



Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia

UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA)
P.O. Box 5815, Lekhnath Marg, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-4417082
E-mail: rosa@unicef.org
Website: www.unicef.org/rosa/

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FOREWORD

Around the world and in South Asia, governments have shown an increasing commitment to education for all and to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on inclusive, equitable and quality education for all. There is a renewed global consensus on making sure that no child is left behind. While these commitments have led to considerable progress, particularly at the primary level, children with disabilities often remain excluded because universal approaches can fail to address their specific needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the situation for children with disabilities, especially those unable to access remote learning services.

According to the UN flagship report *Disability and Development*, on average, children of primary school age with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than their peers without disabilities. Those in school often do not receive the support they need to learn, with teachers inadequately equipped to cater to the diverse learning needs of children in their classrooms. As a result, they often drop out early or fail to learn what is required to reach their full potential and become active and engaged citizens.

Over the years, South Asia has witnessed the implementation of promising initiatives to promote inclusive, equitable and quality education for children with disabilities. In 2018, the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) organized a regional knowledge-sharing event to highlight some of these initiatives and for a better understanding of policies, strategies and programmes needed to advance the inclusive education agenda. As a follow-up to the event, UNICEF ROSA initiated a mapping of disability-inclusive education practices in South Asia.

We are hopeful that countries in the region will be inspired by the many good practices outlined in this report and take action towards improving the quality of education for children with disabilities and the progressive realization of commitments to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These efforts are complemented by the vision outlined in the new UN Disability Inclusive Strategy of mainstreaming disability issues across agencies' operations and programming.

SDG 4 can only be achieved with the inclusion of all children in education, including children with disabilities. UNICEF ROSA remains committed to working with governments and partners across South Asia in promoting the right of children with disabilities to inclusive, quality education and supporting their access to skills required for employability.

George Laryea-Adjei
UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CFS	child-friendly school
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
C4D	Communication for Development
CBE	community-based education
CBR	community-based rehabilitation
CFBS	Child-Friendly Baraabaru School [Maldives]
CFM	Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CRW	community rehabilitation worker
CSO	civil society organization
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	early childhood development
ECE	early childhood education
EFA	Education for All
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESA	Education Sector Analysis
ESP	Education Sector Plan
GC4	General Comment No. 4 [Article 24, CRPD]
GDP	gross domestic product
GDS	Global Disability Summit
GO-NGO	government–non-governmental organization [cooperation]
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HBE	home-based education
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
ICT	information and communication technology
ID	identification [card]
IE	Inclusive Education
IEP	Individual Education Plan

INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
LUL	Let Us Learn [Bangladesh]
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
N/A	not applicable
NGO	non-governmental organization
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
p.	page
para.	paragraph
PEDP	Primary Education Development Program [Bangladesh]
PSQL	Primary School Quality Level [Bangladesh]
RTE Act	Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 [India]
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UDISE+	Unified District Information System for Education Plus [India]
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNICEF ROSA	UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia
WG	Washington Group on Disability Statistics
WHO	World Health Organization

GLOSSARY

- Child** The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, the majority is attained earlier” (Article 1). Countries belonging to the South Asia Region have a varied definition of ‘child’, as articulated in their legislation on children’s rights. However, as all South Asian countries have signed and ratified CRC, most of the national policies in the region recognize individuals below 18 years of age as children.
- Children with disabilities** The term ‘children with disabilities’ is internationally accepted and is used throughout the report. The research team acknowledges that this term, in itself, is controversial and possibly confusing at times. However, it is preferable to a ‘special needs’ discourse, which re-enforces a medical paradigm. The use of the acronym ‘CWD’ has been avoided except in tables and diagrams.¹
- Disability** The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines persons with disabilities as “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (Article 1).
- Discrimination** Discrimination based on disability means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability, which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation.
- Early childhood development** Early childhood development (ECD) encompasses the period from conception to age 8. ECD is an outcome comprised of the skills and abilities that the young child acquires during this age period – across the domains of cognition, language, motor, social and emotional development – as a result of the interaction between the environment and the child. A stable environment is one that is sensitive to the child’s health and nutritional needs, with protection from threats, opportunities for early learning, and interactions that are responsive, emotionally supportive and developmentally stimulating.²
- Other related terminologies used include Early Childhood Care and Education, Early Childhood Education and Care, and Early Childhood Care and Development. In recognition of how countries in the region use different terms to refer to ECD, the report uses all the aforementioned terms interchangeably, retaining the country’s terminology.

¹ The report uses the term ‘children with disabilities’. Terminology other than ‘children with disabilities’ referenced from various sources, especially from government legal documents and reports, has been retained.

² UNICEF Programme Division, *UNICEF’s Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development*, Programme Division, United Nations Children’s Fund, New York, 2017, https://sites.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files/FINAL_ECD_Programme_Guidance_September_2017.pdf.

Early identification

Early identification is the initial identification of children with disabilities, typically conducted before the age of 8 years. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health is frequently used as guidance for this process. Identification ideally leads to provision of multidisciplinary services.

Early intervention

Early intervention for children with disabilities is broadly defined as a systemic approach to ensuring the optimal development of young children and supporting and enhancing their functionality. High-quality intervention services, provided as early as possible, can change a child's developmental trajectory and improve outcomes for children, families and communities.

As family members are usually the first teachers and caregivers of children, early intervention services have increasingly been offered at home, targeting families as well as children with disabilities. Successful inclusive education for children with disabilities is dependent on the establishment and delivery of effective early intervention and ECD services.

General Comment No.4

General Comment No.4 (GC4) (2016) to CRPD Article 24 on the Right to Inclusive Education was developed to provide governments with guidance on the scope of their obligation to provide quality inclusive education for persons with disabilities. This guidance is not, unlike the terms of CRPD itself, formally binding upon ratifying countries.

However, GC4 is significant and provides guidance on the requirements that the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will apply in reviewing compliance by individual countries in relation to Article 24. It is also instructive of the scope of the fundamental human right for children with disabilities to receive an equitable high-quality inclusive education on the same basis as other children, which is best provided in their local community school.³

Inclusive education

Inclusive education aims to reform the education system to ensure that policies, cultures and practices respond to diversity and address the rights and needs of all marginalized children including those with disabilities.⁴ According to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, all children have the right to an inclusive quality education alongside their peers, delivered in their local community schools.⁵

Inclusive system reform

According to GC4, governments must establish system reforms for children with disabilities, which require that education is viewed as a lifelong process, with particular attention to ECD. This will involve a range of interventions at different levels, with different stakeholders, including reviewing and updating education policies, teacher standards and curriculum; capacity development of different stakeholders; addressing stigma and discrimination; and strengthening various services.⁶

³ United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education, 2016.

⁴ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006.

⁵ UNESCO, The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, 7–10 June, Salamanca, 1994.

⁶ General Comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education.

Individual Education Plan

An Individual Education Plan is a separate plan that sets out the needs and requirements of an individual child with disabilities in an educational setting. Whilst the plan has been used internationally since the early 1990s, it is increasingly recognized as encouraging an approach to intervention based on a medical paradigm. It is being replaced by a combination of Child and Family Support Plans and Provision Mapping, both of which enable a social approach in enabling inclusive education.

International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, known more commonly as ICF, is a classification of health and health-related domains. As the functioning and disability of an individual occur in a context, ICF also includes a list of environmental factors. ICF is the World Health Organization framework for measuring health and disability at both individual and population levels.

Mainstream school

Mainstream schools are basic education schools that are usually designated for children without disabilities, also known as regular schools.

Medical model of disability

The medical model of disability is a way of explaining how some people and organizations understand disability and how persons with disabilities are treated, but is not considered to be an inclusive approach. This explains ways in which persons with disabilities are stereotyped or judged, when a person is placed at the centre as the 'problem'. The person is considered 'defective', 'different' or 'not normal' and this often leads to stigmatization and discrimination.

Within this model, support for children with disabilities focuses on 'treatment', rather than on removing barriers to access and participation in mainstream services. Support is often provided in special and segregated centres where the specialist focuses on rehabilitation and treatment.

Non-formal education

Non-formal education is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters to people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway structure; it may be short in duration and/or low intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars.

Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognized as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by relevant national or subnational education authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills and social or cultural development.⁷

⁷ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Quebec, 2012, <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>.

- Persons with disabilities** Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.⁸
- Reasonable accommodation** Reasonable accommodation means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure persons with disabilities enjoy or exercise on an equal basis with others all human rights and fundamental freedoms.⁹
- Special education** Special education often refers to specialized learning provisions for children with disabilities who are deemed different from children without disabilities. Typically underpinned by the medical model of disability, it commonly alludes to children with disabilities being enrolled in special schools following a special curriculum and taught using a different pedagogy. Taught by special education teachers, this often leads to the segregation of children with disabilities from children without disabilities.
- The term ‘special education’ and ‘special needs education’ are often used interchangeably. In some countries, the term ‘special education’ is also used to refer to the provision of education to diverse groups of children who are seen to be ‘outside the norm’. In this report, both these two terms are used to refer to the provision for children with disabilities that is not inclusive.
- Social model of disability** The social model of disability identifies society as the force that disables people through designing services to meet the needs of the majority of people who do not have disabilities. There is recognition within the social model that there is a great deal that society can do to reduce, and ultimately remove, disabling barriers. It is the responsibility of society to make adaptations to ensure access and participation for all citizens, rather than expecting persons with disabilities to adapt to a discriminating environment. Within this model, support for children with disabilities is directed towards identifying and removing barriers to access and participation.
- Twin-track approach** A twin-track approach strengthens the education system through inclusive education. It focuses on improving quality for all while ensuring children with disabilities have access to services on an equal basis with others. It involves both mainstream investments and targeted interventions that address specific needs of persons with disabilities.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** The purpose of the Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. Article 24 is the right to inclusive education.¹⁰

⁸ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Universal design principles Universal design principles ensure that the design of products, environments, programmes and services can be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

Vocational education Vocational education refers to programmes that are designed for learners to acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies specific to a particular occupation, trade or class of occupations or trades. Vocational education may have work-based components (e.g., apprenticeships, dual-system education programmes). Successful completion of such programmes leads to labour market-relevant vocational qualifications acknowledged as occupationally oriented by the relevant national authorities and/or the labour market.¹¹

¹¹ International Standard Classification of Education.



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In South Asia, there is a growing commitment to ensuring children with disabilities are afforded their right to high-quality education on an equal basis with others.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is explicit that education is a fundamental human right anchored on the principles of inclusion.¹² The right of all to inclusive education is advocated by a number of international legal frameworks. As outlined in both the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education¹³ and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),¹⁴ all children including children with disabilities have the right to quality education delivered in their local community schools on an equal basis with their peers (CRC, Articles 28 and 29). This was further reinforced by the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) by recognizing for the first time that a significant number of children are excluded in education. EFA called for an inclusive global response to the growing issue of marginalization in education.¹⁵

Exclusion in education is multidimensional. This mapping focuses on inclusion of children with

disabilities in education. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that disability is the result of the interaction of a person with impairment (physical, mental, sensory or intellectual) and different barriers that hinder full and effective participation in the community on an equal basis with others.¹⁶ Despite the general progress in educational attainment globally, children with disabilities remain one of the most marginalized groups. They are less likely to participate in and complete their education compared to their peers without disabilities.¹⁷

CRPD, specifically Article 24, strengthened the global shift towards inclusion by mandating States parties to improve education systems and undertake measures to fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities to quality inclusive education. General Comment No. 4 (GC4) (2016) to Article 24 further stipulates the provision of reasonable accommodations and adaptations in learning

¹² United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

¹³ UNESCO, Convention against Discrimination in Education 1960, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 14 December 1960, http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=12949&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

¹⁴ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

¹⁵ UNESCO, World Declaration on Education For All and Framework for Action to Meet the Basic Learning Needs, adopted by the World Conference on Education For All, Meeting Basic Learning Needs, 5–9 March, Jomtien, Thailand, 1990, www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/UNESCO_World_Declaration_For_All_1990_En.pdf.

¹⁶ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol, 2006.

¹⁷ World Health Organization and The World Bank, *World Report on Disability*, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2011

environments that maximize personal, academic and social development within the mainstream education system. Governments must reform policies, practices and cultures at all levels to successfully include all learners.

In South Asia, an estimated 29 million children – 12.5 million at primary level and 16.5 million at lower secondary level – were out of school in 2018.¹⁸ Of these, a considerable proportion was estimated to be children with disabilities. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it is not possible to generate statistics that are regionally or globally representative of the status of persons with disabilities with regard to education because of the scarcity of national data.¹⁹ This is true for the South Asia region as well.

The lack of disaggregated education data poses a significant challenge for policy and programme development and implementation. The 2018 Global Disability Summit²⁰ raised the attention of world leaders to the long-neglected area of disabilities. A number of South Asian governments and actors²¹ signed the Summit Charter for Change,²² which embeds inclusive education as a key pillar of action, in line with CRPD Article 24 that requires States parties to ensure inclusive education systems at all levels.

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF ROSA) commissioned a study to:

- map inclusive education policies, strategies and practices implemented at all levels of the education system in the South Asia Region that are effective, or hold promise to be effective, in

increasing access and/or learning outcomes of children with disabilities in education and have the potential for scaling up; and

- inform the development and strengthening of regional and country-level advocacy and programming for advancing disability-inclusive education across South Asia.

METHODOLOGY

The mapping covered interventions towards establishing disability-inclusive education initiated in eight countries in the region: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The mapping focused on initiatives implemented from 2010 to 2020, targeted at facilitating the access of children with disabilities to inclusive pre-primary up to higher secondary education, including vocational training and non-formal provisions.

A theoretical framework was developed to guide the mapping exercise (see Figure ES1). The framework was derived from the fundamental features of an inclusive education system, as articulated in GC4 (2016) to CRPD Article 24, and reflected the key areas for review.

The framework conceptualized inclusive education through four main domains: (1) Enabling Environment, (2) Demand, (3) Service Delivery, and (4) Measuring and Monitoring Quality, defined further by 15 dimensions or key change strategies, which were viewed as interrelated. Each dimension facilitated the achievement of the other dimensions. Cross-cutting issues were included in the review, acknowledging the intersectionality between disability and gender, and disability and humanitarian issues.

¹⁸ UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, ‘Out-of-School rates and numbers by SDG region, 2018’, n.d.

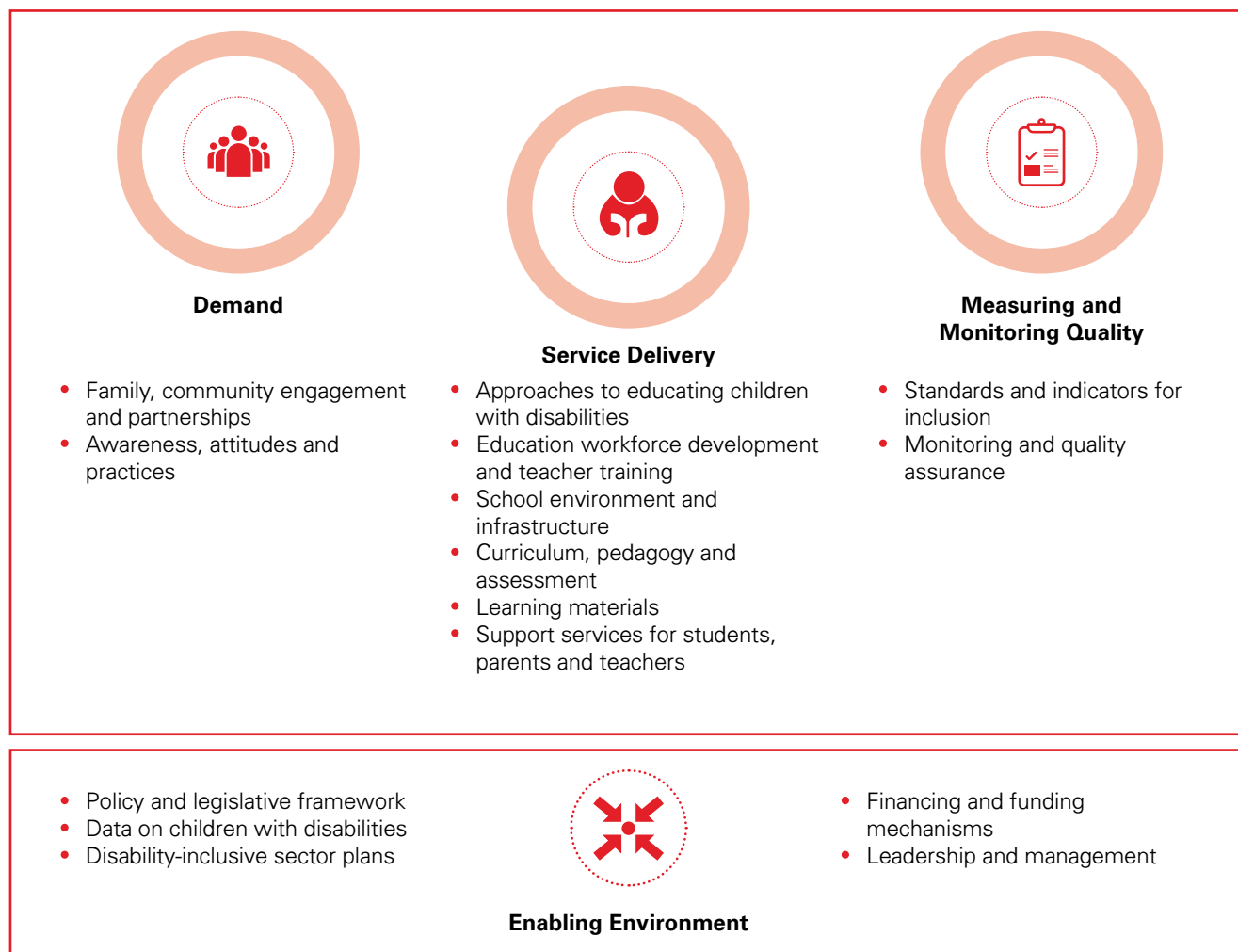
¹⁹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, ‘Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries’, Information Paper No.49, 2018, <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/ip49-education-disability-2018-en.pdf>, accessed 18 December 2020.

²⁰ United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, ‘Global Disability Summit 2018’, www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/global-disability-summit-2018.

²¹ United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, ‘Governments and organisations signing the Global Disability Summit Charter for Change’, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/783193/Gov-org-igning-global-disability-summit-charter-March19.pdf.

²² United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, ‘Global Disability Summit 2018, Charter for Change’, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721701/GDS_Charter_for_Change.pdf.

Figure ES 1. Theoretical framework of the mapping study



The review employed a mixed methods approach that merged qualitative and quantitative research methods. While the questions were mostly qualitative in nature, quantitative data sets were collected to establish trends. A range of sources of information, data collection methods and tools were used to allow for triangulation and cross-checking of findings, including:

- 1. Desk review** – Prominent global, regional and country-level literature, statistics, policy and programme documents, strategy papers, major grey literature, peer-reviewed journals, studies and reports on disability-inclusive education were examined.
- 2. Online survey** – An online survey was used to collect primary data on the progress of disability-inclusive education implementation at the national/subnational level. Key focal persons from Ministries of Education and other relevant ministries, UNICEF and key officials from civil society organizations (CSOs)/Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) active in the field participated in the survey.
- 3. Calls with UNICEF country offices** – Calls were conducted as needed to validate the findings from the desk review and online survey.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Enabling environment

1.1. Policy and legislative frameworks

Legal frameworks set the foundation for achieving inclusion in education.²³ In South Asia, there is a growing commitment to ensuring children with disabilities are afforded their right to high-quality education on an equal basis with others. All countries ensure non-discrimination of any kind on the grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, tribe, economic condition, language and other similar grounds. Notably, Maldives in its 2008 constitution specifically prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability. Out of eight countries, six conceptualize inclusive education as a process of removing barriers to learning for all children, especially those who are disadvantaged, not only for children with disabilities.

The right of children with disabilities to learn in mainstream schools is enshrined in most disability and general education laws. This is undermined however by existing provisions for education in segregated settings and mainstreaming in regular classrooms without sufficient support to make teaching and learning accessible.

Afghanistan and Maldives have adopted national policies dedicated to the advancement of inclusive education, providing stronger legal bases for creating inclusive learning environments for all children. Existing legislative frameworks, although some remain faithful to the medical model, lay the groundwork for successive changes to emerge. Countries need to align definitions with CRPD and eliminate provisions in current laws and policies that promote segregation, and in practice, gradually transition special schools into resource schools for inclusive education.

1.2. Disability-inclusive sector plans

All countries with Education Sector Plans (ESPs) fulfil the right of children with disabilities to education, although implementation strategies mainly focus on special education and mainstreaming in general classes. In most countries, broad goals indicated in sector plans follow the language of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and its specific targets. Bringing more children with disabilities to school is a common aim of ESPs.

Only 4 out of 10 ESPs included some form of statistics on child disability, often drawn from the results of education sector analyses. Data are often limited to estimated disability prevalence, enrolment, number of special education centres and number of teachers in special education programmes. The needs of children with disabilities are considered in the education response to COVID-19 plans of seven countries.

On the whole, sector planning can be strengthened by clearly articulating a twin-track approach to disability inclusion wherein plans are geared to make general education programmes inclusive and accessible to all learners, while at the same time identifying interventions aimed to address specific learning needs of children with disabilities.

1.3. Data on children with disabilities

The alignment between identification and data collection methods is crucial in establishing reliable and comparable data. While initiatives are ongoing in making children with disabilities more visible, challenges remain as statistics often vary widely. Across the region, disability prevalence rates vary greatly, ranging from 1.4 per cent to 13 per cent among the total population, and 1.7 per cent to 12 per cent

²³ UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education: All means all*, 3rd ed., United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 2020.

among children aged 0–19 years. Varying definitions and approaches to identifying and measuring disability result in unreliable and incomparable data sets.

The introduction of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG) Questions and Module on Child Functioning in censuses, national surveys and Education Management Information Systems (EMISs) in some countries is a positive development, which can support ongoing improvements in identifying disability, data collection, monitoring and quality assurance. The adoption of the WG questions across all data collection efforts will enable the generation of consistent and comparable data.

Initiatives to strengthen existing systems should take into account integrating key indicators on access, participation and learning outcomes of children with disabilities, educational needs, as well as barriers to full inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Governments must invest in improving birth registration systems, early identification and data collection systems, and ensure collection of disaggregated data on children with disabilities, including those who are out of school.

1.4. Funding and financing

Disaggregated data on budgets and expenditures on the education of children with disabilities are limited in the region, which warrants further study. Evidence from various studies, however, shows that inclusive education is more cost-effective than exclusion. Findings from the region indicate the need to redirect the focus of financing on inclusive approaches rather than investing in learning in segregated settings.

On the whole, public expenditure on education is below international benchmarks set by the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action.²⁴ Governments are urged to apply a twin-track approach to financing and allocate adequate resources to address system-wide reforms alongside targeted interventions to meet the needs of children with disabilities in education.

1.5. Leadership and management

Across the region, leadership on inclusion is demonstrated through the development of policies supportive of disability-inclusive education, establishment of cross-sectoral committees for promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and integration of disability-inclusive programming into the mandates of key government ministries and agencies. Furthermore, mechanisms and organizational structures for supporting inclusive leadership are present in countries throughout the region.

However, a common finding is the need to build the knowledge and capacity of leaders across government systems in the region in disability inclusion, rights-based education and inclusive leadership. Horizontal and vertical coordination between departments and agencies is a common challenge in the region, despite the existence of cross-sectoral and vertical coordination systems.

Further research is recommended on the horizontal and vertical coordination systems and the extent to which they strengthen disability-inclusive education, and the barriers to effective coordination among key agencies and ministries and ways in which these barriers can be addressed.

²⁴ UNESCO, Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015, http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf.

2. Demand

2.1. Family, community engagement and partnerships

The practice of consulting and involving children with disabilities, their families and caregivers in decision-making processes is limited at the local level and very seldom in national-level policymaking and programming. Moreover, almost all of the countries in the region either have established or have ongoing initiatives to develop coordinating mechanisms that would harmonize efforts towards disability inclusion in education.

2.2. Awareness, attitudes and practices

Negative attitudes and discriminatory practices exist across the region. In the majority of the countries, Communication for Development strategies supported by development partners continue to address these challenges. While education and disability policies and plans embed strategies to raise awareness on and change behaviours towards disability and inclusion, countries are at varying levels of implementation.

Unique country contexts mean different sets of challenges in shifting mindsets. This necessitates strong and comprehensive data on social norms and practices to identify roots of negative attitudes²⁵ and capacitate key stakeholders from government, CSOs/ OPDs, schools and communities to advocate for disability-inclusive education.

3. Service delivery

3.1. Approaches to educating children with disabilities

Education policies are moving towards more equitable and accessible education systems, but implementation can be strengthened. In some countries, contradictory policy provisions exist, where one policy promotes

inclusive education while another endorses segregated systems. Specialized education programmes are still the most common provision for children with hearing and visual impairment and integration in mainstream schools with necessary accommodations are conditional on the level of disability.

Inclusive education programmes are piloted in many countries. However, many children with severe disabilities, especially those who have difficulty travelling to school, continue to learn in isolation, away from their peers without disabilities through home-based learning. Development partners, including OPDs and CSOs, support many inclusive education provisions in the region, including alternative learning pathways for children with disabilities to reach more of them.

3.2. Education workforce development and teacher training

The region is in the initial stages of providing adequate support for teachers to build their capacity for teaching children with disabilities in mainstream settings. Significant initiatives, including curricular reform, supportive policy environments and decentralized approaches to professional development, are signs of progress of the region in supporting teachers' practice of inclusion. However, professional development of teachers in relation to disability-inclusive education still takes a predominantly special education approach rather than an inclusive approach to teaching children with disabilities.

Mainstream teachers need to have continuous professional development opportunities on inclusive education guided by a teacher development framework that integrates principles of inclusion as outlined in CRPD to learn practical and relevant strategies for including children with disabilities in mainstream settings. A

²⁵ UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, Communication for Development Strategic Framework 2018–2021, United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2018.

whole school approach to supporting the needs of children with disabilities, with an emphasis on using special education teachers as a resource for classroom teachers for mainstreaming, needs to be emphasized in policies, strategic plans and teacher development design and implementation.

3.3. School environment and infrastructure

Providing a safe, accessible and responsive learning environment for children with disabilities in South Asia entails strong partnership and collaboration with different agencies and organizations beyond the education sector. Funds, expertise, community partnerships and cooperation of different stakeholders are critical in establishing a school environment that will promote a conducive learning environment for all learners.

In most countries in South Asia, there is recognition of the importance of a safe and inclusive school environment. Safe learning environments include provisions for school-based protection and safeguarding measures, which need improvement. Initiatives to increase the number of schools accessible to children with disabilities are also starting to grow. More work still needs to be done to increase funding and address the lack of expertise on the universal design approach to be able to build accessible schools and classrooms.

3.4. Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

Many countries are taking actions to review and revise the curriculum, as well as establishing systems and frameworks for assessment that will support all learners, including children with disabilities, in achieving desired and intended learning outcomes. The concept of Universal Design for Learning does not appear to be applied as a key principle in the plans of many countries

for developing curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. Similarly, not all countries are explicit in ensuring that all children have the right to access the same curriculum as their peers.

Most national curriculum frameworks are decades old and need to be revisited to identify curricular gaps to achieve quality and equity. This step is deemed necessary by most countries to ensure that education is relevant to all learners, including children with disabilities, as stated in most education sector plans and policies.

A few countries are not paying enough attention to ways in which they can strengthen inclusive practices through guidelines and minimum standards for the implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Others have attempted to create modifications through instructional adaptations to make teaching and learning relevant for children with disabilities while still supporting implementation of the national curriculum.

In the assessment domain, countries have taken actions to balance the use and implementation of formative and summative assessments, and to transition from conventional assessment to assessment for learning as a strategy to improve learning outcomes. Supporting this is the establishment of assessment systems and frameworks at the national level that will provide mechanisms to capture trends in learning outcomes that aim to provide transparent feedback to parents, teachers and school heads.

Ensuring all learners can access the mainstream curriculum, instruction and assessment will lead to inclusive, relevant and quality education for all. As countries

strive to improve the quality of education through curriculum reforms, the role of instruction and assessment must also be seen as equally important. Most countries do include strategies and plans in education sector plans and education policies to improve and update the overall assessment strategy. However, ensuring that key inclusive principles are embedded in curriculum and assessment reform should be a priority for all countries.

3.5. Learning materials

Providing all students with quality learning materials is essential for their participation in school and the wide array of learning materials that supports learning and participation of children with disabilities is a means to provide them with equal opportunities in the same way as their peers without disabilities. Across the region, there is a general lack of accessible learning materials and devices for children with disabilities. In countries where these are made available, access remains limited, especially for children with disabilities living in remote areas.

There is also an absence of flexible and adaptable teaching and learning materials, which is linked to the lack of teacher training on universal design principles as a foundation for developing teaching aids. To provide equal learning experiences to all learners, exploration of the different available learning materials in various formats and platforms and building the capacity of teachers to develop adaptable and flexible teaching and learning materials should be given focus in inclusive education programming.

3.6. Support services for students, parents and teachers

Across the region, international aid organizations, national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), CSOs and communities

continue to be key drivers of inclusive education initiatives and services. Whilst coordination and referral systems at the local level are present, delivery of disability-related interventions by the government and development partners can be further harmonized through a multisectoral coordination mechanism.

In many countries, especially those with geographical challenges, access of children with disabilities to existing mainstream health care services remains limited. This is compounded by families' lack of awareness of disability-related services, limited developmental screening and inaccessibility of early identification and intervention mechanisms.

Access can be improved by building on existing mechanisms such as community-based rehabilitation, early childhood care and development centres and schools. Data collection on the participation of children with disabilities in early childhood education and access to disability-related services should be embedded in programming. A systematic multidisciplinary monitoring system can be developed to review services and programmes for children with disabilities and their families to discover effective ways of working and improve on the delivery of services.

4. Measuring and monitoring quality

4.1. Standards and indicators for inclusion

The integration of standards and indicators into school processes is widely practised in the region and a number of promising practices have been documented. However, the incorporation of inclusive indicators can still be improved by using CRPD as a guide to their development, incorporating these indicators into the standards for all schools and not only special schools. They can be seen as a basis for developmental

improvement based around action learning rather than only as a tool for monitoring.

4.2. Monitoring and quality assurance

Throughout the region, monitoring and quality assurance systems are being established to monitor the country's progress in disability-inclusive education programming. The policy environment supports establishing and strengthening these systems, although the extent to which data are collected for reducing the barriers to education that children with disabilities experience and developing access to and participation in quality education and their integration to institutionalized methods for monitoring vary across the region.

Furthermore, countries are in the process of building/upgrading their systems to harmonize data collection, align with WG definitions and include data measuring the achievement of children with disabilities and the management of barriers to education.

Most countries need to strengthen disability-inclusive education monitoring through expanding the indicators measured to include achievement of children with disabilities and facilitating factors to inclusive education, such as support services available and professional development support teachers and school heads receive on disability-inclusive education.

OPD involvement in monitoring and evaluation and the capacity of key government officials for monitoring and evaluation need to be significantly strengthened across the region.

5. Cross-cutting issues

5.1. Gender

All countries across the region have policy provisions for girls' education. While only

few countries articulate a focus on girls with disabilities in their policies and education plans, some have implemented strategic interventions to address context-specific barriers to girls' education. Further country-level research on structural barriers to girls' education is needed to develop stronger evidence-based interventions addressing deeply rooted drivers of gender inequality in education.

5.2. Humanitarian contexts

Children with disabilities living in humanitarian contexts are at a higher risk of exclusion in education. Humanitarian issues such as emergencies, armed conflicts and protracted crises are aggravated by the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries relied on technology to ensure learning continuity amidst school closures, but the pre-existing digital divide became more glaring. Access to the internet, electronic devices, television and radio is unequal with 40 per cent of disadvantaged learners often left behind. Even when children with disabilities are able to access digital platforms for learning, they are less likely to use them as remote learning programmes rarely consider basic accessibility features.

In South Asia, the particular needs of children with disabilities are considered in six out of eight education response plans to COVID-19. Countries adopted low-tech modalities, adapted the curriculum and learning packages into accessible formats, and provided learning materials and support to teachers and parents to engage children with disabilities.

For emergency response, five out of eight countries have adopted and developed a contextualized Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education, with some having particular focus on children with disabilities.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for governments

1. Strengthen legislative frameworks and increase accountability

by adopting a broader perspective of inclusive education that emphasizes the inclusion of all children with an explicit reference to disability and reflecting this in policies, sector plans and legislative frameworks. Enhance the effectiveness of legislation by eliminating discriminatory language and practices reflective of the medical model of disability, using inclusive language and developing a clear definition of disability and inclusive education aligned to the social model across legal documents.

2. Reach agreed benchmarks for funding education to address inequities by applying a twin-track approach to financing

and allocating adequate resources to address system-wide reforms alongside targeted interventions to meet the needs of children with disabilities in education. Funding must put greater focus on inclusive approaches rather than investing in education in segregated settings.

3. Improve data on children with disabilities.

Definitions and approaches to identifying and measuring disability must be aligned with CRPD. Governments must invest in improving birth registration systems, early identification and data collection systems, and ensure collection of disaggregated data on children with disabilities, including those who are out of school. Data collection needs to go beyond numbers and include the barriers children with disabilities face and the quality of teaching and learning, including learning environments. Persons with disabilities need to be involved in monitoring and evaluation activities.

Relevant ministries (particularly education, health, social protection) need to be oriented on key concepts in disability inclusion to develop awareness on the need for rights-based approaches to identifying disability. Promoting the use of the WG/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning in all data collection initiatives (including censuses, household surveys and EMISs) will enable the generation of more reliable and comparable data.

Inclusive education standards must be incorporated into the standards for school quality and implemented in all schools. Inclusive education must be understood as synonymous to high-quality education for all children and linked to monitoring mechanisms (e.g., EMIS).

4. Apply universal design principles in teaching and learning and school infrastructure.

Supporting capacity building in understanding and implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is one of the most important ways in which governments can enable the transition towards a more inclusive system. UDL is founded on a rights-based approach to education. It provides guidance on making curriculum, instruction, pedagogy and assessment accessible to all learners.

As opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning, UDL provides ways to respond to the needs of learners and address barriers in the curriculum as they emerge.²⁶ UDL must be applied in curriculum design, assessments, pedagogy, infrastructure and design and provision of assistive technology and devices.

5. Strengthen institutional capacity for implementing inclusive education and increase the focus on supporting teachers and raising teacher quality.

The pre-service and in-service curricula for teachers need to

²⁶ UNICEF, *Access to School and the Learning Environment II – Universal Design for Learning*, Webinar 10 – Companion Technical Booklet, United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2014.

be reviewed and aligned with CRPD. Capacity building programmes must adopt a whole systems approach, including strengthening the aptitude of school leaders for instructional leadership and (where they still exist) transitioning the role of special educators to providing inclusive, professional development support to teachers.

Ongoing school-based professional development opportunities must be provided to help develop teachers as reflective and collaborative practitioners, promote action research and facilitate continuous improvement. School-based professional development with an emphasis on coaching and mentoring and collaborative approaches to teacher development, rather than cascade training, needs to be strengthened across the region.

6. Improve coordination across ministries and at all levels of relevant systems.

Sector-wide approach to planning can be leveraged to improve synergy between key ministries and departments. Governments must endeavour to create more opportunities to share experiences, practices and lessons learned within and outside the country. Involving partner organizations (e.g., NGOs, development partners, OPDs and CSOs) in policy and programme development and implementation can help establish common goals and indicators, maximize limited resources, ensure interventions are harmonized and do not duplicate each other, reinforce impact and ensure sustainability.

7. Develop an evidence-based social and behaviour change and communication strategy on which national advocacy and awareness campaigns are to be built. A unified definition of and vision for disability-inclusive education by the government and its partners is imperative in building a national

advocacy and awareness campaign that contains clear messages on a rights-based approach to disability. National advocacy on disability-inclusive education should be supported by policies that facilitate a move towards full inclusion to avoid sending mixed messages (such as advocating for inclusion without clear strategies for moving away from segregated education provisions).

An effective national advocacy and awareness campaign is linked to improved data collection on children with disabilities and comprehensive research on knowledge, attitudes and practices on disability and inclusion in education of all stakeholders at different levels (including families, communities, CSOs, government institutions). Research should explore root causes of negative attitudes and perceptions on disability and inclusive education, which would form a basis for a targeted behaviour change and communication strategy.

8. Include learning continuity for children with disabilities in COVID-19 response and recovery plans and programmes.

Target equitable access and participation of all children, including children with disabilities, to remote learning through employing the principles of UDL and ensuring that teaching and learning materials are delivered through accessible formats for children with disabilities. Provide low-cost and no-tech solutions to bridge the digital divide.

9. Review all new and existing policies and development plans through a gender lens to improve gender equity in education.

