Inclusive Education-Barriers to Learning

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Abstract: *Inclusion is: a social and educational philosophy. Those who believe in inclusion also believe that all people are valuable members of mainstream society, whatever their difference or diversity. Inclusive education in India is seen by many as a matter of providing education for children with disabilities. However, many more children are excluded because of various barriers to learning. Identifying the specific barriers to learning is the first step in focusing advocacy efforts towards reducing and removing these. Barriers include any reason why a child does not have access to fair and appropriate education (based on the child's needs) within his/her community. Children face barriers related to a disability, health, socioeconomic and cultural concerns, lack of government policies and protection, inaccessible infrastructure, language, geography, and awareness of rights within the education system. After identifying barriers, the process of developing mechanisms to address them should be intensified. Rigorous advocacy initiatives should be implemented to persuade decision makers at all levels to take action. Furthermore, the process must be inclusive of schools, parents, students, teachers, government administrators, and community leaders. Using existing resources more effectively is helpful, especially before requesting new or additional resources from the government or other partners. Resources can include teachers or other personnel equipment, facilities or funds. While the mechanisms should be detailed, they should also be flexible and reasonable. They should be adjusted to suit the current local and national realities, while allowing room for continued development and adaptation.*

Key Words: *Inclusion, Inclusive Education, Barriers to learning*

I. INTRODUCTION

India is committed to fulfilling the goal of education for all and inclusive education is now a feature of various government documents and plans. Between 35 and 80 million of India's 200 million school age children do not attend school. In addition, less than 5 percent of children who have a disability are in school. Inclusive education in India is seen by many as a matter of providing education for children with disabilities. However, many more children are excluded on grounds of gender, regional or caste differences, but these are in most cases not considered for inclusive education. While it is recognized that these children need to be included, efforts to do so are not well coordinated.

First, ministries of education must rise above their satisfaction with 90%net enrolment rates and commit themselves to eliminating the net non-enrolment rate of 2%or 5% which in our country can still mean millions of children not in school. They must do this by identifying those groups of children who are not learning whether because of poverty, gender, disability, remoteness, linguistic or cultural difference or HIV/AIDS status. They must answer several questions about these children: Who are they? Where do they live? Why they are not in school?

Those excluded from education are often simply not seen; if seen, they are not counted; if counted, they are not served. Inclusive education really means making the invisible, visible, and ensuring that all learners fulfill their right to an education of good quality. **Beyond this, we strongly believe inclusive education is a way out to create Inclusive Society thereby Inclusive Universe.**

Barriers to learning: Formal and informal education though overtly designed to facilitate learning, comprises a range of barriers to learning and participation. These could be structural, pedagogical, temporal, conceptual, epistemological, professional, financial or attitudinal obstacles. The barriers can be located within the learners, within the center of learning, within the education system, within the families and within the broader social, economic and political context.

These barriers manifest themselves in different ways and only become obvious when learning breakdown occurs, when learners drop out of the system or do not join it. Equally important is to recognize the existing strengths and harness support in order to transform systems from lesser to higher levels of inclusion. It is important to consider that often the indigenous solutions have come about through processes of struggle by learners, parents, educators, policy makers etc while trying to prevent barriers to learning.

Does education begin when a child sets foot in a primary school and does it end when the school bell rings and the class is let out. It often appears to be the other way round, if one was to see the happy faces of many children as they leave schools. Many a times education systems are unable to respond to the life style of the community. Barriers in learning thus arise:

Attitudes: A limited understanding of the needs of the marginalised children often based on deep rooted cultural beliefs, resistance to change and ignorance are perhaps the greatest barriers to inclusive education which exist at all levels from policy makers to the local functionaries. The greatest barriers to inclusion are caused by society, not by particular medical impairments. Negative attitudes towards differences result in discrimination and can lead to a serious barrier to learning. Negative attitudes can take the form of social discrimination, lack of awareness and traditional prejudices. Often the problem is identified as being caused by the child's differences rather than the education systems shortcomings. Strategies for attitudinal shifts are generally

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designed on the experience alien to them. The need is to increase understanding of how people get influenced in a given context and develop mechanisms and processes to make this a continuous process.

