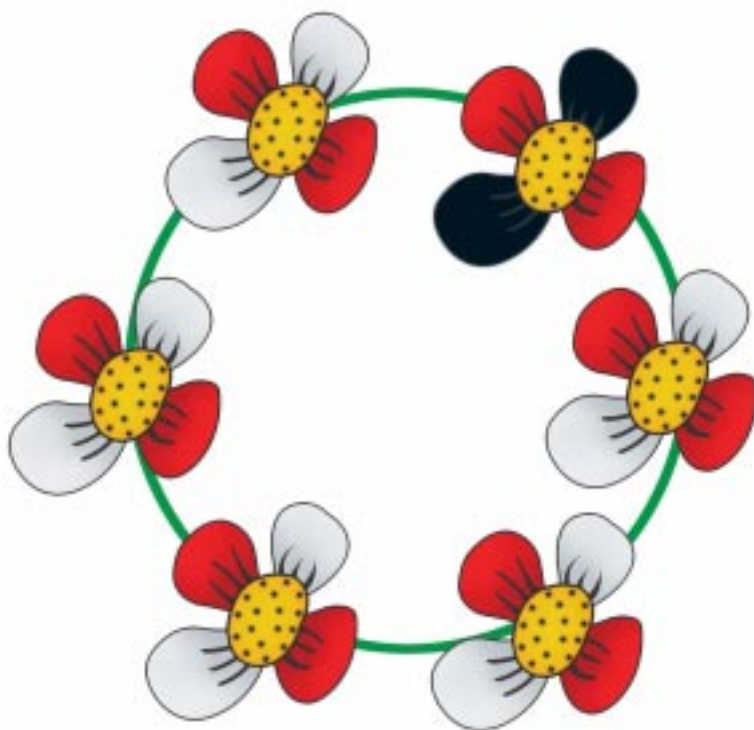


EXAMPLES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

SRI LANKA



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Regional Office for South Asia, 2003

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FOREWORD

The obstacles to a good education faced by millions of children in South Asia are daunting enough. For the 10% of the region's young people who are estimated to have some kind of disability, the barriers are compounded. The UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia has looked at examples in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka of how such children are given schooling, and whether this is the type of education they have the right to expect. The result is a very mixed bag indeed.

Overall it is clear that large numbers of children who struggle daily with additional hardships are not getting the chance to improve their lives through education. This means, of course, they are caught in a spiral of low expectation, low esteem and low income.

The minority of children with disability that do get places are often not sitting in the same classroom as other boys and girls because of a sense that they need to be separated and treated differently. Globally it is estimated that 70% of children with disabilities, including those with mild mental retardation, can attend regular schools provided the environment is designed to be accessible and the institution is willing to accommodate them.

UNICEF believes that the goal should be to enable all children to have full participation in the development of their community. Meeting this goal of inclusion requires all structures and community-based services to be accessible to all members of the community without discrimination.

By producing a snapshot on the activities happening in five South Asian countries UNICEF Regional Office hopes to fill in an information gap on children with disabilities while examining misconceptions, prejudices and discriminatory practices. The documents on each of the five countries examine initiatives being undertaken by governments, NGOs, INGOs, and UN agencies. Crucially they highlight good practices that have proved effective in addressing concerns and constraints.

It is hoped these documents will be a starting point for policies and practices that get many more children with disabilities into school. As we all work to fulfill the Millennium Development Goal of 'Education for All' I would urge that the exclusion of the challenged child be specifically addressed with initiatives aimed at ending prejudice and isolation. UNICEF ROSA will work with experts to pull together the ideas captured in the five documents with the hope that this process will facilitate momentum toward the full inclusion of every child in all that their community has to offer.



Dr Sadig Rasheed
UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia

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ACRONYMS

INGO	international non-governmental organization
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
NGO	non-governmental organization
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study focuses on the education of children with disabilities in Sri Lanka. From early in the twentieth century, significant initiatives have been taken for the welfare of disabled people in Sri Lanka, mainly by missionaries and charitable groups. The provision of education for children with special educational needs through an institutional system can be traced back to 1912, when the Church of England established the first residential special school for the deaf and blind. Voluntary social service agencies and private citizens took an interest in establishing special schools. In 1960, the government in Sri Lanka assumed full responsibility for the education of children, and began to nationalize private and religious schools. It was not until 1964, however, that the first government school for the physically and mentally handicapped was built in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka adopted integrated education for children with special educational needs in 1968. This resulted in the integration of children with special needs into regular schools from the 1960s to the 1990s, and inspired the Sri Lankan educational authorities so much that they espoused the concept of inclusive education.

The National Education Commission (1992) emphasized ‘the establishment of a pervasive pattern of social justice’ as one of the national aims of education. The Salamanca Convention of 1994 also gave further impetus for adopting the concept of inclusion of children with special educational needs. National disability-specific legislation—the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 1996—helped in the establishment of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, and provided for the establishment of a national secretariat for people with disabilities to assist the council in the discharge of its functions. The Educational Reforms of 1997 supported the philosophy and practice of inclusive education. They also included assessment and recording procedures to be implemented for every child on admission to the formal education system. They show that there is a positive trend towards implementation of the inclusive education policy.

Over the years, several initiatives have been taken to provide education to children with disabilities by charity organizations, the government, NGOs and international organizations. This study attempts to review the current status of education for children with disabilities in Sri Lanka in terms of magnitude, policies, resources and practices; and assembles a series of good practice models of special needs and inclusive education initiatives. The purpose of the study is to increase the knowledge base and strengthen the capacity of educators and programmers to develop or improve existing programmes focusing on inclusive education for children with disabilities. It is also expected to serve as an advocacy tool for promoting inclusive education in Sri Lanka. The analysis of good practices, however, was constrained by the limited documentation on these initiatives.

Four potential good practices were identified. Their selection was based on firsthand information obtained from individuals and organizations concerned with the education of children with disabilities. They are two inclusive schools (Dharmapala Vidyalaya and Teppanawa Kumara Maha Vidyalaya), one community-based rehabilitation programme with a focus on teacher training, and one early childhood education programme.

Secondary data were collected from government documents, research reports and literature related to education of children with disabilities. Primary data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and field observation from various stakeholders including children with and without disabilities studying in inclusive schools. Parents of children with disabilities, teachers, communities, implementing partners, and key government officials and professionals were also interviewed.

Dharmapala Vidyalaya (inclusive school) initiated inclusive education at the request of parents. Children with disabilities are admitted to the special education unit. The special education teacher works with them with the help of a modified curriculum to prepare these children to cope with the course work of the regular classroom. Children are provided with opportunities to interact socially with children from the regular school, especially in co-curricular activities. The special education teacher assesses the achievement of pupils annually in relation to the intervention activities planned. Based on this assessment, the teacher and principal decide to which class in the regular school the child can be admitted. Parents and the community actively take part in the provision of physical facilities and special resources for the school. They also contribute and participate in co-curricular activities. Parents readily accept the conditions and changes that have taken place at the managerial level of the school. Supervision processes have recently been geared to support inclusive practice. Under the leadership of the principal, a task force has been created to launch and support the process of inclusion.

