



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# POLICY BRIEFS Inclusion

Sharing Global Experience

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By Nicholas Burnett

## Halfway to DAKAR - where are we?

The Assistant Director General of UNESCO outlines the challenges ahead

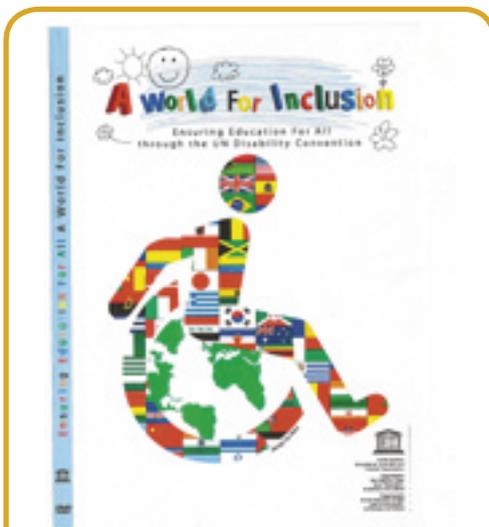
As we move beyond the midway point from Dakar to 2015, it is increasingly urgent that we join our efforts to promote inclusive approaches in education. Today, more than 72 million children are still left without primary education, while over 800 million adults are illiterate.

Despite the plethora of policies targeting some of the excluded children, countries are still struggling to manage and implement an education system that reaches children currently out of school and truly caters for diversity. Educational policy and approaches remain fragmented, partly because of the labeling and categorization of children and the failure to see their learning as a life-long educational process.

This rigidity leads to fragmented educational systems, problems with drop-outs and transitions from the various levels of education as well as low educational outcomes. However, this is not only reflected in the way teaching takes place but also in the compartmentalization of budgets and how policy is implemented.

Inclusion in Education from a policy perspective is about taking a holistic approach to educational change and thus reforming the way the educational system tackles exclusion. This means

**“The challenge for the next eight years is to ensure the inclusion of children, youth and adults whom education systems do not currently serve well.”**



UNESCO is launching a 20-minute DVD to raise awareness of the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular Article 24 on Education. Entitled “A world for Inclusion: Ensuring Education for All through the Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities.” The DVD contains footage from Kenya, Turkey and Finland, over 50 educational resources plus interviews from key stakeholders. The film also includes an endorsement from Academy Award-winning actor, Philip Seymour Hoffman.

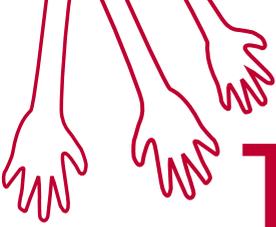
taking a multi-sectoral approach to education and forging coherent

strategies for sustainable change at three key levels: policy and legislation, attitudes at the society and community level and how teaching and learning takes place, how it is managed and assessed.

From now until the Dakar deadline, UNESCO will promote strategies that take into account the uniqueness of every child so as to provide them with lifelong educational opportunities. This means making a paradigm shift from viewing the child as a problem to recognizing the weaknesses of our educational systems in providing equal learning opportunities for all. Experience shows that more attention needs to be devoted to the factors that affect long-term participation in education and prevent children from dropping out.

This applies particularly to disadvantaged children in marginalised sections of the population, since poverty and working conditions often force them to miss school and they gradually drop out. Focus has therefore shifted from equal access to equal participation in basic education with equal opportunities to complete primary schooling. Encouraging children to attend school is now a quality issue. With more emphasis on the effectiveness of learning, all children should increasingly be capable of acquiring the basic knowledge and skills they need for a fulfilled and meaningful life.





# THE ITALIAN EXAMPLE

Italy's system of *integrazione scolastica* is evidence that inclusion is no utopian ideal, reports Simona D'Alessio, researcher on inclusive education

Inclusive education means different things to different people. Its definition also changes depending on the country, the social and political conditions and the historical period in which it is considered. From my viewpoint, inclusive education is the educational principle that aims to reform education systems and to create more equal and just societies.

Italy has had to face many challenges linked to inclusive education, not least the struggle against discrimination, and the exclusion that is inherent in 'special education' in segregated settings.

Italy made a truly inclusive choice. In 1971, despite the difficulties of systemic constraints and the lack of research and resources, the country passed anti-discriminatory legislation known as *integrazione scolastica*. This policy paved the way for dismantling special education and encouraging the process of mainstreaming disabled students into regular classrooms.

