by teachers to respond to the needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms. It also created greater awareness in ordinary schools about the education of children with disabilities. However, the IEDC programme as implemented by the government and NGOs has vast discrepancies in terms of teacher training and quality of services. The need to develop an operational framework for the planning and management of inclusive education is acknowledged.

In recent years two major initiatives that have been launched by the government are worth noting:

- District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) with the support of the World Bank has converged the IEDC and other programmes to bring synergy to the process of including more children with disabilities into the regular school system, with a focus on in-service training of the general teacher to enable early detection, assessment, and use of aids and making of individual educational plans. The states where DPEP is being implemented have made encouraging efforts by developing appropriate infrastructure and appointing consultants and other support staff. State Project Committees and District Resource Groups (DRGs) have been formed and coordinators at the State Project Office (SPO) and District Project Offices (DPOs) have been selected for the implementation of IEDC. Quality improvement is also being attempted through renewal of curriculum and teaching-learning materials and provision of decentralized academic support and capacity building of institutions.
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), or 'movement to educate all', aims at achieving UEE by effective decentralization, sustainable financing, cost-effective strategies, interesting curriculum, community-owned planning and implementation, and focus on girls as well as marginalized groups. Inclusive education is an integral component of SSA and promises to make education for all a reality by 2010.

Other initiatives include District Rehabilitation Centres (DRCs) and the National Programme for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disability (NPRPD), providing financial resources to state governments for initiating services at the district level. Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) is used as a strategy to scale up basic rehabilitation services and to initiate a process for empowering people with disabilities, their families and the communities. UN Support to Community-Based Primary Education or the Community School Programme is a multi-state and multi-agency initiative supporting the ongoing efforts of the Government of India towards universalization of primary education (UPE). The programme aims to enhance and sustain community participation in effective school management, and ensure the protection of child rights. The focus is on addressing the educational needs of working children, children with disabilities and adolescent girls.

The non-governmental sector plays an active role in the provision of services for people with disabilities. The government also sees the role of the NGOs as a way of reaching the people with disabilities and supports the same through various grants-in-aid. International development aid organizations have also encouraged NGOs to try innovative approaches.

### ***Box 2: Bangladesh***

The history of special education provisions in Bangladesh reveals that education for children with disabilities used to be provided by religious and philanthropic organizations in segregated special schools meant for them. This was eventually adopted and extended as part of the national education arrangements, leading to separate parallel school systems for students with special needs.

Over the years, different forms of educational programmes for children with disabilities have been introduced and practised:

- Segregated education in special schools/institutions.
- Home-based education in the form of a mobile education system through specially trained teachers.
- Integrated education where students with disabilities were provided education under the mainstream system, but with some special arrangements.
- Distance education with use of multimedia and conventional print materials.
- Inclusive education mainly started by a few NGOs in their non-formal education programmes.

Although all of these systems of education are currently being practised in Bangladesh, a special school system is generally perceived to be the only means of educating children with disabilities. In recent times, the demand for integrated and inclusive education seems to be growing; however, not many systematic initiatives have been taken at the national level to educate children with disabilities. Inclusive education is still at the conceptual stage with few NGOs working in the area. Most of their interventions are isolated, fragmented and not coordinated. The controversy among the professionals over the issue of special, integrated and inclusive education still continues. In terms of the quality of the existing education and the enabling school environment for the disabled child, the inclusive education advocates also believe that an improvement in these areas is needed before children with disabilities can benefit from inclusive education.

The education of children (and adults) with disabilities is under the purview of the Ministry of Social Welfare and is executed by the Department of Social Services (DSS). The activities and interventions for children with disabilities form part of a number of programmes for a variety of excluded groups of people.

The increasing worldwide consensus on inclusive education is influencing the thinking of professionals in the country. There is growing realization that inclusive education could be the best option for education of children with disabilities considering the financial constraints.

### **Box 3: Nepal**

Nepal's first attempt at educating children with disabilities was initiated through a Special Education Programme for the blind, deaf, mentally retarded and physically disabled. The Special Education Council, established in 1973, coordinated the special education programmes in the country, with schools set up under its jurisdiction in various locations. The special education services were differentiated according to the needs of the children depending on the specific disability.

In 1993, the National Special Education Programme was launched in Nepal as an integral part of the first phase of the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP I, 1992–99) with sponsorship from international agencies. A Special Education Unit under BPEP I was established to plan and implement the programme.

BPEP I marked a shift to an integrated education system under the Special Education Programme. The concept of resource class and resource teacher was introduced to prepare children with disabilities to participate in regular classrooms with their non-disabled peers. Under BPEP I's Special Education Programme, a resource class was established within the ordinary primary school system. The resource classes are preparatory classes/training classes for children who are blind, deaf or have a mental disability. Within this programme, there was a provision for teaching 10 children with special needs in one resource class. The duration of such resource classes varied from 3 to 6 months depending on the time needed by each child for gaining the required level for integration into the mainstream class, from Class 1 to 5. A resource teacher, trained according to the type of disability among children, attended the class. Even after the children were placed in mainstream classes, the resource teacher provided special support. In some cases, after attending the resource class for 3–6 months the children with disabilities were shifted to home schools located near the community from where they came.

Although BPEP I was a promising step towards providing education to children with disabilities, it did not go beyond integrated education. Inclusion to regular classrooms, as the last step of the process, demanded that the children adjust to the education system rather than the system and teachers adjusting to the special needs of the children, creating pressure on the child with disability to prepare herself/himself to be accepted in the regular classroom. Furthermore, children with different disabilities had unequal opportunity for inclusion, with the hearing/speech impaired and mentally challenged children being kept in the resource classes as a result of not being adequately prepared to study with their non-disabled peers. Due to these limitations in practice of the resource room model in BPEP I, the Department of Education took up the challenge of initiating inclusive education in Nepal in the year 2000. BPEP II has sought to promote inclusive education of children with mild to moderate disabilities in primary education. To achieve this aim, the programme has supported primary schools in identifying and assessing children with disabilities, training special education teachers and providing appropriate teaching–learning materials designed to ensure effective mainstreaming of these children. This has led to a movement towards inclusive education in Nepal, especially at the primary level.

### **Box 4: Pakistan**

Prior to independence, education of children with special needs was mainly in the hands of religious institutions. Children and adults with disabilities were generally excluded from the regular school system. After independence, some private institutions became active in providing educational opportunities to children with special needs. The National Commission on Education (1959) for the first time placed the education of special children on the agenda of the government. It recommended the provision of vocational education to children and adults with mental retardation, and training of teachers for educating children with disabilities. The Education Policy (1972–80) provided funds for special education services in the country.

Special education, prior to the Decade of the Disabled (1983–92), was in the hands of non-governmental organizations and religious institutions. These religious institutions have a long tradition of providing equal access to children with special needs in the subcontinent. It is estimated that there are more than 10,000 religious institutions in the country imparting education to 1.5 million students (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 1998), mainly coming from middle and lower-middle classes. Despite various national policies, private organizations are still the main players in educating children with disabilities in special education settings, as well as in regular classrooms.

During the 1980s and 1990s the international movement under the United Nations changed the priorities of member states, to pay special attention to the problems of persons with disabilities. During this period the Government of Pakistan significantly increased the budget allocation to run newly established special education centres and other institutions for the education and rehabilitation of children with disabilities. However, so far, no serious movement for inclusive education has emerged in the country. In the present system, ordinary schools and special schools are working in complete isolation.

