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Evaluation of Inclusive Education Policies and Programmes in Armenia

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This document contains the result of the Evaluation of Inclusive Education Policies and Programmes in the Republic of Armenia, conducted between November 8 and November 24, 2009 at the request of UNICEF Armenia.

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I hope that this evaluation does justice to all that has been accomplished and provides guidance for the work that is yet to be done. I have learned a great deal from this process, and I am very grateful for the friendliness and hospitality with which I was received.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Evaluation was conducted according to a qualitative methodology which included 22 semi-structured interviews and 14 site visits, and presents the findings according to four categories of data pertaining to Policy, Education Administration Practices, Inclusive Programmes and Special Schools, and Support Programmes. The data was analyzed taking into account the Local, Regional, and National contexts and the recommendations offered reflect not only national concerns but also global trends.

Current Context

In 2005 the Government of Armenia adopted the concept of Inclusive Education. In June of 2005 the Law on Education of Persons with Special Education Needs was passed and Inclusive Education is included in the draft Education Development National Programme for 2008-2015. However, the transition from the dual system inherited from the Soviet educational system is not fully implemented, and children with disabilities are most often educated in segregated environments such as special schools. Great progress has been accomplished in the brief 9 years since the implementation of the first efforts. However, the close monitoring of the initiatives has highlighted weaknesses in the current educational provisions.

Policy

The combination of the documents currently in existence effectively reduces their effectiveness and results in contradictory directions and practices in the field. Although the concepts of Inclusive Education, Education for All, Special Needs Education, and its implied need for the categorization of children according to a medical model, are not inappropriate concepts and practices as such, but they are irreconcilable in that the first two emphasize a change in environment to accommodate ALL children, and the last two imply an identification of children according to intrinsic factors and the need for specialized services that make their inclusion in the educational system if not impossible, at least very difficult to attain.

Associated Programmes

In 2002, a UNICEF preliminary evaluation of programmes and policies alerted for the development of “integrated models” of education and, while considering these a successful move away from segregated education, cautioned that the concept of Inclusive Education was being used in its most restricted sense, that of providing services only to children identified as having a disability. Since then, UNICEF has helped develop policy and practice in several other areas such as: the closure of several special schools and the integration of children into general education; the conversion of the closed special schools into Child Care Centers schools; the development of Community Centers that support parents and local authorities involved in education; the institution of several Inclusive Schools throughout the Republic of Armenia.

Impact

At the Ministry of Education and Science level, policy impact is observed in the organizational design of the Department of Education and adjacent departments and, at present, there are three (3) types of schools: Special Schools, General Education schools, and General Education

Schools that provide Inclusive Education services. The general attitude of individual policy makers, teachers, parents, and peers of children with disabilities has dramatically improved over the course of the last 10 years and, while the practical aspects of the required work may not be clear, most of the interviewed stakeholders demonstrated not only knowledge of Inclusive Education but also willingness to providing the necessary conditions for a more equitable educational system. However, the efforts to decentralize decision-making and policy implementation have weakened the links between policy makers and practitioners and diluted the knowledge-base required for systemic reform. In addition, knowledge of each stake-holders role and responsibility has not been clearly imparted and many stake-holders (parents, teachers, and children) are unsure of their role and, in many cases, unaware of systemic reform efforts and their societal implications. The greatest accomplishments with regards to children have been observed in the area of Special Education, with the decrease in Boarding and Special Schools in the last 5 years. Unfortunately, children, as the most important stake-holders in the reform process, seem to have only a marginal role. Through the efforts of UNICEF, all schools are mandated to have a Student Council which can part-take in the decision making process of each school. However, during this evaluation, it was impossible to determine the specific role and impact of the Student Councils.

Programmes

*Inclusive Schools*¹ - the strengths of the Inclusive Schools visited are centered on the work already accomplished with regards to attitudinal changes and philosophical shifts, as well as the availability of Special Education services to students with disabilities. However, there are two issues that demand immediate attention. First, Inclusive Schools have limited provision of “inclusive” practices. Second, although the philosophical stance of the school is one of “Special Education Needs” the only children that receive additional services are those that have been identified as having a disability. The challenges are three-fold. First, there is the need to provide the infrastructure, materials and AT conducive to teaching/learning support that provide a nurturing and safe environment for ALL children. Second, the lack of teacher preparations for Inclusive Education is an equally pressing issue and one that will require targeting both pre-service and professional development concurrently. Lastly, there is the need to bridge the gaps between areas of expertise by creating collaborative exchanges between special teams and “syllabus” teachers.

Special Schools - have developed and maintained the greatest expertise with regards to children with disabilities. The specialized staff of Special Schools is willing and able to share their skills and knowledge with other education professionals and has a central role in future education reforms and in ensuring the distribution of expertise through all educational settings. The weakness of Special Schools is clearly evident in the composition of their school populations. Special Schools serve a variety of students that could be best served in mainstream and inclusive settings. The greatest portion of the students observed in Special Schools either had very mild or no disabilities that warranted their stay at a Special School, which could be taken as a violation of their Rights according to Articles 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 39 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The greatest challenge facing Special Schools is the transformation of some Special Schools into Resource Centers which requires that specialized

¹ The term “Inclusive School” is used throughout this report to denote a General Education School that provides services under an Inclusive Education model.

staff be willing and able to, not only provide services, but also train other staff and participate in inter-disciplinary collaborations.

Support Programmes - From among all the support services the greatest strength comes from the potential of the Community Centers to develop and implement change and reform efforts alongside Inclusive Schools. The Community Centers not only understand the need for a continuum of services, but are also extremely knowledgeable about the communities they serve. The greatest weakness of the support services is their lack of collaboration and common vision. Because services are not closely monitored and provided in collaboration, there are lapses in provisions, and also some overlap, which results in the inappropriate use of resources. As is the case with special schools, the greatest challenge faced by support services is the required need for collaboration and sharing of expertise, which involves a transformation of the professional role of many of the stake-holders, as well as the need for inter-disciplinary collaborations.

Relevance

The existing Inclusive Education programmes are highly relevant. However, because special schools continue to be maintained and endorsed by a large portion of the governing bodies and because Inclusive Education has been introduced as alternative to special and mainstream educations, relevance of these programmes is often compromised. Even in the cases where Inclusive Schools are available, they are not accessible to all students, either because of lack of adequate infra-structure, lack of resources, or lack of adequate services. While the language of the Law of Education is broad enough to allow for Inclusive Practices to flourish, other pieces of legislation counter this possibility.

UNICEF has a central role in promoting Inclusive Education in Armenia, particularly with regards to the 2010-2015 Country Programme. Inclusive Education is not only the driving force behind Education For All, but is also the mechanism identified to implement Millennium Development Goal 2 – Universal Primary Education. In the 2010-2015 Country Programme Draft UNICEF clearly outlines the needs in the areas of rights of women and children, child nutrition, HIV awareness, inequalities in pre-school, upper secondary and quality of education, meeting the obligations of the CRC, and institutionalization. Inclusive Education cuts across all these issues and can provide forums, mechanisms, and collaborative opportunities to address all these issues nationally. Because of its recognition at all levels of governance, visibility among susceptible populations, and international expertise, UNICEF is in a privileged position to lead Inclusive Education efforts with a clear and concise direction, and support the government of Armenia in attaining the MDG by 2015. The main challenge to the future success of Educational Reforms in Armenia is the need for a clear vision, agreed upon all stakeholders, and the capacity to maintain reforms on track, even in the event of political dissent. Because of its objective and non-partisan standing, UNICEF can assume this leadership role and guide not only governance but all the involved stakeholders in creating an Inclusive Education System.

Effectiveness

The Inclusive Education programmes have been very effective in promoting social inclusion and demystifying stereotypes associated with disability. However, with regards to High Quality Education, the schools fall short in its practical implementations due to a variety of constraints, many of which outside of the schools control. With regards to the School Environment, the

difficulties are extreme in all sites observed. Infrastructures are poor, buildings are in disrepair, and renovations have not been sufficient to adequately address needs. All schools function with partial or total lack of water, sanitation, electricity, heating, or a combination, and leaky roofs, moldy walls, and single pane windows were observed in all visited sites. While the specialists in each building are ready to provide services to children with disabilities in inclusive settings, the “syllabus” teachers responsible for educating the children are not. The end result is four-fold: 1) Children with disabilities are seen as Special Education children first, and the full responsibility of the Special Education Team; 2) Children with disabilities are seen as requiring “additional” work, effort, and time, as opposed to differentiated instruction; 3) Children with disabilities that attend “Inclusive Classrooms” do not fully participate in the lessons and are expected to do only partial or modified work that is neither appropriate nor challenging; 4) There is no sense of shared responsibility, distributed expertise, team-work among ALL school staffs.

Efficiency

The Inclusive Education programmes in existence have been highly efficient in introducing the philosophy and goals of EFA, promoting the need for de-institutionalization, introducing the processes and the mechanisms needed for systemic change. From a policy and legislative standpoint, education governance is already set up in a way that is conducive to expanding reform efforts. However, it is necessary to define parameters around de-centralization efforts, in order to prevent chaos and a breakdown in the channeling of funds and the adequate financing of services. De-centralization is not equivalent to lack of oversight, and monitoring mechanisms are essential to ensuring service provision. The most cost-effective way of introducing and implementing inclusive education into 200 mainstream schools in 2010 would be by combining all the efforts of the government, the great variety of non-governmental agencies, and all international donors into one large effort, not a “project”. It is essential to conduct a nationwide, non-partisan needs-assessment initiative in order to ensure that the 200 new schools address the needs of all the marzes, address the needs of a variety of segments of the population, and ensure that the best positioned mainstream schools are targeted for reform.