A complex combination of economic, cultural, security, health and infrastructure factors affect the non-participation of girls with disabilities in education. Improving gender equity in education will involve active participation of women, gender specialists

and girls and women with disabilities in policy review, planning and development as well as capacity building of government stakeholders at all levels on concepts and issues on gender.

- 10. Set achievable and strategic goals through the use of data and evidence** and work with stakeholders and development partners to identify areas of good inclusive practices that can be built upon. A comprehensive and long-term strategic plan to transition from segregation to inclusion is also recommended.

Recommendations for civil society and development organizations

- 1. Continue advocating for disability-inclusive education and helping ensure children with disabilities are targeted in national laws and policies, sector plans and budgets.** A unified behaviour change and communication strategy can be developed among CSOs, in coordination with the government, to ensure that there are no conflicting messages on rights-based and disability-inclusive education. Initiatives and funding should be channelled into education of children with disabilities in mainstream settings, rather than supporting the expansion of special schools.
- 2. Strategically address the gaps in capacity of the education system and wider community** to implement disability-inclusive education by collaborating with government and aligning professional development programmes to existing frameworks, standards and plans for improving teacher and school leader competency. OPDs and CSOs must also focus on building their

own capacities to plan, deliver and monitor programmes and provide technical advice on inclusive education services.

- 3. Organize professional learning communities** or communities of practice among development organizations to foster knowledge sharing. Effective practices and lessons learned in reducing barriers to education of children with disabilities in one country or region can help in another.

Recommendations for further research

Further research is recommended in the following focus areas:

- 1. Financing and expenditures on disability inclusion** to better inform planning, equitable costing and financing.
- 2. Evidence of policies, programmes and practices** at the national, subnational and community levels that have positive impact on disability-inclusive education.
- 3. Knowledge, attitudes and practices on disability and inclusion** across all levels of society (with focus on root causes of negative attitudes and practices) involving all stakeholders, such as children with and without disabilities, parents, teachers, community, government, CSOs, OPDs, disability service providers and other concerned organizations or agencies.
- 4. Accessibility of curriculum, assessment, learning materials** and school facilities and infrastructure.



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An inclusive education system promotes an accessible learning environment where everyone feels safe, supported, stimulated and able to express themselves.

1

BACKGROUND

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is explicit that education is a fundamental human right anchored on the principles of inclusion.²⁷ The right of all to inclusive education is advocated by a number of international legal frameworks. As outlined in both the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education²⁸ and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),²⁹ all children including children with disabilities have the right to quality education delivered in their local community schools on an equal basis with their peers (CRC, Articles 28 and 29). This was further reinforced by the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) by recognizing for the first time that a significant number of children are excluded in education. EFA called for an inclusive global response to the growing issue of marginalization in education.³⁰

Exclusion in education is multidimensional. This mapping focuses on inclusion of children with disabilities in education. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that disability is the result of the interaction of a person with impairment (physical, mental, sensory or intellectual) and different barriers that hinder full and effective participation in the community on an equal basis with others.³¹ Despite the general progress in educational attainment globally, children with disabilities remain one of the most marginalized groups. They are less likely to participate in and complete their education compared to their peers without disabilities.³²

In South Asia, an estimated 29 million children – 12.5 million at the primary level and 16.5 million

²⁷ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

²⁸ UNESCO, Convention against Discrimination in Education 1960, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 14 December 1960, http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=12949&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

²⁹ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

³⁰ UNESCO, World Declaration on Education For All and Framework for Action to Meet the Basic Learning Needs, adopted by the World Conference on Education For All, Meeting Basic Learning Needs, 5–9 March, Jomtien, Thailand, 1990, www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/UNESCO_World_Declaration_For_All_1990_En.pdf.

³¹ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol, 2006.

³² World Health Organization and The World Bank, *World Report on Disability*, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2011.

at the lower secondary level – were out of school in 2018.³³ Of these, a considerable proportion was estimated to be children with disabilities. A number of South Asian governments and actors³⁴ signed the Global Disability Summit Charter for Change³⁵ in 2018, which embeds inclusive education as a key pillar of action, in line with CRPD Article 24 that requires States parties to ensure inclusive education systems at all levels.

Globally, countries have committed to combat discrimination against children with disabilities in education. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action was the first explicit global commitment to include children with disabilities in mainstream education and clearly articulates

that children with disabilities “should attend the local neighbourhood school, that is the school that would be attended if the child did not have a disability”.³⁶

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, Target 4.5, aims to ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations by 2030 (see Box 1).³⁷

The global community is thus obligated to commit investments in education with indicators specifically targeting children with disabilities.

BOX 1. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 TARGETS

Sustainable Development Goal 4 and its targets and means of implementation aim to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

Target 4.1. Free primary and secondary education

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

Target 4.2. Equal access to quality pre-primary education

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

Target 4.3. Equal access to affordable technical, vocational and higher education

By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

Target 4.4. Increase the number of people with relevant skills for financial success

By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

³³ UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, ‘Out-of-School rates and numbers by SDG region, 2018’, n.d.

³⁴ United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, ‘Governments and organisations signing the Global Disability Summit Charter for Change’, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/783193/Gov-org-igning-global-disability-summit-charter-March19.pdf

³⁵ United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, ‘Global Disability Summit 2018, Charter for Change’, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721701/GDS_Charter_for_Change.pdf.

³⁶ UNESCO, The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, 7–10 June, Salamanca, 1994, pp. 17–18.

³⁷ UNESCO, *Unpacking Sustainable Development Goal 4: Education 2030*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2016, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246300>.

Target 4.5. Eliminate discrimination in education

By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

Target 4.6. Universal literacy and numeracy

By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

Target 4.7. Education for sustainable development and global citizenship

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development

Means of Implementation**Target 4.a. Build and upgrade inclusive and safe schools**

Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

Target 4.b. Expand higher education scholarships for developing countries

By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

Target 4.c. Increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing countries

By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

Source: UNESCO, *Unpacking Sustainable Development Goal 4: Education 2030*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016

Disability-inclusive education implementation requires a shift from a medical to a social model of disability. This involves systemic changes, multisectoral collaboration and meaningful involvement of stakeholders from the government and general public, especially children with disabilities themselves. Table 1 highlights some of the main differences between the medical and social models of disability.

CRPD, specifically, Article 24, strengthened the global shift towards inclusion by mandating States parties to improve education systems and undertake measures to fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities to quality inclusive education.

Children with disabilities have the right to attend their local schools without any form of discrimination. General Comment No.4

Table 1. The medical and social models of disability

	Medical model of disability	Social model of disability
Perception towards persons with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with disabilities are seen as 'patients', as persons with limitations or defects who need to be cured. • Disability is seen as an individual problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with disabilities are seen as citizens with rights and duties. • Disability is considered as a difference among people, in the same way as gender, ethnicity, religion or nationality are differences among people. • The problem is situated within society, not within the individual.
Type of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for persons with disabilities is provided in special and segregated centres where the specialist focuses on rehabilitation and treatment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with disabilities receive support in mainstream services, following universal design principles and adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with disabilities are segregated from their families and community life. • In many countries, quality of care and education is low in special settings and there is high risk for abuse and violence. • The strong emphasis on 'defect' has a negative influence on the self-esteem of persons with disabilities. • This model denies persons with disabilities their fundamental right to grow up in a family and be a full member of society. • It does not address barriers in society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fundamental rights of persons with disabilities are respected. • Diversity is valued in the community. • Disability-friendly services benefit all, with better services to meet people's particular needs.

(GC4) (2016) to Article 24³⁸ further stipulates the provision of reasonable accommodations and adaptations in learning environments that maximizes personal, academic and social development within the mainstream education system. Governments must reform policies, practices and cultures at all levels to successfully include all learners. GC4 also describes core features in inclusive education (see Box 2).

Although the concept of inclusive education has gained popularity internationally among policymakers and government leaders, confusion remains regarding what it means in practical terms.³⁹ Misinterpretation of inclusive education is rooted in the different models of education used in providing education for children with disabilities, such as segregated, integrated and mainstreaming.⁴⁰

³⁸ United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education, 2016.

³⁹ Graham, L. J., and R. Slee, 'Inclusion?' in *Disability & The Politics of Education, An International Reader*, edited by S. L. Gabel and S. Danforth, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2008, pp. 81–99; Rieser, R., et al., *Teacher Education for Children with Disabilities: Literature Review*, United Nations Children's Fund, 2013; Stubbs, S., *Inclusive Education: Where there are few resources*, Oslo, 2008; *World Report on Disability*.

⁴⁰ The World Bank, World Development Report, *Learning to Realize Education Promise*, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2018.

BOX 2. KEY FEATURES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Whole systems approach	All resources provided by ministries of education must be towards inclusive education and towards initiating changes in institutional policies, culture and practices.
Whole educational environment	Educational institutions are committed to introduce and embed culture, policies and practices that would help achieve inclusive education at all levels.
Whole person approach	Inclusive education provides flexible curricula, teaching and learning methods that are adapted to different strengths, requirements and learning styles.
Supported teachers	In an inclusive education system, all teachers and staff are capacitated on competencies and core values that would enable them to implement inclusive learning environments in their classrooms.
Respect for value and diversity	All students are valued, respected, included and listened to, regardless of disability, colour, race, sex, language, religion, political affiliation and ethnicity. Effective measures to prevent any form of abuse and bullying are established.
Learning-friendly environment	An inclusive education system promotes an accessible learning environment where everyone feels safe, supported, stimulated and able to express themselves. All children are involved in building a positive school community.
Effective transitions	Inclusive education ensures that all learners with disabilities are supported to guarantee effective transition from learning at school to vocational and tertiary education.
Recognition of partnership	An inclusive education system recognizes the importance of the relationship between the learning environment and the wider community. Parents, caregivers and the community are viewed as partners that can contribute to implementing inclusive education.
Monitoring	Implementation of inclusive education must be monitored and evaluated regularly to ensure segregation and integration are not being practised. Disability-inclusive indicators should be aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Source: United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education, 2016.



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The study aims to map inclusive education policies, strategies and practices implemented in the South Asia Region that are effective, or promise to be effective, in increasing access and learning outcomes of children with disabilities in education and have the potential for scaling up.

2

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 OBJECTIVES

The United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF ROSA) and country offices are committed to supporting governments increase access to quality and inclusive education for children with disabilities. UNICEF ROSA commissioned a study to:

- map inclusive education policies, strategies and practices implemented at all levels of the education system in the South Asia Region that are effective, or promise to be effective, in increasing access and/or learning outcomes of children with disabilities in education and have the potential for scaling up; and
- inform the development and strengthening of regional and country-level advocacy and programming for advancing disability-inclusive education across South Asia.

2.2 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The mapping covered interventions towards establishing disability-inclusive education initiated at all levels of the education system in eight countries in the region: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In particular, the mapping focused on initiatives implemented from 2010 to 2020, targeted at facilitating the access of children with

disabilities to inclusive pre-primary up to higher secondary education, including vocational training and non-formal provisions.

The mapping endeavoured to include all major programmes led or supported by either the national government, civil society organizations (CSOs) or international development organizations. In countries where a federal system of government was present and where data were available, analysis zoomed in on both the national and subnational levels. Cross-cutting issues that may hinder or cause further exclusion from education, such as gender and humanitarian/emergency situations, were tackled in the analysis as well.

The mapping was influenced by a number of limitations:

- The review was largely dependent on available reports and documents submitted to the research team. Online searches for additional information bridged some gaps, however, there were research questions wherein analysis was limited to the presence or absence of certain strategies or mechanisms and therefore only touched lightly on impact and factors hindering or facilitating effective implementation. An example of this is the area of leadership and management.

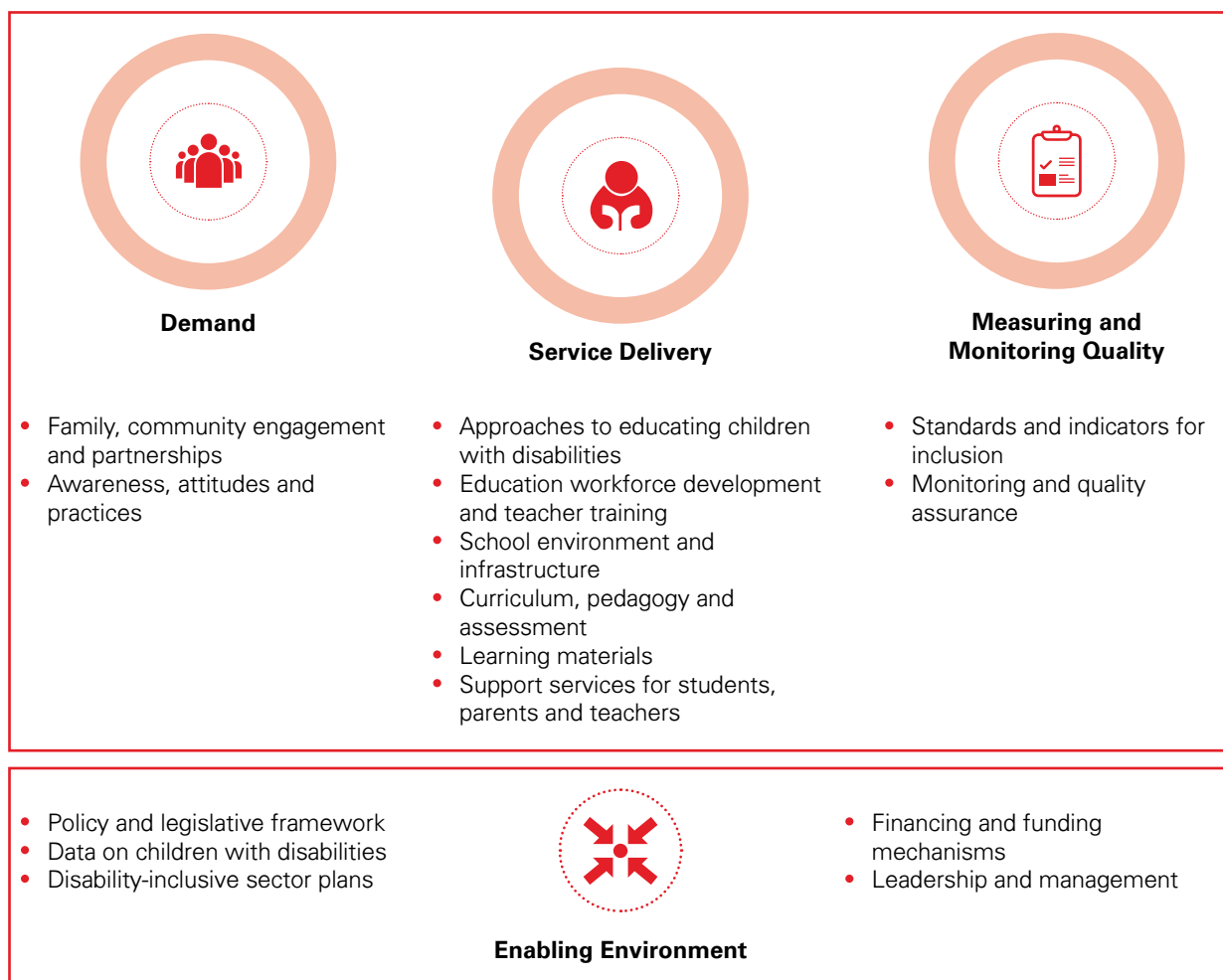
- Some policy documents were not available in English or were in draft form and not available for sharing during the mapping period. To mitigate this limitation, the research team coordinated with UNICEF country offices to gather pertinent information on these specific policies.
- There was insufficient information on disaggregated budgets to draw out spending specific to education of children with disabilities. This dimension will not be discussed extensively in this report, but further research is recommended.
- The analysis of the primary data was affected by contradictions between the perspective of development partners and the government. Validated survey results are referred to in the report.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework was derived from the fundamental features of an inclusive education system articulated in GC4 (2016) to CRPD Article 24 and reflected the key areas for review. The framework conceptualized inclusive education through four main domains: (1) Enabling Environment, (2) Demand, (3) Service Delivery, and (4) Measuring and Monitoring Quality, defined further by 15 dimensions or key change strategies, which were viewed as interrelated where each one facilitated the achievement of the other.

Cross-cutting issues were included in the review to provide an overview of the intersectionality between disability and gender, and disability and humanitarian issues. The framework provided the basis for the main research questions for the study, summarized in Annex A.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the mapping study



2.4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The review employed a mixed methods approach that merged qualitative and quantitative research methods to address the research questions.

While the questions were mostly qualitative in nature, quantitative data sets were collected to establish trends, as deemed relevant. A range of sources of information, data collection methods and tools were used to allow for triangulation and cross-checking of findings.

Evidence of initiatives in including children with disabilities in mainstream education was gathered through the following methodologies:

1. Desk review – Prominent global, regional and country-level literature, statistics, policy and programme documents, strategy papers, major grey literature, peer-reviewed journals, studies and reports on disability-inclusive education were examined to gather secondary data. The research questions guided the structure and focus of the desk review.

2. Online survey – An online, self-administered survey questionnaire was used to collect primary data on the progress of disability-inclusive education implementation at the national/subnational level. The questionnaire (see Annex B) was structured around the domains and subdomains in the theoretical framework and aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of existing interventions and strategies. Key focal persons from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and other relevant ministries, UNICEF and key officials from CSOs/Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) active in the field participated in the survey.

3. Calls with UNICEF country offices – Calls were conducted as needed to validate the findings from the desk review and online survey.

Primary and secondary data collected were analysed through approaches described in Table 2.

Table 2. Approaches in data analysis

Step	Description
Step 1. Organize data	1.1 Consolidate quantitative and qualitative data from desk review, online survey and key informant interviews. 1.2 Where applicable and relevant, disaggregate data by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.2.1 Geographic location/education system units: national, subnational (province, district, school, community level) 1.2.2 Level of education: pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher secondary, vocational training 1.2.3 Type of provision: formal, non-formal 1.2.4 Provider of intervention: government, non-government civil society organizations/Organizations of Persons with Disabilities/international development organizations)
Step 2. Describe data and generate findings	2.1 Undertake content analysis for qualitative data and descriptive analysis for quantitative information to generate emerging themes, trends and patterns in each of the domains and dimensions. 2.2 Triangulate all available data and generate key findings. 2.3 Identify major areas of strength, promising practices, gaps and challenges, lessons learned and potential for sustainability and scaling up.
Step 3. Formulate recommendations	Formulate recommendations based on key findings.



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Disability and general education laws and policies endorse inclusion, but practice focuses on special education and integration.

3

KEY FINDINGS

This section provides an overview of significant initiatives and promising practices in including children with disabilities in education across the region.

3.1 ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The enabling environment includes interrelated conditions that enable or facilitate the development of a disability-inclusive education system, including policies, disability data, plans, leadership, coordination and financing.

3.1.1 Policy and legislative frameworks

A strong commitment to the education of children with disabilities is evident in the region.

International normative frameworks on the right to inclusive education have influenced paradigm shifts in the South Asia region. CRPD is particularly important as it holds national governments legally accountable to implement and monitor disability-inclusive education. GC4 (2016) to CRPD Article 24 (Right to Inclusive Education) calls for an “in-depth transformation of education systems in legislation, policy, and

the mechanisms for financing, administration, design, delivery and monitoring of education”.⁴¹ Recent legislative reforms across the region have the potential to direct education systems in institutionalizing inclusive perspectives, values and practices.

Significant strides over the last decade are evident as countries attune their efforts with global goals on educating children with disabilities in inclusive settings. Almost all countries have either signed and/or ratified CRC and CRPD (see Table 3).

Bangladesh and India were among the first few countries to ratify CRPD in 2007. Unlike the common practice of most countries of aligning domestic laws and policies prior to acceding to or ratifying a human rights treaty, Bangladesh legally adopted the principles of CRPD first⁴² and pursued national legislative reforms subsequently. However, progress was slow in the years that followed. Bangladesh and India’s initial reports to CRPD were not submitted until 2017⁴³ and 2015,⁴⁴ respectively. Bhutan is yet

⁴¹ General comment No. 4 (2016), para 9.

⁴² Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Initial report submitted by Bangladesh under Article 35 of the Convention, due in 2010, United Nations, 2018.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ National Disability Network and National Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Parallel Report of India on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2017.

Table 3. Status of ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in South Asia Region

Country	CRC Ratification	CRPD Ratification
Afghanistan	1994	2012
Bangladesh	1990	2007
Bhutan	1990	No action
India	1992	2007
Maldives	1991	2010
Nepal	1990	2010
Pakistan	1990	2011
Sri Lanka	1991	2016

to ratify the treaty, but the National Policy on Persons with Disability 2019 is highly aligned with CRPD.

The Global Disability Summit (GDS) put a spotlight on disability inclusion in 2018 and called for global and national commitments to accelerate results for persons with disabilities. Across the world, 170 sets of pledges were made by national governments, multilateral organizations, CSOs and the private sector around four key themes (ensuring dignity and respect for all; inclusive education; routes to economic empowerment; harnessing technology and innovation), two cross-cutting themes (women and girls with disabilities; conflict and humanitarian contexts) and data disaggregation.⁴⁵

By 2019, a total of 968 commitments were reported in the GDS18 one-year progress report.⁴⁶ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan were among the 350 signatories to the Summit's Charter for Change.⁴⁷ Nepal recorded the highest number of individual commitments

globally with a total of 50 commitments.⁴⁸ Among the significant progress made in Nepal was the enactment of the Compulsory and Free Education Act in 2018, which prohibits the rejection of children with disabilities in general education and holds the government accountable for ensuring children with disabilities learn in mainstream schools.⁴⁹

In Bangladesh, GDS18 amplified the advocacy work on disability rights. India committed to 22 action points (six from government and 16 from CSOs) and was the only country where there was a convergence among the commitments made by the government, civil society and private sector.⁵⁰ Although a number of commitments were made by CSOs in Pakistan, there was no commitment articulated by the government. Nevertheless, disability inclusion continued to move forward, signified notably in the approval of the Islamabad Capital Territory Rights of Persons with Disability Bill in 2020, which is highly attuned with CRPD. If the bill is approved by parliament, it will be the first disability law in the country.

⁴⁵ United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, Global Disability Summit 2018 – Summary of Commitments, 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/731878/Global-Disability-Summit-Summary-Commitments_2.pdf.

⁴⁶ Equal International, *Global Disability Summit: One Year On Accountability Report*, International Disability Alliance, UKaid and United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2019, www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/gds18-one-year-on-report.pdf.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Table 4. Examples of commitments made by South Asian countries at the Global Disability Summit 2018

Country	No. of commitments	Example of key commitments to inclusive education	Example of progress made
Afghanistan	1 (by government) ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an independent government department for persons with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From functioning under the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, the State Ministry for Martyrs and Disabled Affairs was promoted to a separate ministry in 2019.
Bangladesh	13 (8 by government, 5 by civil society organizations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empower Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to have a stronger voice in shaping the policies that affect them. Undertake a comprehensive disability survey to generate a more detailed understanding of disability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OPDs use GDS18 commitments to strengthen advocacy on the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.^b The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 adopted the Washington Group of Questions in gathering child disability data.
Nepal	50 (7 by government, 43 by civil society organizations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pass or formulate new or revised laws for disability rights. Adopt new systematic policies, action plans or strategies for disability inclusion. Develop inclusive sector policy and plans. Expand teacher capacity building and training on inclusive education. Support inclusive social protection systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Compulsory and Free Education Act was passed in 2018. The Central Bureau of Statistics commits to use the Washington Group Short Set Questions in the upcoming national census. A disability-inclusive education sector analysis is underway that will inform the next education sector plan. The Approach Paper and Roadmap for the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nepal has been drafted to provide a conceptual framework and practical guidance for the implementation of disability-inclusive education. The new Social Protection Act of 2018 has provisions for the social protection of persons with disabilities.

^a International Disability Alliance, 'Commitments, Afghanistan'.

^b Equal International, *Global Disability Summit: One Year On Accountability Report*, International Disability Alliance, UKaid and United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2019.

Guaranteeing the right to education in the constitution is the highest protection countries can afford children with disabilities.⁵¹

Education is expressly stated as a fundamental “right of all citizens/children” offered free and compulsory up to a certain level in the constitutions of seven out of eight countries. In Bhutan, although not explicitly mentioned as a ‘right’, education is to be provided free by the state up to the 10th standard (Article 9, paras. 15–16, Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2008).

All countries ensure non-discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, tribe, economic condition, language and other similar grounds. Notably, only Maldives in its 2008 constitution specifically prohibited discrimination on the basis of “mental and physical disability” (Article 7a).⁵² Explicit articulation of education as a fundamental human right for all and non-discrimination on the ground of disability in constitutions is critical as it shapes formulation of laws and policies. Future amendments to constitutional frameworks must guarantee these are adequately provided for.

Disability and general education laws and policies endorse inclusion, but practice focuses on special education and integration.

The right of children with disabilities to learn in inclusive settings is enshrined in most disability and general education laws. This is undermined, however, by existing provisions for education in segregated settings (see Table 5). Where inclusive education is referenced, it is often

promoted alongside and, in some cases, referred to interchangeably as special education or special needs education.

Across the region, legislative frameworks on disability are beginning to be attuned with CRPD, although in varying degrees. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) of India and the Act for Protecting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010) of Maldives expressly mandate all educational institutions to provide inclusive education and admit children with disabilities without discrimination. A UNESCO report describes the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) of India to be highly aligned with CRPD.⁵³

Both India and Maldives provide for specific measures to promote disability inclusion, ranging from identification of children with disabilities, provision of reasonable accommodation and individualized support when necessary, capacity development at all levels of the education system, establishment of resource centres, application of universal design,⁵⁴ and provision of appropriate facilities and equipment to eliminate barriers to learning.⁵⁵

Notably, Sri Lanka, in its National Policy on Disability 2003, articulated a shift away from using the term ‘special education’, recognizing that the practice can cause further marginalization and advocated the use of ‘inclusive education’.⁵⁶

Except for Maldives, disability legislation in South Asia continues to promote special education alongside admission to regular schools. Bangladesh’s disability laws prescribe special

⁵¹ Leonard Cheshire Disability (UK), ‘Inclusive Education and Accountability Mechanisms’, background paper prepared for the 2017/8 Global Education Monitoring Report, *Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments*, 2017, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259577>.

⁵² Maldives, Functional translation of the Constitution of Maldives (2008).

⁵³ UNESCO New Delhi, *N for Nose: State of the Education Report for India 2019, Children with Disabilities*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization New Delhi Cluster Office, New Delhi, 2019, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000368780?posInSet=1&queryId=61d8f754-79af-400a-ae81-8b3700e24397>.

⁵⁴ The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) of India defines high support as intensive support, physical, psychological and otherwise, which may be required by a person with benchmark disability for daily activities, to take independent and informed decisions to access facilities and participate in all areas of life including education, employment, family and community life, and treatment and therapy.

⁵⁵ Maldives, Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance (Law No: 8/2010) (2010).

⁵⁶ Sri Lanka Ministry of Social Welfare, National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka, Battaramulla, 2003

Table 5. Approaches to education for children with disabilities based on disability laws and policies

Country/ province	Disability law/policy	Special education	Integration or mainstreaming	Inclusion
Afghanistan	Comprehensive National Disability Policy, 2003	Yes	No	Yes
Bangladesh	Persons with Disability Welfare Act, 2001 Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bhutan	National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2019	Yes	No	Yes
India	Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016	Yes	No	Yes
Maldives	Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance (Law No: 8/2010), 2010	No	No	Yes
Nepal	The Act Relating to Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2074 (2017) ^a	No information available	No information available	No information available
Pakistan	National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002 Islamabad Declaration on Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities, 2006	Yes	No	Yes
Balochistan	Balochistan Persons with Disabilities Act, 2017	Yes	No	Yes
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ^b	No comprehensive disability law/policy	N/A	N/A	N/A
Punjab ^c	No information available	No information available	No information available	No information available
Sindh	Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018	Yes	No	Yes
Sri Lanka	The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28, 1996 National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka, 2003	Yes	Yes	Yes

^a The Act is not available in English, but available reports confirm that it promotes the right of children with disabilities to non-discrimination in education and ensures proper learning support (e.g., Braille, sign language, technological devices). However, it is unclear whether the law endorses learning in mainstream or segregated settings.

^b The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Amendment Act, 2012 (Act No. XVI of 2012) is focused on employment and rehabilitation services.

^c A copy of the Punjab Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, was not available and therefore was not reviewed in this mapping study.

N/A: not applicable

education and the development of a specialized curriculum, if necessary.⁵⁷ The government also endeavours to mainstream children with disabilities in regular classrooms, wherever possible.⁵⁸ At the same time, children with disabilities are afforded the right to be admitted to any (regular) school.⁵⁹ Similarly, India endorses education in the neighbourhood school as well as in specialized school settings.⁶⁰

More recent general education laws and policies expressly mentioned inclusive education, following the language of CRPD and SDG4.

Disability laws and policies seem to be more definitive in promoting inclusive education for children with disabilities than general education legislation. Nonetheless, all countries mandate the provision of free and compulsory education for all children through their general education laws and policies.

Explicit mention of inclusive education and equitable access is found in more recent education legislative frameworks (see Table 6). Bhutan’s Draft National Education Policy 2019 commits the government to provide free quality and inclusive basic education (Policy Statement 7.1) and institutes measures to facilitate equitable access and participation in school for all children, including those with disabilities. This includes “specialized support, appropriate educational services and facilities, and trained personnel” (Policy Statement 7.13).⁶¹ No direct reference

to special education was made in the policy. In practice, however, the existence of special educational needs programmes contradicts the emphasis on inclusive education.

In India, the National Education Policy 2020 reaffirmed the provisions in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) regarding inclusive education, which gives children with benchmark disabilities an option to attend a regular or a special school. The policy advocates a broader inclusion perspective and aims to achieve learning for all, particularly addressing the exclusion of socio-economically disadvantaged groups⁶² from early childhood education to higher education.⁶³

At the same time, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act (2009) is in force in India. One criticism of the RTE Act is its silence about specific provisions to support children with disabilities in schools, such as reasonable accommodations and assistive devices. State-level RTE rules in all states provide for specific interventions for children with disabilities, such as transportation and participation of school management committees in implementing inclusive education. Only 1 out of 29 states referred to special schools.⁶⁴

While inclusion is mentioned in Pakistan’s National Education Policy 2009, it does not provide clear strategies to this end apart from a broad policy action statement on promoting ‘inclusive and child-friendly education’, adoption

⁵⁷ Bangladesh, Persons with Disability Welfare Act 2001 (2001).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Women with Disabilities Development Foundation, *Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act in Bangladesh*, User-friendly booklet, 2013, www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/95795/118013/F51789448/BGD95795%20Booklet.pdf.

⁶⁰ India, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009).

⁶¹ Royal Government of Bhutan, National Education Policy (Draft), Thimpu, 2019, [www.education.gov.bt/wp-content/downloads/publications/publication/National%20Education%20Policy%202019%20\(Draft\).pdf](http://www.education.gov.bt/wp-content/downloads/publications/publication/National%20Education%20Policy%202019%20(Draft).pdf).

⁶² Socio-economically disadvantaged groups can be broadly categorized based on gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), sociocultural identities (such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward castes and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor).

⁶³ India Ministry of Human Resource Development, National Education Policy, New Delhi, 2020.

⁶⁴ *State of the Education Report for India 2019*.

Table 6. Approaches to education for children with disabilities based on general education laws and policies

Country/ province	Education law/policy	Special education	Integration or mainstreaming	Inclusion
Afghanistan	Education Law, 2008	Yes	No	No
Bangladesh	National Education Policy, 2010	Yes	Yes	No
Bhutan	Draft National Education Policy, 2019	No	No	Yes
India	Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) National Education Policy, 2020	Yes	No	Yes
Maldives^a	No education law/policy	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nepal	The Act Relating to Compulsory and Free Education, 2075 (2018) Education Policy, 2019	Yes	No	Yes
Pakistan	National Education Policy, 2017	Yes	No	Yes
Balochistan	Balochistan Education Act, 2014	Yes	No	No
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ^b	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act, 2017	No	No	No
Punjab	Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2014	Yes	No	No
Sindh	Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2013	Yes	No	No
Sri Lanka^c	No education law/policy	N/A	N/A	N/A

^a Maldives does not have a general education law in place.

^b No explicit reference to children with disabilities in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act, 2017.

^c Except for the Compulsory Education Ordinance, 1997, Sri Lanka does not have a general education law or policy in place. A new Education Act was proposed in 2009.

N/A: not applicable

of special measures to include ‘special persons’ in mainstream education, literacy and Technical-Vocational Education programmes (p. 12) and forming a team of specialized teacher trainers (p. 34).⁶⁵

A 2016 research study mentioned that there had been limited commitment in Pakistan to ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities at the policy level in recent years.⁶⁶ In 2017, a new National Education Policy was adopted that gave particular attention to inclusive and special education. The policy aims to expand access to inclusive and special education targeting to bring “50 per cent of all children with disabilities in school by 2025 and create inclusive learning environments in 50 per cent of existing formal education institutions at all levels” (p. 7).⁶⁷

At the provincial level in Pakistan, Punjab’s Free and Compulsory Education Act (2014) promotes non-segregation and prohibits denial of admission to schools.⁶⁸ In practice, however, most children with disabilities receive education in special schools. The Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2013) reiterates the goal of education for all children (aged 5–16 years),⁶⁹ but has no reference to inclusive education or an intention to transition from segregated to more inclusive provisions. A review of the policy recommended a paradigm shift from a charity-based to a rights-based approach.⁷⁰

In Nepal, the Act Relating to Compulsory and Free Education, 2075 (2018), emphasizes the provision of special education for children with

disabilities in a ‘school convenient to them’. The new Education Policy 2019 was adopted to align education management and governance with the new federal structure.

Provision for integration or mainstreaming in regular classrooms is not explicit in general education laws, except in Bangladesh. Inclusion is often conditional on the degree of disability and usually provided for children with mild to moderate disabilities.

Expressly addressing education for children with disabilities, Bangladesh’s National Education Policy 2010 provides options for integration in mainstream schools or enrolment in separate schools, according to the degree of a child’s disability (chapter 18).⁷¹ While the Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act (2013) secured the right of persons with disabilities to non-discrimination and the right to education, it provided a rather narrow definition of inclusive education as education provided only to children with disabilities. The draft National Education Act (2016) is expected to include provisions focused on raising the quality of education through the inclusion of all children in regular schools.⁷²

In Balochistan, Pakistan, the Compulsory Education Act (2014) guarantees free education for all children (aged 5–16 years), however, it is conditional on abilities. Children with physical or mental disability are allowed to attend special education (Article 3).⁷³ Implementation of the Islamabad declaration in the province has had little success due to the lack of pre-service

⁶⁵ Pakistan Ministry of Education, National Education Policy 2009, Islamabad, 2009, https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/pakistan_national_education_policy_2009.pdf.

⁶⁶ Singal, N., ‘Education of Children with Disabilities in India and Pakistan: Critical analysis of developments in the last 15 years’, *Prospects*, vol. 46, 2016, pp. 171–183, doi.org/10.1007/s11125-016-9383-4.

⁶⁷ Pakistan Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, National Education Policy 2017, Islamabad, 2017, www.academia.edu/37854462/NATIONAL_EDUCATION_POLICY_2017_BY_Ministry_of_Federal_Education_and_Professional_Training_Government_of_Pakistan%20https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2017/national-education-policy-2017-2025-6414.

⁶⁸ UNESCO, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER): Pakistan, 2020, <https://education-profiles.org/central-and-southern-asia/pakistan/~inclusion>.

⁶⁹ Pakistan, Sindh, The Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2013).

⁷⁰ Ali, S., *Policy Analysis of Education in Sindh*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011.

⁷¹ Bangladesh Ministry of Education, National Education Policy 2010, Dhaka, 2010, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/02.National-Education-Policy-2010-English.pdf>.

⁷² Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

⁷³ Pakistan, Balochistan, Balochistan Compulsory Education Act (2014).

training on special education, limited teaching staff, inadequate facilities and low enrolment rates.⁷⁴

Specific policies dedicated to advancing inclusive education are in place in Afghanistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Apart from blanket statements granting education for all, three governments have adopted or drafted a dedicated policy on inclusive education that creates a stronger policy direction for governments and stakeholders.

- Afghanistan's Inclusive and Child-Friendly Education Policy 2014 aimed to make all schools inclusive and child friendly, and responsive to the learning needs of all children. It challenged exclusion and embraced diversity and called for the government, schools and communities to combat the exclusion of children from mainstream education.⁷⁵ The policy underlined the central role of an inclusive curriculum in developing schools that can support all learners by providing room for flexibility and adjustments to diverse needs, abilities and learning styles.⁷⁶
- In Maldives, an Inclusive Education Policy was adopted in 2013 and revised in 2020 to explicitly address the exclusion of vulnerable groups of children in education. These children are referred to as "children with complex learning profiles" or "learners in school contexts described as having a combination of impairments affecting communication, cognition, mobility, socio-emotional regulation, learning, sensory processing and challenging behaviour".⁷⁷

The new policy promotes the principles of inclusion and equity that would require use of the language of student diversity and education for all learners. It uses the term 'students with complex learning profiles' to define children with disabilities and aims to move away from the medical model.

