

# Social inclusion and inclusive education

A socially inclusive society is defined as one where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity. A socially inclusive society is a society where all people are recognized and accepted and have a sense of belonging. Social inclusion is seen to be defined in relation to social exclusion. Some analysts have argued that both inclusion and exclusion are inseparable side of the same coin. Social exclusion is the process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of a person into the community (Cappo,2002). Social inclusion, community inclusion, social connectedness, normalization, social integration, social citizenship - all these are terms that relate to the importance of the links between the individual members of our society and the role of each person as a member of this group.

Exclusion starts very early in life. A holistic vision of education is imperative. Comprehensive early childhood care and education programmes improve children's well being, prepare them for primary school and give them a better chance of succeeding once they are in school. All evidence shows that the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children benefit most from such programmes. Ensuring that adults, particularly mothers, are literate has an impact on whether their children, and especially their daughters attend school.

An inclusive system benefits all learners without any discrimination towards any individual or group. It is founded on values of democracy, tolerance and respect for difference. It is inefficient to have school systems where children are not learning because of poor quality. Schools with high repetition rates often fail to work in preventive ways. The expenditure incurred by schools when students repeat a grade would be better used to provide additional support to those who encounter difficulties.

Inclusion in education involves:

- Putting inclusive values into action.
- Viewing every life and every death as of equal worth.
- Supporting everyone to feel that they belong.
- Increasing participation for children and adults in learning and teaching activities, relationships and communities of local schools.
- Reducing exclusion, discrimination, barriers to learning and participation.
- Restructuring cultures, policies and practices to respond to diversity in ways that value everyone equally.
- Linking education to local and global realities.
- Learning from the reduction of barriers for some children to benefit children more widely.

- Acknowledging the right of children to an education of high quality in their locality.
- Improving schools for staff and parents/carers as well as children.
- Emphasising the development of school communities and values, as well as achievements.
- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and surrounding communities.
- Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

Inclusive education can promote successful learning. Efforts to expand enrolment must be accompanied by policies to enhance educational quality at all levels, in formal and in non-formal settings. We have to work on an 'access to success' continuum by promoting policies to ensure that excluded children get into school coupled with programmes and practices that ensure they succeed there. It is a process that involves addressing and responding to the diverse needs of learners. This has implications for teaching, the curriculum, ways of interacting and relations between the schools and the community.

Education need to change to accommodate everyone. The overall goal is to ensure that school is a place where all children participate and are treated equally. This involves a change in how we think about education. Inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It means enhancing the quality of education by improving the effectiveness of teachers, promoting learning - centred methodologies, developing appropriate textbooks and learning materials and ensuring that schools are safe and healthy for all children. Strengthening links with the community is also vital: relationship between teachers, students, parents and society at large are crucial for developing inclusive learning environments.

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