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## Emergent Inclusive Education Practice in Kenya, Challenges and Suggestions

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### ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the status of inclusive education in Kenya, analyzing the methodological changes and approaches that have been in existences since the start of special education in Kenya. Beginning with the establishment of special schools (segregation), to integration and now towards inclusive education. The theoretical underpinning of the paper is the recognized importance of Inclusive Education. The paper explains how Kenya as a signatory to the international conventions on education, has domesticated various instruments into the Constitution as well as in various policy and legal frameworks in an attempt to realize inclusive education. The paper highlights the strides Kenya has made towards inclusive education and identifies challenges Kenya is experiencing in the process of implementation of inclusive education and also suggests ways in which the identified gaps can be circumvented in the way forward.

**Keywords:** Disability Integration, Mainstreaming, Inclusive Education, Disability, Special Needs education International Conventions.

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### INTRODUCTION

History of people with disabilities has been characterized by their exclusion. People with disability have been powerless and have not been able to control their own destiny. In a number of countries, disability policies have had substantial elements of protection and charity as opposed to the rights to equalization of opportunities which is a pin pointer to inclusivity. The advocacy towards inclusion and inclusive education in particular just started recently.

How best to provide appropriate and adequate education for learners with disabilities in Kenya has been and still remains the subject of debate. The crux of the matter has been the dilemma of finding an appropriate system that would effectively provide quality education to the learners with disability and special needs. During the last decade, the approach to disability has changed from medical model to a social approach one and now to a human rights-based approach in which focus is on removing barriers created by the society.

As countries worldwide continued to implement emerging trends in educational policies and approaches in the area of disability, similar changes took place in Kenya. First, was the segregated approach which placed learners with disabilities in special learning institutions. The dominant theme of policy was on the nature of special education efforts and the extent of their proximity to general education practices. The reform focused on the extent to which students were isolated, grouped, and were “segregated” for the purpose of meeting their educational needs. The fundamental issue was the discrimination inherent in segregating the children on the grounds of disability.

Then integration and mainstreaming arose as some of the ideal solutions to exclusion. These approaches did not produce the expected wide-scale improvement as the academic achievement gap between the regular students and those with disabilities in the integration and mainstreaming setups continued to widen. Each of the two concepts referred to a discrete set of assumptions and practices and each had its cluster of policy guidelines for implementation, instructional practices, curricular recommendations, assessment procedures and interventions and differed in a number of key dimensions as explained hereunder.

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Caster (2010) describes mainstreaming as the oldest of the three concepts. According to him, it was primarily concerned with the amount of time and specific circumstances under which students with mild or moderate disabilities would simply be in a general education classroom. Integration on the other hand was a system in which students with severe disabilities were clustered for their educational day in environments such as special schools, development centers, institutions, and other placement situations. As a policy reform effort, integration dominated much of the research, teaching, and policy literature of special education.

The primary thrust of the integration movement in reform policy was to educate students with severe disabilities in proximity to their general education peers with opportunities to interact with them, share experiences, and so on. For the most part, placement in special classes located in regular public schools with time together at lunch, recess, and special occasions were desired outcomes of integrated education

Inclusive education, derived from the concept of inclusion came into being. As pointed out by (Lipsky & Gartner 2006), this meant placing students with disabilities of all ranges and types in general education classrooms with appropriate services, positive attitude and supports provided primarily in that context. It is important to notice that inclusion contains a very radical idea of diversity which is not found in the idea of integration.

While integration had principally to do with proximity and opportunities for social interaction, inclusive education advocates for full membership and conjoint participation with peers at all levels of education. It not only involves fundamentally re-thinking the meaning and purpose of education for all children and young people, it also refers to the restructuring of ordinary schools as well as being pro-active. The principle of inclusion raises fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of our education system and the part which schools play in the life of the community. According to Johnsen & Skjørten, (2006), schools do not exist in a vacuum, they are part of the wider community and community life does not stop at the school gates. This concept has been supported by a number of international conventions on education as discussed hereunder.

The Salamanca Statement 1994 affirmed the principle of inclusive education and the importance of 'working towards schools for all- ie institutions which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning and respond to individual needs'

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action are all powerful tools which have advocated for the abolishment of segregated education that denies learners with disabilities the right to be part of mainstream schooling. The spirit of inclusion is further emphasized in the UN Standard Rule 6 that requires member states to provide education for people with disabilities in integrated settings. These documents have made a strong case for inclusion, provided a unique opportunity that places inclusive education firmly on the agenda of the national governments.

The recognition that education is a fundamental right that should be available to all learners is not new in Kenya as the Kenyan policy on Education is centrally crafted within the framework of Education for All, the Millennium Goals, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Furthermore inclusion as a concept is fundamentally subscribed by the constitution of Kenya (2010).

Since Kenyan attained independence in 1963, there have been various education commissions and committees whose policy recommendations have steered the provision of education of learners with special educational needs towards inclusive education. (Ngala, 1964, Ominde, 1964, Gachathi, 1976, Kamunge, 1988 and Koech, 1999) Education Act – CAP 211(1980) affirmed that no pupil shall be refused admission or excluded from the mainstream education on any ground whatsoever. This was in recognition of the principle of inclusive education.