- Sri Lanka drafted a National Policy on Inclusive Education in 2009. It is geared towards the creation of a positive environment for all learners through the process of inclusive education and provision of equal access to quality and relevant education and training for children with disabilities and special needs.⁷⁸ The policy focuses on identifying and eliminating barriers to education; enhancing early identification and intervention; providing and promoting the use of technology in teaching and learning, specialized facilities, services and assistive devices; and strengthening the capacity of teachers and essential service providers, among other objectives aligned to the vision of an inclusive education system.

The conceptualization of disability and inclusive education varies across contexts.

The conceptualization of disability varies across contexts as it is a "complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon".⁷⁹ The evolution of perceptions of persons with disabilities has influenced how education systems approached education delivery. From objects of pity to being patients who need medical intervention, notions of persons with disability have evolved towards a rights-based view wherein they are seen as rights holders and active decision-makers in their own lives (see Box 3).⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Khan, A. S., *Policy Analysis of Education in Balochistan*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Islamabad, Islamabad, 2011.

⁷⁵ Afghanistan Ministry of Education, *Inclusive and Child-Friendly Policy*, Kabul, 2014, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Carrington, S., et al., *Deliverable 1 The Existing Inclusive Education Policy and Inclusive Education Strategic Plan in the Republic of Maldives: Review and recommendations*, Queensland University of Technology, 2019.

⁷⁸ Sri Lanka Ministry of Education, *National Policy on Inclusive Education (Draft)*, Battaramulla, n.d.

⁷⁹ The World Bank, *Every Learner Matters: Unpacking the learning crisis for children with disabilities*, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2019.

⁸⁰ Al Ju'beh, K., *Disability Inclusive Development Toolkit*, CBM, 2017.

BOX 3. EVOLVING NOTIONS OF DISABILITY

The **charity model** focuses on the individual and tends to view persons with disabilities as victims, or objects of pity, their impairment being their main identifier. They are seen as recipients and beneficiaries of services. This approach sees persons with disabilities as passive, tragic or suffering and requiring care. It assumes that it is the responsibility of the community and society to arrange all services for these vulnerable people.

The **medical model** also focuses on the individual and sees disability as a health condition, an impairment located in the individual. It assumes that addressing the medical ailment will resolve the problem. In this approach, a person with a disability is primarily defined as a patient, in terms of their diagnosis requiring medical intervention. Disability is seen as a disease or defect that is at odds with the norm and that needs to be fixed or cured.

The **social model developed** as a reaction against the individualistic approaches of the charitable and medical models. It focuses on society and considers that the problem lies with society, that due to barriers, be they social, institutional, economic or political, persons with disabilities are excluded. This approach focuses on reforming society, removing barriers to participation, raising awareness and changing attitudes, practice and policies.

The **rights-based model** is based on the social model and shares the same premise that it is society that needs to change. This approach focuses on equity and rights and looks to include all people equally within society: women and men, girls and boys, regardless of background or any type of characteristic. It is founded on the principle that human rights for all human beings are inalienable and that all rights are applicable and indivisible. It takes the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as its main reference point and prioritizes ensuring that duty bearers at all levels meet their responsibilities. This approach sees persons with disabilities as the central actors in their own lives as decision-makers, citizens and rights holders. As with the social model, it seeks to transform unjust systems and practices.

Source: Al Ju'beh, K., Disability Inclusive Development Toolkit, CBM, 2017.

In parallel, a movement from organizing segregated learning environments to creating more inclusive settings has become evident in global development goals. The CRPD definition of disability shifted the focus away from the person's impairment and towards reforming society, transforming cultures, policies and practices to eliminate barriers to participation and enable full inclusion of persons with disabilities (see Box 4). GC4 (2016) to CRPD Article 24 has set out an internationally accepted definition of disability and inclusive education.

Despite the convention, disability and inclusive education are defined differently across the South Asia region.

According to national laws and policies, half of the countries define disability based on a medical perspective (see Table 7). Notably, three countries have adopted the CRPD definition, while India has references to both medical and social models in the same policy document. Moreover, legal documents continue to use terminologies to refer to children with disabilities

BOX 4. DEFINITION OF DISABILITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ACCORDING TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (CRPD)

Persons with disabilities are “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (Article 1, CRPD).

Inclusive education is a “transformation in culture, policy and practice in all formal and informal educational environments to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers that impede that possibility. It involves strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It focuses on the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance and achievement of all students, especially those who, for different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalized. Inclusion involves access to and progress in high-quality formal and informal education without discrimination. It seeks to enable communities, systems and structures to combat discrimination, including harmful stereotypes, recognize diversity, promote participation and overcome barriers to learning and participation for all by focusing on the well-being and success of students with disabilities. It requires an in-depth transformation of education systems in legislation, policy, and the mechanisms for financing, administration, design, delivery and monitoring of education.” (para. 9, General Comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24, CRPD)

Source: Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities, 2006; Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education, 2016.

that are offensive and disrespectful to the dignity of children (e.g., dumb, children belonging to a backward class, handicapped). Using inclusive, person-first language⁸¹ is fundamental in crafting inclusive policies.

The majority of countries promote a broad philosophy of inclusive education, which encompasses all children, particularly those who are marginalized, and not only children with disabilities. While some of these countries have identified specific groups of marginalized children in policy documents, this signals an expansion of the conceptualization of inclusive education as synonymous to, rather than separate from, high-quality education for all (see Table 8).

Summary

Legal frameworks set the foundation for achieving inclusion in education.⁸² In South Asia, there is a growing commitment to ensuring children with disabilities are afforded their right to high-quality education on an equal basis with others. All countries ensure non-discrimination of any kind on the grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, tribe, economic condition, language and other similar grounds. Notably, Maldives in its 2008 constitution specifically prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability. Out of eight countries, six conceptualizes inclusive education as a process of removing barriers to learning for all children, especially those who are disadvantaged, not only for children with disabilities.

⁸¹ The language used to describe persons with disabilities is important as it is about fundamental respect for the integrity and dignity of persons with disabilities. The use of ‘people/persons with disabilities’ is known as ‘people first’ language. It is based on the need ‘to affirm and define the person first, before the impairment or disability’. It is the preference in many developing countries and the language used by CRPD. For more information, see Al Ju’beh, Disability-Inclusive Development Toolkit.

⁸² Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

Table 7. Definition of disability based on laws and policies in South Asian countries

Definition of disability	No. of countries	Countries
Social model	3	Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives
Medical model	4	Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
Has reference to both	1	India

Table 8. Definition of inclusive education based on laws and policies in South Asian countries

Definition of inclusive education	No. of countries	Countries
Broad (covers multiple marginalized groups)	6	Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan
Disability-focused	2	Bangladesh, India

The right of children with disabilities to learn in mainstream schools is enshrined in most disability and general education laws. This is undermined, however, by existing provisions for education in segregated settings and mainstreaming in regular classrooms without sufficient support to make teaching and learning accessible. Afghanistan and Maldives have adopted national policies dedicated to advancing inclusive education, providing stronger legal bases for creating inclusive learning environments for all children.

Existing legislative frameworks, although some remain faithful to the medical model, lay the groundwork for successive changes to emerge. Countries need to align definitions with CRPD and eliminate provisions in current laws and policies that promote segregation, and in practice, gradually transition special schools into resource schools for inclusive education.

3.1.2 Disability-inclusive sector plans

Children with disabilities are often invisible in sector plans, largely due to the absence of accurate data on disability prevalence, the

barriers they face and the lack of knowledge on responsive and disability-inclusive sector planning.⁸³ This makes the deliberate inclusion of children with disabilities in national strategic plans imperative so that governments can address needs and barriers systematically, allocate resources equitably and prompt stakeholders to work together towards common goals.

Education Sector Plans (ESPs) in South Asian countries were analysed to determine the extent to which disability inclusion is addressed (see Table 9). The criteria used by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in its 2018 stocktake⁸⁴ of ESPs and GPE-funded grants were adopted for this section of the mapping, which include:

- (1) Commitments on the rights to education of children with disabilities.
- (2) Definition of inclusive education and/or disability.
- (3) Statistics on the number of children with disabilities and clear articulation of their needs and barriers.
- (4) A clear and prioritized strategy/plan for increasing access to and quality and monitoring of education for children with disabilities.

⁸³ UNICEF, 'Children and Young People with Disabilities Fact Sheet', 2013.

⁸⁴ Global Partnership for Education, 'Disability and Inclusive Education: A Stocktake of Education Sector Plans and GPE-Funded Grants', Working Paper no. 3, Washington, D.C., 2018, www.globalpartnership.org/content/disability-and-inclusive-education-stocktake-education-sector-plans-and-gpe-funded-grants.

- (5) Focus on training and capacity building of key stakeholders with the provision of in-classroom support.
- (6) Acknowledgement of the role and importance of parental support and community awareness.
- (7) Illustration of financing for the plan proposed.
- (8) Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including improvements in data and other information.
- (9) Inclusion of children with disabilities in education response plans to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸⁵

All ESPs in the region, except for India that does not have an ESP, address the rights of children with disabilities, although the focus is mainly on expanding special education and mainstreaming in regular classes.

All ESPs reviewed have reference to goals pertaining to education for all children, including children with disabilities. Most countries align overarching goals for sector development with SDG 4, as well as monitoring and evaluation frameworks with SDG indicators. Bringing more children with disabilities to school is a common aim of the ESPs.

A clear definition of disability and/or inclusive education was not found in any of the ESPs, however, this does not mean strategies for increasing access, participation and learning outcomes of children with disabilities are absent in the plans. General principles of inclusion and equity in education are almost always espoused throughout the sector plans.

A major observation that is consistent with the findings in the review of laws and policies is the apparent focus on strengthening special education while promoting mainstreaming of children with disabilities in regular classes and enhancing the capacity of schools and teachers to accommodate all learners. The criteria on

capacity building and parent and community engagement are addressed in the plans mostly in general terms, pertaining to improving education overall and not necessarily for children with disabilities alone.

ESPs across the region underscore the lack of data on disability.

Only 4 out of 10 ESPs reviewed included some form of statistics on child disability, often drawn from the results of Education Sector Analyses (ESAs). Data are limited to estimated disability prevalence, enrolment, number of special education centres and number of teachers in special education programmes. Others such as those cited in Bangladesh included some known barriers to education such as “limited facilities and inaccessible infrastructure, absence of accessible transportation, negative attitudes of the family, teachers and community”.⁸⁶

The challenge in establishing reliable and disaggregated data on child disability is apparent in all ESAs and ESPs. (See also section 3.1.3 Data on children with disabilities)

All countries with an ESP recognize teacher development as a key intervention to raise the quality of education.

Supporting the professional development of teachers in special and/or inclusive education is a key priority found in all ESPs. (See also section 3.3.2 Education workforce development and teacher training). In Nepal, learner-centred and active learning approaches, formative assessment and differentiation in learning are key training topics identified as priorities. Nepal’s School Sector Development Plan aims to institutionalize a compulsory module on inclusive education to prepare pre-service teachers to cater to diverse needs in the classroom. In Punjab, Pakistan, teachers will be trained in managing inclusive classrooms and provided ongoing support through communities of practice.

⁸⁵ This criterion was added to include a brief assessment of South Asian governments’ responsiveness to COVID-19 in relation to the educational needs of children with disabilities.

⁸⁶ Bangladesh Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Program Document: Fourth Primary Education Development Program, Dhaka, 2018, p. 8.

In some countries, equity issues in education such as disability inclusion are addressed through specific strategic plans.

Nepal’s Consolidated Equity Strategy 2014 is an innovative approach in systemically addressing inequities in education. The strategy provides an overarching framework for inclusion and equity in education focused on establishing equitable access, participation and learning outcomes. Disability is given particular attention along with other drivers of inequity, such as social-economic status, gender, geographic location, caste and ethnicity, health and nutritional status, language and certain vulnerable groups.⁸⁷ The strategy is operationalized by the Equity Index, which measures inequities in learning opportunities.⁸⁸

Sri Lanka’s Inclusive Education (IE) Plan 2019–2030 articulates five key areas in disability-inclusive education: policy, curriculum development, human resources development, infrastructure development and awareness of inclusive education.⁸⁹ Early on, models for implementing changes in school cultures, classroom practices and provision of appropriate support had been introduced in the Framework of Action for Inclusive Education 2009.⁹⁰ For example, the framework directs in-service advisers to work together with special needs units and special school teachers to provide support to teachers and school leaders in building their capacities in meeting the needs of all children in regular classrooms.

Most education response plans to the COVID-19 pandemic explicitly includes children with disabilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable groups of children such as those with disabilities. The reliance on remote learning solutions without reasonable accommodations and necessary adaptations are not likely to benefit children with disabilities who

often lack access to assistive devices, internet connectivity and distance learning platforms.⁹¹

With the exception of Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, all countries explicitly addressed children with disabilities in education response plans to the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments made use of available learning delivery modes such as digital (internet, mobile phones, radio and television broadcasting) and printed learning packages to mitigate learning loss during the pandemic. Some plans are more responsive than others in providing targeted support to address specific needs of children with disabilities. (See also section 3.5.2 Humanitarian contexts)

Summary

All countries articulate commitments in Education Sector Plans to fulfil the right of children with disabilities to education, although implementation strategies mainly focus on special education and mainstreaming in general classes. The broad goals indicated in sector plans of most countries follow the language of SDG 4 and its specific targets. Bringing more children with disabilities to school is a common aim of the ESPs.

Only 4 out of 10 ESPs included some form of statistics on child disability, often drawn from the results of Education Sector Analyses. Data are often limited to estimated disability prevalence, enrolment, number of special education centres and number of teachers in special education programmes. The needs of children with disabilities are considered in the education response to COVID-19 plans of seven countries.

On the whole, sector planning can be strengthened by clearly articulating a twin-track approach to disability inclusion wherein plans are geared to make general education programmes inclusive and accessible to all learners, while at the same time identifying interventions aimed to address specific learning needs of children with disabilities.

⁸⁷ Such as children exposed to violence, exploitation and abuse, cultural practices and child labour.

⁸⁸ Nepal Ministry of Education, Consolidated Equity Strategy for the School Education Sector in Nepal, Kathmandu, 2014, www.doe.gov.np/assets/uploads/files/47441f6a3f1e62dedb7bb91655b8df92.pdf.

⁸⁹ Sri Lanka Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education Plan Sri Lanka, Battaramulla, n.d.

⁹⁰ Sri Lanka Ministry of Education, Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka, Battaramulla, 2009.

⁹¹ The World Bank, *Pivoting to Inclusion, Leveraging Lessons from the Covid-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities*, The World Bank Group and Inclusive Education Initiative, Washington, D.C., 2020.

Table 9. Disability inclusion in Education Sector Plans in South Asian countries

Country	Education Sector Plan and COVID-19 Response Plan	Extent of disability inclusion								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Afghanistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Education Strategic Plan 2017–2021 Alternate Education Service Delivery: COVID-19 Emergency Plan, March 2020 	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fourth Primary Education Development Program COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan: Education Sector, May 2020 	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bhutan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014–2024 COVID-19 Response Plan for Ministry of Education: Parts 1 & 2, March–April 2020 	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
India (No national education sector plan in place)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Response to COVID-19 	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes
Maldives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maldives Education Sector Plan 2019–2023 Maldives Education Response Plan for COVID-19, May 2020 	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Sector Development Plan 2016/17–2022/23 COVID-19 Education Cluster Contingency Plan, March 2020 	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 9 (continued)

Country	Education Sector Plan and COVID-19 Response Plan	Extent of disability inclusion								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Pakistan	• National Education Response and Resilience Plan for COVID-19	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes
Balochistan	• Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2020–2025	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	• Education Blueprint 2018–2023	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes*
Punjab	• Punjab Education Sector Plan 2019/20–2023/24	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*
Sindh	• The School Education Sector Plan and Roadmap for Sindh 2019–2024	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*
Sri Lanka (No national education COVID-19 response plan)	• Education Sector Development Framework and Programme 2013–2017	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	N/A

Legend

1. Commitments on the rights to education of children with disabilities.
2. Definition of inclusive education and/or disability.
3. Statistics on the number of children with disabilities and clear articulation of their needs and barriers.
4. A clear and prioritized strategy/plan for increasing access to and quality and monitoring of education for children with disabilities.
5. Focus on training and capacity building of key stakeholders with the provision of in-classroom support.
6. Acknowledgement of the role and importance of parental support and community awareness.
7. Illustration of financing for the plan proposed.
8. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including improvements in data and other information.
9. Inclusion of children with disabilities in education response plan to the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Based on National Education Response and Resilience Plan for COVID-19.

N/A: not applicable

3.1.3 Data on children with disabilities

Lack of data render children with disabilities invisible, but emerging methodologies show promise.

A critical bottleneck in inclusion is the systemic dearth of data on disability. Articles 31 and 33 of CRPD call for appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to evaluate the impact of inclusive education policies on learners, the education system and wider societal development.⁹² Reliable and disaggregated statistical data are crucial because (1) they highlight gaps in educational opportunities and outcomes among learner groups and identify groups of learners at risk of being left behind, and (2) governments are able to develop evidence-

based policies and monitor implementation and results.⁹³

Globally, disability prevalence rates differ substantially⁹⁴ and inconsistencies are not unusual.⁹⁵ Among many factors, discrepancies are often attributed to the lack of a uniform definition of disability and, consequently, varying methodologies in identifying, measuring and collecting disability data. In response to this persistent challenge, the UN Statistical Commission established the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG) in 2001. The Washington Group developed a short set and an extended set of questions aligned with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (see Box 5) for use in surveys and censuses (see Box 6).

BOX 5. INTERNATIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF FUNCTIONING, DISABILITY AND HEALTH

- The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) is the World Health Organization's framework for health and disability. It is a universal classification of disability. It is named as such because of its stress on functioning, rather than on disability.
- Traditional disability terminology conceptualizes disability as a problem belonging to a person. It does not take into consideration the barriers in the environment. Inclusive education is about creating enabling environments. Descriptions of disabilities, therefore, need to provide information on how this can be done.
- ICF goes beyond medical and social models and provides a more meaningful framework to understand disability. As a framework, it provides a language to describe disability in the context of environmental facilitators and barriers. ICF describes situations of people, not people themselves. It provides definitions for the components of functioning and disability, but it does not prescribe or dictate who is normal and who has or does not have a disability.
- Functioning and disability are understood as the result of complex interactions between biological, psychological and social factors. ICF offers a common language to study the dynamics of these components and their consequences and therefore a basis to understand levers to improve the life situation of persons experiencing disabilities.

Source: World Health Organization, 'Towards a Common Language for Functioning, Disability and Health: ICF', World Health Organization, Geneva, 2002.

For more information: <https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/international-classification-of-functioning-disability-and-health>.

⁹² 'Inclusive Education and Accountability Mechanisms'.

⁹³ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

⁹⁴ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries', Information Paper No. 49, 2018, <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/ip49-education-disability-2018-en.pdf>.

⁹⁵ *World Report on Disability*.

BOX 6. WASHINGTON GROUP OF QUESTIONS

- The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG) designed the question sets to provide comparable data cross-nationally for populations living in a great variety of cultures with varying economic resources.
- The Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning, finalized in 2016, covers children between 2 and 17 years of age and assesses functional difficulties in different domains, including hearing, vision, communication/ comprehension, learning, mobility and emotion.
- To better reflect the degree of functional difficulty, each area is assessed against a rating scale. The purpose is to identify the subpopulation of children who are at greater risk than others of the same age or who are experiencing limited participation in an unaccommodating environment. The set of questions is intended for use in national household surveys and censuses.
- WG then developed a separate set of questions for children in the 2–4 age group and children in the 5–17 age group. The WG questions do not provide a diagnosis of disability. It provides an indicator of what children may have or may be at risk of developing certain types of disabilities.

Source: UNICEF, Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning, 2017.

For more information: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-disability/module-on-child-functioning>.

The short set focuses on six functional domains and activities: seeing, hearing, mobility, cognition, self-care and communication. The resulting tool, however, did not reflect developmental disabilities among children. Hence, the Module on Child Functioning was developed by WG and UNICEF in 2016 to better assess the degree of difficulty experienced by children. The module consists of a questionnaire for children aged 2–4 years and 5–17 years.⁹⁶

The lack of and difficulty in collecting accurate and comparable data on children with disabilities are evident across South Asia. Definitions and data collection methods differ, thus there are no comparable data sets to establish reliable

statistics. The three main types of instruments for data collection on persons with disabilities are population censuses, surveys and administrative data and registries.

Birth registration is critical in safeguarding the rights of children with disabilities.

One in three children in South Asia has never been registered and less than half of those registered have a birth certificate.⁹⁷ Almost half of all unregistered children are from India. In Afghanistan, among children aged under 5 years, only 29.5 per cent had been registered.⁹⁸ The right to be counted is advocated by the SDGs (Target 16.9). Providing legal identity for all safeguards children's civil, political and social rights.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

⁹⁷ UNICEF, *A Snapshot of Civil Registration in South Asia*, United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2018.

⁹⁸ Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, *Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016–17*, Kabul, 2018.

⁹⁹ *Snapshot of Civil Registration*.

Table 10. Adoption of the Washington Group of Questions in population censuses

Country	Census report	Responsible agency	Frequency	Includes data on children with disabilities	Adopted CFM or WG Short Set of Questions
Afghanistan	Population and Housing Census	Central Statistics Organization	Every 10 years	No information available	No information available
Bangladesh	Population and Housing Census 2011	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics	Every 10 years	Yes	No
Bhutan (First census was conducted in 2005)	Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2017	National Statistics Bureau	No information available	Yes	Yes
India	India Census 2011	Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner	Every 10 years	Yes	No
Maldives	Population Census 2014	National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure	Every 8 years	No	No
Nepal	National Population and Housing Census 2011	Central Bureau of Statistics	Every 10 years	Yes	No
Pakistan	Population Census 2017	Bureau of Statistics	No information available	No information available	No information available
Sri Lanka	Census of Population and Housing 2012	Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning	Every 10 years	Yes	Yes

CFM: WG/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning; WG: Washington Group on Disability Statistics

The challenge in birth registration of children with disabilities is often compounded by stigma and discrimination and the absence of a systematic identification system. Current practices in some countries are beginning to confront registration issues, particularly for persons with disabilities.

India's Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is establishing a National Database for Persons with Disabilities wherein all persons with disabilities will be issued with a Unique Disability Identity Card. The system is envisaged to increase transparency, efficiency and track the progress of service delivery for persons with disabilities. It should be noted, however, that in the database, identification of disability is based on medical categories.

In Nepal, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare's disability identification (ID) card scheme identifies and classifies persons with disabilities according to the degree of their disability (i.e., 'complete' and 'severe'). Bearing a disability ID entitles a person to receive social security allowances and ensures access to specialized services. In 2017, about 200,000 citizens were issued a disability ID, although an estimated 83 per cent of persons with disabilities nationwide remained excluded. Even so, 30 per cent of those who held an ID did not receive their disability allowances.¹⁰⁰

In both India and Nepal, there is an opportunity to establish a centralized source of uniform information on children with disabilities. Countries can explore how their Education Management Information System (EMIS) can be linked with the disability ID scheme. This will enable the generation of comprehensive profiles of children with disabilities in school and track those who remain excluded in education.

The use of the Washington Group of Questions is an emerging practice and has the potential to address varying ways of measuring disability and provide comparable data across countries.

In almost all countries in the region, the Washington Group of Questions has been introduced in either a recent population census or a national household survey (see Tables 10 and 11). This signals a paradigm shift towards a conceptualization and measurement of disability that is more aligned with the social model.

Disability prevalence rates in the region vary greatly and fall below global estimates.

The most commonly referenced estimates of disability prevalence are reported in the Global Burden of Disease Report. It approximates that 5 per cent to 20 per cent of any population have a disability, while 5.1 per cent and 0.7 per cent of children up to 14 years old experience moderate to severe and severe disability, respectively.¹⁰¹

Due to the lack of comparable data in the region, available data from censuses and national household surveys, although collected using different methodologies over different periods (2010–2019), are presented in Figures 2 and 3. Disability prevalence varies widely ranging from 1.4 per cent to 13 per cent of the total population (see Figure 2). On average, 5.1 per cent of the total population and 7.4 per cent among children aged 0–19 years are living with some form of disability in the region. On the whole, disability prevalence rates in the region fall below global estimates.

Countries that adopted the WG questions reported considerably higher percentages that are closer to internationally referenced prevalence estimates. Whether this can be attributed to the use of the

¹⁰⁰ Holmes, R., F. Samuels and A. Ghimire, 'Nepal's Cash Allowances for Children with Disabilities: A briefing note'. Overseas Development Institute and United Nations Children's Fund, 2018, <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12414.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ *World Report on Disability*.

Table 11. Adoption of the Washington Group of Questions in national surveys

Country	Survey	Responsible agency	Includes data on children with disabilities	Adopted CFM or WG Short Set of Questions
Afghanistan	National Disability Survey in Afghanistan 2005	Handicap International (Humanity & Inclusion)	Yes	No
	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2010–2011	Central Statistics Organization and UNICEF	No	No
	Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan 2019	The Asia Foundation	Yes	Yes
	Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016–2017*	Central Statistics Organization	Yes	Yes
Bangladesh	Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2016–2017	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics	Yes	No
	MICS 2019	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF	Yes	Yes
Bhutan	MICS 2010	National Statistics Bureau and UNICEF	Yes	No
India	National Survey of Household Income and Expenditure 2012	National Council of Applied Economic Research	No information available	No information available
Maldives	Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2017 (conducted every 5 years)	Ministry of Health, DHS Programme, World Health Organization, UNICEF, United Nations Population Fund	Yes	No
	Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2019 (every 3 years)	National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure	Yes	Yes
Nepal	Nepal Living Standards Survey 2010–2011	Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and World Bank	Yes	No
	Nepal MICS 6, 2019	CBS and UNICEF	Yes	Yes
Pakistan	Demographic and Health Survey 2017–2018	National Institute of Population	Yes	Yes
	Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019	ASER Pakistan	Yes	Yes
Sri Lanka	Model Disability Survey 2015	World Health Organization and World Bank	No information available	No information available

Note: MICS is the UNICEF international household survey initiative designed to support countries in collecting and analysing data for monitoring the situation of children and women, <https://mics.unicef.org/>.

*Formerly called the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment. All six activities proposed by the Washington Group were investigated: seeing, hearing, walking or climbing stairs, self-care and remembering or concentrating.

WG questions is difficult to establish because even within a country, national statistics are often inconsistent and have wide discrepancies, largely due to varied approaches used.

For example, in Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016–2017 suggested that 3.2 per cent (294,000 persons) of the total Afghan population had a disability, higher than the estimate from the National Disability Survey in Afghanistan (2.7 per cent) in 2005. The Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan 2019, on the other hand, reported that 79 per cent of the adult population had disabilities¹⁰² – a wide difference from 4.7 per cent found in 2005 by the National Disability Survey. The Model Disability Survey attributed the alarming proportion to the sustained conflicts and violence in the country, among other factors.

Children with disabilities fall behind their peers without disabilities.

The Disability Data Portal Project by Leonard Cheshire Disability and the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office¹⁰³ collated and analysed disability data from 40 countries, including Bangladesh and Maldives. Data sources for the analysis primarily included Demographic and Health Surveys and some national household surveys.¹⁰⁴ The results on education indicators point to a significant gap in completion rates between children with and without disabilities (see Figures 4 and 5). A wide gap was observed in Bangladesh where only 6 per cent of children with disabilities enrolled in school completed primary education, about five times lower than those without disabilities.¹⁰⁵

EMIS upgrades are expected to be more disability inclusive.

All countries collect data on children with disabilities through their respective EMISs,

albeit often limited to enrolment. Data on type of disability or difficulty in functioning, learning outcomes, needs and barriers to learning are largely missing. These limitations can highly impact learning delivery. Participation of children with disabilities and the quality of their learning is influenced not only by impairments, but also the multiple barriers surrounding them in the classroom, within the school and the larger education system.¹⁰⁶ Data collection must therefore contribute to an in-depth understanding of these barriers.

Some EMISs include information on support services provided to children with disabilities. In India, the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+), one of the largest EMISs in the world, covers more than 1.5 million schools, 8.5 million teachers and 250 million children. UDISE+ collects enrolment data along with the availability of accessible facilities, learning materials, assistive technology solutions and teacher profiles (including teachers' disabilities and training related to disability inclusion).

The approaches employed in identifying and measuring disability adopted by governments in EMISs are mostly reflective of the medical perspective. However, positive developments are taking place. In Bhutan and Pakistan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), their EMIS already utilizes adapted versions of the WG questions. The Bhutan EMIS is envisaged to function beyond collecting data on enrolment to provide information on students' learning outcomes, transition, access to infrastructure, facilities and support from professionals, parents and the community. Furthermore, Nepal is currently implementing a pilot project aimed at integrating the WG questions into its EMIS.

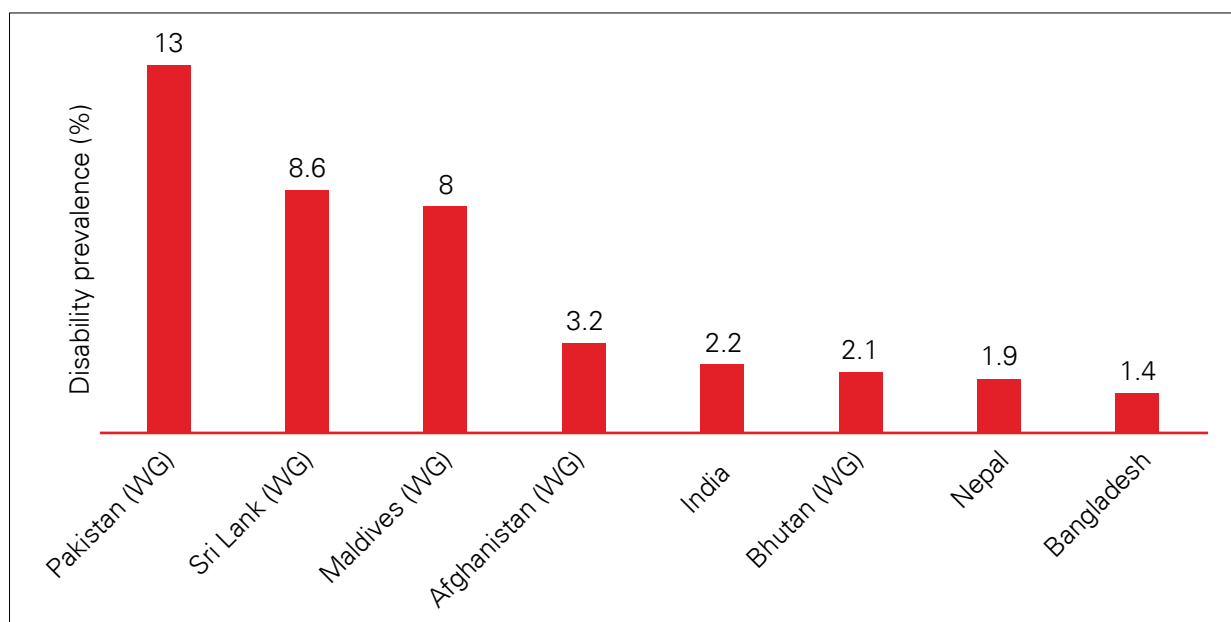
¹⁰² *Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan 2019*, The Asia Foundation, 2020.

¹⁰³ Formerly Department for International Development.

¹⁰⁴ Disability Data Portal, www.disabilitydataportal.com.

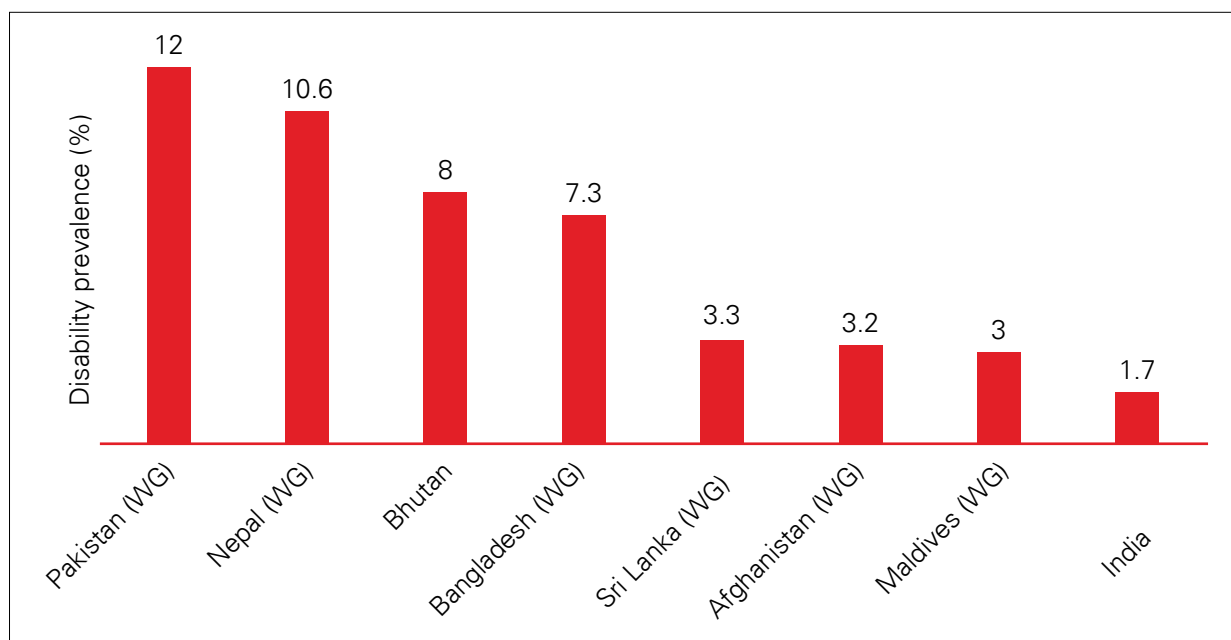
¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ General comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education.

Figure 2. Proportion of population with disabilities in South Asia (%)

Note: (WG) identifies countries with disability data collected using the Washington Group questions.

Source: Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016–2017; Population and Housing Census of Bangladesh 2011; Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2017; Census of India 2011; Household Income and Expenditure Survey of Maldives 2019; Census of Nepal 2011; Demographic and Health Survey of Pakistan 2017–2018; Census of Population and Housing of Sri Lanka 2012.

Figure 3. Proportion of children with disabilities (0–19 years) in South Asia (%)

Note: (WG) identifies countries with disability data collected using the Washington Group questions.

Source: Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016–2017; Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019; Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2017; Census of India 2011; Nepal MICS 6 2019; Demographic and Health Survey of Pakistan 2017–2018; Census of Population and Housing of Sri Lanka 2012.