At Teppanawa Kumara Maha Vidyalaya (inclusive school), the education programme for disabled children is formulated through a combined effort of the special education teacher, regular classroom teachers, the principal and parents. All children, including those with disabilities, have an equal opportunity to enrol in the school. Presently, the school has mentally challenged children, and those with visual and hearing difficulties. They study alongside non-disabled children. Braille and sign language are taught in the special unit. The teaching-learning process is activity based. Aesthetic subjects (e.g., dance, music) are used as an interactive medium to improve the communication skills of disabled children. Parents are eager to help and provide support. Some children join the regular school after a period of preparation in the special education unit, while others are admitted directly to the regular school. All children participate in the common programme of the school, and a conscious effort is made to identify the abilities of children with special needs. The administration provides the required support to teachers. The school principal has a positive attitude towards inclusion, and gives support to the staff for this.

The nationwide Community-based Rehabilitation Programme has been instrumental in establishing a mechanism to identify children with disabilities before they reach school age, and direct them for pre-school education. The progress of children is monitored regularly. The programme uses volunteers to provide special services such as speech therapy and physiotherapy at home to children with disabilities who cannot go to school. Special education teachers, parents and partners from other organizations are collectively involved in taking decisions regarding programme implementation and progress. The community has been motivated to support the programme, and has offered to provide hearing aids, wheelchairs, crutches, and other items required for learning at school. A major focus of the programme has been teacher training implemented throughout the country on a decentralized basis. It aims at promoting inclusive practice in the classroom. The training content is designed to build the skills of teachers to work with children with disabilities. Training promotes the involvement of teachers, principals, in-service advisors, and other professionals.

The Early Childhood Development Programme is run by the Directorate of Social Services in the North Western Province. Provision of physical resources to pre-schools is made through the intervention of the community. The programme focuses on enrolment of children with special needs into pre-schools irrespective of their age or impairment. Pre-schools retain children until they are deemed fit to receive formal education. Staff kept systematic and standard records of progress of all children. The programme seeks the involvement of unpaid voluntary teachers. Provision of essential resources has been made by various local and foreign organizations. Over 70 per cent of disabled children in pre-schools have been admitted to formal education. The programme ensures constant communication between pre-schools and regular schools in the area.

Based on analysis of the state of special needs and inclusive education in Sri Lanka and the documentation of 'potential good practices' in inclusive education, the following key observations are made:

- In Sri Lanka, Buddhist and British missionaries laid the foundation for special education. The practice moved gradually from segregation to integrated education. Recently, conceptual understanding and practice of inclusion have been growing.
- Despite a long history of special education, less than half of all school-aged children with disabilities benefit from education services. Disabled girls are more discriminated against and have poorer access to schooling compared to disabled boys. Non-school-going disabled children report disability as the main reason for not attending school. There are significant regional disparities; the number of children with disabilities is highest in the most disadvantaged situations in rural remote areas, tea plantations, urban slums and conflict-affected areas.
- There is an ongoing debate on the relevance of inclusive education. Although professionals and practitioners agree on the philosophy of inclusive education, some are sceptical about inclusive practice in the light of the inadequacy of existing resources in the school system.
- The Educational Reforms of 1997 support the philosophy and practice of inclusive education. They include the assessment and recording procedures that should be implemented for every child on admission to the formal education system. They show that there is a positive trend towards the implementation of the inclusive education policy.
- Although the concept of educational inclusion is accepted, a procedure in keeping with this concept has not been implemented within the school system. One common feature of inclusive practice is the setting up of special units within regular schools. Special teachers take the major responsibility for children with disabilities in a segregated environment. Children with disabilities are denied the opportunity to learning with children in regular classroom, and interaction with other children in the school is mainly restricted to social activities.
- There are differences in the meaning and modes of practice of inclusive education among schools.
- The National Institute of Education is taking the leading role in designing and developing short- and long-term training programmes. In addition, awareness-raising programmes are conducted for provincial managers to work out modalities for implementing inclusive education based on agreed policy guidelines.

- In order to meet the needs of children with disabilities within existing resources, core teams consisting of trained special education teachers have been established. These core teams are attached to provincial education offices with resource centres. They provide training to ordinary teachers during holidays. Almost all provinces, except the trouble-torn northeast, have developed resource centres with facilities for in-service training and guidance. Core-team training is the responsibility of the National Institute of Education.
- Parents play a key role in initiating and supporting inclusive practices in schools in terms of admission, monitoring progress, and providing monetary resources for daily activities and the salary of support teachers.
- Volunteers provide special services such as speech therapy and physiotherapy at home for children with disabilities who cannot go to school. The community supports the programme by providing hearing aids, wheelchairs, crutches, and other items required for learning at school. Voluntary workers occasionally monitor the progress of children who enter school.

The following recommendations for promoting inclusive education in Sri Lanka are made:

- A substantial effort has to be made to raise the level of awareness regarding inclusive education among regular classroom teachers. There is also a need for student teachers to learn about teaching all types of children in the same classroom. A comprehensive training package on inclusive education needs to be developed. Curriculum developers and subject teachers should also be aware of the concept. Capable and interested parties can be mobilized to sponsor awareness through mass media.
- The teacher is the most important human resource for promoting inclusive education. The regular classroom teacher has little support. The role of the special education teacher needs to change to become a facilitator for the entire school. The setting up of a teacher support team in every school can be promoted to provide on-site support as a matter of policy.
- Professionals, practitioners and stakeholders hold contradictory views regarding inclusive education. Training on special education should not be confined to teachers and resource teachers; it should include other key personnel such as principals, supervisors, directors, etc., particularly those who are directly concerned with the promotion of inclusive education. Training should go beyond special teaching techniques, and cover issues of planning, management, organization, implementation and evaluation of special education programmes.
- Core-team training should be made more informal at school level so that there is more involvement of parents and community members in acquiring knowledge and skills.
- Community-based rehabilitation programmes should be strengthened so that support in the form of promoting access to inclusive education, introducing reforms in schools, and providing supporting materials is facilitated.
- Support to children with disabilities could be built up through the creation of a support network of non-disabled peers. This would help not only in sharing the responsibility but also in promoting a non-discriminative social relationship in the school environment.

- Sharing of ideas and information about inclusive practice is central to developing skills, knowledge and understanding, and reinforcing changes in attitudes and values. The National Institute of Education and the provincial Departments of Education should encourage information dissemination. General teachers who have not gone through specific training in special education could be sensitized to the needs of children with disabilities through short-term training services in school.
- In order to strengthen the impact of inclusive education in Sri Lanka, action research should be undertaken on practices of inclusion; the findings should be disseminated.
- Simultaneous initiatives in special education and inclusive education tend to obscure the focus on education of children with disabilities in regular school settings. There is a need to review and redirect the functioning of special education units in schools so that they serve the purpose of inclusive education. Children who have disabilities should be the concern of all personnel in the school rather than that of the resource or special education teacher. Future reviews and amendments to national educational reforms and policy should emphasize inclusive practices for children with disabilities, and discourage strategies that promote their segregation.

