



Lesotho Council of NGOs

POLICY BRIEF

Policy Brief No. 2021/02

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HOW LESOTHO CAN OVERCOME ITS BOTTLENECKS & IMPLEMENT ITS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

Key Messages

- *According to UNICEF, about 95% of children with disabilities in developing countries are out of school and 90% of them may never gain access to basic education in their lifetime (JONAPWD: 1).*
- *The right to education is also protected under Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2007).*
- *Civil Society organizations have lobbied for an Inclusive Education Policy since the 1980's, following this the Ministry of Education committed itself to it through Policy Statements in 1989 (Ministry of Education, 1989).*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The obligation to educate all people, including people with disabilities, was proclaimed by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948: everyone has the right to education (United Nations, 1948). After much lobbying by Disabled People Organizations (DPOs) in the mid-80s, Lesotho finally lay the ground work for a policy to integrate children with disabilities into the mainstream schooling system in 1990 (Stubbs, 2000: 1). Promisingly, a Special Education Unit was established and a Feasibility study for Special Education was conducted in 1992 (1). Despite the Ministry of Education and Training's (MoET) early commitment Lesotho's Inclusive Education Policy was only completed in 2019 with a Commonwealth Study noting that "despite promising practice in the 1990s, Lesotho has not made the expected gains in inclusive education" (Reiser, 2012). In fact, about 40% of children with disabilities between the ages of 5 and 10 still do not attend primary school while 23% of children with disabilities between ages 10 and likewise 20 do not attend high school (Eriamiatoe, 2013). Urgent policy action is therefore overdue to rectify this course.

INTRODUCTION

According to UNICEF, about 95% of children with disabilities in developing countries are out of school and 90% of them may never gain access to basic education in their lifetime (JONAPWD: 1). The international community found this exclusion discriminatory but also as an unnecessary stumbling block towards development in the third world. Put simply, by not educating and skilling children with disabilities, developing countries are not capitalizing on human capital that could otherwise be tapped into- human capital is after all any economies most valuable commodity. To this end, the United Nations has not only called for children with disabilities to be stimulated “to achieve their full potential” but also be “integrated in mainstream schools” (UNESCO 1981: 293). Integration is important in light of the fact that research has indicated that educating Learners with Special education Needs (LSEN) in special schools fails to “help them gain skills necessary to reintegrate into society” (Thomas et al., 1998: 294). In such scenarios their exclusion may persist not only in their formative years but long after. To prevent this, it is necessary for education policy makers to bear in mind the diversity and needs of all potential learners and creating education system that embraces their diversity whilst ensuring the equality of opportunity and learning outcomes. This is what is referred to as Inclusive education, “ a process whereby the school ethos changes in a way that the content is adapted to individual needs...and teaching approaches are diversified to engage all learners” to ensure quality education for all (Johnson, 1999: 295).

- *Situational Analysis*

Lesotho has a 3-7-3-2 formal education structure. There are three years of Pre-primary Education, which are then followed by Primary Education which runs from Grades 1 to Grade 7 (MoDP, 2019: 37). Secondary Education is divided into Lower secondary and Upper secondary. Junior Secondary is comprised of grades 8 through to Grade 10 and results in a Junior Certificate. Upper Secondary is made up of the remaining grades: Grade 11 to Grade 12 and results in the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (37). Quality education (SDG 4) together with health (SDG 3) is part of human capital development

and critical enabler for achieving sustainable development in the country (MoDP: 4). The Education sector has consistently received the lion’s share of Lesotho’s national budget at roughly 17%, the next closest sector is Health which receives roughly 14% for perspective (World Bank, 2020). Indeed, Lesotho has made commendable strides in enrolment through its pledge to UNESCO’s Education for All movement which called for states to ensure universal access to education, globally. In light of this, Lesotho sought to eliminate barriers to entry by launching a Free Primary education policy in 2001 which has successively seen enrolment rise to 81.1% (GoL, 2019: 108). The Free Primary education policy was launched in the absence of an Inclusive Education policy however, and as a result a conscious effort was not made to mainstream LSEN (or an inclusive agenda) in the effort. This is clearly displayed by the fact that the rise in national enrolment rates has failed dismally to filter through to LSEN.

