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Cultural Organization



International Bureau of Education

**IBE-UNESCO Preparatory Report for the 48th ICE on**

**Inclusive Education**

**Regional Preparatory Workshop on Inclusive Education – The Gulf Arab States;  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates, UAE, 27-29 August 2007**

## **Abstract**

The International Conference on Education (ICE) is a major international forum for educational policy dialogue among Ministers of Education and other stakeholders (researchers, practitioners, representatives of intergovernmental organizations and NGOs). The ICE is organized by the International Bureau of Education (IBE); the UNESCO institute specialized in assisting Member States in curriculum development in order to achieve quality Education for All. The IBE Council, composed of 28 UNESCO Member States, has proposed in January 2007 that the 48th ICE session, to be held in Geneva in November 2008, should focus on the theme “Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future”. The 48th ICE will focus on broadening the understanding of the theory and practice of inclusive education while discussing how governments can develop and implement policies on inclusive education. The IBE is hosting a series of regional preparatory workshops dedicated to exploring and advancing inclusive education in preparation for the ICE 2008. Hosted by the Gulf Arab States Education Research Centre (GASERC), the Gulf Arab States Regional Workshop on Inclusive Education was held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from August 27<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> 2007. This report details the discussions that took place at the workshop, the status of inclusive education in participating countries, and concrete ideas on what the next steps should be and on how to advance inclusive educational policy in the region.

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## **I. Introduction**

The IBE-UNESCO, through the Community of Practice (COP) in Curriculum Development<sup>1</sup>, is organizing a series of Regional Preparatory Workshops on Inclusive Education (see Appendix 2 Workshops Calendar) with the overall goal of initiating a participatory consultative process to highlight key issues and challenges in inclusive education, to be presented at the 48th session of the International Conference of Education (ICE 2008).

The Gulf Arab States Regional Workshop on Inclusive Education was the second one of the above-mentioned series of Regional Preparatory Workshops. The meeting objectives included sharing visions, strategies and practices on inclusive education at the regional and national level; identifying common challenges related to inclusive education; and providing structured technical inputs from a regional perspective for the debates of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE. Some of the expected outcomes were a common understanding of the inclusive education concept, key issues and challenges and discussion of what the next steps should be.

Some 20 high-level education professionals and curriculum specialists from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and United Arab Emirates as well as from the GASERC, the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE), the UNESCO Headquarters (Division of Basic Education) and the IBE-UNESCO staff, attended the regional workshop (see Appendix 1 List of Participants).

There are a number of critical dimensions to consider as part of an inclusive education agenda. Each preparatory regional workshop centres on four sub-themes around which the IBE Council has proposed to articulate the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE:

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<sup>1</sup> IBE, in conjunction with curriculum specialists from different regions of the world, set up from 2005 onwards, the Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (up to the moment made by 697 members from 85 countries). It is understood as an open and plural worldwide space that contributes to generate collective thinking and action on curriculum issues within the framework of a holistic approach to determining and implementing the Education for All (EFA) goals.

1. Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content (to broaden the understanding of the theory and the practice of inclusive education);
2. Inclusive Education: Public Policies (to demonstrate the role of governments in the development and the implementation of policies on inclusive education);
3. Inclusive Education: Systems, Links and Transitions (to create education systems which offer opportunities for life-long learning); and
4. Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers (to foster a learning environment where teachers are equipped to meet the learners' diverse expectations and needs).

The IBE Council visualizes the conference as an opportunity for promoting dialogue among Ministers of Education, highlighting some universal and complex issues, and engaging the audience. The ICE should play a pivotal role in orientating and clarifying the debate on inclusive education.

The IBE Council also proposes that the ICE should be based on evidence and involves the Ministers of Education in enriching discussions on evidence-informed policies.

Inclusive education is a concept which is part of a developing process in the Gulf Arab States. The purpose of this report is to shed light on the concept of inclusive education from the standpoint of the International Bureau of Education (IBE) and examine how inclusive educational practices play out in the region.

The first section of the report provides a background on inclusive education based on United Nations framework and documents. The second section discusses the concept of inclusive education and its evolution. Traditionally, inclusive education has been circumscribed to students with special needs but it has been gradually being recognized and seen as a way of democratizing learning environments and opportunities for all students, therefore promoting social justice. The third section details the current status of inclusive education in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and United Arab Emirates. This section draws directly from the country reports, presentations and discussions on inclusive education from the Regional Workshop. The fourth section focuses on good practices that various countries within the region are employing with

regard to inclusive education. The Finland case is also cited and discussed because it provides a good model for countries on effective inclusive educational policy. The fifth section draws from a regional roadmap that participating countries helped develop at the workshop and various actions that workshop attendees felt need to be taken with respect to inclusive education in the region. The final section puts forth a strategic vision for the region by incorporating the four sub-themes the IBE has developed to facilitate discussions about inclusive education at regional workshops in preparation for the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE.

## II. Inclusive Education: United Nations Normative Framework

Building a truly inclusive society, where all people learn together and participate equally hinges on providing a quality education for all. The United Nations Education for All (EFA) movement is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, clearly lays down the foundation for the Education for All movement. It states:

Everyone has the right to education and education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom<sup>2</sup>.

Inclusive education seeks to address the diverse learning needs of all children. This is further supported by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, which states that all children have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on the basis of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, capabilities, and so on.

The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the 1994 World Conference on “Special Needs Education: Access and Quality” in Salamanca, Spain. It was restated at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal. The idea of inclusion is further supported by the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities proclaiming participation and equality for all.

Essentially, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education call upon member states to guarantee the implementation of inclusive education to bring back children who are excluded into the mainstream educational system. According to the Salamanca Statement inclusive education means that:

Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions. They should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote and nomadic

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (2007). In the *United Nations website*. Retrieved July 2, 2007 from the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights website: <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>.

populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups<sup>3</sup>.

The Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (2000) further supports previous initiatives by calling upon nations to address the needs of learners who are victims of marginalization. It states:

Education for All (...) must take account of the need of the poor and most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health, those with special learning needs<sup>4</sup>.

The Convention on the Right of Persons with disabilities<sup>5</sup> (2006) specifically addresses the right of all persons with disabilities to education (article 24)<sup>6</sup>. In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that (i) persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability ; (ii) persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live; (iii) reasonable accommodation of the individual's

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<sup>3</sup> The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, Adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality. (1994). In *UNESCO website*. Retrieved July 2, 2007 from UNESCO website: [http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA\\_E.PDF](http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF).

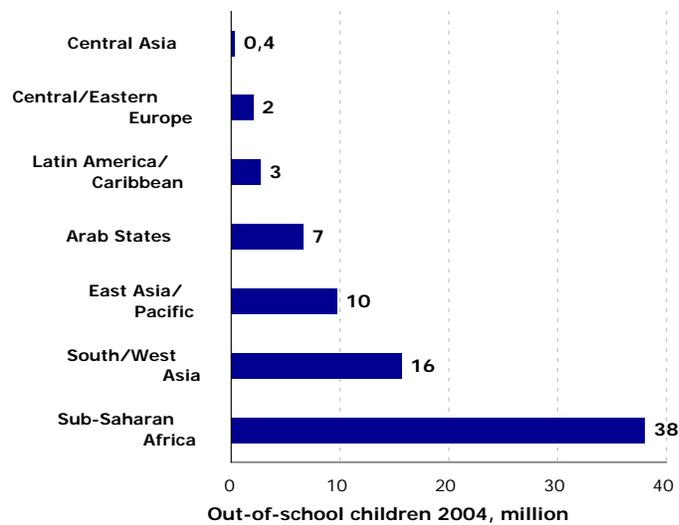
<sup>4</sup> Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All. (2000). In *UNESCO website*. Retrieved July 2, 2007 from the UNESCO website: [http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed\\_for\\_all/framework.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/framework.shtml).

<sup>5</sup> Accessible online at: [www.un.org/disabilities/convention/](http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/).

<sup>6</sup> According to the UN Press Release of 11 July 2007, the countries that have signed both the Convention and its Optional Protocol are: Algeria, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chile, Republic of the Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Lebanon, Liberia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, **Qatar**, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Uganda and **Yemen**. The signatories to only the Convention are: Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Canada, Cape Verde, China, Colombia, Cuba, Denmark, Dominica, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Gabon, Greece, Guinea, Guyana, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Kenya, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Norway, Poland, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Thailand, Turkey, Uruguay, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu and the European Community. Jamaica also ratified the Convention on 30 March 2007. The Treaty needs 19 additional ratifications to come into force – a figure the United Nations Secretariat of the Convention feels will be reached by the end of the year –.When the Convention opened for signature at the United Nations on 30 March, 81 Member States and the European Community signed the treaty and 44 signed the Optional Protocol. Together, this is a record for the first day of signature for any Convention. The Press Release is accessible online at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/hr4928.doc.htm>.

requirements is provided; (iv) persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education; and (v) effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

Quality education for all remains one of the biggest development challenges of our times: in the world, 781 million persons are illiterate and over 77 million children are still not in school (see the following graph): approximately 30-40% of them are children with disabilities and 80% live in developing countries<sup>7</sup>.



If we are to move by 2015 towards EFA goals that 164 countries committed to in 2000, we need to focus on the most excluded. Effective legislation and policies will contribute to build a world of inclusion, not only for people with disabilities, but also for all those who are unable to exercise their basic human right to education.

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<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, 2007. *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007. Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

### III. Conceptual Dimensions of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a growing universal concern that informs and challenges the processes of educational reform in both developing and developed regions. Inclusive education is an evolving concept that can be useful to guide strategies of educational change to address the sources and consequences of exclusion within the holistic framework of EFA goals and the understanding of education as a human right.

#### Special Needs Education

Traditionally and even today in various world regions (for example, in Eastern and South Eastern Europe<sup>8</sup> as well as in the Commonwealth of Independent Countries<sup>9</sup> – CIS- and most parts of Asia<sup>10</sup>) the concept and practices of inclusive education have been mainly circumscribed to students categorized as having special needs such as (and predominantly) those with physical and/or mental disabilities and refugees. Under this perspective the approaches and responses given to students' needs have been remedial and corrective by setting up and increasing the number of special schools, curricula tracks and special education teachers.

One significant consequence of differentiated curricular and institutional structures for students categorized as having special needs has been their segregation and isolation within the education system. The assumption that there are “special needs children” is questionable as stated by Sue Stubbs (2002)<sup>11</sup> – “any children can experience difficulty in learning (...) Many disabled children have no problem with learning” and “children with intellectual impairment can often learn very well in certain areas” (p.3).

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<sup>8</sup> OECD. 2006. *Education Policies for Students at Risk and those with Disabilities in South Eastern Europe, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia*. Paris: OECD Publications

<sup>9</sup> See International Bureau of Education (IBE) Report on the *Commonwealth of Independent States, Third Workshop on Curriculum Development: “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future”* Minsk, Belarus, October 29-31, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> See International Bureau of Education Report (IBE) Report on the *East Asia Workshop on Inclusive Education, Hangzhou, China, November 2-5, 2008*.

<sup>11</sup> Stubbs S. 2002. *Inclusive Education. Where there are few resources*. Oslo: The Atlas Alliance. page 23

## **Integration**

As an alternative to special needs curricula and school models, the concept of integration came forward in the 1980s with the objective of placing students, defined as having special needs, in mainstream schools. The restructuring and improvement of physical facilities, the increase in numbers of special classrooms and specially trained teachers in the mainstream buildings and the provision of learning materials were, and still are, some of the main components for the application of integration models. Mainly focused on students with mild impairments, integration can risk becoming a rhetorical device rather than a reality in practice, being more about a spatial change of school classrooms than a change of curricular content and pedagogy relevant to children's learning needs.

