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**Vision for SDG 4 implementation by 2030 in line with the CRPD**

**Consensus position prepared by the IDA Inclusive Education task team**

**voted by the IDA Board (Nov. 2019)**

**Introduction**

The following document presents the consensus reached by the International Disability Alliance Inclusive Education task team on the framing of implementation of SDG 4 with the CRPD in the area of education.

The consensus document is based on extensive exchanges between IDA members, dialogue with members of the International Disability Development Consortium (IDDC) and review of literature and in-depth analysis of the Nepal context, including an exchange with Nepalese representatives of disability organizations (DPOs). This document is the result of a collaborative process that lasted 16 months and included:

* A stock taking workshop with the IDDC IE task group in March 2018 and preparation of a preliminary report on the global state of play of education in general and for learners with disabilities in particular.
* A comprehensive data collection on Nepal and an in-depth exchange with Nepalese DPOs in March 2019, and interaction with DFID and UNICEF.
* A workshop in Brighton in July 2019, to formalise this consensus

If IDA wants to play an effective role in framing the increasing momentum on access of children with disabilities to education, including the new World Bank Inclusive education initiative currently being established, it needs a clear and strong position. The workshop in Nepal also showed that the lack of consensus among IDA members weaken the ability of both IDA and its members to support national DPOs in their advocacy efforts.

This Document is divided into 2 parts:

* The common IDA Vision for Sustained Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) implemented by 2030 in line with the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
* The elements of dialogue that contributed to building the common vision (parameters set to frame the exchange and country analysis, key points of general consensus, the “special schools” debate)

# **The Task Team calls on IDA members to adopt this Vision and make it the common platform for both global advocacy and support to national DPOs.**

# **IDA Vision for SDG 4 implemented by 2030 in line with the CRPD**

Building a truly inclusive education system is the only way to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all children and learners, whoever they are and wherever they are.

Responding to both the learning and schooling crises, inclusive education systems would contribute to the greater ability of future generations to embrace diversity and achieve gender equality, to promote sustainable development, peace and non-violence, and to develop the wider range of skills required in future economies.

In an inclusive education system, all learners with and without disabilities, are learning together in classes in their local community schools. All learners receive the support they need, from preschool to tertiary and vocational education, in inclusive and accessible schools and educational facilities, including sign language bilingual schools.

## Some learners with and without disabilities may choose to attend an inclusive school or educational institution away from their community to (i) benefit from quality bilingual education, including sign language, and/or (ii) acquire skills and knowledge and/or (iii) get specific support that is not yet available in their local community schools. Such skills, knowledge and support should be progressively available in the entire country.

## An inclusive education system is geared to foster equity, quality and inclusion through the following measures:

### All schools and education facilities are regulated by the ministries of education and higher education (in collaboration with relevant ministries for inclusive vocational training, early childhood development and life-long learning) whether they are managed by the public, private or voluntary sectors.

### Enforcement of non-discrimination and zero rejection policies including provision of reasonable accommodation, across the country in all levels and systems of education.

### Specific cognisance is given to the particular inclusion and support requirements of girls with disabilities, students with multiple disabilities and those students who experience compounded marginalisation.

### Significant investments are made in recruiting and training sufficient numbers of teachers including teachers with disabilities. Curriculum reforms and teachers’ pre-service and in-service training are learner centric and foster Universal Design for Learning to ensure that general education teachers are in the best position to provide quality learning for all learners in their classrooms[[1]](#footnote-1).

### Teachers with disabilities have been recruited, are provided with required reasonable accommodation, and teach children with and without disabilities across all levels and system of education.

### There is an emphasis on the recruitment and the training of support staff and teacher assistants who will support the inclusion of learners with disabilities in regular classes.

### Significant investments are made in the accessibility of all education facilities and teaching materials, with access to assistive products and technology, including the provision of information in accessible formats for children with print disabilities and provision of assistive listening systems.

### There are well resourced support services at national, provincial, and local levels, to assist all schools and all teachers to provide inclusive and effective learning for all learners, including those with disabilities.

* A diversity of languages and modes of communication are used throughout the system. Sign language and tactile sign language are progressively recognized as official languages of instruction, with relevant standards and licensing, ensuring particularly that teachers have full fluency in sign language.
* Special schools and other segregated settings are progressively phased out with key human resources and knowledge assets converted into support of inclusion, equal access and reasonable accommodation. Because of their critical role in language acquisition for deaf children, schools for the deaf are supported in their transformation into inclusive bilingual sign language schools for deaf children and other sign language users.

### Peer support and mentoring is available to learners who want it.

### Data are consistently collected, disaggregated and analysed to ensure adequate monitoring and resourcing of inclusive and equitable quality education.

### In decentralised systems, there is a comprehensive and consistent set of regulations and adequate resource planning for inclusive and equitable quality education at the different levels of government, with relevant vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms.

