

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN REALISING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Kenya Institute of Special Education.

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ABSTRACT

Education is a fundamental right that is enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya (Laws of Kenya, 2010). In realising this right, the Government of Kenya has ratified international treaties as well as enacted national policies on quality education for all. To support the provision of education for all children in Kenya, the government continues to dedicate massive resources to the education sector. For instance, in fiscal

year 2015-2016, the government allocated 22.3% of the national budget to education (KNBS, 2016). With the global commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically goal 4 on Inclusive and equitable quality education for all, the government has invigorated its commitment to provide inclusive, quality and equitable education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right that is enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya (Laws of Kenya, 2010). In realising this right, the Government of Kenya has ratified international treaties as well as enacted national policies on quality education for all. To support the provision of education for all children in Kenya, the government continues to dedicate massive resources to the education sector. For instance, in fiscal year 2015-2016, the government allocated 22.3% of the national budget to education (KNBS, 2016). With the global commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically goal 4 on Inclusive and equitable quality education for all, the government has invigorated its commitment to provide inclusive, quality and equitable education.

In 2003, the enactment of Free Primary Education (FPE) brought hope to many children in Kenya who had been left out of school. The immediate impact of FPE was huge, with enrollment increasing by one million to 7.2 million (MoEST, 2005). It is noted that the benefits of FPE mainly accrued more to children with no special needs in education.

Access to education for learners with disability and special needs continues to face uncharted barriers. In order to achieve inclusive quality education, it is imperative to focus on the practice of special needs education in Kenya. The Special Needs Education Policy Framework of 2009 aimed at providing a direction in bringing into schooling populations that otherwise had been excluded. To this effect, the Government in collaboration with partners has made efforts to expand learning opportunities to all children in Kenya.

This conference brought together over 500 delegates for a scholarly discourse on inclusive education. A total of 20 papers were presented and discussed. There was a round table discussion on policy on inclusive education practice and a parallel children's voices conference.

The Conference Goal

The conference sought to explore the trends, gaps, challenges and emerging issues with a focus to advance Inclusive Education in Kenya. It stimulated debate through the following themes:

- Policies and Legislation for Inclusive Education
- Inclusive Practices in Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- Teacher Training for Inclusive Education
- Financing Inclusive Education
- Role of Development Partners in Inclusive Education
- Assistive Technology and Inclusive Education
- Curriculum design, implementation and evaluation
- Learner experiences and Voices in Inclusive Education
- Role of media in promotion of Inclusive Education

Contributions by Development Partners

A representative from Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK), observed that broadcasting plays a major role in development. Therefore, there is need for inclusion. They further added that CAK had reviewed the licensing policy to accommodate persons with disability, regretting that out of 65 registered broadcasters; only four have sign language interpreters.

A representative from Girls Education Challenge (GEC) reported that the organisation targets girls who are marginalised to take them to school. GEC works in 19 counties and in 1,200 schools, mainly in arid and semi-arid areas.

The regional Head of Leonard Chesire Disability, observed that there was a strong correlation between poverty and disability. The organization is working with the county governments to advocate for inclusion of children with disabilities in schools. The organization is also working with local administration (chiefs and sub-chiefs) to help locate children with disability whose parents are reluctant to bring them to school. Further, the organization is also creating awareness among children through child-to-child clubs, to advocate for accommodation of children with disabilities and special needs by others.

Teacher Training

Inclusive education is defined as an on-going process aimed at offering quality education for all, while respecting diversity, different needs, abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and the communities. The legal basis for training teachers for inclusive education such as Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The following challenges in the training of teachers to deliver Inclusive Education services

- Lack of clear Inclusive Education policy and legislation

- Shortage of appropriate trained teachers and teacher trainers
- Lack of resources and assistive devices in schools for the learners with disabilities
- Inaccessible school environment
- Inflexible curriculum that is exam oriented
- Inappropriate teaching methods