Sustainability

The Inclusive Education programmes have created an environment that is welcoming to de-institutionalization, good examples and model schools upon which to base the structure required for systemic reform of basic education, and has demonstrated a greater political will and commitment for systemic reform. However, because there is no clear vision and guidance from the government, and because there are a great number of non-governmental agencies and international donors involved in separate projects that do not have one main target, basic education reform efforts are inconsistent and temporary. Issues of sustainability of Inclusive Education reforms should be addressed by representatives of not only the Ministry of Education and Science but also with representatives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Health, international donors and non-governmental agencies. Because the issues surrounding Inclusive Education cut across a variety of governmental agencies, funding for Inclusive Education should be determined by a variety of stakeholders

Recommendations

Short-Term Interventions

- Suspend all reform efforts (opening on new Inclusive Education schools, and closing of Special Schools) until an autonomous working group has been established;
- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all stake-holders;
- Develop a collaborative structure of communication and implementation of services that includes all stake-holders;
- Reflect upon the most recent accomplishments and develop a clear vision for the future of the educational system in the Republic of Armenia;
- Clearly define Inclusive Education as the main mechanism towards attainment of Education for All, the Millennium Development Goals, and European Integration;
- Clearly define the mechanisms needed to uphold the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and involve children at all levels of decision-making.

Medium-Term

- Re-formulate all educational policies into a cohesive and single set of guidelines that has Inclusive Education (as defined by the Salamanca Declaration) as its main overarching construct;
- Ensure the enforcement of the principles of the Law of Education by ensuring “a well-planned learning process for all learners” (p.6) and High Quality Education at all levels of compulsory education.
- Promote the use of the terms “Inclusive Education” and “Special Needs Education” as intended in the Salamanca Declaration and further promulgated by the 2008 UNESCO Education Summit, and extend services beyond the school walls.
- Define the model of service provisions more appropriate for the Republic of Armenia;
- Determine the need and adequacy of a categorizing system that is based on a medical model;
- Provide parent education opportunities;
- Develop funding mechanisms that allow for the development of policies that envision the WHOLE child.
- Ensure that the funding mechanisms chosen do not promote the excessive identification of children with Special Educational Needs;
- Ensure that each existing school/community/marz is utilizing the best prepared personnel for each task, and create mechanisms for addressing over-staffing (i.e. early retirement; re-training; role transformation; re-assignments, etc.);
- Implement school-wide needs-assessment strategies to access the strengths and weaknesses of each school building (inside and out), and prioritize infra-structural needs, address the most immediate needs, and involve children and communities in the renovation efforts;
- In collaboration with UNICEF continue to promote de-institutionalization;
- In collaboration with UNICEF, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Ministry of Health, develop parent mechanisms to enhance de-institutionalization;
- In collaboration with UNICEF develop external mechanisms to target child protection efforts;
- Identify 6 schools in the country, one for each medical disability, that can best service students with severe disabilities and concentrate all efforts in providing them with the infrastructure, specialized personnel and assistive technology to provide not only exceptional care but also high quality education
- Transfer all severely impaired students from all other schools to those identified above, as well as existing expertise within special schools and transfer them to potential IE schools.

- Develop a group within each of the 6 schools that can work towards providing training and specialized materials to be distributed to all schools thus transforming the existing special schools into resource centers.
- Suspend the opening of IE schools in marzes were some already exist, and expand the identification of potential IE schools to ALL other marzes.
- Provide funding, infrastructure and training opportunities to each school that target High Quality Education for ALL students
- Develop strategies to search for, identify, and provide protection and education to ALL children in the surrounding communities.
- Provide opportunities for exchange of knowledge and expertise
- Introduce and promote the use of school self-assessment mechanisms in ALL schools
- Conduct in-depth needs assessment in each marz and targeted community in order to better determine the placement of each new IE school
- Every year, for the next 5 years, identify 20% of the school population that can best be served in Inclusive Schools and initiate transition of the above 20% onto Inclusive/Mainstream schools with the support of a team from the special school;
- Identify and support the transition of expert staff from special schools onto Inclusive Schools.
- Develop impartial and independent monitoring teams in each Marz/community responsible for ensuring the proper provision of services (composed of representatives from the municipalities, schools, and CPUs) along a continuum, including the development and follow-through of Individualized Educational Plans.

Long-Term

- Ensure transitional mechanisms among all levels of education and life after post-secondary education and consider existing Vocational Education plans and enhance their access to ALL students.
- Consider alternative completion and existing processes that will allow ALL students to become active citizens and participants of a democratic society.
- Provide adequate technological support and training to enhance assessment, provision of services and teaching/learning.
- Provide Pedagogical Institutes with the ability to develop search for and secure expertise in Inclusive Education in order to become a resource for other nations in the region, and encourage the sharing of expertise and inter-disciplinary collaborations.
- Prepare ALL teachers to work with ALL students, both independently and in collaboration, and target the dissemination of skills and knowledge related to: curricular modifications/adaptations, differentiated instruction, classroom management, learning styles, individualized interventions, co-teaching, peer-tutoring, and grouping instruction, which target ALL students.
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities of ALL school staffs and ensure that clear collaboration/networking mechanisms are made available and address the existing power relationships and devise strategies to equalize roles among ALL stakeholders.
- Consolidate the existing data gathering mechanisms into a centralized system that allows all stakeholders adequate data management tools to better plan for and provide services.

1. INTRODUCTION

This document contains the results of the Evaluation of Inclusive Education Policies and Programmes in the Republic of Armenia conducted between November 8 and November 24, 2009 at the request of UNICEF Armenia.

This Evaluation was conducted according to a qualitative methodology which included 22 semi-structured interviews and 14 site visits, in an attempt to answer UNICEF's main objective: "to review the Armenian government policy on provision of education for children with special needs, identify strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the ongoing inclusive education programmes and come up with recommendations on well coordinated interventions at national, local and community level that will ensure qualified and targeted programmes for children with special needs".

Armenia is a fairly young democracy, with a long tradition of quality education and intellectual capacity. In the past 15 years the government of Armenia has overcome great obstacles, among which, the planning and implementation of an ambitious education reform, unique in the region. The findings presented in this evaluation are a testament to all that has been accomplished in the last decade, particularly regarding the countries' commitment to Inclusive Education. Therefore, the findings will be discussed according to four main parameters: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the governmental policy with regards to the education of children with special educational needs, in both restrictive and inclusive environments.

This document presents the findings according to four categories of data pertaining to Policy, Education Administration Practices, Inclusive Programmes and Special Schools, and Support Programmes. The data was analyzed taking into account the Local, Regional, and National contexts and the recommendations offered reflect not only national concerns but also global trends.

2. CURRENT CONTEXT AND PROJECT OBJECTIVE

2.1. Current Context

In 2005 the Government of Armenia adopted the concept of Inclusive Education. In June of 2005 the Law on Education of Persons with Special Education Needs was passed and Inclusive Education is included in the draft Education Development National Programme for 2008-2015. Within this policy reference, and for the first time in Armenia, children with special educational needs are given the opportunity to be educated, both formally and informally, with their peers in general education classrooms. However, the transition from the dual system inherited from the Soviet educational system is not fully implemented, and children with disabilities are most often educated in segregated environments such as special schools.

In 2000, UNICEF initiated support projects designed to increase awareness about the educational rights and needs of children with special needs, and ensure them equal access and quality educational opportunities within general education settings. Since then, and in collaboration with governmental agencies and various national and international NGO's (Bridge of Hope, Mission East, World Vision, and Open Society Institute), UNICEF has worked towards reforming the special education system in conformity with international requirements, as well as national, regional, and local reform efforts.

Great progress has been accomplished in the brief 9 years since the implementation of the first efforts, in particular with respect to changing societal attitudes and expectations regarding children with special educational needs, and ensuring their desegregation and access to general education. However, the close monitoring of the initiatives has highlighted weaknesses in the current educational provisions, such as:

- Inclusive education concept is used in the most restricted sense, and only in relation to students identified as having disabilities;
- Culture of the schools is often not welcoming to children with disabilities unless they are linked to possible financial support;
- Links between inclusive pre-schools and schools is too weak;
- Continuous professional development for teachers and staff is not-existent;
- Roles and responsibilities of school staff are not well defined;
- Referral, assessment, and support services require further technical improvement;
- Accountability of students with special educational needs emphasizes only the financial and administrative aspects, and ignores student achievement;
- There is no accountability of education provided according to Individualized Educational Plans;
- Children with disabilities are often excluded from formal testing and automatically transferred from one grade to another;
- Government continues to rely on assistance from international organization.

2.2. Project Objective

The main purpose of this evaluation is to review Armenian governmental policy regarding the provision of education for children with special needs, identify strengths, weaknesses and challenges in the ongoing inclusive education programs and provide recommendations for coordinated efforts and national, regional and local levels, in order to address the already identified weaknesses highlighted above. It is expected that this evaluation will result in a set of assessments and recommendations that will inform UNICEF Armenia, various governmental branches, implementing partners, bilateral agencies, and other stakeholders.

Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the government policy and provision of services to students with special educational needs constitute the main focus of this evaluation, both with regards to students with disabilities in special schools and students in general education placements. The scope of the evaluation takes into account internal developments to date, and the possible comparisons to global trends, both regional and global, with regards to the overall impact on individuals, communities and institutions.

Relevance

- What is the relevance of the government inclusive education programmes in Armenia with regards to four criteria, i.e. availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability of education?
- What is the value of the programmes in relation to primary stakeholders' needs, national priorities, national and international partners' policies and global references such as human rights and in particular, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Concluding Recommendations of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child made to Armenia?
- What is the relevance of inclusive education for families and children with special needs?
- For UNICEF, what is the relevance of the inclusive education programme in relation to the 2010-2015 country programme and its contribution to the Education Reform?

Effectiveness

- In general terms, the formative evaluation will measure the effectiveness of the project at school level in terms of school environment, teaching and learning methods, assessment methods, and identify key achievements and lessons learnt. In particular, the extent to which the inclusive education model has enriched and added value and relevance to the teaching and learning process of the mainstream environment, as well as improved the learning and socialization experience of children with special needs.

Efficiency

- What would be the most cost-effective way to reach the following result:
- To introduce and implement inclusive education in 200 mainstream school by 2010
- To create conditions for sustainable systemic change and ongoing professional development for professionals working with children with special needs

- To develop clear mechanisms of students transfer from special and boarding schools to inclusive schools.

Sustainability

- Has the government's inclusive education programme appeared to strengthen or add value to the basic education reform effort in the education system of Armenia (introduction of 9-year basic education)?
- Are there a political will and available resources by MoES to bring the project to scale and mainstream further the inclusive education in the education system? How is this reflected in MoES annual and/or long-term programme planning and budgetary allocations?