After the 1990s, the scope, objectives, contents and implications of inclusive education in relation to integration were considerably changed. This was principally due to the recognition that integration models solely based on closing special schools and "adding" students to mainstream schools and curricula, do not respond to the diversities of learners' expectations and needs. Such an understanding prompts revision of education policies dealing with integration issues by questioning the relevance of curriculum and school models that are the same for all students regardless of their differences. In such models, students must *adapt* to the norms, styles, routines and practices of the education system instead of the education system changing according to the learner. Moreover, dropout rates may increase among students with special needs when integrated into mainstream schools that are not grounded on a comprehensive set of institutional, curricular and pedagogical changes.

## **Inclusion**

Inclusive education can be understood both as a guiding principle and a strategy to attain reasonable levels of school integration for all students. In the context of a broader vision of integration, inclusive education implies the conception and the implementation of a vast repertoire of learning strategies to precisely respond to learners' diversities. In this

sense, education systems have the obligation to respond to the expectations and needs of children and youth considering that the capacity to provide effective learning opportunities based on a rigid scheme of integration (placing students labelled as special needs in mainstream schools) is very limited. This is what Susan Peter refers to<sup>12</sup> as the placement paradigm; that is, when inclusive education is conceptualized as a place and not as a service delivered within the general education classroom as the continuum.

The debate on inclusive education and integration is not a dichotomy between integration and inclusion policies and models (as if we can integrate without including, or include without integrating) but rather on identifying to which extent there is progress in understanding that each school has the moral responsibility of including everyone. Such an obligation is challenged at the same time when education systems have to effectively address other core universal education problems of non-school attendance, repetition, over-age and dropouts as well as low learning outcomes that undermine the goals and functioning of education worldwide. Empirical evidence indicates that a student who repeats the first school years has a strong probability of dropping out from school<sup>13</sup>. Each one and also the combination of the above problems generating exclusion, is exacerbated by persistent institutional and pedagogical practices that presuppose that all children have the same learning conditions and capabilities. Moreover, as noted in the 2004 International Conference on Education<sup>14</sup>, a child's exclusion from education represents his/her lack of professional and social competencies needed to access essential knowledge to exert an autonomous and responsible citizenship.

Therefore, approximately in the last fifteen years, the concept of inclusive education has evolved towards the idea that all children and young people, despite different cultural, social and learning backgrounds, should all have equivalent learning opportunities in all

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<sup>12</sup> <sup>12</sup> Peters S. World Bank. 2004. *Inclusive Education: an EFA strategy for all children*. Washington: World Bank.

<sup>13</sup> See UNESCO, 1998. *Wasted Opportunities: when schools fail; repetition and drop-out in primary schools, Education For All, Status and Trends*, Paris, EFA Forum Secretariat. UNESCO, 1996. *La Repetición Escolar en la Enseñanza Primaria Una Perspectiva Global*. Ginebra, Oficina Internacional de Educación; UNESCO, 1984. *The drop-out problem in primary education: some case studies*. Bangkok, Regional Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific.

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO. 2004. *International Conference of Education. 47<sup>th</sup> meeting. Workshops 2A y 2B Quality education and social inclusion*. Geneva: IBE/UNESCO. Annex XVI, pp. 8–14.

kinds of schools. The focus is on generating inclusive settings, which implies: (i) respecting, understanding and taking care of cultural, social and individual diversity (education systems, schools and teachers' response to the expectations and needs of students); (ii) providing an equal access to quality education; (iii) having close coordination with other social policies. This should involve the expectations and demands of stakeholders and social actors.

A broad conception of inclusive education also addresses the learning needs of students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages as conceptualized by OECD<sup>15</sup>. Although there are different categories to consider, the nature of the concept of inclusive education is non categorical, and aimed at providing effective learning opportunities to every child, in particular tailored learning contexts.

Precisely UNESCO<sup>16</sup> defines inclusion “as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children”. Furthermore, as stated by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow (2002) in their proposal of an index for inclusion<sup>17</sup>, “inclusion is about making schools supportive and stimulating places for staff as well as students (...) It is about building communities which encourage and celebrate their achievements” (p.4) .

Indeed, the design and the development of policies on inclusive education should not be understood as the sum of initiatives and efforts towards specific groups (an endless list with the risk of forgetting some of them). Quite to the contrary, the focus is not on which categories to include but on the provision of friendly learning environments and diverse

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<sup>15</sup> OECD. 2006. *Education Policies for Students at Risk and those with Disabilities in South Eastern Europe. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia*. Paris: OECD Publications

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO. 2005. *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>17</sup> Booth T. and M. Ainscow. 2002. *Index for inclusion, developing learning and participation in schools*. CSIE: Bristol.

learning opportunities for all. According to Rona Tutt (2007)<sup>18</sup>, the main challenge is to provide inclusive settings in all schools through the provision of a diverse continuum of services that are part of a school network in articulation with other social policies.

Thus, the challenge of an inclusive education implies the articulation of a coherent and articulated set of policies aiming for (i) a pertinent and relevant curriculum with a vision that facilitates dialogue among different levels of the educational system; (ii) a vast repertoire of diverse and complementary pedagogical strategies (formal and non-formal schooling) that can respond to the specificities of each student by personalizing the educational provision; (iii) available physical facilities and equipment aligned with the designed curriculum and its implementation; (iv) strong teacher support in the classroom, seeing him/her as a co-developer of the curriculum and (v) engaging in dialogue with families and communities in order to understand their expectations and needs as well as to promote their active participation in the schools.

An inclusive educational strategy implies the careful and detailed consideration of the specificity and uniqueness of each child and teenager so as to provide them with effective educational opportunities throughout their lives. In these terms, inclusive education is about the ways and the modalities under which teachers and students interact and generate mutual empathy and nearness; how they understand and respect their diversities and jointly create suitable and attainable conditions for achieving relevant and pertinent learning opportunities for all.

Cognitive education plays a key role in achieving an inclusive education as it tends to make children aware of their own cognitive functions, which can help them to understand and learn better. It is an effective way for educators to address the needs of diverse populations by better understanding how students learn, think, and reflect, critically and creatively, and how to use this in the co-construction of a meaningful curriculum and of associated activities.

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<sup>18</sup> Tutt, R. 2007. *Every Child Included*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing / The Association for all School Leaders (NAHT).

As a contribution to the discussion of pedagogical approaches of inclusive education, David Skidmore (2004)<sup>19</sup> draws attention to the difference between a pedagogy of deviance and one of inclusion by noting the following five aspects:

- a) student's learning – while the deviance discourse establishes a hierarchy of cognitive skills to place measure the abilities of each student, the inclusion discourse highlights the open learning potential of each student that can be progressively discovered and stimulated;
- b) explanation of school failure – while the deviance discourse points out that the main learning difficulties are related to the deficiencies of the students' capacities, the inclusion discourse argues that the main difficulty lies instead on the insufficient responses generated by the curriculum;
- c) school response – while the deviance discourse states that the support of the learning process should be focused on the students' deficiencies, the inclusion discourse emphasizes the need of reforming the curriculum and of implementing a crosscutting pedagogy in the school;
- d) theory of teachers' expertise – while the deviance discourse emphasizes the importance of specialized discipline knowledge as key to teachers' expertise, the inclusion discourse highlights the active participation of the students in the learning process, and
- e) curriculum model – while the deviance discourse argues that an alternative curriculum should be designed for those students categorized as low achievers, the inclusion discourse emphasizes the need of a common curriculum for all students.

In overall terms, inclusive education implies four key elements:

- a. it is essentially a process of looking for the most appropriate ways of responding to diversity as well as trying to learn how to learn from differences;
- b. it is linked to the motivation and development, through multiple strategies, of students' creativity and capacity to address and resolve problems;
- c. it comprises the right of the child to attend school, express his/her opinion, have quality learning experiences and attain valuable learning outcomes; and

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<sup>19</sup> Skidmore. D. 2004. Inclusion, the dynamic of school development. London: Open University Press. Pp. 112-127

- d. it implies the moral responsibility of prioritizing those students who are at risk of being marginalized and excluded from the school, and of obtaining low learning outcomes.

### **Inclusive Education and Social Inequalities/ Social Inclusion**

The urgent need to advance in the democratization of opportunities for all children accessing and profiting from a high-quality equitable education can be based on the conception of inclusion as a central strategy to foster educational and social change. Inclusion from an educational perspective can help address the traditional and structural problems of poverty; the challenges of modernization and social and cultural integration; and the growing diversity of national societies. Social inclusion and inclusive education are mutually implicated in a feedback relationship. Inclusive education opens the way to increasingly addressing forms and contents of exclusion. For example, inclusive education can aim to address the social gaps in access to ICT; the marginalization of disaffected young people (those who do not study, do not work and do not look for work); the lack of educational opportunities and low learning outcomes among migrant populations; the cultural homogeneity of educational proposals that do not know, understand and value multiculturalism; and the stigmatization of cultural and social diversity as an obstacle to integration.

Therefore, inclusive education can be considered as a pathway to attain social inclusion. From a societal perspective, inclusive education is clearly and substantially linked to the discussion around the type of society to be attained; the kind of well-being desired for all citizens; and the quality of democracy and social participation we wish to pursue. On a long term basis, basic education in relation to social inclusion implies an understanding of the former as key to citizenship and as an essential component of social policy.

Along those lines, the relationship between social inclusion and education highlights central issues of inclusive education related to (i) the struggles against poverty, marginality, cultural and social segregation, exclusion and HIV-AIDS; (ii) the consideration of cultural diversity and multiculturalism as both a right and a learning

context within an universal framework of shared universal values, and (iii) the protection of the rights of aboriginal, migrant, displaced populations and populations in a minority.

In the context of an ongoing discussion, the following points seem to be critical in understanding and advancing on the conception and practice of inclusive education:

- a. Identifying the significance and priority given to inclusive education, in governmental and state policies. Inclusive education, as a key social policy, is a powerful instrument to mitigate the negative effects of social inequalities and cultural disintegration as well as residential segregation; inclusive education is useful to address the changing cultural, ethnic, migrant and social composition of schools, a major challenge to the development of efficacious and efficient government social policies.
- b. Fostering high quality equitable learning opportunities for all by considering the articulation, diversification and flexibility between the different ladders and pathways of the education system, its structures and contents, within a global and unified vision of basic and youth education.
- c. Developing a tailored approach towards providing a real opportunity of educational success to each child by focusing on the learning needs both of potential and current students (those who have never attended school, those who are currently attending and those who dropped out), taking into account their cultural, social and cognitive diversities as well as their ethnic origin, philosophical and religious beliefs and migrant status. Diversity in learning contexts should be considered as a challenge and an asset to education and not as an obstacle.
- d. Guiding, articulating and undertaking efforts and initiatives aimed at generating suitable conditions for achieving useful and relevant learning by conceiving the school as the main force of educational change, and also as an integrated institutional and pedagogical unit within a solid educational policy and shared curriculum framework, from early childhood to youth education.
- e. Renovating and recreating teachers' professional role taking in account their ethical, societal mission and responsibility. Teacher training should strengthen the ways in which teachers understand, approach and respond to students' differences; teaching styles should be revised and adjusted in order to be aligned with cultural and social contexts that are increasingly complex and uncertain; teachers should be considered as co-designers and co-developers of inclusive education policies at the school and classroom levels, and not as mere implementers of curriculum change.

In overall terms, the transformation of education into inclusive education<sup>20</sup> implies collective thinking and action on the concept of social justice and social inclusion; on the beliefs around the learning potentials of each student; on the conceptual frameworks that sustain good practices of teaching and learning; and on endorsing a comprehensive political and technical vision of curriculum encompassing processes and outcomes.