INTRODUCTION

Special care for disabled members of society is a convention in Sri Lanka. At the beginning of the twentieth century, missionaries and groups engaged in charitable welfare undertook significant initiatives for the welfare of disabled people. The provision of education for children with special educational needs through a formal and institutional system can be traced back to 1912 when the first residential special school for the deaf and blind was established by the Church of England. Voluntary social service agencies and private citizens took an interest in establishing special schools, mainly for children with visual and hearing impairment, and mental retardation. In 1935, the Catholic Church started the second residential school. The country's third residential special school was started in 1956. This school was for the Tamil-speaking community. By 1956, 515 children were enrolled in schools catering to special education (Mathews *et al.*, 1977).

In 1960, the government of Sri Lanka assumed full responsibility for education of the children of the country, and began to nationalize private and religious schools. It was not until 1964, however, that the first government school for physically and mentally handicapped children was built. In 1965, there were 10 special schools. All were managed either by Christian/Catholic missionaries or Buddhist organizations. Education in these schools was limited to children with hearing and visual impairment. By 1977, there were 26 residential schools with almost 1900 handicapped students with an average teacher-to-pupil ratio of one to 10 (Mathews *et al.*, 1977).

Two factors led the Sri Lankan Government to adopt the model of integrated education in 1968. Firstly, the human rights movement took up the cause of disabled children facing challenges through lack of education. Secondly, there was a global change from segregated schooling to integrated forms of schooling. Initially, 17 visually handicapped children were integrated in the first grade of six regular schools. The children were enrolled in a school near their home, and followed the same programme as other children. A special teacher visited the school for tutoring, counselling and providing special learning aids.

The integration of children into regular schools from the 1960s to the 1990s inspired the Sri Lankan educational authorities to espouse the concept of inclusive education. The National Education Commission of 1992 emphasized 'the establishment of a pervasive pattern of social justice' as one of the national aims of education. The Salamanca Convention of 1994 also gave further impetus to adopting the concept of inclusion of children with special educational needs. Inclusive education is presently the accepted concept for educating children with special educational needs by the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Cultural Affairs along with its professional arms. The National Institute of Education has taken several initiatives related to professional and curriculum development, and research into the promotion of inclusive education in Sri Lanka. In addition to government initiatives, NGOs, INGOs and other external agencies have also addressed the special educational needs of children with disabilities, following an implicit policy shift to mainstreaming disabled children in regular schools.

OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To assess the state of special needs and inclusive education in Sri Lanka in terms of policies, resources and practices, and emphasize the main implications of the lessons learnt with respect to policy reform.
- To identify and document model practices in the area of inclusive education, and to highlight the mechanisms and strategies that have proved effective, the areas of concern and the constraints in successfully mainstreaming children with disabilities.
- To provide recommendations based on the lessons learnt in order to strengthen the capacity of the government and other partners in the country to bring about policy reforms, ensure adequate resource allocation, and promote programming that supports inclusive education.

METHODOLOGY

A purposive sampling procedure was adopted to select good practice models in inclusive education for detailed analysis. Four potential good practices were identified using firsthand information obtained from individuals/organizations concerned with the education of children with disabilities. They are two inclusive schools, one community-based rehabilitation programme with a focus on its teacher training programme, and one early childhood education programme.

Data were collected from secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources included government documents, research reports and literature related to the education of children with disabilities. Primary data were collected from various stakeholders including children with and without disabilities studying in inclusive schools, parents of children with disabilities, teachers, communities, implementing partners, and key government officials and professionals. Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and field observation were used for data collection.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF DISABILITY

According to the Compulsory Education Ordinance of 1997, education in Sri Lanka is compulsory for all children aged 5-14 years. In 2000, government schools had about 4.19 million pupils, and private schools had about 95,400 pupils. The country report on special education for the Asia and Pacific Programme on Educational Innovation for Development showed that 10.6 per cent of school-aged children in Sri Lanka were disabled (APEID, 1994). The report also stated that only 4.6 per cent of children with special needs have access to educational services. In a survey by the Ministry of Education in 1998, 10.2 per cent of non-school-going children reported disability as the reason for not attending school.

About 1.96 per cent of school-going girls are disabled compared to 2.78 per cent of school-going boys (Department of Non-formal, Continuing and Special Education, 2002). The gender difference is greatest for children with communication disability and least for visual disability. In 2000, 95 special schools were run by NGOs registered with the Department of Social Services and the Ministry of Education (Department of Non-formal, Continuing and Special Education, 2002). The number of children with various disabilities in 24 schools registered with the Ministry of Education is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of children with disabilities in 24 special schools run by NGOs registered with the Ministry of Education in 2000

Disability type	Boys	Girls	Total
Visual	233	194	427
Hearing	798	651	1449
Mentally retarded	250	252	502
Others	21	19	40

Source: Department of Non-formal, Continuing and Special Education, 2002.

At least 23 per cent of all schools had more than 10 disabled students enrolled. About 29 per cent of all schools had no disabled students. In a country with a long history of integrated educational practice, the reasons for the low enrolment of children with disabilities need to be examined.

Table 2: Schools by number of students with disabilities

Number of students with disabilities	Percentage of all schools
More than 150	0.5
More than 100	1.1
More than 50	4.1
More than 20	13.1
More than 10	23.1
1-10	29.0
0	29.1

Source: Department of Non-formal, Continuing and Special Education, 2002.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISABILITY

Various initiatives have brought about a change in the attitudes to and beliefs about children with special educational needs. Weerakoon (1994) studied the attitudes of various stakeholders and reported that a majority of teacher advisors (67 per cent) were of the opinion that the service provided to children with special educational needs by regular schools is better than in special schools. Teachers identified several reasons for this including receiving a good quality education by attending school while living with their parents, opportunities to experience a variety of learning situations, availability of transport facilities, and reaching out to a larger number of children.

The study also revealed that teachers considered the regular class suitable for children with special educational needs since it provided opportunities for disabled children to acquire experience of socializing with regular classroom children. However, they still believe that children with hearing impairment who could not speak, and the lack of a permanent special education teacher were considerable problems. Over 80 per cent of regular teachers expressed an interest in retaining disabled children in their classes. They also stressed the importance of having a special education unit in the school. About 87 per cent of children with special educational needs expressed a desire to engage in the learning process alongside regular classroom children.

Wijemanna (1999) found that although children with special educational needs wanted to receive a regular education, existing educational provisions were limited. In addition, many professionals did not agree with practicing inclusion; they preferred to provide education to disabled children separately from the regular classroom. There is a need for a policy that will lead to an in-service teacher training system (Dysegard, 1995-96).

Lopez (1999) found that there were differences in the meaning of inclusive education between schools. Most teachers and principals were willing to support inclusion, but the obstacles for supporting change were a lack of skills training, a lack of time for planning, and a lack of necessary resources and commitment. Administrative officers such as principals, directors of special education, and supervisors need training in order to become the transformational leaders that structural change requires. General classroom teachers must have access to human and material support. Student teachers should learn about teaching all children in the same classroom during their training.