Presentation Recommendations

- Formulation of feasible inclusive education policy
- Sufficiently train and equip all teachers with necessary attitudes, values, knowledge, skills and competences to meet all learners' needs
- Make inclusive education a foundation for all teacher training programmes
- Educate teachers about legislation and policies related to inclusion of children with disabilities
- Prepare all teachers to manage and adapt to change; support teachers in their attempt to implement inclusive education practices in schools
- Modify the existing curriculum and education system to meet all learners' needs
- Equip all schools with the necessary resources and assistive devices for learners with disabilities

On the presentation **“Inclusion and Differentiation of Instruction: Tenets of why Many Teachers do not Differentiate Instructions”** the presenter stated that inclusive education requires that teachers attend to a learner's needs as opposed to the more typical pattern of teaching the class as though all individuals in it had similar abilities. Teachers should use strategies that address learners' diverse needs.

Strategies for differentiating Instruction

- **Readiness:** Capacity of the student to learn new things; currently, class determines a student as opposed to level of understanding
- **Interests:** Use of students' interests to teach such as songs, arts or sports
- **Learning profile:** The way students learn best such as in groups or independently

Presentation Recommendations

- Teachers should teach the student and not the class
- Minimise use of commercial or international sources of information and come up with local materials

In the presentation: **“Reconceptualization of Orientation and Mobility Curriculum in order to Address Habilitation Needs of Children with Visual Impairment in Inclusive Settings”** a representative defined orientation and Mobility (ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY) as a profession that focuses on instructing and assisting individuals who are blind or visually impaired to achieve independent movement within their environment.

Why the Need for Orientation and Mobility?

- All children have the right to acquire skills which allow them to function in a wide variety of environments
- To enable children with disability live comfortably within the community
- Some individuals with visual impairment have felt discouraged from seeking employment opportunities
- Early introduction to orientation and mobility skills gives children the freedom and confidence to move through the world independently
- Many children with visual impairment due to early sensory loss are not able to develop concepts using similar modalities as their sighted peers

The presenter also recommended an Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) with additional set of skills which a learner with visual impairment must learn. The skills include: compensatory skills, orientation and mobility, social interaction, independent living, sensory efficiency skills, career education, assistive technology, self-determination and recreation and leisure skills. Orientation and mobility training in schools is not evident especially due to the fact that it is a subject that is not examinable. This has made it difficult to evaluate how well it is being implemented.

The presenter noted that the call for inclusive education is outlined in the Salamanca Declaration of 1994 that is supported by three key justifications: Educational, Social and Economic. In the paper “**Teacher Training for Inclusive Education**” it stated that the Salamanca Declaration calls for teachers to commit to the challenge for the sake of equity and social justice, schools to change to become inclusive be motivated by the desire to “give access” not to stigmatise, but see education as a right to every child.

Presentation Highlights

- Many teachers in regular schools conceptualise disability as to what is observable. If they can't see it, they may not identify it. For example, dyslexia
- Some teachers have basic awareness on children with special needs. However, many schools do not have any teacher trained in special needs education
- Many teachers feel inadequate when they want to make children with special needs comfortable in school
- Core units on special education be offered to all teachers through in-service training

The presenter observed that a teacher's enthusiasm, constructivist approach to instruction, patience, conducive learning environment, follow-up with individual learners, non-discrimination of learners and experience are all attributes that make learning possible. In her paper “**What Successful Teaching Means in an Inclusive Classroom Setup: Key Lessons for Professional Development**” the presenter stated that these attributes are fundamental for the success of inclusive education. inclusion of children with special needs should begin at home and at an early age.

However, inadequate resources, lack of remuneration for extra work, large classes and feeling of inadequacy among teachers affect inclusive education practice. It is recommended that teacher training institutions should incorporate a unit on inclusive education in their programmes.

ICT & MEDIA

In the presentation “**Information Communication and Technology (ICT) for Inclusion in View of Government Digital Literacy Programme (DLP)**” the presenter stated that for all learners, technology makes things easier but for learners with disabilities, technology makes education more accessible. In the presenter’s opinion, inclusion is an approach to reforming the education system in order to meet learning needs of all children.