Figure 4. Primary school completion rate in Bangladesh and Maldives (%)

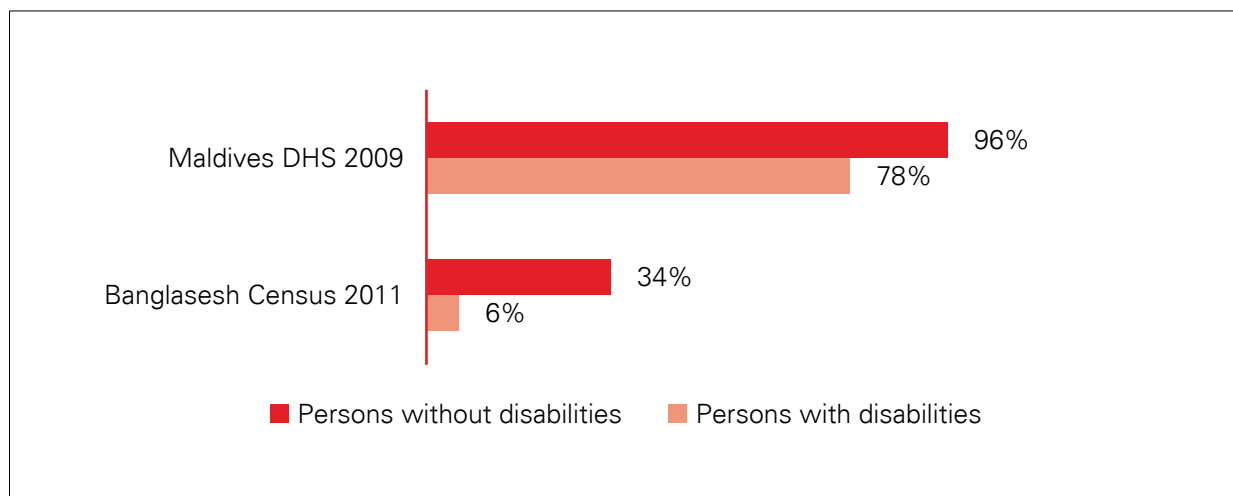
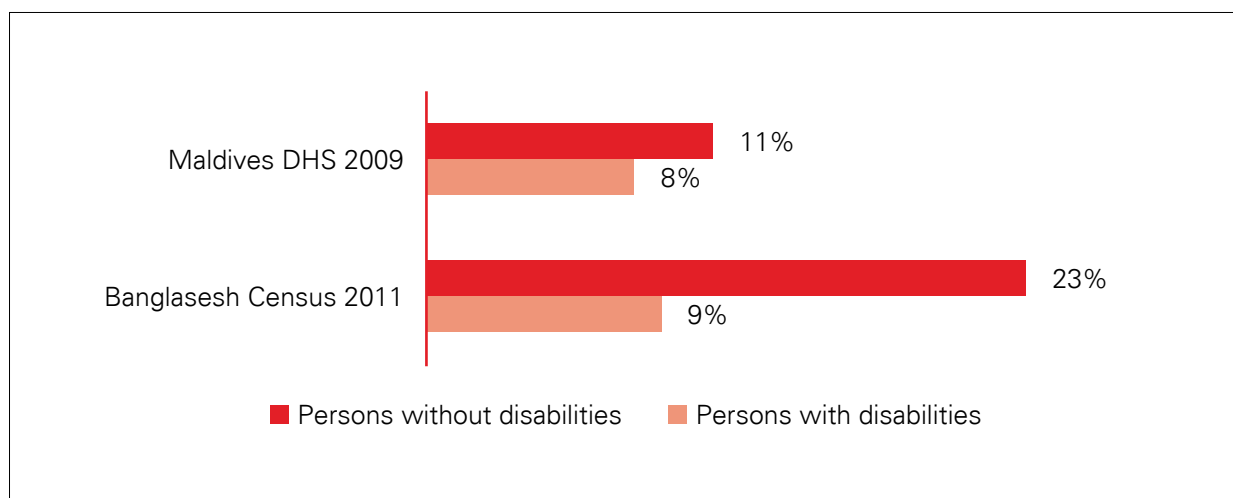


Figure 5. Secondary school completion rates in Bangladesh and Maldives (%)



The commitment to enhance disability data is evident in the majority of the countries. For example, in Maldives, ESP as well as the revised IE Policy aim to strengthen its EMIS to track the progress of learners with disabilities based on the goals set in Individual Education Plans (IEP) and curriculum outcomes. Currently, the Department of Inclusive Education is developing tools to collect data focused on the functional abilities of children with disabilities.

Summary

The alignment between identification and data collection methods is crucial in establishing reliable and comparable data. While initiatives are ongoing in making children with disabilities more

visible, challenges remain as statistics often vary widely. Across the region, disability prevalence rates vary greatly ranging from 1.4 per cent to 13 per cent among the total population and 1.7 to 12 per cent among children aged 0–19 years. Varying definitions and approaches to identifying and measuring disability result in unreliable and incomparable data sets.

The introduction of the Washington Group of Questions and WG/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning in censuses, national surveys and EMISs in some countries is a positive development that can support ongoing improvements in identification of disability, data collection, monitoring and quality assurance. The

Table 12. Disability data in the Education Management Information System (EMIS) of South Asian countries

Criteria ^a	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan		Sri Lanka
							Balochistan	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	
1. Contains data on students with disabilities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Approach to identifying disability									
a. Use of Washington Group set of questions to identify disability	No	No	Yes	No	No	No ^b	No	Yes ^c	No
b. Identified only by 'disability' or 'special needs'	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
3. Level of data collection									
a. Pre-primary	No	No	No information available	Yes	Yes	Yes	No information available	No information available	No information available
b. Primary	Yes	Yes	No information available	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
c. Secondary	Yes	Yes	No information available	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Data collected									
a. Participation (enrolment, dropout, completion)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
b. Learning outcomes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Table 12 (continued)

Criteria ^a	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan		Sri Lanka
							Balochistan	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	
c. Type of disability/functional difficulty	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
d. Degree of disability/functional difficulty	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
e. Barriers to education at the school level	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
f. Children with disabilities who are not in school	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
5. Disaggregation available									
a. Sex	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
b. By definition of disability/functional difficulty	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
c. Geographical location	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
d. Type of institution (government/private)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No information available	Yes

Note: As there was very limited information available on the EMIS of Punjab and Sindh, Pakistan, data on these provinces are not included in this summary. According to the Government of Punjab, Program Document of Education Sector Implementation Grant for Punjab, Pakistan, 2020, disability data are collected in the Punjab EMIS. No further information on this was found in the mapping.

^a Criteria adapted from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'The use of UIS data and education management information systems to monitor inclusive education', Information Paper No. 60, 2019. ^b A pilot project integrating WG questions into EMIS is being conducted.

^c An adapted version of the WG short set of questions including the 6 domains of functioning. The degree of difficulty asked is only 2 levels: 'some difficulty' and 'cannot do at all'. Source: Pakistan Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Elementary & Secondary Education Department, Education Management Information System (EMIS) School Census Questionnaire (2019-20), 2019.

adoption of the WG questions across all data collection efforts will enable the generation of consistent and comparable data.

Initiatives to strengthen existing systems should take into account integrating key indicators on the access, participation and learning outcomes of children with disabilities, educational needs, as well as barriers to full inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Governments must invest in improving birth registration systems, early identification and data collection systems and ensure the collection of disaggregated data on children with disabilities, including those who are out of school.

3.1.4 Funding and financing

Inclusive education is beneficial not only for children with disabilities but for society in general because of its returns in social, economic and political aspects. Research findings argue that inclusive education is beneficial for all learners and not only for learners with disabilities. Children without disabilities develop lifelong learning skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and communication skills.¹⁰⁷

On the other hand, the economic argument for inclusive education supports that it is far more cost effective and more efficient than maintaining dual systems of education, especially in low-income contexts. Evidence from low-middle income countries, including India and Nepal, reveals that when investments are directed towards the education of children with disabilities, the economic returns are two to three times higher than those of persons without disabilities.

Evidence from Nepal demonstrates that increase in schooling years for children with disabilities mean higher returns to education for persons with disabilities, ranging from 19.3 per cent to 25.6 per cent.¹⁰⁸ The cost of exclusion is higher as it results in a myriad of problems, such as illiteracy, limited access to and low-paying employment opportunities, unsafe living and working conditions, among others,¹⁰⁹ and is therefore not economically viable¹¹⁰ and limit national economic growth.¹¹¹

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda, signed by 193 countries in July 2015, provides a global impetus for financing SDGs. Endorsed by the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action,¹¹² it highlights the provision of education for children with disabilities in “inclusive and effective learning environments for all” (para. 78). The Agenda commits signatory parties to increase investments and international cooperation, boost gross domestic product (GDP), raise the number of qualified teachers and upgrade inclusive educational facilities and infrastructure.¹¹³ The agreement recommends that governments allocate 4.1 per cent of their total GDP and/or 15–20 per cent of total government expenditure to the education sector.

Most countries in the region are not meeting the required expenditure on education (see Figure 6). In the economic context of South Asia, it is recommended that countries with GDPs that are relatively low compared to global norms will need to hit the upper limits of the recommended benchmarks if they are to effectively accommodate children in disability-inclusive education systems. Additional funding streams focused on children with disabilities should also be sought.

¹⁰⁷ Mitchell, 2009; Greenberg and Nielsen, 2015, as cited in ‘Financing of Inclusive Education’, Background Information Report, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Odense, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Filmer, 2008: 150, as cited in Saebones, et. al., ‘Towards a Disability Inclusive Education’, Background paper for the Oslo Summit on Education for Development, 2015.

¹⁰⁹ UNICEF, 2013a; Mont, 2007, as cited in *#CostingEquity: The case for disability-responsive financing*, Light for the World and International Disability and Development Consortium, 2016.

¹¹⁰ Morgon Banks and Pollock, 2014, as cited in *#CostingEquity: The case for disability-responsive financing*, Light for the World and International Disability and Development Consortium, Brussels, 2016.

¹¹¹ Buckup, 2009, as cited in Saebones, et. al., ‘Towards a Disability Inclusive Education’, Background paper for the Oslo Summit on Education for Development, 2015.

¹¹² Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action.

¹¹³ Meyers, J., et al., *#CostingEquity: The case for disability-responsive education financing*, Light for the World and International Disability and Development Consortium, Brussels, n.d.

Funding earmarked for disability-inclusive education may not always be apparent in financial plans.

There are insufficient data to determine the percentage of education budgets spent on the education of children with disabilities. Some ESPs indicate targeted interventions and outline budget allocation specific to special education programmes. However, the data available are not adequate to come up with conclusions.

Survey results suggest, however, that funding for children with disabilities in all countries is mostly focused on expanding special education programmes without clear articulation of investments being made to make the general education system more inclusive and responsive to diverse learners.

Budget analyses that focus on disability and inclusion will need to examine the extent to which disability and inclusion are embedded in interventions like continuous teacher professional development and textbook and curriculum reforms, and the extent universal design is applied to school construction, among others.

Summary

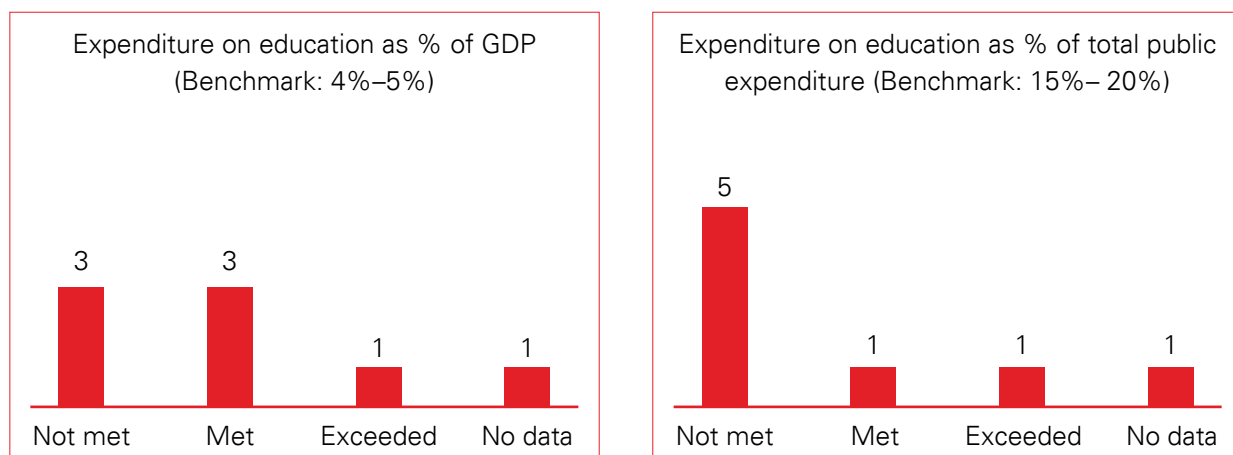
Disaggregated data on budgets and expenditures on the education of children with disabilities are limited in the region, which warrants further study. Evidence from various studies, however, indicates that inclusive education is more cost effective than exclusion. Findings from the region point to the need to redirect the focus to financing inclusive approaches rather than investing in learning in segregated settings.

On the whole, public expenditure on education is below international benchmarks set by the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. Governments are urged to apply a twin-track approach to financing and allocate adequate resources to address system-wide reforms alongside targeted interventions to meet the needs of children with disabilities in education.

3.1.5 Leadership and management

Inclusive leadership and management play a key role in the development of an education system supportive of inclusive education. Leadership within the different levels of the education system influences the extent to which inclusive education policies are implemented¹¹⁴ from the national level to the school level.

Figure 6. Number of countries in South Asia meeting international benchmarks on expenditure on education



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Sustainable Development Goal 4 Country Profiles, n.d.

¹¹⁴ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

At the school level, school leadership is essential in creating a school ethos that promotes a sense of well-being and belonging among members of the community,¹¹⁵ as well as developing and strengthening policies, culture and practices that improve teaching and learning and support the development of all students.¹¹⁶

This section looks at the extent to which leadership and management are supportive of inclusion in the education systems by examining evidence for the practice of inclusive leadership and governance and coordination systems supporting the development of inclusive education in schools. It also discusses promising practices to support the development of inclusive leadership in education systems within the region.

Vital to the implementation of disability-inclusive education is the integration of disability-inclusive programming into the mandates of key ministries and departments, and the establishment of systems and structures for vertical and horizontal coordination among significant agencies.

Six countries in the region have roles in disability-inclusive education implementation embedded in the mandate of key departments and offices in MoE. In Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, a specialized unit on disability-inclusive education has been developed within the ministry responsible for education to develop, implement and monitor disability-inclusive education programmes.

Furthermore, in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the role of key departments and ministries such as health, social welfare and justice in supporting disability-inclusive education has been articulated in major policies. The actual implementation and provision

of a coordinated cross-sectoral approach to facilitating disability-inclusive education remain a challenge across the region.

Policies across the region articulate a cross-sectoral committee responsible for joint decision-making on matters related to disability inclusion. Policies set out a system or a structure for cross-sectoral coordination of relevant ministries, such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Justice, in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. For example, in Afghanistan, both the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled¹¹⁷ (later the State Ministry for Martyrs and Disabled Affairs) and the National Disability Commission¹¹⁸ were mandated to lead the coordination of activities within the disability sector and policy development.

In India, the Central Advisory Board on Disability is the national advisory body facilitating policy development and coordination of activities that uphold the rights of persons with disabilities. The board is chaired by the Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment and composed of representatives from Ministries or Departments of Social Justice and Empowerment, School Education, Higher Education, Women and Child Development, and Health and Family Welfare, among others. Each state government is also mandated to establish a State Advisory Board on Disability to serve as the advisory and coordinating body on disability matters at the state level.¹¹⁹

However, most of the inter-ministerial bodies work within a broader mandate of disability inclusion and their role in jointly working towards ensuring that all children, including children with disabilities, have access to and participate in equitable and quality education is

¹¹⁵ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

¹¹⁶ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

¹¹⁷ Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, *Disability Rights in Afghanistan*, Stockholm, 2014.

¹¹⁸ Afghanistan Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled, *The Comprehensive National Disability Policy*, Kabul, 2003.

¹¹⁹ India, Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), <http://legislative.gov.in/actsofparliamentfromtheyear/rights-persons-disabilities-act-2016>.

not comprehensively articulated in most policies. Nepal and Afghanistan are exceptions as an inter-ministerial committee has been established in both countries for inclusive and special education.

The Nepali government established a Special Education Council in 1973 responsible for implementing the special education curriculum and the management and control of special education institutions and schools. The council is chaired by MoE and representatives from the Ministries of Finance, Women, Children and Social Welfare, National Planning Commission and National Disabled Federation participate.¹²⁰ The Inclusive Education Section of the Department of Education serves as the secretariat of the Special Education Council and is responsible for implementing inclusive education policies, coordinating with key departments and strengthening knowledge and skills of the workforce on inclusive and special education.¹²¹

In Afghanistan, the Inclusive and Child-Friendly Coordination Working Group Committee was established in 2008. The committee, co-chaired by UNESCO and MoE with membership from key development partners, including OPDs, worked towards improving inclusive education in the country¹²² and led many significant reforms. The effectiveness of existing cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms is an area needing more in-depth research.

Vertical coordination mechanisms strengthen inclusive education implementation.

Mechanisms for vertical coordination facilitate implementation of inclusive education by promoting sharing of data and information relevant to disability-inclusive education programming, appropriate distribution of funds to local governments and coordinated implementation of programmes and policies.¹²³

All countries in the region have a system for vertical coordination in place for special education and five were identified to have vertical coordination units specifically for strengthening inclusive education (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka). Even though the extent to which inclusive models of education are practised varies across the region, the education of children with disabilities in most countries falls within the mandate of the ministry responsible for education (see Table 13).

Even though education delivery to children with disabilities is within the mandate of MoE and vertical coordination mechanisms are available, the extent to which the system supports the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream settings still varies as education systems go through the process of shifting towards a more social model of disability.

In Sri Lanka, vertical coordination systems for inclusive and special education aim to strengthen the capacity of the system to provide adequate and responsive support for children with disabilities. The education of persons with disabilities falls within the mandate of the Non-Formal and Special Education Branch of MoE, which is responsible for the policy implementation of education delivery for persons with disabilities.

At the provincial level, the Provincial Education Office provides in-service training to teachers on special and inclusive education and a special education director supports education delivery for children with disabilities in a province. The Zonal Education Office is responsible for overseeing the management of special education units and ensuring the provision of requisite equipment and resources.

¹²⁰ Regmi, N.P., *Inclusive Education in Nepal: From theory to practice*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ludwig-Maximilians-University, 2017.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Inclusive and Child-Friendly Education Policy.

¹²³ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

Table 13. Ministries responsible for the education of children with disabilities

Country	Ministry of Education	Ministry/Department of Social Welfare	Ministry of Justice/ Human Rights
Afghanistan	Yes ^a		
Bangladesh	Yes	Yes	
Bhutan	Yes		
India	Yes	Yes	
Maldives	Yes		
Nepal	Yes	Yes ^b	
Pakistan		Yes ^c	Yes
Sri Lanka	Yes		

^a Some children with disabilities were educated in Community Rehabilitation Development Centres, which offered education and rehabilitation services for children with 'developmental/intellectual impairment'. Source: UNESCO Kabul and Afghanistan Ministry of Education, *Needs and Rights Assessment: Inclusive Education in Afghanistan*, 2009.

^b Most special education units and special schools are under the management of MoE; only a few special schools are under the governance of the Social Welfare Council. Source: Regmi, N.P., *Inclusive Education in Nepal: From theory to practice*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ludwig-Maximilians-University, 2017.

^c Education of children with disabilities are under the jurisdiction of departments of social welfare and protection at the provincial level. Source: Pakistan Government of Balochistan, Social Welfare, Special Education, Literacy, Non-formal Education & Human Rights Department, 2020; Pakistan Government of Punjab, Special Education Department, 2020; Pakistan Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Zakat Ushr, Social Welfare, Special Education and Women Empowerment Department; Pakistan Ministry of Human Rights, 2020.

The in-service advisers for special education needs offer support for inclusive education and special education in a province. They are responsible for training teachers in developing learner-centred educational experiences and for coordinating between special education units and schools, with the special education units as an additional resource for schools.¹²⁴

Throughout the region, initiatives and mechanisms to strengthen the capacity of key government officials in inclusive education are implemented, although the type of support and the extent to which the support emphasizes the development of knowledge and skills for disability-inclusive education varies. (See section 3.3.2 for more details on institutional capacity building)

Policy implementation guidelines and strategic plans articulating the role of school leaders in facilitating inclusive education at the school

level are common across the region, although the degree to which they emphasize disability-inclusive education varies. Some policies and guidelines articulate the role of the school leader in improving the quality of education in general, without an emphasis on children with disabilities.

However, in Maldives, the Inclusive Education Strategic Plan clearly articulates the role of school leaders in developing inclusive schools. Examples include supporting inclusion and developing inclusive school policies, values and practices, providing instructional leadership and ensuring continuous professional development opportunities for teachers and support staff, aligned to the principle that inclusive education is quality education for all students.

Collaboration between key stakeholders at the school level provides an opportunity for shared accountability and joint problem-solving, which is a key foundation to inclusive schools.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka.

¹²⁵ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

Most countries in the region have mechanisms supporting school leaders to engage the school community in governance and decision-making.

This is often through the school development planning processes and parent-teacher committees such as the school management committees, although their implementation varies. India, in particular, has proposed the structuring of schools in clusters to be able to share resources and teaching-learning content, support children with disabilities and employ a participative and context-driven method for management and school governance.

The National Education Plan 2020 suggests the formation of a school complex management committee, which decentralizes governance and decision-making to school leaders, teachers, staff and members of the school community as the cluster will be treated as a semi-autonomous unit. Aggregated schools would be able to determine their own goals and identify contextual needs and find innovative responses to issues encountered within the cluster. This governance structure allows for greater autonomy, collaboration, knowledge-sharing and contextual response within a cluster of schools, potentially supporting inclusion and responsiveness to the individual needs of students and includes a participative process of planning and school development within the aggregate of schools.¹²⁶

However, it should be noted that decentralization and aggregation of schools can, in some contexts, have a negative impact unless certain measures are put in place to ensure equity. These could include equity formula funding for schools and clusters, which compensate for localized differences in wealth, ensuring that aggregation of schools does not reduce

local access to school or equitable access to high-quality education environments and establishment of clear equity-based standards for school service delivery.

Inclusive leadership is encouraged when school leaders are provided methods to assess their schools against inclusive and quality standards, identify barriers to education that children experience and find ways to work together with the community in responding to these barriers.¹²⁷

Countries across the region have institutionalized tools for school leaders to engage in a process of reflection, planning and action to achieve equitable education for all. Bhutan has developed a comprehensive set of standards for inclusive education that emphasizes a reflective process for planning and action towards more inclusive school systems. The standards are presented as a set of guidelines and inclusive indicators are presented in a progression, providing school leaders a framework to engage in a continuous process of development towards inclusion.¹²⁸

The Nepal Equity Index is used to assess disparities at the school level and address them through evidence-based planning and resource allocation, and supporting education leaders in developing a more equitable school system for marginalized students, including children with disabilities.¹²⁹

The Maldives School Improvement, Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework engages the school community in a process of self-assessment, planning and strategic action against a child-friendly quality framework founded on inclusive principles. The framework is a method for school improvement founded on the Child-Friendly Baraabar School (CFBS)

¹²⁶ National Education Policy 2020.

¹²⁷ UNESCO, *A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017.

¹²⁸ Bhutan Ministry of Education, *Standards for Inclusive Education*, Thimpu, 2017.

¹²⁹ Price, W., and J. Oostrum, 'Nepal's Equity Index: Innovations in financing to reach the children most in need', Global Partnership for Education and United Nations Children's Fund Nepal, 21 June 2018, www.globalpartnership.org/blog/nepals-equity-index-innovations-financing-reach-children-most-need#:~:text=Nepal's%20equity%20index%20is%20an,%2C%20participation%20and%20learning%20outcomes.

quality framework, which guides teachers, school leaders, school community and MoE in assessing the extent to which practices are reflective of the standards for a quality school.¹³⁰

Summary

Across the region, leadership on inclusion is demonstrated through the development of policies supportive of disability-inclusive education, establishment of cross-sectoral committees for promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and integration of disability-inclusive programming into the mandates of key government ministries and agencies. Furthermore, mechanisms and organizational structures for supporting inclusive leadership are present in countries throughout the region.

However, a common finding is the need to build the knowledge and capacity of leaders across government systems in the region in disability inclusion, rights-based education and inclusive leadership. Horizontal and vertical coordination between departments and agencies is a common challenge in the region, despite the existence of cross-sectoral and vertical coordination systems.

Further research is recommended on the horizontal and vertical coordination systems and the extent to which they strengthen disability-inclusive education, and on the barriers for effective coordination among key agencies and ministries and ways in which these barriers can be addressed.

3.2 DEMAND

This domain focuses on initiatives supporting children with disabilities and their families to improve knowledge on their rights, demand for inclusive services, encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour and increase participation in education. It includes involving the wider community, forging partnerships and putting in place systems and structures to facilitate meaningful engagement.

3.2.1 Family, community engagement and partnerships

One of the core features of an inclusive education system, according to GC4 (2016) of CRPD Article 24, is the recognition of parents, caregivers, school community, OPDs and other formal and informal support organizations as key actors of change. This means that within inclusive schools, systems are in place and operating to encourage direct and active participation of a range of stakeholders in ensuring all children have access to and participate in education.

Policies are facilitative of family and community engagement, but only some countries are able to translate these policies into working mechanisms of coordination.

Across South Asia, education policies articulate the importance of participation of families, caregivers and support organizations, especially OPDs, in planning, developing and implementing disability-related programmes. While most countries have general provisions for involvement and engagement of families of children with disabilities and OPDs in school-level programming and national-level policymaking, other countries like Afghanistan and Bangladesh have operationalized these policies and established active mechanisms of participation and collaboration.

Afghanistan's inter-ministerial and multisectoral Task Force on Disability¹³¹ and the Comprehensive National Disability Policy 2003 established the key roles of parents, caregivers, school community, OPDs and other formal and informal support organizations in developing new inclusive laws and supporting the education of children with disabilities. The Task Force enabled collaboration between representatives from ministries of health, education, labour and social affairs, women affairs, martyrs and persons with disabilities, as well as local and international NGOs and OPDs.¹³²

¹³⁰ Maldives Ministry of Education, School Improvement, Quality Assurance & Accountability Framework, Malé, 2017.

¹³¹ Afghanistan Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled, The Comprehensive National Disability Policy, Kabul, 2003.

¹³² Ibid.

Bangladesh has established similar mechanisms, such as the National Coordination Committee and Inter-ministerial Task Force on Disability Issues, Primary Education Development Program (PEDP) sector-wide approach,¹³³ and the government and non-governmental organization (GO-NGO) cooperation. These networks and coordination mechanisms enable and strengthen coordination between the government and education stakeholders. They facilitate synchronization of implementation, management and monitoring processes of both governmental and civil society institutions and organizations.

The National Coordination Committee, including its five layers of coordination at different levels of government, comprises 28 members formed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, representatives from other relevant ministries and OPDs.¹³⁴ With the outpouring of development budget from various international aid organizations into the country, Bangladesh further formalizes and defines its partnership with development organizations through the GO-NGO¹³⁵ cooperation, which also outlines systems of coordination.

Development partners are key in driving inclusive education initiatives across the region, but initiatives can be better coordinated.

While enabling policies and systems are in place to develop and maintain partnerships with development organizations, OPDs and CSOs, a mechanism to harmonize initiatives of all partners towards inclusion is missing in most countries. Almost all countries either have established or are developing vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms to help ensure programmes and services for children with disabilities promised in legislations are implemented.

School and community-level coordination committees are common as well as inter-ministerial/thematic working groups focused on disability or inclusive education. These coordination groups are composed of parents, students, teachers and administrator at the school level and at the national level, relevant ministries, development partners such as international NGOs, aid organizations, CSOs and OPDs.

To increase efficiency in inclusive education implementation, it is recommended to periodically review and monitor initiatives from various partners and assess whether coordination mechanisms are working. A systematic review of ongoing initiatives and established communication processes will reduce the risk of overlap and contradictory practices and help ensure all initiatives are aligned with national policies and directions.

Although engagement with development partners, OPDs and CSOs is strong in almost all countries in the region, technical capacity on inclusive education remains a concern.

There is little evidence on initiatives to enhance the technical capacity of CSOs, OPDs and other organizations supporting children with disabilities on disability-inclusive education programming. Across the region, the civil society community supports and/or leads various initiatives in bringing more children with disabilities to school.

However, evidence suggests that many CSOs and OPDs, across all countries, also support programmes that promote segregated education provisions. For instance, many organizations manage or support special schools for children with hearing and visual impairment, residential schools for children with severe disabilities, or alternative learning programmes (home

¹³³ Asian Development Bank, *Bangladesh: Second Primary Education Development Program*, 2015.

¹³⁴ *Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act in Bangladesh*.

¹³⁵ Bangladesh Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, *Third Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-3) – Revised*, Dhaka, 2015, <https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2015/third-primary-education-development-program-pedp-3-revised-2011-2016-6393>.

or community-based) where children with severe disabilities learn in isolation and are not transitioned to mainstream education.

It is important that all education stakeholders, such as families, governments, development partners, OPDs and other support organizations, working towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in education share the same rights-based definition of disability and are on the same progressive path to inclusion.

There are promising initiatives to include families, caregivers and children with disabilities in decision-making processes at local levels, but there is limited evidence on national-level policymaking and programming.

At the school and community level, almost all countries in the region engage families and caregivers of children with disabilities in their education. This participation varies in degree from being recipients of information as in Bhutan¹³⁶ to providing feedback on school effectiveness such as during School Self-assessment¹³⁷ in Sri Lanka.

In Bangladesh, regular courtyard meetings¹³⁸ for parents created an avenue for capacity building, knowledge sharing and consultation. This gives families a direct and active role in improving access to inclusive education. There are similar mechanisms in Pakistan, such as school councils¹³⁹ in Punjab and parent-teacher school monitoring committees¹⁴⁰ in Balochistan.

Two countries, Bangladesh and Nepal, developed initiatives that promote the active consultation and participation of children with disabilities in addressing issues that involve them.

The Child Forum in Bangladesh,¹⁴¹ composed of children with and without disabilities, enables children to participate in school meetings, community consultations and Union Parishad or local council dialogues to raise awareness on issues that affect them. This form of advocacy has resulted in tangible results such as enrolling out-of-school children with and without disabilities in school and successfully lobbying government officials for budget allocation for education, community-based rehabilitation (CBR) centres and improved infrastructure in schools and community public spaces.¹⁴²

In Nepal, UNICEF supports child-friendly local governance through annual child consultations, called Bal Bhela.¹⁴³ Through this, children from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities, are given opportunities to express opinions and needs to the local councils for consideration in planning and resource allocation. The participants of the Bal Bhela are members of a child club, who regularly represent the voices of children in village child-friendly local governance committees, local-level dialogues, annual reviews and public audits.¹⁴⁴

Summary

At present, the practice of consulting and involving children with disabilities, their families and caregivers in decision-making processes is limited at the local level and very seldom in national-level policymaking and programming. Moreover, almost all of the countries in the region have either established or ongoing initiatives to develop coordinating mechanisms that would harmonize efforts on disability inclusion in education.

¹³⁶ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

¹³⁷ Sri Lanka Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) 2013 – 2017, Battaramulla, 2013.

¹³⁸ Save the Children, *Mainstreaming Inclusive Education: Sharing good practices*, 2019.

¹³⁹ Pakistan Government of Punjab, Punjab Education Sector Plan 2019/20 – 2023/24, 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Mujahid-Mukhtar, E., *Situation Analysis of the Education Sector*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Pakistan, n.d.

¹⁴¹ *Mainstreaming Inclusive Education*.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ UNICEF Nepal, *UNICEF Annual Report 2014, Nepal*, Kathmandu, 2014, www.unicef.org/about/annualreport.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

3.2.2 Awareness, attitudes and practices

Attitudes and practices in relation to children with disabilities and inclusive education are evolving around the world. In South Asia, policies and plans on education and disability are embedding strategies to raise awareness and demystify disability and inclusion to initiate positive change in behaviour towards children with disabilities.

As knowledge about educating children with disabilities is developing, mindsets are shifting towards a more positive perspective of disability. In the process of changing attitudes and behaviours, however, there are remaining negative attitudes and discriminatory practices around the region that development partners in most countries are consistently working to address.

Most countries include disability awareness raising in their policy framework, and in more than half of the countries, this is leading to strategic communication plans on disability-inclusive education.

Education and disability policies and plans in all countries in the region include strategies or general provisions to raise awareness on disability and increase access to education of children with disabilities. UNICEF has been leading communication for change and development across the region.

UNICEF ROSA has developed a Communication for Development (C4D) Strategic Framework. It identifies strong practices, opportunities for building capacity of UNICEF country offices, focus areas and ways forward in C4D programming in the region.¹⁴⁵ To help address negative attitudes and behaviour towards disability and inclusion in education, communication strategies should have clear and explicit focus on disability. At present, few

countries have existing communication strategies focused on disability inclusion.

More than half of the countries in South Asia have developed¹⁴⁶ or are in the process of developing¹⁴⁷ a national communication strategic plan focused on raising awareness and advocating for disability-inclusive education and inclusive social change. UNICEF country offices are supporting these efforts with technical input.

Afghanistan, with UNICEF support, was drafting a National Communication Plan for Social Change focused on disability-inclusive education. Bhutan's MoE partnered with UNICEF in developing a C4D strategy and action plan, which includes the development of communication and campaign materials to address issues on social norms and gaps in knowledge on disability.¹⁴⁸

In Maldives, UNICEF and Care Society developed a social and behaviour change communication strategy, through which communities on six islands were engaged to improve inclusion of children with disabilities in education and address prevailing negative attitudes and behaviour towards them.¹⁴⁹ Multiple communication tools were utilized, such as video spots, posters, social media engagement and direct community engagement. These interventions led to increased school attendance and improved physical accessibility of schools and communal facilities.¹⁵⁰

In Pakistan, the Second Punjab Education Sector Programme requires School Education Departments to include strategies on attitudinal changes towards children with disabilities in the Strategic Communications Plan.¹⁵¹ The Punjab Inclusive Education Project contributes

¹⁴⁵ Communication for Development Strategic Framework 2018–2021.

¹⁴⁶ Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan.

¹⁴⁷ Afghanistan and Bhutan.

¹⁴⁸ UNICEF Bhutan, 'Executive summary', *Country Office Annual Report 2019, Bhutan*, Thimpu, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ UNICEF Maldives, *UNICEF Annual Report 2017 – Maldives*, Malé, 2017.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Pakistan Government of Punjab, School Education Department, *Second Punjab Education Sector Programme (PESP II): Inclusive education strategy 2019–2024*, Mott Macdonald Cambridge Education, 2019.

to these efforts by implementing awareness-raising activities on the right of children with disabilities to learn alongside their peers without disabilities.¹⁵²

In Bangladesh, as part of the UNICEF C4D strategy on building institutional capacity, the country office has helped the Directorate of Primary Education to develop a communication strategy to address prevailing attitudes and practices on the education of vulnerable children.¹⁵³

Following this communication strategy, the Primary Education Development Program, also supported by UNICEF¹⁵⁴ and other development partners, included a communication and social mobilization component to raise awareness on disability and inclusion and promote positive attitudinal and behavioural change.¹⁵⁵ PEDP-3 included research, multisectoral capacity building, communication materials development, awareness building through sports and cultural events¹⁵⁶ and strong collaboration with the media.¹⁵⁷

UNICEF developed the Meena audiovisual communication package on the education of children with disabilities¹⁵⁸ and has highlighted children with disabilities and their experiences in mainstream media. The programme was aired on national radio where radio presenters acted as the popular cartoon characters Meena, Mithu and Raju. They interacted with children all over Bangladesh and shared issues affecting their lives.¹⁵⁹

Strengthening research and evidence base can improve C4D programming.

The UNICEF ROSA C4D strategic framework recognizes the challenges in C4D programming in South Asia and acknowledges that country offices are at different capacity levels, working in complex and diverse settings. The unique country contexts warrant creative strategies and solutions that involve comprehensive evidence base and analyses.

The C4D strategic framework outlines eight pillars for C4D behaviour and social change programming.¹⁶⁰ Two of the pillars focus on strengthening research, evidence generation and analysis to inform programmes. Countries in South Asia have conducted disability-related research to obtain data on prevailing attitudes, practices and experiences of children with disabilities. Knowledge, attitudes and practice studies were conducted in Afghanistan¹⁶¹ through Save the Children and in Bhutan¹⁶² through UNICEF.

Studies on gaps, opportunities and assessment of inclusive education initiatives and disability-related services were also done in all countries in the region. Knowledge gained from these studies provides vital perspective on the barriers experienced by children with disabilities. UNICEF and the government have, as part of the C4D strategy, developed partnerships with universities and other education institutions to conduct disability-related research.

¹⁵² Second Punjab Education Sector Programme.

¹⁵³ UNICEF Bangladesh, 'Executive summary', *UNICEF Annual Report 2012 for Bangladesh, ROSA*, Dhaka, 2012.

¹⁵⁴ UNICEF Bangladesh, *Situation Analysis on Children with Disabilities in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Third Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-3) – Revised.

¹⁵⁶ Such as the Bangabandhu and Bangamata gold-cup football tournament, inter-school sports, inter PTI cultural competition.

¹⁵⁷ Third Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-3) – Revised.

¹⁵⁸ *UNICEF Annual Report 2012*.

¹⁵⁹ UNICEF Bangladesh, 'Executive summary', *UNICEF Annual Report 2013, Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Communication for Development Strategic Framework 2018–2021.

¹⁶¹ Save the Children International, *Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices on Violence and Harmful Practices against Children in Afghanistan: A baseline study*, Save the Children Afghanistan Country Office, 2017.

¹⁶² UNICEF Bhutan, *Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) Study on Children with Disabilities*, Thimpu, 2017.

Lack of awareness and negative attitudes on disability and inclusive education still exist and unique country-specific belief systems require a specialized approach.

The results of the mapping survey showed that respondents believe that the lack of awareness of (95.45 per cent) and negative attitudes (74.24 per cent) to disability and inclusive education are the main challenges in family and community participation in disability-inclusive education.

Studies conducted in countries around the region have found that prevailing negative attitudes towards children with disabilities compound issues of equity and access to education. In Maldives and Nepal, stigma, discrimination and misconceptions that children with disabilities are liabilities, uneducable¹⁶³ and have little chance for employment¹⁶⁴ still exist.

While awareness campaigns and advocacy programmes have helped improve the general perception towards disability, studies recognize that some people, including those in leadership positions, might still hold these more traditional and negative perceptions.¹⁶⁵ As such, negative attitudes towards children with disabilities continue to affect education planning.¹⁶⁶

In some countries, cultural beliefs may affect participation in school. The perception, for example, that disability is a punishment¹⁶⁷ due to transgressions in their or their parents' past life can contribute to discrimination and bullying.