There are ongoing debates in Pakistan on whether to promote inclusive education. The opponents of inclusive education argue that the people who have formulated the policy are, generally speaking, international experts who are totally ignorant of the situation prevailing in the country and who want to impose a Western model on Pakistan. Some people who are attempting to apply innovations in education at the grassroots level have tried to implement indigenous methods to educate the challenged children. The teachers, administrators, professionals and parents appear to be aware of the concept of inclusive education, but lack the knowledge and means to implement it in an ordinary setting. The attitudes of society in Pakistan about people with disabilities are generally positive, and are more favourable in rural areas than in urban areas. However, lack of knowledge about the capabilities of such people leads to a low profile of children with disabilities. Lack of proper education facilities only exacerbates their problems.

**Box 5: Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka has a long history of special education, mainly contributed by Buddhist and the British systems of schooling. The Government of Sri Lanka directly intervened in special education in 1965, following the initiative to provide free and compulsory education for all children (1961). A major development in 1971 was the setting up of the special education unit in the Ministry of Education. The aim was to make education for children with disabilities a part of the regular school education. The main focus in special education was on training of teachers to build a teaching force to work with children with special educational needs. The first formal training programme in special education was formulated for teaching the visually handicapped, extending in time to hearing-impaired children. By 1977 two types of special education programmes were operative in Sri Lanka – the residential special school programme and the integrated education programme. By 1984 children with mental retardation had the opportunity to receive education in regular schools.

Due to the increased prevalence of integrated programmes and their qualitative improvement, attention of international agencies was drawn towards the field of special education in this country. During this period the number of special education units in regular government schools increased in parallel with the number of special education schools. Based on existing provisions, children identified by the Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) and other field programmes were referred to the Department of Education to be enrolled in government schools. If a child with disability was not ready to join the mainstream classroom, s/he would first have the opportunity to go into a 'special unit' attached to the mainstream school, to join the ordinary classroom once considered to be ready.

In the 1990s the international declarations on children's right to education and the practice of inclusive education had a positive impact on the field of special education in Sri Lanka, and led to the development of inclusive practice. During the last decade implementation of programmes pertaining to the policy of inclusion has expanded to many parts of the country encompassing a large number of children who are in need of this service. The Department of Special Education in the National Institute of Education (1989) added the required impetus to meeting special educational needs by designing and developing short-term and long-term programmes to train primary school teachers and include intervention strategies in the primary curriculum to teach children with special needs.

With the realization that the resources available would not be sufficient to train and employ the various specialists needed for meeting the needs of children with disabilities, core teams of trained special education teachers were established, to provide training to ordinary teachers in all provinces of Sri Lanka. The curriculum development for the ongoing core team training and their re-training is the responsibility of the National Institute of Education. The core teams have been instrumental in making education available to a large number of children with disabilities.

The Community-Based Rehabilitation programme has been instrumental in establishing a mechanism to identify children with disabilities before they reach the schooling age and to direct them into pre-school education where the children's progress is regularly monitored. It has also helped in using the services of volunteers to provide special services such as speech therapy and physiotherapy in the homes of the children with disabilities who cannot go to school. The community has been motivated to support the programme by providing hearing aids, wheelchairs, crutches and other items required for learning at school. The major focus of the CBR programme has been the teacher training practice implemented throughout the country on a decentralized basis. It aims at promoting inclusive practice in the classrooms. The training content is designed in such a way as to build the skills of teachers to work with the children with disabilities, including those with multiple disabilities. The training promotes the involvement of teachers, principals, in-service advisors and other professionals.

The Early Childhood Development Programme has focused on the enrolment of all children with special needs into pre-schools, irrespective of their age level or impairment level. The pre-school has been able to retain children until they are deemed ready to receive formal education. The staff have kept systematic and standard records of the children's progress. The programme has been able to seek the involvement of unpaid voluntary teachers. The provision of essential resources has been made by various local and foreign organizations. Seventy per cent of the children in the pre-schools have been admitted to formal schools. The programme has done well to ensure the maintenance of constant communication between the pre-schools and the normal schools in the area.

General educational reforms were introduced in 1997, primarily to address issues related to the quality of education and limited access for children. These reforms support the philosophy and practice of inclusive education and envisage a learner-centred classroom environment. According to the reforms, the assessment of each child should be done on entrance to Grade 1, and records should be maintained continuously and cumulatively. The reforms aim to promote self-confidence and self-esteem of the learner and provide quality education.



## **6. KEY FINDINGS**

The country reports reveal that in all the five South Asian countries there is an acceptance of the need to shift towards inclusive practice. While an understanding has developed at the conceptual level, in a large number of situations the struggle is about the 'how' of inclusive practice at the micro and macro levels. There is a gap between policy and practice. In some countries policies influence practice, whereas in others policies are being shaped by results from the field. There is also a perception in some countries that inclusive education (for all children) is an 'alien and impracticable solution' imported from the West. Nevertheless, inclusive education in South Asia is practised in various forms using different strategies, different entry points, with varied impact and raising many critical questions.

In this section, an attempt is made to synthesize the key findings in four key areas: early childhood development programmes, community-based rehabilitation programmes, teacher development initiatives and inclusive schools. It may be noted that the potential good practices in inclusive education documented in the four key areas are not always mutually exclusive. While some practices work with a single area, others use one as an entry point and link with other initiatives and some combine all four initiatives.

### **6.1 Early childhood development programmes**

The benefits of systematic provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) in the physical, social and cognitive development of children have been globally recognized. Attending early childhood development centres also provides a greater chance for marginalized children, such as street children, disabled children, child workers, disadvantaged ethnic or tribal children, and girls, to be mainstreamed into regular primary education. In the case of children with disabilities, early childhood development programmes provide the means for early identification and intervention, as has been acknowledged and documented by experts in the field. Access to basic preventive services and information about early detection of impairments, early stimulation and psychological development of young children enable caregivers to prevent or lessen the effects of disabilities (such as polio, or as a result of accidents and malnutrition, for example) and provide better care to their children, while creating the opportunities for realization of inclusive education.

The importance of early childhood development programmes is being acknowledged by the governments of South Asian countries, as revealed by the country reports. With the exception of Pakistan, all countries have recently initiated early childhood development programmes. While in Sri Lanka provision of early childhood centres is mainly a government initiative and focuses only on raising the capacity of children with disabilities, in India and Nepal there is

government and NGO collaboration, with a community-based and integrated approach.

In India, the Udisha–Portage Project is an example of government and NGO collaboration in an early identification and intervention project for children in the 0–6 years age group. It aims to reach out to unreached children with disabilities in rural/tribal areas and impoverished urban areas. The training programme, based on the Portage pack,<sup>2</sup> modified and field tested to reflect local concerns, indicates that Anganwadi workers could assimilate the required skills and to use them to ensure the holistic development of children. The Portage pack is simple to use by all parents and the material required is available in the community if not at home. The training programme is very flexible and allows self-learning, as well as modifications to the activities. There is, however, a need for monitoring the process of inclusion of children to ensure that every child is included in the Anganwadi Centre. The involvement of parents and the village community is essential to ensure success.