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<sup>20</sup> British Educational Research Journal. 2005. *Thematic Review. Inclusive education: discourse and action*. Vol. 31, No. 2, April 2005, pp. 269–275.

## IV. Country Situations, Challenges and Lessons Learnt<sup>21</sup>

Three regional seminars with participants from the Gulf States have been organized by the UNESCO Office in Beirut<sup>22</sup>. Also, in 2005, the Dubai Municipality, the Arab Urban Development Institute and the World Bank organized a conference entitled “Urban Children and Youth in the MENA Region: Addressing Priorities in Education<sup>23</sup>”. The main outcome of the conference was the Dubai Declaration on Urban Children and Youth<sup>24</sup>, which intends to enhance the quality of education through various policies. It refers to “inclusive education for all children and youth” as the first priority, stating that “conference participants stress the importance of inclusive education and reaffirm their commitment to improve the well-being and quality of life for all children and youth, regardless of their age, gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, or social background”.

While there is still no unified concept of inclusive education in the Gulf Arab States there is a common tendency of seeking to broaden the idea beyond only serving children with special needs. Whilst having made significant progress in integrating students with special needs into mainstream schools, countries in this region face some challenges towards designing and implementing more inclusive educational practices addressing the diverse needs of all learners, especially those who are subject to forms of exclusion other than disabilities (economic, social, cultural, gender, etc.).

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<sup>21</sup> The information in this section is mainly adapted from the country reports and discussion presented at the 2007 Regional Preparatory Workshop on Inclusive Education in the Gulf Arab States in preparation for the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Conference on Education held from August 27-28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Participating countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and United Arab Emirates.

<sup>22</sup> 1- Regional Arab Conference on Inclusion of Persons with Special Needs in Formal Education (Beirut, 2001), 2- Regional Conference on the Inclusion of Blinds in Education (Beirut, 2003) and 3- Sub-regional Seminar on Inclusive Education (Sana’a, Yemen, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> See the website of the conference: <http://www.childyouth.ae/introduction.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Dubai Declaration on Urban Children and Youth. (2005). In *MENA Child Protection Initiative website*. Retrieved August 22, 2007 from *MENA Child Protection Initiative website*: <http://www.menacpi.org/CPI/English/01News/09News21052005.htm>.

## A. Kingdom of Bahrain<sup>25</sup>

Among Arab States, Bahrain scores highest in the Education for All Development Index (EDI)<sup>26</sup>. Education in the country is free and compulsory: all school age children attend either public or private schools. The Kingdom has developed and expanded its concept and vision for inclusive education, respecting human rights and international law and including international conventions related to children and persons with special needs. In order to do so, the Kingdom has engaged in many legislative and policy reforms, for its policies and practices to be consistent with its international commitments and obligations to its own citizens. The community with special needs has been given the constitutional right to receive an education enabling every member to exercise equal citizen rights. In line with the legislation of Bahrain, special education is offered throughout all stages of education, including adult education<sup>27</sup>. The State provides all the necessary financial services. According to the legislation, education provided for special and regular classes should be equitable; the aim of special education classes being to offer the same learning environment for all pupils, and learning should be promoted to encourage, as much as possible, the progressive integration of disabled persons.

In the Kingdom, special education is seen as: (i) a right for every child with special needs; (ii) a criterion of progress and development of society; (iii) an application of the principle of equal opportunities and; (iv) a need for balanced growth.

The Ministry of Education is expanding the umbrella of inclusive education to integrate the category of persons with special needs into schools, providing special assistance to them, in order to develop capacities and skills leading to increased self-esteem and development of equal life opportunities. This policy aims at diversifying educational

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<sup>25</sup> The information in this section is mainly adapted from the presentation and discussion performed by Ms. Madina Hassan Taha (Head of Section, Section for Sciences and Technical Curricula) and Ms. Amina Abdulla Kamal (Head of Section, Directorate for Private Education) from the Ministry of Education of Bahrain on the country situation.

<sup>26</sup> UNESCO, 2007. *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007. Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>27</sup> See UNESCO, 1996. *Legislation Pertaining to Special Needs Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

offers and opportunities, in accordance with students' different needs, in order to integrate them into the education process.

Believing in the utility of integration as a the best way of realizing humanitarian and educational targets, which have a direct and long-term impact on the future life of learners, the government of Bahrain has engaged, for some years, in providing attention and care to many groups with special needs, and in assuring their integration into government schools. Such groups include: (i) visually impaired and blind students, (ii) students with hearing difficulties, (iii) physically handicapped students, (iv) students with slight mental retardation, Down syndrome, learning problems, (v) very gifted students. However, the integration of some handicapped students still cannot be realized in schools because of these students' very difficult situations such as lack of mental capacity or medium/severe mental retardation. Students in such cases need to be accompanied by a special work team during the school day.

In the Ministry of Education, the Commission for Special Education has the responsibility to define the different categories of disability, to create rehabilitation programmes and to co-ordinate their work with other commissions. Admissions into special education classes are decided by a commission made up of the school director, a social assistant, a special education teacher and the class teacher under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Arabian Gulf University. There are approximately 10-12 pupils in special education classes and school hours are approximately 15-18 per week. In principle, the same learning curriculum is provided for all pupils and students with compensating facilities for the disabled. Centres such as the Blind Institute and the Hope House Centre are compelled to have their own curriculum addressing specific needs. The Ministry tries to make this curriculum as equitable as possible.

The Directorate for Special Education is responsible for identifying students with disabilities, as well as for supervising students with special needs in public schools and special institutions. The Educational Technology Centre at the Ministry of Education produces various teaching aids which support the disabled in regular classroom activities.

The International Centre of Bahrain, created in 1979, works for the purpose of integrating disabled persons into society by promoting the elimination of discrimination towards them. A number of special institutions are available in Bahrain such as: the Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Blind<sup>28</sup>, the Al-Amal Institute<sup>29</sup> and the Social Rehabilitation Centre<sup>30</sup>. For vocational education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs runs the National Vocational Centre, now known as the Bahrain Training Institute in Essa Town. This Institute offers vocational training from the basic core level up to the national diploma level. In addition to the training offered by the above-mentioned special institutions, various societies such as the Red Crescent, Women's Societies and National Clubs have their own voluntary training programmes for the disabled.

The results and the experience of implementing inclusive education have so far been very positive and the Kingdom of Bahrain and its Ministry of Education have made significant achievements in terms of:

1. Reducing the devastating effects of the stigmas attached to children with disabilities;
2. Providing greater opportunities for children with special needs to interact, communicate and develop mutual relations with ordinary peers and to learn from them;
3. Preparing children with special needs and their parents to work and deal with each other, in "real life" environments, closer to society and by being more representative;
4. Helping the academic and social development of children with special needs;
5. Developing greater awareness by enhancing levels of understanding and appreciation of differences among the individuals and in the community as a whole;

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<sup>28</sup> The institute uses the same grade structure and curriculum as regular public schools for primary and intermediate levels. Students who complete their intermediate level are transferred to regular secondary schools, which provide them with special care.

<sup>29</sup> The Institute offers individualized educational services for the mentally retarded through designing an individual educational-instructional plan for each student. The special curricula include various skills such as arithmetic, language, social and motor skills.

<sup>30</sup> Run by the Ministry of Social Development, the Center provides a variety of vocational and academic rehabilitation programs for handicapped children and youth. It consists of four units: Hearing Defect Unit, Special Education Unit, Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, and Craft Workshop Unit.

6. Creating a positive trend and opinion among workers, students and parents to cope with individuals with disabilities; and
7. Providing support and guidelines to parents to teach them to accept their child.

It is agreed that several resources are required to apply the concept of inclusive education such as: (i) recruitment of the optimal staff (special education teachers, assistant-teachers, social coaching at all educational levels, etc.); (ii) material requirements (school furniture, communication support, which includes audio and visual educational tools, etc.) and (iii) adequate teaching resources (deployment of a variety of teaching methods and modern tools and behaviours at different levels of teaching, diagnosis of teacher skills and development of evaluation relevant to special needs education, etc.).

Following an inclusive education conception, school curriculum materials should be prepared on the basis of horizontal educational capacities (interface), and by taking into account the efficiency of materials in different areas that include cognitive, emotional and psychological aspects to achieve complete and integrated learner development, and to create positive changes in behaviour and life skills, according to horizontal and vertical levels in order to provide an opportunity to learn for all.

Teachers should be encouraged to adapt to the requirements inclusive education poses to them, such as: (i) the desire to teach students with special needs; (ii) academic and professional preparation in special needs education; (iii) ability to describe and identify the level of the current performance of the special needs students in the academic, psychological and physical aspects; (iv) ability to synthesize and conciliate remedial and enrichment methods appropriate for each age group; and (v) ability to build strong relationships with the parents of special needs students and provide them with useful information to help them assist their own children.

## *B. State of Kuwait*<sup>31</sup>

Kuwait's Constitution stipulates the right to education for every national. This right is to be guaranteed by the government, along with associated costs (free books, transportation and meals are indicated). Education is compulsory until the age of 18 and parents who do not send their children to school face imprisonment or other forms of penalties. In order to avoid offenses to the right to education, the State has established a data system in all hospitals in which every born child is to be registered. This data system, as well as literacy centres and evening schools in which educational services are provided, have allowed low illiteracy levels in Kuwait.

The State's educational system started in 1934 but did not include people with disabilities. In 1955, the first school provided basic, but not comprehensive or inclusive, education for blind students. In 1959, initiatives for special education took place to include all disabilities, however excluding autism which was not well known at the time. When autism was diagnosed as a type of disability, it started being taken care of by a special school in 1999. Communication difficulties with such students encouraged the State to send teachers for training in countries with an experience in teaching autistic students. From then on, such students were provided with their own right to education.

In 2007, the total number of pupils enrolled in special schools was 2049, including 1663 Kuwaiti nationals, 166 Gulf State nationals, 91 from other Arab countries, 11 from non-Arab states and 98 unidentified.

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<sup>31</sup> The information in this section is mainly adapted from the presentation and discussion performed by Mr. Ali Abdulrasoul Ismail (Head of Section, Section for Educational Achievement) and Mr. Abdullah Almansoor (Principal of Alnoor School for the Blind) from the Ministry of Education of Kuwait on the country situation.

### *C. Sultanate of Oman*<sup>32</sup>

The education system in Oman began in 1970 when his majesty Sultan Kabous laid plans for a comprehensive education. Prior to 1970, there were only three schools in the Sultanate which only included male students and never exceeded 200 students.

Thanks to qualitative and quantitative progress that the Sultanate has witnessed, there are now 1200 public government-sponsored schools with independent buildings owned by the Ministry of Education distributed in the Sultanate. There are also 200 private schools. The Omani educational scene comprises about half a million students, male and female. The Sultanate Decree No. 129 states that education is a right for every citizen. In 1998, the State started applying a main educational strategy for primary education from years 1 to 5. This strategy stressed the right to EFA. The Educational Assessment Statement stressed the importance of assessing students with special needs according to their abilities and capacities.

There is no fixed definition of inclusive education in Oman; what exists has been drawn from legislations and decrees. Inclusive education in Oman seeks to provide educational services to children according to their capacities.