Furthermore, this evaluation includes a situation analysis of Special (Boarding) Schools, with a view on how to utilize existing expertise while supporting inclusive practices and the de-institutionalization of children with disabilities.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Choice of methodology

This evaluation gathered data according to a qualitative methodology, which “typically include an *emic* (insider to phenomenon) in contrast to quantitative studies’ *etic* (outsider) perspective” (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger & Richardson, 2005, p.199). Because this evaluation relied mostly on opinions, perceptions, and the evaluator’s reflections of policies and implementation, it was important to utilize a methodology that lends itself to their witnessing and recording. Qualitative research does not make causal predictions about people or events. However, the observations and interpretations from qualitative research do inform policy and practices, and provide descriptions that are not only useful but difficult to gather with quantitative analysis.

While Armenia maintains a strong tradition of data gathering, this data is not compiled or accessible in a comprehensible data system. Therefore, any mentions to the number of students, teachers, classrooms, etc., should be regarded as an estimate provided by various stakeholders, and not statistically relevant data.

3.2. Interviews

Throughout the 12 days of field work, 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were arranged by UNICEF and mostly conducted in Armenian, with translation provided by a UNICEF team member. All interviews were audio recorded and substantiated with field-notes. All data provided in this report is the result of various analyses of the audio recordings and the field notes, as well as the informal observations done during the interviews. The following stakeholders were interviewed:

- Ministry of Education and Science, Yerevan
 - Manuk Mkrtchyan, Deputy Minister
 - Nuriyan Manukyan, Special Education Unit of the General Education Department
 - Anahit Muradyan, Special Education Unit of the General Education Department
 - Robert Stepanyan, Development Programs and Monitoring
 - Varduhi Katinyan, Medical, Psychological and Pedagogical Assessment Center
 - Norayr Ghukasyan, National Institute of Education
 - Vagharshak Voskanyan, National Institute of Education
- Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
 - Eduard Israelyan- Representative of the Women, Children and Families Protection Department
- Tavush Marz
 - Ijevan Municipality
 - Pashinyan, Marz Education - Department Head
 - Ijevan School #3
 - Varsenik Stapanyan, Principal

- Special Education Team (focus group - 1 defectologist, 1 pedagogue, 1 special pedagogue, 1 psychologist)
- Ijevan Community Center
 - Armine Nersisian, Director
 - 8 Parents (focus group)
- Nojemberyan School #2
 - Parsadan Alexanian, Principal
 - Teaching staff (focus group – Deputy Principal, 1 defectologist, 1 pedagogue, 2 special pedagogue, 1 psychologist, 4 general education teachers)
- Nojemberyan Community Center
 - Alisa Gulkanyan, Director
 - 4 Parents (focus group)
- Dilijan Center for Socially Vulnerable Children
 - Vardan Hakhverdyan, Director
- Gegharkunik Marz
 - Special School for Children with Mental retardation
 - Lavrik Arevshatyan, Director
 - Child Protection Unit
 - Tigran Karapetian, pedagogue
- City of Yerevan
 - Non-Governmental Organizations
 - Kristine Mikhailidi, World Vision - Operations Manager of Area Development Programs
 - Susanna Tadevosyan, Bridge of Hope - Director
 - Anna Hovhannisyan, Children Development Foundation – Director
 - Diana, Mission East
 - Special School for children with Hearing Impairments
 - Nadezhda Yeghiazaryan, Deputy Director
 - Special School for Children with Physical Impairments
 - Amalya Harutyunyan, Director
 - Byurakn School
 - Vaghram Ghazaryan Inclusive Pre-School
 - Julieta Taghjanosyan, Principal

3.3. Site Visits

Throughout the 12 days of field work, 14 site visits were conducted subsequent to interviews with site directors, school principals, and responsible staff. The visits were arranged by UNICEF and conducted in Armenian, with translation provided by a UNICEF team member. Field notes were taken during the visits, and further observations noted shortly following each visit. The following sites were visited:

- City of Yerevan
 - Medical, Psychological and Pedagogical Assessment Center of Yerevan (Republican center) and Boarding School
 - Special School for Children with Hearing Impairments

- Special School for Children with Physical impairments
- Child Development Foundation
- Inclusive School #27
- Byurakn School
- Inclusive Pre-School
- Ijevan
 - School #3
 - Community Center
- Noyemberyan
 - School #2
 - Community Center
- Dilijan
 - Center for Socially Vulnerable Children
- Gavar
 - Special School for Children with Mental Retardation
 - Child Protection Unit

4. FINDINGS

The findings being reported were gathered through the above described methodology, as well as through careful reading and analysis of various policy reports and documents provided by the UNICEF office. An analytical reading of the gathered data was conducted, and a situation analysis is provided with regards to policy in the context of current global trends and programmes, and the observed impact of said policy on institutions, communities, and individuals.

4.1. Policy

4.1.1. Global Trends

Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action/Education for All

UNESCO has been influencing policy since 1948 with the development of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. While each country is more or less apt to following policy that derives from a transnational entity, the past half century has seen a clear increase in attempts to generate a Child Rights centered education throughout the world.

The year 1990 welcomed both the *Convention of the Rights of the Child*, and the *World Declaration on Education For All*, a six-goal framework that supports access to education to all children around the world, and has been subscribed by 191 nation states. While the Convention reaffirms previous policies and makes specific mention of children with disabilities, the *World Declaration on Education for All* is global in scope, addresses educational access and participation, and introduces the concept of Inclusive Education as the means to attaining universal education. Furthermore, it declares that each nation state must “provide resources and funding solutions to access and equity” (Peters, 2007).

The 1994 the World Congress on Special Educational Needs Education in Salamanca (Spain) yielded the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action*, adopted by 92 governments and 25 international organizations. This policy is the first to bring children with disabilities to the fore, and to offer a clear outline of Inclusive Education as the vehicle for the strategies outlined in Education for All. In it, student abilities and strengths take center stage, Inclusive Education is defined, and indicators of quality of participation in education are offered. The structures of the Salamanca Statement are further strengthened in the *EFA Framework for Action* in 2000 and, most recently, in the 2008 *UNESCO Education Summit*.

Therefore, the global trend in the field of education has been, since the mid 1990’s to implement high quality education to ALL children while streamlining points of entry into education. In this respect, the adoption of international policy and recommendation by nation-states, while varied, has maintained the trend for Inclusive Education as defined by the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* of 1995. Thus, the purpose of the Salamanca Statement is to:

“further the objectives of Education for All by considering the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education, namely enabling schools to serve all children”(pg.iii),

and,

“Reaffirming the right to education of every individual as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights...ensure that right for all regardless of individual differences...urges States to ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the education system”(p.vii).

The Salamanca Statement envisions a total educational reform as the necessary condition to providing Inclusive Education for all children, and broadens the target of educational reform and the spectrum of policy writing to encompass

“all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups....the term ‘special education needs’ refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties...at some time during their schooling” (pg.6 – emphasis in original).

Furthermore, the Salamanca Statement names Inclusive Schools as its fundamental principal and declares that

“Inclusive Schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities” (p.12).

Cautions and Definitions

Throughout this report, and unless otherwise specified, the terms being used are those used in the Republic of Armenia. It is important to note that many of the concepts in use (i.e. Inclusion, Inclusive Education, Inclusive Schools) are, in the field, being used loosely and without a clear definition. Terms such as “Special Education” and “Special Educational Needs”, “Integration” and “Inclusion” are, at times, used interchangeably which might impact the ways in which discourse occurs.

Several cautions and definitions will be offered throughout this document, the most important of which is the need for a clear understanding of what Inclusion is and is not. According to Vislie (2003), Inclusion is NOT:

1) Focusing on an individual or small group of pupils for whom the curriculum is adapted, different work is devised or support assistants are provided; and it is not about how to assimilate individual pupils with identified special educational needs into existing forms of schooling.

Inclusion IS:

- 1) a process (rather than a state), by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals;
- 2) emphasizes the reconstructing of curricular provision in order to reach out to all pupils as individuals;
- 3) emphasizes overall school effectiveness;
- 4) is of relevance to all phases and types of schools, possibly including special schools, since within any educational provision teachers face groups of students with diverse needs and are required to respond to this diversity.

Additionally, the UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education published in 2009 further ratify not only the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action but provide a clear definition of Inclusive Education as “increasingly understood more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners” (p. 4). Therefore, “Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners, and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve Education For All. As an overall principle, it should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society” (p. 8).

Republic of Armenia Law of Education and National Curriculum

According to the Human Development Report and the finding of this evaluation, Armenia’s goal for its educational system is aligned with the goals of its European counterparts: to contribute to the development of an active and productive citizen. Many of the laws that manage educational institutions have changed since the collapse of the Soviet regime, and tried to reflect an educational reform trend toward de-centralization, but the changes are not yet evident in practice. Despite these policy reform efforts, educational institutions have not responded to societal changes and continue to implicitly abide by Soviet rules and pedagogies. Funding for education has declined from 7.2% GDP in 1992 to 3.23% of GDP in 2006, pre-school enrolment has declined, and there are high levels of drop-out rates particularly in the rural areas.

Policy reform efforts initiated in Armenia in 1999 with the Law on Education and the revisions to the National Curriculum abide by global trends and reflect a discourse that clearly states the intent to provide education to ALL children. Students with special educational needs are expected to access and participate fully in the curriculum, and their rights are to be ensured. The National Curriculum very early on speaks to the need to accommodate ALL students in general education taking into account age, psychological and physical characteristics of learners by ensuring “a well-planned learning process for all learners” (p.6). Furthermore, the policy emphasizes the environment as the primordial site for change (not the child), extends services beyond the boundaries of schools, and makes provisions for individualized instruction and alternative assessments.

If only with regards to the policy language and implied discourse, the Armenian government has put forth an excellent (even if short) guide to the education of students with special education needs (henceforth SEN). In 6 short sentences, the policy dispels any questions regarding the goal of making ALL students with SEN General Education students first, a lesson that many western countries with longer histories of discrimination and special education

legislation have yet to learn. The Armenian government should be commended for their commitment, even more so considering that, at the time, many of these issues were not discussed at an international scale.