Presentation Highlights

- Pupils with disabilities are at risk of being doubly disadvantaged if access to appropriate ICT is not supported
- Learner’s needs should be accepted as unique to the individual therefore, technology needs to provide an alternative or compensatory approach that works around the need
- Learners with disabilities need equal access to computers and other assistive technologies
- The government’s Digital Literacy Programme provides the best platform to achieve access, equity and quality education for all learners
- Access to appropriate ICT enhances access to information which is a human right

A presenter presented statistics on disability in Kenya were presented in the presentation “**Information, Communication Technologies and Assistive Technologies for Persons with Disabilities – A Paradigm to Sustainable Development**”. According to the Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities conducted in 2007, the overall disability rate in Kenya is 4.6%, which translates to 1.7 million persons. Out of these, 65% regard environmental barriers as their greatest challenge.

The number of persons with disabilities using computer assisted devices is negligible. The presenter noted that in as much as the government is committed to giving 5% of its jobs to persons with disabilities, they have no suitable devices to perform their duties.

Key Questions

- Are there closed captioning or sign language interpretation implemented by TV broadcasters?
- Is there sign language interpretation during news bulletins, emergency communications or other live announcements?
- Are there libraries for the blind or public libraries providing books services?
- Are government websites accessible to Persons with Disabilities?
- Are there programmes in place to facilitate the use of telephony by persons with disabilities?

It's observed that only 4 of the TV stations in Kenya have sign language interpreters, and only during news time. In addition, most services from the government are now automated without putting into consideration needs of Persons with Disabilities.

In the presentation **“Challenges in Accessing Electronic Information Resources by Students with Visual Impairments”** the presenter stated that; students with visual impairment who use assistive technologies such as screen readers are most at risk of being excluded from accessing web based information. It further submitted that students who rely on screen readers experience barriers accessing information due to the rich graphical interfaces and complex web designs. While screen readers enable students to navigate their on-line environment, they are limited on how they can interpret a busy website.

Assistive technologies used by individuals who are blind are costly. Accessible materials, such as popular books and textbooks, are slow to be developed, while the increasing provision of web-based information resources has moved from a simple text interface to dynamic and interactive designs.

The presenter observed that most learners with visual impairment are unable to retrieve and use e-resources through their own effort. More than half of the students with visual impairment spend a lot of time retrieving a single e-resource. A good number of learners rarely use e-resources even after retrieval. Most learners with visual impairment use other learners to read for them. Assistive technology should therefore be introduced in the curriculum to enable learners with visual impairment access and use e-resources.

There was expressed the important role played by the mainstream media in influencing public opinion and attitudes. In the presentation **“Mainstream Media Framing of Inclusive Education: The Case of KBC TV’s “Abled Differently” Programme”** the presenter observed that the choice of words and images among others determine individual perceptions and behaviour. Most representations of Persons with Disability in the media show them in stereotypical roles.

Presentation Highlights

- Representation of Persons with Disability should be framed to show them in active roles where they contribute to societal development
- Media programme producers must be aware of the disabling impact of language and avoid inappropriate terminologies
- The media should raise awareness on the laws and policies on disability
- More programmes featuring Persons with Disability should be created and producers attend Disability Equality Training (DET) courses

In the presentation **“Role of Media in Promoting Inclusive Education: Coast Region of Kenya Perspective”** the presenter stated that Africa has the largest number of children not in

school and the realisation of having all children in school by 2015, as stipulated by the MDGs and EFAs, is a far cry from reality. In Kilifi, for instance, only a third of children with disabilities are in school. Many children with disabilities at the Coast are unaccounted for because their parents hide them.

Presentation Highlights

- The Constitution provides that every citizen has basic rights
- There is unreliable data on the number of persons with disabilities. The government should undertake further research to get the accurate data for policy formulation
- Media should increase public knowledge on inclusion
- Communities should promote inclusion and participation of Persons with Disabilities in their day-to-day social, political and economic activities.