Special needs education programmes are divided into two sections: 1- special needs schools and 2- mainstream schools which cooperate with such programmes. These programmes are elaborated through the Ministry of Education, and NGOs also provide services of qualification and early intervention for special needs students. There are plans for more legislation in order to increase the inclusion of these students, not only in government schools but also in private schools. The number of students benefiting from the special needs programmes is now of about 5000. These services are provided to either

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<sup>32</sup> The information in this section is mainly adapted from the presentation and discussion performed by Mr. Suliman Abdulh Aljamodi (Director, Department for Literacy and Private Education) and Mr. Hamad Salem Alrajehi (Vice-Director, Department for Curriculum Development for Human Sciences and Islamic Education and Culture) from the Ministry of Education of Oman on the country situation.

visually or auditory handicapped students and to gifted students. They are provided not only in city centres and main population concentrations but also in the countryside.

There is an improvement in school and classroom facilities, in equal gender opportunities, as well as in equal opportunities between coastal and inner areas, the countryside and cities. The Sultanate has witnessed expansion and improvement of special education programmes to meet existent needs and reach international standards. It has experienced improvement in its education system and legislation to satisfy the educational needs of the country by giving students the opportunity to attain quality education.

Through improved capacity of facilities and better opportunities, illiteracy has been strongly reduced and there has been an increase in attendance in schools. This trend also includes physically disabled students, blind, mute and deaf students and special needs students. Special classes for blind, mute and deaf adult students were established to reduce illiteracy among them. Gifted and talented students were also included within the framework title “one class”. A number of students suffering from osteoporosis were also included in the classes.

Several factors have limited the number of included special needs students in the current programmes, notably the large geographical space of 309 thousand square kilometres and the weak societal awareness of a comprehensive education concept. Also, there is a shortage of human resources and relevant training programs specialised in special needs education. Resources in terms of appropriate classroom and school environments are also insufficient. The State is trying to overcome these challenges by developing appropriately designed schools that address the needs of special needs students.

#### *D. State of Qatar*<sup>33</sup>

In Qatar, before 1947, regular schools were not available and only mosque schools existed. In 1951 a Ministry of Education was created. Between 1956 and 1957, education was opened on an equal basis for boys and girls. The Ministry elaborated a number of motivations to encourage learners, but free education remained the major motive to attract students to schools.

Three stages of development of education can be identified: (i) 1956-1971: diversification of education, generalisation on implementation, regulation, organisation and industrialisation of education; (ii) 1972-1980: establishment of two colleges of education, rehabilitation/qualification/motivation of teachers and apparition of specialised institutes such as language centres; and (iii) 1981-1990: adoption and introduction of new educational policy and systems.

The State of Qatar has adopted a vision to raise the quality of rehabilitation and educational services in response to the needs of students to develop their own abilities. There is commitment to providing a full, effective and equal enjoyment of human rights, basic freedoms for all and realisation of educational equality. Schools are responsible for the development and adaptation of their curricula, procedures, and systems, in order not to reject any applications.

The Higher Council of Education, which is very comprehensive, is a landmark in Qatar and is supported by the present Prince. It was established according to Decree-Law No. 37 (2002) and is responsible for the educational system in the State. The following executive committees work under the authority of this council: (i) Committee for Education: responsible for the establishment, building and supervision of schools; (ii) Committee for Evaluation: responsible for the development of tests on the performance

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<sup>33</sup> The information in this section is mainly adapted from the presentation and discussion performed by Mr. Hamad Abdula Al-Sulati (Director, Department for Curriculum and School Textbooks) and Ms. Aisha Yousef Abdulrahman (Supervisor, Department for Private Education) from the Ministry of Education of Qatar on the country situation.

of students and schools; and (iii) Committee for Higher Education: responsible for higher opportunities in the State. Through these three committees, the Higher Council is preparing the ground for a new education scene to be built around 4 principles: independence, accountability, diversity and selection (parents choose schools for their children). This shall be realised through independent schools. Every April, the Council will elaborate a notice to choose principals to run new schools. Principals have an important role as they are responsible for the recruitment of teachers and staff as well as for their assessment. The school is to provide everything within its environment without any inspections or official assessments (assessments are to be internal), although there are standards and criteria which the Council tries to activate.

The State has been addressing special needs education since 1975. People suffering severe disabilities are referred to a rehabilitation centre and people with light or minor disabilities are referred to the Ministry of Education in order for them to be included into public education. The latter system effectively began in 1971 through the opening of a special education class for students with hearing disabilities. In 1979, three special education classes opened including students with hearing and mental disabilities. In 1980, a special education department was opened at the Ministry as well as the Alamal institute for boys and in 1982 the Alamal institute for girls. In 1984, a decision was taken to separate mentally disabled students from others. In 1989, a law was issued to regulate the functioning of special education schools. In 1990, a unit for speech therapy and psychological counselling was opened in the department of special education. In 2000, the visually impaired were included in preparatory schools. Blind children are rehabilitated in a special institute and are given a programme which prepares them to integrate preparatory school. In 2004, a law regarding the regulation of disabilities was issued by the Emir.

Today, the definition of inclusive education refers to the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools, either completely or partly. Inclusion is the practical application of normalisation and the realisation of equal educational opportunities. This

encourages mainstream and special teachers, principals, and parents to help students with special needs to achieve their goals.

Following the idea of inclusion, some physically disabled students were given public education and healthcare. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education were asked to include these students. At the beginning this was just a proposal among Ministers but the idea was welcomed to be applied, according to certain rules.

All categories of disabled students have been put in mainstream schools except those who are severely mentally disabled. Certain programmes are however provided for these students.

Assistance is given by inclusive teachers to prepare national and local staff with bachelor degrees in social services and sociology. Reference rooms have been created in 9 schools and provide everything that is needed by students with special needs (learning equipment, remedial teaching, etc.). Inclusive teachers are sometimes present in these rooms to help students included in mainstream classes to follow what is being taught. Some rooms for physiotherapy have also been prepared for physically impaired students.

There are now 9 schools for inclusion in the country. The number of students has increased from 25 initially to 116 nowadays. The number of working teams from Arab countries (committees were sent abroad to select certain psychologists and therapists) increased from the initial 2 teams with 4 members to 9 teams with 36 specialists. The programme started with 16 teachers and now includes 43. These increases show that the services of the programme have been expanded to adapt to the rise in number of students. The proportional rise of the number of students is higher than the proportional rise of specialized staff, but the latter is steadily increasing.

### *E. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*<sup>34</sup>

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as in the other Arab countries, before special schools were introduced the teaching of special needs students was done in mainstream schools. After special schools were introduced, mainstream schools stopped accepting special needs students. They were admitted to special schools and then to boarding schools. Nowadays the country is returning to including all students in mainstream schools but in another manner: there are now support systems that help the inclusion of special needs students within mainstream schools. In 1984, the first successful integration experiment was carried out in Hofuf, and since then, there have been other successful experiments.

Main advances in this field include the assessment of special needs education in the Kingdom and the theorization of the educational needs of concerned students, based on which relevant programmes and policies were developed. For example in 2006 a three-year assessment programme was concluded, covering mainly the following topics: (i) management of human resources; (ii) the effects of school and home environments (performances of integrated and non integrated students were compared to see if they reached standards or not); and (iii) advantages and disadvantages of integration. The result of the survey demonstrated that the integration in the Kingdom was on a correct path.

The definition of inclusive education as understood in the Kingdom is based on international references and adapted to the Saudi environment. Inclusion in Saudi Arabia targets two categories:

1. Students with minor physical and communicative disabilities. They are included into mainstream schools and are considered to be the majority of mainstream students who need special education.
2. The second category consists of blind, deaf, mentally retarded students as well as those who suffer from autism or multiple disabilities. These students are

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<sup>34</sup> The information in this section is mainly adapted from the presentation and discussion performed by Mr. Nasser Ali Al-Mousa (Director General, Department for Private Education) and Mr. Mohammed Abdulla Albishy (Executive Director, Comprehensive Project of Educational Development) from the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia on the country situation.

traditionally taught in special classrooms which were affiliated to mainstream schools. They however badly need full inclusion with peers in ordinary classrooms, and efforts are being made to try to include them into mainstream schools.

Three categories however still cannot be covered: behaviourally and emotionally disabled, hyper-active, and inattentive students. There is indeed shortage of specialised staff. Some Saudi universities start to provide some courses for teaching such categories.

The educational policy of the Kingdom, issued 40 years ago, stipulates that the education of disabled and talented students is an integral part of the national educational system. This commitment remains rather up-to-date. The State guarantees the right of the disabled to protection, care and rehabilitation. The regulation of special education for disabled persons stipulates that the ordinary school is the natural environment of social, psychological and educational development. The Kingdom considers inclusive education and educational curriculum to be very important and the leadership pays great attention to people with disabilities. This is reflected in the attitudes of society which began to accept people with disabilities, finding suitable services for them.

In terms of curriculum, the Kingdom adopts the idea of applying mainstream curriculum for all students with special education needs. Even mentally retarded and deaf students gradually study the mainstream curriculum. This keeps in line with the goal of inclusion. But there is necessity to adapt the curriculum which will change according to the disability. Very minor changes will be made for physically disabled students, blind students and those suffering from writing problems. For certain groups, such as deaf students, there is a need for average amendments. Essential amendments need to be made for mentally retarded students. The best solution seems to be the use of the general, mainstream curriculum as a guide, a reference. On top of this, it is necessary to find certain frameworks which revise and define necessary skills to be used by teachers. This means teachers make use of the general curriculum whilst using certain frameworks for disabled students.

Likewise, there is a need for a good individual education programme which deals with a very heterogeneous population. There is diversity not only among groups but also within a group itself (e.g. among the visually impaired, some students can see a little, others are completely blind). In this case teachers can be instructed to apply the mainstream curriculum whilst taking into account individual needs and differences.

Concerning student assessment in special education, the country has specific rules on the methods by which each category is assessed. Different assessment scenarios used to be applied for different disabilities. With the passage of time it was deemed better to try and find a general comprehensive assessment system. So far, the coherence between the assessment of general education students and their special needs counterparts has been improved.

Currently, the success of inclusion programmes is dependant on both the perspectives of school management and teachers' abilities.

In terms of physical facilities, the Ministry of Education is working on making arrangements such as adjusting buildings, hallways and study rooms. Organisational structures of institutions were accommodated in regulations and standards were set for these facilities in schools.

Surveys have shown that in general attitudes regarding inclusion are becoming positive. More importantly, attitudes are more positive the nearer individuals get to the inclusion process. The most positive attitudes are those of teachers working directly with inclusion programmes and those working in an inclusion school. Teachers working in special needs schools are likely to be less positive. This is a very important point which should be focused upon.

According to the Ministry of Education, in the school year 1994-1995, the number of institutions and programmes for special education was 48 for boys and 18 for girls. In 2006-2007 the number increased to 3130, out of which 2268 for boys and 862 for girls. In

year 1995-1996, the number of students enrolled in these institutions and programmes was 7725, out of which 5208 were male and 2517 female. In 2006-2007, the number of students grew to 61'980, out of which 48'547 were male and 13'433 female. The number of students who benefit from special education programmes in mainstream schools exceeds the number of students enrolled in special education institutions. The percentage of special needs students included in mainstream schools in 2006/2007 was 93% out of all students with special needs. The percentage of included female students was 69% of all female students with special needs.

As a result, the special needs education programmes have been able to benefit a diversity of students: not only the mentally disabled, but also those who have movement impairment and learning difficulties. Other patterns of special education are also used in the Kingdom. There are, for example, boarding schools, resource rooms and travelling teachers. The objective of such diversity is to supply the needs of all children. Facing the developing notion of comprehensive education, questions are raised about whether special needs institutions will be abolished. But comprehensive education should be the solution, instead of being a problem. It has opened new frontiers towards improving infrastructure and adapting facilities in mainstream schools. To further the progress, there is a need to adopt a practical approach, rather than a theoretical one.