In another country, the view that persons with disabilities are given 'special' or 'divine' abilities to overcome challenges tries to celebrate achievements of persons with disabilities. However, social activists argue that this view is patronizing and reinforces the charity model of disability. It takes the responsibility away from the government to remove existing barriers.¹⁶⁸

These country-specific challenges require further socio-anthropological research and deeper analysis for a more targeted C4D strategy.¹⁶⁹ Awareness-raising strategies need to demystify disability and inclusive education based on CRPD, communicating clear messages and addressing misconceptions.

It is likely that negative attitudes of teachers towards teaching children with disabilities are rooted in limited pedagogical capacities and knowledge on disability-inclusive education.

A study in Bangladesh revealed that teachers' negative attitudes towards teaching children with disabilities who have high support needs (those who need Braille, sign language or individualized education programmes) were linked to a lack of knowledge and training on disability and inclusion.¹⁷⁰

It has been argued that in India, teachers' negative perceptions towards teaching children with disabilities stem from their lack of capacity to provide appropriate learning environments responsive to the children's diverse needs.¹⁷¹

¹⁶³ Plan International, *Include Us in Education: A qualitative research study on barriers and enablers to education for children with disabilities in Nepal*, 2014.

¹⁶⁴ UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, *Meeting the Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities in South Asia: A gap analysis covering Bhutan and Maldives*, United Nations Children's Fund, Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu 2014.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Dukpa, D. and L. Kamenopoulou, 'The Conceptualisation of Inclusion and Disability in Bhutan', in *Inclusive Education and Disability in the Global South*, edited by L. Kamenopoulou, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72829-2_3.

¹⁶⁸ Singal, N., 'Challenges and Opportunities in Efforts towards Inclusive Education: Reflections from India', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, vol. 23, no.7–8, 2019, pp. 827–840, doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1624845.

¹⁶⁹ Communication for Development Strategic Framework 2018–2021.

¹⁷⁰ Ahsan, T. and U. Sharma, 'Pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with high support needs in regular classrooms in Bangladesh', *British Journal of Special Education*, 2018.

¹⁷¹ Singal, 'Challenges and Opportunities'.

In Nepal, a Human Rights Watch report conveyed that special education teachers lack motivation and awareness on disability and inclusion.¹⁷²

Another factor that could be affecting teachers' attitudes is the growing number of children with disabilities, especially in schools known as 'inclusive schools'. For example, in Changangka Lower Secondary School in Bhutan where the class sizes are above 40 students, it is challenging to make the teaching and learning process inclusive and provide individualized support for children with specific learning needs.¹⁷³

Moreover, while regular teachers are usually respected members of the community, special education teachers are subject to discrimination by their community. The low regard for special education teachers is likely due to the low competency standards and compensation provided by the government.¹⁷⁴ Teachers who are supported through relevant and effective training¹⁷⁵ and are made partners¹⁷⁶ in providing inclusive education are empowered teachers who feel confident and capable of teaching diverse learners. Education leaders need to ensure teachers are supported and opportunities for school-based and ongoing professional development are made available.

Summary

Negative attitudes and discriminatory practices exist across the region. In the majority of the countries, Communication for Development strategies supported by development partners continue to address these challenges. While education and disability policies and plans embed strategies to raise awareness on and change behaviours towards disability and inclusion, countries are at varying levels of implementation.

Unique country contexts mean different sets of challenges in shifting mindsets. This necessitates strong and comprehensive data on social norms and practices to identify roots of negative attitudes,¹⁷⁷ document lived experiences of children with disabilities to demystify disability, and capacitate key stakeholders from the government, CSOs/ OPDs, schools and communities to advocate for disability-inclusive education.

3.3 SERVICE DELIVERY

This domain deals with the availability of and access to various services for children with disabilities and initiatives to strengthen different aspects of the education system.

The right to equitable and quality education of all children is enshrined in CRPD and GC4 (2016) further emphasizes that inclusive education is key to realizing high-quality education for all children, including children with disabilities. GC4 (2016) provides clear definitions of inclusion, integration, segregation and exclusion of children with disabilities in education (see Box 7).

Inclusion in education is defined as a process of systemic transformation of the education system that allows diverse learners to learn together in an environment that is responsive to each of their needs and contexts.¹⁷⁸ This means that in an inclusive education setting, children with disabilities learn alongside their peers without disabilities under the same curriculum and are provided with appropriate accommodation. Across the region, inclusive, segregative and integrated approaches to education of children with disabilities can be seen.

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch, *Futures Stolen: Barriers to education for children with disabilities in Nepal*, 2011, pg. 48, www.hrw.org/report/2011/08/24/futures-stolen/barriers-education-children-disabilities-nepal.

¹⁷³ *Meeting the Educational Needs of Children With Disabilities in South Asia*.

¹⁷⁴ Hunt, P.F., and N. Poudyal, *Education of Children with Disabilities in Nepal: Baseline data 2019*, International Disability Alliance, 2019.

¹⁷⁵ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

¹⁷⁶ Singal, 'Challenges and Opportunities'.

¹⁷⁷ Communication for Development Strategic Framework 2018–2021.

¹⁷⁸ General comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24, p.4.

3.3.1 Approaches to educating children with disabilities

Strong policy commitment, but limited implementation and conflicting education provisions slow down the progress to inclusion.

Education legislations and plans show the commitment of South Asian governments to providing education for children with disabilities. Half of the countries (Afghanistan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka) have inclusive education policies and there are a few (Bhutan and Bangladesh) that have embedded principles and strategies for inclusion in their education plans.

However, governments are at varying levels of institutional capacity in implementing disability-inclusive education. They continue to gradually move towards more equitable systems with the support of development partners in disability and inclusion and as knowledge and attitudes on disability and how children learn are evolving.

Countries try to reach all children with disabilities coming from diverse contexts with varied learning provisions made available to most of them.

Dual education systems are common across the region where governments provide general education and special education programmes in the formal education system. In all eight countries in South Asia, special education is the main provision for children with specific disabilities such as visual and hearing impairments. Mainstream or general education is provided for all other children, within which children with mild to moderate disabilities are integrated (except in Pakistan where there are no integrated schools¹⁷⁹). The integration of children with disabilities is conditional on the level of disability and the capacity of schools to provide appropriate support.

In Bangladesh, the National Education Policy 2010 notes that many children with disabilities

BOX 7. EXCLUSION, SEGREGATION, INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION ACCORDING TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- **Exclusion** occurs when students are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to education in any form.
- **Segregation** occurs when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular impairment or various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities.
- **Integration** is a process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as the former can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions.
- **Inclusion** involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organization, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion. Furthermore, integration does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion.

¹⁷⁹ 'Disability and Inclusive Education: A Stocktake of education sector plans and GPE-funded grants'.

can participate in mainstream education settings with some accommodations but children with severe disabilities will be provided special education services.¹⁸⁰ In Nepal, despite the Inclusive Education Policy 2017 espousing rights-based quality education for children with disabilities, integration is provided to only those who have the potential to be placed in the general class after 2–3 years in separate classes.¹⁸¹ Those with more severe disabilities are placed in special education schools and are not expected to eventually integrate with the general education population.¹⁸²

Most governments are piloting inclusive education programmes, albeit on a limited scale, and are largely supported by development partners. The Bangladesh National Plan of Action II endeavours to have all vulnerable school-aged children (aged 3 to 5 for pre-primary and 6+ to 10+ for primary), including those with disabilities, enrolled in school and completing primary education in government schools.¹⁸³ The government began implementing inclusive education in schools. The Directorate of Primary Education under the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education implements inclusive education in all regular primary schools where all head teachers were given training on inclusive education under the PEDP-II programme.¹⁸⁴

Plan International Bangladesh supported the government's inclusive education agenda through the development of an inclusive education model. The project called Developing a Model of Inclusive Education in Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh involved pilot inclusive education programmes in five upazilas (subdistricts).¹⁸⁵

In Pakistan, while there is no inclusive education policy yet, the government has conducted interventions on disability-inclusive education. The Punjab Inclusive Education Project¹⁸⁶ implemented pilot inclusive education programmes in 955 government and private schools focusing on children with mild disabilities in seven districts: Attock, Chakwal, Jehlum, Lahore, Multan, Rawalpindi and Vehari.

Pilot programmes in government schools were managed by the Special Education Department while those in low-cost private schools were led by the Punjab Education Foundation. The pilot programme involved teacher training, provision of assistive devices, financial support to schools and infrastructure development.

Following the learnings from this project, the Punjab IE strategy was developed. It utilized the WG/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning in identifying target children with mild to moderate disabilities. The strategy uses a whole systems approach to inclusive education and focuses on improved access and education quality for all children. The strategy does not only focus on children with disabilities, but also on other vulnerable groups in recognition of the various barriers to education that children face.¹⁸⁷

Alternative paths to education were established to give children with disabilities more opportunities for learning. However, without clear plans to transition to inclusion, initiatives risk promoting segregation.

Alternative provisions for educating children with disabilities in diverse contexts are made available by almost all countries in the region. Most of these initiatives are conducted in collaboration

¹⁸⁰ National Education Policy 2010, p. 51.

¹⁸¹ *Include Us in Education*.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO, *Report on EIU situation in Bangladesh*, Ministry of Education, 2013.

¹⁸⁴ Sightsavers, *Situational Analysis of Education of Children with Disabilities in Bangladesh*, 2015.

¹⁸⁵ Asian Centre for Inclusive Education, *Mapping of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh: Identification of good practices*, Save the Children International, CBM International Bangladesh and Disabled Rehabilitation and Research Association, 2019, <https://zeroproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Revised-Final-Report-of-IE-Mapping-Study1.pdf>.

¹⁸⁶ Second Punjab Education Sector Programme.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

with governments and local communities and supported by development organizations. Education delivered through CBR programmes are common in many of the countries.

The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan built schools and supported existing community-based education (CBE) in providing education to children with disabilities.¹⁸⁸ It also provided inclusive education training for teachers, home school/coaching classes, support for mainstreaming students and technical support to transition from CBE to formal schools. Children with physical disabilities who had difficulty in mobility were enrolled in regular schools, but received education and rehabilitation services at home through CBR programmes.¹⁸⁹

In Nepal, children with disabilities and other vulnerable children and youth who are not able to access formal education systems are catered to by non-formal education centres through the Non-Formal Education Policy 2007.¹⁹⁰ The non-formal education centres conduct literacy, technical and skill training, and awareness-raising activities for children and youth who are not able to access formal education due to various barriers, such as ethnicity, language, gender, geographical limitations, poverty and physical disabilities.¹⁹¹ The policy mandates the equivalency of education obtained from non-formal education centres to formal education. Non-formal education centres are run by communities and development partners following a set of operation standards and local education plans.

Some countries such as Afghanistan,¹⁹² Pakistan¹⁹³ and India¹⁹⁴ provide home-based education (HBE) as a means to bring education to children with disabilities who are not able to access schools and learning centres due to issues in mobility.

India's Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) mandates free and compulsory elementary education for all children aged 6–14, including children with disabilities. The amendment to the Act in 2012 further provided for the option of HBE¹⁹⁵ for children with intellectual disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy and multiple disabilities. These children are in a mainstream school registry but enrolled under the HBE programme. In the state of Karnataka, the School Readiness Programme Centres work in conjunction with HBE, where children with disabilities from HBE are transitioned to these centres in preparation for formal mainstream schooling.¹⁹⁶

Alternative pathways to education such as community-based and home-based education continue to be essential means for more children with disabilities to access education. However, they shift the focus of governments and implementing partners from removing barriers to accessing education and improving education systems.

Even in countries with established alternative education pathways such as non-formal education, HBE and CBE, the quality of education, equivalency and certification systems

¹⁸⁸ Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, *Annual Report 2018*, 2018.

¹⁸⁹ UNESCO, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER): Afghanistan, 2020, <https://education-profiles.org/central-and-southern-asia/afghanistan/~inclusion>.

¹⁹⁰ Nepal Ministry of Education and Sports, Non-Formal Education Center, Non-Formal Education Policy 2063 (2007AD), Kathmandu, 2007.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² UNESCO Kabul and Afghanistan Ministry of Education, *Needs and Rights Assessment: Inclusive Education in Afghanistan*, 2009.

¹⁹³ UNESCO Islamabad, Pakistan: UNESCO Country Programming Document 2013–2017, Islamabad, 2013.

¹⁹⁴ Nanjundaiah, M., 'Adapting Teaching for Children with Intellectual Impairments', *Confluence*, vol. 18, 2016, pp. 41–46, https://mhrd.gov.in/documents_reports?field_documents_reports_category_tid=24.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

and data on participation of children and youth with disabilities should be studied. Without clear and strong strategies and programmes to transition children with disabilities to inclusive mainstream education systems, alternative paths to education risk leading children with disabilities to learning in isolation.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) initiatives show commitment to inclusive skills education training.

GC4 (2016) to CRPD Article 24 obligates States parties to ensure inclusive education for children with disabilities at all levels, including vocational training. In South Asia, all countries have outlined strategies for disability-inclusive TVET. Programmes for technical skills and vocational training for children and youth with disabilities are often delivered in partnership with international and national NGOs, CSOs and private organizations.

In Bangladesh, the National Education Policy 2010 guarantees the participation of students with disabilities in vocational and technical education. The government's partnership with UNICEF in the Let Us Learn (LUL) initiative provides a continuum of support from pre-primary education to skills training.¹⁹⁷

The TVET component of the LUL programme targets out-of-school children aged 8–14 in a supervised informal apprenticeships skills training programme and out-of-school youth aged 14–17 in its livelihood skills training under the guidance of a master crafts person. This is delivered through a supervised informal apprenticeship skills training model that is responsive to the needs of the labour market.¹⁹⁸

The National Policy on Skill Development 2009¹⁹⁹ in India aims to create a workforce of empowered youth from vulnerable sectors, including those with disabilities, with relevant and marketable skills and knowledge to be able to access decent employment and participate in the labour market.

In partnership with the government, local communities and the private sector, the organization Youth4Jobs²⁰⁰ in India prepares youth with disabilities for employment. Through various trainings and placement initiatives, 18,800+ youth with disabilities have been trained by the organization with 62 per cent successful placement. Youth4Jobs has 28 training centres in 18 states of India and partnerships with around 500 companies.

UNICEF ROSA partnered with Generation Unlimited and the Global Business Coalition for Education to host the South Asia Youth Skills and Solutions Forum in 2019. The forum brought together key stakeholders from all over the region to build strategic partnerships and discuss strategies to improve the access and participation of youth, including those with disabilities, and the quality of TVET in South Asia.²⁰¹

Summary

Education policies are moving towards more equitable and accessible education systems, but implementation can be strengthened. In some countries, contradictory policy provisions are present where one policy promotes inclusive education while another endorses segregated systems.

¹⁹⁷ UNICEF Bangladesh, *Let Us Learn (LUL) Formative Evaluation*, Dhaka, 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Government of India, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, *Education for All 2015 National Review Report: India*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi, 2014.

²⁰⁰ UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, *South Asia Youth Skills and Solutions Forum Report*, United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2020.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Table 14. Approaches to educating children with disabilities based on actual implementation

Country	Inclusive pilot	Integrated/mainstream	Special school	Alternative education/CBE/HBE	TVET
Afghanistan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bangladesh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bhutan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
India	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maldives	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nepal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pakistan	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sri Lanka	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

CBE: community-based education; HBE: home-based education; TVET: Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Specialized education programmes are still the most common provision for children with hearing and visual impairment and integration in mainstream schools with necessary accommodations, conditional on the level of disability. Inclusive education programmes are piloted in many countries. Development partners including OPDs and CSOs support many inclusive education provisions in the region, including alternative learning pathways and TVET programmes for children and youth with disabilities.

However, many children with severe disabilities, especially those who have difficulty traveling to school, continue to learn in isolation, away from their peers without disabilities through home-based learning. TVET programmes across the region strive to be inclusive of youth with disabilities, but data on participation and completion remain limited for most countries in the region.

Studies on effectiveness of existing academic and non-academic programmes (inclusive of higher education programmes and TVET) and exploration of other pathways in preparing youth with disabilities for a meaningful and productive life should be conducted. This will provide an evidence base for education ministries to implement inclusive general secondary and tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning programmes as required by CRPD.

It should be noted that youth with disabilities must have equitable access to all levels of education, whether through academic programmes or TVET. This requires governments to work towards transforming the secondary system so that all students can make equitable choices about their preferred pathway, rather than being encouraged into non-academic pathways because of a disability label.

3.3.2 Education workforce development and teacher training

For inclusive education to progress, the capacity of the workforce across all levels of the education system needs to be strengthened. Teacher capacity needs to be strengthened to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that facilitate learning for all children in the classroom, including those with disabilities, by integrating inclusive education into pre-service and in-service programmes for teachers.

Continuous capacity building support for teachers through in-service development is needed for knowledge to translate into positive changes in behaviour.²⁰² This section looks at the promising practices in the region in workforce development, teacher training and capacity building support for inclusion.

Initiatives to build capacity of the workforce on disability-inclusive education are given priority in policies.

Strategic plans across the countries recognize the need to build the capacity of the workforce for disability-inclusive education. Across the region, actions towards capacity building of key government officials to develop an understanding of disability-inclusive education are integrated into education government plans or national disability action plans.

Although the extent to which they incorporate the requirements of CRPD and GC4 (2016) vary, governments in the region have a clear intention to improve the education and services children with disabilities receive. Some detail a whole systems approach to developing system capacity for supporting inclusive education. For example, Bhutan's Ten-Year Roadmap for

Inclusive and Special Education 2019 articulates the provision of training on disability-inclusive education at different levels of the education system. The policy provides directives to build the capacity of education offices at the division and district level to better support school leaders and teachers in their progress towards inclusive education.²⁰³ The plan also includes the development and implementation of a long-term strategy for strengthening the capacity of special education teachers.²⁰⁴

The Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka 2009 articulates an introductory training in inclusive education not just for principals and teachers, but for trainers and education officials as well. Furthermore, the Inclusive Education Plan Sri Lanka 2019–2030 provides a comprehensive strategy for workforce capacity building, including training officers at the central, provincial, zonal and school level (including in-service advisers and special education needs coordinators).²⁰⁵

In Bangladesh, inclusive education training has been provided to all Directorate of Primary Education officers, field officials and teachers.²⁰⁶ In Maldives, along with a review of the inclusive education policy, an inclusive education capacity needs analysis and development plan were created to enhance the competencies of teachers, support staff, school leaders and education officials to implement disability-inclusive education.²⁰⁷

Across South Asia, international aid agencies contribute to improving the capacity of governments, school leaders and teachers in adopting disability-inclusive approaches to teaching and learning (see Table 15).

²⁰² Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

²⁰³ Bhutan Ministry of Education, ECCD & SEN Division, Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education in Bhutan, Thimpu, 2019.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Inclusive Education Plan Sri Lanka.

²⁰⁶ Government of Bangladesh, General Economics Division, Seventh Five Year Plan FY2016–FY2020, GED, Bangladesh Planning Commission, Dhaka, 2015.

²⁰⁷ Carrington, S., G. Mann and S. Mavropoulou, *Deliverable 3 and 4 (combined) The Inclusive Education Capacity Needs Analysis and the Inclusive Education Capacity Development Plan*, Queensland University of Technology, 2019.

Table 15. International aid agencies provide a valuable contribution to system strengthening

Country	Development agency	Activity
Afghanistan	UNICEF	Child-friendly schools training modules were implemented nationwide.
India	UNICEF	Technical assistance was provided to teacher training institutes in designing need-based in-service training programmes. This included school-based mentoring packages that supported teachers, head teachers and managers in child-centred pedagogies.
Maldives	UNICEF	Training for curriculum developers of the National Institute of Education and Faculty of Education on integrating child rights into the national curriculum.
Nepal	Plan International	Capacity building activities for civil society organizations and local government education officers leading to the formulation of local government inclusive education plans and resource allocation for inclusive education.
	UNICEF	Capacity building programmes for Centre for Education and Human Resource Development, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and municipalities on inclusive education.
Pakistan (Punjab)	Sightsavers	Technical support to Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development and Special Education Department of Punjab in developing inclusive education training for education managers, head teachers and schoolteachers.

Source: UNICEF Afghanistan, *Annual Report 2015*, Kabul, 2015; Brinkmann, S., *Improving Education Quality in South Asia: A review of UNICEF's efforts*, United Nation's Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia, 2018; UNICEF Maldives, *UNICEF Annual Report 2014 – Maldives*, Malé, 2014; Plan International Nepal, *Country Annual Highlights*, 2018; Pakistan Government of Punjab, School Education Department, Second Punjab Education Sector Programme (PESP II): Inclusive education strategy 2019–2024, Mott Macdonald Cambridge Education, 2019.

Inclusive education is beginning to be integrated into pre-service curricula and programmes across the region.

All countries in the region have special education programmes in universities and teacher training institutions focusing on teaching children with disabilities. Inclusive education is starting to be introduced in university programmes, some more comprehensively than others (see Table 16). All countries have initiatives to further mainstream

disability-inclusive education into their pre-service programmes.

Afghanistan conducted a review of its pre-service teacher education curriculum as part of its inclusive education pilot programme in 2014.²⁰⁸ Nepal's School Sector Development Plan 2016/17–2022/23 articulates actions that contribute to strengthening the integration of disability-inclusive education into pre-service training for teachers.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Afghanistan Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, National Disability Action Plan 2008–2011, Kabul, 2008.

²⁰⁹ Nepal Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, School Sector Development Plan 2016/17–2022/23, Kathmandu, 2016.

Table 16. Special education programmes in universities and teacher training institutions

Country	University special education (SPED) programme	University inclusive education (IE) programme	Embedded approach for IE/SPED (compulsory for all teachers)	Separate modules on IE
Afghanistan	Yes			Yes
Bangladesh	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Bhutan	Yes	Yes	Yes	
India	Yes			Yes
Maldives	Yes			Yes
Nepal	Yes	Yes		
Pakistan	Yes		Yes	
Sri Lanka	Yes			

Pakistan's National Plan of Action on Education for All includes the reform and enhancement of pre-service training towards a greater emphasis on learner-centred pedagogies.²¹⁰ The Inclusive Education Plan of Sri Lanka 2019–2030 articulates the intention to revise pre-service curriculum to include inclusive education as a mandatory subject by 2022.²¹¹

Bangladesh has made significant progress in integrating inclusive education into their pre-service teacher training programmes. The Diploma in Primary Education incorporates a unit on inclusive education in its Professional Studies course. The Secondary Level Bachelor of Education Curriculum integrates inclusive education across all subjects. Clear instructions were provided across the curriculum to address diverse communication needs and encouraged various ways of assessing learning.²¹²

The Access and Inclusive Education Cell of the Directorate of Primary Education revised their training manual to include inclusive education in the modules used in the Primary Teacher Training Institute.²¹³ The Diploma in Primary Education replaced the Certificate in Education programme for pre-service primary schoolteachers, one of the aims of which is to build the capacity of pre-service primary schoolteachers to practise inclusive education²¹⁴ through focusing on the development of teacher competencies related to inclusion.²¹⁵

The Higher Education Commission of Punjab province in Pakistan has incorporated a mandatory full credit course on inclusive education for the Bachelor of Science in Education and Bachelor of Science in Special Education students at Punjab University.²¹⁶

²¹⁰ Pakistan Ministry of Education, Second Draft National Plan of Action on Education for All (2001–2015), Islamabad, 2002, <https://bangkok.unesco.org/sites/default/files/assets/ECCE/publications/National%20plans/PakistanNatiPlan.pdf>.

²¹¹ Sri Lanka, Inclusive Education Plan Sri Lanka (2019–2030), PowerPoint presentation, Colombo, 11 October 2019.

²¹² Ahsan, M. T., *National Baseline Study for Developing a Model of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh Project Based on Secondary Data*, Plan Bangladesh, 2013.

²¹³ *Mapping of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh*.

²¹⁴ Ahsan, *National Baseline Study*.

²¹⁵ *Mapping of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh*.

²¹⁶ Second Punjab Education Sector Programme.

Governments across the region give emphasis to building the strength of in-service teachers to teach children with disabilities.

Various initiatives have been developed across the region to provide in-service support to teachers. Among these are national policies that contain imperatives to include skills development of teachers in teaching learners with disabilities, development of standards for teacher training institutions, development of decentralized methods for in-service teacher education and efforts to embed disability-inclusive indicators in teacher competency standards.

All the countries have provided training on disability-inclusive education to in-service teachers organized and delivered by the government or development organizations.

Several countries have successfully integrated inclusive education into their in-service programmes for teachers. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, an inclusive education module is integrated into the teacher induction programme, which provides an introduction to the principles of inclusion, facts on disability and mainstreaming in the province and practices that facilitate inclusive education in the classroom.²¹⁷

In Sri Lanka, the MoE National Institute of Education and the Primary Education Unit organize regular two-to-three-day training programmes for primary schoolteachers on teaching children with learning disabilities. The trainings are conducted in different zones and include teaching techniques in mainstream settings, identification and response to the needs of children with learning disabilities. Monthly training programmes are also provided for teachers teaching in special units and schools.²¹⁸

The Government of India integrated topics on adapting curriculum and instruction, designing parallel curriculum outcomes, and developing IEPs and learning materials for children with disabilities into their 20-day mandatory training for in-service teachers through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme. Teaching strategies for children with specific disabilities, such as autism, low vision, hearing impairment, attention problems, locomotor disability and learning difficulties, were also covered.²¹⁹

The Rehabilitation Council of India has also conducted a 45-day training programme for teachers who will serve as inclusive education resource persons in their districts.

Notable decentralized school-based professional development initiatives for inclusive education and learner-centred and rights-based education can be found in the region. The Indian government has developed a Teacher Self-Assessment Rubric and Performance Indicators for Elementary School Teachers. The self-assessment tool aims to help teachers reflect, evaluate and improve their practice and role as a teacher. It can also serve as a tool for instructional leaders to identify the professional development needs of teachers and how they can be addressed.²²⁰

The self-assessment tool encourages teachers' inclusive practice as it allows them to reflect on the teaching and learning process and adjust their teaching strategies to help all learners learn, including children with disabilities.

These strategies include:²²¹

- designing learning experiences to meet the needs of all learners;

²¹⁷ Institute of Social and Policy Sciences, *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Analysis 2019*, Pakistan, 2019.

²¹⁸ Jayawardena, P., and M. Abeyawickrama, *Barriers and Opportunities in the Provision of Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in Sri Lanka*, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, 2016.

²¹⁹ Maheshwari, U., 'Curricular adaptations for CWSN by Tamil Nadu SSA', *Confluence*, vol. 18, 2016, pp. 37–40, www.education.gov.in/en/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/Confluence.pdf.

²²⁰ India National Council of Educational Research and Training, *Guidelines and Rubrics: Teacher's self-assessment*, 2019.

²²¹ Ibid.

- developing a student-centred environment;
- using resources and various strategies for teaching and learning to address the unique needs of individual learners;
- providing feedback to learners to enhance learning;
- working with colleagues and the school community to support student learning; and
- participating in school development activities.

The geographic setting in Maldives has led to a significantly decentralized approach to teacher development. In each atoll, inclusion coaches specifically trained on inclusive and special education are available for teachers to consult.²²²

MoE, supported by UNICEF, established teacher resource centres in 2007, which addressed challenges in in-service teacher training. These centres provide teachers access to equipment and internet connectivity that allow them to participate in online courses and training.²²³ The centres also develop in-service professional development programmes for teachers including support for school-based professional development.²²⁴

To encourage inclusive education practice among teachers, the National Institute of Education in Maldives has been using social media to share videos that can inform classroom strategies.²²⁵ UNICEF provided support for the development of an e-learning platform for teacher development. The National Institute of Education was also trained on instructional design. These initiatives

were geared towards improving teacher competency to teach the new curriculum; however, it is not clear whether these include a focus on disability-inclusive practices.²²⁶

Despite the trainings available for teachers, the literature shows that in all the countries in the region, teachers still lack the confidence and skills needed to teach diverse learners.

In Pakistan, teachers in mainstream schools often have limited capacities in meeting the learning needs of children with disabilities.²²⁷ Teachers still mostly employ rote learning and non-learner-centred approaches in the classroom.²²⁸

In Sri Lanka, a study on the special education units in three public schools found that most teachers focus on the impairment of students with disabilities and often lack the capacity to adapt teaching and learning practice to address barriers these students are experiencing.²²⁹

In India, many teachers who teach in mainstream settings are not confident in their skills to teach in inclusive classrooms and have expressed the need for additional training on practical strategies to respond to the diverse needs of students.²³⁰

In Maldives, most teachers still widely hold the perspective that children with disabilities must be taught only by special educators. Mainstream teachers do not appear to be confident to teach children with disabilities. Support provided by special educators is not seen as valuable by mainstream teachers because of the predominant view that teaching children with disabilities is not their responsibility.²³¹

²²² Carrington, S., et al., *Deliverable 1 Existing Inclusive Education Policy*.

²²³ UNICEF, 'Teacher resource centres launched in the Maldives', 26 November 2007, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2007/11/241172-unicef-launches-teacher-resource-centres-improve-education-maldives>.

²²⁴ Maldives National Institute of Education, *Technology Enabled Learning Environments*, Malé, 2017.

²²⁵ Maldives Ministry of Education, Policy Planning and Research Division, *Maldives Education Sector Analysis*, Malé, 2019.

²²⁶ UNICEF *Annual Report 2017 – Maldives*.

²²⁷ UNICEF Pakistan, *Situation Analysis of Children in Pakistan*, Islamabad, 2017.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Abeywickrama, S., I. Jayasinghe and S. Sumanasena, 'Excluded in Inclusive Schools: Experiences of children with disabilities, their families and teachers in Sri Lanka', *Disability, CBR & Inclusive Development*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2013, pp.115–129, doi 10.5463/DCID.v24i1.172.

²³⁰ Singal, 'Challenges and Opportunities'.

²³¹ Maldives National Institute of Education, *Maldives Strategy for Inclusive Education, 2016–2018*, Malé, 2015.

A common challenge is the need for a coordinated and systemic response to in-service teacher development. Training must be aligned with disability-inclusive competency frameworks and its content is practical and responsive to teacher needs, espouses the values and principles of CRPD, and supports teachers across different career stages.

In Sri Lanka, there is a need for inclusive and up-to-date curricula for both in-service and pre-service teachers that target teaching in diverse classrooms. Learning modules need to be added to address attitudinal barriers and bullying of students with disabilities.²³²

In-service trainings in Bhutan were mentioned in literature to have limited focus on practical classroom application and are often delivered by foreign experts with limited contextual understanding. The application of trainings is

neither monitored nor evaluated, suggesting a lack of a strategic and well-coordinated training plan.²³³

The role of special educators as resource persons, especially for school-based professional development, and the role of the school principal as an instructional leader can be strengthened to improve in-service professional development throughout the region. Teacher competency frameworks can also be integrated into the process of planning teacher professional development by the government and development partners.

Not all countries have an institutionalized, standardized set of indicators used across teacher professional development systems for improving performance and guiding professional development. Table 17 shows the countries with competency standards for teachers.

Table 17. South Asian countries with competency standards for teachers

Country	Competency standards for teachers	Disability-inclusive education integrated into competency standards
Afghanistan	Yes	Yes
Bangladesh		
Bhutan	Yes	Yes
India*		
Maldives		
Nepal	Yes	Yes
Pakistan	Yes	Yes
Sri Lanka		

* Competency standards in India will be developed and released in 2022 according to the National Education Policy 2020.

²³² Ekanayake, S.B., et al., *Study on Development of Special Education and Non-Formal Education*, National Education Commission, Sri Lanka, 2014.

²³³ Dorji, R. and M. Schuelka, 'Children with Disabilities in Bhutan: Transitioning from special educational needs to inclusive education', ch. 36 in *Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, concerns and prospects*, edited by M. Schuelka and T.W. Maxwell, 2016, pp. 181–198, doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-1649-3_12.

Some countries in the region have integrated disability inclusion into their competency standards to support teachers in developing knowledge, attitudes and practices key to supporting children from diverse backgrounds, including children with disabilities.

The Pakistan Teacher Standards include competencies that encourage teachers to have high expectations for all students, and understand the developmental stage of children, the learning needs of students in relation to sociocultural background, learning styles and ‘special medical, physical or emotional challenges’ and the application of learning theories responding to the unique learning needs of students.

Furthermore, the standards outline the expectation for teachers to develop a classroom environment where children feel ‘socially, emotionally and physically safe’ and give emphasis to continuous professional development through action research and collaboration with co-teachers and the wider school community.²³⁴

The Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers, aside from integrating practices facilitative of inclusive education, address teacher recruitment, remuneration and performance management.²³⁵

Summary

The region is in the initial stages of providing adequate support for teachers to build their capacity for teaching children with disabilities in mainstream settings. Significant initiatives, including curricular reform, supportive policy environments and decentralized approaches to professional development, are signs of progress in the region in supporting teachers’ practice of inclusion. However, professional development

of teachers in disability-inclusive education still takes a predominantly special education approach rather than an inclusive approach to teaching children with disabilities.

Mainstream teachers need to have continuous professional development opportunities on inclusive education guided by a teacher development framework that integrates principles of inclusion as outlined in CRPD to learn practical and relevant strategies for including children with disabilities in mainstream settings.

A whole school approach to supporting the needs of children with disabilities, with an emphasis on using special education teachers as a resource for classroom teachers for mainstreaming, needs to be articulated in policies, strategic plans and teacher development design and implementation.

3.3.3 School environment and infrastructure

Target 4.a of SDG 4 aims to build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.²³⁶

In many countries in South Asia, improvements in school facilities, furniture and adopting inclusive design to school building construction for a safe, accessible and disaster-resilient school environment are included in education sector plans, which support the strategy to achieve goals set out in Education 2030 towards making schools safer and resilient to disaster impacts.²³⁷

Efforts to ensure the protection of children against violence in schools are present across the region, but a focus on children with disabilities is needed.

²³⁴ Pakistan Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, National Curriculum Framework Pakistan, Islamabad, n.d.

²³⁵ Bhutan Ministry of Education, Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers, Thimpu, 2020.

²³⁶ Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action.

²³⁷ Ibid.

Classroom construction and upgrading of school buildings and facilities increase access and participation of children with disabilities.

The inclusion of children with disabilities in education requires support for an accessible school learning environment as the built environment is the most commonly considered dimension of accessibility.²³⁸ Various reports from different countries show that children with disabilities do not attend school due to the lack of classrooms with accessible infrastructure²³⁹ and a supportive school environment.²⁴⁰ These barriers to inclusive education are addressed by countries at different levels and capacity.

Afghanistan increased the budget allocation for school infrastructure development. Construction of safe and accessible schools and classrooms for General Education, Islamic Education and TVET received the highest indicative budget in the National Education Strategic Plan 2017–2021.²⁴¹ Classroom construction projects were also supported through partnerships with UNICEF, government donors, local NGOs and private organizations. These projects built classrooms and refurbished facilities to equip them with accessible ramps, handrails and drinking water facilities.²⁴²

Through partnerships among donor agencies, governments and private organizations, other countries in the South Asia region, have implemented similar classroom construction projects and strengthened plans to improve school development and infrastructure to

accommodate children with disabilities and increase their participation in schools.

In Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka, projects for the building of safe schools and enhancement of basic facilities were implemented through partnerships. In Bangladesh, the Third Primary Education Development Program in 2011 delivered new infrastructure and improvement of school facilities and furniture. In Sri Lanka, government partnerships have led to the construction, renovation and inauguration of new school buildings for children with disabilities.²⁴³

In Maldives, improvement and construction of classrooms in strategic areas in the atolls through the Enhancing Education Development Project²⁴⁴ has expanded classroom facilities in overcrowded large classrooms and improved physical facilities that benefited students in the atolls, including children with disabilities.

In India, a guidebook, 'Making Schools Accessible to Children with Disabilities', provides comprehensive guidance for parents, school administrators, management committees and civil works personnel. It also provides direction on making school infrastructure safe and accessible for children with disabilities based on universal design principles and national accessibility standards (see Box 8). It includes checklists for assessing school facilities and emergency preparedness as well as solutions for ensuring that the physical environment is safe for all learners, including children with disabilities.²⁴⁵

²³⁸ UNESCO, *Disability at a Glance 2019: Investing in accessibility in Asia and the Pacific — Strategic approaches to achieving disability-inclusive sustainable development*, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 2019.

²³⁹ *Futures Stolen: Barriers to education for children with disabilities in Nepal*.

²⁴⁰ *Needs and Rights Assessment: Inclusive education in Afghanistan*.

²⁴¹ Afghanistan Ministry of Education, National Education Strategic Plan 2017–2021, Kabul, 2016.

²⁴² 'Afghanistan: Making schools accessible for children with physical disabilities in Afghanistan', Zero Project, 2020.

²⁴³ Reliefweb, 'Japan to support school building for children with disabilities', 5 September 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report-sri-lanka/japan-support-school-building-children-disabilities>, accessed 29 September 2020; UN-Habitat Sri Lanka, 'Construction of New School Buildings Underway in Mannar District with Funding from the Government of Japan', July 2016, <http://unhabitat.lk/news/construction-of-new-school-buildings-underway-in-mannar-district-with-funding-from-the-government-of-japan>, accessed 29 September 2020; U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, 'U.S. Embassy Inaugurates School Construction Projects, U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, 2019, <https://k.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-inaugurates-school-construction-projects>, accessed 29 September 2020.