Armenia's ratification of the Convention of the Rights of the Child ensured that a system was created to protect the rights of children across the country. The reform efforts reflected in the Law of Education of 1999, targeted accessibility and quality of education in accordance to EFA guidelines. Paradoxically, it also stipulated that, at parent discretion, children who require accommodations may be educated in either general or special schools, effectively allowing for a dual system of general and special education to co-exist. While the general tenor of the document maintains the global trends that imply a total reform of the educational system in order to encompass ALL children without exception, this last provision in fact allows for a division among "categories" of students, and an implicit view of children with special needs as a separate school population, that may be educated in segregated environments.

Criteria for Medical, Psychological, and Pedagogical (MPP) Assessment of Children in Need of Special Conditions of Education

The passage of the decree "Criteria for Medical, Psychological, and Pedagogical (MPP) Assessment of Children in Need of Special Conditions of Education" in 2003 further recognized the presence of a categorical arrangement within education, establishing the boundaries of a group of children in need of Special Conditions in Education, further demarcating the existence of a particular group of children to be identified, assessed, and provided with "special" education within schools.

Republic of Armenia Law on Education of Persons in Need of Special Conditions of Education

The further development of the Law on Education of Persons in Need of Special Conditions of Education, in May of 2005, further weakened the purpose of Inclusive Education in accordance to EFA put forth by the Law of Education of 1999, and sanctions the development of policies and practices that target a specific portion of the school population, that of children with disabilities.

The 2005 Law on Education of Children in Need of Special Conditions of Education defines Inclusive Education as the provision of specific services to ensure that children with special needs are educated alongside non-disabled peers. It is based on child-centered pedagogy including the assessment of each child's individual needs through the creation of a multidisciplinary team made up of specialists, parents, and other team members, and the development of an individual plan for each child.

The 7 categories of special needs ratified in 2005 with the intent of identifying children in need of specialized services facilitate their placement in Special Schools. Despite the fact that the language of the National Curriculum clearly departs from a medical model of special education, all 7 categories are, in some way or another, related to the need of a medical diagnosis. Furthermore, because students must fall into one of the 7 categories in order to be eligible for services, many of the students with special educational needs (as defined by the Salamanca

Statement and EFA) do not, under this medical provision, qualify for services. In other words, instead of becoming an ALL-inclusive system, the provisions of the special education law have made it an exclusive system, one in which only a few “categorical” students are eligible to receive services. Therefore, the provisions made in the document, while appropriate for a Special Education system, do not abide by the implied recommendations of the Salamanca Statement or the global tendencies to provide services for ALL children in an all-encompassing environment.

Law on Pre-School Education

In the Republic of Armenia, all stages of education are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science with the exception of early education (nurseries and kindergartens). While policy development falls under the purview of the Ministry of Education and Science, its implementation falls under the responsibility of the communities.

With the endorsement of the Law on Pre-School Education in 2006, a period of some 7 years of inactivity towards Early Childhood Development was initiated, with the Ministry of Education and Science assuming responsibility for policy (which includes the provision of services for children with special education needs) and the communities assuming financial and implementation responsibilities. Thus, the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for strategy development, standards, curriculum, content development and staff training in collaboration with the National Institute of Education and several NGO’s.

Policies in Combination

The combination of the four documents above and the difficulties experienced in the area of Early Childhood Development, effectively reduces their effectiveness (individually and in combination), and results in contradictory directions and practices in the field. Although the concepts of Inclusive Education, Education for All, Special Needs Education, and its implied need for the categorization of children according to a medical model, are not inappropriate concepts and practices as such, but they are irreconcilable in that the first two emphasize a change in environment to accommodate ALL children, and the last two imply an identification of children according to intrinsic factors and the need for specialized services that make their inclusion in the educational system if not impossible, at least very difficult to attain. Furthermore, the difficulties experienced in the area of Early Childhood Development and transitional mechanisms among the various educational levels, make the challenges in coordination of services and standardization of education increasingly difficult to overcome.

4.1.2. Associated programmes

UNICEF Programmes and Partnerships

UNICEF has been involved in education and in particular Inclusive Education efforts since the mid 1990’s. Through a variety of programs, and both independently and in support of a variety of NGO’s, UNICEF has provided theoretical, practical, organizational, financial, and systemic guidance. While maintaining a strong Child-Rights approach to the educational issues at hand, UNICEF has maintained a strong emphasis on systemic reform and attempted to varying degrees of success, to focus the efforts on ALL children.

In 2002, a UNICEF preliminary evaluation of programmes and policies alerted for the development of “integrated models” of education and, while considering these a successful move away from segregated education, cautioned that the concept of Inclusive Education was being used in its most restricted sense, that of providing services only to children identified as having a disability (as per *Criteria for Medical, Psychological, and Pedagogical Assessment of Children in Need of Special Conditions of Education*). At this time policy revision recommendations were put forth, envisioning an answer to the need of: shared expertise, professional development, the establishment of Inclusive Education Resource Centers, and the involvement of the Department of Higher Education as organizing entity.

UNICEF has also supported efforts by World Vision and Mission East, two Non-Governmental Agencies involved in both policy design and practical efforts in the field of education. World Vision has concentrated its efforts on developing criteria and programmes for the education of pre-school aged children in Inclusive settings, while Mission East helped develop criteria for the identification, classification and provision of services for children with mild and severe Mental Retardation.

Furthermore, in close collaboration with the above NGO’s and with Bridge of Hope and the Open Society Institute, UNICEF has supported the government to develop policy and practice in several other areas such as: the closure of several special schools and the integration of children into general education; the conversion of the closed special schools into Child Care and Protection Institutions ; the development of Community Centers that support parents and local authorities involved in education; the institution of several Inclusive Schools throughout the Republic of Armenia.

4.1.3. Overall impact on: Institutions, Communities, and Individuals (Children, Parents, Teachers and Others)

Impact on Institutions

The impact of the above policies can be observed at all institutional levels.

At the Ministry of Education and Science level, policy impact is observed in the organizational design of the Department of Education and adjacent departments. While Inclusive Education is declared the purview of General Education policy, it is in effect regulated by the Special Education Unit. Similarly, the National Institute of Education (a departmental branch of the Ministry of Education and Science) regulates the curriculum and monitoring of Special Education as a separate entity from General Education, regulates Special Schools, as well as the curriculum and monitoring of schools that operate under the endorsement of Inclusive Schools. Therefore, at present, there are three (3) types of schools in operation under the purview of the Ministry of Education and Science:

- (1) Special Schools, which serve students with categorized Special Education Needs or disabilities (i.e. Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, Mental Retardation, etc);
- (2) Inclusive Schools which serve both children with and without disabilities.
- (3) General Education schools, which serve only those students deemed non-disabled.

In addition, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs maintains seven (7) centers throughout the Republic which serve students deemed “socially vulnerable” who attend their neighboring schools without any special education needs provisions.

Impact on Communities

The impact of the above policies on the various communities across the Republic of Armenia is, as expected, varied. While some communities have seen the amount and quality of educational services altered, new challenges have also been presented.

UNICEF and the various partnering NGO’s have been most successful in their social and community involvement, particularly in changing the attitudes of individual stakeholders regarding children with disabilities, their social integration, education and future endeavors in society. Invariably, all communities observed were cautiously optimistic with regards to changes in education and wrap-around services. UNICEF and partnering NGO’s are fittingly proud of their accomplishments with regards to changes in attitudes, social integration efforts, and policy reform accomplishments. While they recognize that much is still to be done, they are also aware that changes in attitude and political standing require consistent and persistent effort and take, in many cases, generations to take hold.

The Ministry of Education and Science staff interviewed described their goal as ensuring that the philosophical and bureaucratic mechanisms of General and Special Educations are followed, and supporting and monitoring the various policies currently in place. While the discourse employed reflects acquiescence with the various provisions, the knowledge and ability to explicitly reflect upon accomplishments and challenges was not equally observed. It is important to note that, while several parallel policies have been developed, all of which implicitly and explicitly support inclusive practices, there is no holistic plan in how to accomplish this.

As a community of practice, governmental employees seemed at odds as to whose responsibility is it to implement policy and make the necessary transitions between policy and practice, especially with respect to Inclusive Education, which continues to be implemented by the Special Education Unit, perhaps do to their spearheading efforts with regards to students with disabilities. Furthermore, many of those interviewed were of the opinion that the international community should take a more active and explicit role in implementing the practical aspects of Inclusive Education.

School staffs, particularly in the schools that have been granted “Inclusive School” status, are equally proud of their accomplishments, while constantly challenged by lack of financial, material, and professional support. The transformation in the day-to-day operations of some of the schools is profound, but all those interviewed see the effort as valid and a valuable step towards an all encompassing social transformation.

Early Childhood Development stake-holders struggle with policy implementation due to the lack of cohesion among policy and practice and the lack of resources at the community level. In Pre-Schools, the greatest concern with regards to the implementation of Inclusive Education is the lack of transitional services to ensure that a child cared for in an Inclusive Pre-School is enrolled and educated in an Inclusive School upon entering 1st grade.

The involvement of Community Centers and the many wrap-around services they provide was a wonderful surprise during this evaluation. Their deep commitment and involvement in both Special Education and Inclusive Education speaks highly of the accomplishments achieved by UNICEF and partnering NGO's. In one particular case, the partnership between UNICEF, the NGO's, the Community Center, parents, teachers and the students of an Inclusive School demonstrated that Inclusive Education (as defined by the Salamanca Statement and EFA) can go beyond the boundaries of the school building. In this case, and despite financial, infrastructural, and material difficulties, the school and the Community Center worked together to not only assist the students but also provide the teachers and parents with additional support.

Impact on Individuals

Throughout all the interviews, visits and informal observations it became quite clear that the general attitude of individual policy makers, teachers, parents, and peers of children with disabilities has dramatically improved over the course of the last 10 years. While the practical aspects of the required work may not be clear, most of the interviewed stakeholders demonstrated not only knowledge of Inclusive Education but also willingness to providing the necessary conditions for a more equitable educational system. Time and again various stakeholders spoke of ALL children as entitled to an equal and high quality education. Statements such as those below were frequent and heartfelt.