The Kenyan government has enshrined in the national policy and legal instruments (Children’s Act, 2001, Persons with Disability Acts, Sessional Paper No.1, 2005, National Special Education Policy Framework, 2009 & Disability Mainstreaming Policy, 2012) all in recognition of the education of the learner with special educational need in the mainstream.

Efforts to meet obligations under the Kenyan laws and international commitments have also been demonstrated in the implementation of Educational for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in an effort to make education more responsive to the needs of all its citizens in the Kenya. The reforms process is re-aligning education to the Constitution of Kenya and the country’s development blue-print, the Kenya Vision 2030, which are highly responsive to inclusion and to inclusive education by extension. The vision is based on three pillars which touch on the social economic and political aspects, all in favour of the vulnerable groups. The economic pillar aims at providing prosperity of all Kenyans through an economic development programme to reduce the rate of poverty thereby unlocking the abilities to provide for the vulnerable in the society which include persons with disabilities.

The social pillar seeks to build a just and cohesive society with social equity in a clean and secure environment and ensures that opportunities are availed for all in the society to participate regardless of the individual differences in order to eliminate exclusion in the society. The political pillar on the other hand aims at realizing a democratic political system founded on issue-based politics that respects the rule of law, and protects the rights and freedoms of every individual in the Kenyan society including those with disabilities. This also ensures that related policies and legal instruments are enhanced as stipulated in the frameworks to bring about equity and equality within the law.

The right to education for every person is affirmed in the Constitution of Kenya (2010) in Chapter Four (Bill of Rights) Article 43 Sec.1 (f) & Article 54 Sec.1 (b). In addition, Article 55 (a) commits the state to take measures including affirmative action to ensure individuals access relevant education and training for persons with disabilities. Policy documents that focus on the attainment of EFA and MDGs include: the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on Education Training and Research; the Non-Formal Education sub-sector Policy (2008); Special Needs Education Policy (2009); and the Kenya’s Vision 2030.

Efforts to implement Education For All including those with disabilities by the government in reforming the education sector translated into the increase in the pupils enrolment at primary school level at the end of 2010 to 9.4 million compared to 6.1 million in 2002, courtesy of Free Primary Education (FPE). Through the constitution, persons with disabilities are now appointed in decision making organs and their voices are heard. Due to learners’ diversities in regular classrooms, the ministry of education through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development and the Kenyan National Examination Council has been able to differentiate the curriculum and the national examinations respectively to take care of the needs of every individual learner with disability and special need.

A number of universities have been successful in including learners with disabilities in regular classes and this is working very well. Maseno and Kenyatta universities for instance have included and graduated a number of students with hearing as well as visual impairment while engaging the services of sign language interpreters as well as Braille transcribers to cater for the needs of learners with disabilities in the regular lecture halls.

Within the Kenyan constitution are policies on inclusion among them the disability mainstreaming policy in which institutions have signed performance contract and a directorate formed to oversee the implementation status of the activities on inclusion on quarterly basis to establish the implementation status of the related inclusive activities. This policy is promoting inclusion and addressing barriers in terms of communication as well as in environment that excluded persons with disabilities from the equal enjoyment of their human rights. It has embedded disability considerations within programming, project design, policies, protocols and procedures as well as in staff training. Consequently the number of people with disabilities in higher institutions is drastically increasing in Kenya.

The role of the Non-governmental Organization such as Leonard Cheshire Disability International, Sight Savers International, in support to inclusive education implementation cannot be overemphasized. In collaboration with the government, they have made immense contributions in ensuring implementation of Inclusive education practices especially in regular primary schools in Western Kenya. Efforts have been made in areas such as awareness creation, capacity building for teachers, provision of teaching and learning resources, support in the development of barrier free environments in schools, empowerment of parents with knowledge skills and attitudes towards

inclusive education, educating community members and professionals in allied service systems on inclusive education philosophy.

Despite the efforts the government has put in place, a number of challenges have persisted in regard to the implementation of inclusive education in Kenya. The most significant constraint seems to be the apparent lack of clarity in the inclusive education policy, i.e. ambiguity about the goals for inclusion and the means through which this can be achieved. The others are to do with various issues around the poor implementation of the policy.

According to MOE (2009), inappropriate infrastructure, inadequate facilities, inadequate capacity of teachers to manage learners with special educational needs in regular schools, inadequate and expensive learning materials, societal negative attitude and inadequate supervision and monitoring of the schools have been impediments to implementation of inclusive education.

Although teacher education in Kenya currently models teachers on how to accommodate diverse needs in a classroom in line with the social model of disability which is rooted firmly in the human rights paradigm that argues for inclusion and the removal of all barriers that hinder full participation of individuals with disability, this is a new phenomenon as previously they were trained to teach in special education programmes being by-products of the tenets of the medical model. This has created attitudes regarding the separate education of learners with disabilities that have become strongly embedded in the Kenya teaching culture and reorienting such teachers according to Danohue and Bornman, (2014) to new ways of educating learners after many years in the profession remains a significant challenge to inclusive practice.

