

# **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A MEANS TO ACHIEVE EDUCATION FOR ALL IN ZANZIBAR**

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**MESSAGE:** Including children with disabilities in mainstream education as a means of alleviating problems encountered by them

## **INTRODUCTION**

The majority of children with special needs in Zanzibar do not go to normal schools because there is no policy on inclusive education encouraging children with special needs to join normal schools. This would be one of the means of alleviating problems in accessibility to education that children with disabilities encounter. "Inclusive education is something seen as a political strategy based on human rights and democratic principles, that confront all forms of discrimination as a part of concern to develop an inclusive society" (Ture Johnson, 2001). In brief, inclusive education is a process of learning in a normal school without any barriers. In contrast, special schools have the negative impact of segregating disabled children. These schools are very expensive and most developing countries do not consider education of children with disabilities as a priority. As a result, the community is overburdened with illiterate children with disabilities who will become unemployable adults. Therefore, this article presents three advantages of including disabled children in regular schools.

### **1. Creating a Platform for Disabled Children**

Inclusive education creates a platform for the needs of disabled children to be identified and addressed. Inter-ministerial committees, donors, bilateral partners and other stakeholders can start to advocate for the needs of these children. This leads people with different expertise to look at the problems and find solutions. In this way, the education system can adapt and be more accessible to children with disabilities. Education needs to be adapted to each individual's needs ([www.handicapinternational.org/p.55](http://www.handicapinternational.org/p.55)).

In addition, accessibility to education can be improved through:

- equipping schools with teaching aids for children with special needs
- training teachers (most teachers lack knowledge of the needs of disabled children, their abilities and skills).
- improving the school environment by building ramps, wide doors, adapted latrines and leveled school compound etc.

The above strategies are currently lacking in the education system and therefore prevent disabled children from joining schools. Thus, immediate and coordinated efforts must be taken to improve accessibility. Barston and Wamai (1994) give an example from Uganda: "general access to education in Uganda is affected by high education costs and household poverty". From experience in Zanzibar, general access to education is also affected by both government and household poverty. This is why the involvement of bilateral partners and donors is essential. In addition, negligence, ignorance about disability issues and the importance of inclusive education affect access to education.

### **2. Creating Positive Examples for Information Dissemination**

Disseminating information on positive examples of children with disabilities who benefitted from inclusive education can remove negative attitudes. This can also make parents, community members and local leaders aware of the potential of disabled children and their rights as human beings. As a result of the community being

aware of the benefits of inclusive education, they may encourage the identification and referral of school-aged disabled children to regular schools.

It is obvious that successful inclusion of disabled children in mainstream education needs a lot of awareness creation.

### 3. Identifying Other Needs

Moreover, the Ministry of Education should identify other needs of disabled children so that they are also included in education policies. The Government should involve people in their communities, PWDs, stakeholders, desk officers from chief Minister's office concerning disability issues, and disabled person's organizations. With this, the government will be able to reform/formulate, introduce and successfully implement inclusion policies.

Policy is a directive measure to action. There is a need to reform existing education policies and/or formulate an independent inclusive education policy. Mei Ainscow (June 2004) commented that "...inclusive education involves efforts to reform policy and practice in education". This policy needs to be considered for the sustainable development of disabled children.

To conclude, inclusive education is the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving 'Education for All'. Every child has a right to education but not every child has the opportunity. We believe that inclusion in education is the path to follow in order to fulfill the right to education. It should be built within all sections of the society: parents, community members, non-governmental organizations, so as to influence government policies.

#### Bibliography:

1. Accessibility and Relevance of Uganda Education System, Uganda Society for the Disabled Children, (2003)
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3. Mei Amscow, (June 2004), Enabling Education, EENET