QUANTIFYING THE SCOPE OF THE CRISIS

Lesotho surveys have done a poor job at capturing the magnitude of its disabled population. The Feasibility study conducted in 1992 to study the need for an Inclusive Education policy found that about 17% of students in primary school had some sort of disability (hearing, visual, physical or learning impairment (Stubbs, 2000:1). Further, the 2001 Demographic Survey however, found that about 4.2% of Basotho live with some form of disability with children under 15 years of age accounting for a third of the figure (LNFOD: 2020). Additionally, available data indicates that “children living with disabilities enrolled in ECCD schools were less than two percent between 2015 and 2017 nationwide” (MoDP: 41). This statistic should be extremely alarming for education practitioners as ECCD schools are the first point of entry into the education and schooling system. Failure to enrol at this level is an indicator of that future enrolment at higher levels is unlikely as well as that dropout rates will also be high. Indeed, studies show that that there is a strong positive correlation between ECCD enrolment and future learning outcomes

- It is inescapable that in order for Inclusive Education to succeed it has to be adequately financed. Financial support is required to rehabilitate school infrastructure to make it appropriate for LSEN (MoET has recognized the need for school rehabilitation in the policy), to create an effective Special Education Unit, teacher trainings, school inspections as well as programme and material development. Without proper financial backing the Inclusive Education Policy will remain moot. It is therefore recommended that the government adjust its financial allocation to inclusive allocation in accordance to its needs and commitments made to it.

CONCLUSION

Access to education for every child is a fundamental Human Right. The advantage for Lesotho is that it has finally launched an Inclusive Education Policy. The challenge will be transforming it from a document on paper to concrete action on the part of duty-bearers. This will require implementation. This policy brief has identified certain actions that indispensable for the success of Inclusive Education such as the training of both pre and in-service teachers, mobilizing resources for programme development, infrastructure upgrades and school inspections, consistent of consultations with education sector stakeholders such as the LEG & DPOs and holding the yearly Education Review amongst others. Implementing all the aforementioned Policy recommendations identified in this document will undoubtedly foster the success of Inclusive Education in the country. In so doing the Kingdom of Lesotho will have secured the rights of all learners as well as Her own future.

Lesotho Council of NGOs

Hooхло Extension, House No.544

Private Bag A445, Maseru 100, Lesotho

Tel: (+266) 2231 7205/ (+266) 2232 5798

Fax: (+266) 2231 0412

Email: info@lcn.org.ls

Website: www.lcn.org.ls

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and retention (Yoshikawa, 2015: 3). It is therefore unsurprising given Lesotho's poor ECCD enrolment rates of children with disabilities that about 40% of children with disabilities between the ages of 5 and 10 fail to attend primary school while 23% of children with disabilities between ages 10 and 20 do not attend high school (Eriamiatoe, 2013). The failure to enrol and dropout rates are therefore substantially higher than those of their counterparts without disabilities. ists about what constitutes inclusive education" (292).

The Case for Inclusive Education and Affirming Legal Instruments

The right to education is also protected under Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2007). Most states including Lesotho are signatories to this convention. Being party to the convention does not only mean that states recognize the rights of peoples with disabilities but makes states duty-bearers in terms of protecting and realizing the needs of that population. This means that states ought to ensure that inclusion is "complemented by accessibility, reasonable accommodation, and effective individualized support aimed at maximizing academic and social development' albeit within a state's means (Ali, 2016).

Article 3 of Chapter Lesotho's Constitution recognizes education as "a directive principle of state policy" (Constitution of Lesotho, 1993). It is classified as a right albeit not a justiciable one. The country's Education Act as well as Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 however goes further by explicitly affirming the right of LSEN to education (MoDP, 2019: 8).