²⁴⁴ The World Bank, *Enhancing Education Development Project: Implementation Completion Report*, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2019, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/358341555103520796/pdf/Maldives-Enhancing-Education-Development-Project.pdf>, accessed 26 September 2020.

²⁴⁵ UNICEF India, *Making Schools Accessible to Children with Disabilities*, New Delhi, 2016, www.unicef.org/india/media/1191/file/Making-Schools-Accessible.pdf.

BOX 8. UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a concrete approach to meeting the educational needs of all children from a rights-based perspective. It is the guiding principle in educational provision including curriculum and teaching models, which “seek to make learning accessible to all students, particularly those students who have not been successful because of inflexible systems of learning” (p. 14). UDL aims to avoid a one-size-fit-all curriculum and helps educators identify barriers in the curricula and address them within the instructional environment.

The three principles of UDL are:

- Multiple Means of Representation: Flexible approaches to design and delivery
- Multiple Means and Action and Expression: Flexible approaches for students to manage and demonstrate their learnings
- Multiple Means of Engagement: Flexible approaches to engage students to learn

UDL therefore facilitates the creation of a higher-quality education system through:

- developing flexible ways for students to learn;
- creating an engaging classroom environment;
- maintaining high expectations for all children, yet allowing multiple ways to meet expectations;
- empowering teachers to think differently about their own teaching; and
- focusing on educational outcomes for all children, including those with disabilities.

Source: UNICEF, *Access to School and the Learning Environment II – Universal Design for Learning*, Webinar 10 – Companion Technical Booklet, United Nations Children’s Fund, New York, 2014.

Standards for safe schools were developed in most countries in the region.

Most countries in South Asia have instituted minimum standards on school environment, which consider children with disabilities in response to SDG 4, Target 4.a of providing safe and non-violent learning environments for all.²⁴⁶

Countries in the South Asia region are prone to natural disasters such as cyclones, landslides and earthquakes, resulting in the destruction of infrastructure, including schools and learning centres. All countries have developed minimum

standards to foster safe schools where recent developments are focused on safety in the context of disaster and risk preparedness. The standards and protocols were developed to set guidelines for a safe and non-violent school environment.

In Bhutan, the Standards for Inclusive Education mandates schools to develop processes for prevention of and response to emergencies and incidences of violence against children. These processes should take into account the diverse needs and contexts of children, including those with disabilities.

²⁴⁶ Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action.

In Nepal, the concept of safe schools was operationalized through the Comprehensive School Safety Framework. The country developed the Comprehensive School Safety Master Plan in 2015 to provide a roadmap for ensuring that all students can be educated in safe schools.²⁴⁷ In addition to the Master Plan, the Comprehensive School Safety Minimum Package is a guide for creating a minimum level of acceptable safety in all schools in the country, including private and public schools. This includes checklists on non-structural mitigation measures, preparedness for response, and child protection and schools as zone of peace issues.

In other countries, standards for an inclusive learning environment have been instituted. Bhutan's Standards for Inclusive Education outlined the minimum standards for school environment that are aligned with the draft National Education Policy 2019. In Maldives, the Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptation to support the national curriculum include guidelines for implementing an inclusive learning environment for children with different types of disabilities.²⁴⁸ In Pakistan, standards for the school learning environment linked to the UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools Standards are included in its Minimum Standards for Quality Education.²⁴⁹

Legislative frameworks on the protection of children against violence exist in the region, but implementation could be strengthened. In most countries, national and subnational legislation should include an explicit focus on addressing violence against children with disabilities within education settings.

Violence against children with and without disabilities is prevalent in various education settings across South Asia.²⁵⁰ In general, boys are more at risk of physical violence and corporal punishment than girls, while girls are more likely to experience sexual and psychological abuse than boys.²⁵¹

Although there are limited data on the prevalence of violence against children with disabilities in the region, existing global and regional research note that children with disabilities are more prone to experience all forms of violence.²⁵² Factors such as a child's disability, ethnicity and socio-economic status intersect with the gendered nature of violence against children, increasing the risk of girls with disabilities to violence in schools.

Legislation ensuring the rights of women and girls to protection against violence is in place in all countries in the region. All eight countries have signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and have laws and policies on child protection.²⁵³

In Bhutan, the government has banned the use of corporal punishment, while awareness programmes continue to promote child-friendly schools.²⁵⁴ Bhutan's draft National Education Policy requires all education facilities to be safe and learner-friendly, free from abuse, harassment and violence.²⁵⁵

In India, several legal protections are in place that help address the prevalence of violence

²⁴⁷ Nepal Ministry of Education, Comprehensive School Safety Minimum Package, Kathmandu, 2018.

²⁴⁸ Maldives Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations to Support the Implementation of the National Curriculum, National Institute of Education, Malé, 2018.

²⁴⁹ Pakistan Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Minimum Standards for Quality Education in Pakistan: Attaining standards for improved learning outcomes and school effectiveness, Islamabad, 2016.

²⁵⁰ UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, *Violence against Children in Education Settings in South Asia*, United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2016.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² UNICEF and University of Edinburgh, *Violence against Children in South Asia: A systematic review of evidence since 2015*, United Nations Children's Fund, 2020, www.unicef.org/rosa/documents/violence-against-children-south-asia.

²⁵³ Solotaroff, J. L., and R. P. Pande, *Violence Against Women and Girls: Lessons from South Asia*, The World Bank, 2014, doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-0171-6.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Draft National Education Policy 2019.

against children with disabilities. The Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012²⁵⁶ provides more severe punishment for sexual assault committed by specific persons, in specific situations and/or against specific individuals. For instance, a sexual assault becomes more serious and warrants a more severe punishment when committed by a staff member of an educational institution on a child with physical or mental disability.²⁵⁷

Physical punishment and ‘mental harassment’ are punishable offences in India’s RTE Act 2009.²⁵⁸ The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015²⁵⁹ prohibits corporal punishment and if such an offence caused a disability to a child, a more severe punishment is to be given to the offender.

A confidential and accessible reporting mechanism is crucial for immediate and appropriate response to incidences of violence against children with disabilities. It is thus important to include accessibility and availability of support mechanisms for children with disabilities in reporting and response protocols. This can include sign language interpreters, provision of assistive devices, presence of social workers, counsellors, child protection officers, among others.

In India, the Supreme Court ruled in 2014 that victims of sexual violence can report and file complaints through electronic mail or post.²⁶⁰ In Nepal, the Zero Tolerance Programme includes a reporting mechanism that utilizes suggestion boxes in schools, allowing students to anonymously report incidents.²⁶¹ India’s

Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences Act requires that children be provided ‘special support’ such as translator or interpreters, special educators, and other support services or groups during trial or pre-trial.²⁶² There is limited information, however, on how these mechanisms are used by children with disabilities in actual incidents.

Some countries in the region have overarching laws for the protection of children,²⁶³ but have no explicit focus on the protection of children with disabilities against violence in schools. Where legislations are in place, implementation of laws on the ground remain limited for most countries in the region.²⁶⁴

A comprehensive legal review can be conducted to look at how laws address school-related gender-based violence against children with disabilities. Moreover, research on perception of gender and gender roles, social inequalities, and other structural drivers will facilitate the development of targeted and evidence-based interventions addressing violence against children with disabilities in schools.

Summary

Providing a safe, accessible and responsive learning environment for children with disabilities in South Asia entails strong partnership and collaboration with different agencies and organizations beyond the education sector. Funds, expertise, community partnerships and cooperation of different stakeholders are critical in establishing a school environment that will promote a safe and conducive learning environment for all learners.

²⁵⁶ UNICEF India, *Strategy for Ending Violence against Children*, New Delhi, 2020.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ *Violence against Children in Education Settings in South Asia*.

²⁶¹ UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report, *Gender Report: A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020.

²⁶² *Strategy for Ending Violence against Children*.

²⁶³ *Violence against Children in South Asia*.

²⁶⁴ *Violence against Children in Education Settings in South Asia*.

In most countries in South Asia, there is recognition of the importance of a safe and inclusive school environment. Safe learning environments include provisions for school-based protection and safeguarding measures, which need improvement. Initiatives to increase the number of schools accessible to children with disabilities are also starting to grow. More work still needs to be done to increase funding and address the lack of expertise on the universal design approach to be able to build accessible schools and classrooms.

A closer study on the structural causes of violence against girls and boys with disabilities in and outside education settings is needed. Addressing complex and deeply rooted drivers of violence, such as negative perceptions of gender and gender roles intersecting with disability, ethnicity and economic status, will entail further work and cooperation among several stakeholders at different levels of society.

3.3.4 Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

The need to address quality concerns in education is commonly mentioned in policy documents that justify the need for curriculum reform. In many countries globally, curriculum reform has been employed as an essential strategy for educational change. Such reforms are instrumental to the review of educational aims, revision of content learning areas, identification of new learning outcomes, restructure of assessment systems, upgrade of learning materials, and promotion of relevant teaching and learning methodologies.

In most countries in South Asia, education policies have indicated the need for a curriculum review and revision where provisions for accommodating children with disabilities are stipulated ensure all children can fully participate in mainstream education.

Ongoing curricular reforms and innovations provide opportunities for improved inclusion of children with disabilities.

Among the eight countries, Maldives and Pakistan established the most recent national curriculum frameworks in 2016 and 2017, respectively. The Indian government is producing a new national curriculum framework following the release of its national education policy in July 2020. Aside from the national curriculum frameworks and national education policies, most countries have more recent education sector plans or a roadmap on which education policies and plans are stipulated.

In most countries, curriculum review and revision are identified as one of the major strategies to respond to the need for a diversified and inclusive curriculum to increase accessibility and participation of children with disabilities.

For more than a decade, countries in South Asia have recognized and adapted the Education for All framework in policy documents, which aimed at including children with disabilities in mainstream education. Recent curriculum reforms have resulted in the expansion of inclusion in education by encouraging inclusive practices, culture and values inside the classroom.

In Bhutan, the Standards for Inclusive Education, a tool to support schools towards becoming more inclusive for all children, was developed and endorsed in 2017. The toolkit provides standards for different domains, such as curriculum, assessment and teaching and learning. It includes indicators and processes that revolve around three dimensions – inclusive policy, inclusive practice and inclusive culture – to support inclusion.

In Pakistan, the Minimum Standards for Quality Education outline the specifications for five categories, including standards for learners, teachers, curriculum and textbooks, school environment, and assessment. The standards

for curriculum explicitly state the need to be inclusive, and its assessment system provides constructive information for teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders to improve learning outcomes.

Bhutan is developing a participative approach to identifying curriculum gaps and gathering insights from all stakeholders. A conference in 2016 with stakeholders from school to national level, including students, parents, teachers and education experts, was held to undertake a nationwide curriculum review. This led to the drafting of a resolution for the creation of a curriculum that is diversified and differentiated.²⁶⁵ In 2018, partnerships between Bhutan Foundation, Perkins International and the Royal Education Council led to the facilitation of a workshop to develop an inclusive education curriculum.²⁶⁶

In Afghanistan, the International Bureau of Education-UNESCO and MoE collaborated in 2018 to identify strategies and practices to be adopted in curriculum development.²⁶⁷

Restructuring of national assessment frameworks and systems aims to measure learning outcomes.

In the context of South Asia, the national assessment framework of most countries is either missing or outdated. The most recent education sector plans and education policies across the region identified gaps in school-based and national assessment systems. Moreover, there is a significant dearth of data across the region on the provision of reasonable accommodation and assistive tools and devices during assessment and alternative assessment

methods for children with disabilities. In most countries, education plans showed prioritization of establishing an assessment framework and strengthening assessment systems.

To address concerns regarding tracking of pupil progress, the Afghanistan National Education Strategic Plan III had set out the development and implementation of a National Student Learning Assessment System and a National Assessment Framework.²⁶⁸ They were to be integrated in EMIS to record and analyse trends in educational outcomes.

India prioritized educational assessment and proposed the establishment of a national assessment centre, called Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development, as a standards-setting body for student assessment and evaluation.²⁶⁹

In Nepal, the government aimed to ensure formative and summative assessments are more skills- and learner-focused by revising the continuous assessment system and ensuring that assessment is competency-based and standardized.²⁷⁰

In Pakistan, building the capacity of the National Education Assessment System to inform student learning outcomes across the various systems was included as a strategy to achieve standardization of curriculum.²⁷¹

Few countries introduced standards and guidelines for classroom assessment that promote inclusive education and formative assessment for improved learning outcomes.

²⁶⁵ Dukpa, Pedup and Royal Education Council, *Complete Bhutan National School Curriculum Conference 2016 Report*, Royal Education Council, Paro, 2016, www.researchgate.net/publication/326736255_Complete_Bhutan_National_School_Curriculum_Conference_2016_Report.

²⁶⁶ Bhutan Foundation, 'Educators meet to develop inclusive education curriculum in Bhutan's public schools', Inclusive Education Curriculum Workshop, 2018, <https://bhutanfound.org/educators-meet-to-develop-inclusive-education-curriculum-in-bhutans-public-school>, accessed 7 September 2020.

²⁶⁷ International Bureau of Education-UNESCO, 'IBE-UNESCO supports Afghanistan's education system with its technical expertise in curriculum reform', 2018.

²⁶⁸ National Education Strategic Plan 2017–2021.

²⁶⁹ National Education Policy 2020.

²⁷⁰ School Sector Development Plan 2016/17–2022/23.

²⁷¹ Pakistan Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, National Education Policy Framework, Islamabad, 2018.

Bhutan, Maldives and Pakistan have developed minimum standards and guidelines for inclusive classroom assessment.

CRPD is clear on the right of children with disabilities to flexible assessment methods as alternatives to standardized tests.²⁷² Most countries in the region show efforts to improve the provision of assistive tools and devices for improved teaching and learning as well as introducing more learner-centred assessment methods. However, little is known on the experiences of children with disabilities during learning assessments, especially during school-based national tests.

In Pakistan, the Government of Punjab has collected data on learning outcomes disaggregated by disability.²⁷³ The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)²⁷⁴ has been used to capture data on literacy and numeracy of children, including children with disabilities.²⁷⁵ While ASER Pakistan includes WG questions on functioning and simple numeracy and reading tasks, no adaptations were provided to children with disabilities.

In India, the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development to measure learning outcomes has been adapted in accessible formats.²⁷⁶ The EGRA-Braille was designed for learners with visual and hearing impairments and has been adapted on paper and tablets. Similar adaptations to national and school-based assessments should be developed in other countries in the region.

As assessment systems are being reformed to ensure relevance to all kinds of learners, it is necessary to give attention to providing children with disabilities alternative methods of measuring learning, availability of assistive tools and devices during assessments, and provision of reasonable accommodation as required by CRPD.

Promoting differentiation and child-centred approach to teaching and learning is key to inclusion.

While many countries have adopted the concept of inclusion at various levels, few countries have taken further steps in ensuring the constructive alignment of curriculum, assessment and instructional methodologies.

In Maldives, the Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations were created to support the implementation of the national curriculum. The guidelines include adaptations for specific disabilities, and provide advice on planning, teaching, assessment, environment and resources. Differentiation as a teaching strategy is promoted to support the learning needs of all children by providing guidelines and recommendations for adaptations to support the national curriculum.

India's National Council of Educational Research and Training developed a handbook for primary schoolteachers entitled 'Including Children with Special Needs'.²⁷⁷ The handbook discusses the nature of disabilities common in classrooms across the country, such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical disabilities and cognitive disabilities. It includes strategies for accommodation and practical interventions that teachers can incorporate in their everyday practice.

Bhutan and Pakistan have similarly developed standards and guidelines for inclusive and quality teaching and learning approaches, while other countries have indicated plans to improve pedagogical practice to better learning outcomes through the promotion of child-friendly, learner-centred and interactive approaches to teaching and learning.

²⁷² General comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education.

²⁷³ *Every Learner Matters*.

²⁷⁴ A large-scale household-based assessment that collects data on literacy and numeracy of children who are in school, have dropped out of school and have never been in school.

²⁷⁵ *Every Learner Matters*.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ India National Council of Educational Research and Training, *Including Children with Special Needs: Primary stage*, 2014.

Summary

Many countries are taking actions to review and revise the curriculum as well as establish systems and frameworks for assessment that will support all learners including children with disabilities in achieving the desired and intended learning outcomes. The concept of Universal Design for Learning does not appear to be applied as a key principle in plans in many countries to develop curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. Similarly, not all countries are explicit in ensuring that all children have the right to access the same curriculum as their peers.

Most national curriculum frameworks are decades old and need to be revisited to identify curricular gaps to achieve quality and equity. This step is deemed necessary by most countries to ensure that education is relevant to all learners, including children with disabilities, as stated in most education sector plans and policies.

A few countries are not paying enough attention to ways in which they can strengthen inclusive practices through guidelines and minimum standards in the implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Others have attempted to create modifications through instructional adaptations to make teaching and learning relevant for children with disabilities while still supporting the implementation of the national curriculum.

Countries have taken actions to balance the use and implementation of formative and summative assessments, and to transition from conventional assessment to assessment for learning as a strategy to improve learning outcomes. Supporting this is the establishment of assessment systems and frameworks at the national level that will provide mechanisms to capture trends in learning outcomes that aim to provide transparent feedback to parents, teachers and school heads.

Ensuring all learners can access the mainstream curriculum, instruction and assessment will lead to inclusive, relevant and quality education for all. As countries strive to improve the quality of education through curriculum reforms, the role of instruction and assessment must also be seen as equally important. Most countries include strategies and plans to improve and update the overall assessment strategy. However, ensuring that key inclusive principles are embedded in curriculum and assessment reform should be a priority for all countries.

3.3.5 Learning materials

Another imperative in the delivery and implementation of a quality curriculum is the availability of learning materials that are contextualized and applicable to all learners. In an effort to support education systems to increase the quality and accessibility of textbooks and learning resources, UNESCO provided three broad principles that must be taken into consideration: accessibility, quality and efficacy.²⁷⁸

Civil sector partnerships were forged to develop accessible teaching and learning materials.

The development and production of learning materials involves many complex processes and manpower expertise from inception to distribution. Processes usually involve a great amount of time that compounds the high cost of producing accessible learning materials. The efficiency of systems and processes as well as the quality of outputs, high cost for production, expertise of developers and capacity to distribute materials are areas where countries are trying to address to be able to deliver the whole gamut of learning materials to all learners.

Children with disabilities and students with special educational needs require materials such as audiovisual aids, tactile resources, assistive devices and interactive software and tools to

²⁷⁸ UNESCO, *Textbooks and Learning Resources: A Framework for Policy Development*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014.

achieve equal learning opportunities. To be able to bring this whole gamut of learning materials, countries are identifying means and strategies to reduce the cost and increase efficiency in the processes.

Partnerships with NGOs and OPDs help address issues in the development and production of accessible learning materials and tools. In Bangladesh, the Centre for Disability in Development together with OPDs and persons with disabilities have developed the Bangla sign language, including accompanying sign language manuals, toolkits and training for students, teachers and parents of children with disabilities.²⁷⁹

In Afghanistan, books in Braille and an audiovisual sign language dictionary²⁸⁰ were developed by the Family Welfare Foundation/Hearing Impaired Foundation of Afghanistan School for the Deaf²⁸¹ in Kabul in coordination with MoE.

Upgrading learning materials and improving textbook development standards facilitate inclusive teaching and learning.

To aid the learning of children with disabilities and students with special educational needs, making textbooks inclusive and sensitive to the needs of the learners is necessary. Countries have identified strategies to make textbooks inclusive and relevant to children with disabilities, including the setting of standards for developing textbook materials.

Most countries envision developing quality learning materials that are inclusive and relevant to all learners. In this effort, some countries have developed standards for the development of teaching and learning materials. In Bhutan, inclusive standards were developed for the creation and adaptation of learning materials for children with disabilities.²⁸²

In Maldives, guidelines for the adaptation of learning materials for the use of children with disabilities were developed to help teachers modify and adapt while still supporting the implementation of the national curriculum. In Pakistan, the Minimum Standards for Quality Education also provided standards for textbook and other learning materials that are aligned with promoting child-centred pedagogy.

Assistive devices and leveraging technology increase learning opportunities.

Aside from textbooks, assistive devices for children with disabilities are found to be scarce in most countries. Assistive products, according to the International Organization for Standardization, are those that are used by or for persons with disabilities for participation; to protect, support, train, measure or substitute for body functions/structures and activities; or to prevent impairments, activity limitations or participation restrictions that may include devices, equipment, instruments and software.²⁸³

It is generally acknowledged that these assistive products used by children with disabilities in learning, such as Braille, sign language modules and dictionaries, and hearing aids, among others, are essential for ensuring equal opportunities in learning. Yet, it is also recognized that there is a wide gap in addressing concerns regarding the supply and demand for these materials. At present, there are limited data from countries showing updated information on the provisions of assistive devices and accessible learning materials or lack thereof.

Education sector plans of most countries also included the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the delivery of educational content. In Maldives, initiatives to enable access to assistive technology and

²⁷⁹ *Mapping of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh.*

²⁸⁰ 'Disability and inclusive education: A stocktake of education sector plans'.

²⁸¹ *Needs and Rights Assessment.*

²⁸² Standards for Inclusive Education.

²⁸³ World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund 'Assistive Technology for Children with Disabilities: a discussion paper', World Health Organization, Geneva, 2015.

other appropriate ICT tools for students with exceptionalities and special educational needs are explored. With the wide use of technology and software apps, the use and application of technology have been useful even in the education sector. Interactive online classes and remote learning are made possible even for hard-to-reach areas with the use of technology.

Moreover, access to information by children with disabilities through the use of assistive technology has brought advantages in the teaching and learning process. According to a discussion paper published by the World Health Organization, the use of assistive technology provides the following advantages: (1) it bridges disparities between children with and without disabilities; (2) it provides the means of access to and participation in educational, social and recreational opportunities; (3) it empowers greater physical and mental function and improved self-esteem; (4) it reduces costs for educational services; and (5) it provides quality online resources.²⁸⁴

Summary

Providing all students with quality learning materials is essential for their participation in school and the wide array of learning materials that supports the learning and participation of children with disabilities is a means to provide them with equal opportunities in the same way as their peers without disabilities. Across the region, there is a general lack of accessible learning materials and devices for children with disabilities. In countries where they are made available, access remains limited especially for those living in remote areas.

There is also an absence of flexible and adaptable teaching and learning materials, which is linked to the lack of teacher training on universal design principles as a foundation for developing teaching aids. To provide equal learning experiences to

all learners, exploration of the different available learning materials in various formats and platforms and building the capacity of teachers to develop adaptable and flexible teaching and learning materials should be given focus in inclusive education programming.

3.3.6 Support services for students, parents and teachers

Development partners support governments in delivering early identification and intervention services to children with disabilities and families.

Early identification and intervention programmes across the region are delivered mainly through the support of and coordination with development partners such as NGOs, OPDs, CSOs, foundations and communities. The majority of these services are implemented through community-based rehabilitation centres as they tend to be the most accessible and available; on this basis it is possible to state that local-level coordination of services appears to be well established in most countries.

The NGO Amar Seva Sangam²⁸⁵ in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu provides a set of integrated services focused on supporting children with disabilities and their families in rural areas. As part of its programme, the NGO has trained about 1,800 community rehabilitation workers (CRWs) on conducting initial assessment and providing home-based early intervention therapy to children aged 0–6.

To support CRWs in remote locations, the Mobile Village-Based Rehabilitation – Early Intervention app was developed linking CRWs to rehabilitation specialists who provide online training, enrichment and consultation. The specialists can conduct assessments remotely with the help of a CRW and input findings and an intervention plan into the app. The CRW implements the

²⁸⁴ 'Assistive Technology for Children with Disabilities'.

²⁸⁵ Butcher, T., et al., *Inclusive Education*, Zero Project Report 2020, Essi Foundation, Vienna, 2020, <https://zeroproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2020-Zero-Project-Report-Education-accessible.pdf>.

intervention plan and the rehabilitation specialist tracks the progress using tools within the app. Support trainings for caregivers and families are provided during monthly face-to-face visits of CRWs and specialists.²⁸⁶

Further, the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram initiative of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare under the National Rural Health Mission has made significant impact in providing early identification and early intervention for children aged 0 to 18 in India.²⁸⁷ The initiative covers birth defects, childhood diseases, developmental delays and disabilities.

District Early Intervention Centres cater to children aged 0-6 and links those aged 6-18 to existing public health facilities. A home-based newborn care package allows screening of newborns 48 hours to 6 weeks old at home. Screening and monitoring of children aged 6 weeks to 6 years happen through mobile health teams at Anganwadi centres and in school for those aged 6 years to 18 years. Referral of services from these screening points ensure free and appropriate health care and intervention services.²⁸⁸

In Bangladesh, Shishu Bikash Kendra (Child Development Centres) in district hospitals and government tertiary medical colleges conduct early assessment and diagnosis for children identified with potential disabilities. These centres also provide intervention and rehabilitation of some disabilities as well as training and support for families of children with disabilities.²⁸⁹

Inclusive early childhood development (ECD) programmes are crucial in providing a continuum

of support services for children with disabilities. UNICEF continues to provide technical inputs and support to national-level advocacy to promote ECD in countries across South Asia. All countries have existing ECD programmes.

In Bhutan, as in other countries, Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centres often serve as entry points for identifying and detecting those at risk and those who have disabilities.²⁹⁰ The centres are usually linked to other rehabilitation and intervention services, creating an organic referral system.²⁹¹

Various community-based ECCD centres in Bhutan have been supported by UNICEF's partnership with MoE and local organizations. Particular focus has been given to supporting those in hard-to-reach rural areas²⁹² as there had been evidence of disparities in access to early education for children with disabilities from rural and low income families.²⁹³ Dropout and repetition rates were reported as high in these areas as children with disabilities experience barriers to accessing early learning.²⁹⁴ To address this, provision and support for ECCD centres was increased to widen their reach²⁹⁵ and to strengthen the capacity of ECCD facilitators to improve care and child development skills.²⁹⁶

Similar mechanisms are present across South Asia where development partners fill the gaps of the government in providing early identification and interventions services to children with disabilities and their families. Implementation and quality of services differ depending on the support they receive to develop their technical capacity.

²⁸⁶ Butcher, et al., *Inclusive Education*.

²⁸⁷ Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, 'Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK)', New Delhi, 2021, <https://nhm.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=4&sublinkid=1190&lid=583>.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ *Situation Analysis on Children with Disabilities in Bangladesh*.

²⁹⁰ UNICEF Bhutan, *Early Childhood Care and Development in Bhutan: A case for investment*, Thimpu, 2017.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² UNICEF Bhutan, 'Executive summary', *UNICEF Annual Report 2017, Bhutan*, Thimpu, 2017.

²⁹³ *Early Childhood Care and Development in Bhutan*.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Bhutan Ministry of Education, 31st Education Policy Guidelines and Instructions (EPGI) 2013-2017, Thimpu, 2017.

²⁹⁶ *UNICEF Annual Report 2017, Bhutan*.

In some countries, such as in Pakistan and Maldives, intervention programmes have limited reach due to geographic difficulties and the lack of specialists.²⁹⁷ Referral systems appear to be at varying levels of efficiency. Data collected suggest that referral mechanisms at local community level exist, but linkages to government health and social support services can be strengthened.

Early childhood education (ECE) programmes are present in all countries, but participation of children with disabilities remains low.

In Bangladesh, through the universalization of pre-primary education, children aged 5 are assured of one year free pre-primary education at government primary schools. A large number of private kindergartens, madrasahs and NGOs also manage non-formal schools offering pre-primary education. However, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 findings show only 12.5 per cent of surveyed children aged 36–59 months with functional difficulty are attending ECE programmes.²⁹⁸

While there are many organizations supporting ECE programmes in the region, UNICEF ROSA reports only 69 per cent of children²⁹⁹ are able to access ECE. Globally, one of the main factors that affects participation in ECE is household economic status where children from higher income households are seven times more likely to attend ECE programmes than those from lower income households.³⁰⁰ Data on the participation of children with disabilities in ECE, however, are limited.

Providing universal access to quality ECE services will help improve participation of children with disabilities in pre-primary education.³⁰¹ However, increasing access to ECE is not enough and raising the awareness of families on its gains is important to encourage parents to bring their children to school. Setting quality standards and supporting teachers will also help improve the quality of inclusive pre-primary education.

Community-based rehabilitation programmes provide access to essential services.

In all countries, CBR programmes help sustain access to essential services, such as early identification and intervention services, referral to health care and social services, information on disability and early education of children with disabilities who are not able to access the formal education system. Afghanistan developed a community-based education policy,³⁰² reinforcing the education component of CBRs in the country, while Bangladesh³⁰³ has provided funding and supported expansion of services.

Pre-primary education is an essential component of many CBR projects, such as Holistic Approach towards Promotion of Inclusive Education³⁰⁴ and Developing a Model of Inclusive Education in Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh,³⁰⁵ run by international NGOs and local partners and supported by the government. These CBR projects have developed a system of education and health care provisions for children with disabilities and their families, in which schools are capacitated to identify children needing support and refer them to appropriate health care support services.³⁰⁶

²⁹⁷ *Meeting the Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities in South Asia.*

²⁹⁸ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and UNICEF Bangladesh, *Progotir Pathey, Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Findings Report*, BBS, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2019.

²⁹⁹ UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, 'South Asia Headline Results 2018–2021', United Nations Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, n.d., www.unicefrosa-progressreport.org/childdeducation.html#fn2.

³⁰⁰ UNICEF, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education*, 2019.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² Afghanistan Ministry of Education, *Community Based Education Policy*, Kabul, 2018.

³⁰³ *Mainstreaming Inclusive Education.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *Mapping of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh.*

³⁰⁶ Ahsan, M.T., Study Report On 'End Line Study of the Project- Developing a Model of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh (DMIE) project', Plan International Bangladesh, 2019

Most CBRs have established coordination systems built on existing community partnerships. They are often run by local communities and supported by development partners. As such, these programmes tend to be limited in scale as they are largely dependent on existing technical capacity and constrained funding.

Social support schemes for children with disabilities are present in all countries, and some countries have targeted support for girls with disabilities.

Almost all countries provide some form of social protection support for children with disabilities and their families. Some countries provide multiple benefits. Nepal provides 16 types of scholarships for children with disabilities, children belonging to the Dalit caste, girls and other vulnerable groups.³⁰⁷ India³⁰⁸ provides scholarships for girls with disabilities and Sri Lanka³⁰⁹ offers the same to children from low-income households including those with disabilities. Other countries provide transportation allowances, cash grants, social insurance and education allowances. In Afghanistan, cash grants were offered only to children and persons with war-related disabilities.³¹⁰

Summary

Across the region, international aid organizations, NGOs, CSOs and communities continue to be key drivers of inclusive education initiatives and services. Whilst coordination and referral systems at the local level are present, delivery of disability-related interventions by government and development partners can be further harmonized through a multisectoral coordination mechanism.

In many countries, especially those with geographical challenges, access of children with disabilities to existing mainstream health care

services remains limited. This is compounded by families' lack of awareness of disability-related services, limited developmental screening, and inaccessibility of early identification and intervention mechanisms. Access can be improved by building on existing mechanisms, such as the CBRs, ECD centres and schools.

Data collection on the participation of children with disabilities in ECE and access to disability-related services should be embedded in programming. A systematic multidisciplinary monitoring system can be developed to review services and programmes for children with disabilities and their families to discover effective ways of working and improve on the delivery of services.

3.4 MEASURING AND MONITORING QUALITY

This domain includes measures to ensure the quality of education and support services for children with disabilities.

3.4.1 Standards and indicators for inclusion

Standards for disability-inclusive education provide a clearly defined set of indicators to guide the practice of inclusion. They play an integral role for different actors to jointly work towards inclusion.³¹¹ If structured as a self-assessment tool at the school level, they support the school community to evaluate their own progress towards inclusion, encouraging a reflective and iterative process for the development of inclusive school values, policies and practices.

Standards that are aligned to international instruments for inclusion such as CRPD and SDG 4 with clearly defined implementation guidelines provide a concrete way to translate policies into practice.

³⁰⁷ Nepal National Institute for Research and Training, *Nepal Education Sector Analysis*, Kathmandu, 2016.

³⁰⁸ Singal, 'Challenges and Opportunities'.

³⁰⁹ Sri Lanka Ministry of Education, *Education Sector Development Plan: General Education in Sri Lanka 2018 – 2025*, Ministry of Education, Battaramulla, 2017.

³¹⁰ UNESCAP, *Disability at a Glance 2012: Strengthening the evidence base in Asia and the Pacific*, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 2012.

³¹¹ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

This section discusses the standards and indicators for inclusion in the region and the initiatives related to the development of these standards.

School quality standards in the region encourage inclusive practice by integrating indicators facilitative of inclusion, such as the practice of learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning, encouraging the development of inclusive learning environments and accessibility of school infrastructure.

Most countries in the region have institutionalized standards for school quality and inclusion. In Bangladesh, standards are monitored at the school level that measure school quality and inclusion. At the upazila level, the Primary School Quality Level (PSQL) indicators serve as a tool to gauge if minimum standards are being met.³¹²

Indicators relevant to inclusive education include the number of children with ‘mild and moderate disabilities’ enrolled in mainstream primary schools, percentage of teachers who receive continuous professional development training, percentage of teachers with professional qualifications (e.g., Certificate in Education, Diploma in Education, Bachelor’s degree in Education), percentage of teachers and school leaders who have participated in curriculum training, and accessibility to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities of children with disabilities.³¹³

The data from schools are consolidated at the upazila level.³¹⁴ The standards are also used to monitor the country’s progression towards targets for inclusion. In particular, PSQL indicator 16 measuring the number of enrolled children with ‘mild and moderate disabilities’ in mainstream primary schools monitors the

country’s progress towards the goal of having 80 per cent of children with mild and moderate disability enrolled in mainstream primary schools. The performance of the sector against PSQL is discussed annually in the Bangladesh Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report.

The Standards for Inclusive Education in Bhutan encourage a collaborative and reflective process of improving access and providing “quality education for all children with disabilities in Bhutan” (p. 6).³¹⁵ They were developed through a consultative process involving teachers, school leaders, representatives from relevant government institutions, teacher education institutions and NGOs. Inclusion is viewed broadly and not just in relation to disability.

The application of the standards encourages a reflective approach to action and planning, where school communities assess their progress by reflecting on their practice and creating plans of action by using the indicators as a guide for development. This emphasizes inclusion as a continuous process.³¹⁶

The standards are not to be used as a monitoring tool. Instead, they are designed to guide the school community through a process of self-evaluation against a set of indicators that can guide the progressive development of a more inclusive school for all learners.³¹⁷

The framework adopted in the formulation of the the standards reflects a whole systems approach to inclusion:³¹⁸

- It highlights three domains for inclusive schools – inclusive culture, inclusive policy and inclusive practice – and provides guidelines towards strengthening the three domains.

³¹² Fourth Primary Education Development Program, 2018.

³¹³ Bangladesh Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Directorate of Primary Education, *Bangladesh Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report – 2019*, Dhaka, 2019.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Standards for Inclusive Education 2017.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

- It encourages participation of students, staff, leaders and community in the school.
- The content is comprehensive and includes guidelines on:
 - o Inclusive language, people first language
 - o Inclusive culture and values
 - o Inclusive school policies
 - o Student participation
 - o Parent and community engagement
 - o Rights-based education
 - o Transitions and support for transitions
 - o Teacher support and teacher development
 - o The use of IEP in supporting children in mainstream settings

The standards are designed to be initially used by schools with Special Educational Needs programmes. Although MoE encourages all schools in Bhutan to use the standards, the message that they must be used by all schools and integrated into the school improvement processes needs to be strengthened to facilitate a social model view of inclusion and encourage inclusive education in all schools. The standards, having been released and published in 2017, are still relatively new in their implementation. The extent to which they have been integrated into school processes and the resulting changes from their use would need to be assessed.

The Maldivian government has integrated the inclusive school quality framework into the process for school improvement. The School Improvement, Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework is a method for school improvement founded on the Child-Friendly Baraabar School quality framework, which guides teachers, school leaders, school community and MoE in assessing the extent to which their practice is reflective of quality standards.

The framework is used for self-evaluation and internal assessment of school practices, but can also be used for external assessments. The standards are stated as observable actions for schools to be able to implement good practice.

The standards used together with the framework serve as a guide for the school in making decisions on its performance. They are not prescriptive, and as each standard is not considered applicable for all schools, they allow the school and community autonomy to make choices and decisions relevant to their context. A revised method of rating school performance against the standards was developed using a rating scale for self-assessment by the school community. The rating feeds into the school improvement cycle.³¹⁹

Despite the introduction of child-friendly school quality standards and indicators (CFBS) in 2010 with more comprehensive implementation leading up to 2014, monitoring their implementation was difficult due to the geographic context of Maldives and limitations in available resources.³²⁰

Initiatives for developing inclusive education standards are present across the region.