According to a study conducted by the National Institute of Education (2000), 70 per cent of classes for disabled children function separately from regular classes. These classes are the sole responsibility of the special education teacher. When the special education teacher takes leave, children in the special education unit are also absent.

According to directors in charge of special education, there is inadequate space in regular schools to accommodate children with special educational needs. They highlight the need for a policy

through which all children with special educational needs could be accommodated in regular schools. About 82 per cent of parents stated that they have not faced any significant problem when admitting their children with special educational needs to regular schools. About 18 per cent stated that they had faced administrative problems, and were often asked by school authorities to make additional contributions to meet the salary requirements of the special education teacher.

LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) clearly grant the right for all children to receive education without discrimination on any grounds. The UN's Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 1993 mentions that the state should recognize the principle of equal educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities in integrated settings. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the Salamanca conference (UNESCO, 1994). The conference's statement proclaimed that those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools as a means to combat discriminatory attitudes and build an inclusive society. The urgency of reaching marginalized groups was re-stated in the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000. These global declarations have influenced Sri Lanka's government policies, plans and goals with regard to education of children with disabilities.

In 1961, the National Education Commission made free education compulsory for all children aged 6-14 years. It recommended that legislation be enacted to compel the registration of all children with disabilities in order to obtain reliable figures. It also suggested the setting up of a special school for every 150 sensory and physically handicapped and 100 mentally handicapped children. The commission influenced the movement towards adopting an integrative approach to special education by stating that 'wherever possible, handicapped pupils should be accommodated in normal schools'. This became government policy.

In 1966, a special cabinet paper recommended the adoption of a special education programme for the visually handicapped children. The Jeen Cenmore Report (1966) proposed the establishment of an integrated education system and the commencement of a relevant teacher training programme. Following a cabinet memorandum, integrated education programmes for visually impaired children were started in 1968, and a teacher training programme was started in 1970. The Sri Lankan Constitution of 1978 declared that every citizen has a right to free education. The Education Reforms Committee (1979) recommended that 'the general course of training provided for teachers who handle non-handicapped children should include at least a basic knowledge of the skills required for handling handicapped children'.

In 1991, the National Institute of Education policy guidelines for the development of special education were prepared (Rajapakse, 1991). These state 'that the provision of a comprehensive range of facilities and services for the disabled, ranging from prenatal care through education, vocational training, employment and support during adult life, cannot be entirely the responsibility of any single government department or agency. The growth of services of real quality will require the active cooperation and involvement of many organizations including NGOs. It should necessarily be the collective effort of all involved in welfare work for the disabled.' The guidelines aimed to assist administrators and practitioners to develop education in keeping with accepted norms and practices. They stated that the identification, screening, assessment and evaluation of children with special educational needs should be conducted in the school and in the community, utilizing appropriate instruments of assessment. The curriculum for special education, although

based on the curriculum for regular schools implemented by the Ministry of Education, should be modified to meet the needs of children with special educational needs, and that a variety of organizational patterns and services should be provided to meet their needs.

Sri Lanka signed an agreement for implementation of inclusive education after the Salamanca Conference in 1994. The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was enacted in 1996. It mentions rights related to non-discrimination in employment and education, and access to appropriate environment, transportation and communication. It also led to the establishment of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities and provided for a national secretariat to assist the council. The council specifically addresses education and vocational training, and establishment and maintenance of educational institutions for accommodating people with disabilities.

Legislation was enacted in 1997 to ensure compulsory schooling for children aged 5-14 years. The Educational Reforms of 1997 support the philosophy and practice of inclusive education. They also include the assessment and recording procedures that should be implemented for every child on admission to the formal education system. The reforms, introduced to schools in 1998, shows that there is a positive trend towards the implementation of the inclusive education policy.

The Act on the Rights of the Disabled was ratified in 1998. Under the thirteenth amendment to the constitution, the administration of education has been decentralized to the eight provinces. A Special Education Unit was established under each provincial Ministry of Education.

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The government directly intervened in special education in 1965. The focus was on training a teaching force to work with children with special educational needs. In 1967, the first formal training programme on special education was inaugurated at the University of Sri Lanka especially for teaching visually handicapped children. Later, a two-year teacher training programme for graduates was instigated at the Teacher's College at Maharagama with the help of the American Foundation for the Overseas Blind. In 1973, a two-year teacher training course focusing on teaching children with hearing impairment was initiated. The training programme was extended in 1984 to cover the teaching of mentally challenged children.

A major development was the setting up of the Special Education Unit in the Ministry of Education in 1971. Subsequently, an effort was made to improve the fragmented approach to special education. Consultants from the American Foundation for the Overseas Blind, the Inspectorate of the Inner London Education Authority, UNICEF and the Commonwealth Aid Scheme helped in formulating the initiatives. By 1977, two types of special education programmes were operative in Sri Lanka: the special residential school programme, and the integrative education programme (Mathews *et al.*, 1977).

By 1980, children with hearing impairment and children with mental retardation were studying in regular schools. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education introduced a training programme for special education teachers in regular government schools with special education units. Moreover, children identified by community-based rehabilitation programmes and other field programmes were referred to the Department of Education and enrolled in government schools. If children with disabilities were not ready to join the mainstream classroom, they had the opportunity to join a 'special unit' attached to mainstream school; once they were considered ready, they joined the regular classroom. Teachers were given training in managing the special education units.

During this period, the number of special education units in regular government schools increased in parallel with the number of special education schools. Officers in charge of special education, teacher advisors and administrative officers all took a keen interest in the development of special education. The increase in prevalence of integrated programmes and their qualitative improvement drew the attention of foreign sponsor agencies, such as JICA and SIDA, and foreign governments. The International Year for the Disabled (1981) focused the attention of the international community on the education of children with special needs. Concurrently, international organizations, such as the UN, developed policies and conventions on the education of children with special needs. This

had a positive impact on the field of special education in Sri Lanka, and led to the development of inclusive practice.

With the establishment of the National Institute of Education (1989), a Department of Special Education was inaugurated. The National Institute of Education has designed short- and long-term training programmes as well as courses leading to degrees and diplomas. Steps have been taken to train primary school teachers and include intervention strategies in the primary curriculum to teach children with special needs. Awareness-raising programmes are being conducted for provincial managers to work out modalities for implementing inclusive education based on agreed policy guidelines.

Teacher training programmes run by the Ministry of Education are open to teachers in state-run and NGO-run schools. These programmes include a two-year course in special education, postgraduate courses in special education, and short two-week courses. The short course has been widely taken up, and at least one teacher in each school has received this in-service training.

It was realized that resources would not be adequate for training all the specialists required for meeting the needs of children with disabilities. In 1994, core teams were established with special education teachers to train ordinary teachers during holidays in all provinces of Sri Lanka. These core teams are attached to provincial education offices with resource centres. Almost all provinces, except the trouble-torn northeast, have developed resource centres with facilities for in-service training and guidance. Curriculum development for core-team training is the responsibility of the National Institute of Education.

It is reported that core teams have been instrumental in making education available to a large number of children with disabilities (National Institute of Education, 2000). By 1999, special education programmes were introduced in nearly 800 schools. Approximately 8000 children with special educational needs receive education under these programmes. Nearly 800 special education teachers, 30 officers in charge and 70 teacher advisors serve this special education network.

