**Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum CDPF**

**CCEM 2024. Developing Inclusive Education Is the Way Forward for Disabled People**

**Despite radical changes in the international Human Rights framework, from exclusion and segregation towards Inclusive Education [UNCRPD Article 24 and SDG 4], most Commonwealth countries have not seriously followed suit. Exclusion (not being in school), segregation (in separate schools and institutions) or poor integration (disabled students attend, but little or no accommodations are made) remain persistently the norm. Everyone agrees that a good education is a firm foundation for a successful life and a strong national economy. So why do we continue to effectively exclude so many disabled young people from accessing equitable quality education and denying our countries their potential?**

**Last year, the International Disability Alliance, the International Disability and Development Consortium and the Global Campaign for Education backed by the Government of Sierra Leone, the United Nations and numerous Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs /OPDs), including CDPF and NGOs made a** [**Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education**](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000384964)**.**

“This includes the 240 million children with disabilities worldwide who, even before COVID-19 disruptions to education, experienced disparities in learning. Compared to children without disabilities, children with disabilities were 49% more likely to have never attended school and 42% less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills (UNICEF, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these discrepancies, compounding the learning crisis for the most marginalized learners. Transforming education to reach all learners, including those with disabilities, is needed to ensure resilient and inclusive education systems. Solutions that support the inclusion of learners with disabilities, who are often those most at risk of neglect, stigma and abuse, are the same approaches that support the well-being and success of all learners.”

‘For girls with disabilities these challenges are intensified by additional gender-related barriers, including higher risks of sexual violence or preferences from parents to educate boys. So, girls with disabilities really are among the most marginalised children in the world’. FCDO Dec 2023.

**The fundamental issue remains that governments, educators, those who teach teachers and those who run schools and colleges remain wedded to a ‘deficit ‘ model of disabled people and Special Education. The paradigm shift required to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with regard to education, has not mainly been embraced, with the old Special Needs approach, the problem is seen as what the child ‘cannot do’. We need to support and develop what each child ‘can do’ using different pedagogy, , accommodations and removing the barriers in the bult environment, attitudes and organisation and creating self and peer empowerment.**

**There are plenty of examples at a small scale of how to develop this approach to inclusive education. Few as yet are generalised. The UNCRPD Committee has criticised every Commonwealth country scrutinised, as inadequate in differing degrees in their implementation of Article 24.**

**Last year’s call as above, set three important targets:**

**‘1. Progressively increase budgetary allocations for disability-inclusive education towards being at least 5% of education budgets.**

**2. Set a medium to long-term target to ensure all disabled learners are reached in all education programmes, recognising that at least 10% of learners in any country will be disabled learners.**

**3. Ensure all education programmes and grants mainstream disability and include disability-inclusion criteria and target.**

Achieving these commitments would not only reverse the education gap for children with disabilities but would transform education systems in a way that will bring benefits to all and will help make greater, and more rapid, progress towards the achievement of SDG4.’

**‘How to meet these commitments?**

1. **Progressively increase budgetary allocations for disability-inclusive education.**

• Adopt a 'twin-track' approach to education budgeting that promotes system wide transformation to improve the quality of education for all, whilst providing targeted support to disabled learners. This includes increasing the number of specialised teachers and support staff, as well as accessible edtech and ensuring early identification and support for disabled learners.

• Fund the specific support needs of disabled students by budgeting for support, assistive technology, braille literacy, bilingual sign language education and captioning, among others. Progressively phase out segregated schools and reinvest in delivering truly inclusive education.

• Invest in teacher training, including in disabled teachers, enabling and empowering teachers to create learning environments accommodating diverse learning styles, such as applying Universal Design for Learning, and accessible curricula & assessments.

 • Promote participatory budgeting and budget transparency that meaningfully engages disabled learners, Disabled People’s Organisations and the teachers, parents and carers of disabled learners.

• Strengthen inter-sectoral alignment of budgets to enable the provision of full support systems responding to the interconnectedness of health, social protection, transportation, education of disabled children and youth, their families, from birth onward.

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•Ensure all education data, from early childhood through to tertiary and vocational education and training, is fully disaggregated by gender and disability.

•Integrate the Washington Group Questions on Disability into all education management information systems.