The Framework of Action Inclusive Education 2009 in Sri Lanka articulates the development of school standards for child-friendly schools, putting emphasis on learner-centred approaches. Standards for child-friendly learning centres were developed by UNICEF in Nepal.³²¹

In India, the 'Making Schools Accessible to Children with Disabilities' guidebook was developed as part of the Accessible India Campaign with the goal of improving accessibility of schools for children with disabilities. The guidebook can be used by school leaders,

³¹⁹ School Improvement, Quality Assurance & Accountability Framework, 2017.

³²⁰ UNICEF Maldives, *UNICEF Annual Report 2014 – Maldives*, Malé, 2014.

³²¹ UNICEF Nepal, *UNICEF Annual Report 2015, Nepal*, Kathmandu, 2015, <https://sites.unicef.org/about/annualreport>.

Table 18. Countries with principles of inclusion integrated in school quality standards

Country	Quality standards present	Quality standards integrate principles of inclusion
Afghanistan	Yes	Yes
Bangladesh	Yes	Yes
Bhutan	Yes	Yes
India	Yes	Yes ^a
Maldives	Yes	Yes
Nepal	Yes ^b	Yes
Pakistan	Yes	Yes
Sri Lanka	Yes	Yes

^a Focused on physical accessibility of infrastructure.

^b Standards only for early childhood education and not primary or secondary education.

school management committees and school communities to identify barriers children with disabilities may experience and address them through the standards provided.³²² The indicators for compliance with the RTE Act also include accessibility, specifically the construction of ramps in schools.

In Afghanistan, the child-friendly school (CFS) standards for inclusive learning friendly environments were integrated into the National Education Sector Plan 2017–2021. CFS quality standards were integrated into government plans for institutionalizing quality education. The standards had components supporting inclusive education, particularly “inclusiveness, effective teaching and learning; safe, healthy, gender-responsive learning environments; and community participation”.³²³

Summary

The integration of standards and indicators for inclusion into school processes is widely practised in the region and a number of promising practices have been documented. However, the incorporation of inclusive indicators can still be improved by using CRPD as a guide to developing indicators, incorporating the indicators

into the standards for all schools, and not only special schools, and be seen as a basis for developmental improvement based around action learning rather than only as a tool for monitoring.

3.4.2 Monitoring and quality assurance

Monitoring and quality assurance systems for disability-inclusive programming allow stakeholders and policymakers to make evidence-based decisions on planning, budgeting and implementation. Key to effective monitoring and quality assurance systems is the collection of appropriate data that can measure progress in inclusive education, such as enrolment of children with disabilities, achievement and transitions, number of children with disabilities who are out of school, impact of training on practice, changes in organizational cultures, professional development support available for teachers, and other measures for reducing barriers to education and increasing access.

Evaluation data should be collected regularly and integrated into the education management information system of the department or ministry for monitoring and evaluation to be sustainable. For information to be used for policy development, planning and programming,

³²² *Making Schools Accessible to Children with Disabilities.*

³²³ UNICEF Afghanistan, *Annual Report 2016*, Kabul, 2016.

indicators being monitored must be standardized and information should be shared across all levels of the system.³²⁴

The participation of persons with disabilities and OPDs in data collection encourages a participative process for monitoring and evaluation. Capacity building for those who are part of the data collection process is integral to a robust monitoring and quality assurance system.³²⁵

This section discusses the monitoring and quality assurance systems for disability-inclusive education, their utilization in informing programme and policy development and initiatives to improve monitoring and quality assurance in the region.

Policies encourage a monitoring and quality assurance process for improving disability-inclusive programming.

All countries in the region have policies articulating the need to monitor disability-inclusive programming. Some countries integrate monitoring and evaluation of disability-inclusive programming with that of education plans, which have inclusion targets, while others have attached it to policies specific to inclusion.

In Bangladesh, for example, the education sector plan includes a set of indicators for inclusive education outcomes. Monitoring of indicators of inclusive education outcomes articulated by PEDP4 are integrated into PSQL and monitored by the Monitoring and Evaluation Division of the Directorate of Primary Education. Indicators on the targets of PEDP include the number of children with ‘mild to moderate disability’³²⁶ in mainstream primary schools, percentage of teachers and head teachers who have received

special education training and percentage of upazilas that have made accommodations for children with disabilities in district-level summative examinations.³²⁷ Monitoring and quality assurance have also been integrated in policies specific to inclusive education.

Maldives has integrated guidelines on monitoring and evaluation into their IE Policy with a circular detailing the indicators to be monitored in the implementation of the policy as well as the role of the MoE Quality Improvement Division in data collection and progress monitoring.³²⁸

Across the region, monitoring of disability-inclusive indicators and quality assurance of disability-inclusive programmes have been developed, although the extent of the data gathered and their utilization vary among the countries.

In Afghanistan, data were collected on the number of children with disabilities in the community who were enrolled in school as well as those out of school. Data collection was built into the school improvement planning process introduced by UNICEF to schools under the CFS programme. The planning process included identifying school needs through the use of assessment data and employing an evidence-based approach to planning and school programming.³²⁹

Similarly, Bhutan's MoE collects information monitoring progress in inclusion through the Annual Education Statistics, which collects information on the number of schools implementing inclusive education programmes and the number of enrollees and teachers in inclusive schools.³³⁰

³²⁴ UNICEF, *Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation*, Companion Technical Booklet, United Nations Children’s Fund, 2014.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Whilst this is not necessarily reflective of the medical model, it is an attempt to begin tracking the number of children in school who may have a disability.

³²⁷ *Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report – 2019*.

³²⁸ Maldives Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education Policy, Malé, 2013, www.nie.edu.mv/index.php/en/resources/inclusive-education/documents/296-inclusive-education-policy-translation-english-2013/file.

³²⁹ UNICEF Afghanistan, Module 9: School Assessment & Development Plan, Child Friendly School Training Package, Kabul, n.d.

³³⁰ Bhutan Ministry of Education, Policy and Planning Division, *Annual Education Statistics, 2018*, Thimpu, 2018, www.education.gov.bt/wp-content/downloads/publications/aes/Annual-Education-Statistics-Book-2018.pdf.

Some countries collect a broader range of information for monitoring and quality assurance. As mentioned earlier, monitoring of indicators of inclusive education outcomes are integrated into PSQL in Bangladesh.³³¹ India monitors the provision of allowances, scholarships and transport or school bus services for students with disabilities. Data are consolidated at the national level.³³² Collecting data such as the professional development of teachers and the extent to which barriers to education are being addressed provides valuable information that can improve policy and programming.³³³

Some countries have a more extensive framework for measuring and utilizing disability-inclusive indicators across the system. The Nepal government launched the Equity Index in 2017 to measure deprivations in education experienced by marginalized children, including those with disabilities.³³⁴ The Equity Index, integrated into EMIS, is used to collect data on inequities children are vulnerable to due to their context. The data are used for evidence-based planning and activity implementation to address the barriers children from marginalized backgrounds experience. It was developed by MoE, UNICEF ROSA, UNICEF Nepal, World Bank and GPE.

The Equity Index uses the Human Opportunity Index model, using variables such as access, participation and learning. A Human Opportunity Index is then computed per district. The information is used by education leaders and policymakers to develop strategies and plans for addressing the inequities and divert resources to districts that most need it. The data are shared with stakeholders and decision-makers at the school, municipal, provincial and national levels.³³⁵

Maldives has developed a Monitoring Framework for Inclusive Education, published by the MoE

Department of Inclusive Education in 2019. The monitoring framework is designed to be used across all levels of the system to monitor and inform inclusive education practices in schools.

It aims to provide a standardized toolkit for schools to assess their current IE practices and make adjustments to improve their inclusive practices; improve accountability of stakeholders of disability-inclusive programming; institutionalize a monitoring system for the school, regional and central level for provision of support; and develop a framework of monitoring in all levels of the system. It monitors four dimensions:

- Capacity building and awareness – school plans and programmes in building capacity of teachers to teach children with disabilities and raise awareness of stakeholders.
- Teaching practices – teaching and learning processes.
- Support system – school environment, funding and resource allocation and referral systems available in school.
- Managing information, records and documents – records and documentation on students, staff allocations, IEPs and the IE Policy.

The monitoring system is designed to be multilevel with a standardized system for data gathering and monitoring from the school, regional and central/national level, and information is designed to flow in both directions.³³⁶

Integration of monitoring and quality assurance systems for disability-inclusion into EMIS and other systems for gathering information encourages the regular collection of data and

³³¹ *Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report – 2019.*

³³² India Ministry of Human Resource Development, *Selected Information on School Education* (Reference year: 2015–2016), New Delhi, 2017.

³³³ *Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation.*

³³⁴ Price and Oostrum, 'Nepal's Equity Index'.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ Maldives Ministry of Education, Department of Inclusive Education, *Monitoring Framework for Inclusive Education*, Malé, 2019.

sustainability of monitoring disability-inclusive indicators. In Pakistan, data for children with disabilities are collected through ASER.³³⁷ The annual situation report provides the number of children with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools and special education institutions by collecting data on disability using the WG/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning nationwide.

India has integrated the collection of data on disability-inclusive programming into the Unified District Information System for Education, which includes data on the enrolment of children with disabilities and the transition rates of children with disabilities between grade levels and educational stages.³³⁸ Similarly, the mapping survey respondents note that the Sri Lankan government collects data on participation, types of disability, barriers to education and number of children with disabilities who are out of school through EMIS.

Involvement of OPDs in monitoring and evaluation strengthens their role in advocating for the rights of children with disabilities for equitable education.

In Nepal, the OPD National Association of Hard of Hearing and Deafened Nepal participates in monitoring data on persons with disabilities, including the status of children with disabilities in education. The OPD has attended capacity building activities on monitoring human rights issues of persons with disabilities and they have also trained their partners on disability-inclusive education practices. It also engages in monitoring educational progress of children with disabilities and providing assistance to teachers for better implementation of disability-inclusive education.³³⁹

Summary

Throughout the region, monitoring and quality assurance systems are being established to monitor progress in disability-inclusive

education programming. The policy environment supports establishing and strengthening these systems, although the extent to which data are collected varies across the region for reducing the barriers to education that children with disabilities experience and developing access to and participation in quality education and their integration in institutionalized methods for monitoring.

Furthermore, countries are in the process of building/upgrading their systems to harmonize data collection, align with WG definitions and include data measuring the achievement of children with disabilities and the management of barriers to education.

Most countries need to strengthen disability-inclusive education monitoring through expanding the indicators measured to include achievement of children with disabilities and facilitating factors to inclusive education, such as support services available and professional development support on disability-inclusive education teachers and school heads receive. OPD involvement in monitoring and evaluation and the capacity of key government officials to monitor and evaluate needs to be significantly strengthened across the region.

3.5 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

3.5.1 Gender

The Global Education Monitoring Report 2019 states that gender parity has been achieved globally and the gender parity index for South Asia has rapidly progressed in primary, secondary and tertiary level enrolment.³⁴⁰ However, challenges to the education of vulnerable girls and boys persist within countries.

Legislations and education plans across the region support the education of girls with explicit provisions on girls' access to education. Afghanistan, India, Maldives and Nepal include

³³⁷ ASER Pakistan, *Annual Status of Education Report*, 2019.

³³⁸ Singal, 'Challenges and Opportunities'.

³³⁹ Hunt and Poudyal, *Education of Children with Disabilities in Nepal*.

³⁴⁰ UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report, Gender Report: Building bridges for gender equality*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019.

a focus on improving the access to education of girls with disabilities in their policies.

The Afghan Constitution mandates compulsory basic education with emphasis on girls' education.³⁴¹ The country's Comprehensive National Disability Policy 2003 stated that women and girls, including those with disabilities, must have equal access to social services including education and vocational training and be able to participate in social and community activities. It also stated that women and girls with disabilities should be included at the grassroots level and that their issues of marginalization should be addressed in the broader context of gender mainstreaming in development.³⁴²

India's Samagra Shiksha programme, linked with the RTE Act's 'no rejection policy', has a strong focus on girls' education, including girls with disabilities.³⁴³ The programme has an explicit focus on improving access of girls with disabilities to education and has helped increase girls' enrolment in conjunction with the RTE Act, providing for free, compulsory elementary education for children aged 6–14.³⁴⁴

In Maldives, the Education Strategic Plan 2019–2023 includes strategies to improve gender parity in education through improved data collection. One of the action points is inclusion of well-defined parity indices with disaggregation on gender, disability, location, economic status and ethnicity to allow for analysis on intersectionality of barriers to education for girls and boys.³⁴⁵

The Government of Nepal's Consolidated Equity Strategy for the Education Sector recognizes the intersectionality of disability, gender and geographic location and how it affects access of

girls with disabilities to education opportunities. The report notes that girls with disabilities living in rural areas have significantly lower access to basic education than those in urban areas. Further disaggregation of data on disability was recommended to help improve gender equality in education.³⁴⁶

Various initiatives respond to country-specific barriers to girls' education.

Initiatives have been taken to improve gender parity in education across the region. Improving gender-specific sanitation facilities in schools appears to be the most common intervention as it encourages more girls and female teachers to attend school.

In India, initiatives for promoting girls' education include mainstreaming gender issues in all educational programmes, ensuring availability of pre-primary and primary schools in most communities,³⁴⁷ and infrastructure development such as construction of female toilets,³⁴⁸ which brought not only more female students but also more female teachers to schools.³⁴⁹

Moreover, the scholarship schemes of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities to promote access of girls with disabilities to different levels of education have encouraged more parents to enrol their daughters.³⁵⁰ The Indian government's soon-to-be-established Gender Inclusion Fund includes provision of sanitation facilities, conditional cash transfers for girls, boarding facilities, provision of transportation to and from school such as bicycles, and other projects that support community-based interventions addressing context-specific barriers.

³⁴¹ National Education Strategic Plan 2017–2021.

³⁴² Comprehensive National Disability Policy, 2003.

³⁴³ *Education For All 2015 National Review Report*.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Maldives Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, *Education Sector Plan 2019–2023*, Malé, 2019.

³⁴⁶ Consolidated Equity Strategy for the Education Sector in Nepal.

³⁴⁷ *Education For All 2015 National Review Report*.

³⁴⁸ Singal, 'Challenges and Opportunities'.

³⁴⁹ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, *Inclusion and Education*.

³⁵⁰ Singal, 'Challenges and Opportunities'.

Summary

All countries across the region have policy provisions for girls' education. While only few countries articulate a focus on girls with disabilities in their policies and education plans, some countries have implemented strategic interventions to address context-specific barriers to girls' education. Further country-level research on structural barriers to girls' education is needed to develop stronger evidence-based interventions addressing deeply rooted drivers of gender inequality in education.

3.5.2 Humanitarian contexts

In the majority of countries, children with disabilities are targeted in the education response to COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to the education system as it struggled to provide timely and appropriate responses to ensure continuity of learning during periods of school closure. Worldwide, it is estimated that one in five children and young people were out of school before the COVID-19 pandemic. Children with disabilities were only half as likely to have ever attended school compared to children without disabilities.³⁵¹ School closures are likely to widen this gap due to growing systemic inequalities.³⁵²

Globally, many countries have relied on technology in their response to education disruption. It is estimated that due to a pre-existing digital divide and unequal access to internet, electronic devices and television, 40 per cent of disadvantaged learners in low and lower middle-income countries are left without any form of education during the pandemic.³⁵³

Families of children with disabilities are more likely to belong to the poorest households and have less access to electronic devices, including radios and televisions, to be able to participate in remote learning programmes. Even when children with disabilities do have access to such devices, they are less likely to use them as remote learning programmes rarely consider basic accessibility features.³⁵⁴ In addition, during health emergencies, children with disabilities have limited or no access to rehabilitation, physical therapy or other services, which would otherwise support their learning.³⁵⁵

In the response and recovery plans of most countries, children with disabilities and marginalized groups are taken into account by the government. Except for Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, response plans include specific measures to address the needs of children with disabilities.

Different approaches are specifically targeted to children with disabilities. These include:

- employment of low-tech modalities to widen the reach of interventions, such as short message service (SMS), interactive voice responses and development of low-cost learning packages (Bangladesh);
- development and adaptation of the curriculum and learning packages for children with disabilities (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal);
- production of electronic content in accessible formats such as Digitally Accessible Information System (India), in sign language (Bhutan, India, Maldives), high-resolution print materials and use of text to speech features (Bhutan, India);

³⁵¹ Hayes, A. M., J. Niad and J. Bulat, 'Inclusive from the Start: Building Inclusivity into Education Programming During Covid-19 School Closure—and Beyond', UKFIET, 2020, www.ukfiet.org/2020/inclusive-from-the-start-building-inclusivity-into-education-programming-during-covid-19-school-closures-and-beyond, accessed 5 June 2020.

³⁵² McClain-Nhalpo, C., 'An Inclusive Response to Covid-19: Education for Children with Disabilities', Global Partnership for Education, 2020, www.globalpartnership.org/blog/inclusive-response-covid-19-education-children-disabilities, accessed on 5 June 2020; Hayes, Niad and Bulat, 'Inclusive from the Start'; *Pivoting to Inclusion*.

³⁵³ *Pivoting to Inclusion*.

³⁵⁴ McClain-Nhalpo, 'Inclusive Response to Covid-19'; *Pivoting to Inclusion*.

³⁵⁵ McClain-Nhalpo, 'Inclusive Response to Covid-19'.

- provision of learning materials and stimulus packages to support parents of children with severe disabilities in home-based learning (Maldives);
- engaging parents through home visits and teachers to support children at a higher risk of dropping out, including girls and children with disabilities, and provision of counselling/ psycho-social support to temper fear of COVID-19 (Bangladesh); and
- engaging volunteers in teaching children with disabilities using learner-centred strategies (Nepal).

In India, the Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing, the nation's digital infrastructure, provides e-content for school education in states/ Union Territories. Special e-content for visually and hearing impaired has been developed and made accessible for children with disabilities with internet connection on the Digitally Accessible Information System and in sign language on the National Institute for Open-Schooling's website and YouTube channel. In Bhutan, explicit guidelines on the adaptation of the curriculum were instituted (see Table 19).

Minimum standards for education in emergencies have been adopted in some countries to ensure safety in schools.

The geographical location of countries in South Asia makes them vulnerable and prone to risks caused by natural disasters. Countries have adopted and developed a contextualized Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education to respond to the call of SDG 4, Target 4.a on providing safe schools for children with

disabilities,³⁵⁶ and to ensure that protocols are in place during education in emergencies.

INEE is a global tool that articulates the minimum level of educational quality and access in emergencies through to recovery and ensures access to safe and relevant learning opportunities for all learners in emergencies through to recovery.³⁵⁷ Countries that have developed contextualized INEE Standards include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan. In Afghanistan, INEE contextually developed the implementation of community-based rehabilitation programmes, focusing on providing inclusive education to children with disabilities.

Initiatives to address education of children with disabilities living in armed conflicts and protracted crisis are present.

Barriers to education for children with disabilities are compounded in humanitarian contexts, such as emergencies, armed conflicts and protracted crisis.³⁵⁸ According to a report on inclusive education in Afghanistan, conflict had resulted in schools being targeted by militants with more than 700 schools closed and over 300,000 students, including those with disabilities, having no access to schooling.³⁵⁹ In 2015, Afghanistan endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration³⁶⁰ that encouraged the demilitarization of schools.

In Bangladesh, refugee children, including children with disabilities in Cox's Bazar camps are provided access to learning through the support of development organizations. In 2019, UNICEF and its partners guaranteed access to learning for 192,063 (49 per cent girls) Rohingya children aged 4-14, including 359 children (35 per cent girls) with disabilities, enrolled in 2,167 (against the target of 2,500) learning centres.³⁶¹

³⁵⁶ Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action.

³⁵⁷ International Network for Education in Emergencies, Sri Lanka Minimum Standards for Education, INEE & Sri Lanka Education Working Group, 2013.

³⁵⁸ UNICEF and Handicap International, *Guidance on Including Children with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action: Education*, n.d., https://sites.unicef.org/disability/emergencies/downloads/UNICEF_Education_English.pdf.

³⁵⁹ *Needs and Rights Assessment*.

³⁶⁰ Reliefweb, 'Practical impact of the Safe Schools Declaration', 23 October 2019.

³⁶¹ UNICEF Bangladesh, *Bangladesh Humanitarian Situation*, Report no. 52 (Rohingya Influx), Dhaka, 2019.

Table 19. Curriculum adaptations for children with disabilities in response to COVID-19 in Bhutan

School	Description of learners	Adaptation to curriculum	Mode of delivery
General schools with Special Educational Needs Programme	Group A: Learners who can cope with the general curriculum	Follow the education package with adaptation and modification	YouTube, Google classroom
	Group B: Learners who cannot cope with the general curriculum	Learners will be offered daily living skills	YouTube, Google classroom
Muenselling Institute	Group A: Children who have vision problem	Adapted curriculum in accessible formats (e.g., audio materials and high-resolution print materials, with Accessibility Talk Back features (Text to Speech))	YouTube, Google classroom
	Group B: Learners who cannot cope with the general curriculum	Learners will be offered daily living skills	YouTube, Google classroom
Wangsel Institute	Deaf and hard of hearing students	Separate curriculum developed specifically for deaf and hard of hearing students delivered through Bhutanese sign language. Key learning areas, instruction and assessment techniques were selected from the curriculum to be delivered during the pandemic.	

Summary

Children with disabilities living in humanitarian contexts are at a higher risk of exclusion in education. Humanitarian issues such as emergencies, armed conflicts and protracted crises are aggravated by the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Countries relied on technology to ensure learning continuity amidst school closures, but the pre-existing digital divide became more glaring. Access to the internet, electronic devices, television and radio are unequal with 40 per cent of disadvantaged learners often left behind. Even when children with disabilities are able to access digital platforms for learning, they

are less likely to use them as remote learning programmes rarely consider basic accessibility features.

In South Asia, particular needs of children with disabilities are considered in six out of eight education response plans to COVID-19. Countries adopted low-tech modalities, adapted the curriculum and learning packages into accessible formats, and provided learning materials and support to teachers and parents to engage children with disabilities. For emergency response, five out of eight countries have adopted and developed contextualized INEE Minimum Standards for Education, with some having particular focus on children with disabilities.



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Prevailing negative attitudes to and cultural beliefs on children with disabilities and how they learn hinder their access to education and social services.

4

MAIN GAPS AND CHALLENGES

4.1 ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

1. Institutional barriers exist in legislation as special education is continually promoted.
2. The systemic lack of data on children with disabilities impacts policy and programming, rendering children with disabilities invisible.
3. Leaders across all levels of the system still need to build their knowledge and capacity on disability inclusion, rights-based education and inclusive leadership.
4. Strengthening horizontal and vertical coordination between departments and agencies that can facilitate disability-inclusive education is a common need in the region.

4.2 DEMAND

1. Collaboration and partnerships between development partners, NGOs, CSOs, OPDs and governments that foster knowledge sharing on disability-inclusion in education need to be strengthened. Lessons and good practices are not systematically collected and shared to influence changes in practices within organizations and find solutions to problems.
2. Prevailing negative attitudes to and cultural beliefs on children with disabilities and how

they learn hinder their access to education and social services. Stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities influence policy and programming, services and learning environments.

3. A national communication strategy on rights-based disability-inclusive education is missing in most countries. Most advocacy efforts for awareness on disability and equity in education are led by development partners, NGOs, OPDs and CSOs. Without the support of national policies and plans and ownership from the government, sustainability and reach of initiatives will be limited.

4.3 SERVICE DELIVERY

1. Segregated provisions to educating children with disabilities are common in the region, especially for children with hearing and visual disabilities and disabilities that limit a child's mobility. As long as general education systems are not equipped and the teaching force is not supported to handle children with diverse needs, specialized education provisions will continue to exist so that children with disabilities receive some/any form of education.
2. A commitment to gradually discontinue segregated education models is missing across the region. This does not mean abrupt

closure of specialized education programmes; instead, a strategic plan is needed to gradually transition segregated models of education to an inclusive education system.

3. Teachers still lack the confidence and competencies needed to teach diverse classes. There is a need to review pre-service and in-service curriculum towards the integration of inclusive education principles in alignment with CRPD.
4. Curricula, pedagogy and assessment systems are generally not facilitative of inclusive teaching and learning for children with disabilities.
5. National policies outlining curriculum and assessment frameworks that strengthen school-based assessment and national assessment systems to address the needs of children with disabilities are limited.
6. Policies and guidelines for the production and distribution of learning materials and assistive technologies are not available. Infrastructures and systems to support ICT and the use of assistive technology need to be established.
7. Violence against children with and without disabilities in schools is manifested in many forms, such as verbal, emotional, physical and sexual abuse, bullying and discrimination by school authorities or peers. Across the region, there is limited evidence of national legislation and school-level policies that comprehensively address issues of school-based violence against children with disabilities.
8. Integrated delivery of support services is lacking in most countries. While there are policy provisions for the coordination of ministries and organizations in delivering disability-related services in most countries, implementation is either lacking or weak.

Referral systems linking community-based identification programmes to national support services are lacking across the region.

9. Programmes to ensure the transition of children with disabilities to secondary and tertiary education can be strengthened.

4.4 MEASURING AND MONITORING QUALITY

A cross-sectoral and standardized system for monitoring the conduct of inclusive education is not present in many countries. The technical capacity of the workforce in monitoring and quality assessment needs to be developed.

4.5 GENDER

Few countries have policy focus on girls with disabilities. Most policies and plans on education and disability lack a gender lens. National programmes and NGO-led projects lack focus on girls with disabilities. Programmes generally centre on either girls' access to education or access of children with disabilities to education without addressing the intersectionality of barriers to girls' education.

4.6 HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

Learning opportunities during emergencies and humanitarian issues do not often consider accessibility and reasonable accommodations for children with disabilities. Armed conflicts and protracted crises continue to pose risks of further marginalization for children with disabilities, including in education. Although strategic plans consider learning needs of children with disabilities, there is a general lack of evidence supporting the effective implementation of such initiatives.



A strong commitment to move from special segregated education to inclusive education should be made. This requires the development of a comprehensive and long-term strategic plan to transition the segregated provision of education to inclusive education to ensure equity.

5

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS

1. Strengthen legislative frameworks and increase accountability.

Governments should expand their understanding of inclusive education at all levels of the system. While it is crucial that children with disabilities are targeted in laws and policies, it is equally important for education systems to embrace a wider understanding of inclusion.

Inclusive education is not only about children with disabilities. It is about all children, regardless of backgrounds. At least two countries have a limited view of inclusion, focusing only on disability. A broader philosophy should be adopted in all laws and policies, including sector plans, with emphasis on fully including children with disabilities along with children from all other marginalized groups.

Across the region, substantial development has taken place in aligning legislative frameworks with international conventions on disability-inclusive education. However, segregated provisions still remain, and in some countries, special education laws and policies are enforced alongside legislation that promotes learning in inclusive settings. Governments must commit to

eliminating discriminatory language and practices in laws and policies.

Ratification of CRPD should be made a priority where it has not been ratified. Medical model terminology used to refer to children with disabilities in some laws and policies need to be replaced with inclusive language and the definitions of disability and inclusive education across legal documents need to be consistent and aligned with the social model of disability and CRPD.

A strong commitment to move from special segregated education to inclusive education should be made. This requires the development of a comprehensive and long-term strategic plan to transition the segregated provision of education to inclusive education to ensure equity in education.

2. Increase investments towards inclusive education.

Governments must aim to reach the agreed benchmarks in the Incheon Declaration for funding education to address inequities affecting the most vulnerable groups of children. A twin-track approach is most likely to be effective in financing disability-inclusive education. It encourages allocation of adequate resources

to address system-wide reforms, such as changes in policies, culture and practices, alongside funding targeted interventions, such as individualized support, reasonable accommodations, assistive devices and other specialized services, to meet the needs of children with disabilities in mainstream education.

Funding must put greater focus on inclusive approaches rather than investing in learning in segregated settings.

3. Improve data on children with disabilities.

Accountability is inextricably linked with the availability of reliable and robust data. The availability of accurate and reliable information remains a serious issue across the region. Definitions and approaches to identifying and measuring disability vary in different country contexts and must be aligned with CRPD.

The introduction of the Washington Group of Questions and WG/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning in national surveys and EMISs is a positive development, which can support ongoing improvements in identification of disability, data collection, monitoring and quality assurance. Continuing to promote the use of these questions and the module in all data collection initiatives will enable the generation of more reliable and comparable data.

Governments must invest in improving birth registration systems, multidisciplinary early identification and screening, and data collection systems, and ensure the collection of disaggregated data on children with disabilities, including those who are out of school. Data collection needs to go beyond numbers and include the barriers children with disabilities face and the quality of teaching and learning, including learning environments. Persons with disabilities need to be involved in monitoring and evaluation activities.

Relevant ministries (particularly education, health, social protection) should be oriented on key concepts in disability inclusion to develop awareness on the need for rights-based approaches to identifying disability.

Inclusive education standards must be incorporated into the standards for school quality and implemented in all schools. Inclusive education must be understood as synonymous with high-quality education for all children and must be linked to monitoring mechanisms (e.g., EMIS). Existing standards for inclusion can be further strengthened by communicating clear indicators and taking a developmental approach to implementation.

4. Apply universal design in teaching and learning, including infrastructure.

Universal Design for Learning must be promoted and education stakeholders should be supported to develop their understanding of UDL. Supporting capacity building in understanding and implementing UDL is one of the most important ways in which governments can enable the transition towards a more inclusive system.

UDL must be applied in curriculum design, assessments, pedagogy, infrastructure and the design and provision of assistive technology and devices. The key principle is to enable a variety of approaches to be applied to remove any barriers to learning and give all students equal opportunities to succeed. Building flexibility in design and provision enables adjustments to be made to respond to every student's strengths and needs.

Expand the provision of assistive technology for greater accessibility, especially during school closures due to national emergencies such as that caused by COVID-19.

5. Strengthen institutional capacity for inclusive education implementation. Increase focus on supporting teachers and raising teacher quality.

The pre-service and in-service curricula for teachers need to be reviewed for their alignment with CRPD. Capacity building programmes need to adopt a whole systems approach, including strengthening the role of school leaders in instructional leadership and (where they still exist) transitioning the role of special educators to providing inclusive, capacity building support to teachers.

Inclusive education is beginning to be integrated into initial teacher training curricula and in-service training programmes across the region. While there is progress, most teachers still lack understanding of inclusion and have limited skills and confidence to effectively teach diverse learners. Capacity development initiatives are predominantly based on the misconception that special pedagogy is required to teach children with disabilities.

Teachers mostly employ rote learning approaches and need support in developing inclusive values and learner-centred classroom practices based on UDL. Ongoing school-based professional development opportunities must be provided to help develop teachers as reflective and collaborative practitioners, promote action research and facilitate continuous improvement.

A consolidated approach to training where special education teachers and mainstream teachers are trained together and their roles defined in teaching a diverse class of learners can be used to strengthen capacity building support at the school level.

School-based professional development with an emphasis on coaching and mentoring and collaborative approaches to teacher development, rather than cascade training, needs to be strengthened across the region. Teachers should also be encouraged to conduct action research, reflect on their practices, adjust teaching strategies, and increase self-agency and collaborative communities of practice in creating inclusive classrooms.

Supporting school leaders is crucial in teacher development. Tools and instruments for developing inclusive school ethos are starting to be developed and utilized in the region. However, there is a need to put more emphasis on the role of leaders in developing values and cultures, along with distributed models of leadership that promote inclusive attitudes and practices supportive of disability-inclusive education, in policies as well as in developing capacity building programmes. This includes ensuring that teacher

and leadership competency standards reflect inclusive values and practice.

6. Improve coordination and partnerships and increase opportunities for learning among and within countries.

Coordination across ministries and all levels of relevant systems need to be strengthened. Despite the existence of cross-sectoral and vertical coordination systems, a common finding across the region is the need to strengthen coordination to improve disability-inclusive education planning, implementation and monitoring. A sector-wide approach to planning can be leveraged to improve synergy between key ministries and departments. Inclusive education entails a holistic perspective that needs to be reflected in multidisciplinary policy and practice coordination.

Governments must also endeavour to create more opportunities to share experiences, practices and lessons learned within and outside the country. Although approaches often need to be contextualized, sharing and learning from others' experiences have the potential to inspire stakeholders to start making changes within their spheres of influence. Establishing communities of practice can facilitate knowledge exchange.

Partnerships with development partners, NGOs, OPDS and CSOs have proven to be effective in driving the inclusion agenda forward. However, coordination and harmonization of initiatives should be improved. Involving partner organizations in policy and programme development and implementation can help establish common goals and indicators, maximize limited resources, ensure interventions are harmonized and do not duplicate each other, reinforce impact and ensure sustainability.

7. Raise awareness and understanding of disability and inclusion.

An evidence-based behaviour change and communication strategy should be developed by governments. Further research should explore deeply embedded causes of negative attitudes

and perceptions towards disability and inclusive education that would form the basis for targeted behaviour change and communication strategy, including a national advocacy and awareness campaign on disability-inclusive education. This entails a unified direction towards disability-inclusion across all sectors and clear messages on a rights-based approach to disability, involving the active participation of persons with disabilities.

8. Include learning continuity for children with disabilities in COVID-19 response and recovery plans and programmes.

Unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic put children with disabilities at a higher risk of exclusion in education. While it is true that the pandemic has highlighted the pre-existing learning crisis, it also provides an opportunity that can be leveraged to rebuild better, more inclusive and equitable education systems that include all learners. Response and recovery plans and programmes must explicitly target children with disabilities. Remote learning can employ UDL principles to ensure greater accessibility.

Accessibility needs to be a priority when delivering lessons through digital platforms and designing remote teaching and learning materials. Providing low-cost and no-tech solutions can help bridge the digital divide, which is more likely to affect vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities.

9. Ensure gender equality.

Factors for non-participation of girls with disabilities are complex. A combination of economic, cultural, security, health and infrastructural reasons drive families to keep girls with or without disabilities at home. Governments need to recognize the intersectionality of barriers to the education of girls with disabilities in their respective country contexts and develop strategies to address each of these barriers at different levels.

To improve gender equity in education, all new and existing policies and development

plans should be reviewed with a gender lens. This should involve the active participation of women, gender specialists, and girls and women with disabilities in policy review, planning and development as well as capacity building of government stakeholders at all levels on concepts and issues on gender.

10. Set achievable strategic goals.

Inclusive education is a complex process, and no education system can change overnight. Strategic goals must be achievable and based on reliable evidence, and governments should begin by working with stakeholders and development partners to identify areas of good inclusive practice within the education sector plan, which can be built upon. This might include developing resourced schools and establishing or expanding inclusive school pilots to strengthen the evidence base and replicate good practices.

However, wherever possible governments should avoid expanding special, segregated provision for children with disabilities and instead start to identify the steps required to begin transitioning all children into inclusive learner-friendly regular schools.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

1. Continue advocating for disability-inclusive education.

Continue advocating for disability-inclusive education and help ensure children with disabilities are targeted in national laws and policies, sector plans and budgets. With extensive links to communities, advocacy initiatives should aim to increase the demand for inclusive education. Providing families and communities access to information on the legal rights of children with disabilities and available support services (where and how to access them), among others, can help empower them to claim children's rights to education on an equal basis with others.

A unified behavioural change and communication strategy can be developed among CSOs, in coordination with the government, to ensure that there are no conflicting messages on rights-based and disability-inclusive education. Voices of persons with disabilities, including children, must be amplified in awareness campaigns.

2. Direct programming and funding towards inclusive education.

Initiatives and funding should be channelled into the education of children with disabilities in mainstream settings, rather than supporting the expansion of special schools.

3. Strengthen institutional capacity.

Strategically address gaps in the capacity of the education system and wider community to implement disability-inclusive education. Improve responsiveness and reach of capacity building programmes to mainstream teachers and special education teachers by collaborating with the government. Align professional development programmes with existing frameworks or standards for teacher competency.

Development partners and national umbrella organizations for persons with disabilities are encouraged to support the capacity building of OPDs and CSOs to plan, deliver and monitor programmes and provide technical advice on inclusive education services. This can help transition CSO-led programmes and services that are based on social or charity models (such as programmes on providing care and cure) to focusing on removing barriers to education (such as moving from providing home-based education to helping increase access of children with disabilities to nearby regular schools).

4. Create communities of practice.

Organizing professional learning communities or communities of practice among development organizations will foster knowledge sharing and changes in practices. This would entail disability-inclusion actors (such as OPDs, inclusive education focal persons from NGOs, development partners, government and private

institutions, and CSOs working on disability-inclusion) within organizations or from several different organizations to come together for continuous learning through the exchange of experiences.

Effective practices and lessons learned in reducing barriers to the education of children with disabilities in one country or region can potentially help in another. This needs to involve the government to facilitate institutional capacity building.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Analyse financing and expenditure on disability inclusion.