Plenary Session 2: Legislation and Policies that Respond to the Needs and Objectives of an Inclusive Education Agenda

Keynote Address

In the keynote address, acknowledged the milestones made in pursuit of inclusive education, saying that the fact that this was the first ever conference on inclusive education by KISE was a testament to how far our thinking and law has evolved. For the first time in history, the general agreement and consensus reflected in the Constitution is that challenged persons have rights consistent with their needs. It was further expressed the strong believe that children with disabilities should not be in special schools, but enrolled in the regular system.

It reiterated that the rights of Persons with Disabilities are important and must be recognised. The Bill of Rights is applicable to all persons regardless of their condition or status. These rights include adequate housing, water and sanitation (Article 43 of the Constitution). To achieve all these rights, one must have the right to education. Other rights are right to freedom of speech and association and the right to not be discriminated against. Provisions of the law prohibit discrimination on anyone based on disability. Inclusive education is necessary if the country and individuals are to rise above poverty.

“Without an education, the input my parents and teachers put into my education, despite the negative perspectives of people because I couldn’t see properly in the sun and so on, I could have gone to waste,”

It was expressed that over the last eight years the presenter had interacted with a lot with children with visual disability. The presenter started engaging with them when they realised that even though their life as a person with albinism turned out differently, many children did not have the chance they had, and may never get a chance to get the kind of education that they got. The findings were that a large percentage of children with visual disability attended schools for the blind, yet they can see with some intervention. In these institutions, they’re segregated

from other children and from the society in general. Some are not accepted back at home during holidays, and are totally isolated from other children and their communities. On facilities at the schools the presenter had visited, the findings were wanting. Some schools for learners with visual impairment have crowded sleeping places and the children have difficult time manoeuvring around. The schools have pit latrines as opposed to special ones that are conducive for children with challenges.

“We can do better. We can’t have children who are different put in a box somewhere, only to leave school at the age of 18 when they venture into an unreceptive society,”

Presentation Highlights

- Policy makers and educators should find a way of integrating children with disability into the society early enough so that they can adjust
- There is no special society or world for children with disability. They are part of society and must be integrated early enough
- Enabling facilities, language, machines and other tools must be made available—Treasury and the ministry of education should endeavour to create a transformed inclusive society

Policy Round Table Discussions

Panellists were in agreement that Kenya has several legislation on disability such as the Children’s Act 2001, Persons with Disability Act 2003, the Constitution of Kenya 2010 and the Basic Education Act 2013. However, implementation of these legislations has remained a challenge. They cited that all the legislations touch on education for all but little has been realized. What is needed is to ensure that mechanisms for implementation are put in place. These strategies should be made known to all actors in the Education sector and the general public.

“When I think of inclusive education, I think of that big family sitting at the dinner table. The person preparing a meal is aware that some people don’t eat certain foods, or some eat more than others, and serves them all to their satisfaction. From the point of view of the ministry of education, inclusive education is ensuring that all learners access quality education and their educational needs are met”

A presenter expressed concern that the issues that were being discussed at the round table were the same ones that were discussed in 1993 by a taskforce formed to look into laws as they affect Persons with Disabilities, which later gave birth to Persons with Disabilities Act and policy.

“We must begin the process of sorting out what we mean by inclusive education. Does inclusive education mean just going to deposit our children in an ordinary regular school with no support whatsoever? Perhaps the only support that might be is a KISE trained teacher who has nothing in his or her hands to help that child? Does that pass for inclusive education?”

A Mediamax representative stated that inclusive education is not about the lower or the middle classes; it should cut across from pre-schools to colleges to tertiary Institutions. Inclusion is about ensuring that the child is empowered for them to achieve their fullest potential, so that everybody has an opportunity to be employed, have skills and can employ themselves.

A presenter lamented that the community is rarely involved in policy making and this becomes difficult for them to implement as expected. They particularly cited the Educational Assessment and Resource Centre teachers (EARCs) as some of the forgotten staff and community members.