*Integrazione scolastica* sought to trigger educational change

through actions, rather than words. It outlawed the practice of placing disabled students outside the mainstream, calling this a denial of human rights. In Italy, all students are welcomed in their neighbourhood schools. There is no waiting list for enrolment and all students can register at anytime of the school year, without going through screening measures, and without any risk of being rejected.

It is thanks to this 'inclusive' policy that Marco Borzetti, 17, is now attending his local upper secondary school. When he was born he was diagnosed with Down's Syndrome, and given a medical label that did not say anything about his love of cycling and computers and his yearning to learn along with his peers. Luckily enough however, the process of "statementing" in Italy, known as 'certificazione di handicap' (Law 104/1992), does not lead to segregation through separate educational settings. If Marco had been born in another country, he may not have studied with children from his district and he may not have gone cycling



Photo: UNESCO Paris

in the local area with his school friends. Despite the bias that his parents still face at school level, Marco takes part in all school activities and is provided with additional personnel (a support teacher and a learning support assistant) and material resources (IT tools and specialised aids) to help him study.

Such extra support is possible because under the terms of the *integrazione scolastica*, each "statemented" student receives an individual educational plan (IEP). This contains a description of their potential and difficulties, and a guide containing recommendations for the school and class teachers about removing other barriers in the school that may hinder participation in learning. The IEP is not only a key

tool for implementing *integrazione scolastica*, it is also an important document for Marco and his family, showing Marco's progression in learning.

Italy's policy of *integrazione scolastica* appears to provide strong evidence to counter arguments that inclusion is a utopian project, ideologically driven but not feasible on a practical level. The success of "statemented" students under the policy of *integrazione scolastica* shows how a sense of belonging is an essential pre-requisite for learning to take place. Marco once told me that he wanted to be with his classmates where he belonged. Could *integrazione scolastica* in Italy's schools set the example of inclusion throughout society as a whole?



# Royal seal for Asia

The UNESCO Office in Phnom Penh and the EFA Flagship Secretariat, together with the Division for the Promotion of Basic Education at UNESCO Headquarters and UNESCO Office in Bangkok, and the Cambodia Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS), organised a Regional Asian Workshop on Inclusive Education from 16 – 18 January at the Cambodian Hotel in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Policy makers, educators and practitioners from 15 countries across the region as well as various international experts met to discuss different aspects of Inclusive Education, from a national and regional perspective, and how to further promote Inclusive Education towards achieving the

Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015.

Mr. Teruo Jinnai, Representative of UNESCO in Cambodia, provided the welcome address, with Dr. Kol Peng, Senior Minister of Cambodia MoEYS, delivering the opening remarks. This was followed by introductory and keynote addresses given by UNESCO HQs, the EFA Flagship Secretariat and an expert from Australia.

The three-day workshop had a packed agenda: presentations from experts, country specialists, NGOs, UNESCO, an introduction by the EFA Flagship Secretariat, as well as theme-based discussions ranging from policy issues to on the

ground practices. These included issues related to persons with disabilities, ethnic minority children, street children, teacher education, and many more. Various members from 25 civil society organizations also took part. Participants consistently placed the emphasis on taking a holistic approach to education for those who are presently excluded from the system.

The highlight of the workshop was a moving and beautiful performance

## China project holds

The Golden Key project in China and Inner Mongolia aims to integrate blind and visually impaired children into mainstream education. It is the brainchild of Xu Bailun, whose personal experience as a blind man fuels his conviction that rather than educating them apart, blind or visually impaired children thrive best when attending the same structures as other children. Here Mr Xu reports on his successes and the challenges ahead.

“In Inner Mongolia and parts of China where we are active, the Golden Key project is the only solution for the 5000 or so blind or visually impaired children that have been involved in the project. The State provides no options for their education and they would otherwise have been left without any education.

Our approach was first to raise awareness of this situation in the local communities, then to actually locate the children who

were slipping through the net and provide them with a structure.

To identify the children, Golden Key printed posters aimed at local school children asking them to report back to their teachers if they know of any blind children left without schooling. We produced easy screening cards and trained community personnel to carry out screening of the children who they identified. The screened child was then given a medical check and diagnosis by a county hospital oculist and their own ophthalmological file. Children of school age were then placed into the nearest regular classroom. Usually, this meant no increased economic burden either on the child’s family or on the school.