As aforementioned, states must invest in the health and education of their populations to cultivate productivity and innovation and in so doing stimulate economic growth. Indeed, "without human capital development, achieving SDGs by 2030 will be a tall order in Lesotho" (MoDP, 2019: 38). The country is already facing a crisis as it has the smallest economy in the SADC region exacerbated now by the Covid-19 pandemic. Pre- Covid-19 700 000 people were already food insecure and in need of food assistance, this figure has likely ballooned due the pandemic (UNDP, 2020: 3). Not with standing this, the unemployment rate stands at 25% with

the youth being most affected by the scourge of unemployment with an unemployment rate of 36% in a country where the youth accounts for 38% of the population (MoDP, 2019: 21). The crisis is therefore grave. The solution for Lesotho here is two-pronged: firstly, to create an economy that is able to absorb its workforce; and secondly, to build its labour-base and skill it according to the needs of its economy.

Advantages:

The need to make schooling at all levels accessible to all children, including the disabled is crystal clear. Doing so will not only increase Lesotho's human resource base but also drastically reduce the number of out of school children and reduce the social burden of unproductive and unskilled population. Lesotho did after all launch a social grant for the disabled for the first time in its history this year (GoL, 2019). Whilst it is a commendable feat in recognizing the economic plight that so often accompanies being disabled, it is also a further burden on existing tax payers. Additionally, although it was targeted at Nigeria, a Nigerian study identified the following prospects of inclusion, they could hold true for Lesotho:

1. *Inclusion enhances the attainment of the objectives of the [National Policy on Education, Universal Basic Education Act of 2004], the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals. Education cannot be for all until it is received by all. A system that excludes some people, cannot be for all and should therefore give way to one that is accommodating of all. It has been argued, "A system that serves only a minority of children while denying attention to a majority of others that equally need special assistance ... need not prosper in the 21st century.*

2. *Inclusion promotes a sense of cooperation and the feeling of togetherness in the learner.*

3. *It promotes favourable competition among school children of different abilities, endowments and backgrounds.*

4. *In addition to its direct benefit on children with disabilities, inclusion allows for the resources of special education teachers and other relevant professionals to be tapped to the fullest, since they*

could be used as regular school teachers. It should be noted here, that special education teachers have the unique ability to teach in both the special and regular schools. Inclusion thus presents an avenue for full utilization of the resources of all the members of the community.

5. Inclusive education provides a means of building a cooperative school community, where all are accommodated and able to participate.

6. Inclusive schooling is cost effective, as all the learners are accommodated in the same environment using virtually the same facilities. Unnecessary duplications of cost that are associated with segregated arrangements, are avoided in inclusion (JONAPWD: 3)

The Bottlenecks

Civil Society organizations have lobbied for an Inclusive Education Policy since the 1980's, following this the Ministry of Education committed itself to it through Policy Statements in 1989 (Ministry of Education, 1989). The Policy Statement was bold- it aimed to, amongst others, "integrate" children with disabilities into mainstream schools, ensure that they completed their primary education, establish resource centres to not only assess the needs of learners but prepare them for integration and create a travelling special education team to support teachers in mainstream schools as and when needed (Mosia, 2014: 295). Indeed, the Ministry of Education did institute a Special Education Unit 1991 as well as a contingent of itinerant special education team to support teachers in mainstream schools, albeit only in 6 districts (295). Moreover, it also launched a Feasibility Study 1992 and piloted Inclusive Education in 10 schools (295). The Ministry additionally, launched an Education Sector Plan with 7 objectives in 2005 that committed to, amongst others, accelerating the intake of disabled children in schools from a paltry 4.8% to 20% by 2009 and then to 40% 2015 and training 700 teachers a year on "SEN identification and assessment skills" (296).

Much of the Strategic Plan's objectives with regard to LSEN have not been met to date, however. This can be attributed to the fact that Ministry failed to meet the Sectoral

Plan's first target: to have "established a Special Education Policy" by 2006 (296). This was only completed 12 years behind schedule in 2018 and launched a year later in August 2019, in the form of the Ministry of Education and Training's (MoET) Inclusive Education Policy (MoET, 2018).

The slow progress of Special Education in Lesotho is therefore not surprising given that it has largely operated in the absence of a guiding policy specific to Special Education. It had been hampered by the lethargic development of the Inclusive Education Policy. This was the first and greatest bottleneck-but has been overcome. The fact that it took almost three decades after government committed itself to inclusive education and 13 years after its own deadline to have established an official policy, however, is a terrible indictment on the sluggish pace of policy development processes in Lesotho. Moreover and most worryingly, the existence seems to have brought about no tangible changes in the implementation of Inclusive education since the policy was launched.