“I feel that the EARCs are the neglected child of the ministry. We need this policy to articulate the roles of the EARCs, the capacity gaps and to articulate research interest as far as EARCs are concerned. To crown it all, I’ll suggest that in order to inform policy, we shouldn’t be in a hurry. We should look into areas and even research a little bit, go down a bit at the community level, at the school level, parents’ level, so that it’s all inclusive process. Unless we have an inclusive society, it is going to be challenging to implement inclusive education”.

It was reiterated that although there had been challenges, the government was in the process of strengthening all EARCs in the country by relooking and re-examining how assessment services are provided. A representation of Sight Savers International (UK) also added that their organisation was working with the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission to strengthen EARC’s in Homabay over the next five years but hoped that the programme can be rolled out countrywide.

MANAGEMENT

In their presentation **“Conducive and Safe Environment for Children with Special Needs: Are Public Utilities Accessible?”** the presenters zeroed in on data on toilets accessibility in 4377 public schools. In the sampling, 56% of the schools had children with disabilities. Their research results showed that most of the schools sampled lacked adequate toilet facilities. On average, 33 learners without any reported disability shared one “regular” toilet while an average of 12 learners with disability shared a “disability-friendly” toilet. However, there were large disparities in this resource between schools and counties.

Presentation Highlights

There are gaps in the various education policy documents with none of them being explicit on the characteristics of a disability-friendly toilet, leaving it open to school-level interpretations that may not meet the threshold of being disability-friendly. There is need to have these specifications in the policy documents and extend these into building regulations to ensure mainstreaming of the issues in all institutions of learning

A presenter was of the view that early diagnosis is key since as much as some children have obvious disability signs, others do not. In the paper **“Successful Inclusion through Collaborative Strategies on Early Diagnosis and Intervention for Infants at Risk of**

Development Delays and other Special Needs”, the presenter stated that early intervention can improve children’s quality of life by enhancing development and preventing additional developmental delays and/or disabling conditions. Children spend most of their time with their family members and therefore involving their family in the intervention process is more effective than focusing only on the child.

Presentation Highlights

- Incorporate early identification and intervention programmes into routine paediatric care
- Prioritize regular childhood developmental screening for possible delays and disabilities
- Training of all health workers in child development or recognition of early neuro-developmental delays
- Early referral for interventions
- Revise current health based and education curriculum to include the definition of inclusion to incorporate high quality inclusive practices
- Improve professional development across all sectors of the early childhood field

A presenter stated that from there experience,

“Inclusion cannot be achieved in the present status of facilities in Kenya, adding that countries like the UK have already set framework for inclusion, with most schools being compliant.”

In thier presentation **“Management, Leadership and Governance of inclusive education in Kenya: Perspectives 20 Years after Salamanca Call”** the presenter asked:

“since 1994 Salamanca call, what have we done?”

Basing their argument on a 2015 research paper, the presenter had done sampling in six schools in Nyahururu, Central Kenya they concluded that Kenya has a long way to go in attaining inclusive education because in all the schools sampled, none had modified facilities for learners with disabilities, making it difficult for inclusion. Overall, the head teachers in secondary schools were rigid where inclusive education was concerned for fear of affecting the overall performance. On the other hand, head teachers of primary schools, were willing to accommodate children with special needs but lacked resources. In addition, admission of children with disability into regular schools was “accidental” not planned, according to the findings.

Presentation Highlights

- Inclusive education can be a success if the process is well planned
- There is need for training of school heads and teachers to embrace inclusion
- Creation of awareness in the community through information and education
- Government should allocate a budget for inclusion

In the paper **“Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities in Context of Social Change and Development”** the presenters emphasised that unless special needs education is effectively implemented, children with special needs will always be left behind in all spheres of life.

Inclusion should therefore run across board and not only in schools. Kenya's development towards inclusion has remained theoretical rather than practical, resulting in the country being left behind by many countries in the region and Asia that are effectively developing inclusive education.

Benefits of Inclusive Education

- Inclusive education facilitates social change and development more than other models of education
- It's cost-effective
- It offers access to general curriculum for learners with disabilities and those without
- Effective means of social change and development for both persons with disabilities and those without disabilities.