Through the Golden Key scheme, some initial training in Braille was provided to the teachers, the child and to his or her parents. We distributed Braille materials to the schools and Golden Key staff made

some follow up visits. With these inexpensive provisions, visually impaired children are provided with equal chances for development as all other children.

Before the Golden Key Project was implemented, many teachers felt that it was not their responsibility to educate visually impaired children. It was quite a tough job for teachers to instruct a visually impaired child because they are already burdened with heavy tasks of teaching regular school children. They were also unsure whether they had the right skills to teach them successfully.

We began by helping teachers to reassess their teaching program and methods, the

# n inclusion!

## UNESCO hosts regional workshop on Inclusive Education in Asia

by the Chinese Disabled People's Performing Art Troupe, "My Dream," recently nominated as UNESCO Artists for Peace. The performance was attended by His Majesty the King of the Kingdom of Cambodia, together with other honorary guests from the government ministries, diplomats, NGOs and children and youth with disabilities. The Troupe will be starring in the opening ceremony festivities of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

The conference also received substantial input from the UNESCO Institute of Education (IBE). The outcome of the conference will serve as input from the Asian region to the International Conference of

Education (ICE) in Geneva November 2008, whose theme is "Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future".

Education for All, adopted by the World Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000, aims at providing quality basic education for all children, young people and adults by 2015. By promoting debate around the concept of inclusive education, UNESCO seeks to ensure the development of effective policies and concrete actions that reach out to all those excluded from the education system, so that all children and young people will have access to quality education by 2015.

## the Golden key

teaching environment and the school administration. We then put together a plan to gradually introduce progressive training in stages and a scheme to assist teachers and monitor the educational quality of the project. The aim was to guarantee all the visually impaired children the right kind of education for their special needs.

Since they began cooperating with Golden Key, the village teachers have deepened their understanding of human rights, gained important teaching skills and developed a strong sense of commitment to educating the visually impaired. They now take on the tasks of teaching the children with a real sense of duty.

Although there is a major lack of teaching staff in the country, this should not be an obstacle if we can more fully tap into the potential for developing inclusive education inside China's existing excellent public school system. Our

work has shown that locally selected teachers are fully able to integrate all blind and visually impaired children into their establishments. Having worked for many years in poverty-stricken, remote and ethnic minority areas in China, we are more convinced than ever that inclusive education is the most effective approach to educating the visually impaired and to achieving the 2015 Goal. What matters most not finding the money but improving people's awareness and understanding of inclusive education. This focus on the respect for all children's human rights could dramatically shorten the distance between the ideal of inclusion and the reality in China today."

Golden Key Research Center of Education for the Visually Impaired. [www.goldenkey.org](http://www.goldenkey.org)



Photos: UNESCO Paris



Inclusion is the headline focus of UNESCO's 2008 International Conference on Education (ICE), to be held in Geneva on 25-28 November. Over 2,000 participants are expected to attend the conference on "Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future" many of whom will be education ministers from around the world.

The International Bureau of Education has been organizing the ICE sessions since 1934. The conferences are seen as a major international forum for policy

# Ministers to meet on ICE!

In order to share concepts, strategies and good practices in inclusive education in preparation for the conference, nine international/regional/sub-regional consultation conferences and workshops were held between June 2007 and March 2008. These took place in Romania, Kenya, United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Romania, Belarus, China, Jamaica and Finland, where the EFA Flagship on the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities was represented.

The consultations allowed countries to share national perspectives within regional and inter-regional contexts and thus to broaden the notions and approaches to inclusive education. Expertise within and across regions was mobilized as the basis for promoting South-South and North-South-South co-

operation, and opportunities for partnerships with regional and international organizations were created. The process enabled common challenges to be identified and roadmaps to be defined on a regional and sub-regional basis, as substantive intellectual and policy inputs to the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE session. Some excellent potential keynote speakers and panellists for the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE were also identified.

In bringing together a host of national ministers of education and stakeholders across the world, UNESCO hopes to boost social and political awareness of inclusive education in the broadest sense. This also means showing its implications and relevance for an expanded vision of Education for All (EFA), and promoting the adoption of an evidence-based policy agenda.

The long-term objective of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE is to support UNESCO Member States in providing the social and political conditions in which everyone can exercise their human right to access, take an active part in and learn from educational opportunities. In this sense, the key message of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE is: inclusive education as a way of achieving the EFA goals.



