

NEPAL

**A Country Report
On
The 26th Asia-Pacific International Seminars on Education for Individuals with
Special Needs**

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Collaboration based on Partnership among related fields (Education, Healthcare, Medical care, Welfare etc.) for appropriate service provision to Individuals"

1.0 Country context

Nepal is a landlocked country, which borders by China on the North and India on the East, South and West. Approximately, it has an area of 147,181 sq. km. The country is located between 26°22' to 30°27' latitude north and between 80° 4' and 88°12' longitude East. Geographically, it consists of four layers of distinct zones: 1) the Himalayas, the high mountain range with snow-covered peaks 2) the Mahabharat range, lush high hills and valleys 3) Siwalik, low conglomerate hills and shifting valleys, and 3) the Terai, a strip of fertile plains. All these geographic belts of Nepal run from east to west.

Administratively, the country is divided into 5 Development Regions (Eastern, Central, Western, Mid-western & Far-western). It is also further divided into 14 Zones and 75 Districts as administrative units. It has a total of 205 Electoral Constituencies, 58 Municipalities and 3915 Village Development Committees (VDCs) at present. Nepal is predominantly an agricultural country and about 81% of the population directly depends upon agriculture.

According to the Census of 2001, Nepal has a population of 23.1 million with a growth rate of 2.2 percent annually. The literacy rate (6+ years) is 54 percent. Likewise, there are 102 social groups, 92 languages out of which more than a dozen are in active use among a significant size of the population section.

Nepal has undergone several major political changes through several political unrests over the years. Especially, the political change in 1990 has created a pressure and environment for moving towards achieving Education for All by 2015. The popular movement II of 2006 has also created a ground to raise people's voices from dependency to autonomy in management and from exclusion to inclusion in education for ensuring equity and quality education for all.

2.0 Status of special needs education in Nepal

According to WHO there is about 10% of the world's population disabled, of these 80% are living in developing countries. In the context of Nepal, there has not been any census, which may indicate the exact number of the persons with disabilities (PWDs), but it is estimated that more than 10 out of 100 people in Nepal are suffering from one or the other form of disability, which means nearly 2.4-2.7 million people in the country are disabled. If their family members and relatives are included, nearly half of the total population seems to be influenced by disability.

Nepal is a signatory to the Declaration of the Rights of PWDs under the United Nations Charter and 'The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 clearly states that special provisions will be made to protect the interests of the PWDs, with special emphasis on education, health, and social security. Several measures were introduced for providing education to PWDs. These are not sufficient for addressing the sheer discrimination faced by PWDs in every sphere of their lives.

Special Needs Education in Nepal primarily focuses on providing primary education to four groups of children (blind and low vision, deaf and low-hearing, intellectually disabled and physically disabled). At present, the concept of inclusive education is being implemented, which includes educational support arrangement for different groups of children including disabled.

3.0 Provisions for services to individuals with special needs

The Government has ratified most declarations related to children with special needs and promotion of their rights and development. Since the early 1980s government agencies and various associations' federations and NGOs have been working for children with special needs mainly in education, skills training, community-based rehabilitation and against social stigma, discrimination and exclusion. Such organizations are spread throughout the country raising a voice for the rights and development of children with special needs.

Different line ministries of the Government of Nepal have played important roles in the prevention of avoidable disabilities and also in providing various services to the disabled persons for their rehabilitation. The Ministry of health with the help of the UN agencies has also been playing a significant role particularly in the field of avoidable disabilities. Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare is responsible for social welfare activities.

Different sectoral ministries and social organizations are working for providing services to the persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Education and Sports has made the following provisions to provide appropriate services to the children with special needs.

- i) A Special Education Council (SEC) headed by the Minister for Ministry of Education and Sports has made policy decision with respect to the special needs education. It comprises members from different organizations, namely National Planning Commission, Parliamentary Committee, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, NGOs, Experts, and Teachers. Basically, the SEC has to liaise and co-ordinate with national and international NGOs and government agencies in the field of special education and initiate and participate in national special education programs and develop and extend the network system for mobilizing different resources.
- ii) National Disability Policy 2006 has made a provision of national level coordination team to

- ensure rehabilitation on health, education and welfare.
- iii) Child Act 1991, The Disabled Protection and Welfare Act 1982 and the Disabled Protection and Welfare Regulation 1994 are also in favour of the disabled people.
 - iv) The National Plan of Action (NPA) for Education for All has envisaged that all children should have their right to basic and primary education and that children should have equitable access to quality education in schools through formal and non-formal modes.
 - v) In order to reflect the inclusiveness in the school curriculum, the government has introduced a policy of designing 20% local contexts in the curriculum.

3.0 Major initiatives towards inclusive education

Several initiatives have been carried out both by the government as well as public over the years. The first important step taken in Nepal for the services of the disabled was a Civil Code (Muluki Ain) promulgated in 1853 (B.S. 1910) by the government. The note-worthy change in this regard took place only in 1977 after the formation of the Social Service National Co-ordination Council (SSNCC). Establishment of the Ministry for Social Welfare, the enactment of legislations for the Rights and Welfare of the Disabled, the formation of several non-governmental organizations for /and of disabled persons, the founding of Federation of Disabled persons, expansion of special education, the establishment of Social Welfare Council are some of the important changes.

