



INCLUSION & EQUITY

Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum View of the Progress Necessary to Include All Disabled Young People in Education



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CDPF supports a Social Model/Human Rights approach to disability and full implementation of inclusive education across the Commonwealth.¹

What is inclusive education?

The right to inclusive education encompasses a transformation in culture, policy and practice in all formal and informal educational environments, to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers impeding that possibility. It involves strengthening the capacity of the education

system to reach out to all learners. It focuses on the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance and achievement of all students, especially those who, for different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalised. Inclusion involves access to and progress in high-quality formal and informal education without discrimination. It seeks to enable communities, systems and structures to combat discrimination, including harmful stereotypes, recognises diversity, promotes participation and overcomes barriers to learning and participation for all by focusing on the well-being and success of disabled students. It requires an in-depth transformation of education systems in



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legislation, policy, and the mechanisms for financing, administration, design, delivery and monitoring of education.²

Inclusive education

This is now broadened and seen as a core principle of education to ensure that all children are reached under the assumption that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive effective educational opportunities. However, this paper aims to make a strong case for ensuring access to quality inclusive education specifically for disabled people, as one of many groups who are vulnerable to exclusion. For disabled people of all ages, the main challenge remains to be able to attend

and achieve at schools and educational institutions in the communities where they live and with their peers. This is important, first and foremost, because it provides learners with the fullest realisation of their right to education, but also because it is the most efficient and cost-effective means of ensuring the fulfilment of this right. In low-income countries, large-scale exclusion of disabled children remains the order of the day and is not often high on government agendas. In middle and high-income countries, far too many are segregated in special schools or units. The UN's 2018 Disability and Development Report said: "Among the countries with data, persons with disabilities [...] are less likely to attend school, they are more likely to be out of

school, they are less likely to complete primary or secondary education, they have fewer years of schooling and they are less likely to possess basic literacy skills."

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN, 2006)³ and the subsequent General Comment 4 on Article 24 (2016)⁴ were the most critical milestones since the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994)⁵ to affirm the right of disabled people to access inclusive education. In 2015 this right was further embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) committing all countries to ensure equal

opportunity in access to quality learning opportunities at all levels of education from a lifelong perspective. There is also a new focus on the relevance of **learning outcomes** both for the world of work, as well as for citizenship in a global and interconnected world. This is particularly explicit in target 4.5, which aims to **eliminate gender disparities and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for those at risk of exclusion, including disabled people, indigenous peoples and children in risk situations.**

The language we use

Why do we still choose to call ourselves disabled people? In the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), we call ourselves **'disabled people'** because of the development of the **'social model of disability'**. In the nineteenth and twentieth-century, a disabled person's medical condition was thought to be the root cause of their exclusion from society, an approach now referred to as the **'medical or individual model'** of

disability. We use the **'social model of disability'**. We also view ourselves as united by a common oppression, so we are proud to identify as **'disabled people'** rather than **'people with disabilities'**.

Inclusive education has become problematic, as, despite international exhortations to implement it, little real progress is occurring around the world. Roger Slee, in an essay to generate input to the 2020 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, puts this down to a number of causes but **especially the confusion between special education (as a medical model response to impairment) and inclusion, which requires wholesale transformation addressing barriers to disabled learners so they can thrive.**⁶

Across the Commonwealth, understanding of what is required to make inclusive education a reality is poor, and progress in most States is very slow. Some countries have made progress but in others, there are just pilot projects run by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Despite over 30 years of these small-scale projects, little movement

to scale is seen. In this document, we examine the main ingredients of a successful inclusive education policy and illustrate with examples from Commonwealth countries. Some recent projects in the Commonwealth in Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania and Bangladesh are underway in the UK Government FCDO Disability Inclusive Development Project but, while making real change locally, there remain many issues to bring the good practice reported upon to scale.⁷

Barriers

The UN CRPD Committee identify barriers⁸ that impede access to inclusive education for disabled people attributing them to multiple factors:

- a. the failure to understand or implement the **human rights model of disability**, in which barriers within the community and society exclude, rather than personal impairments and functioning exclude a **medical model approach**;

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- b. persistent discrimination against disabled people, compounded by the isolation of those still living in long-term residential institutions, and low expectations about those in mainstream settings, allowing prejudices and fear to escalate and remain unchallenged;
- c. lack of knowledge about the nature and advantages of inclusive and quality education, diversity and its positive impact on the learning of all; lack of outreach to all parents; lack of appropriate responses to support requirements, leading to misplaced fears and stereotypes that inclusion will cause a deterioration in the quality of education, or otherwise impact negatively on others;
- d. lack of disaggregated data and research necessary for accountability and programme development, impeding the development of effective policies and interventions to promote inclusive and quality education;

- e. lack of political will, technical knowledge, and capacity in implementing the right to inclusive education, including insufficient education of all education staff;
- f. inappropriate and inadequate funding mechanisms to provide incentives and reasonable accommodations for the inclusion of disabled students, inter-ministerial coordination, support and sustainability;
- g. lack of legal remedies and mechanisms to claim redress for violations.

We have examples of making inclusive education work for disabled people with the full range of impairments in countries at every social and economic development across the Commonwealth.⁹ What is stopping this from coming to scale is a lack of political will. The benefits of achieving this are high in terms of a sense of individual achievement, well-being in our communities and adding to the economic wealth and growth of all countries. ■

1. Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum (CDPF) represents 94 DPOs/OPDs-Organisations run and controlled by disabled people with representation in 49 of 56 Commonwealth countries. More information can be found at www.commonwealthdpf.org.
2. Para 9 General Comment No 4 (2016). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-4-article-24-right-inclusive>
3. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html>
4. UNCRPD Committee General Comment No 4 (2016). <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57c977e34.html>
5. UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework (1994). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427>
6. Roger Slee (2018). Defining the scope of inclusive education: think piece prepared for the 2020 Global education monitoring report, Inclusion and education. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265773>
7. Disability Inclusive Development Inclusive Futures Education. <https://inclusivefutures.org/inclusive-education/>
8. Para 4 General Comment No 4 (2016)
9. R. Rieser (2012). A Commonwealth Guide to Implementing Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. <http://worldofinclusion.com/v3/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Implementing-Inclusive-Education-promo-copy1.pdf>



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