#### *F. United Arab Emirates*<sup>35</sup>

The United Arab Emirates have always recognized the vital role of education in achieving development and welfare of both individuals and society, as well as in achieving sustainable human development. The country's Constitution emphasizes education as an important factor in achieving societal progress, guarantees the provision of educational opportunities at all educational levels for all citizens, and renders basic

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<sup>35</sup> The information in this section is mainly adapted from the presentation and discussion performed by Ms. Fatema Mohamed Abdullah (Head of Section, Directorate for Private Education) and Ms. Makia Hassan Alnajjar (Senior Supervisor of English) from the Ministry of Education of the United Arab Emirates on the country situation.

education compulsory, with the goal of expanding educational services and increasing access rates in all levels of public education.

Among the twelve objectives of the United Arab Emirates' educational policy, one can quote in particular: building human resources in fields of belief, behaviour, skills and performance; expanding compulsory education beyond the second stage (age of 18); offering equal educational opportunities for all citizens; diversifying educational opportunities according to the needs and capacities of learners; achieving a teacher-learner society which is marked by the coordination between formal and informal educational institutions in a way that offers opportunities for lifelong learning<sup>36</sup>.

Up to recently, in the field of special needs education, as stated by the Decision No. 96 of the Council of Ministers (year 1981), educating and rehabilitating students with special needs was the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs. In 2006, the Union Act No. 29 was issued, stating that the Ministry of Education should become responsible for educating students with special needs. Since then, the Ministry of Education has been intensely seeking to offer equal educational opportunities for students with special needs in accordance with the goals of Education for All.

Moreover, since 1979/1980, the Ministry of Education has made well-rewarded efforts regarding ordinary school students who suffer from educational problems for different reasons. This has been done through *special education classrooms* and *resources classrooms* which are located in ordinary schools, and, therefore, do not isolate these students from the school community. Focus is on: students with learning and/or speech difficulties; visually and/or auditory handicapped students; students with kinetic disabilities. Visually and/or auditory handicapped students as well as students with kinetic disabilities are included in ordinary classrooms within mainstream schools.

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<sup>36</sup> The other objectives are: supporting the sense of belonging to the State and to the Arabic and Islamic nation and supporting the cultural identity; considering Arabic as the language of education; communicating with the cultures of the others in the light of the Arabic and Islamic culture; meeting society needs of the human resources quantitatively and qualitatively; promoting the quality of education and its ability to achieve the current and future goals of society; quality education for invention and innovation; education dependence on a progressive cultural base.

The *special education classrooms* are one of the educational alternatives in special education. A maximum number of 10 students who have educational problems are regrouped in a special classroom. They spend most, or all, of the school day at school and have the same educational programme as the other students. In special education classrooms, some educational and remedial programmes and services, suitable for students with special needs, are introduced. The number of male and female students who benefited from special education classrooms services reached 1709 students in the school year 2006/2007.

The *special education resources classrooms* are another educational alternative to support students with special needs, especially those who suffer from learning difficulties. Target students are shifted from their ordinary classrooms, in which they are registered, to the resources classroom in which they receive particular education adapted to their educational needs by special teachers for part of the time only. The number of students with learning difficulties who benefited from resources classrooms in the school year 2006/2007 reached 5760 students.

Causes of exclusion for students who are currently still excluded from mainstream schools are: inconvenient school environment (concerns mainly students with graver special needs), unavailability of suitable educational curricula, of adapted buildings, of specialised educational staff.

The United Arab Emirates Government gives a high priority to special needs education in its general strategy. It views students as the centre of the learning process and calls for providing special legislations and regulations to achieve inclusion in education of students with disabilities, and of some other categories. There is a will to continue the adoption of the concept of inclusive education in the future at various educational levels and stages in order to achieve EFA goals. Efforts to provide equal educational opportunities for students with special needs after issuing the Union Act No. 29/2006 are:

1. Promoting coordination and spreading awareness. Activities include: meetings with officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs and relevant institutions to activate the Union Act; issuing Ministerial Decision No. 2/486 (15/10/2006)

according to which the supervisors in the educational zones are authorized to monitor and follow up on the educational process in special needs centres, as well as Ministerial Decision No. 5297 (1/11/2006) according to which special needs programmes are to be expanded to all educational stages; meetings to explain and clarify the Union Act and illustrate the philosophy of special needs education (the meetings involve managers of departments in the Ministry of Education, managers of educational zones, head supervisors and special capacities supervisors).

2. Improving education for blind and auditory handicapped students. Activities include: counting numbers of blind and auditory handicapped students in public schools; sharing ideas and opinions in a meeting held with members from the blind community; holding a meeting with blind students and representatives from relevant institutions to develop recommendations for achieving inclusion of this category of students; providing the necessary equipment needed to help such students, and holding a training session for teachers who work in classes that include blind students.
3. Improving education for deaf students. The department of special capacities programmes in the Ministry of Education has fulfilled the inclusion of eight deaf students in a special classroom in Alfath School in Abu Dhabi. This has been done in order to accomplish complete inclusion into mainstream classrooms along with ordinary students next year.
4. Improving education for mentally retarded students. Four students have been included in Alrabe kindergarten in Dubai in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs.
5. Improving education for students with kinetic disabilities. The Ministry of Education is seeking to make changes in school buildings to make them suitable for this category of students and to provide the needed equipment.

The Ministry of Education has adopted the goal of total inclusion of students with special needs into mainstream schools, along with peers of the same age. Its goal is also to provide assistant teachers to mainstream classrooms, ideally in the number of one assistant per two students with special needs. In the school year 2007/2008, the Ministry will seek to attain the inclusion of students with auditory, visual and kinetic disabilities. To achieve these goals, the Ministry is adopting many educational alternatives to offer equal educational opportunities for students with special needs. Such alternatives include the following schemes: (i) inclusion of all students in mainstream classrooms; (ii) co-existence of mainstream classrooms and resource classroom; (iii) co-existence of

mainstream classrooms and consultant teacher or assistant teacher; (iv) special education classroom inside the school; and (vi) monitoring of the educational process for persons with special needs in special needs centres.

### *G. Yemen*<sup>37</sup>

Based on the Education for All strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Yemeni Government, represented by the Ministry of Education, adopted the Inclusive Education Programme. This commitment is attributed to the belief that education is a right for all children. It is clear to the Ministry of Education that the concept of inclusion in education does not only cater for children with disabilities but also for other segments of the child population, such as: ordinary children, high achievers, disadvantaged, deprived and marginalized children such as working children, etc. Therefore, educational integration aims to achieve equal opportunities for all children to access appropriate education. Following this strategy, the Ministry of Education established the first Inclusive Education Directorate in 1997 and continues to expand the programme in different governorates to include all categories of children. The Ministry of Education has incorporated the policy of inclusive education as a cross-cutting issue in all the activities of its annual plan since it is considered to be an integral part of achieving the EFA goals. During a meeting held on 27 February 2007, Ministry leaders and representatives from civil society institutions agreed that inclusive education should seek to help all children to cope with their difficulties and disabilities by providing an active and rich environment that promotes their social interaction.

The Yemeni National Strategy of *Basic Education* prioritizes the following actions in the direction of inclusive education: (i) increase access rates to 95% and focus on facilitating

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<sup>37</sup> The information in this section was adapted from the presentation and discussion performed by Mr. Asia Abdullah Almashriqi (Director of Comprehensive Education, Ministry of Education of Yemen) and Mr. Abdulhakim Hamed Alshamiri (Senior Researcher, Center of Research and Development, Ministry of Education of Yemen) on the country situation, as well as from the *Inclusive Education in Yemen: Introductory Booklet* (2006) jointly prepared by the Ministry of Education of Yemen and Save the Children Sweden.

access to education for students with special needs by: making school buildings more suitable for students with disabilities; providing schools with equipment and facilities in order to make the schools more secure and comfortable for students with disabilities; providing free educational materials; eliminating school fees and other monetary burdens for poor families; building special departments in the Ministry of Education and its offices in the governorates to support and monitor inclusive education; building schools in remote regions and providing compensatory educational opportunities for those who are unable to access basic education; (ii) improve the quality of education and make it more appropriate for the needs of society; (iii) minimize the gap between boys and girls, rural and urban areas, in accessing education; (iv) identify social, economic, and cultural obstacles to girls' education and determine solutions for them; (v) initiate an informational campaign to change attitudes towards education of children with special needs; (vi) improve the quality of girls' education and make it more appropriate for their needs; and (vii) develop curricula that are more suitable for the requirements of local environments and increase their economic and social returns.

Inclusive education is also reflected in the National Strategic Goals of Secondary Education through the following elements: (i) expand and spread secondary education in order to achieve equity and justice in educational opportunities at the secondary level, including the education of students with special needs, through increasing access and graduation rates; and (ii) improve the quality of secondary education so as to improve learning achievements while diversifying orientations in order to provide for students' needs, including those of students with special needs.

Since the 90s, through the cooperation between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the country's Social Fund for Development (established in 1997 to cushion the effects of governmental reforms on vulnerable groups) and a number of civil society organizations such as Save the Children Sweden, the country has witnessed remarkable development in the field of inclusive education. Apart from the establishment of the Inclusive Education Directorate, one can also note the implementation of Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Programmes, the establishment of the Care and

Rehabilitation of Disability Fund and the creation of a number of specialized civil society organizations concerned with children's rights and different disabilities.

In 1997 a project was initiated in three chosen governorates (Taez, Lahj and Abyan) where the CBR Programme was present. Fourteen schools were selected in the three governorates. Children were referred to by the CBR Programme and followed by the Inclusive Education Directorate in schools. From 1997 to 2001, the Inclusive Education Directorate implemented a number of training courses and workshops through local and regional experts.

These experiences are evidences of Yemen's commitment to its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed and ratified by the country in 1991. Yemeni legislations have, to a certain extent, accommodated the rights of children promoted by the convention. These rights are indeed found in Yemeni legislations either as laws specifically related to children or related to the society as a whole. Yemen also signed the Arab Child Rights Charter (CRC) and issued the Yemeni Child Rights Law. Great efforts are required in the coming years to advocate for a public opinion that values the issue of child rights. In addition, a number of laws and resolutions linked to CRC were issued, such as the Republic Law No. 5 (1991) related to the establishment and formation of the Higher National Committee for the care of disable people and the Resolution No. 407 (1997) of the Ministry of Education related to the enrolment of all children with disability in schools near their homes and the exemption of their school fees.

In discussing the subject of child rights, the country chose to focus on the rights of those with special educational needs and their inclusion in society. Regarding this main objective, the Ministry of Education prepared, at the end of 1996, a strategy on the integration of children with special needs in regular schools in all the governorates in the Republic of Yemen. The aim is to give education access to all children without exception and to provide the appropriate setting to support their enrolment, as well as to endow them with necessary skills to adapt in society.

The training of educational personnel within the Inclusive Education Programme was placed as one of the priorities in planning at both the central and governorate levels. Since 1998, more than 200 teachers, school principals, inspectors and social workers were trained. The training programme in these courses included various topics such as: strategies and teaching techniques of children with visual and hearing impairments, changing attitudes towards children with special needs, improvement of teachers' performance in inclusive schools, teaching gifted children, introduction to concepts related to inclusive education, inclusion of blind pupils, also girls, in regular schools, development of teacher and social worker skills and making teaching aids from the local environment's materials. These trainings provided inclusive education schools with a number of qualified professionals in the field of teaching children with special needs. However, the training still needs to be improved and organized to cater for the needs of the different groups of school children, for example those with learning difficulties.