Action in Development (AID) in Bangladesh introduced an early intervention initiative on disability issues as an essential part of the integrated community development programme. The interventions include early detection, community awareness, child care practices, health check-ups and nutrition, facilitating inclusion in mainstream development components, and therapeutic and assistive device support. Trained staff provide home-based education to learners with special needs. The AID staff help the community to select the site for a child education centre, and to identify and detect disability in the early years of a child's life. Workshops and meetings are conducted at national and regional levels to increase awareness of the importance of early care and stimulation for young children. The inclusion strategy has made the initiative more accessible to the community in terms of sustainability and enabling their ownership. Extensive counselling and sensitization has helped in changing community attitudes. Lack of finances, the growing demand from communities and the high turnover rate of skilled persons are the existing constraints of the programme.

The Adarsha Child Development Centre in Nepal is a community-based development centre providing both centre-based (pre-primary school) and home-based programmes. It provides early detection, early prevention and parent education programmes, all of which are interlinked. Children learn daily living skills, communication and socialization and the importance of maintaining good health and hygiene. Young children, mainly from a low socio-economic background, learn by doing chores themselves and through play. The facilitator uses local examples and teaching aids such as posters, pictures and stories to facilitate the learning. The deficiencies in the children and the appropriate learning pace are assessed through group activities. Necessary interventions are

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<sup>2</sup> The standard Portage pack is a home-visiting guide to early childhood development that originated in the USA (UNESCO, 1996). The pack is being used in about 145 countries, with modifications as necessary to suit local conditions.

planned in consultation with the parents. Periodic medical check-ups for children of all households are also covered by the programme, enabling identification of children with disabilities. Parent education is provided through home visits and parents are convinced of the value of sending their children to the centre. There has been a gradual change in attitude among parents and other children to inclusion of children with disabilities into the centre.

The Directorate of Social Welfare in the North-Western Province has initiated an Early Childhood Education Programme for children with disabilities in Sri Lanka. The programme was initiated to provide a formal base and help prepare children for inclusion in regular classrooms. Trained pre-school teachers prepare disabled children aged 2–13 from rural families for formal schooling by raising their capacity for admission to regular schools. Most of the centres are built close to town and the main road and have adequate accommodation for indoor and outdoor activities. In some centres, activities take place in the open air. Children are mainstreamed to regular schools on the recommendation of teachers. Parents of children who attend the centres feel that their children have shown considerable improvement.

## **6.2 Community-based rehabilitation programmes**

Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) programmes have been instrumental in many cases in supporting inclusive school initiatives and teacher training programmes. The focus has been on planning awareness programmes, mobilizing resources and facilitating access to schools.

The Community-Based Programme (Noakhali Rural Action Society or N-RAS) in Bangladesh operates in the disaster-prone, rural coastal belt, where the prevalence rate of disability is comparatively high. The target group is the underprivileged section of the society, mostly landless habitants of char lands, destitute and deprived men and women and those with disabilities. The community is conservative, unfriendly to new ideas and with a negative attitude towards disability. Through the programme, continuous awareness and motivational programmes have been provided, in partnership with other organizations, for inclusion of children into mainstream development and therapeutic services. In addition, HIV/AIDS and STIs prevention and control, health and family planning, income generation, women's development, environmental awareness and infrastructure development activities have been undertaken. Participatory planning, implementation and monitoring of activities are ensured by involving the community, including inputs from persons with disabilities. The programme has built strong linkages with the local schools. Essential sharing and sensitization activities are carried out so that schools are open to the idea of inclusive education for children with disabilities. According to a policy decision, if any school of the locality includes children with disabilities, the programme provides special support such as the construction of ramps, steps and slopes. Teachers are provided with in-depth training sponsorships, and

learning materials are provided to children with disabilities. The programme is receiving financial support from different national and international organizations.

The Association for the Rehabilitation of the Physically Disabled in Peshawar, Pakistan, promotes rehabilitation services for people with disabilities in rural areas, small towns and suburbs through raising awareness of the needs of the physically disabled and advocating for their inclusion. The inclusive school provides admission to children on a first-come first-served basis and charges no fees. Students come to the school from the nearby village. Teachers with disabilities work on a voluntary basis and teach multi-grade classes, offered from Nursery to Class 3. Special attention is given to provision of proper access and a safe environment. The classrooms are located on the ground floor and ramps and support bars are provided in the building. Children with loose handgrips are given extra time to complete their work. The teachers engage children in the learning activities and avoid one-shot annual evaluation. The parents and community support inclusion by helping in acquiring land, equipment and material for school construction, as well as by constructing link roads. The school management approaches the community on religious grounds, which is a suitable approach for fund-raising according to the micro-politics of the society. The Amin Maktab Centre in Pakistan initiated the provision of outreach services to the homes of children with mental retardation residing in economically depressed areas. It provides educational training, medication and nutritional advice to the children. Genetic counselling is provided to the parents. Outreach teams also train parents to identify problems among children, through regular 'home' visits by programme teams.

As part of the UNICEF-sponsored CBR project, implemented in Anuradhapura and Kalutara districts in Sri Lanka, children with special needs are identified before they reach the schooling age. During the follow-up activities it was realized that the teachers required additional skills to work with the children. A teacher training programme thus became the focus of the CBR programme, with school principals, teacher advisors and education officers also participating. The training focused on recent global trends in meeting the needs of children with disabilities. The basic principles and approaches of child development, identification of children with disabilities, assessment and teaching strategies, and preparation and use of low-cost aids for children with disabilities also formed part of the training. A follow-up study indicated the positive impact of the training on improved accessibility, identification of needs, the teaching-learning process and parent and community participation. The participating teachers and school principals were positive about the impact of the training and felt that it provided an opportunity to plan and work together. With the establishment of the Department of Special Education within the National Institute of Education in 1989, this programme was introduced in all the provinces as a national programme.

In Nepal, the community-based Rehabilitation Organization of Bhaktapur is being run by committed youth volunteers from the local community supported by INGOs and the private sector, while some individuals also provide financial support. Prior to the programme, children with disabilities used to stay at home all day and were perceived as a burden by parents. In some cases, the family members and society abandoned them. These children had no access to any form of education, formal or informal. However, the parents had a strong desire to educate and train their children and make them self-reliant. The children were identified and rehabilitated through early intervention and education programmes. All planning for activities was done in close consultation with the children and their families. A variety of strategies was used to create awareness and sensitize others. Child-to-child interactions were encouraged through games. There have been combined efforts of disabled people themselves, their families and communities and schools to enable children to study together and respect each other's strengths rather than weaknesses. A gradual increase in the levels of confidence has been observed, leading to more children and families participating in mainstream education programmes and community activities. The programme has helped to dispel some of the myths regarding disability.

### **6.3 Teacher development initiatives**

The need for skilled human resource, advocacy and networking were found to be essential to the success of IE initiatives in the countries studied. The country reports indicate that often there is a lack of knowledge and skills in working with children with disabilities and including them in society. Lack of awareness about the abilities of children with special educational needs is apparent among those who design and manage development programmes. Most mainstream government organizations are in need of orientation on addressing the needs of children with disabilities and other marginalized groups. Initiatives as part of pre-service and in-service training of teachers show variations from country to country.

The Sir Shapurji Billimoria Foundation in Mumbai, India, provides training to ordinary schoolteachers and allied professionals and parents to meet the needs of children with disabilities. It also promotes inclusive education by networking with educationists and organizations and influences educational and social policy at local, national and international levels. A three-year pre-service B.A. programme has been developed in Integrated Education, based on research into teacher training. This programme recognizes that all children are special with variations in their capabilities, learning pace and inputs. It deals with pedagogical as well as human development aspects, and with the diversity in children's development and needs. The principles of inclusion are followed and practical experiences, as well as exposure to various methodologies, are emphasized along with participatory learning. Teachers completing the course are expected to form a new cadre equipped with skills to teach in multiple settings and with the sensitivity required to meet the diverse needs of the children.