•Support education systems to use the UNICEF/Washington Group Child Functioning Module to track and reach disabled children who are in and out of school. Ensure all education programmes and grants mainstream disability and include disability-inclusion criteria and targets.

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• Develop clear criteria and targets on disability-inclusive education for all education programme grants.

• Ensure specific allocations and guidance on mainstreaming disability are included in all education funding programmes and grants.

• Track all donor investments in education at all levels using the OECD-DAC’s policy marker on the inclusion and empowerment of disabled people.

• Actively involve Disabled People’s Organisations and other civil society organisations, in the design, development and implementation of education programmes.’

In the **CDPF** we call ourselves disabled people because we embrace the ‘social model’,realizing that the systematic barriers of environment, attitude and organization are what disable us, not our impairments. We have impairments but are disabled by Disabilism, a social oppression. When referring to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), we will be using ‘persons with disabilities’.

**Mission of the CDPF**: ‘To develop a unified voice for the implementation of Disability Rights and Equality for DPOs (Disabled People’s Organisations) and disabled people across the 56 countries of the Commonwealth.’  **‘Nothing Without Us’.** DPOs or Representative Disabled People’s Organisations need to and must be involved in all these developments if they are to be successful. We have the expertise at living with our long-term impairments in our disabling societies and can provide training, advice and empowerment to young disabled people, but act as mentors, role models and train staff and parents in **disability equality**.[**https://commonwealthdpf.org**](https://commonwealthdpf.org)

The poor embracing the human rights of disabled people and implementation of UNCRPD across the Commonwealth, with a few notable exceptions, has led **CDPF** to put forward a [**Disability Inclusion Action Plan**](Disability%20Inclusion%20Action%20Plan)**,** to be added as an addendum to the CHOGM 2024 communique. We call on all Governments to give this their support. This includes a call to give priority to developing inclusive education.

**Putting Inclusive Education into Practice**

Since the Salamanca Statement (1994), for 30 years the world has been increasingly committed to a fully inclusive education system. Although we clearly understand how to achieve this, there remains considerable resistance. See Richard Rieser’s [A Commonwealth Guide to Implementing Article 24](http://worldofinclusion.com/v3/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Implementing-Inclusive-Education-promo-copy1.pdf) of UNCRPD, 2012. Given continuing confusion among states parties the [UNCRPD Committee produced General Comment No 4](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-4-article-24-right-inclusive). World of Inclusion produced [Developing Inclusive Education and Disability Equality : A World of Inclusion Broadsheet for Global Summit July 2018](http://worldofinclusion.com/developing-inclusive-education-and-disability-equality-a-world-of-inclusion-broadsheet-for-global-summit-july-2018/).

[**The Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS)**](https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2017/fiji-education-management-information-system-femis-disability-disaggregation-package-guidelines) is online and contains individual student data entered at the school by teachers who are able to continuously update the information provided on the platform. Each child’s record includes a large variety of data items, such as: student ID number, registered birth number, parent details, gender, ethnicity, date of birth, home situation (eg. household income, electricity, employment), school attendance, record of school fees, and financial assistance accessed**, health and disability**. A toolkit is provided containing documents aimed at facilitating the process for schools and teachers. These include: - **the Fiji Disability Services Information and Referral Directory** which provide assistance to disabled children , the schools and their families. A sign language dictionary, a disability inclusive handbook for teachers and a DVD containing additional resources on inclusive education to give teachers a broader understanding and awareness on inclusive education and the range of disabilities that children can have**.** The programme is being implemented by the Fiji Ministry for Education, Art and Heritage, in partnership with primary and secondary schools, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. **A focus is set on the involvement of organizations working with disabled people, the students themselves, their parents in the data collection process and after in the response.** The System was funded by the Australian government through the Australian AID Access to Quality Education Programme (AQEP).