Physical Barriers: The inability of learners to access the educational provisions and other services impact adversely on the learning process. The vast majority of centres of learning are physically inaccessible to many learners, especially to those who have physical disabilities. In poorer, particularly rural areas, the centres of learning are often inaccessible largely because buildings are rundown or poorly maintained. They are unhealthy and unsafe for all learners. Many schools are not equipped to respond to special needs, and the community does not provide local backing. Environmental barriers included: doors, passageways, stairs and ramps and recreational areas. A major problem identified by many students is physically getting into school. Inequalities in the society such as urban/rural disparities, discrimination etc are linked with inadequacies in educational provisions as seen in the insufficient number of centers of learning and other facilities.

Inflexible Curriculum: One of the most serious barriers to learning and development can be found within the curriculum itself and relates primarily to the inflexible nature of the curriculum which prevents it from meeting diverse needs among learners. Materials used for teaching and learning, which constantly reflect only a culture or life experience, may lead to learners from other cultures and life experiences feeling excluded and marginalised. One of the most serious ways in which learners are prevented from accessing the curriculum is through inadequate provision of materials or equipment they may need for learning to take place. . In many contexts, the curriculum is centrally designed and rigid, leaving little flexibility for local adaptations or for teachers to experiment and try out new approaches. The content might be distant to the reality in which the students live, and therefore inaccessible and unmotivating. Such barriers often affect learners especially with disabilities who do not receive the necessary assistive devices, which would equip them to participate in the learning process.

Teachers: Teachers' abilities and attitudes can be major limitations for inclusive education. The training of staff at all levels is often not adequate. Where there is training it often tends to be fragmented, uncoordinated and inadequate and largely inappropriate to the existing needs. The move to inclusion, however, demands that regular teachers develop a high level of skill in responding to a range of diverse needs. It also demands that specialist teachers be trained to refocus their expertise into more advisory and consultative roles in regular schools. Further training needs arise with respect to other professionals such as for the community level workers, particularly parents, local level support personnel. Promoting and facilitating professional development for inclusive education is a major obstacle to overcome for inclusive education.

Language and communication: A further area of barriers arising from the curriculum, are those which result from the medium of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning often takes place through a language which is not the first language of some learners. This places these learners, at a disadvantage and it often leads to significant linguistic difficulties which contribute to learning breakdown. Second language learners are particularly subject to low expectations and discrimination. . Educators often experience difficulties in developing appropriate support mechanisms for second language learners.

Socio-economic factors: Inadequacies and inequalities in the education system and are most evident in areas which have sustained poverty and high levels of unemployment. The impact of violence and HIV/AIDS can also have adverse effects.

Funding: A major constraint is serious shortages of resources – lack of schools or inadequate facilities, lack of teachers and/or shortage of qualified staff, lack of learning materials and absence of support. The inadequacy of resources available to meet the basic needs in education is a pervasive theme. It is estimated that achieving education for all will require additional financial support by countries and donors of about US$ 8 billion per year (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000).

Organisation of the education system: Education systems are often centralized and this can inhibit change and initiative. There is also a lack of information within many systems and often there is not an accurate picture of the number of learners excluded from the school system. Only a small percentage of learners who are categorized as having 'special needs' receive appropriate education in ordinary schools or special settings and there is no support available for those learners who are outside the system. Existing provision after primary school is inadequate to meet the needs.

Policies as barriers: Policy makers who do not understand or accept the concept of inclusive education are a barrier to the implementation of inclusive policies. In some countries there may still exist policies that facilitate the possibility for authorities to declare that some children are 'uneducable'. Usually this practice applies to children with severe intellectual disability. Contemporary India is one of the few countries worldwide where the education of disabled children doesn't fall within the purview of the human resource development ministry. It is the burden of the omnibus ministry of social justice and empowerment. Very often this leads to a situation where these learners are not expected to participate in mainstream education and, consequently, they do not have equal opportunities for further education or employment.

Inadequate Involvement of Parents and Communities: Like disability, belonging to ethnic or linguistic minorities, poverty etc. has created a disadvantage in the education system creating wider social stigma. Education has often involved separating children from their families and communities to a greater or lesser extent. A lack of parental involvement in centers of learning and resources to facilitate such involvement, low levels of empowerment particularly in poorer communities and support for parent organizations are visible barriers in the system.