The joyful inclusion training programme of India is a community-based initiative providing training to teachers in rural inclusive schools in Karnataka. The training is based on a training pack, which consists of a curriculum-based criterion-referenced checklist with simplified learning outcomes. The training pack takes into account the child's own pace and ensures that the targets are achievable by each child. Facilitator cards, multi-sensory materials, child self-learning activity cards and an evaluation format, which could be used by parents with limited education, have been developed. The pack is presented to the teachers in a five-day training programme, to then be used by them in schools for a period of three months. The pack has been found to be easy to assimilate. The feedback from the teachers based on the criterion-referenced checklist indicates that the learning levels of all children have increased as a result of the methodology developed in the joyful inclusion package. Teachers from special schools have developed a similar checklist for the Plus curriculum, a modified curriculum for children with disabilities, though this has yet to be field-tested for its effectiveness. The results could help in convincing the government to implement inclusive education as a policy on a larger scale thus scaling up education opportunities for children with disabilities.

The Pakistan country report indicates that in the several teacher training institutions, teachers are prepared for regular schools with the assumption that the education of children with special needs is not their responsibility. This practice is continuing in spite of collaborative intervention of the Ministry of Education and University Grant Commission. The Aga Khan University for Education and Development is an exception to this practice, offering an open learning programme. It has a module on inclusive education for children with special needs and prepares teachers for teaching in inclusive schools. The Department of Special Education, Allama Iqbal Open University in Islamabad, offers a master's programme in a distance-learning mode for teachers working in special education. The National Institute of Special Education in Islamabad is an in-service training college, promoting inclusive education through regular schools and providing training to teachers and heads of regular schools. As an initiative towards preparing teachers for working in inclusive schools, the Department of Special Education, University of Punjab in Lahore, has recently revised its scheme of studies for a master's degree to include the basis of inclusive education.

In Bangladesh, the need to understand and meet the needs of human resource development in the area of education of children with disabilities has led to the establishment of the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD). The Centre is involved in the training of the staff of both government and non-government organizations, community-based rehabilitation workers, teachers and disabled people to design ways of including children and others with disabilities in their existing programmes and institutions. CDD works in partnership and collaboration with different stakeholders and support agencies. The programme

focus is on the capacity development process of trainers by information exchange, practical orientation from partner organizations, refresher and advanced courses for the continuous development of knowledge of the trainers on inclusive education, and interactions with children with disabilities and their parents.

The teacher training activities are aimed at enabling teachers to develop an understanding of the prevailing situation, and to explore the possibilities and scope for inclusion of children in mainstream formal and non-formal education. Teachers gain the understanding and technical knowledge essential for managing and facilitating the learning of children with disabilities in classroom situations, including creating a positive environment. They gain knowledge about preparing the families of children with disabilities in particular and the society as a whole. The centre provides training on Braille and sign language and has recently developed a comprehensive package of sign-supported Bangla. The methodology focuses on the use of participatory approaches. The CDD training team assesses the training needs before initiating the training courses.

The post-training impact study indicates that many of the participating organizations have ensured access for children with disabilities. The training recipients have gained the confidence to include children with disabilities in their schools and programmes. Low-cost teaching–learning materials, including locally made abacuses, standing frames, handwritten large font text, etc., are used.

Many organizations have made amendments to their organizational policies and programmes on the issues of inclusion of children with disabilities, resulting in high rates of enrolment in mainstream government primary schools in the area. In some instances, however, teachers find it difficult to apply the skills acquired during the training due to overcrowded classrooms, lack of classroom space and assistive devices and shortage of learning materials. In some cases, therefore, after completion of education in non-formal education programmes, children with disabilities have had difficulty obtaining admittance to government schools.

In Nepal inclusive education has only recently started to build a presence, and hence progress on teacher development initiatives is limited. In the initiative reported in the country report, the resource teacher in a primary school was provided inputs on identification of children with special needs and on improved teaching–learning processes, including training in Braille script and sign language.

#### **6.4 Inclusive schools**

The examples of inclusive schools presented in each country report have been identified as initiatives with the potential to become good practice models, with pioneering attempts to take up the challenge of educating children with disabilities through accommodating them in regular schools. Although the

examples are still few in number and have room to be made more child and disability friendly, nevertheless they have created opportunities for including children with disabilities in regular schools by creating a welcoming environment. The identification and presentation of the examples of inclusive schools were based on the parameters of admission, funding, accessibility, classroom environment, enrolment, teachers and teacher training, teaching–learning process and curriculum, learning outcomes, supervision and monitoring, and parent and community participation.

➤ **Admission criteria**

A number of factors influence whether disabled or non-disabled children enrol and regularly attend school. Children may be deprived of primary education because of the admission rules of the school. For many poor families, school fees, contribution to schools or parent–teacher associations, cost of learning materials and school distance can also keep children away from school. In some countries, if children do not have any proof of birth registration, they will be denied access to school, or only allowed a limited number of schooling years. This often affects girls, migrants, children from minority cultural groups and refugees.

The country reports reveal that countries adopt varied methods for admitting children into school. In Sri Lanka, children with hearing difficulties and mentally challenged children are admitted to the regular school after preparation in the special education (SE) units attached to the schools. Once a child is admitted to the SE unit, an individual teaching programme, as well as a common teaching programme for all children, is planned and implemented. The ultimate objective is to prepare the child to attain the required competencies to enter the regular school. The time spent in the regular school after admission is 2–3 hours per day and gradually from one to five days a week. The timescale for each child is decided based on the observations of the teacher in charge of the special education unit and the recommendation of the principal. In some cases, children are admitted to the regular classes directly at the request of the parents. In these cases, the special education unit teachers provide the required support to the regular class teacher.

In Pakistan, admission into the urban-based inclusive schools covered in the study is open to all children of low, middle and high socio-economic classes from all religious groups, although most children admitted belonged to lower middle and middle class Muslim households. The number of boys admitted in the schools exceeded the number of girls. The parents have to pay school fees, but these are flexible and are based on the parents' ability to pay. Similarly, in Bangladesh, 99 per cent of the students admitted to such schools are Muslims and from the underprivileged sections of society. In Nepal, inclusion of physically and mentally challenged children into mainstream classes is based on the demands of the community, in tune with the philosophy of the school. In India, in the practice reported, volunteers go into the community and ensure that all



children with disabilities attend school. The initiative began with the inclusion of orthopaedically handicapped children. The success of the effort has gradually resulted in the enrolment of children with visual and hearing difficulties also. Only children with severe disabilities are admitted in special schools.

The ongoing initiatives need to take special measures and introduce the required flexibility in the admission criteria to enable admission of children from groups otherwise deprived. There is a need to ensure that children of migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees, girls, children with disabilities and minorities have equal opportunities to be admitted and learn in schools.

➤ **Funding**

The sources of funding for the inclusive school practices varied from country to country. All the three inclusive schools reported in Pakistan generate their own finances, drawing primarily from private donations and school fees paid by the parents. Individual sponsors in a foreign country support one of the NGO-run schools in Nepal. Government-run initiatives are seen in the schools in Sri Lanka and in one school in Nepal. Recently in Nepal, international donors have contributed to support the government initiatives in inclusive education. The potential good practices reported from India and Bangladesh are examples of government and international partnership.