Disaggregated data on budgets and expenditures on the education of children with disabilities are scarce. Further research on this area will inform better planning and more equitable costing and financing.

2. Build evidence of good practice.

One of the key findings from the data collection has been that there is not enough information about the impact of programmes and policies to increase equity and reduce barriers. There is a need to address the impact of interventions on practice and identify ways in which changes can be tracked in organizational cultures. For example, case studies on changes in teaching practices and the effect on children's learning outcomes will provide insights into what works and what can be scaled up. All countries have had pilot inclusive education programmes. Evaluating these pilots to generate lessons learned can inform future programming.

3. Research knowledge, attitudes and practices towards disability.

Studies on knowledge, attitudes and practices on disability and inclusion should be conducted to explore experiences of children with disabilities, parents, teachers and other key stakeholders, such as decision-makers, OPDs and other disability-support organizations.

Capacities of CSOs can be developed to conduct and engage in comprehensive socio-anthropological research to explore and identify contextual social norms, cultural practices and beliefs surrounding disability. Knowledge from such research will substantially inform advocacy and behaviour change strategies.

4. Conduct a mapping study on the accessibility of learning environments.

Accessibility is key in disability-inclusive education. Conduct research focused on the accessibility of learning environments, including

curriculum, assessment, learning materials, school facilities and infrastructure.

5. Research the recruitment, training and impact of teachers with disabilities in disability-inclusive education.

Making teachers with disabilities more visible in schools has the potential to transform views and norms and bring a unique perspective in the teaching and learning process. There was limited information on teachers with disabilities found in the mapping.

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Data collection needs to go beyond numbers and include the barriers children with disabilities face and the quality of teaching and learning.

ANNEXES

ANNEX A. MAPPING DOMAINS, DIMENSIONS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Domains and Dimensions	Research Questions
1. Enabling Environment	
1.1 Policy and legislative framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Is there a legal framework (at the national/subnational levels) that establishes the right of all children to receive a quality and inclusive education? b. To what extent do these laws and policies promote inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education? c. Is there a specific law on inclusive education supported by a strategic plan/implementation guideline?
1.2 Disability-inclusive sector plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what extent are disability/inclusive education issues covered in the Education Sector Analysis (ESA) process? b. Is there an Education Sector Plan (ESP) in place? c. To what extent does the ESP promote inclusive provisions?
1.3 Data on children with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Is the country's definition of disability aligned with the social model of disability? What are the available data on children with disabilities and their education? b. Is there a national identification system in place aligned with the ICF which involves intersectoral cooperation? What are existing data collection methods/systems (e.g., national surveys, child functioning modules) to gather information on children with disabilities in the country (i.e., disability prevalence among children)? c. Does the Education Management Information System (EMIS) include disaggregated data on enrolment, participation and achievement of children with disabilities in education, including out-of-school children?

Domains and Dimensions	Research Questions
1.4 Financing and funding mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what extent does the government ensure that appropriate resources are invested towards advancing inclusive education? b. Do national plans (e.g., ESP, strategic plan for IE) include budget for inclusive education for children with disabilities? What forms of education provision are being financed? c. Are support services for children with disabilities funded? What funding mechanisms exist?
1.5 Leadership and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what extent is the capacity for inclusive leadership evident in government units (i.e., national/subnational levels)? b. Are there established management structures/coordination systems among government units (such as health and social protection, specialized services) and between national and subnational education units, down to the school level to ensure implementation of disability-inclusive education? Are roles and responsibilities in relation to IE clearly defined?
2. Demand-Side	
2.1 Family, community engagement and partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what extent do policies/programs involve children with disabilities and their families, OPDs/CSOs in consultations, collaborations, policy development, decision-making, planning and implementing programs? b. Are there existing mechanisms and structures which support collaboration and partnerships between schools and the wider community?
2.2 Awareness, attitudes and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How does the government raise awareness on disability and inclusive education? Are strategic plans in place that advocate for inclusive education and push for inclusive social change? b. To what extent have these strategies developed positive attitudes in the society towards disability and inclusion? c. To what extent are families of children with disabilities informed of children's rights to inclusive education?
3. Service Delivery	
3.1 Approaches to educating children with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How is education for children with disabilities delivered compared to what is planned in the ESP/national or subnational strategic plan? b. What types of provisions exist (i.e., segregated, integrated, fully inclusive) for children with disabilities at different levels (pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher secondary)?

Domains and Dimensions	Research Questions
<p>3.2 Education work force development and teacher training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Are there initiatives to strengthen capacity of government institutions/education work force (national/subnational levels) to develop inclusive leadership, values and culture, and implement inclusive education? Are these initiatives systematically designed in a strategic plan? b. To what extent does the national pre-service teacher education curriculum equip teachers to respond to diversity in the classroom? c. Is inclusion an integral professional development area for in-service teachers including both mainstream and special schoolteachers? To what extent are teachers supported to develop inclusive values and practices? d. Are there existing models of decentralized and continuous teacher professional development? To what extent does specialized knowledge and expertise being transferred to mainstream education? e. Is there a policy setting the National Professional Competency Standards for teachers and school leaders which follow the principles of equity and inclusion?
<p>3.3 School environment and infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what extent does the government adhere to the principles of Universal Design for Learning in ensuring physical accessibility of learning environments? b. Are there systems or programs for creating safe and inclusive learning environments? Are there procedures in place that ensure child protection and prevent abuse any bullying?
<p>3.4 Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what extent are the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) evident in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment? b. What initiatives are being undertaken to ensure curriculum, pedagogy and assessment system are flexible, inclusive and accessible to all learners?
<p>3.5 Learning materials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what extent does the education ministry facilitate the adaptation of teaching and learning materials? Do learning materials include positive references to persons/children with disabilities? b. Are reasonable accommodation and assistive learning materials provided to promote access to the curriculum for children with disabilities?

Domains and Dimensions	Research Questions
3.6 Support services for students, parents and teachers	<p>a. Is there an existing cross-sectoral mechanism in place that supports holistic delivery of support services for children with disabilities and their families? Is there a national/subnational program which ensures accessibility of a full range of multi-disciplinary services for children with disabilities such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. multi-disciplinary assessment/child functioning screening services including children with disabilities who are out-of-school; 2. Early Identification and Intervention (EII); 3. Early Childhood Development (ECD); 4. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE); 5. Transition programs; 6. Therapy interventions, family support and community-based rehabilitation programs and other specialized services. <p>b. Are there established collaboration mechanisms between schools/teachers and specialists to provide appropriate specialized support to children with disabilities?</p> <p>c. To what extent are parents of children with disabilities supported?</p>

4. Measuring and Monitoring Quality

4.1 Standards and indicators for inclusion	<p>a. Does the government have and is implementing an established set of standards and indicators for quality education based on inclusive and equitable principles, that is enshrined in a policy?</p> <p>b. To what extent have these standards influenced the development and delivery of services for children with disabilities (i.e., infrastructure, curriculum and pedagogy, learning equipment and materials, teacher development, and support services) such that they are inclusive and equitable?</p>
4.2 Monitoring and quality assurance	<p>a. Does the national/subnational government use disability-inclusive indicators in monitoring the participation, achievement of children with disabilities in education?</p> <p>b. Are there systems and mechanisms in place to periodically monitor and evaluate inclusion of children with disabilities? To what extent are children with disabilities and their families involved in the process?</p>

5. Cross-Cutting Issues

5.1 Gender	<p>To what extent do initiatives address gender-specific needs and barriers?</p>
5.2 Humanitarian Contexts (including emergency, conflict, socio-economic status, disaster, etc.)	<p>a. To what extent do initiatives address humanitarian issues which cause further disadvantages for children with disabilities?</p> <p>b. To what extent do response to the COVID-19 disability-inclusive?</p>

ANNEX B. ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

MAPPING OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES IN SOUTH ASIA

Welcome

Thank you for your participation in the study. By completing this survey, you are supporting the development and strengthening of programmes for advancing the inclusion of children with disabilities in education.

Scope of the Mapping

The mapping aims to document policies, practices and strategies in disability-inclusive education (D-IE) led by government and non-government organisations, implemented within the last 10 years (2010-2020), at all levels of the education system (national, subnational – provincial, district, schools), targeted at facilitating access of children with disabilities to inclusive pre-primary up to upper secondary education, including vocational training and non-formal provisions.

Structure of the Survey

The survey will collect information on key aspects of an inclusive and equitable education system, organised around 4 domains:

Enabling policy environment
Demand side issues
Supply side issues
Quality of provision

Instructions

- Please respond to the questions to describe policies, programmes or initiatives led or supported by your office/organisation, on the level at which you work (e.g. national, provincial, state-level, etc).
- Please use the comment box to include any additional information, as needed.
- You may skip or select 'I don't know' for questions you are not able to answer.

For online respondents (via Survey Monkey)

- Your responses are automatically saved.
- Should you wish to leave the survey and come back to complete it on another time, you may do so.

Estimated Duration

45-60 minutes

Basic Information

What is your full name?

Which organisation do you work in?

In which department/unit?

What is your job title/position?

Which country are you responding for?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Afghanistan
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangladesh
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bhutan
<input type="checkbox"/>	India
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maldives
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nepal
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pakistan
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sri Lanka

At which level are you working now?

<input type="checkbox"/>	National
<input type="checkbox"/>	State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provincial
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, specify

Please provide name of state or province (if you work at the state or provincial level).

E-mail Address

Phone Number

Preliminary Question

P1. In which areas has your organisation undertaken significant initiatives to advance the inclusion of children with disabilities in education in the last 10 years? Select all which apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Legislative/policy reforms
<input type="checkbox"/>	Education sector analysis/planning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Financing disability-inclusive education
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identification of disability and improving child disability data
<input type="checkbox"/>	Capacity building of key education stakeholders
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teacher education/professional development
<input type="checkbox"/>	Curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and learning materials
<input type="checkbox"/>	Awareness raising and community engagement
<input type="checkbox"/>	Building inclusive school environments and infrastructure
<input type="checkbox"/>	Including children with disabilities in humanitarian response
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other; please specify

If there are available policies, reports or any document related to these initiatives, kindly share these through UNICEF.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The enabling environment includes interrelated conditions that enable or facilitate the development of an inclusive education system, including policies, plans, co-ordination and financing.

Policy and Legislative Framework

PL1. Does the country/state/province have a specific policy on Inclusive Education (IE)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know

Comment

PL2. Is the IE policy currently supported by a strategic plan or implementation guidelines?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know

Comment

PL3. Are there policies in effect that endorse special education/special schools?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know
Comment	

PL4. What do you think are the main challenges the country/state/province faces in terms of legislation/policies in disability-inclusive education?

	Absence of a strong legislative framework that supports disability-inclusive education
	Contradicting and inconsistent policies with provisions that allow children with disabilities to be educated in separate settings
	Laws and policies are not supported by strategic plans or implementation guidelines
	I don't know
	Other; please specify

PL5. What do you feel are the most significant initiatives, projects, or reforms undertaken by your organisation to ensure that laws/policies support the full inclusion of children with disabilities in education? Please describe below.

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Data on Children with Disabilities

DD1. What are the main sources of child disability data (i.e., disability prevalence) in the country/state/province? Please check all which apply.

	Censuses
	Household Surveys
	National Disability Surveys
	Administrative records
	Clinical assessments
	Quantitative/qualitative studies
	Survey using UNICEF/Washington Group Child Functioning Module
	NGO reports
	Development partner reports
	I don't know
	Other, please specify

DD2. Does the country/state/province have in place an identification/screening system for children with disabilities (in and out-of-school)?

	Yes, for in-school
	Yes, for both
	No for both
	I don't know

Comment

DD3. Which data on children with disabilities are collected in the Education Management Information System (EMIS)? Please select all which apply.

	No data
	Participation (enrolment, drop-out, completion)
	Learning outcomes
	Type of disability/functional difficulty
	Degree of disability/functional difficulty
	Barriers to education at the school level
	Children with disabilities who are out of school
	I don't know
	Other, please specify:

DD4. Does the EMIS use the Washington group set of questions^{362,363}(vision, hearing, gross motor, fine motor, intellectual, communication, behavior and socialisation) to define disability?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

Comment

DD5. What are the main challenges relating to reliable collection, storage and utilisation of data on children with disabilities and their education? Please select all that apply.

	Definition and/or measurement of disability is based on the medical model of disability
	Lack of a unified approach in identifying children with disabilities
	National surveys/censuses do not contain items on children with disability
	Quality of data on children with disabilities is limited
	Data on children with disabilities are not used in policy development and/or sector planning
	I don't know
	Other, please specify:

³⁶² For more details on the WG group set of questions, visit: <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/>

³⁶³ To download the Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning, go to: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/module-child-functioning/>

DD6. What do you feel are the most significant initiatives, projects, or reforms undertaken by your organisation to improve data on child disability and their education? Please describe below.

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Disability-inclusive Sector Plans

SP1. In your opinion, what are the main challenges in the promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities in Education Sector Analysis (ESA) and Education Sector Plan (ESP)?

--

SP2. Can you cite the most significant initiatives, projects, or reforms that have been undertaken by your organisation to ensure that the Education Sector Analysis and the Education Sector Plan include a focus on children with disabilities?

--

Financing and Funding Mechanisms

FF1. Does the government allocate dedicated funding for the education of children with disabilities?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

Comment

FF2. In which ministry/ies is dedicated funding for disability-inclusive education reflected?

	Ministry of Education
	Ministry of Health
	Ministry of Social Welfare/Protection
	Ministry of Labour and Employment
	I don't know
	Other; please specify

Comment

FF3. What government funding mechanisms exist to support disability-inclusive education?

	Scholarships
	Exemption from school fees
	Cash transfers
	Grants
	I don't know
	Other; please specify

FF4. What funding mechanisms from NGOs/CSOs/DPOs exist to support disability-inclusive education?

	Scholarships
	Exemption from school fees
	Cash transfers
	Grants
	I don't know
	Other; please specify

FF5. Is funding for disability-inclusive education reflected in sub-national budgets and in school budgets?

	Yes in sub-national budgets
	Yes in school budgets
	Yes in both
	In neither sub-national or school budgets
	I don't know

FF5.1 If yes, please describe briefly.

--

FF6. What support services for children with disabilities (e.g. health, social protection, and transport) are financed by the government?

	Identification/screening/diagnosis
	Rehabilitation
	Therapy
	Allowances
	Transportation
	Advisory support provided to teachers and children in schools
	Psycho-social support
	I don't know
	Other; please specify

FF7. What are the challenges or issues surrounding funding for disability-inclusive education?

	Lack of policy commitment to fund D-IE
	There is no budget line specifically for inclusive education
	Funding is mostly focused on supporting special schools
	Funding for D-IE is not reflected at subnational and school levels
	I don't know
	Other; please specify

FF8. What do you feel are the most significant initiatives, projects or reforms that have been undertaken by your organization to ensure equitable financing in education? Please share below.

Leadership and Management

LM1. In your opinion, how effective are coordination systems for children with disabilities across the different sectors such as education, health and social protection on the level at which you work?

	Very effective
	Somewhat effective
	Not effective
	I don't know

Comment

LM2. How effective, in your opinion is coordination between national and sub-national levels (state/ province, district, schools) of the education system?

	Very effective
	Somewhat effective
	Not effective
	I don't know

Comment

LM3. What do you think are the main challenges on the level at which you work related to leadership, management and coordination structures that affect disability-inclusive education?

	There is no clear vision and strategic direction to develop inclusive schools from the national government
	Roles of different sectors (education, health, social protection) in inclusive education are not clearly articulated or delineated
	Coordination between national and subnational education units (including schools) is weak
	I don't know
	Other; please specify

LM4. What significant initiatives have been undertaken to improve coordination systems for the education of children with disabilities?

DEMAND

This domain focuses on supporting children and their families to improve knowledge on their rights, demand for inclusive services, encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour, and increase participation in education. It includes involving the wider community, forging partnerships and putting in place systems and structures to facilitate meaningful engagement.

Family, Community Engagement and Partnerships

FC1. Are there programmes that provide structures or mechanisms for engaging families of children with disabilities and the community including CSOs/DPOs in disability-inclusive education?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

FC1.1 If yes, please can you describe below.

Comment

FC2. In your work, what are the roles of children with disabilities and their families in policy/ programme development? Select all that apply.

	Consulted during planning/development process
	Part of the decision making
	Involved in implementation
	Involved in monitoring and evaluation
	None
	I don't know
	Other, specify

FC3. What do you think are the main challenges in terms of family and community participation in disability-inclusive education? Please select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of awareness on disability and inclusive education
<input type="checkbox"/>	Negative attitudes towards disability and inclusive education
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, specify

FC4. In your experience in your work, what are the roles of CSOs/DPOs in policy/programme development? Please select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Provider/implementer of interventions for children with disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consulted during planning/development process
<input type="checkbox"/>	Part of the decision making
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involved in implementation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involved in monitoring and evaluation
<input type="checkbox"/>	None
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, specify

FC5. What do you think are the main challenges in terms of active and meaningful engagement of CSOs/DPOs in disability-inclusive education? Please select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Weak coordination systems between government and CSOs/DPOs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited funding
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, specify

FC6. Other than government and private schools, do you know of other organisations that provide education for children with disabilities at a large scale? (e.g. NGOs, faith-based organisations, etc.)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know

FC6.1 If so, can you name some of these key organisations below?

--

FC7. What do you feel are the most significant initiatives, projects or reforms undertaken by your organisation that helped increase participation and collaboration between schools, families and the wider community including CSOs/DPOs in disability-inclusive education?

Awareness, Attitudes and Practices

AA1. In your opinion, what are the main challenges in terms of awareness, attitudes and practices towards education of children with disabilities?

AA2. What significant initiatives, projects, or reforms have been undertaken by your organisation to raise awareness and combat negative attitudes towards disability and inclusive education? Please check all which apply.

	Drafting of a national Communication Plan for Social Change focused on disability-inclusive education
	Study on Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices (KAP) towards children with disability
	Advocacy and awareness raising campaigns
	I don't know
	Other, specify

AA3. In your opinion, how effective are these strategies in developing positive attitudes towards disability and inclusion?

	Very effective
	Somewhat effective
	Not effective
	I don't know

Comment

SUPPLY

Supply deals with the availability and access to various services for children with disabilities and initiatives to strengthen different aspects of the education system.

Participation of Children with Disabilities in Education

PC1. Which type of education provision would you say is the most dominant for children at the following age group? Please check the box which corresponds to your answer.

Type of provision	Pre-primary school age	Primary school age	Secondary school age	Upper secondary school age
Separate schools that provide special education/special needs education				
Home education				
Integrated where children are in the same school but attend different classes				
Inclusive education where schools include children with disabilities in mainstream/general classes				
Vocational training				
Apprenticeships				
Non-formal provision outside formal schools				
None				
I don't know				
Other; please specify				

PC2. Are there learning opportunities available for children with disabilities who are out of school?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

PC2.1 If yes, can you please describe below?

Education work force development and teacher training

TT1. Are there efforts to strengthen capacity on disability-inclusive education among key government officials?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

TT1.1 If yes, can you cite some of the major interventions which have been implemented?

Pre-service Teacher Education

TT2. What approaches to pre-service teacher training for inclusive education exist in the country/ state/province? Please select all which apply.

	Special Education/Special Needs Education Programmes: Only special education programmes exist in teacher education institutions. Graduates become special education teachers and teach in special schools.
	Inclusive Education Programmes: There are teacher training institutions that offer Inclusive Education programmes, founded on rights-based perspectives and promote inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.
	Embedded approach: Inclusive education is part of the compulsory curriculum for ALL trainee teachers and inclusive principles are reflected in every subject.
	Separate modules: A separate, optional module on inclusive education is available. Not all trainee teachers are required to take the course.
	None
	I don't know
	Other, please specify

TT3. In your opinion, to what extent do initial teacher training programmes encourage the inclusion of children with disabilities and ensure that trainee teachers are aware of their learning needs?

TT4. What do you think are the main challenges in pre-service teacher education related to education of children with disabilities? Please select all that apply.

	Inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education is not part of the compulsory curriculum for all trainee teachers
	Pre-service curriculum lacks an emphasis on learner-centred classroom approaches
	I don't know
	Other, please specify

TT5. What significant initiatives, projects, or reforms have been undertaken by your organisation to support the improvement of the national pre-service teacher education curriculum to ensure it prepares trainee teachers to teach diverse learners, including children with disabilities? Please select all that apply.

	Review and reform of teacher education curriculum
	Training for university teachers on disability inclusion
	Development of university programmes on inclusive education
	I don't know
	Other, please specify

In-service Teacher Education

TT6. What do you think are the main challenges in in-service teacher education related to education for children with disabilities? Please select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of knowledge on inclusive teaching approaches
<input type="checkbox"/>	Negative attitudes towards disability and inclusive education
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of support (e.g. training, specialised support, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please specify

TT7. Does the country/state/province have National Teacher Professional Competency Standards in place?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know

Comment

TT8. To what extent do in-service teacher training programmes focus on the needs of children with disabilities? Please select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Inclusive education is a key development area articulated in the national teacher professional competency standards
<input type="checkbox"/>	There are compulsory teacher training programmes on strategies for teaching children with disabilities in mainstream classes
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please specify

TT9. What significant initiatives have been undertaken or supported by your organisation to reform IN-SERVICE teacher education to ensure teachers are supported to include children with disabilities in mainstream classes?

--

School environment and infrastructure

SE1. What are the main challenges in the country/state/province in terms of physical accessibility of learning environments?

Comment

SE2. Is physical accessibility for children with disabilities included in school improvement plans?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

SE2.1 If yes, can you please provide some details below:

Comment

SE3. Does your organisation have a programme in place to ensure the accessibility of educational infrastructures?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

SE3.1 If yes, please describe briefly.

Comment

SE4. What are the prominent issues related to bullying and discrimination against children with disabilities in schools?

--

SE5. Does your organisation have a programme in place to counter discrimination, bullying and abuse against children with disabilities?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

SE5.1 If yes, please describe briefly.

Comment

Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

CA1. Is there a separate/special curriculum for children with disabilities?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know

CA1.1 If there is, please can you describe it briefly below.

Comment

CA2. What are the main challenges around curriculum, teaching and learning methods, and assessment that hinder children with disabilities to participate and achieve in education? Please select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Curriculum is rigid and does not allow flexibility
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teaching and learning approaches remain teacher-centred
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of understanding of Universal Design for Learning ³⁶⁶
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please specify

CA3. What significant initiatives have been undertaken or supported by your organisation to ensure the basic education curriculum, pedagogy and assessment systems are flexible and accessible to all learners?

Comment

Learning Materials

LS1. To what extent do learning materials (i.e. textbooks) include positive references to persons/ children with disabilities?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Textbooks/learning materials do not include positive references to children with disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Some textbooks/learning materials include positive references to children with disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Most textbooks/learning materials include positive references to children with disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	All textbooks/learning materials include positive references to children with disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know

Comment

³⁶⁶ An approach that is designed to provide all students an equal opportunity to learn in inclusive environments through flexible curricular approaches. (UNICEF, 2015)

LS2. What are the main challenges when it comes to learning materials for children with disabilities?

Comment

LS3. What significant steps have been undertaken or supported by your organization to facilitate the adaptation of teaching and learning materials, provision of reasonable accommodations³⁶⁷ and assistive learning devices so that the curriculum is accessible to all learners?

Comment

Support Services for Students, Parents and Teachers

SS1. At the level in which you work, is there an existing cross-sectoral mechanism (across education, health, social protection ministries) in place that supports holistic delivery of support services for children with disabilities and their families?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

Comment

SS2. Which support services exist in the country/state/province for children with disabilities? Select all that apply.

	Multi-disciplinary assessment/child functioning screening services including children with disabilities who are out of school
	Early Identification and Intervention (EII)
	Early Childhood Development (ECD)
	Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)
	Transition programs
	Therapy interventions, family support and community-based rehabilitation programmes and other specialised services
	I don't know
	Other; specify

Comment

³⁶⁷ Students with disabilities must be provided with 'reasonable accommodation' to help them have an education on an equal basis with others. This can include adaptations or services which will help overcome discrimination in getting an education. Accommodations might include, for example changing the location of a class, providing different forms of in-class communication, enlarging print, providing materials and/or subjects in sign, or in an alternative format, providing students with a note-taker, or a language interpreter, allowing students to use assistive technology in learning and assessment situations, allowing a student more time, reducing levels of background noise an ensuring sensitivity to sensory overload, providing alternative evaluation methods or replacing an element of curriculum by an alternative element. (UNICEF, 2017)

SS3. Are there established collaboration mechanisms between schools/teachers and specialists to provide appropriate specialised support to children with disabilities, when needed?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

Comment

SS4. What significant steps have been undertaken to ensure accessibility of support services for children with disabilities, their parents and teachers?

Comment

QUALITY

This domain includes measures to ensure the quality of education and support services for children with disabilities.

Standards and Indicators for Inclusion

ST1. Are there national/subnational standards and indicators for disability-inclusive education?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

ST2. To what extent have these standards influenced the development and delivery of education and support services for children with disabilities?

--

Monitoring and Quality Assurance

QA1. Is there a cross-sectoral monitoring mechanism with appropriate tools to systematically monitor inclusive education for children with disabilities?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

Comment

QA1.1 If yes, at what levels of the system are monitoring tools adapted for? Please select all that apply.

	School
	Municipality
	District
	Provincial
	Regional
	State
	National
	I don't know

QA2. What significant initiatives have been undertaken or supported by your organisation to establish structures and systems for monitoring and quality assurance of disability-inclusive education?

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Gender

GD1. In the country's context, are there issues which particularly affect the education of girls with disabilities?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

GD1.1 If yes, can you name some of these issues?

GD2. In the country's context, are there issues which particularly affect the education of boys with disabilities?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

GD2.1 If yes, can you name some of these issues?

GD3. Are there existing programmes that address the issues above?

	Yes
	No
	I don't know

GD3.1 If yes, can you name some of these programmes?

--

Humanitarian Contexts

HC1. What are the most significant humanitarian issues in the country that affect the delivery of education for children with disabilities? Please select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Poverty
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conflict/war
<input type="checkbox"/>	Natural disasters
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public health issues (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Caste-based discrimination
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please specify

HC2. To what extent have these issues influenced the provision of inclusive education for children with disabilities? Leave blank if not applicable.

Poverty	
Conflict/war	
Natural disasters	
Public health issues (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic)	
Caste-based discrimination	
Other issue/s, please specify	

HC3. What significant programmes are in place to address these issues?

--

COVID-19 and Children with Disabilities

CV1. Does the country have a Learning Continuity Plan in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know

Comment

CV2. What are the main challenges in education for children with disabilities during COVID-19? Please select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Availability and accessibility of learning materials
<input type="checkbox"/>	Engagement of families
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of capacity to support children’s learning at home
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don’t know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please specify

CV3. Are there issues which particularly affect the education of children with certain types of disability/functional difficulty (vision, hearing, gross motor, fine motor, intellectual, communication, behavior and socialisation)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don’t know

CV3.1 If yes, can you name these issues?

Children with difficulty in:	Specific challenges in education in the time of COVID-19
Vision	
Hearing	
Physical (gross motor, fine motor)	
Intellectual)	
Communication	
Behavior and socialisation	

CV4. What steps have been undertaken by your organisation to ensure learning continuity for children with disabilities in the time of COVID-19 and in the context of school closures? Please select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Supported teachers in developing remote learning materials, delivering remote learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assisted families of children with disabilities to provide learning support at home
<input type="checkbox"/>	Worked with CSOs/DPOs to deliver remote education for children with disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensured distance/remote learning platforms and materials are accessible to children with disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don’t know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please specify

CV4.1 Can you please provide details on these initiatives?

Promising Practices

What do you think can be considered a promising practice, strategy or an innovative initiative towards advancing disability-inclusive education in the country/state/province? Please describe below or share relevant documents.

Other Comments

Do you have any other comments or suggestions related to disability-inclusive education?

ANNEX C. CONTRIBUTORS

AFGHANISTAN

Organization
Ministry of Education
Accessibility Organization for Afghan Disabled
United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
International Rescue Committee
United Nations Children's Fund Afghanistan

BANGLADESH

Name	Designation	Affiliation
Md Muzibor Rahman	Education Officer (Inclusive Education), Policy and Operations Division, Directorate of Primary Education	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
Mohammad Tariq Ahsan	Professor, Institute of Education and Research	University of Dhaka
Mahbubur Rahman	Assistant Specialist	National Academy for Primary Education, Mymensingh
Pranay Bhuiyan	Assistant Coordinator, Content Development	Shuchona Foundation
Nusrat Jahan	Deputy Manager, Knowledge Management & Organizational Development	Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed
Dipti Das	Education Program Coordinator, Office of Population, Health, Nutrition and Education	United States Agency for International Development

Name	Designation	Affiliation
Mohammed Kamal Hossain	Education Advisor	Save the Children Bangladesh
Md. Murshid Aktar	Head of Education Programme	Plan International Bangladesh
Shereen Akther	Education Programme Officer	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Dhaka Office
Laila Farhana Apnan Banu	Education Specialist	United Nations Children's Fund Bangladesh
Kenneth Russell	Education Specialist	
Nor Shirin MD Mokhtar	Chief of Education	

BHUTAN

Name	Designation	Affiliation
Karma Jigyel	Programme Leader/Lecturer, Master of Education in Inclusive Education, Paro College of Education	Royal University of Bhutan
Soman Gyamtsho	Executive Director	Disabled Peoples' Organization of Bhutan
Bishnu Bhakta Mishra	Education Officer	United Nations Children's Fund Bhutan
Natalia Mufel	Chief of Education and Early Childhood Care and Development	

INDIA

Name	Designation	Affiliation
Bharti Kaushik	Associate Professor, Central Institute of Educational Technology	National Council of Educational Research and Training
Ashu J.	Senior Research Associate, International Relations Division	
B. Kalyan Chakravarthy	Principal Secretary, Samagra Shiksha	Department of Education, Assam
Satyendra Kumar	Additional State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha	Department of Basic Education, Uttar Pradesh
Huma Masood	Programme Officer (Gender & Education), Education Unit	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization New Delhi Cluster Office

Name	Designation	Affiliation
Akhil Paul	Executive Director	Sense International India
Amitabh Mehrotra	Founder cum Director	SPARC-India
Anjlee Agarwal	Executive Director and Accessibility Specialist	Samarthyam
Dipendra Manocha	Founder and Managing Trustee	Saksham
Ramachandra Rao Begur	Education Specialist	United Nations Children's Fund India
Ganesh Nigam	Education Specialist	

MALDIVES

Name	Designation	Affiliation
Ahmed Athif	Director General	Department of Inclusive Education
Fathimath Azna	Education Development Coordinator	
Hassan Mohamed	Principal	Jamaaludhin School
Fathimath Raabia	Lead Teacher	Muhyidheen School
Aishath Looba	Resource Member	Care Society
Shafeenaz Saeed	Program Director	Maldives Autism Association
Fathimath Shahuru	Psychologist	
Mazeena Jameel	Education Specialist	United Nations Children's Fund Maldives

NEPAL

Name	Designation	Affiliation
Divya Dawadi	Under Secretary and lead of the inclusive education thematic working group	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
Sushila Aryal	Section Officer	
Tanka Prasad Sharma	Under Secretary and head of the inclusive education section	Centre for Education and Human Resource Development
Narad Dhamala	Section Officer	
Manjua Baral	Section Officer	
Rama Dhakal	Vice President	National Federation of the Disabled
Kati Bose	Head of Cooperation, Counsellor (Development)	Embassy of Finland
Indra Gurung	Education Advisor	Embassy of Finland

Name	Designation	Affiliation
Ingrid Buli	Counsellor (Education)	Royal Norwegian Embassy
Kamla Bisht	Education Advisor	
Ian Attfield	Senior Education Adviser, South Asia Region	United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
Laura Parrot	Inclusive Education Specialist	United States Agency for International Development
Abhiram Roy	Comprehensive Sexuality Education Project Coordinator	United Nations Population Fund
Subekshya Karki	Inclusive Education Specialist	Humanity and Inclusion
Paras Malla	Head of Projects, Education	Plan International
Laxmi Paudyal	Education Specialist	Save the Children
Karthika Radhakrishnan-Nair	Senior Education Specialist	World Bank
Helen Sherpa	Country Director	World Education
Seema Acharya	Program Officer	
Ananda Paudel	Sisters for Sisters Manager	Voluntary Service Overseas
Lyndsay Rae McLaurin	Education Specialist (formal education)	United Nations Children's Fund Nepal
Jimmy Oostrum	Education Specialist (system strengthening)	
Mark Waltham	Chief of Education	

PAKISTAN

Balochistan Province		
Name	Designation	Affiliation
Abdul Khaliq	Focal Person, Policy and Governance	Policy, Planning and Implementation Unit – Secondary Education Department
Ijaz Baloch	Director	Provincial Institute of Teacher Education – Secondary Education Department
Muhammad Dawood	Teacher Trainer/Subject Specialist	
Hamid Baqi	Education Officer	United Nations Children's Fund Pakistan – Balochistan

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province		
Name	Designation	Affiliation
Ashfaq Ahmad	Director, Education Sector Reform Unit	Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at Abbottabad
Gohar Ali Khan	Director, Directorate of Curriculum & Teacher Education	
Hashmat Ali	Chief Planning Officer	
Abdul Munsif	Senior Instructor, Provincial Institute of Teacher Education Peshawar	Provincial Institute of Teacher Education Peshawar, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at Abbottabad
Hafiz Dr. Muhammad Ibrahim	Director, Directorate of E&SE	Directorate of Elementary & Secondary Education
Zia-ul-Haq	Project Director	Independent Monitoring Unit, Elementary and Secondary Education Department
Salahuddin	Deputy Director, EMIS	Elementary & Secondary Education Foundation
Obaid ur Rahman	Deputy Director	Directorate of Social Welfare Merged Areas, Social Welfare Department, KP
Nuzhat Amin	Programme Manager, Education	Khwendo Kor
Rukshanda Naz	Ombudsperson KP	KP Ombudsmen
Arshad Haroon	Managing projects and programs	Noor Education Trust
Fayyaz Ali Khan	Senior Technical Advisor, Education	GIZ
Nasir Azam	Assistant Program Officer	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Peshawar
Mussarrat Khattak	Consultant	-
Muhammad Akram	Education Officer	United Nations Children's Fund Pakistan – Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Punjab Province		
Name	Designation	Affiliation
Khaula Minhas	Headmistress, Special Education Department	Government of Punjab
Zarina Wahid	Headmistress, Special Education Department	
Shamas Zia	Lecturer, Special Education Department	

Name	Designation	Affiliation
Qaiser Rashid	Additional Secretary (Budget & Planning), Focal Person, Punjab Education Sector Plan, School Education Department	
Akram Jan	Project Manager, Curriculum and Research, Literacy & Non Formal Basic Education Department	
Mansoor Akhtar Ghouri	District Education Officer, Bahawalpur, Literacy & Non Formal Basic Education Department	
Tahira Rafiq	District Education Officer, Muzaffargarh, Literacy & Non Formal Basic Education Department	
Muhammad Aamir Razzaq	District Education Officer, Literacy Sargodha, Literacy & Non Formal Basic Education Department	
Muhammad Akram Jan	Protection Manager, Literacy Sargodha, Literacy & Non Formal Basic Education Department	
Salma Jafar	Freelance Consultant	-
Nabila Chaudhary	Director, Programs and Projects	Rising Sun Education & Welfare Society Lahore
Afaf Manzoor	Lecturer, Department of Special Education	University of Education, Lahore
Parveen Din Muhammad	Subject Specialist	Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development, School Education Department
Nasir Mahmood	Director of Assessment	Punjab Examination Commission, School Education Department
Muhammad Afzan Munir	Associate Research Fellow	Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi
Sehar Saeed	Deputy Director, Research	
Sehr Raza Jafri	Education Officer	United Nations Children's Fund Pakistan – Lahore

Sindh Province		
Name	Designation	Affiliation
Fouzia Khan	Chief Advisor/Additional Secretary, School Education and Literacy Department	Government of Sindh
Maira Siddiqui	Monitoring and Evaluation Manager	Family Educational Services Foundation
Fayaz Uddin Afridi	Education Officer	United Nations Children’s Fund Pakistan – Sindh

SRI LANKA

Name	Designation	Affiliation
K.A.D. Punyadasa	Director, Education, Non-Formal and Special Education Branch	Ministry of Education
Rajapaksha Mudiyansele Janaka Chaminda Kumara	Deputy Director, Education, Non-Formal and Special Education Branch	
Ponna Henedige Samantha Priyadarsana Dias	Lecturer, Department of Inclusive Education	National Institute of Education
Jasmine HyunKyung Lee	Education Consultant	United Nations Children’s Fund Sri Lanka
Yashinka Suriyaarachchige Jayasinghe	Education Specialist	
Takaho Fukami	Chief of Education	

Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia



For further information

UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA)
P.O. Box 5815, Lekhnath Marg, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-4417082
E-mail: rosa@unicef.org
Website: www.unicef.org/rosa/