

INDIA

Collaboration Based on Partnership among Related Fields for Appropriate Service Provision to Individuals

INDIA: Executive Summary

Anita Julka

“We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.”

Mother Teresa

India hosting a population of 1,027,015,247 is a multicultural and multilingual society with a continuing undercurrent of essential unity. Large number of beliefs, religions, languages and races accounts for the heterogeneity of this geographically diverse country. The country is broadly divided into States and Union Territories. The States are further divided into Districts, Blocks, Clusters and then Villages. The local governments are municipalities in urban local bodies and village *Panchayats* in the rural setups. Considering the diversity of the country many contextualized local specific approaches have been adopted for the education of children with special needs*. The Constitution of India guides State policy in all sectors including education. The important features bearing on education are:

- Provision of free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of fourteen years (Article 21 A).
- Education, in general, is the concurrent responsibility of the Union and the States (Constitutional amendment of 1976).
- Local authorities (Panchayats and Municipalities) are to be assigned a suitable role in education (especially School, Adult and Non-Formal Education) through individual State legislations.
- State Governments and Local Authorities are expected to provide facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) stresses on integration of persons with special needs in the community as equal partners and encourages partnerships with voluntary agencies to achieve this goal. Some of the major endeavours for realizing the goals of NPE are the *Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995*, that establishes the responsibility on the society to provide equal opportunities to persons with disabilities and guarantees them right to have free education up to the age of 18 years, the *Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992* for manpower development for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and the

* The word Special Needs has been used interchangeably for Disability

National Trust for Welfare of Persons with autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999 providing total care to persons with mental retardation and cerebral palsy and also managing the properties bequeathed to the Trust.

Also, the National Curriculum Framework (2005) highlights inclusive education as one of the major guiding principle for not only policy reforms but also for the selection of learning tasks and pedagogical skills for all children. It acknowledges partnerships with Teachers' and Parents' associations, Universities, Institutes of Higher Learning, State and District level institutions, and with various Ministries and the Departments within for realizing the envisaged goals.

Out of the approximately 207.76 million children in the 6-14 age group in 2000, the number of children not attending the schools was 40 million. Those outside were mostly girls, children belonging to scheduled castes/schedule tribes, working children, urban deprived children with disabilities and children in difficult circumstances. The Government of India, therefore, raised the public spending in education to at least 6% of the GDP and also introduced a Cess (2004) on all central taxes to finance the commitment to universalize access to quality basic education. The **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**, launched in 2001-02 by the Government of India as an umbrella programme for achieving UEE, is being implemented to support and build upon other primary and elementary education projects. The programme aims to ensure bridging all gender and social category gaps for all children at the primary level (five years of schooling) by the year 2007 and at elementary education level (eight years of schooling) by 2010.

The programme is implemented in partnership with the States and other programmes of the Central Government . In the year 2005-06 (till January 2006) Rupees 73.61 billion had already been released. Out of this an amount of Rupees. 1.87 billion had been allocated for including children with special needs in education.

The issue of education of children with special needs touches the life of more than 18 million people. Out of these, 75 per cent stay in rural areas frequently in poor living conditions with inadequate facilities of health, hygiene, poor means of transport and communication and have an immense need to be empowered. The SSA adopts a holistic and convergent approach and makes efforts to dovetail programmes implemented at the district level with all other programmes including health and welfare programmes. The major components under the programme for the education of children with special needs are: creating awareness, building infrastructure, early identification and detection, assessment, provision of aids and appliances, teacher education, resource support and monitoring. Strengthening the partnership between Central, State and the local Government, it makes an effort to effectively involve the Panchayati Raj Institutions at the local level, School Management Committees, Village and Slum Level Education Committees, Welfare Organizations like District Rehabilitation Centres and Composite Resource Centres, Red Cross Society, Primary Health Centres, Parents' Teachers' grass root structures in the management of elementary schools, different Ministries like Health and Family Welfare, Social Justice and Empowerment and Non Governmental Organizations.

Another major endeavour of the Government of India is the development of **Comprehensive Action Plan** for inclusion in education of children and youth with disabilities in all available general educational settings. The PLAN realizes the need to develop Parents' Associations, Neighbourhood Associations and partnerships with community members like the elderly and disabled is important for supplementing in-school activities. Governmental organizations like the different Ministries, National Institutes for specific disability groups, Teacher Education Institutions, Welfare Departments, Health Departments, Universities and other governmental organizations involved in the education, welfare and rehabilitation of children with disabilities have all come together in this plan as implementing agencies.

The paucity of resources and large teacher pupil ratio has resulted in pooling in of efforts by building partnerships with those working in the area of special needs education to achieve similar and desirable goals. However, as is evident from the National Statistics, only half of the children (5-18 years) with disabilities are in schools.

In spite of the various benefits of collaboration, there are a number of challenges faced. Many of these challenges would be similar to the ones faced in other developing and even developed countries. An analysis of these challenges reveals the following ones to be of great significance in India: overcoming the differences in professional backgrounds, ideologies, values and/or beliefs (for example charity vs. rights); developing the commitment to follow through on the shared goals of the partnership ethos; overcoming competition between collaborating organizations and individuals; doing away with fragmentation of authority (different Ministries involved in achieving parallel targets); overcoming fears of losing control. Till these challenges are met, most of the mandates of Government of India for the empowerment of disabled would not be realized.