➤ **Accessibility**

Children may not be able to attend school because of difficulties in accessibility. There is a need to understand the ways in which the physical and social environment can be adapted to include all children. In Sri Lanka, access is limited and transport is not provided by the schools included in the study. Many children studying in special units come to school with their parents using public transport or personal vehicles. On days the parents find it difficult or are unable to commute, children miss school. The parents are often seen to be overprotective towards their children. Attendance after a long vacation is also usually low. Often the special education teachers have to convince the parents to send their children to school. In the inclusive schools in Pakistan, children have to commute a long distance and often travel more than 10 km to school. Some use the school bus (available in only one school) while others use their personal transport. In another school it is the parents' responsibility to take children to and from school and they are unable to do so regularly.

The school documented for the study is situated quite close to the homes in Bangladesh. All children live within half a kilometre radius of the school. They walk to and from school and family members and classmates usually accompany them. Wheelchair users face some barriers, especially during the rainy season, due to the deteriorating condition of the road. In Nepal, on the other hand, the schools are adjacent to the highway making them highly accessible. Suitable modifications to provide physical access have not been made in the schools in Pakistan as they are in rented buildings. In India, under the government scheme,

old school buildings are being modified and new school buildings have ramps or slopes and accessible toilets. In Sri Lanka, children with special needs do not face any difficulty in the special units with regard to physical access to classrooms, using the toilets and reaching the taps to wash their hands and to get drinking water. In the inclusive schools in Nepal and Bangladesh, ramps and slopes have been built wherever necessary to ensure accessibility, especially for wheelchairs, and toilets have been made user-friendly. Most children with disabilities can move independently in the school compound and in the classrooms.

➤ **Classroom environment**

In many countries, particularly in rural areas, teachers often find the work related to creating welcoming classroom environments, and managing teaching and learning, especially challenging. The stark realities facing most practitioners when introducing IE at school level include rigid school systems, inflexible curriculum, poorly paid and poorly trained teachers, lack of basic facilities such as books and desks, and buildings in a state of disrepair. However, despite these difficulties, exciting and innovative work is going on in schools, indicating that by building upon the strengths of even the most impoverished schools it is possible to introduce fundamental changes in educational practice.

With the aim of creating a safe classroom for children, the SE unit in Sri Lanka has comfortable sets of desks and chairs with separate shelves and cupboards to store the children's bags and teaching-learning materials within easy reach. In the inclusive education school started by the Underprivileged Children's Education Programme (UCEP) in Bangladesh schoolteachers, staff and students are sensitized towards disabilities. Issues related to creating a mutually sharing relationship among children are also discussed. All children are taught to respect one another and focus on each other's abilities. They are motivated and inspired to believe that physical limitations do not necessarily act as barriers for learning and acquiring knowledge and skills. In three of the four schools in Pakistan the staff reported that the friendly and supporting school environment has enhanced the confidence levels of students. The environment is gender-sensitive, and there is respect for female teachers and girl students, particularly those with disabilities. Female teacher assistants are working in the school. There is provision of separate toilets and a dressing room for children and teachers. In the inclusive school in India, the classroom environment is safe, and children with disabilities are not discriminated against. Discrimination on the lines of gender and caste, though against school policy, is apparent however. Children from minority groups sit together and commute to school and home together, though disabled children are not discriminated against further as a group.

The classrooms have been modified in Bangladesh to allow sufficient light into the rooms. Where the classes do not have sufficient natural light, fluorescent lights have been installed to assist the children with low vision. Mats have been placed on the floors of the rooms to prevent echoing of sound, which helps those

using hearing aids and also the children with visual impairments. Classroom furniture has been reorganized to enable all children to move freely. Wheelchair users normally are seated in the front of the class near the teacher's desk and have an adapted desk that can be used while sitting in their wheelchairs. Children with hearing difficulties are made to sit in the front row of the class, from where they can lip-read the teacher.

Getting children with special needs to sit in front may be uncomfortable for some children and may cause resentment in other children. In the non-government run inclusive school in Nepal, the conventional row-by-row seating arrangement has been abandoned and children sit in face-to-face groups.

➤ **Enrolment**

In many of the inclusive schools covered by the study, children with disabilities are very few as compared with the total number of children. In Sri Lanka, from the student population of 3000 there are 15 mentally challenged children (with Down's syndrome) enrolled and on an average only 8–9 of these children attend school regularly. The school in India has six children with disabilities, with fewer girls than boys. There are only nine children with disabilities in the primary section of the NGO inclusive school and eight in the government school in Nepal. In Bangladesh, the inclusive school has 99 children (14% of the total school children) with disabilities. As in other countries, the ratio of girls and boys is not proportionate with 60 per cent of the disabled being males. However, high enrolment of children with disabilities is seen in the inclusive schools included in the study in Pakistan. Exceptionally, one inclusive school in Pakistan has 70 children with disabilities studying with 60 other children in the school. The attendance by disabled children is very high with over 75 per cent attendance in two of the schools.

➤ **Teachers and teacher training**

In all the country examples of inclusive schools, the teachers seem to have a positive, friendly, welcoming and supportive attitude towards children with special needs. Female teachers outnumber male teachers in the schools. All teachers working in the three schools in Pakistan have degrees, with only short course training received in special education. Orientation training was given to teachers in Nepal and Bangladesh to help them improve their skills of working with children with disabilities. They develop an understanding about the varied levels among students and the need to respond in multiple ways to improve their learning. The school principal provides full support to the teachers. Teachers are encouraged to meet on a regular basis to discuss their problems and develop confidence in their own abilities.

In India, although the teachers are provided short training courses in disabilities, they do not acquire the skills to work with multiple disabilities. The teachers feel that the large class size does not allow them to spend the required time with children who need extra learning time. The system of assistant teachers

(educated members of the community) appointed by the government provides good support. The resource teachers who visit the school on a regular basis are also part of the support system.

In Sri Lanka, well qualified special education teachers with two years' teacher training degree in special education are in charge of the special unit in the regular school. They implement the education programme and monitor the development of the children while maintaining a close relationship with the parents, who support the school efforts. Support teachers with on-job experience of teaching in the special education units and pre-school have been appointed with the help of the parents. The regular schoolteachers have general education training and have attended a short in-service training course on working with children with disabilities.

In most inclusive schools documented in the study, the class sizes have been adjusted to provide an improved learning environment. In Bangladesh, the pupil:teacher ratio in the schools documented ranges from 15:1 to 30:1 (which includes children both with and without disabilities). The pupil:teacher ratio is higher in the lower classes and decreases in higher grades due to the increase in dropout rates. A pupil:teacher ratio of 30:1 was also found in the inclusive schools in Sri Lanka. In Pakistan and Nepal care is taken to maintain a low pupil:teacher ratio in the schools. The pupil:teacher ratio, however, is very high in the inclusive school in rural India, with 70–100 students per teacher.

➤ **Teaching–learning process and curriculum**

From the documented inclusive schooling practices, it is evident that in inclusive schools the teachers adapt and adjust the curriculum in keeping with the requirements and needs of the children. In Pakistan, except for one school, the curriculum for children with special needs is modified according to the needs of individuals and type of disability, and includes the selection and presentation of the content for teaching instructional material and assessment of children. Once again, except for one school where learning is passive, students are active participants and take part in discussions and other instructional activities in the class. Teachers plan active forms of learning to provide opportunities for children to progress at their own pace. In the rural school in India, the curriculum is rigid, though with exemptions for different subjects being granted. Children with disabilities, being a part of the general class, follow the same schedule with no differentiated treatment for their learning needs. Rote learning is the teaching technique for all students in learning the alphabet, numbers and multiplication tables.