General educational reforms were introduced in 1997 primarily because of issues related to the quality of education and limited access for children. There are significant regional disparities especially affecting the most disadvantaged situations in rural remote areas, tea plantations, urban slums and conflict-affected areas. The reforms support the philosophy and practice of inclusive education, and envisage a learner-centred classroom. According to the reforms, assessment of each child should be made on entrance to Class 1. This includes a section for teachers to document the child's disabilities, if any; the teacher's assessment is supported by a medical assessment. This record is continuous and cumulative, and is particularly advantageous to a child who has disabilities, since it looks at the child's development holistically rather than just at learning. The reforms aim to promote the self-confidence and self-esteem of the learner. They will be completed through all levels of schooling by 2003.

Milestones of special education in Sri Lanka

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1912 | Establishment of first special school for deaf and blind children. |
| 1965 | Sri Lankan Government directly involved in the education of children with disabilities. |
| 1967 | First Bachelor of Education degree in a university. |
| 1968 | Integration of children with visual impairment into regular schools. |
| 1970 | One-year teacher training course. |
| 1971 | Special Education Unit at the Ministry of Education. |
| 1972 | Two-year teacher training course. |
| 1973 | Integration of children with hearing impairment into regular school. |
| 1976 | Postgraduate diploma on teaching of children with mental retardation. |
| 1976 | Integration of children with mental retardation into regular school. |
| 1983 | SIDA sponsorship for special education. |
| 1984 | Training primary teachers to teach children with special educational needs. |
| 1989 | Establishment of the Department of Special Education at the National Institute of Education. |
| 1989 | JICA sponsorship for special education. |
| 1993 | Bachelor of Education for special educational needs. |
| 1998 | Master of Education in inclusive education. |
| 2001 | UNICEF sponsorship for special education. |

EXAMPLES OF WORKING MODELS

The following initiatives have the potential to become good practice models as they have created opportunities for including children with disabilities in regular schools by creating a welcoming environment for all children. However, they all have room for improvement.

8.1 Dharmapala Vidyalaya

The Dharmapala Vidyalaya in Kottawa, Western Province, is located in a highly populated suburban area. It started as a popular primary school in the early 1970s, and has gradually developed into a comprehensive school offering Class 1 to Class 13. It has a student population of about 3000 and a teaching staff of over 100.

Special education unit

A special education unit was established in the school at the request of parents of children with special needs. It provides an opportunity for mentally challenged children, living close to the school, to seek admission. Presently, there are 15 children with special needs enrolled but, on average, only 8–9 children attend school regularly.

In the building where the primary classes are held, a separate room has been allocated for the special education unit. Individual teaching programmes as well as a common teaching programmes are implemented. The objective of the special education unit is to prepare children for admission to the regular school.

Admission criteria

Children are admitted to the school based on assessment by the teacher in charge of the special education unit. The progress of each child is entered in the child's personal file and updated every month. Based on this record, the special education teacher decides when a child has attained the required level of competency for entry into the regular school. The recommendation is forwarded to the principal who assigns the class and teacher. The number of days and hours that a child can participate in the teaching–learning activities of the special unit/regular classroom are determined by the teacher in charge of the unit. The time spent in the regular school is usually 2–3 hours per day, and varies from one to five days a week. Opportunities are provided for disabled students in the regular school to work with the special education teacher, and obtain help whenever needed. Currently there are five children with special needs studying in the regular school in Classes 1–8.

There are also cases where children with special needs are admitted to regular classes directly at the request of parents. In such instances, the special education teacher provides the required support to the regular class teacher.

Accessibility

Most children studying in the special education unit come to school with their parents using public transport. Some commute in their parents' personal vehicles. During school hours, parents often stay and provide support to the special education teacher. This is allowed only until children are included in the regular classroom.

The special education unit has good ventilation and light. It is at the end of the school building, and noise and movement of other children do not disturb children with special needs. The unit has a fence around it. There is a separate toilet with a washbasin and tap near the unit.

In the special education unit, children are the sole responsibility of the special education teacher. Whenever this teacher is on leave, parents are advised to keep their children at home. Attendance after a long vacation is usually low. Often the special education teacher has to persuade parents to send their children to school.

Learners

Most learners currently enrolled in the special education unit are children with Down's syndrome. Some have mild physical disorders, while others have pronunciation difficulties and unclear expression. At times, some of them exhibit aggressive behaviour and become unruly to the extent of hitting and frightening other children.

For most children in the special education unit, this is their first exposure to formal schooling. Some children had joined pre-schools but soon dropped out. A few children attend speech therapy classes after school in nearby clinics.

The school is popular, and many children with special needs seek admission to this unit every year. Many applicants are from other schools. Twenty-six children with special needs have been admitted to the special education unit since its inception. Of these, six have left school because of change of residence, non-availability of transport, or reaching 16 years of age. Students who have been admitted to regular classes have continued their education and moved up to Class 8. According to the teacher in charge of the unit, not all students in the unit can be admitted to the regular school. These children might benefit from suitable vocational training.

Teachers

A well-qualified special education teacher, who has had two years of training in teaching children with mental retardation and a Bachelor's degree in special education, works in the unit. In addition, a support teacher has been appointed with the help of parents. He has teaching experience in a pre-school but does not have any formal qualifications in special education. According to him, on-the-job experience in this unit that has given him the skills and confidence to work with children with disabilities.

Teachers of children with special needs in the regular classroom have general education training. A short in-service training course for working with these children has been organized. Support from

the special education teacher is also available, wherever needed. Other mainstream teachers provide practically no support to these teachers.

Curriculum and the teaching–learning process

The special education unit follows a specifically designed curriculum. The content of the curriculum includes the development of speech and language skills, pre-reading and writing skills, and appropriate social skills. The teacher uses various teaching methodologies. The teaching–learning process is based on the learning needs of each child, and the teacher prepares individualized education plans. There are also activities designed to develop and improve fine and gross motor skills, and self-help skills. Working on suitable behaviour modifications also forms part of the curriculum. Dancing and singing are part of classroom activities.

A common curriculum is used for those children who have been admitted directly to the regular classroom. It was observed that teachers adapt and adjust the curriculum in keeping with the requirements and needs of these children. For example, if the child is unable to grasp a mathematical concept proposed for children of the same age/grade level, the teacher, instead of pursuing it, selects another suitable mathematical activity and builds the learning event around it, helping the child feel motivated and involved. Care is taken to safeguard the child's self-esteem. Observations of the school reveal no gender bias. Some children with special needs have successfully continued from Class 1 to Class 8 in the regular classroom.

Opportunities have been provided for all children, including those with special needs, to interact with other children in the school. Children with special needs participate in daily activities including morning assembly and sports meets. They have been awarded prizes in the annual prize distribution function. Four children have participated in daily physical training activities. Students of the special education unit, their parents and teachers participate in the annual walk arranged by the school. Often disabled children meet other children in the playground, and arrangements have been made to facilitate their participation in the play activities of Class 1 students. Since some disabled children travel in the school van, they have another opportunity to interact with other children.