“Regardless of difficulties, in 5 years, ALL children and ALL teachers should be under an Inclusive Education model, everywhere”.

“Inclusive Education should be the measuring stick against which the quality of education of ALL children is measured”.

“The goal is to have ALL schools be accessible to ALL children”.

“There is a need to develop clear vision and concepts of Inclusive Education, not has a reform of Special Education but as a General Education reform”.

However, power relations among and between stakeholders continue to be a dividing issue among individuals. Bureaucratic explicit and implicit roles inherited from the Soviet regime are still in evidence, and teams of stakeholders are thus unbalanced. Throughout the observations, visits, and interviews it became clear that, very often, women defer to man, teachers defer to principals and specialists (defectologists, psychologist, pedagogues, etc.), parents defer to teachers and community center administrators, etc. These power relations become strained in the face of debate over policy implementation, as well as during the development of individual planning which requires team involvement. Furthermore, the involvement of national and international organization, their financial and technical support, in many cases supersedes local and regional decision making opportunities. On the one hand, the efforts to decentralize decision-making and policy implementation have weakened the links between policy makers and practitioners and diluted the knowledge-base required for systemic reform. On the other hand, knowledge of each stake-holders role and responsibility has not been clearly imparted and many stake-holders (parents, teachers, and children) are unsure of their role and, in many cases, unaware of systemic reform efforts and their societal implications.

The parents interviewed represented children in General, and Inclusive Schools. For the most part, those parents that had children with disabilities being educated in Inclusive Schools were happy with the fact that their children were no longer segregated. However, they also expressed concern for their future and possible employment opportunities. The parents of children with disabilities in General Schools did not express any interest, or indeed knowledge, of differences between General and Inclusive schools. While they also expressed concern over their children's social integration and employment opportunities, they did not seem to understand the potential of an Inclusive Educational system. One parent discussed the possible assessment of their child and the contingent special services derived from a possible certification as a student with a disability. In this case, the possibility of additional services was the determining factor, not the conditions under which those services might be provided.

The greatest accomplishments with regards to children have been observed in the area of Special Education, particularly in Special Schools, Boarding Schools and Care Centers, both under the scope of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Social Welfare. The last 5 years have seen a decrease in Boarding and Special Schools through the careful assessment of children and their needs. Thus, a great number of children that were previously housed in Special Schools despite not having a disability have been re-integrated in their original families and communities. The number of Special Schools has decreased to 25 (approximately half of the previous existing schools) with an approximate total number of 3,000 children, and all the children have been identified as having a disability that falls under one of 6 categories: Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Muscular and Speech Disorders, Mental Retardation, Psychological Disorders, and Behavioral and Emotional Problems.

Children, as the most important stake-holders in the reform process, seem to have only a marginal role. Through the efforts of UNICEF, all schools are mandated to have a Student Council which can part-take in the decision making process of each school. However, during this evaluation, it was impossible to determine the specific role and impact of the Student Councils.

4.2. Education Administration

4.2.1. Ministry of Education and Science (Ministry of Education and Science)

All the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science interviewed have a clear understanding of the accomplishments attained in the past 10 years, as well as of the challenges and required reforms in the pursuit of a truly Inclusive Education system. Philosophically, theoretically, and politically, there is great cohesion in policy development and in the ability to reflect upon not only the most recent accomplishments, but also the financial and human requirements of implementing Inclusive Education.

As the only country in the Caucasus to embrace the goal of Inclusive Education, Armenia is also one of the few countries to demonstrate such widespread reform, particularly with respect to Special Schools and students with disabilities. As such, the accomplishments of the past decade stand as an example of determination, and a deep commitment to ALL children. Despite the fact that Inclusive Education as defined by the Salamanca Statement (see above) implies a truly transformative agenda at all levels of education, which is still not in evidence in Armenia, progress towards more inclusive practices is undeniable. One of the challenges acknowledged within the Ministry of Education and Science, is the fact that Armenia's education is solely based

on standards and an inflexible curriculum that is cumbersome and not conducive to the spirit of Inclusive Education. Academic excellence dominates Armenian society and even students with motor and physical impairments are required to take the final Physical Education exit exam.

The Ministry of Education and Science affirms that the spirit of Inclusive Education, being clearly defined in the 1999 Law of education, permeates all subsequent policies and procedures, and justifies the need for a specific Law on Education of Persons in Need of Special Conditions of Education as a requirement to ensure the de-segregation of students with educational needs, not as a contradictory and parallel requirement, but as a part of a greater whole. However, it recognizes that Inclusive Education is a process of transformation and that, without a systemic approach, Armenia runs the risk of accomplishing only Integration and not Inclusion (see above). At this time, it is difficult to determine whether the wide-scope of education can support and sustain Inclusive systemic reform.

In an effort to decentralize education, each school principal is given the responsibility to educate every child within their building, but the Ministry of Education and Science is clearly aware that the organizational and procedural aspects of scaling up and sustaining Inclusive Education efforts are problematic. Further, the Ministry of Education and Science contends that teachers (education and attitudes) are pivotal in education reform and recognizes that much work is to be done in this area. The need for infra-structural revamping, Assistive Technology, and provision of a continuum of services are also problematic areas thus far unresolved. Finally, the continued perceived need for special schools also precludes a fully inclusive educational system.

The process of school organization is delegated to each school principal, and each school principal must organize services and programs according to school population needs and points of service. Information regarding Inclusive Schools was disseminated to all schools in the Republic of Armenia, and each school interested in the process of reform urged to apply to the Ministry of Education and Science. Although some schools (as described below) took the initiative without the support of the Ministry Of Education And Science, a process is now in place through which schools and the surrounding community undergo a variety of needs-assessment, remodeling, and training of staff in order to be given the status of Inclusive School. There are currently 49 Inclusive Schools in Armenia out of which 45 received state funding for organization of inclusive education provision (6 schools supported by the Ministry of Education and Science, 4 supported by World Vision and the remaining 39 supported by various Non Governmental Agency collaborations) and, in 2009, the Ministry of Education and Science received 35 applications of which only 19 were approved. The application process involves the identification of needs and existing conditions in the community and school, the existing number of children with disabilities, infrastructure needs, , administrative initiative and willingness of the school staff, and round-table discussions with all stake-holders.

Every school is obligated to provide services to ALL students. However, according to the Ministry of Education and Science, there is no financial incentive for schools to apply for “Inclusive School” status because, currently, the funding each Inclusive School receives for children with SEN (twice as much as for General Education children) is immediately absorbed by the costs of running the minimal programs and services (food, transportation and salaries of specialized personnel) they offer. Although, initially, further funds had been planned for Inclusive Schools, these funds have not been released due to cuts to the current budget.

Furthermore, the Planned Budget for 2010-2012 currently being revised will likely not be funded in its entirety.

The Ministry of Education and Science affirms that the choice to maintain open 25 Special Schools, which serve approximately 3,000 children, is a compromise between the previous educational system and the move towards Inclusive Education. Special Schools have experts, services and methodologies that are, in many ways unique and necessary, and continue to provide parents with the ability of making appropriate choices of placement. However, the Ministry of Education and Science would welcome guidance in further reforming the existing Special Schools and transforming them into Resource Centers able to provide services to other schools. As of 2004 some orphanages and schools for socially vulnerable children were also closed or transformed into Care Centers that are now the responsibility of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The children currently at the Care Centers are, for the most part, educated in neighboring schools.

With regards to monitoring, the Ministry of Education and Science maintains not only the requirement that each school compiles their own reports to be disseminated through the community, but also maintains 2 separate data gathering systems: EMIS (Education Management Information System-statistical data gathered once per year under the NaCET) and the Inspectorate (which covers both comprehensive and specific issues, including information pertaining to students with disabilities). There is another data gathering system under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs: the Database on Children in Difficult Life Conditions. However, there is no central database system that facilitates accounting of children with Special Educational Needs. In fact, there is not accurate accounting system, computerized or otherwise, that might provide data with regards to students.

The Ministry of Education and Science is rightfully pleased with the results of implemented reforms thus far and plans to implement further reform initiatives, slowly scaling up Inclusive School with the use of replicating Model Schools, and extending reforms at the teacher preparation level. However, some individuals within the Ministry of Education and Science caution against the rapid growth of the last 3 years without proper monitoring, assessment mechanisms, clear vision, and transitional services or life-long goals.

At this time the Ministry of Education and Science would welcome the involvement of national and international donors particularly with respect to capacity building of teachers and school staff, as well as methodological and didactical guidance, longitudinal data-gathering, and engaging in cooperative opportunities that allow for knowledge distribution and exchange of experiences. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Science is looking forward to widespread participation in developing a guiding document to ensure Childs Rights and ensure transparency in education.

4.2.2. National Institute of Education (National Institute of Education)

The National Institute Of Education has been involved in the efforts towards Inclusive Education since its inception. Philosophical and theoretical changes were initiated with the support of UNICEF and Bridge of Hope by providing examples of successful se-institutionalization in other countries and, under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and Science the National Institute Of Education has attempted to provide curricular and training

support nationwide. The National Institute Of Education was been deeply involved in creating an alternative curriculum for children with Mental Retardation (mild and severe) as well as ensuring that all schools continue to uphold proper following of the National standards.

The National Institute of Education is working collaboratively with Bridge of Hope and Mission East in providing training for the staff at Inclusive Schools in Tavush Region as part of Mission East project on extending inclusive education within one marz. The training has followed two distinct models. When initiated 2 years ago, a Trainer-of Trainers model was used in which two teachers from each school were trained in the philosophical, conceptual and practical issues surrounding Inclusive Education as well as the development of Individualized Educational Plans. Currently, all the specialized staff from Inclusive Schools is trained, including Marz personnel, in order to become resources for the remaining staff. The National Institute of Education is also involved in monitoring and ensuring that the practical applications of the trainings are implemented accordingly. The National Institute of Education is further involved in developing materials, in collaboration with the Pedagogical Institute.

The National Institute of Education would like to engage with UNICEF and other donors and NGO's in ensuring scaling up of efforts to support an additional 50 schools reaching Inclusive School status.

