

Inclusive education? Special needs education?

Inclusive Education Brief No. 1

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Inclusive Education Task Team, EIE Sector Working Group, developed in collaboration with MOES and NUDIPU

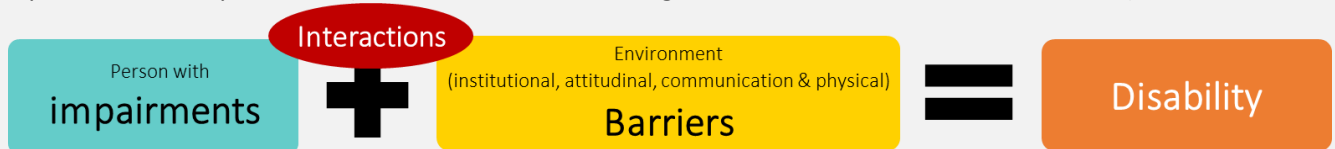
Inclusive education is a fundamental right of all learners, regardless of age, gender, disability, economic status, or any other marginalised group, to access quality education and achieve the learning outcomes to their full potential. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities describes it as “**a process of systemic reform** embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences” (para. 11).¹

Yet, this is not a reality for many children. **Globally, 258 million primary and secondary school aged children** (17% of the population) **are out of school** (UNESCO, 2020).² The situation is worse in sub-Saharan Africa where 97 million children (31%) of the primary and secondary school aged children are denied a right to education (ditto). Learning poverty is serious where 6 out of 10 children, aged 10 years old, are not able to read and understand a simple story in low- and middle-income countries (UNICEF, 2022)³.

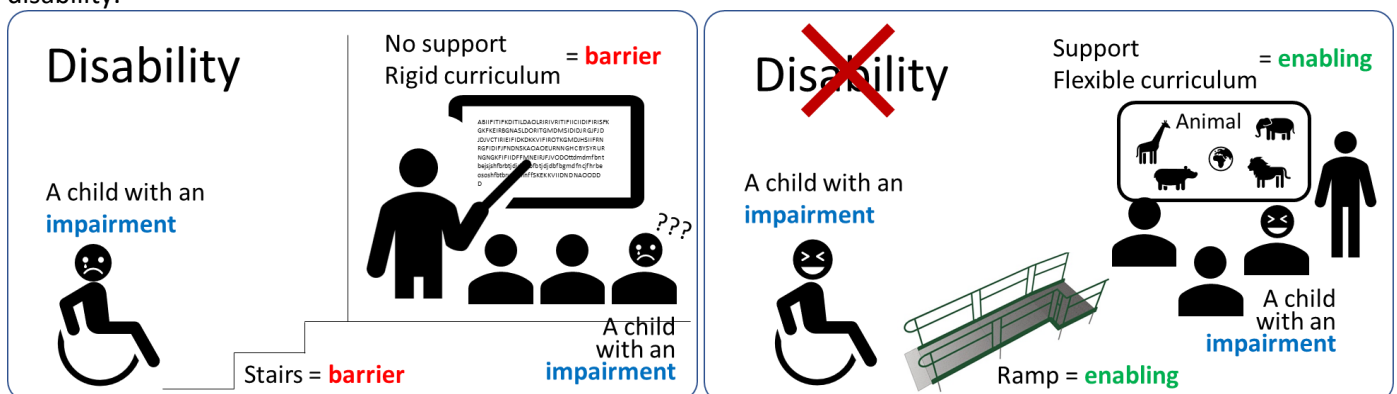
Children with disabilities (see Box 1) are among these children who are at high risk of exclusion from education. **In Uganda, almost 20% of children with disabilities never attended school**, compared to 10% among children without disabilities (UBOS, 2017)⁴.

Box 1: What do you mean by “disability”?

Understanding of “disability” has changed over years. Traditionally, disability was considered as medical conditions of a person, which were often associated with negative images such as “inability” “not normal” and “inferior”. This thinking is outdated. Instead, disability should be understood as an interaction between barriers in environments and persons with impairments (Ref: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD]).



Learners may have impairments, but it is the education system and society that impose barriers and create disability.



This paper concerns **inclusive education with focus on children with disabilities**. To achieve this, two education systems often co-exist and simultaneous; namely inclusive education and special needs education. These words are often mixed, leading to confusion. The table below, developed based on CRPD, clarifies the differences.⁵

¹ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2016). General comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education. CRPD/C/GC/4

² UNESCO. 2020. Global Education Monitoring Report Summary 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all. Paris, UNESCO

³ World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID, FCDO, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2022). The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update.