Moreover, the inclusion process required the review of school buildings and was also placed as one of the priorities in the Inclusive Education Programme. This demanded support from partners and different sides to make basic and necessary adaptations in order to implement inclusive education in schools. Since 1998, a number of adaptations and refurbishments have been executed by the Inclusive Education Programme in some school buildings of the targeted governorates. Save the Children Sweden has played an active role in supporting, coordinating and directly monitoring implementation of renovation. The Social Fund for Development was the main donor for building renovations and constructions. A number of recommendations were submitted to relevant sides on building schools in order to take into consideration children with special needs when designing school buildings in the governorates.

The Inclusive Education Programme also promoted the system of Reference, i.e. referring cases from a given programme to another supporting programme in order to complete the educational, rehabilitative and medical process. For example, a pupil can be referred from an ordinary classroom to a special education programme in the school. This is known as a referral system *within* the school. Referral outside school is often made to other

institutions such as hospitals or specialized centres in order for these institutions to provide required medical services or assistive equipment (eye glasses, hearing aids or wheelchairs). Referral is preceded by data collection processes such as: personal information, referral reasons, medical and psychological diagnosis and level of academic or skill performance of each case. The aim of the referral system is to activate the role of the related parties concerned with the case of the child in order to choose the appropriate intervention and to have an overall background on his/her case. Through this system, it is easier to access existing services in the community. Yet the system for the integration of children with disabilities as well as the link between resource rooms and other relevant institutions have been considered to be insufficiently explicit. It is therefore essential to put in place coordination mechanisms, whether at the school level or at the level of other institutions, to ensure the success of the Inclusive Education Programme.

The decision of expanding the Inclusive Education Programme was based on the above-mentioned pilot experience. The expansion covered Sana'a, Aden, Hodeida, Al-Mahweet, Ibb, Hadramout and Dhamar. Teachers from these governorates were also sent to study in Jordan. The aim of the expansion is a comprehensive adoption of the Programme by the Ministry of Education by 2015. 2095 students with special needs were enrolled in 46 schools of 10 governorates during year the year 2005/2006 (half of them being girls). In 2006, the expansion included five new governorates: Al-Mahra, Sa'ada, Mareb, Amran and Shabwa. In addition to the geographical expansion, the aim is to include other categories of children with special needs such as gifted children, working children, and marginalized children as has been mentioned in the National Child and Youth Strategy. Old statistics providing access rates of students with disabilities in schools are now being replaced by new statistics reflecting the new definition of inclusive education.

The UNESCO Offices in Beirut and Cairo, Save the Children Sweden, the Yemeni Ministry of Education and National Committee for Education, Science and Culture organized a semi-regional seminar on integration of children with special needs in regular education (19-21 November 2005). Delegations from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, the Sultanate of Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Syria and Sudan participated in the seminar.

Experiences of integration were presented by Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Egypt by experts in the implementation of these experiences.

It is considered that there is a great deal of work yet to be done in Yemen. The country is currently facing difficulties such as a low access rates of students with special needs to basic education; a gap between male and female, rural and urban children regarding access rates; the lack of accurate data about children with special needs; the need to clarify the role of civil society in the field of special education; the inactive role of families in defending the rights and participation of their children in education, especially in informal education; the weakness of female teachers' training; the weakness of pre-school preparation and early intervention; the insufficient participation of local communities in the educational process, etc.

#### *H. Common Challenges for the Region*

For most Gulf Arab States, the major challenge still remains to assure education for all, with only Bahrain being close to achieving this goal<sup>38</sup>. Education for All aims for the inclusion of all children into the formal education system, despite obstacles that may stem from development levels, poverty, the situation in rural areas, the gender gap, etc. The need to broaden the concept and scope of inclusive education is very much linked to the current processes of educational change. These processes mainly imply the strengthening of basic education (primary and secondary), the development of competency-based approaches in curriculum and the improvement in provision of learning resources (e.g. textbooks).

While the idea of inclusive education as promoted by UNESCO is still not the primary concern in the region, many Gulf Arab States have made positive advances in terms of vision of special needs education. These States have shifted from opening specialized

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<sup>38</sup> UNESCO, 2007. *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007. Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

schools for children with disabilities – although specialized schools still have an important role – to integrating them into the mainstream education system. This process, principally entailing the provision of physical facilities and diversified learning strategies, still needs to be further consolidated and extended to other marginalised groups.

The main challenges the region faces appear to be related to: (i) awareness-raising among different stakeholders towards a broadened concept of inclusive education as a right and towards the attainment of EFA goals (participants agreed on this aim and emphasized the need of a gradual strategy towards its realization); (ii) the dissemination of the UNESCO vision on inclusive education (i.e. the UNESCO Guidelines for Inclusion, which are not very well known in the region), as a way of building institutional capacities for the implementation of inclusive education; (iii) the sensitization and training of professionals regarding inclusive education as a core strategy in the aim to address learners' diverse expectations and needs; and (iv) strengthening cooperation, especially communication, between countries in order to promote the sharing of lessons learnt, and set up regional agendas. The complex issue of immigrants, guest workers and temporary residents having much difficulty in accessing the social welfare system, including educational services, was also addressed during the workshop.

Common barriers of exclusion include lack of resources and data for inclusive education, lack of trained teachers and staff, lack of clear educational/curricular guidelines addressing diversity, insufficient family involvement, etc. There is also a general perception that these group of countries can look at the Nordic experiences as references in the field of inclusive education.

## V. Good Practices

Finland is considered one of the pioneers in inclusive educational practices and was therefore used as a reference at the Gulf Arab States Regional Workshop, in order to animate the discussion and to provide inputs to the set up of a regional agenda. Nordic experiences can be references to Gulf Arab States; however inclusive education must first be defined and articulated as an official policy at the national level, and then country-specific strategies must be devised and implemented.

This section will first expose some aspects of the Finnish experience and of its successes in order to reveal essential elements for effective inclusive educational policy, and then discuss good practices in the Gulf Arab States.

### *A. Finland: an Effective Model*

Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that Finland has achieved both equality and quality concerning educational outcomes. The successful performance of Finnish students can be attributed to a wide variety of factors. According to some scholars, the success of the Finnish comprehensive school is due to the cultural homogeneity of the nation<sup>39</sup>: “Grave political conflicts and sudden changes in educational thinking have been relatively rare<sup>40</sup>”. This undoubtedly is an asset in having both a stable yet progressive educational system. Today, in the country, comprehensive schooling is a pedagogical philosophy and practice: school is a right for every child without exception and, and it has to adjust to each child’s needs.

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<sup>39</sup> According to the PISA data, non-native students in Finland account for a mere 1 percent. See Linnakylä, P. and Valijärvi, J. (2003). *Finnish Students Performance in PISA: Why such a success?* From the Finnish PISA team, Institute for Educational Research University of Jyväskylä Retrieved on July 11, 2007 from <http://www.oph.fi/info/finlandinpisastudies/conference2005/jounivalijarvi.doc>.

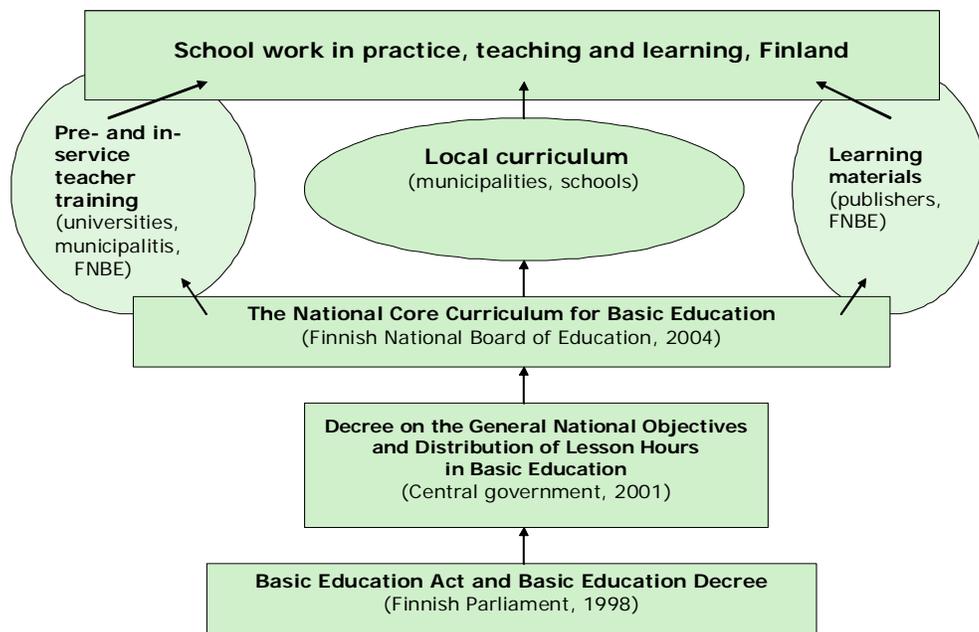
<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE)<sup>41</sup> asserts that inclusive education is that of an education organized in such a way that every pupil gets adequate and well-timed support to his/her personal learning and development. In order to execute an effective inclusive educational policy, school culture and pedagogical methods must promote the success of all pupils in their studies. In Finland the dialogue between national decision-making bodies, administration, municipalities and other educational institutions is open and flexible. The key objective of Finnish educational policy is to provide all citizens with equal opportunities to access education regardless of age, place of residence, economic status, gender or mother tongue. Education is considered to be a fundamental right of all citizens and basic education helps to increase equality at both regional and national level.

In Finnish schools, fundamental values such as human rights, democracy, equality, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability and endorsement of multiculturalism can be seen at three levels that are linked to each other: in school culture, in social relationships and in the content of education. The country also has the smallest class sizes, a common and flexible curriculum for nine-year basic education, and student-centred instruction. The National Core Curriculum has been formulated on the basis of a conception of learning as an individual and communal process of building knowledge and skills. Curriculum plays a central role in Finnish school development. Across time, it has experienced the transition from a centralized to a decentralized system and its developers are now again seeking for more guidance and support from the central government (one can visualise the pattern in the following graph).

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<sup>41</sup> This information is adapted from the presentation given by Ritva Järvinen of the Finnish National Board of Education on *Current Trends on Inclusive Education*.



In terms of support for learning, generally speaking, pupils' welfare is the concern of all people working in the school community and a goal pursued in close cooperation with families. The multi-professional pupil welfare coordination team is a widespread practice. Every student has access to student guidance and counselling. Schools are expected to guide and advise students in learning and streaming options. Between schools and families, mutual respect and equality is perceived as the starting point of cooperation.

In Finland, special education is closely integrated into classroom teaching and is inclusive by nature. From grade 1 to 9, every school has a part-time support teacher for special needs who works closely with other teachers. In some schools, one out of every seven teachers is devoted to "laggards". In any given year, a third of pupils get one-on-one remedial lessons<sup>42</sup>. All efforts (differentiated teaching, remedial teaching, student welfare services or part-time special needs education) are made in the highest possible way from the very moment a special learning need is noticed.

Both schools and students are assessed in the Finnish education system. Local authorities have the responsibility to ensure a continuous evaluation and development of the local education systems and curricula. Schools also carry out self-evaluations, which aim to

<sup>42</sup> Education. How to be top. In *The Economist*. October 20<sup>th</sup> 2007.

make activities transparent to parents and other interested groups. The evaluation of schools helps different stakeholders to form a common and integrated understanding about the main goals, the working procedures and their impacts. Students' assessment goes together with the concept of learning. Its target is the learning process, i.e. the learner's progress along his learning path, and aims to provide further support, adaptation and guidance. In other words, students are assessed according to their individual goals and achievements, and are driven by motivations other than exams, such as the expectation of a better and enriching life. There are no eliminatory tests, national examinations or inspections in the Finnish education system; the results of informal audits are kept confidential.