Promoting parental and community involvement poses to be as a barrier since the parents and community members of marginalised learners themselves often experience marginalisation living in poverty, or in isolated communities, or be members of ethnic and linguistic minorities. Most often they are uneducated and feel they have nothing to contribute to the schooling process. Sometimes, where women take the lead in issues to do with children, they live in societies where men are expected to be concerned with work outside the family as the bread earners. In such situations for overcoming these barriers school authorities need to develop the parents confidence and consider varied ways of involving them.

Linking micro to macro issues: A lack of a clear understanding of inclusion poses challenges in all education systems. Sometimes inclusion is seen as location integration of special classes in mainstream schools, which hampers efforts for real inclusion and improvements throughout the education system. Political instability in many countries does not encourage innovations, neither does continuous financial constraints. Attitudes of the decision-makers, as well as lack of policies and support from the government and education authorities may discourage initiative towards inclusive education at local level.

Inclusion is not an utopian dream, which leads to an inclusive society overnight. Conflicting views, contradictions, war, inequality will continue, the struggle is to find approaches, which will help, find continuous options to address exclusion.

When we know what barriers to learning are, we should also work to bring about a change. **Who is responsible to bring change?** who have the responsibilities to deliver inclusive education? It is the responsibility of the stakeholders ie : Children, Parents, Teachers, School, the Education Administration, government, educationist, NGOs and donors.

All for Children, for All the Children …

- Inclusion is an idea a belief to discuss and elaborate according to local conditions and concepts not a universal prefab model to impose. Inclusion defies a single solution and necessitates the need for determining different modalities. Our concern is to make schools effective for ALL children.

- The challenge for inclusion and overcoming exclusion are a challenge for all; the rich and the poor alike; rural and urban needs etc. The focus needs to shift from only the learner within the school to prevailing social context and issues related to access and equity of provision.

- Inclusion requires everyone working together involved collectively in supporting learning at whatever level and identifying and responding to priorities of development as they exist locally. It is about maximising community resources, building new links and strengthening old ones.

- Building local ownership and creating a "new space" for the voices of the excluded children and adult alike.

- Countries need to consider ways of involving all stakeholders in a process of internal reflection and sensitisation on priority issues related to inclusion. A coherent policy and practice bridging the existing gaps is required. Inclusion is a cross cutting issue.

- Barriers to exclusion are contextual and can be identified within national policies and cultures, communities and education institutions.

- One of the major steps in overcoming barriers to learning is to focus on the nature of the barriers what causes them and how they manifest themselves. Equally important is to recognize the existing strengths and harness support.

- It is essential to find ways to reduce external dependency and find ways to generate internal revenue. External agencies to give equal weightage to both the quantitative and qualitative needs of nations for extending support to inclusion.

- Who are the marginalised children with in and outside the learning system? Who is responsible for children who are out of school? Sometimes political considerations too impact children's education for example children affected by war and children living in refugee camps. Planning and resource allocation is based on skewed information.

- Formal educational systems need to determine ways of adopting methods used successfully in non-formal educational- innovations.

- The implications for teacher training, curriculum development, building local capacity, community involvement, redirecting resources and intra-sectoral collaboration are key issues.

- The urban bias in provisions of services and lack of efficient service delivery and infrastructure in rural areas.

- Inclusion is premised on success and not failure and thus a cost effective system of education.

- Assessment and analysis should include listening to ALL children and adult perspectives. This often poses to be one of the major barriers to inclusive practice.

II. CONCLUSION

Inclusion in schools should help in promoting inclusive societies. It is not the children we must change; it is the education that needs to respond to the needs of the children and their communities. It is clear however that there are no readymade recipes, nor quick fix solutions or uniform remedies. Contextual issues impact the strategies developed for inclusion. It is primarily because many of the difficulties children face in their learning are connected to factors other than educational. If we move beyond seeing inclusion as a special education concern, beyond those to be included as those with disabilities, then we have the potential to challenge and transform far more within our schools and society. The Process of initiation: The reason for initiation of inclusive education is actually very simple-The presence. "Out of sight, out of mind" is an old saying which remains relevant today. The presence of learners with diverse needs in regular schools automatically influences policy, administrative and organizational decisions. Presence is must whether through reserving seats or through building ramps and toilets. Presence alone would raise our level of comfort and take us to the threshold of celebrating diversity.

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