In the school run by the voluntary agency in Nepal, the curriculum goes beyond textbooks. A modified curriculum of the Government of Nepal is followed, with modern teaching methods. The teachers are trained to follow a flexible school curriculum and use multiple ways of teaching. Art, computing, dance, music and sports are essential parts of the curriculum. Children are continuously assessed,

with periodic discussions between parents and teachers. In the government-run inclusive schools in Sri Lanka the teachers prepare individual education plans based on the learning needs of each child. The special education unit follows a specifically designed curriculum, which includes the development of speech and language skills, pre-reading and writing skills and appropriate social skills. Interaction among students is promoted and opportunities for engaging in group and individual activities are provided.

In Bangladesh, UCEP follows the modified curriculum and textbooks prescribed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board. They produce teaching material and teaching aids to suit the learning needs of children and help children learn at their own pace. However, pressure to complete the syllabus is felt by the teachers.

In all the inclusive school practices, the teachers recognize that the learning capabilities of children vary, and try to facilitate learning of all children by applying different techniques. Different learning methods are used, including group learning, peer tutoring, project work and role-play. Rote learning is avoided in most of the schools but dependence on textbooks is still prevalent.

#### ➤ **Learning outcomes**

The assessment of learning provides feedback for planning teaching content and strategies. In practice, the teachers reported that evaluating learning of children with disabilities is a challenging task and it is difficult to maintain individual records. It is found that their performance shows an improvement but usually they lag behind other children in the class with learning taking place at a slower pace. There are also differences in learning achievement in children with different types of disabilities. In Nepal, children with physical and visual disabilities obtained academic results that were close to those of their non-disabled peers. Children with mental disabilities, on the other hand, showed a much lower achievement compared with their non-disabled peers, as was revealed by the Pakistan and Nepal studies. Individual cases of high learning achievement are, however, also reported. In non-academic areas, the performance of children with disabilities is found to be at par with that of other children.

In the school in Sri Lanka, children with disabilities at the level of Grade I and II could identify numbers and count. These children could also write a few words, identify pictures and label the family relationships. In Bangladesh, assessment of children with disabilities (mainly physical disabilities) showed 30 per cent of them achieving the minimum expected level of competence, while another 56 per cent were close to this level, developing at a slower pace.

#### ➤ **Supervision and monitoring**

The teachers need to be supported in their attempts to accommodate children with special needs in inclusive settings. The role of other teachers, administrators and supervisors is crucial in promoting inclusive practice. In most of the inclusive

schools documented, the importance given to positive and cooperative supervision is apparent. In Sri Lanka in-service advisors visit the schools for supervision. With the cooperation of the special education teacher, the principal monitors the education of children with special needs and participates in daily activities of the special education unit, providing support to the teacher in charge of the units. The inclusive school of India is supervised by the District Educational Officer, who is aware of the educational needs of the children with disabilities. In Pakistan also, the mode of supervision is supportive and friendly and the attitude towards inclusion is positive. Supervision and evaluation take place through active and frequent interactions between the supervisory staff and the teachers. The coordinators and the section in charge monitor the assigned duties and progress.

In Bangladesh, supervisors receive orientation training on disability issues and inclusive practice and monitor all relevant indicators of inclusive education. The supervision is conducted at different levels, from both within and outside the school. The school head supervises the activities from within, while the educational divisional and central coordinators do so from outside.

➤ **Parent and community participation**

The involvement of the community, which includes the parents and guardians of students, their extended families, neighbours near the school, government workers and all others who live in the catchments, is crucial for the success of inclusive education initiatives. One critical factor for productive participation and support by community members proves to be directly linked to their increased awareness and education about disabilities: disability does not act as a barrier to being a part of the community or to acquiring knowledge and skills. In Sri Lanka, the parents give full support (both financial and personal) voluntarily and with commitment to the special education unit and regular schoolteachers. They support the activities of the special education unit and help to ensure that the transition is smooth, and that children gradually accept each other. They attend the parent–teacher meetings regularly, at which the school authorities discuss difficulties and possible solutions.

In India, the concept of ‘our children’ is prevalent among community members. The parents are involved in the learning of their children and some volunteer to teach Braille after learning themselves. The parents also take a keen interest in getting trained for daily living skills by the resource teachers. Parents support inclusive practice in Pakistan and discuss issues of their concern with the teacher and school principals. In Nepal, several volunteers are continuously providing support by helping to develop appropriate teaching–learning materials. The parents, however, are not aware of the importance of the education and still believe that their children are disabled due to their fate. On the advice of the community leaders and schoolteachers, they have admitted their children to school and are beginning to see the advantages of schooling.

## TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA

The school in Bangladesh organizes bi-monthly meetings with all parents of the school and discusses the progress of children and other school-related issues. These meetings are used to identify the support that parents can provide. Teachers also make frequent visits to the community and hold informal meetings. Although initially some of the parents had considered their children with disabilities as a burden and a curse upon them, they have changed this negative attitude immensely after counselling, motivation and sensitization by the school. Now they believe that their children with disabilities are equal to other children, with the expectation that they will become productive and contributing members of the family.

## **7. LESSONS LEARNED**

### **7.1 Developing a clear understanding about inclusive practice**

The concept of inclusive education in the South Asian context has gained attention, but its implications and practice are still very limited. Debates concerning promotion of inclusive education are ongoing in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Although there is agreement on the philosophy of inclusive education, scepticism about its implementation prevails, especially in the context of the present low level of awareness, poor infrastructure, lack of professional training and inadequacy of resources.

In such a situation, it is a challenging task to identify examples that reflect good practice in inclusive education. Moreover, since this study takes into consideration only the inclusion of children with disabilities, it is even more difficult to identify schools following good practice. There is, therefore, a need to develop a clearer understanding about the meaning and full implications of inclusive practice. Even in Sri Lanka, where we see a long history of special education, fewer than half of all school-age children with disabilities benefit from education services, with even slower movement towards inclusive education in all the South Asian countries.

This slow movement appears to be related to and also a result of absence of consistent data on the numbers and educational status of children with disabilities, and disparities across regions and types of disability. This makes it difficult for educators, policy-makers and programmers to understand the nature of the problem and make realistic interventions. The need for studies and data collection in these areas is therefore essential.

### **7.2 Inadequate policies for sustainable implementation**

There are inadequate policies and guidelines at the national level to allow for sustainable implementation of inclusive education. Laws on education for children with disabilities lack clarity and are, therefore, interpreted differently by different organizations. An overlap of the policies on special, integrated and inclusive education prevails. While advocating for inclusion, the policies neither fully reject nor accept earlier concepts of integration or segregation. Until recently, the policy approaches for the education of disabled have been guided by charity and welfare paradigms without recognizing the right to education of children with disabilities. The formulation of national level policies and legislation on inclusive education is therefore essential to establish the system in the South Asian countries.