4.2.3. Marz and Municipalities

The Education Departments at each Marz cooperate with schools, school management groups and provide assistance to school staff and teachers, but not to children directly. The marz governmental agencies try to provide services to students indirectly in order to not discriminate against a particular student/group of students.

The Ijevan Marz Education Department has been involved in work with 4 Inclusive Schools for the last 3 years, and indirectly serves 126 children with disabilities although others exist that have not yet been officially identified. The Marz authority participates in disability assessments through the Child Protection Units and works directly with teachers in order to identify students' strengths. It was reported that in rural areas ALL children have special educational needs and thus require specialized teaching. Furthermore, the Educational Department reported concerns with life after graduation and local labor, particularly the mismatch between the skills students are acquiring in school and those that are required in the international labor market.

The Ijevan Marz Education Department is satisfied with the degree of decentralization observed between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Marz, but concerned with the lack of involvement and willingness to change from the older generation of teachers in their schools. Innovation is seen as an asset, particularly in the attitudinal changes of younger students and teachers thus far. However, there is the concern that there is no sense of collective responsibility towards Inclusive Education and school leadership is weak. Ideally, each school would have a leadership position separate from the principal and with the express goal of responding to the community at large.

4.2.4. State Pedagogical Institute

The State Pedagogical Institute is currently undergoing a variety of reform efforts in order to better address the needs of pre-service teachers with regards to Inclusive Education. In collaboration with Mission East and Bridge of Hope, the Institute has reformulated 6 syllabus that are used with both general and special education pre-service teachers. The courses are taught by 3 faculty members, although 37 have been trained in Inclusive Education, but not yet disseminated to all students.

There is also a specific course on Inclusive Education being offered as an elective to students of the Department of Psychology, and the Department of Pre, Elementary, and Special education. While this course is not yet mandatory to all students, this provision is being discussed. This same course is, however, mandatory for Masters students, who are also required to conduct research in Inclusive Schools.

Special Education student practice are also being offered in Inclusive Schools as opposed to only Special Schools and currently, out of 1000 graduates, approximately 40% have had some exposure to Inclusive Education. Inclusive Education school principals are also invited to the student's final exams in order to be able to determine the quality of the future work-force.

4.2.5. Non – Governmental Organizations

World Vision (WV)

World Vision has been involved in Inclusive Education efforts since 1999. At the time, and in collaboration with UNICEF, WV initiated services at the pre-school level targeting particularly children with disabilities. They worked in awareness raising and attitude change towards children with disabilities by working with families of disabled and non-disabled children, and contend that a systemic approach to Inclusive Education must start at the Pre-School level.

World Vision espouses a Social Model of Inclusion (versus a medical or charity model) and reports great success in attitudinal changes and material development. They consider the process as time-consuming but worthy, and hope that further capacity building aimed at the teacher force will greatly enhance systemic capability. Furthermore, WV's stance is that Special Schools should adopt the role of Resource Centers and that close linkages are needed between the Ministry of Education and Science and the various NGOs working in the field to ensure cohesion of effort and the provision of Quality Education to ALL children

Bridge of Hope (BoH)

Bridge of Hope has been involved in promotion of the rights of children with disabilities since 1996, either independently or in collaboration with UNICEF and other NGOs and governmental partners. They consider Inclusive Education the right of ALL children to have equal participation in education, as well as a way to organize educational systems.

Despite having a clear understanding of the links between the Salamanca Statement, Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, BoH is critical of the involvement of governmental agencies as well as large international organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank in the field of education, particularly with regards to lack of promotion of inclusive practices. BoH contends that Inclusive Education must be seen as systemic reform and not as

simply a “project” and that one of the greatest challenges for reform is an inflexible curriculum that does not allow for accommodations to be made.

The BoH is pleased to have been involved in the implementation of inclusive education programmes in the 49 existing general education schools but asserts that the educational practices in those schools are their biggest challenge. The BoH wishes to see the monitoring of quality of education as the most important short-term goal as well as the building of capacities, within Inclusive Schools in order to improve practice. Furthermore, schools should have mechanisms with which to be accountable to their students and communities and extend monitoring and inspectorate to areas beyond the financial issues

In 5 years, BoH would like to see Inclusive Schools to extend to remote areas of the country, as well as structural changes within the Ministry of Education and Science to address: 1) need for expertise in Inclusive Education; 2) one Inclusive Education Law, encompassing ALL children; 3) proper assessment, monitoring and financing of education, per-capita, based on the needs of the child; 4) transitional mechanisms between boarding schools and neighboring schools/families.

Mission East

Mission East has been an NGO with a national program since 2001. It maintains a variety of programs, both independently and in collaboration with Ministry of Education and Science, National Institute of Education, Bridge of Hope, etc., and is currently involved in the training of general educators in Inclusive Schools. The long-term goal of the NGO is to have ALL schools be considered Inclusive Schools by 2015.

At present, Mission East is being funded by Norwegian and Danish funds and is implementing a new project that involves introduction and implementation of “Inclusive education Programme” to 50 schools in Tavush marz and trains approximately 1,600 teachers over 16 days. There are 25 pairs of trainers (trainers of trainers) from both the National Institute of Education and Yerevan-based resource centers that will be involved in both training and subsequent monitoring. The NGO is also involved in work with the Pedagogical Institute and attempts to reform their curriculum in order to train all pre-service teachers to work with ALL students.

4.3. Programmes:

4.3.1. Inclusive Schools

Ijevan Inclusive Education School #3

Having been approached by the marz authority and Bridge of Hope, the school underwent the necessary reviews and trainings and has been considered an Inclusive School since 2007. The school staff was trained by the National Institute of Education, Bridge of Hope and staff from existing Inclusive Schools in Yerevan, on a variety of issues, such as Inclusive Education philosophy, attitudes, social integration, methodology, etc. The special education staff at School #3 has also been trained under a Trainers-of-Trainers model to become facilitators for other schools in Tavush marz. School #3 is one of four (4) schools in the marz that became granted “Inclusive Education” status in 2007, with a common training and guidance format as part of

UNICEF funded “Capacity Building of Inclusive Schools” project. The school makes use of a van, provided by UNICEF and Viva Cell local company, which transports some children to and from school.

The school has 487 children in grades 1st to 9th, 27 of which have been identified as having a disability. These children are concentrated mostly in the elementary grades. There are 45 staff members, 5 of which are specialized staff. In the past school year, they graduated approximately 100 children to High School, but the staff has remained unchanged. The children are divided among 20 classes, and there are 4 active councils involved in the school operations: School Management, Pedagogical, Parents, and Students.

At school #3, in general, Inclusive Education is defined as the creation of educational opportunities for children with special needs, with “special needs” taking on the broad sense explicit in the Salamanca Statement. However, the children identified as children with SEN (and under the provision of services from the SEN team) all have been given disability certificates. These children are included in all classes, have their education planned and monitored through the use of Individualized Education Plans, and are regularly monitored and assessed by the Special Needs Team (constituted of a Coordinator, Psychologist, and three special pedagogues). The Special Education Team reports working primarily with children with SEN but invariably with ALL children because they provide the links among ALL children. They also collaborate with all other teachers because children with SEN are in all classes.

The entire school has put forth tremendous effort to change the environment and make every child feel welcome. They feel that it is important to include children that previously had been isolated from society, even if they have to extend their school days and engage in extra work to make this possible. The school receives extra funding for the children that have been identified as having a disability, and the funding is used for salaries, provision of food, and transportation.

School #3 was described as a “big school with big issues” and needs are felt at a variety of levels, especially with regards to infrastructure conducive to teaching/learning (i.e. electricity, heating, water and sanitation), current and sufficient text-books and consumables, ICT and assistive technology, as well as teacher training. In the next 5 years, they would like to have all their windows replaced and be equipped with both science and sports materials.

The Special Education Team reported concern and apprehension with regards to the future of the children with SEN with whom they work. They are concerned with children obtaining a certificate of completion that does not allow them to extend their learning past 9th grade or experience the same services that are extended throughout the General Education system. Their close relationship with the School Management team, the Community Center and parents as made the integration of children with SEN a priority, but they consider that the many challenges they face will require the intervention of other stake-holders, particularly with regards to poverty relief and social services.

School #3 is a wonderful example of how a truly Inclusive School can extend beyond the boundaries of the building. The school staff maintains close ties and daily communication with parents and the Community Center, which is vitally important in the region due to a high density of children from vulnerable backgrounds and living in poverty. Reportedly, parents lack both the

educational and financial capitals necessary to provide adequate support to their children and the school and community center endeavor to make the necessary links between children and services. They further reported that even children under the purview of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (orphans and socially vulnerable children) lack the necessary conditions to grow, thrive, and become engaged citizens.

The staff at School #3 considered Inclusive Education and the joint “work FOR children” as vitally important. However, they consider Inclusive Education only a small portion of the “much required project of social inclusion”.

Noyemberyan Inclusive Education School #2

The Noyemberyan School #2 was trained and received status of “Inclusive School” alongside Ijevan School #3. The school has 350 children, 22 of which have been given a disability certificate and 10 more students are currently being assessed. The school maintains 43 teachers despite a decline in enrolment. Assistance with consultation, training and advice is provided by UNICEF and Bridge of Hope, as well as the Noyemberian Community Center. Because the municipality has financial difficulties, the school has turned to individual and organizational donor for their renovation efforts, as well as medical specialized intervention for one of their students.

The school staff underwent training provided by the Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, over two years, and the training covered philosophical, policy, and practical areas of Inclusive Education. The school staff has a deep understanding of Inclusive Education, as well as the ability to reflect upon their successes and challenges, and brainstorm the necessary implementation steps to be taken.

Reportedly, parents are one of two greatest challenges of truly inclusive practices. Despite awareness raising campaigns and a cohesive team-work approach, many parents refuse the services that can be provided to children with SEN. The stereotypes inherent to disabilities are difficult to overcome and there is a great need for parent education with regards to Children’s Rights. Despite these difficulties, the Special Education Team has extended their services to ALL children in the school, and Special Pedagogues work collaboratively with all teachers, in both a push-in and pull-out model. It must be noted that the symbiotic work between the school and community Center observed in Ijevan was not noted in Noyemberyan. This is, undoubtedly, an area of further exploration.