Although adequate opportunities for interaction are available, the special education teacher felt that students with special needs admitted to the regular classroom often do not receive appropriate educational experiences since teachers lack training in this field. Hence, although some disabled students are in the regular classroom, they only learn two or three subjects.

Parents and community participation

Parents have given their full support voluntarily and with commitment since the inception of the unit. They support activities designed for their children, and regularly participate in monthly parent–teacher meetings. Parents also support the admission of children with special needs into the regular school, and help to see that the transition is smooth and the children accept each other in the regular classroom. They also provide monetary help for resources for daily activities, and for paying the salary of the support teacher.

Support

The principal and deputy principal have positive attitudes towards children with special needs, and play a supporting role in supervising the operation of the programme. The special education teachers and other teachers of the school, officers of the Ministry of Education and the Divisional Education Office are consulted whenever decisions are taken about the unit and its progress.

Constraints

The school has so far only been able to include children who are mentally challenged. Pupils are placed in the special unit and only interact socially with other children. The special education unit is situated at a distance from the regular primary classes. The children are the sole responsibility of the special education teacher until they join the regular school. Teachers and parents do not have access to other ancillary services that can support children with special needs, e.g., physiotherapists, speech therapists, etc. Some children drop out from the special unit without acquiring skills commensurate with their potential. Teachers in the regular school have limited skills for handling children with special needs. Some pupils and teachers still look at children with special needs with pity.

8.2 Teppanawa Kumara Maha Vidyalaya

The Teppanawa Kumara Maha Vidyalaya is situated in a rural remote area of Ratnapura District in Sri Lanka. The school has Grades 1–13, and 822 students and 28 teachers.

Special unit

The special education programme started in 1996 with the inclusion of a child with difficulties in hearing. Currently, there are 13 children with special educational needs. Initially, the special education unit functioned in the school library. However, as the number of children increased, a separate unit was established with the help of the Provincial and Zonal Education Office.

The special education unit plays the role of a mediating and facilitating body until children are admitted to the regular classroom. The special education teacher works with children to impart the skills required to cope with work in the regular class. According to her, the separate unit allows children to work at their own pace and learn with ease. It also provides space for additional inputs by resource persons. The teacher believes that placement in the special education unit also helps to build a healthy relationship with other children, and facilitates the learning process.

Accessibility

The distance between children's homes and the school varies from 2 km to 5 km. Most disabled children have no difficulties in attending school. Two children with hearing impairment travel alone to school, while parents accompany others. Two children are currently not attending school regularly because their mothers are pregnant and cannot walk with them to school. The special

education teacher has advised these parents to find an alternative way of sending their children to school.

Children with special needs do not face any difficulty with regard to physically accessing classrooms, using toilets or reaching taps. In the special education unit, there are comfortable desks and chairs, and enough space to move around. When children are sent to mainstream classrooms, teachers assist them to move around. The special education unit has been furnished with the aim of providing the necessary safety for children. There are separate shelves to keep their bags and other items, and cupboards to store teaching–learning aids. Children are able to reach them with ease.

Teachers

A teacher with a two-year degree in special education is in charge of the unit. She implements the education programme, and monitors the development of children with special needs. A close relationship is maintained with parents. In addition, the cooperation of other teachers in the school is sought. The principal supports teachers in organizing the programme.

The school environment motivates the educational activities of children with special needs. Teachers have come to accept that all children have a right to education. They believe that children with special educational needs have a greater opportunity to develop and enhance their abilities when learning alongside other children; these children respond positively when addressed with respect. All teachers feel that they should all cooperate to support the learning of children with special needs. Children are encouraged to learn about each other's needs, and work together to support each other's learning. The learning environment is based on love and care, and does not discriminate between boys and girls.

Besides the fully trained special education unit's teacher, two teachers have participated in short-term teacher training on inclusive education conducted by the National Institute of Education. No training has been provided in sign language.

The special education teacher, who has received pre-training in Braille, is aware of the needs of children, and the form of communication that should be encouraged. She looks after the needs of children with visual and hearing impairment. She also receives support from the resource centre at the Provincial Education Office. The school does not provide any clinical service with or without the support of therapists, and children do not receive assistance of any specialists.

Learners

Twelve of the 13 children with special needs are studying in primary classes, and one child is in Grade 7. None of the children has attended a pre-school. Of the 13 children, two girls have visual difficulties, five boys and two girls have hearing and speech problems, and four children are mentally challenged. It was observed that one girl with no vision is a popular child. Children notice with pride her athletic skills and cheer her during sports meets, where she wins laurels for her school.

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All children are encouraged to engage in the learning process. Care is taken to build an environment of mutual love and respect. Strong friendships are observed among the children with special needs and other children.

A cause for concern is the repetition of grades among children with special needs. In 2000, six children repeated Grade 1.

Curriculum and the teaching–learning process

The general curriculum is implemented for children with special educational needs. Teachers have the ability to adjust it appropriately to suit the requirements of disabled children. Learning words and understanding numbers through pictures is often practiced. Braille boards have been provided for use during Braille lessons.

Teachers speak clearly and look at the class while talking. They use short sentences while communicating, and repeat instructions. They check whether all children have understood by asking children to restate information. The children with difficulties in hearing have been trained to lip-read. During the learning process, children also exchange ideas through simple gestures and signs that are understood by all. Sign language is not used in the teaching–learning process since teachers lack this skill.

Teachers provide opportunities for engaging in group and individual activities. They adopt a thematic approach for various subjects; this works well in the lower primary classes. However, children with special educational needs, when learning with other children, find it difficult to follow these themes from Class 4 onwards. This had been observed when teaching subjects such as aesthetics, Buddhism and environment.

Attempts are made to improve the motor skills of children through the use of musical instruments. Cassette recorders and the melodica are also used as teaching aids. All children attend the dance class together. There are plans to introduce home science as subject for children with special needs.

Children with special needs work in the regular classroom in the morning, and spend the afternoon in the special unit. Various activity-oriented games to motivate them and help in the learning process are used.

Teachers of regular primary classes plan their lessons carefully, and ensure that children with special needs participate and make valuable contributions. They also consult the special education teacher to discuss problems faced by children and ways to solve them.

Evaluating the learning of children with special needs has been a challenge for teachers. They feel that it is difficult to evaluate each child and maintain records. Teachers meticulously maintain attendance records. A special focus is given to children with low attendance.

Special efforts are made to promote interaction among all children in the school. Children with special needs participate in sports activities, especially in inter-house sports meets, along with other children. They participate in morning assembly and the health programme. Interaction is also promoted through drama, and entertainment programmes for all children. During break-time (recess), children play games such as carom, darts and badminton. All children plan the physical health promotion programme of the school together. The school principal and special educator states that children are sent to special health clinics, when necessary.

Academic learning outcomes

A recent assessment of learning revealed that a few disabled students in Classes 1 and 2 can count up to 500, and use the five times mathematical tables in simple calculations. These children can also write two- and three-letter words, identify pictures and family members, and label relationships. A child who has hearing and speech impairment has drawn a large map of Sri Lanka on a wall of the school building. The principal stated that this child has consistently demonstrated special abilities in art.