Successful policy development, implementation and monitoring of IE, as consistently indicated by the country reports, require coordination among I/NGOs, government and the private sector. While INGOs in the region have provided the required impetus for the adoption of inclusive policies, the national governments and NGOs have planned, coordinated and monitored the implementation of inclusive practices. During the Inter-Country Experts' Consultation, it was further determined that governments should involve not only the private sector and NGOs but also other actors/stakeholders such as the local community/civil society, professionals and academia, local governments, donor agencies and all children, both with and without disabilities, and their parents, in both developing the IE policy and putting it into practice.

The lack of policies and guidelines, while creating an obstacle to the development of inclusive education, has also led to limited and ad hoc implementation of inclusion practice by the different organizations. One of the common features has been the setting up of special units and resource rooms in regular schools, which create barriers to inclusive practice. In special education units, children are the sole responsibility of the special education teacher and whenever s/he is on leave, the parents are advised to keep the child at home. This practice denies the disabled child the opportunity of learning with regular classroom children in the same class, and interaction with other children in the school is mainly restricted to social activities. The schools with resource classes and residential facilities, on the other hand, often cause exclusion of the disabled children by moving them away from their families and their community. These practices demand that children adjust to the education system rather than the educational system and the teachers adjusting to the students' needs.

Another common feature has been the concentration of the limited services available for children with disabilities in urban areas, in big cities or close to district headquarters. Even then the available services benefit a very small number of disabled children, with only certain types of disabilities. Therefore, in addition to the need to expand the services in urban areas, there is a need to provide opportunity to the majority of children with disabilities who live in rural areas, who cannot benefit from education or other services.

### **7.3 Starting inclusive education initiatives and managing change in schools**

Inclusive education by its definition includes all children and all schools. It may be necessary to be selective in the initial pilot stages in order to develop models of good practice, but ultimately inclusive education has to be for all children in all schools. It has been indicated by the country reports that the development of inclusive education is possible if schools themselves are committed to becoming more inclusive, and that this can be realized through several complementary initiatives:

- Modifying school and classroom infrastructure.

- Changing negative attitudes towards disabled children.
- Preparing a suitable curriculum.
- Preparing professionals to support inclusive education.

Physical access to schools poses barriers to learning and participation. In addition to factors such as long distance or dangerous roads, schools might be inaccessible for the learners who have difficulties in mobility. Simple ramps, user-friendly toilets and internal classroom arrangements have been shown to easily overcome this difficulty. Modifications in the classrooms that create a safe and friendly environment, with suitable seating arrangements and space for mobility, and easy access to shelves and cupboards for their belongings, enables the children with disabilities to fit in to regular classrooms. Similarly, the number of students in the class is an important factor. When schools have large classes, with more than fifty students, teachers are more reluctant to include children with disabilities. They consider it an additional unmanageable workload.

Promoting positive attitudes and respect for differences is a prerequisite for implementation of inclusive education at school and community level. Schools often cause exclusion when they are not able to deal with violence, bullying and abuse between learners, and occasionally between learners and teachers and amongst the school staff. Parents are not likely to send their disabled children, especially girls, to a school which they do not perceive as being safe and in which learners' and teachers' attitudes towards disabled children is negative or discriminatory. Inclusive school practice indicates that there will be children with a wide range of disabilities in the same class when children attend their local school. Children with disabilities and other children will, therefore, need to be prepared to accept each other. Since children with disabilities often lack confidence and feel inferior due to the messages they have received from family and community, they will also need to develop an improved self-concept as they start their journey in education. It is the task of the inclusive education practitioners to sensitize and orient teachers to these issues and to guide them in their response to the diversity in the classroom.

Curriculum is often rigidly prescribed at the national or central level. There is a need to find ways to ensure that it leaves room for the school or the individual teacher to make modifications so that it is relevant to the local context and for the individual learners.

It is evident from the country reports that school-based training aimed at supporting school-based development can be particularly powerful in the early stages of the move towards more inclusive education. Where training resources are scarce, cascade models enable training to be disseminated throughout the system; and where there are logistical problems in giving teachers access to training, a distance learning mode has proved beneficial. However, training efforts need to be sustained over time in a planned and systematic manner to create a sufficient cadre of professionals since the required skilled and trained

personnel for supporting inclusive practice have not been adequate to meet the needs of different types of disabilities. Training for sensitization towards disability and inclusion issues, and how to converge efforts for effective implementation of programmes, are important concerns in this regard. In addition, factors such as large class size, long working hours (teaching in two shifts), low salaries and lack of recognition for good work have to be addressed for they act as deterrents for regular teachers to work with children with disabilities.

#### **7.4 Strengthening school–parent–community links**

The importance of the role parents play in initiating and supporting inclusive practices in schools in terms of admission, assessing and monitoring the progress of children, and providing financial support as resources for daily activities and for paying the salary of the support teacher, is clearly evident from the country reports. This has been the result of concerted efforts in raising community awareness. Similarly, efforts made through volunteers to procure special services (speech therapy and physiotherapy) at home for children with disabilities who cannot go to school and monitoring the progress of those who do enter school have proved beneficial. Regular contact between parents, teachers and school authorities stimulates parents' interest in their child's learning and can often serve to identify problems in the initial stages.

Related interventions outside the school improve the school reform process. These 'emergent beneficial activities' include schools providing training for the community outside of regular school activities and normal school hours. This has been observed to have strengthened the school–community link, which in turn has proved crucial for successful implementation and sustainability of inclusive activities. Strong links with parents and community-based development organizations are also beneficial to the success of inclusive education.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

A key objective of the study was to analyse the available practices in the area of inclusive education in South Asia, in order to strengthen the capacity of the governments, other partners and UNICEF staff to bring about policy reforms, ensure adequate resource allocation and promote programming that supports inclusive education. The following recommendations draw on the findings from this study and provide actions that can be undertaken by all relevant stakeholders to promote inclusive education that will enable disabled and marginalized children to enjoy their right to education. The deliberations during the Inter-Country Experts' Consultation further determined some immediate interventions to promote the establishment and implementation of inclusive education practice (see Box).

### **8.1 Establishing policies**

The principles of inclusion set out in international declarations need to be interpreted in the context of individual countries. Statements of principles at government level should be used to generate a debate around inclusion and begin the process of consensus building among the general public, including children and people with disabilities, disabled people's organizations and policy makers. The policies need to be broad-based to cover all children with and without disabilities, as well as the different types of disabilities, thus satisfying the CRC that aims to facilitate equal education for all children. However, care should also be taken to ensure that there is flexibility in the policy implementation wherever possible so that special needs of children with different types of disability can be addressed. Additionally, the education policies need to provide for each ordinary school to accept and welcome all children with disabilities, supported by proper legislation.

### **8.2 Coordination among ministries**

Effective implementation of inclusive education practice necessitates an improved coordination between of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education or Social Affairs or Women and Social Welfare, as the case may be, with the ultimate aim of shifting the portfolio of education of children with disabilities and other marginalized groups to the Ministry of Education. While education of children with disabilities should mainly be the responsibility of the education department, an inter-agency coordination structure needs to be developed to coordinate the ministries, NGOs and other agencies.

### **8.3 Regular surveys**

Comprehensive and regular surveys must be undertaken to identify and generate data on children with disabilities, particularly those who are not in schools. The instrument for data collection should be prepared in consultation with the specialist on disability. In this exercise care should be taken to involve trained personnel. The population census in the countries of the region can be used to gain data on prevalence of disability on a scientific basis. National sample surveys could also provide the required database.