It is worthy to underline that, in Finland, the teaching profession is viewed as one of the most important professions in society, and teachers are compensated accordingly. In fact, only 10% of those who apply for the teaching track in universities are accepted. Teachers are also highly valued as experts holding a master's degree either in their subject area or in educational science. The government invests important resources in teacher training resulting in both teachers and schools experiencing a great sense of autonomy.

Inclusive education in Finland still requires systemic changes, and in order to fulfil goals of equity and equality, the country needs to focus on individual support in learning.

The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) believes that: (i) growing up and studying in heterogeneous groups is good both for individuals and for the nation as a whole, and therefore commits to support the versatile growth and development of the unique personality of each child; (ii) curricula should be improved in order to connect everyday school life with the future needs of society; (iii) it is important to emphasize the coherent transition from pre-school to basic education as well as the educational unity of the nine-year comprehensive school; (iv) teachers should acquire strong skills in cooperation and pedagogical leadership; (v) in the world of education, from different points of view, it is important to develop the sense of community; (vi) students should be able to participate actively in planning and developing learning environment and

practices and become responsible persons who will be motivated to learn throughout their entire life; (v) better ways should be found to prevent students from dropping out after basic education; and (vi) schools must ensure a larger responsibility of students' well-balanced development and well-being.

If Gulf Arab States can strengthen the recognition of teachers in society, implement a more integrated and flexible curriculum, deliver effective training on inclusive practices to all their teachers to ensure high educator qualifications, and in overall terms invest more in their educational systems, they might gain similar benefits as Finland. Clearly these are lofty goals which can only be achieved gradually but education must be given a top priority.

## *B. Good Practices in the Region*

### B.1. Adaptation of school curricula and support (Oman, Qatar and United Arab Emirates)

In *Oman*, several curricular adaptations have been made, including the following: (i) teachers in charge of taking care of mentally disabled students are required to develop curricula according to an individual education plan; (ii) the educational ladder has been raised for the hearing impaired: such students' education was indeed limited to grade 9, but in 2007 they have started to pass the general certificate examination for grade 12; (iii) adaptation of primary curricula in accordance with the needs and requirements of the visually and auditory handicapped; (iv) providing adequate textbooks and varied educational aid by governmental printing and publishing services; (v) providing gifted students with an enrichment programme and including them in the "learning impaired" segment; and (vi) creation of around 250 schools that address learning difficulty needs. Last year a programme for treating learning difficulties was introduced. Special examinations were also devised for this group to include other cognitive impairments.

In *Qatar*, students with disabilities must pass certain assessment tests that are supervised by a specialised team. Each case is studied under certain terms and provisions to decide if

the child can be included or not. The included child shall also remain under observation during two weeks. Mechanisms for implementation of the programme usually have clear and flexible education objectives and require the amendment of activities to fit the abilities and capacities of the child. There is a multi-faceted adaptation of the curriculum to absorb various capacities of students, which relies on certain references such as remarks, interviews, tests, files, non-official information and data. Also, technical teams visit inclusion schools to take note of any shortages or problems.

A follow-up system, in the shape of a “daily plan form”, was elaborated in coordination with specialists from the other Gulf Arab countries. This system creates a register for the follow-up in which the teacher sends his/her remarks to parents on a daily basis. The teacher is responsible for the child’s education and must provide information on all required details.

There are also psychological services available which concentrate on emotional and social aspects. Such services include: guidance, consultations, analysis of behaviour, communicative therapy (communication in all situations), and expressive and receptive language skills.

Overall, there is much interaction between general education students and their included peers. Schools are prepared to welcome disabled students and allow them to integrate without any feeling of inequality. The programme of inclusion is very positive and parents are confident about its benefits.

In the *United Arab Emirates*, rules which regulate special education classrooms have assured the adoption of an ordinary curriculum which considers the following activities: (i) diversifying appropriate teaching methods for students with special needs; (ii) recognizing individual differences in education and adjusting education to meet the needs of every student; (iii) simplifying the ordinary curriculum to be suitable for the abilities of these students; (iv) adopting the educational and psychological principles in education;

(v) multiplying teaching aids; (vi) connecting and strengthening the knowledge acquired by students; and (vii) repeating lessons as a part of the daily programme.

Basic education curriculum in the United Arab Emirates has adopted the concept of inclusion and inclusive education in its main structure, for example in subjects like: science, English language, math, Arabic language. The following strategies and processes are used to achieve this goal and to meet the diverse needs of all categories of learners:

1. Adaptation of teaching methods and strategies to meet all students' needs using the following methods: listening to visual and audio tabs; giving answers in oral instead of in written form; offering picture cards and using special helping tools (e.g. in math).
2. Peer instruction, which is a strategy offering an opportunity for a real social interaction among learners, with an educational environment supporting direct teaching and learning. This strategy reaches all the students with a math curriculum. Teachers are also being trained on specific strategies and methods to deal with the different categories of learners with special needs (e.g. in science and English).
3. Supplementary materials, for example: Math and Arabic language curricula provide teachers with special supplementary materials and additional or alternative activities to be used with the different categories of learners. Likewise, teachers are provided with multi-level activities to be used with learners according to the level of their abilities.

The concept of inclusive education was particularly used in developing the curriculum of the following subjects: English Language from grade one to six, Science from grade one to five, National Education from grade one to three, Arabic Language in grade four.

## B.2. Teacher and educational staff incentives and training (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia)

The Ministry of Education of *Bahrain* has prepared a qualified and trained staff specializing in dealing with people with special needs. Teachers receive training before and during their service by placement in postgraduate studies at the Arabian Gulf University. All Ministry workers in this area hold graduate diplomas, masters or higher

degrees in special education. Teacher training programs also provide a variety of training workshops for teachers in schools. These programs aim at highlighting ways to deal with students with special needs in the various categories in which they work, according to the needs of the school. Exchange programs between schools aim at sharing experiences among teachers and enable them to strengthen inclusive education programs. Moreover, the rehabilitation of teachers, social workers and school governing bodies, through the organization of workshops and training courses, help them to provide better education to students with special needs.

The *Kuwaiti* Government has started a special section at the College of Special Education to prepare teachers for public and special education schools. Such teachers are trained to deal with certain disabilities and help students adequately. Unqualified teachers can encounter problems as, for example, minor mistakes in sign language can severely alter communication. Mainstream and special education schools are provided with teachers from other Arab countries who are specialised in all subjects and different sorts of disabilities, to teach and help train teachers. Teachers and instructors are also sent to developed countries which specialise in such fields. This is often done free of charge for the institutes. Creation of books and textbooks is usually supervised by specialised educators and inspectors who have good experience and who have generally studied in the developed world. They thus know how to adapt these books to the needs of the disabled.

*Oman* drew from experiences of the GCC and the Arab Countries in qualifying teachers and instructors. With the support of the Ministry of Saudi Arabia, intensive training courses were given for teachers teaching deaf, blind and mentally disabled students. There are both fixed and ongoing training programmes that support the education and training of special needs teachers to equip them with the necessary experience to accomplish their jobs. There are also training programmes that promote teachers to the functions of supervisors and inspectors and encourage them to further specialise in specific fields.

*Saudi Arabia* has been successful in finding motives for working with special needs groups. Extra pay is provided to teachers working in this field.

### B.3. Promotion of awareness and positive attitudes (Kuwait, Qatar and Yemen)

The integration of disabled persons requires society to be adapted and prepared to accept them. In *Kuwait*, this has been successful and disabled persons have been integrated and accepted in the community. Activities for disabled persons have been encouraged, for example, by inviting officials and public bodies to attend lectures and communicate with teachers. Televised events have also been organised to eliminate misperceptions of disabled persons as being “useless”. For example, disabled people are sometimes integrated into the events of the Kuwaiti national day which are vastly televised, attracting important public attention. Disabled persons have been introduced into scouting camps in Kuwait and abroad (Lebanon, UK, etc.), and they can also participate in musical competitions or be introduced to corporations as salespersons.

*The State of Qatar* strongly believes that inclusion of disabled students is a comprehensive continuous process in which all staff, parents, civil society and organisations are involved. There is also a provision for motivating educational environment and raising the education level of children, through the spread of common awareness and positive attitudes, and a provision for finding an objective system for the assessment of all the elements of inclusion.

In line with the belief that children with special needs should be provided with an appropriate rehabilitation environment and equal opportunities, one objective of the *Yemeni* Inclusive Education Programme was to work on changing attitudes towards people with disabilities and changing their attitudes towards themselves as well. A number of training courses, workshops and awareness raising seminars have been carried out in a number of governorates where inclusive education existed in certain schools. These activities targeted relevant stakeholders such as: school administrations, teachers,

social counsellors, students, families of children with disabilities, and parent committees. It also involved decision makers, associations related to the issue, various media institutions, offices of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health and Population and the Ministry of Guidance and Endowment. These workshops included various activities which contributed to the provision of appropriate community settings.

#### B.4. Early intervention and preparation (Kuwait)

In 1999, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education started to open nurseries and kindergartens for children suffering from the Downs Syndrome. This system comprises special classes established within mainstream schools, and thus fosters co-existence and prepares for increased acceptance in primary schools. Once such a system is put into place, physical equipment and specialised teachers (ex: who know brail) are needed and provided. Some teachers who are specialised in communication have also been provided to help with speech therapy and to develop communication with parents, friends and family.

#### B.5. Geographical balance (Oman and Saudi Arabia)

In *Saudi Arabia*, special needs education programmes are not only concentrated on the areas with high population concentrations but have been extended to the countryside and villages, which have started gaining awareness in dealing with special needs students. It is believed that the best approach is to reach out to the people and the school is the core for disseminating such information and imparting such services. *Oman* shares similar experience.

#### B.6. Preferential practices for the disabled (Kuwait)

In *Kuwait*, special education schools provide educational learning workshops which greatly help to further integration into the professional world. Special needs students acquire skills in the following fields: crafts, embroidery, and typing, as well as beautician classes. Following this education, students receive certificates and are provided with recruitment services. The Kuwaiti government tries to guarantee priority for disabled persons in accessing jobs. Once a disabled person receives his/her diploma and applies for a job, he/she is guaranteed good remuneration and receives special conditions depending on his/her health condition.