Presentation Highlights

- There is need for proper legislation and policy to push the inclusion agenda
- Financial support for inclusive education should be enhanced
- Political good-will and support is essential
- Development of systems, processes and indicators on participation in inclusive education
- Teaching workforce should be enhanced

CURRICULUM

In the presentation “**Inclusive Practices in Technical and Vocational Training**” the presenters defined Inclusive Education as an approach in which learners with special needs, regardless of age and disability, are provided with appropriate education in regular schools. The presenters noted that; inclusive education is a prerequisite to national development and attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. The SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all. One of the ways of reducing lifelong dependency of persons with special needs is by imparting the right skills, knowledge and attitudes. The question presented was, “who is training the trainers?” Trainers have no special background in training learners with special needs.

Presentation Highlights

- Every child is valued equally and deserves same opportunities and experiences. There should be no exceptions
- Inclusive education is about children with disabilities, whether disability is mild, severe, hidden or obvious
- All children learn in different ways and sometimes all a special child requires is special tools or technology
- Examinations should address the building and discipline of a character – not on ranking of students, teachers and institutions
- Collaboration of all stakeholders in designing local solutions in training approaches/methodologies suitable for SNE adult learners.

According to their presentation “**Certificate Syndrome and the Quality of Education**” the presenters observed that many people are focused on attaining good grades to a point that they cheat in exams resulting in “half-baked” graduates who are unable to deliver. They stated that inclusive education refers to policies and procedures for enabling and encouraging groups in society who are under-represented in the education system.

They proposed that the Ministry of Education should:

- Be more vibrant on improvement of the quality of teaching by exposing teachers to best practices in inclusive education
- Emphasize on formative evaluation more than the summative
- Revise the national goals of education and the curriculum to be more responsive to inclusive education

Presentation Highlights

- Performance of teachers and students should not be pegged only on grades but also on how well students excel in co-curricular
- Emphasis should be on holistic educational experience of moulding an all-round individual
- There is need to look at various Acts touching on persons with disability and special needs in education

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

Most of the partners present had experience working with communities and the government in providing support for children with special needs and were therefore familiar with the situation on the ground.

A representation from Sense International in the presentation “**Towards Inclusion, Community Based Education for Learners with Multiple/Severe Disabilities,**” noted that there still exist many barriers to inclusive education. Some of the barriers include distance, inadequate number of teachers for children with severe/multiple disabilities, inadequate teaching and learning materials to support school-based education of children with severe/multiple disabilities.

The Sense International organisation works through a community based education project, a home-based approach for learners with severe/multiple disabilities. The project identifies such children and then engages a teacher from the nearest public mainstream school. The teacher is then assigned to teach the child twice a week at home. The advantage of the approach is that the organisation is able to reach more children as opposed to units in mainstream schools that can only admit a certain limited number of learners. The organisation is also working with the national and county governments to advocate for home based education for learners who are deaf and blind.

A representative of Girl Child Network, in their presentation **“Promoting Effective Practices in Inclusive Education through Teacher and Parent Exchange Programme (Teacher Training For inclusive education)”** stated that the organisation was established in 2009 and since then it has been implementing an inclusive quality basic education project in collaboration with Save the Children. The project presence is in Vihiga and Kwale counties. Its mandate is to train teachers to implement inclusive education and to train parents to work alongside schools as they support all children, including those with disabilities.

After six years of operation, the organisation changed strategy. It invited teachers and parents from the communities they were working with to visit each other to exchange ideas for best practice. The visiting teams realised that there was need to create awareness about inclusive education because the issue of disability was not adequately addressed. County governments and communities needed to be brought on board.

Currently the organisation and the teams involved are working towards training of teachers and parents on proposal writing so that they can apply to county governments and corporate institutions for funding of their work. Focus is also on future exchange visits that will include students with and without disabilities.