Lesotho's Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (LCN) is the umbrella body of Civil Society Organizations in Lesotho. Through consultations with DPO CSO's such as the Lesotho National Federation of Organizations of the Disabled (LNFOD) LCN has established that disappointingly, the launching of the inclusive Education policy is yet to bring about any tangible changes in the implementation of Inclusive education. In short, the policy exists on paper- the education system is yet to digest the Inclusive Education Policy by overhauling itself and mainstreaming inclusivity in accordance with the policy. Inclusive education is namely being implemented in-line with the pre-policy framework. This is further evidenced by the fact that the launching of the Inclusive education policy has not led to any additional budgetary allocations for it by government, which currently stands at around 0.2 % of the Education budget according to these organizations.

The paltry budgetary allocation is an indicator that Special Education is not a priority within our Education system. Indeed, Special Education in Lesotho is inadequately financed. The inadequate financing allocated for the Special Education Unit has led to most of it being used to service the salary

demands of the Unit leaving little for programme and learning- material development, according to DPOs.

Inequitable financing is also visible in the rural/ urban divide of the provision of inclusive services, "most schools that cater for children with disabilities are mainly located in the capital city, Maseru" (Eriamiatoe, 2013). Whilst in other districts children with disabilities many have to "travel several kilometres to go to school," (Eriamiatoe, 2013). This is unconscionable considering that it is likely inclusive of those with physical infirmities.

Additionally, disabilities are wide-ranging- they range from visual, to hearing, to physical and learning impairments. They differ from person to person as well as in severity and it is not uncommon for one to face a combination of infirmities. The current policy

is vague on the development of systems to assess learner needs which should then inform how they will be placed and the resources needed for that individual learner's success. For example a local study found "students learning Braille when they could cope with eyeglasses or enlarge print (Mosia, 296)

.POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Kingdom of Lesotho has finally produced an Inclusive Education Policy. An inclusive agenda, however, is yet to be mainstreamed into the broader Education policy in the manner envisaged in the Inclusive Education policy. This can be partly attributed to the fact although MoET is mandated to hold an Education Review annually to review education policies, it does not. The last was held in 2018 and is this two years overdue. It is therefore recommended that MoET adhere to its annual Education Reviews. This is essential for reviewing and updating policies as well as for quality assurance in the education sector

- Lesotho has constituted a Local Education Group (LEG). This body is comprised of education sector CSOs, teacher formations, school proprietors and even UNICEF. It acts as a stakeholder consultation forum and also monitors and appraises education projects. Through consultations with education sector DPOs and teacher formations LCN (which is also a member of LEG) has established that the frequency MoET's consultations with LEG have waned recently. It is recommended that MoET resuscitate to its LEG. This will not only concern parties the chance to monitor and DPOs will be able to voice again is another quality assurance platform, where the implementation of the inclusive education can also be deliberated and monitored

- Indeed, "no discussion on Special Education can avoid the problems inherent in identifying children who need services" (Good Governance Africa, 2012: 5). Unfortunately, just like the policy frameworks before it, the completed Inclusive Education Policy is silent on this critical aspect. Inclusive education's success hinges on being able to identify LSEN, accurately diagnosing their needs and only this assessment can inform their placement. The Inclusive Education Policy should be amended to encapsulate this. MoET and the Special Education Unit should develop organized systems for identification and placement. This might mean recruiting non- teaching professional such as "psychologists and occupational therapists" (Mosia: 296).

- At present, MoET's Special Education Unit is comprised of only 12 individuals for all of Lesotho (MoET, 2018: 8). This is not nearly enough to service the Special Education needs of the country. In the same manner that there are District Education Officers, Special Education teams should be established at district level. This decentralized approach will allow each Special Education team to adequately zoom in on the needs of the LSEN in their district, mobilize LSEN and their parents to enrol and also develop tailored programming and provide supportive services to schools. In order for this to occur the Special Education Unit is going to have to expand and be funded accordingly.