[**Sightsavers and the International Disability Alliance (IDA) lead FCDO’s flagship Disability Inclusive Development – Inclusive Futures (DIDIF)**](https://commonwealthdpf.org/inclusive-education/) programme, supporting FCDO’s [disability inclusion and rights strategy 2022 to 2030](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fcdo-disability-inclusion-and-rights-strategy-2022-to-2030/fcdo-disability-inclusion-and-rights-strategy-2022-to-2030-building-an-inclusive-future-for-all-a-sustainable-rights-based-approach) The DIDIF programme’s committed over [£12m to fund nine inclusive education projects](https://inclusivefutures.org/inclusive-education/) **in Bangladesh, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, and Tanzania**. By 2023, the programme supported nearly 1,700 disabled children to access education via its innovation phase. This project aimed to bring the innovations to scale but was severely disrupted by Covid 19. However, a number of innovative methods and practices were developed in involving Communities and DPOs.

In **Zambia** Sightsavers carried out the [Zambian Inclusive Education Programme](https://www.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Exec-summary-Zambia-Inclusive-Education-Programme-End-of-Term-Evaluation-Sightsavers.pdf) developing innovative practice for dealing with visually impaired children, influenced MOE and worked with DPO ZAFOD . <https://youtu.be/V0F2IRFSgWQ?t=4>

Parts of **Australia, Canada** such as New Brunswick and [British Columbia](Episode%201%20Bridging%20the%20Divide%20https%3A/youtu.be/XT0n5uTSjyY) are fully inclusive. **New Zealand and UK** are inclusive, but many special segregated schools still co-exist.

**India** <https://youtu.be/64vLIWCFC9I> Dr Sruti Mohapatara tells us how the largest country in the Commonwealth is the one of only a few developing countries to have national mandatory framework for inclusive education that has been increasingly expanded and tightened up in 2009,2012,2016 Acts and then the 2020 Education Policy. Barriers remain. Teacher and parental attitudes, physical and sanitation barriers, bullying and lack of appropriate curriculum, assessment and learning materials. These are being addressed but DPOs and NGOs are pushing the boundaries and showing what is possible. Swabhiman in Orrisa in 2012 set up SUCTION, a project that placed Inclusive Child Resource Centres in 8 schools with a facilitator, provided support and interesting things to do. Drop out stopped and disabled children, once their parents, teachers and principals had been trained made progress at a higher than expected rate. The State Government observed this low cost measure and the benefits in 2022 rolled it out to all 314 Blocks. [The UNESCO Report into Inclusive Education in India](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000373670/PDF/373670eng.pdf.multi) demonstrates much still needs to be done. Not least the need to challenge home education and use of special schools.

**Guyana** Inclusive Education <https://youtu.be/2iFOAR-rMqg> Ganish Singh of Guyana Council of Orgs.PWD reports Guyana has a hybrid special and inclusive system. Recently all teacher training includes inclusive education. An Inclusive Education policy drawn up in 2010 is still to be enacted.

**Sierra Leone** [The National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools](https://commonwealthdpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Radical-Inclusion-Policy-Sierra-Leone.pdf) is the first attempt by any Government in Sierra Leone to provide a roadmap for the day-to-day operations of schools and the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, to ensure inclusion and positive experience for all students regardless of their status in society**. Radical Inclusion**, as defined by the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, David Sengeh, is “the intentional inclusion of persons directly or indirectly excluded (from education) due to actions or inactions by individuals, society or institutions. Sometimes silence and infrastructure added to other intentional actions exclude. Radical inclusion means that these silent exclusionary policies, moral stances, formally stated actions, institutional regulations, national laws and systemic frameworks should be removed intentionally and with urgency to achieve inclusion.” DPOs have been involved in implementing the policy**.** A [Baseline Report](https://commonwealthdpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Radical-Inclusion-Baseline-Report.pdf) found good socio-political acceptance of inclusive principles at the grassroots level, with strong political will to implement a strong policy at the top. Collaborative culture between government and development partners has strengthened the institutional environment and are a force for change. However, some system weaknesses, especially: a) unpredictable government funds; and b) limited capacity and resource at district-level, leave questions as to how the policy can be implemented to achieve national impact.

**General Comment 4** clarifies that while inclusion is subject to progressive realisation, there are certain obligations that must be **immediately realised**: providing access to common schools on the basis of equal opportunity, and reasonable accommodation of the common learning environment to suit the needs of children with disability. In the long-term, the state should strive to reduce dependence on special schools, and phase out segregated schooling, with particular emphasis on tackling institutionalisation where the child loses access to the community and family.

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