Relationships with the community

Parents are grateful for the opportunities provided to their children with special needs by the principal, staff and students. They appreciate the manner in which the school encourages their children to engage in learning activities alongside other children, and achieve their potential.

Parents of children with special needs attend the school daily. They willingly support the teachers in taking care of their children. In this process, they also learn to support their children at home. They attend parent–teacher meetings held once a term; during these meetings, the principal discusses issues relating to their child. The school authorities also discuss the difficulties that the school faces because of limited availability of space in school. The principal states that the parents of children with special needs donate many sports goods to the school.

Supervision

The principal states that in-service advisors in special education often visit the school for supervision. With the cooperation of the special education teacher, the principal monitors the education of children with special needs, and provides quality inputs. She looks forward to being able to train all teachers to work with children with special needs on an ongoing basis.

In this school, children with special needs are directly admitted to the regular classroom, and the regular teacher has the main responsibility for teaching these children. The special education teacher acts as support teacher to the regular classroom teacher.

Constraints

The school is remote with limited transport facilities. The special education teacher has to shoulder a major part of the responsibility of teaching children with special needs, when they are in the special education unit.

8.3 Community-based rehabilitation programme with a focus on teacher training

In 1984, a UNICEF-sponsored community-based rehabilitation project was implemented in Anuradhapura and Kalutara Districts in Sri Lanka. As part of the project, a mechanism was established to identify children with disabilities before they reached schooling age and direct them into pre-school education. Efforts were made through volunteers to procure specialized services, such as speech therapy and physiotherapy, at home for children with disabilities who could not go to school. The community supported the programme by providing hearing aids, wheelchairs, crutches and other items required for learning at school. Voluntary workers occasionally monitored the progress of children who entered school. During follow-up, it was realized that teachers lacked the skills required to work with these children. A teacher training programme, thus, became the major focus of the community-based rehabilitation project.

Teacher training model

A teacher training project was initiated to build the skills of teachers who had volunteered to teach children with special needs in two project districts. Two consultants from SIDA with the assistance of a local counterpart implemented the training programme. In 1987, the Ministry of Education selected a core group of trainers from among senior special education teachers and used the project to train them. The positive impact of the training programme was noticeable.

With the establishment of the Department of Special Education at the National Institute of Education in 1989, the teacher training programme, which had been limited to only a few districts, was introduced in all provinces as a national programme. During 1991, core groups (both Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking) were trained for all provinces. The implementation of this programme was the collective responsibility of the Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Education and the provincial Departments of Education. In addition to teachers, school principals, teacher advisors and education officers also participated in the programme on a part-time basis.

Under this programme, a 15-day workshop was held in each province. These were followed by two similar 10-day workshops in each province. At the provincial level, the core group identified provincial needs, conducted workshops, sought feedback and initiated activities using local financial allocations.

The responsibilities of the National Institute of Education are preparation of curriculum and training materials for the programme, training and follow-up training for core groups, and planning in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and provincial Departments of Education. The responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and the provincial Departments of Education are selection of participants, organization and implementation of programme, implementation of follow-up workshops, and monitoring and evaluation.

Objectives

The programme aims to develop the competency that is necessary for primary teachers to improve the teaching process in the classroom for the benefit of all children, including children with special needs. The training also targets other professionals involved in bringing education to diverse students in the classroom.

Training curriculum and its implementation

The training focuses on the basic principles of child development, and approaches to behavioural modifications that foster self-esteem and develop communication skills. It also includes physical and mental well-being; identification and assessment of children with mental retardation, and visual and hearing difficulties; teaching strategies; and preparation, adaptation and use of low-cost aids. A participatory training methodology was adopted, and group activities (small and large), role-play, problem-solving activities, discussions and brainstorming are used.

Participants are selected from Tamil- and Sinhala-speaking teachers with the aim of building mutual understanding among different ethnic groups during the residential training. Most teachers are teaching Classes 2 or 3, are less than 45 years of age, and have volunteered to work with children with special needs. They also show a special commitment to their profession.

The 10-day training was implemented as a full-time residential course to provide adequate time for activity-based learning, discussions and brainstorming sessions. The first two days focus on personality-building activities and providing inputs for handling individual differences among children. Seven days are directed at classroom teaching and learning activities for meeting the needs of children with disabilities. On the last day, an orientation programme is planned, and collaborative planning is undertaken with principals, teacher advisors, and education officers. Programmes are planned for each school.

The training inputs are monitored and evaluated by concerned officials. The Education Officer of each province provides support to teachers for follow-up to the training.

Outcomes of the teacher training programme

The following information has been elicited from data collected from a randomly selected sample of 39 teachers and 20 principals from Kegalle District in Sabargamuwa Province about this short-term programme.

Accessibility

Teachers who participated in the training programme have established special education units in their schools for children with severe disabilities, and made interventions to support children with mild special educational needs to learn alongside regular classroom children. Children with mental retardation, nerve dysfunction, speech, behavioural and motor problems, and those with reading and writing difficulties, were found to be studying in Classes 1 to 11.

Teachers and administrators have worked together to make arrangements to retain those children who are likely to drop out because of their special educational needs. Efforts have been made to admit children of school-going age with disabilities who have not enrolled in school before.

Identification

Children with special educational needs are identified with the help of teachers and parents of neighbouring schools and with the support of the Social Service Officer in the Provincial Secretary's Office.

Teaching–learning process

Trained teachers implement the general syllabus for all children including those with special educational needs. Regular classroom children are made aware of the abilities of children with special educational needs so that healthy interactions can be established. Opportunities are provided for group participation in activities along with individual learning. Outside classroom activities include games, drama and aesthetic programmes. Opportunities are provided to participate with regular children in term-end variety entertainment programmes, in school assembly, and activities such as New Year festivals and literary competitions. The needs of disabled children are assessed regularly, and children are directed to clinics and NGOs depending on the nature of their needs.

Parents and the community

Teachers develop active relationships with parents. During the teaching–learning process, parental support is obtained. In order to develop holistic attitudes within the community towards children with special educational needs, exhibitions of creative work, variety entertainments and sports competitions are held.

Principals

During the training programme, principals and teachers had the opportunity to develop the skill of preparing programmes for their schools, with the cooperation of teachers, teacher advisors and other relevant education officers. Principals considered this important and useful, and felt that they had acquired a better understanding of inclusive practice.

Principals notice that although teachers start the programme with much enthusiasm, they find it difficult to sustain their momentum. Owing to this, the programme often flags. Failure to provide and receive feedback on their needs was given as a reason for this.

Teachers

Teachers felt that this was an important and effective programme. They now use various learning–teaching methodologies, create a pleasant learning environment, maintain equity in the treatment of students, and look at the problems of children from different perspectives. They stated that participation in the programme had enhanced their ability to prepare teaching–learning aids, and implement the teaching–learning process more efficiently and effectively. They expressed satisfaction that they have been able to change the attitudes of other teachers towards children with special educational needs, and to use active teaching–learning methods in their classrooms.