The second greatest challenge is the lack of methodological/pedagogical support to all teachers. The Special Education, General Education, and School Management Teams work in collaboration and participate in on-going training opportunities as well as on the implementation of monitoring findings. They deem their collaboration as vital to providing high quality education to ALL children but reported several difficulties. Despite the trainings already completed which allow them to integrate children with SEN in all classes, teachers reported the lack of materials and expertise to provide quality education, and thus make the leap between integration and inclusion. All teachers agreed on the need for methodology trainings in differentiated instruction, curriculum mapping, classroom management, ICT and assistive technology, which are missing and severely constrains the work being done with ALL children in an Inclusive environment.

Inclusive School #27- Yerevan

School #27 was the first school in the country to initiate services under an “Inclusive School” denomination. In 1999 the school was approached by the parent of a child with mobility difficulties that had not previously attended school, and asked to make accommodations in order to allow the school to attend and pursue an academic education. With the support of UNICEF, OXFAM and Bridge of Hope, the school engaged in a variety of infrastructural renovations and equipment gathering that allowed for the child, on a wheelchair, to attend and make the extraordinary gains needed to complete Secondary School on par with her grade-level peers.

Concurrently with this initial experience, the School engaged in a variety of trainings provided by UNICEF, Bridge of Hope, and Step-by-Step, and now serves 48 children with disabilities, from 1st to 12th grades, with a total school enrolment of 916 children. “Inclusive Education” services are provided in grades 1 through 9 and, if the child meets requirements, moves on to 10th grade with no provision of additional services or, alternatively, engages in Vocational Education services. In many cases, the school provides the child with a Certificate of Completion of 9th grade, but this certificate has no legal standing and does not ensure the child’s participation in any other educational/vocational settings. The school has a total of 63 teachers, and an additional 7 staff that comprise the “Special Education Needs” Team.

Despite the denomination of “Inclusive School” School #27 provides additional services only to students that have been identified as having a disability. The process of identification is the same as with many other schools: the child goes to the Assessment Center, undergoes a variety of assessment measures, receives a certificate that is then further certified by the local Child Protection Unit, and then enrolls at the school. The school uses a Resource Room model in which members of the SEN Team do observations in the general classroom for up to 2 months, and an Individualized Educational Plan is developed. After the Plan is developed, the child is pulled out from the general classroom and into the Resource Room, up to 5 hours/week, depending on need, in order to receive additional services.

Reportedly, several impediments have precluded School#27 from engaging in a fully inclusive model of service provision, such as:

- 1) Inability to identify children with Learning Difficulties due to what is perceived as a conflict of interest between education (funding) and parents;
- 2) Inability to provide services to children with Learning Difficulties due to what is perceived as an inadequate use of the categorical label.
- 3) Lack of General Education Teacher training in how to accommodate curriculum, differentiate instruction, engage in appropriate classroom management strategies, and engage in collaborative approaches with SEN trained staff;
- 4) Large gaps in knowledge between SEN Team (disability specific) and General Education Team (content specific);

In 2005 School #27 was provided with additional funding reportedly originated from Special Schools that closed and the school has a bus that provides transportation to some students. The remaining funding comes from the Ministry of Education and Science and special education students receive twice as much funding as general education funding. The monies are used for

salaries, transportation and food costs. Because most SEN students originate from poor households, the provision of food is highly relevant.

Great care has been given to the collaboration among Social Workers and the SEN Team and the family in order to ensure medical care and family cohesion. Additionally, many services are extended to the entire school population such as a class director that closely monitors a small group of children, social worker and psychological services, extra-curricular activities and a very active student council that has developed teams of students that are engaged with students with disabilities.

The staff at School #27 has engaged in close collaboration with Ministry of Education and Science and participated in the development of a guidebook for principals of Inclusive Schools. They equally participated in the development of Parent Guidebooks to Disability, Education, Social benefits, etc., as well as the development of the modified curriculum for students with Mental Retardation.

School #27 counts among their greatest successes the raising of awareness throughout the community regarding the possibilities of educating ALL children in Inclusive Schools. It is their belief that with appropriate services all children can develop to their full potential and become fully independent. However, they also have the ability to reflect upon their shortcoming and challenges, particularly with regards to needed guidelines and supports for children and staff when making transitions between Special Schools and Inclusive Schools.

In the short term, School #27 would like to adapt the entire building to children with mobility issues so that they could attend classes beyond the first floor. Concerns with the provision of Quality Education are equally at the forefront of their agenda.

Byurakn School – Yerevan

The Byurakn School in Yerevan is a private school, with no governmental funding, that serves students in age-equivalents to K-12 education. All students pay tuition and the principal is currently being paid by private funds. As of yet, no efforts have been made to seek the support of NGO's. This is a school considered by some in the Ministry of Education and Science to be a "model" Inclusive School due to the non-traditional methodology it employs.

The Byurakn School has been functioning for 6 years and currently has 120 students, including two students with special educational needs. The school does not use a grade level model, but each course at the school has a curriculum that is derived from the National Curriculum and Standards. Children are placed in classrooms according to individualized educational plans and children are paired with other children, and encouraged to work in a peer-tutoring system. Reportedly, each child is taught according to their own plan, pace, and interests, which reduces competitiveness among them and allows children with special educational needs to be integrated easily and naturally.

The school is based upon a cooperative teaching research-based model and incorporates Russian pedagogy, specific methodology, and a developmental teaching method. As of January of 2010 the school will become a non-profit pedagogical institute. Because the demand place on teachers is reportedly higher than that placed on mainstream teachers, their hiring criteria are: 1) commitment; 2) high quality specialist. For the most part, teachers are not educated in

pedagogical institutes and undergo on-the-job training on teaching, pedagogy, methodology and research.

Inclusive Pre-School – Yerevan

The Inclusive Pre-School visited in Yerevan was a Step-by-Step school for 10 years and it has been an Inclusive School since 2001. They have 185 children ages 1.5 to 6 years old from a variety of communities, including 22 children with special educational needs.

The school has 48 staff members and includes a Community Resource Center equipped by the municipality and a multi-disciplinary team also paid by municipality funds. Although the Ministry of Education and Science, the municipality and the community were reportedly supposed to provide them with financial support, the school has been without any financial support for the past 18 months, the time at which their funding from World Vision ended. While cooperating with World Vision, staff training, renovations of the community room and improvements in sanitation were provided. Since then the school staff is paid by funding from the community budget but no other financial support is provided.

Besides the community support and resource/specialist services provided, the school also provides parents with guidance regarding what elementary schools to place 1st graders in. At parent request, a few of the 6 year-olds have remained in the school due to lack of readiness for 1st grade. The school also provides after-school resource services to some of their older students.

4.3.1.1. Inclusive Schools - Strengths

In summary, the strengths of the Inclusive Schools visited are centered on the work already accomplished with regards to attitudinal changes and philosophical shifts, as well as the availability of Special Education services to students with disabilities.

4.3.1.2. Inclusive Schools - Weaknesses

In summary, there are two issues that demand immediate attention. First, Inclusive Schools have limited provision of “inclusive” practices. While children with disabilities are being allowed access to regular classrooms, their participation in High Quality Education was not observed, not does it seem achievable without the full participation, training, and commitment of all Staff. Second, although the philosophical stance of the school is one of “Special Education Needs” the only children that receive additional services are those that have been identified as having a disability.

4.3.1.3. Inclusive Schools - Challenges

The challenges are three-fold. First, there is the need to provide the infrastructure conducive to teaching/learning (i.e. electricity, heating, water and sanitation), current and sufficient text-books and consumables, ICT and assistive technology support that provide a nurturing and safe environment for ALL children. Second, the lack of teacher preparations for Inclusive Education is an equally pressing issue and one that will require targeting both pre-service and professional development concurrently. Lastly, there is the need to bridge the gaps between areas of expertise by creating collaborative exchanges between special teams and “syllabus” teachers.

4.3.2. Special Schools

Care Center for Socially Vulnerable Children - Dilijan – Tavush Marz

The Care Center in Dilijan has been in existence since 1961. The infrastructure is poor, despite efforts from the staff and various donations from both individuals and organizations. The Center was changed from a Boarding School to a Care Center in 2007 and houses 122 children, ages 6 to 17, from two marzes. One child, reportedly, has a disability and is under medical care. The Center has 95 staff members, 10 of which are educators. The staff further includes a pediatrician, 2 Social Workers, a psychologist, a dentist and nurses. The Center is funded by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, with further funding being received from World Vision and other donors. World Vision collaborates with the Center in organizing summer camps.

Due to the change in 2007, all children now attend a variety of neighboring schools, with some transportation provided by the Center. After school, the children are involved in a variety of extra-curricular activities and also receive support with their academic tasks. Most of the children at the Center are not orphans and maintain contact with their parents, extended families or guardians, and spend all school breaks with their families. At age 17 the children leave the facility and return to their communities.

The children are placed at the Center by the Child Protection Units, who maintains responsibility for placement. It was indicated that due to societal constraints, the services provided by the Center are absolutely essential.

Special School for Children with Hearing Impairments, Yerevan

The Special School for Children with Hearing Impairments in Yerevan serves 190 children and has 80 staff members. The school was borne out of the combination of two other schools and reformed into a school that offer support for all types of Hearing Impairments, and it is the only school of its type in the country. The school has boarding capacity for 320 children and can provide educational services up to 300 children. The school is financed by the Ministry of Education and science as well as a variety of donors.

The School receives referrals from a variety of entities and health centers but also advertises and tries to raise awareness of their services. Approximately 100 children stay at the facility in “boarding” regime throughout the year (except winter and summer vacations), approximately 30 children attend the school only during the day and the remaining goes home every weekend. Many of the children originate in poor families and communities and for many, reportedly, the living conditions are better than at home.

The school accepts all referrals and, although all children have a diagnosed Hearing Impairment, many have a co-morbidity of impairments. Each child is assessed individually and on a variety of ranges, and a plan is developed according to the level of needs. The school uses both a development of Language skills and a Sign Language methodology, and all teachers have been trained in Sign Language as well as interactive teaching/learning models which have been adapted to the environment.