⁴ Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2017). Uganda Functional Difficulties Survey

⁵ Created by the author based on MOES website (accessed Jan 13 2023), Educational Provisions and Approaches in Special Needs & Inclusive Education, Special Needs & Inclusive Education Department, and General Comment No. 4 (see the link in footnote 1)

	Special needs education ⁶		Inclusive education ⁶
Target learners	Learners with “special needs” (see Box 2), arising from various reasons, but often associated only with disabilities		All learners regardless of age, gender, disability, economic status, or any other marginalised group
Location	Special schools (e.g. Schools for the Deaf, for the Blind*)	Special units or annexes inside mainstream schools	Mainstream classrooms in mainstream schools.
Visual image	<p>Segregation</p> <p>Note: often separated by type of impairment</p>	<p>Integration</p>	<p>Inclusion</p>
Educational approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special teachers (SNE teachers) are responsible for teaching • Different curriculum from the one in mainstream schools • Focus on activities of daily living and vocational skills, not academic skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special teachers (SNE teachers) are responsible for teaching • Children join a mainstream class only for certain lessons due to limited adaptations in mainstream classes • Learners should adjust to the standard requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any teacher teaches children with disabilities, with technical support from SNE teachers when needed. • Full range of adaptations, and reasonable accommodations where necessary, in content, teaching methods, classroom arrangements, learning materials, etc. • Teachers and environments adjust to learners, differentiated approaches to teaching.

* Special schools: MOES recognizes 26 special schools at the primary level and 4 at the secondary level in the whole country⁷.

BOX 2: Children with “special needs” – who you are referring to?

In Uganda, people use different terms when referring to children with disabilities.

Children with special needs

Children with special learning (or educational) needs

Children who are special needs

Special children

Slow learners, or, time takers

Special needs children (or SNE children) *and more!*

Phrases such as “slow learner” are derogatory and not scientific. All in all, these terms are considered offensive and not appropriate. Learn more! [Disability-Inclusive Language Guidelines \(UN, 2021\)](#)

Children with disabilities.. especially physical disability

You may be using the same word..

Children with different types of disabilities, refugee children, pregnant girls, students who have babies, overaged children.....

Let's support children with **special needs!**

while thinking about different children!



BOX 3: A case study: a boarding facility attached to a school with a special education unit

Freedom Primary School⁸ in rural Uganda recognizes many children with various disabilities in the surrounding communities are out of school. With support from NGOs, the school built a Special Needs Education unit for those children. However, parents of children with disabilities claimed that their children cannot attend in the unit, due to long distance in a hilly terrain. The school therefore also built a boarding section where children with disabilities live and attend lessons in a special unit and when appropriate in mainstream classes, during the week.

Questions: Is the response inclusive? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this response?

⁶ For more information about what is inclusive education and what it is not, see [Defining inclusive education \(EENET, n.d.\)](#)

⁷ Personal communication, SNE Department, MOES, 24 June, 2022

⁸ The name has been changed

● Is this inclusive education?

No. This situation represents **integration, but not inclusion**. Only children with disabilities are in the boarding facility and they are placed in a special unit. One issue is that “integration does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion” (para. 11, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).⁹ Concrete time-bound plans should be available to realize a system change that addresses the root causes of the issues, in order to exit from the boarding service (e.g. distance to a school and limited ability for families to afford transportation, addressed via community-led rideshare system, a livelihood and other social programs for families).

● What are the pros and cons of this intervention?

Advantages:

- Trained teachers in a special unit (i.e. SNE teachers) may provide specific learning support to children and an opportunity for other teachers to learn various pedagogical skills, depending on their capacities.
- A boarding service ensures access to learning to avoid the learning gap now.
- Parents devote time to work etc., which was otherwise spent accompanying their children with disabilities to commute to schools every day.

Disadvantages:

- Specific communication or behaviour management skills a child with disabilities learns in schools (e.g. sign language) are not shared with family members, making it difficult for a child to adjust when going back home.
- Bonds between a child, family members as well as peers in the community are limited.
- Children’s right to be included in their community is at stake (CRPD Article 19).
- Protection and safeguarding risks. Note that children with disabilities are 3.7 times more likely than their peers with disabilities to be victims of violence (as cited by Human Rights Watch, 2017).¹⁰
- Higher costs for residential services

● Conclusion

- **Segregation/integration** (like a specific boarding section) **should be a temporary step on the way towards inclusion**. It can be helpful, e.g. for children with severe/complex disabilities who cannot access education near their homes or Deaf children who need to learn Sign Language. Yet, it is important that children are not segregated in their childhood. If special needs support is needed, it shall be given ideally in mainstream school. Education actors shall always look for ways to connect special schools or units with mainstream schools / classrooms and ideally transfer children to mainstream settings whenever possible and relevant.
- **Planning for inclusion** needs to take place at all stages **with a timeline and budgets** e.g. transition planning for students in special schools (e.g. transitional class); building a new school in an accessible way; equipping classrooms with inclusive teaching and learning materials; regular teacher training on inclusive education.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR ALL



Source: UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2020. Cartoon-20-Flexible-curriculum

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⁹ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2016). General comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education. CRPD/C/GC/4
¹⁰ Human Rights Watch. (2017). *Children with disabilities: Deprivation of liberty in the name of care and treatment*.