Presentation Highlights

- Encourage greater participation of children with disability and special needs in the community
- Empowerment of advocacy groups
- Hold duty bearers accountable

The Education Manager at Leonard Chesire Disability stated that many children with disability in Kenya are not getting an education. In their presentation **“Innovative Approaches to Implementation of Inclusive Education in Kenya: A Case of Leonard Chesire Disability”** the presenter observed that more than 20 years after the Salamanca Conference, there is little to show in the case of inclusive education. The presenter was of the view that there was need to create awareness among service providers so that when children with special needs visit them for certain services, and that they do not prejudice them on the basis of their disability. There was also need to train teachers on special needs education so that they can in turn train their peers. This is more sustainable. The Leonard Chesire Disability Organisation in collaboration with Maseno University had trained 600 teachers in inclusive education approaches. Additionally, the use of child-to-child advocacy model used by the organization has raised awareness on the need to bring out children with disability. The capacity building done to parents’ support groups has also proved effective in building their confidence, reducing stigma and enabling them to work together to ensure their girls and boys are retained in school and are learning. Male mentors have been incorporated to successfully influence male parents of children with disability.

The senior technical advisor at at Deaf Child Worldwide (East Africa) stressed the need for families to support their children with disabilities in their presentation “**Role of Development Partners in Inclusive Education for Deaf Learners.**” Families should be empowered first and equipped to help their children. Deaf Child Worldwide (DCW) is the international arm of the National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS) in the UK. It works with partners in developing countries, facilitating work that enables deaf children and young people to be fully included in their family, education and community life.

The organisation works with development partners to raise the bar on creating awareness that will influence policy relating to deaf learners. The. Deaf Child Worldwide DCW philosophy is that: inclusion is a state not a place, hence the need for deaf children to be placed in an environment in which they have full access to learning, social, emotional and recreational activities in both mainstream and special classrooms.

The presenter singled out stereotyping as one of the greatest challenges, adding that there is need to create awareness to tackle the problem. Role models are also lacking among persons with disabilities, and these are needed for exposure and mentorship.

Presentation Highlights

- Donors are very specialized in their areas of operations and the government can benefit from them
- Working with role models in schools motivates learners
- internal structures and policies are important for organisations working towards inclusive education for learners who are deaf
- Success stories need to be documented and shared

CHILDREN’S VOICES FORUM

This session was devoted to school going children from primary, secondary schools and tertiary institutions. The aim was to capture their voices, take necessary action and articulate them to the relevant bodies. According to the Director Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) it was prudent to include all children in the conference. Similarly, the conference Chief Guest, Principal Secretary was happy that students were present in the conference where they directly contributed on issues that affect them while they are in schools at whatever level.

Opening Remarks by Student Leaders

The president of Westlands Primary School raised a number of issues regarding children with disability and special needs that needed attention. These included:

- Provision of educational resources and conducive learning environment
- Community sensitization on how to interact with children with disability and special needs to eliminate stigma
- Teachers to embrace and appreciate various talents in areas like sports, music or arts as opposed to emphasising on academics only

- Have an education system that appreciates all children regardless of their ability

Children love each other and enjoy each other's company as they play but adults pay more attention to a child's inability; inclusive education, therefore, is the way to go where we create a world that has every one in it whether disabled or not. He challenged the participants: "have you done something in the life of someone with special needs?"

The students' deputy president in Westlands Primary school expressed that:

- It is easier for children with special needs to learn in an inclusive environment because they love one another
- Children with special needs should be helped with assistive devices

Children's Views: Understanding Inclusive Education

The moderator and the Deputy Academic Registrar Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) illustrated how learning in an inclusive setting may have challenges when the teacher does not cater for all learners' needs. Using song and dance it was clear that children who are deaf could not hear the song, children who were blind could not see the dance, some children learn very slowly and the teacher was fast, and instructions were not clear as the teacher had not prepared well for children with intellectual challenges.

Lesson learnt: Inclusive education is about the teacher accommodating needs of all children irrespective of their differences.