### **8.4 Redirecting functioning of special schools**

The simultaneous initiatives in special education and inclusive education tend to divide the focus on education of children with disabilities in regular school settings. Links and bridges need to be built between special schools and inclusive education practices. There is a need to review and redirect the functioning of the special education initiatives so that they serve the purpose of inclusive education. All existing special education practices should be redesigned with the aim of supporting inclusive education practices.

### **8.5 Creating positive attitudes**

Inclusive education is feasible only when there is a belief at all levels that the right to education is a basic human right. Child rights awareness campaigns should be undertaken before instituting other project activities. Initiating change in favour of inclusive education should involve mobilizing opinion, building consensus among the general public through seminars, workshops and the media. Sensitization programmes, with active participation of people with disabilities who can be projected as role models and can propagate direct and positive messages to the general community, would be useful.

The print and electronic media are very effective communication and advocacy tools in raising positive perceptions of the community, including those of the parents. It is important to note that while ensuring positive attitudes, it is also necessary to avoid labelling and to remove stereotyping. Therefore, the media need to be monitored for any negative portrayal of people with disabilities. Various associations working in drama and cultural events can be involved on a regular basis in monitoring how characters and stories project disability.

Similarly, teachers need to be encouraged to discuss the positive points of disability issues in their classes with the students. They can together be involved in developing short plays to depict the causes of disabilities and how children with disabilities feel about themselves.

## **8.6 Forging meaningful partnerships**

The endeavour in inclusive education needs to focus more on the parents' and the community's role in their children's education, and the approach needs to be guided more by education as a fundamental right of every child and less by the concept of general charity and welfare. Local government agencies therefore should have knowledge about existing policies and should encourage the formation of partnerships between schools, parent groups, community leaders, NGOs and professional groups. These groups can form a core team so that there would be more involvement of parents and community members in acquiring common knowledge and skills.

## **8.7 Supportive curriculum and teaching–learning materials**

Adaptation of curriculum, instruction and evaluation is central to the process of inclusion, requiring higher levels of competence than are available in all places. The countries of the region should, therefore, pool their resources to develop their expertise to the extent that curriculum adaptation can be undertaken in a meaningful way at local level. Issues related to disability should be included in the school curriculum so that negative attitudes towards people with disabilities can be mitigated.

The curriculum, at the same time, needs to be flexible and responsive to the diversity of learning needs of children. It needs to accommodate a range of learning styles and emphasize skills and knowledge that are relevant to students. Vocational training and skill development should be part of any education project for students with disabilities. Like other students, children with disabilities need to develop abilities that will allow them to find work and gradually improve their living conditions. Children with disabilities need support to develop as much self-sufficiency and as much independence as possible.

Resources must be used to provide assistive devices and other teaching–learning aids in classrooms. Development of resource centres and sharing of inclusive education materials could be feasible.

## **8.8 Training of teachers**

The training of regular teachers at pre-service and in-service levels should address the issue of education of children with disabilities through the introduction of new courses on inclusive education. This will equip the teachers to create an inclusive culture in schools.

This area deserves high priority since in schools only the resource teacher seems to be trained in educating disabled children and s/he has to look after all children with disabilities of the school. There is often a communication gap

between regular teachers and students with disabilities, as they have to have the help of a mediator to access one another.

The role of a special education teacher needs to undergo a change to become a consultant for the entire school. The setting up of a teacher support team in every school can also be promoted to provide on-site support.

Efforts should be made to launch training courses for supporting staff such as speech therapists, physiotherapists, audiologists, mobility support staff and Braille instructors, at least at national level. Inviting international consultants to provide professional support for this purpose can be an effective input and speed up the process.

### **8.9 Alternative support mechanisms**

The existing handful of teacher trainers cannot reach the vast number of teachers working with children with disabilities in rural/remote areas. There is thus a need to explore alternatives such as training para-teachers, investing in pilot studies to develop tele-rehabilitation programmes and exploring the strategies of distance education.

### **8.10 Orientation programmes for key persons**

At a time when inclusive education is being experimented through pilot projects, teachers cannot take the complete responsibility of inclusive schooling. They need the active support of policy makers, education officials, supervisors and grassroots level workers, particularly those who are directly concerned with the promotion of inclusive education. Orientation programmes for the stakeholders need to go beyond special teaching techniques and cover issues of planning, management, organization, implementation and evaluation of special education programmes.

### **8.11 Identification and assessment of learning outcomes**

It is important to identify the manner in which the specific and individual needs of each child with disability will be fulfilled. Preparation of children by means of early childhood intervention before enrolment is required, which will improve retention rates and help children with disabilities to achieve their full potential. Teachers need to learn how to assess the needs and abilities of their students with disabilities and use specific methods and interventions for increasing the learning and abilities of each child.

### **8.12 Developing appropriate tools for evaluation**

Initiatives should be taken to develop functional screening skills at school level and provide assessment facilities for identification of disabilities. Resource centres should be established at regional levels in order to provide immediate support and services to the schools.

The focus on evaluation needs to go beyond the academic achievement of children with disabilities. Suitable additional provisions to the existing approaches and practices of examination and evaluation should be introduced (e.g. extra time, writer facility for children with visual disability). In this respect, a developmental profile of learners with disabilities will be more useful than a psychometric assessment. Children can be assessed by ongoing assessment, using a wide variety of methods to get feedback about their learning. This will also help teachers to adapt their planning and instruction to the need of the learners so that all will have the chance to learn and succeed.

All students should be able to make smooth progress into, through, and out of the formal education system. Any barriers at key transition points should be identified and removed.

### 8.13 Role of parents' organizations in teaching–learning processes

Parents' organizations need to be formed with more structured links with professionals. Parents need to be trained in the development and evaluation of early childhood programmes for their own children. They can also be encouraged to prepare and manage the use of low-cost teaching–learning materials, including locally made toys and written materials in the form of traditional stories, legends, songs and poetry.

### 8.14 Government, NGO and donor equation

The private sector has taken a lead in promoting and implementing inclusive education in most countries. There is a need to support these efforts by providing grants from the government and international donor agencies, and monitoring progress.

The private regular schools funded by national and international agencies should also be encouraged to start inclusive education. Implementing inclusive education, for instance, could be made a pre-condition for disbursement of grants.

#### Immediate and priority interventions for Inclusive Education

- Establishment of network of Inclusive Education experts at regional level.
- Establishment of National and Regional level **Inclusive Education Group (IEG)** (Inclusive Education Group of South Asia constituted by the Experts in Inter-Country Consultation in Lahore, Pakistan).
- Establishment of national resource centres for inclusive education in member countries. Possibility of establishing a regional resource centre on inclusive education in any of the member states should be explored.

*Inter-Country Experts' Consultation on Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities, January 2004, Lahore, Pakistan*



In a scenario where services of inclusive education are not offered by the state, NGOs need to develop into service providers. In Pakistan, education has become a profitable business that has attracted investment from different groups and individuals because of tax rebates and other incentives. However, with limited initiatives on the ground, there is an urgent need for organizations and the state institutions to collaborate, network and build on collective experiences to bring about change. This can best be achieved by shaping policies and through advocacy initiatives.

### **8.15 Managing resources**

All countries face difficulties in finding adequate funds to support education. It is important to find ways of meeting needs without always calling for extra funds and other resources. One of the first steps towards effectively managing the available resources could be by overcoming the separation of special and mainstream education funding. This has to be complemented with the development of alternative methods for distributing the funding. The plans and allocations should not be based on incidence but on prevalence of special education needs, taking into consideration the backlog created due to decades of neglect.

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