### A multi-sectoral approach is implemented to ensure collaborative partnerships between parents, families, communities, educators, multi- disciplinary professional services, schools and ministries of education to ensure the provision of access, support, reasonable accommodation and overall effective inclusion.

### In coordination with the education system, a range of supports are available for children and their parents from an early age through early childhood including (re)habilitation services for the development of specific skills and language acquisition, social protection and Community Based Inclusive Development (CBID). Such supports are available during transition periods between home and school and school to work or higher education.

*A matrix showing common and specific education requirements of different groups of learners with disabilities remain to be developed*

**B. Elements of the Dialogue Leading to the Consensus of the IDA Inclusive Education Task Team**

The following parameters defined the work on country policy scenarios and helped to frame the overall discussion:

1. As both SDGs and CRPD imply universality, all policy scenarios considered should positively impact on all learners, including all learners with disabilities across any given country, whoever and wherever they are located, to ensure that no one is left behind.

2. All efforts and steps towards achieving SDG 4 should be compliant with the CRPD and

at all times imply a concurrent double duty which means:

* (i) Immediate and continuous improvement and enforcement of non-discrimination laws, policies and standards, and (ii) the provision of reasonable accommodation and support in access to schooling and learning at all levels and education.
* (iii) Progressive transformation of the entire education system towards full and effective inclusion, with comprehensive accessibility provisions and individualized support for learners with disabilities. Progressive realization requires states to realise the rights of all children as quickly and effectively as possible. States should report evidence to the United Nations of increased policy efforts and progress in terms of availability, accessibility and quality of services and actual outcomes.

3. All schools and education facilities are regulated by the ministries of education and higher education (in collaboration with relevant ministries for vocational training, Early childhood development and life-long learning)

4. Advocacy of any disability constituency (i.e. group with a particular disability) should be compliant with the CRPD and should not undermine the advocacy of any other constituency.

There was also **consensus among the IDA Inclusive Education Task Team on the following general elements**:

* One key to equitable quality inclusive education for all learners is having an adequate number of **fully** qualified teachers across the country with pre-service and in-service training in inclusive teaching of learners with disabilities.
* Strong investments have to be made in overall improvement of the education system, to ensure an adequate student-teacher ratio, to develop the pedagogical capacities of teachers and school leaders, as well as curriculum development and adaptation.
* Qualified teachers might still require specific support on various pedagogical issues related to the diverse learning and accommodation needs of individual learners with disabilities, among others. Investment should be made to ensure that such quality support is made available to all teachers and schools.
* An inclusive education system should be learner centric and ensure that support is brought to the individual learner in their community school rather than the learner being required to leave their community to receive requisite support.
* Despite concerns about the availability and quality of support currently available, it is essential to tackle the vast problem of out-of-school children with disabilities by systematically enforcing non-discrimination and zero rejection policies. In parallel, all the required resources that will contribute to an inclusive equitable quality education system have to be developed progressively.
* Enforcement of non-discrimination and zero rejection policies, including duty to provide reasonable accommodations, do not alone equate with inclusive education. They are necessary but not sufficient conditions to ensure that all out of school children access education in their community as fast as possible. However, they are only some of the critical components leading to an effective and inclusive education for all children.
* Children (in particular those that are deaf or with deafblindness) should have the choice to learn and be educated in sign language and/or tactile sign language which should be both officially recognized as languages of instruction.
* Access to assistive products and technology has a significant role to play for many constituencies of persons with disabilities and is achievable within few years. The introduction of assistive products and technology should involve assessment, funding provisions and training for the individuals and teachers in the use and care of the devices.
* Factors external to the education system itself that contribute to or undermine inclusive and equitable quality education in general are of significant importance for children with disabilities and their families. These factors may include the level of access to early childhood care and education, the overall accessibility and quality of infrastructure (including energy, water and sanitation) and transport, inclusive social protections, and level of provision of (re)habilitation and assistive technology.

Consensus was readily reached on the above issues. The last issue of debate was reaching an agreement on “phasing out special schools”. We are summarising below some of the elements discussed which helped to unbundle the debate.

**C. Addressing the special schools debate**

There was a consensus among the IDA Inclusive Education Task Team that in an inclusive education system, there is no role for special schools or segregated settings (with the understanding that inclusive bilingual sign language schools are not to be considered special schools).