Photo: UNESCO Paris

dialogue in the field of education among education ministers, researchers, practitioners and representatives of inter-governmental organizations and civil society.

## HUNGRY FOR THE UN CONVENTION

"Promoting Inclusive Policies: The New UN Disability Convention as a Lever for EFA" was the main course on the menu at a working luncheon at the 34<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Conference. Hosted by the Swedish and Finnish National Commissions in collaboration with UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Flagship on Inclusive Education, the lunch brought together 50 Member States to discuss the new United Nations Disability Convention. Ministers of Education, Ms Sari Sarkomaa (Finland)

and Mr Lars Leijonborg (Sweden) pointed out that the historic convention is the first international legally-binding instrument specifically concerning human rights and disability. The participants discussed key instruments for implementing the Convention, including policy and legislative reform, teacher training and the forthcoming International Conference of Education (ICE). Participants stressed the need to revise country policies and practices and to start gradually adopting the Convention into domestic

legislation. Effective monitoring of the ratification process at country level must be ensured, and the use of the EFA Global Monitoring Report was suggested as one of the possible instruments in monitoring. All agreed on the importance of raising awareness about the Convention and of getting the full involvement of government authorities, civil society, public and private sector, parents, teachers and human rights associations.

# Teamwork in

# Sudan!

In the Winter 2006/7 edition of "Inclusion", we reported on the life of blind student Kentaro Fukuchi. Here, we look at Kentaro's work with Sudanese student Abdin - who he met at a blind soccer match - to set up an innovative project supporting blind children in Sudan.

*"When Kentaro and I met as players in a blind football team in 2004, and shared our stories of life at regular schools, we soon realised that including children in mainstream education was a hot issue for us. It seemed natural to start some small projects together to help support children in Sudan. Initially the projects were ad hoc, donating balls for the blind and raising money for slates and braille transcriptions.*

*In 2007 we set up the association CAPEDES - The Committee for Assisting and Promoting Education of the Disabled in Sudan. Our goals were pro-Inclusion: "Full Participation and Equality of people with disabilities in Sudan". We adopted four basic strategies: assisting basic education, helping ICT education, promoting adapted sports and setting up local movements and networks.*

*In Khartoum, children with disabilities are supposed to learn basic skills such as braille in special schools and then transfer to regular schools in their community. But this system is not working due to lack of resources and low priorities. We plan to support 7 center schools where blind children learn braille up until 3rd grade. We donate slates and stylus and plan to organize teacher training in the center schools.*



(Left to right) Kentaro and Abdin.

*In September 2007, I organized a workshop to identify the main challenges in the system. It helps to get the message across by demonstrating some successful cases to local education authorities. We are planning to assist one school financially and technically as a pilot project.*

*As for ICT education, we plan to set up a computer training center in Khartoum, mostly to assist the 60 blind students enrolled at the University of Khartoum who currently have no facilities. Without ICT skills, it is difficult for them to find jobs even if they have higher education.*

*On the sports front, we are working toward establishing a national football team for the 2010 World Cup. When I held workshops in blind football in September 2007, we had more than 10 blind participants. As soccer is the most popular sport, it is incredibly meaningful for blind people to do the same sports and participate in their community by sharing conversation and passion*

*by Mohamed Omer Abdin for sports. In fact, it encourages blind people to take one step to have contact with the society in Japan as well.*

*We work hard to encourage local people to support inclusive education and adapted sports. By facilitating teacher networks in center*

*schools and blind schools, we urge people to learn from our experience and actively take up the challenges ahead.*

*We are also working to raise awareness in Japan of the situation in Sudan. Because of the Darfur crisis and other major issues, the education of children with disabilities in Sudan has been largely ignored by the government and many of the international agencies. It is time to put this back on the priority list.*

*Since we don't have special training, every day is full of challenges and lessons, from fundraising to implementation of the projects both in Sudan and Japan. We were lucky to have been educated, and we know what is important for the blind. We hope to reach out to all children with special needs to include them in schools in the community as we learn from our experiences." If you have any feedback or advice on our projects, we would be very pleased to hear from you. "*

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of UNESCO. Contributions to: [ie@unesco.org](mailto:ie@unesco.org). Graphic Design: [joperkins@free.fr](mailto:joperkins@free.fr)