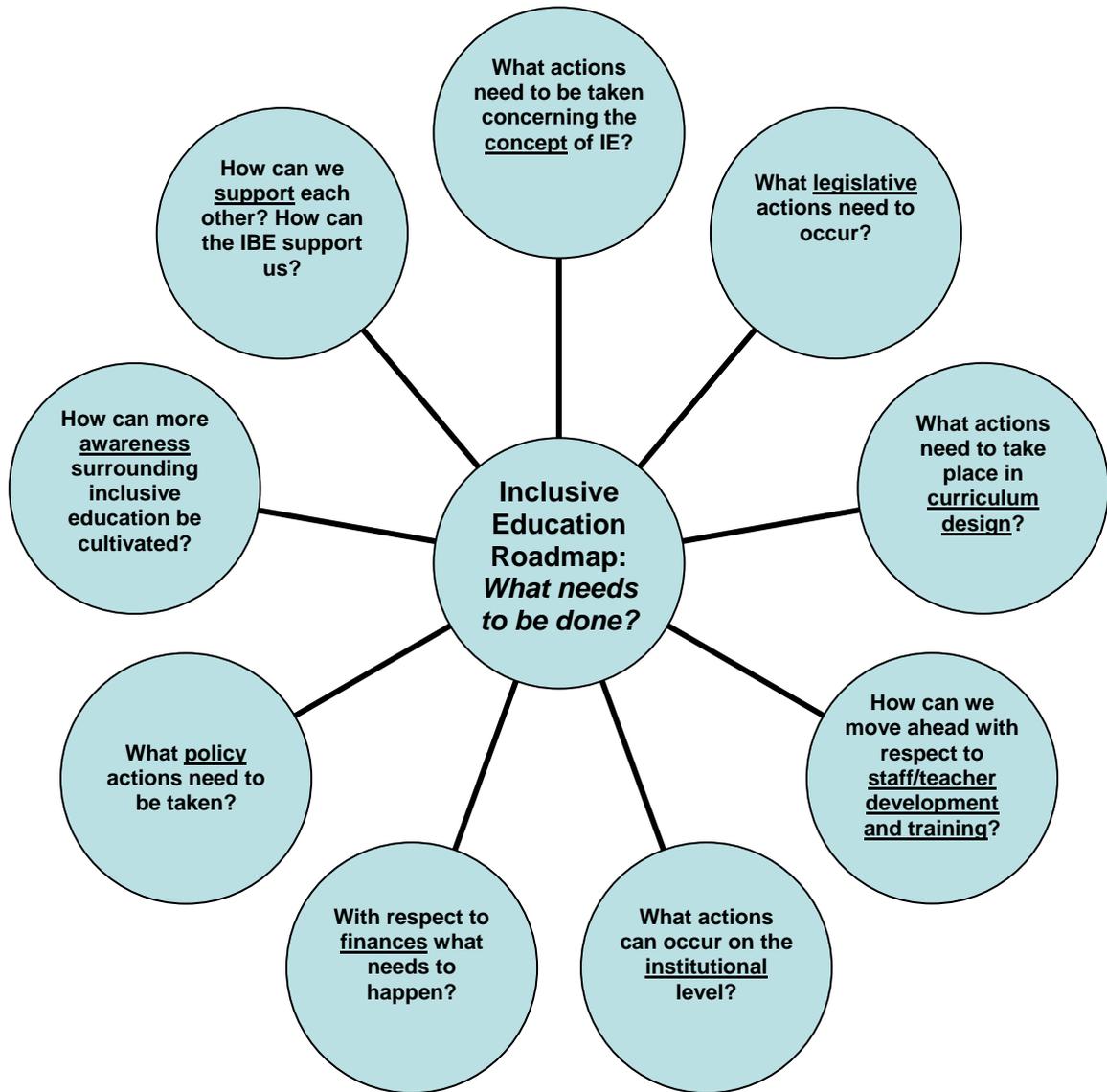
#### *C. Common Elements of Good Practices*

Each country in the region could advance on the issues of broadening the concept of inclusive education, committing to an official policy and looking to successful initiatives on an inter-regional basis in order to articulate and implement inclusive educational policies. Adapted school and learning settings, early intervention, increased teacher training and tolerance initiatives are actions that countries have been able to implement in order to progress in the realm of inclusive education. In summary, the key elements of good practices incorporate ideas of awareness, flexibility and diversity both in terms of the offer and demand for education and a coherent transition between the different levels of the educational system. They also seek to bolster adapted teacher training, cross-sectoral cooperation (political, social, and economic) and involvement of students, parents and the community at the international, national and local levels.

## **VI. The Way Forward**

Inclusive education must become a significant priority within government policies. There must be integration between the different ladders and pathways of the education system in each nation. The individualization of the learning needs of both potential and current students must take into account their cultural, social and cognitive diversities. Teachers must receive adequate training and support, and schools must help the advance on inclusive practices. Yet there is no unique model to follow: the approach can be context specific. In the Gulf Arab States, as in other regions, there have been good practices, but scaling up these practices is essential.

Workshop attendees discussed a number of questions with respect to inclusive education and actions that need to be taken. The main points of discussion centred around the questions in the following diagram which is also used as a guide in future Regional Workshops on inclusive education (see schedule of upcoming Regional Workshops at the end of the document):



Workshop attendees came up with some crucial steps to be taken with respect to inclusive education. Actions recommended include:

Concept:

- Establish a joint team with the Gulf Arab States Educational Research Centre (GASERC) to define a common concept of inclusive education in the region and strategies for its promotion.
- Put forward a broader, more comprehensive definition of the concept of inclusive education to include children with diverse learning needs as well as all socially, politically and economically marginalised and excluded groups.

Policy/Legislation

- Sign and ratify all relevant international conventions, declarations, etc., promoting inclusion, in particular the UN Disability Convention 2007.
- Translate the UNESCO « Guidelines for Inclusion » into Arabic and disseminate them together with challenges and recommendations for the region.
- Develop complementary legislation and instructions in fields of education, health, social rehabilitation and professional training for all institutions and applying clear educational policies and strategies to support inclusive schools.
- Adopt legislation for making infrastructures, transportation, buildings and schools physically accessible for all.
- Develop policies to ensure that all children in the country be guaranteed the right to education, regardless of their status.
- Prepare centralised and comprehensive statistics concerning different aspects of inclusive education.
- When applicable, implement policies to address the gap between male and female, rural and urban populations.
- Develop inclusive policies in the fields of early childhood care and education (it has been shown that pre-school education greatly affects later education stages) as well as of primary education.
- Develop policies promoting the use of ICTs for increasing learning opportunities for all children.
- Develop strategies for scaling up good practices on inclusion (e.g. pilot projects).

- Develop comprehensive educational standards to evaluate programs and projects relevant to inclusive education.

### Institutions/Governance

- Ensure that the Ministry of Education is primarily responsible for the education of all children.
- Initiate a national commission to coordinate educational, health and social services institutions.
- Plan for transition of special needs schools towards inclusive education resource centres and support institutions for regular schools.
- Establish ombudsperson/office to monitor implementation of right to education.
- Strengthen regional and national networks to cooperate, collaborate and share good practices.

### Finances

- Ensure resource allocation for equipment, facilities etc. for support of all children in mainstream schools.
- Promote partnerships between private and public sectors.
- Identify resources dedicated to education and shift distribution of resources to ensure that it reaches the most vulnerable groups.
- Allocate adequate resources to finance both pre-service and in-service teacher training.

### Curriculum Design

- Improve curricula by adding some new topics related to the concepts and terminology of inclusive education.
- Encourage schools to adopt flexible inclusive curricula which embrace EFA goals based on a national core curriculum.
- Facilitate the links and transitions between early childhood, primary, and secondary education in order to provide life-long learning opportunities.
- Promote values and citizenship education in curriculum design.

- Develop national guidelines to assess how curriculum is implemented and to help teachers manage diversity while using mainstream school curriculum as a reference.

#### Staff/Teacher Training and Development

- Develop and invest in pre-service and in-service training programs to respond to the diverse needs of learners in schools. Incorporate inclusive education as part of the whole pre-service training programme instead of addressing it separately.
- Ensure that regular classroom teachers are trained to deal with diverse needs in the classroom with the support of specialised teachers.
- Provide comprehensive training for all educational personnel including inspectors, social workers, etc., and create inter-disciplinary support teams.
- Explore alternatives such as distance training.

#### Awareness

- Conduct advocacy work (informational campaigns and programs) to change negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities (e.g. Children's Days, etc).
- Ensure the participation of local communities and NGOs in the education process; involve NGOs in monitoring process.
- Raise awareness in the media about the rights to education of all children in the country.

#### Support

- Activate the capacity of families and communities to uphold and defend the rights of their children to education.
- Develop guidance and counselling services in school.
- Strengthen coordination with universities.
- Offer support to parents, students, teachers and educational personnel in the form of subsidies, financial aid, etc.

Clearly, there is great value in sharing national perspectives in a regional context because collective learning is very enriching and stimulating. The workshop participants are now aware of the ICE 2008, its objectives, scope and modalities, and will become agents for

dissemination of this knowledge within their sphere of action. Since each workshop participant is already a member of several other networks they can disseminate the workshops outcomes, with a multiplier effect, using existing websites and planned events. Additional professional exchanges among participants and with IBE have been generated as a result of this workshop. Furthermore, participants will rely on each other for provisions of technical expertise and professional peer support. Cooperative relations will be established not only among the regional participants, but also through inter-regional exchange with inclusive education specialists working in other parts of the world.

## VII. Relevant Issues for a Regional Agenda

Outline of some core issues according to the suggested four themes of the 48<sup>th</sup> ICE:

- Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content:
  - (a) Inclusive education touches the very foundation, strategies and contents of the education system. It promotes active citizenship, social justice and collective well-being. To address inclusive education, a human rights-based approach well embedded in the holistic framework of EFA goals should be adopted.
  - (b) The goal of inclusive education should be to include all children in education, but also to include all citizens in the society and thus, to create a new relationship between people, namely social justice.
  - (c) Inclusive education can be visualized with a generational approach. Pupils of today will be the parents of tomorrow: if they can benefit from inclusive education, our societies will be more likely to progress towards equity, equality and democracy.
  
- Inclusive Education: Public Policies:
  - (a) The role of the government in developing inclusive education policies should be one of: advocacy, coherent and sustainable policy design, attainment of financial sustainability, capacity building for relevant institutions and actors, active involvement of multiple stakeholders and accountability to society.
  - (b) The design and the development of inclusive education policies should not be understood as the sum of initiatives and efforts towards specific groups. Focus should be on providing friendly environments and effective learning opportunities to every child in mainstream schools. Learners' diversity should be recognized and respected.
  - (c) It is crucial to base the design and implementation of inclusive education policies and programmes on a cross-sectoral approach.
  
- Inclusive Education: Systems, Links and Transitions:
  - (a) The organization and functioning of the education system should reflect flexibility and diversity (in terms of attendance, learning opportunities, learning content, learning environments, teaching practices, use of technologies, among other aspects) to meet learners' differences and needs.

- (b) The transition and coherence among the different levels of the education system should be improved (for example, from early childhood to primary education), especially for special needs education and in order to reduce dropout. A common curricular framework and guidelines should be developed for compulsory schooling. Strong early intervention is a key factor.
  - (c) If the general education curriculum framework is to be used as a reference, parallel guidelines should be adopted in order to provide teachers with clear direction on how to manage different learning needs.
- Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers:
    - (a) Inclusive education should be learner-centred and also synonym of a good quality education. High expectations should be conveyed to each child and individual support should be provided.
    - (b) More resources should be invested in inclusive education as a critical component of pre- and in-service teacher professional development. Teachers should be able to co-develop the curriculum from the school level by forging tailored approaches towards the learning expectation and needs of their students.

## VIII. Appendices

### Appendix I

#### List of Participants to the Regional Preparatory Workshop on Inclusive Education – The Gulf Arab States; Dubai, United Arab Emirates, UAE, 27-29 August 2007

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## Appendix II

### List of IBE Regional Preparatory Workshops on Inclusive Education

The workshops are planned over the period June 2007 – March 2008 in different geographical regions according to the following calendar:

1. Eastern and South-eastern Europe: Sinaia, Romania (14-16 June 2007), completed;
2. Eastern and Western Sub-Saharan Africa: Nairobi, Kenya (25-27 July 2007) completed;
3. Gulf Arab States: Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) (27-28 August 2007), completed;
4. Latin America: Victoria, Argentina (12-14 September 2007), completed;
5. Africa: Kigali, Rwanda (27 September 2007), completed;
6. CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States): Minsk, Belarus (29-31 October 2007), completed;
7. East Asia: Hangzhou, China (2-5 November 2007),
8. The Caribbean: Kingston, Jamaica (5-7 December 2007),
9. Eastern Europe: Riga, Latvia (24-26 February 2008)
10. Northern Europe: Helsinki, Finland (7-8 March 2008)

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