8.4 Early Childhood Education Programme

The early childhood education programme for children with disabilities is a broad programme initiated by the Office of the Director of Social Services in North Western Province. It is implemented throughout the province with the aim of catering to the special educational needs of children with disabilities. Centres have been established in each divisional secretariat of Kurunegala and Puttalam Districts under JICA sponsorship. There were several reasons for starting this form of early childhood education programme.

- Early childhood education centres for children with disabilities are presently ineffectively implemented.
- There is no formal basis for early childhood education centres in the provision of education for children with disabilities.
- Children with disabilities have to be prepared for the regular classroom by the end of their early childhood education.

The early childhood centres operate under the administration of the Director of Social Services in Kurunegala District, and are managed by pre-school staff under the supervision of the director. The regional secretaries keep in constant contact with the Director of Social Services and the officer in charge, under the direction of the provincial secretariat. There is an early childhood education centre for children with disabilities almost in every secretariat. All buildings have been provided either by the provincial secretariat or by other organizations. Several buildings were built by various organizations under the sponsorship of Japanese philanthropist organizations. The

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Provincial Council has provided land. Most of these centres have adequate accommodation for indoor and outdoor activities. In some places, some activities are done in the open air within protective fencing.

Target group

Age and the nature of disabilities are not barriers to admission of children to the early childhood education programmes. Children with hearing and visual impairments, and with speech disorders and multiple disabilities (mental retardation/autistic tendencies /hyperactivity) aged between two years and 13 years are admitted to the centres. They are taught here until they are ready for regular school. Most children come from rural families that have no regular income. Most disabilities are congenital, and not caused by malnutrition.

Accessibility

Each early childhood education centres is built close to a town or main road. It is quite easy for children to use public and private transport to reach it. About five per cent of children walk. Mothers or another relative or guardian accompany their wards, and generally remain at the centre while it is open.

Pre-school teachers

Almost all the pre-school teachers are professionally trained. They have attended various short-term courses in addition to courses held at the National Institute of Education on education for children with disabilities. They feel that the short course given by the Department of Education of the North Western Secretariat is the most useful and complete. The Department of Social Services of the North Western Province pays their salary.

Output

The main aim of the early childhood education centre programme is to raise the capacity of children with disabilities for admission to regular school. About 70 per cent of children enter regular school for formal education, and 65 per cent continue education in regular school either in a special education unit or in the regular classroom. Children are recommended to regular schools when the teacher at the centre feels the child has reached a satisfactory level both mentally and physically. Most parents feel that their children have progressed as a result of the educational programme.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

- In Sri Lanka, Buddhist and British missionaries laid the foundation for special education. The practice moved gradually from segregation to integrated education. Recently, conceptual understanding and practice of inclusion have been growing.
- Despite a long history of special education, less than half of all school-aged children with disabilities benefit from education services. Disabled girls are more discriminated against and have poorer access to schooling compared to disabled boys. Non-school-going disabled children report disability as the main reason for not attending school. There are significant regional disparities; the number of children with disabilities is highest in the most disadvantaged situations in rural remote areas, tea plantations, urban slums and conflict-affected areas.
- There is an ongoing debate on the relevance of inclusive education. Although professionals and practitioners agree on the philosophy of inclusive education, some are sceptical about inclusive practice in the light of the inadequacy of existing resources in the school system.
- The Educational Reforms of 1997 support the philosophy and practice of inclusive education. They include the assessment and recording procedures that should be implemented for every child on admission to the formal education system. They show that there is a positive trend towards the implementation of the inclusive education policy.
- Although the concept of educational inclusion is accepted, a procedure in keeping with this concept has not been implemented within the school system. One common feature of inclusive practice is the setting up of special units within regular schools. Special teachers take the major responsibility for children with disabilities in a segregated environment. Children with disabilities are denied the opportunity to learning with children in regular classroom, and interaction with other children in the school is mainly restricted to social activities.
- There are differences in the meaning and modes of practice of inclusive education among schools.
- The National Institute of Education is taking the leading role in designing and developing short- and long-term training programmes. In addition, awareness-raising programmes are conducted for provincial managers to work out modalities for implementing inclusive education based on agreed policy guidelines.
- In order to meet the needs of children with disabilities within existing resources, core teams consisting of trained special education teachers have been established. These core teams are attached to provincial education offices with resource centres. They provide training to ordinary teachers during holidays. Almost all provinces, except the trouble-torn northeast, have

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developed resource centres with facilities for in-service training and guidance. Core-team training is the responsibility of the National Institute of Education.

- Parents play a key role in initiating and supporting inclusive practices in schools in terms of admission, monitoring progress, and providing monetary resources for daily activities and the salary of support teachers.
- Volunteers provide special services such as speech therapy and physiotherapy at home for children with disabilities who cannot go to school. The community supports the programme by providing hearing aids, wheelchairs, crutches, and other items required for learning at school. Voluntary workers occasionally monitor the progress of children who enter school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A substantial effort has to be made to raise the level of awareness regarding inclusive education among regular classroom teachers. There is also a need for student teachers to learn about teaching all types of children in the same classroom. A comprehensive training package on inclusive education needs to be developed. Curriculum developers and subject teachers should also be aware of the concept. Capable and interested parties can be mobilized to sponsor awareness through mass media.
- The teacher is the most important human resource for promoting inclusive education. The regular classroom teacher has little support. The role of the special education teacher needs to change to become a facilitator for the entire school. The setting up of a teacher support team in every school can be promoted to provide on-site support as a matter of policy.
- Professionals, practitioners and stakeholders hold contradictory views regarding inclusive education. Training on special education should not be confined to teachers and resource teachers; it should include other key personnel such as principals, supervisors, directors, etc., particularly those who are directly concerned with the promotion of inclusive education. Training should go beyond special teaching techniques, and cover issues of planning, management, organization, implementation and evaluation of special education programmes.
- Core-team training should be made more informal at school level so that there is more involvement of parents and community members in acquiring knowledge and skills.
- Community-based rehabilitation programmes should be strengthened so that support in the form of promoting access to inclusive education, introducing reforms in schools, and providing supporting materials is facilitated.
- Support to children with disabilities could be built up through the creation of a support network of non-disabled peers. This would help not only in sharing the responsibility but also in promoting a non-discriminative social relationship in the school environment.
- Sharing of ideas and information about inclusive practice is central to developing skills, knowledge and understanding, and reinforcing changes in attitudes and values. The National Institute of Education and the provincial Departments of Education should encourage information dissemination. General teachers who have not gone through specific training in special education could be sensitized to the needs of children with disabilities through short-term training services in school.
- In order to strengthen the impact of inclusive education in Sri Lanka, action research should be undertaken on practices of inclusion; the findings should be disseminated.

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- Simultaneous initiatives in special education and inclusive education tend to obscure the focus on education of children with disabilities in regular school settings. There is a need to review and redirect the functioning of special education units in schools so that they serve the purpose of inclusive education. Children who have disabilities should be the concern of all personnel in the school rather than that of the resource or special education teacher. Future reviews and amendments to national educational reforms and policy should emphasize inclusive practices for children with disabilities, and discourage strategies that promote their segregation.

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