The Government of Nepal initiated special education program for blind children in Kathmandu in 1964. Since the early 1980s the governmental agencies and various organizations and NGOs have been working in education, skill training, community-based rehabilitation, movement against social stigma, discrimination and exclusion. In the same way, National Special Education Program was started in 1993 in co-ordination with Denmark and the Government of Nepal. The implementation strategies comprised establishment of integration structure, teacher training, human resource development, involvement of community and provision of residential facility.

Nepal, one of the South Asian developing countries in the world, has committed itself on several international forums to ensure Education for All (EFA) by 2015. The Dakar Framework of Action (DFA) and the UN Declaration on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent the most important international political commitments towards promoting education for all. In line with this, the Government of Nepal has implemented Education for All (2004-2009) Program. The main objectives of EFA (2004-09) are to achieve universal primary education, ensure relevance and quality in learning and efficiency through an enhanced capacity of institutions. It has adopted the six policy goals of EFA and made an implementation arrangement in the national context building on the experiences and lessons drawn from previous educational initiatives. In addition, Government of Nepal has also implemented Secondary Education Support Program (SESP) for improving access to quality secondary

education in harmony with developmental needs of the country. Its objectives are to enhance the quality and relevance of secondary education, improve access to secondary education with focus on girls, children with special learning needs, poor and marginalized groups, and develop the institutional capacity and management of educational institutions at all levels.

Several initiatives have been introduced and implemented from EFA and SESP for the betterment of primary as well as lower secondary and secondary children respectively. These initiatives are in line with the intention of the Education for All National Plan of Action, a visionary document of the government for 15 years, which envisaged that all children should have their right to quality basic and primary education with equitable access through formal and non-formal channels. Now, Inclusive Education in Nepal is conceived to secure right of all the children to relevant education in their own community. It must promote an educational system that celebrates the rich cultural differences of the country upholding non-discriminatory environments. Inclusive approach assumes that all children have capacity to learn if a favourable environment is ensured aligned with child centred approach. It emphasises on identifying children excluded, for whatever reasons, or at risk of dropping out in a particular context and facilitating processes corresponding to the social, cultural and academic needs.

5.0 Strategies for special needs education

The major strategies taken for the development of the special needs education/inclusion are decentralization, collaboration and partnership with NGOs/CBOs, capacity building at all levels, conduction of resource classes, establishment of Assessment Centres/Support Centres and development of home schools, management of Braille books, sign language, support materials, equipment, etc.

6.0 Major issues and challenges

There are various issues and challenges in the field of Special Education sector in Nepal. Some of the major ones are:

- i) Human resources** - It is difficult to find out the individual capacities and possibilities to cater to the needs of children with disabilities due to inadequate human resources.
- ii) Disaggregated data** - The disaggregated data with respect to the special needs education is unavailable at the present moment. As a result of the unavailability, it is almost impossible to manage holistic development programs for the children from the families below the poverty line.
- iii) Co-ordination** - Normally there is insufficient coordination mechanism among the organizations working in the field of special needs education, which often results duplication and unavailability of the programs for the target groups.
- iv) Monitoring and supervision** - The existing monitoring and supervision system has not been

effective. In order to monitor and supervise the implemented activities smoothly, the system should be strengthened.

v) **Parental attitude** - Parents have not fulfilled the responsibilities of enrolling children into the classes as expected. In addition, they do not prefer to cater to the needs of their children once they enrol in the school. These sorts of behaviours affect the psychological aspects of the children.

vi) **Environment** - The existing school's internal and external environment is not disabled friendly. It is very difficult to develop positive attitudes of the communities and planners for securing such friendly environment on every aspects of life.

vii) **Vocational and skill based education** - The children with special needs are also treated as normal children and mostly provided with academic education, which is not effective for them as expected. The government needs to give high priority to vocational and skill-oriented education to the children with special needs.

7.0 Future direction for special needs education

Resource classes will be further strengthened and expanded focused on the number of deaf and intellectually disabled children. However, an integrated approach will be adopted to blind and children with physical disabilities. The effect of initiatives implementing Inclusive Education (IE) program will be assessed and successful experiences replicated to wider coverage. Assessment centres will be equipped and strengthened so that the level of disability is assessed adequately and counselled appropriately as regards the education of children.

Teacher development program will emphasize IE approaches in teacher training programs and develop advance level training programs in this area. Special pedagogy emphasis on life skills will be endeavoured to innovate to respond to the learning needs of intellectually disabled children.

Networking of NGOs working in this area will be strengthened and activated for innovating instructional methods suitable to the learners as per their difficulties. Provision of scholarship to children with disability on their categories will be continued.

8.0 Conclusion

For a country like Nepal where the population of disabled persons is relatively high, Special Needs Education is really crucial to improve their educational status in the country. Recently, the concept of inclusive education has come into practice in Nepal, too. But the inclusive education program has not been effective enough to bring all the children with special needs into its mainstream as per its real intention. Therefore, more efforts and resources need to be geared up towards maintaining the

inclusiveness as per the aim of the Education for All for improving the status of the disabled children in Nepal.

Different government and non-government organizations working in the field of special needs education, should work hand in hand with a view to provide quality education with better services keeping in mind that the children with special needs are an integral part of the society. Without bringing them into the mainstream of education, the goal for ensuring education for all by 2015 cannot be achieved.