At the core of the debates within the IDA Inclusive Education Task Team there were great concerns of loss of existing support, or perpetual segregation or cultural existential threat:

* Some members feared that the mention of phasing out special schools will lead to:
	+ Loss of knowledge, specific skills and human resources that have been developed for education of persons with particular disabilities, for example, the teaching of the expanded core curriculum for blind children and young people (for example, braille, orientation and mobility, assistive technology, social and independent living skills).
	+ Inability for some groups to find peer support and a sense of identity.
	+ Closure of schools for deaf children with fear that it would lead to further isolation and language deprivation of deaf children, significantly undermining access and use of sign language and the deaf culture.
* Some members expressed fear that the defence of the status quo on special schools or boarding facilities for some disability groups will contribute to perpetuating segregation of these groups and others with disabilities. Defending the status quo might also lead to the understanding that inclusive education applies only to some children but excludes others (for example children in rural and remote communities).
* With regards to deaf persons, the following three imperatives have to be taken into consideration:
	+ The right to have a quality bilingual education with teachers that are fully qualified in sign and/or tactile sign language;
	+ The right to be educated and to socialise with other deaf children within a cultural and linguistic community, among others, is essential for language acquisition; and
	+ Schools for deaf children are not only educational institutions, but have been pillars for the development and evolution of deaf culture.
* At a different level, some disability organisations for example, the World Blind Union, the World Federation of the Deaf and the International Federation of Hard of Hearing) have voiced the importance for their constituencies of accessing specific skills and developing language at early age and throughout their school years. The organisations also highlighted the importance of persons having moments during their learning years to meet peers with similar disability. Such opportunities are needed so that children and young people can enjoy peer support, exchange experiences and strengthen their self-confidence and identity.

Based on the above considerations, the **following elements of consensus on issues relating to special schools were discussed:**

* The group agreed that the emphasis on special education policies and schools has failed to deliver quality education and inclusion for the vast majority of children with disabilities, of whom half remain out of school globally[[2]](#footnote-2). Special education policies have often diverted attention, efforts and resources away from required investment in improving the overall quality of teachers, reforming the curriculum and teaching methods, and providing required support to learners in schools of their communities. Special education policies and schools have also resulted in legacies that undermine effective transformation towards inclusive education systems.
* The inevitable challenges and pitfalls of transforming an education system towards inclusive and equitable quality education should not be used as evidence of failure or as reasons to maintain the status quo of special schools and segregated education for children with disabilities. Fear of losing existing services, including those of low quality, for comparatively very few learners with disabilities should not undermine the true effort towards inclusion for all learners, including learners with disabilities. Similarly, poor outcomes for students with disabilities in regular classes with poorly trained teachers and no reasonable accommodation or individualized supports should not be considered a failure of inclusion – rather it is a failure of peer integration.
* IDA would oppose any education settings:
	+ whose attendance is solely based on having a disability and would be exclusive of others, and/or
	+ provides subpar education standards compared with the general education system, and/or
	+ does not lead to equal qualification, and/or
	+ is not regulated by the same ministry responsible for students who do not have a disability (Ministry of Education or Higher Education)[[3]](#footnote-3) whether it is managed by the they are managed by the public, private or voluntary sectors.
* IDA would agree that such education settings as listed above should be phased out, with transformation and conversion of key human resources and knowledge assets to support inclusion, equitable access and reasonable accommodation in local community schools. Because of their critical role in language acquisition for deaf children, schools for the deaf (that are in such situations) should be supported in their transformation into inclusive bilingual sign language schools for deaf children and other sign language users.
* As per the CRPD, IDA emphasises that children should be educated within their local communities as a general rule and being away is the exception and should be duly justified. IDA agrees with the CRPD that an inclusive education system does not exclude the right of children and parents to choose to attend an inclusive school, that is for example, a boarding school or other accommodation options that is, outside of their community in the following circumstances:
	+ To get a quality bilingual education (with teachers that are native speakers/signers), including in sign language
	+ To be educated and grow among peers using a similar sign language
	+ To benefit from subjects, or specialisation (for example, arts, sports) that are unavailable in their local community school; or
	+ To benefit from specific support that is not yet available in their community school due to geographical remoteness and/or lack of human resources
* As per the CRPD, support services and (re)habilitation services that are required to develop specific skills and language acquisition should be available at the community level. While investments are made to ensure effective national coverage, some children and their families may have to attend, for a time limited period, facilities away from their home. Such occurrence should never lead to long-term segregation and should always contribute to enabling children and their families to live and be included in their communities.
* IDA also emphasizes that for some learners with disabilities, it may be beneficial during school years to have moments, such as summer camps, to meet with their peers with similar disability or to acquire specific skills (for example, orientation and mobility skills). Such opportunities are needed so they can enjoy peer support, exchange of experience and strengthening of self-confidence and identity.
1. Curriculum reforms and teacher training include among others: differentiated curriculum, multi-level teaching, flexible classroom management and basic knowledge about the diversity, needs and capabilities of learners with disabilities. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Education commission report, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For vocational training, early childhood development or life-long learning, other relevant government ministries might be in charge depending on the country context [↑](#footnote-ref-3)