When children in mainstream schools were asked how children with disability ought to be supported in schools and at home, they expressed the following:

- Love and care for them as this will help them build their self-image hence will learn survival skills
- Help them in personal hygiene, holding their hands and pushing those on wheel chairs This will help them move around and access facilities such as toilets and classrooms among others
- Positive attitude – help children with special needs to be assertive, clear and accept what they can do and saying no to what they cannot do
- We should not discriminate them as there is no student who cannot do anything. This will help them have self-confidence and achieve their goals

Children with disabilities were also asked to outline challenges they experienced in school and at home. They stated the following:

- Lack of teachers' preparedness hence no inclusivity while teaching
- Need to build their capacity such as use of tactile graphs
- Lack of co-operation, curiosity and open mindedness
- Being too dependent in situations where they can be independent
- Lack of learning materials due to high cost
- Lack of expertise to repair learning machines

- Lack of involvement/participation for the challenged in class activities hence limit maximum benefits

Success Story of Inclusive Education

The presenter was born without arms and one of his legs did not fully develop. They are a secondary school student at Juja Preparatory & Senior School that has an inclusive education programme. They told participants their dream is to be a pilot’.

Creative Drawings and Paintings Activity

Learners were given an opportunity to do pictorial presentations by either painting or drawing about their experiences in relation to inclusive education. Their artwork had messages such as creating enabling environment and need for equal treatment.

Role Play

A demonstration of a conversation between a child who was deaf and one who could hear was done. They could not understand each other hence the question: who was deaf between the two? The children said that both were deaf since none could understand the other.

Lessons Learnt

- Importance of communication
- This demonstration was meant to teach children that sign language is important; in fact, it is the third official language in Kenya after English and Kiswahili.

Poem/Shairi

One of the recited poems emphasized that challenged children are capable, can do all things and they do not regret their disability. Another presentation was a “shairi” calling on parents to take their children with disability to school.

Role of Children in Inclusive Education

The key rights mentioned by children were:

- Right to education
- Right to be treated with dignity and respect
- Right to be taken care of by the parents regardless of marital status of the parents
- Right to association
- Right to participation

Children expressed that they should be included during policy formulation and curriculum development because:

- The policy directly affects them
- The policy will benefit them at the end and
- If excluded, non-essential laws /policies will be formulated

Areas of Improvement

When asked about what to be done to ensure all children get their rights, they responded:

- Need to improve on how we treat the Persons with Disabilities
- Do not treat them like objects
- Involve children with disability in various activities

When asked about what the government should do to improve quality of education in schools, they recommended:

- Involve more partnerships with like-minded private institutions to incorporate more interpreters in our schools for easier learning
- Some boarding school dormitories are not well equipped for example: some have grill windows, lack fire extinguishers and doors are locked with padlocks at night. This should change
- Teachers are forcing students to have better grades instead of distinguishing the slow and quick learners
- There is need for Teachers Service Commission to employ teachers with special education training and skills such as Sign Language for easier learning by students with special needs

Way Forward and Resolutions

- Overhaul teacher training from Early Childhood Development all the way up to tertiary to make them inclusive
- More male parents should play an active part in the development of their children at the family level
- Advocacy: Create awareness on inclusion – inclusion is a lifestyle
- Media to allocate more airtime for disability issues
- Involve children in developing policies

Possible initiatives for success of inclusive Education in Kenya

- Research - know the number of children with disabilities, and the types of disabilities in every county in Kenya
- Develop facilities - instead of abolishing special schools, make all schools accessible
- Allocate budget for inclusive education
- Implement the pieces of legislation on inclusive education to have functional systems
- There is need for monitoring and evaluation to ensure that money dispersed by the government for SNE is used for that purpose
- Overhaul the curriculum to be responsive to all teachers and learners

CLOSING REMARKS

In the closing remarks it was observed that the conference was exciting and an eye opener, challenging and tear jerking. It was stressed that “*we need to be a lot louder in inclusion.*” For effective inclusion, there is need for early intervention, team spirit, promotion of family empowerment and improvement as well as need for advocacy and quality research.