There is need for the enforcement of inclusive education policy and legal framework to realize equitable and quality education. Capacity building on inclusive education approaches should be organized for the Curriculum Developers, Education Administrators, Quality Assurance Standards Officers (QUASO) and the Examination Councils officers. We call for open and dynamic learning environment where the needs of students are at the heart of the system. The system should be able to support teachers, students and their families to recognize and work with diverse strengths, interests and abilities, to connect learning to family and community background, create diverse learning opportunities and networks, use diverse teaching approaches and balance academic achievement with the development of knowledge, skills and values.

While we need to focus and to work on quality service where we focus on putting in place specific service standards with agreed service pathways for students, there is also a need to provide training that will enable special education officers to be skilled and to keep learning, including supervision, reflective and practice and research.

It has been noted that there is more advocacy on inclusive education in primary schools than in Early Childhood, Secondary and Post Secondary School programmes. This process is not being carried across all levels of education to enhance smooth transition. While there is some literature on inclusive education in primary schools in Kenya with a number of piloting projects going on, one can hardly find such programmes in secondary as well as in early childhood programmes in inclusive settings.

Policy on Assessment of children at risk of special educational needs should be reviewed to enable all service providers be involved in determining the actual needs of the child and prescribe early intervention strategies specifying the role of each member of the multidisciplinary team. This may ameliorate the challenges learners with disabilities face in future.

Although young children with disability between three to five years receive special education services in schools, they are not included in inclusive quality child care programs that are the natural environments of their peers who are typically developing as early as possible. According to California Department of Education (2009), this would make them know and interact with typically developing peers, their families will also benefit from the programs as they begin to realize the differences in their children and how to handle them. Children and families want to be accepted and included in their community regardless of ability. They want to truly belong and the kind of belonging they desire goes beyond simply “being together.” We suggest full, unconditional membership in family and community and this must begin early enough.

Roles of various sectors, such as people with disabilities, parents, policy makers, educationalists, health officers and community development professionals and crucially, the society at large should be

clearly defined including family involvement, enhancement of inclusive community services, the promotion of advocacy and community education strategy. Inclusive education is never an ending process. Our institutions shall only be viewed as inclusive when our government and the society are committed to a development journey steered by inclusive values. Those values include recognition of diversity, working together, participation in the contribution of ideas and be able to be heard and valued as everyone feels safe and secure in the learning the environment.

Polat (2011) has pointed out that resources and improved infrastructure are not the only adjustments for inclusion and that dealing with attitudinal barriers among school educators and in the wider community is a key aspect of making inclusive education take place. The meaningful participation of children and adults with disabilities in the school and the community is influenced by the cultural attitudes and values of its citizens. If a society expresses disregard and prejudice towards people with disabilities, then discriminatory practices will continue to be propagated

Although there are many school-level and cultural barriers to inclusion, in our view the major factors hindering the implementation of especially inclusive policy in our country is the lack of clarity (ambiguity) in the special education policy of 2009 regarding the means through which schools can meet the goals of inclusive education. Inclusive education is merely mentioned without any direction as to how reach the destination. This has undoubtedly led to inaction by the stakeholders involved.

We concur with key strategies for establishing an inclusive education system as espoused by the South Africa department of education, as reported by Danohue and Bornman (2014), which includes improvement of existing special schools to cater for learners with severe disabilities, conversion of some special schools to inclusive resource centres, identification of the many children with disabilities who are of school-going age but not currently in school, the conversion of some mainstream primary schools into full-service inclusive schools, which will be those schools that are inclusive, the orientation of the staff and in mainstream schools to the tenets and practices of inclusive education and establishment of county based support teams to help support educators with the process.

Without funding, county departments cannot have ability to make any progress towards implementation of inclusive education. In order to progress, the ministry of education should take the responsibility of and not to relegate the responsibilities to school principals and teachers. As pointed out by Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007, without realistic support from the ministry, the burdens associated with implementation quickly become overwhelming to school officials and they swiftly revert back to a special education model of education delivery.

When addressing school-level barriers to implementation, the ministry must determine the extent to which teachers are prepared to educate a diverse body of learners within one classroom. As Danohue and Bornman, 2014 puts it, "teachers must receive comprehensive training programmes in areas where they lack skills. These training programmes can be supplemented with specialized support teams that have the capacity to enter classrooms and provide teachers with the hands-on- training and practical skills that they need to address barriers to learning"

To address cultural-level barriers to inclusion, the ministry must proceed with the information and advocacy programme, this will help combat negative perceptions of disability within society and help win support for inclusive policies. In this way, the rights, responsibilities and obligations attached to inclusive policy will be disseminated to key players.

We argue in support that children with disabilities should remain in their communities and to receive the schooling and social supports they need within the ordinary structures available in local communities. In view of this therefore, parents need to be empowered, communities should be mobilized and educationists need relevant contemporary training on emerging inclusive teaching approaches.

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