Currently the School offers grades Pre-School through 12 grade plus 2 extra years of Vocational Education and there is one classroom for each grade, as well as a variety of extra-curricular activities such as sewing, rug making, ICT skills, and hairdressing.

The school population can be divided among two groups of children: those which are totally deaf, and those with partial hearing. The difficulties of the school can also be divided accordingly: the first group of children suffers from a complete lack of Assistive Technology and ICT support; the second group of children suffers from the lack of adequate programs and textbooks. The children are educated with the use of general education texts and curricula that, because it requires adaptations (approved by the Ministry of Education and Science) prevents the large majority of children to not be able to complete both portions of exiting exams, effectively averts them from pursuing Higher Education. The School has requested from the Ministry that a modified curriculum and assessment be considered, particularly with regards to language acquisition.

The cooperation of the Special School with Inclusive Schools and Mainstream schools is bi-lateral. In some cases the Special School has received students that were previously enrolled in mainstream schools, and in other cases has transferred children to mainstream and inclusive schools. However, it was reported that both Inclusive and mainstream schools lack the required expertise to continue supporting the students in adequate ways. The school staff also expressed concern with the lack of extra-curricular activities and Vocational Education opportunities outside of the School.

The School staff has organized and participated in a training with Inclusive education staff, both on Sign Language and Psychology of Hearing Impaired Children and is also attempting to set a precedent of trainings with pre-service teachers, who now do a portion of their practicum at the School.

Despite an obvious lack of proper infrastructure (i.e. heating), and lack of adequate Assistive Technology (only 2 audiometers for 190 children) the staff at the School was competent and willing to share their expertise at all levels of the system.

Special School for Children with Physical Impairments - Yerevan

The Special Schools for Children with Physical Impairments in Yerevan houses 80 children and 52 staff. The children ages 7 to 17 are both on a boarding scheme (45 children) and day-service. All the children have a documented Physical Impairment although approximately 50% also have a co-morbidity of issues, particularly Mental Retardation and Speech Impairments.

This school is the only one in the country with the sole purpose of serving children with physical impairments and also the only one with an infrastructure that supports the use of wheelchairs. Despite a recent renovation which included a new roof, heating (partial and faulty) and new windows, the building is in disrepair, particularly considering that the children it serves have mobility difficulties. The School needs considerable attention paid to sewer and water provision, heating throughout and adequate transportation, but consider that it has sufficient ICT. The school is financed by the Ministry of Education and Science as well as a variety of external and international donors.

Out of the 80 children, 70 receive educational services at the school while 10 receive some services at home due to being homebound. The school has all grades 1 through 9th and is also licensed for High School subjects, and children with learning difficulties are taught in a different classroom with the use of the Ministry's modified curriculum and standards for children with mild Mental Retardation. Some students have continued on to Higher Education and integration within a mainstream school seems to become easier as the children age. Three of their staff members are also graduates of the school. However, for some children, academic attainment is not the primary objective and socialization and Life Skills are emphasized.

In the last 3 years the school population has decreased by 30 students due to lack of transportation and the opening of Inclusive Schools. The school tries to support parents in making appropriate school choices and placements, especially when there are other siblings in neighboring schools. The School also works actively with the Community centers in dissemination information, awareness raising, and promoting their services.

All teachers have participated in interactive teaching/learning training sessions sponsored by the World Bank, as well as trainings provided by the National Education Institute with regards to alternative curriculum. The school is involved in supervision of pre-service teachers, and is planning a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs regarding medical and orthopedic services to be offered at the school. Furthermore, the school is planning on extending Vocational Education services as well as strengthening their relationship with the medical community and equally involving parents in their children's education. The school would like to further extend their services to parents by providing them with hostel facilities to allow them to visit their boarding children more often.

In their efforts to broaden services and extend their cooperation to other schools, the Special School is looking forward to ways in which to participate by distributing their expertise, and provide services to a wider spectrum of the population as a Resource Center.

Special School for Children with Mental Retardation – Gavar - Gegharkunik Marz

The Special School in Gavar houses 83 children ages 6 to 18, from the Gegharkunik Marz, 58 of which have received a certificate of disability (2 with a severe Mental retardation, all others with mild Mental Retardation). The School has 30 educators and 35 service providers. 18 of the children go home every night, and 35 other go home during the weekend.

The school infrastructure is in extremely poor condition, despite a renovated roof, sanitation and a fence, all items provided by various donors. The school also has a mini-bus donated by a Non Governmental Agency. The School is financed by the Ministry of Education and Science and a variety of donors. The entrepreneurial spirit of the staff and their ability to raise funds and engage in collaboration with all willing partners was clearly present.

All academic services are provided in the School. Grades 1 through 6 curriculum is aligned with the National Institute Curriculum and Standards for Children with Mental Retardation and the school also uses old textbooks that were used by the previously existent Boarding School. The School also offers extra-curricular activities and would like to initiate life-skills education. Upon exiting the children are awarded a Certificate of Completion which allows them to pursue Vocational Education although the marz does not provide Vocational Education

settings. Most exiting children return to their families and have little employment or secondary education opportunities.

The School has initiated collaboration with neighboring schools and plans on expanding visits to and from mainstream schools and University students. Although the staff has been participated in expertise exchange with other special schools in Yerevan, further opportunities for distribution of knowledge are needed.

It was reported that the social conditions in the Marz are extremely difficult and that all the children at the School come from families in poverty, or with histories of mental illness. Despite provisions in the law that constrain their services, the School is willing and able to extend services to socially vulnerable children and thus houses both children with and without disabilities, which the School Director deemed “a human responsibility”.

Yerevan Psychological, Pedagogical, and Medical Assessment Center (YPPMAC)/ Boarding School

The YPPMAC is the only assessment centre of its kind in the Republic of Armenia. It has been in existence since September of 2007 and advertises their services via television, Marz authorities, Child Protection Units, and Health Services. The Center also maintains two mobile units that access children in the most remote areas of the country. It was reported that the effectiveness and efficiency of the mobile units is higher than the main center due to their ability to observe the children in their natural environment and involvement of the community.

Its main objective is to medically assess a child's special needs and developmental milestones, and transform the medical diagnosis into an educational assessment, with goals and recommendations with regards to educational outcomes. The Center further offers suggestions with regards to the appropriate placement of the child (facility or program), as well as the identification of specific curricula or services. Since September of 2009, the Center has completed 4,100 assessments and, reportedly, approximately 40% of those assessed are being educated in Inclusive Schools.

The Center has 62 staff members, divided among 3 Units: Methodology, assessment and Educational Organization. The Center hires psychologists, social pedagogues, special educators, general pedagogues, visual, hearing, motor specialists, etc., and collaborates with the Open Society Institute, the Pedagogical Institutes, the National Institute of Education and the Ministry of Education and Science.

The average stay at the Center varies depending on the child's willingness to complete the assessment, anywhere between 3 days and 3 months. Upon exiting, the parent is provided with 2 documents: 1) Statement of Disability; 2) Recommendations for services and educational placement. The parent can then go to the Child Protection Unit of their community and chooses what school to place the child in.

The Center has a variety of children in their facilities, some of which are boarding and some of which go home every night. Currently, two of the classes of students from the Boarding Center are attending classes in mainstream schools with the support of staff from the Center, which takes the children to school and stays with them in order to ensure a proper

transition. It is expected that, next year, those students will be able to attend school unaccompanied and two other classes will start transitioning.

The Center is willing to work towards ensuring the expansion of Inclusive Schools, as well as the reduction of the number of special schools, although not their extinction, because educational and care/social services continue to be needed. The staff at the Center works in collaboration with pre-service teachers and specialists, but recognizes that further work is needed in preparing teachers to work with ALL students with both pre-service and continuous professional development opportunities. The Center further recognizes that the recent advent of Inclusive Schools has been too rapid and not yet been able to address the quality and participation of ALL children in education.

4.3.2.1. Special Schools - Strengths

Special Schools have developed and maintained the greatest expertise with regards to children with disabilities. The specialized staff of Special Schools is willing and able to share their skills and knowledge with other education professionals and has a central role in future education reforms and in ensuring the distribution of expertise through all educational settings.

4.3.2.2. Special Schools - Weaknesses

The weakness of Special Schools is clearly evident in the composition of their school populations. While Special Schools are not uncommon in many countries, Special Schools tend to be seen as the most secluded of settings, and a placement to be utilized under the most pressing of needs and equated with severe disabilities. However, in the Republic of Armenia, Special Schools serve a variety of students that could be best served in mainstream and inclusive settings. The greatest portion of the students observed in Special Schools either had very mild or no disabilities that warranted their stay at a Special School, which could be taken as a violation of their Rights according to Articles 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 39 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

4.3.2.3. Special Schools - Challenges

The greatest challenge facing Special Schools is not of a logistical nature but of a professional and pedagogical nature. The transformation of some Special Schools into Resource Centers requires that specialized staff be willing and able to, not only provide services, but also train other staff and participate in inter-disciplinary collaborations.

4.3.3. Support Programmes

Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs - Women, Children and Families Protection Department

Although not directly involved in issues of education, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is of particular interest to this evaluation due to the predominant role the Ministry has had in the reform of special schools, care centers, and orphanages. In Armenia, children deemed as “socially vulnerable” are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, despite the co-morbidity of needs many times present.

The reform of special schools initiated in 2005 gave the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science the opportunity to cooperate in making special schools more inclusive. Before 2005, all boarding schools were under the purview of the

Ministry of Education and Science and the children received all services within the walls of the buildings. The reform initiated in 2005 accessed the needs of the children in the existing 52 boarding schools and the schools, and by 2007, 17 boarding schools were reformed with 10 now under the purview of the Ministry of Education and Science as mainstream schools, and 7 under the purview of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs due to housing socially vulnerable children.

The children currently being housed in any of the 7 Care Centers for Socially Vulnerable Children are required to be registered in the Family Welfare System which ensures that they come from poor backgrounds. There are currently 2 Care Centers in Yerevan and 5 other spread across 5 different marzes, for a total of 716 children. Despite the fact that the initial goal of the reform was to provide only day-care services, the Centers still provide boarding services (food, shelter, clothes, medical services, etc.). The short-term future of the Centers is grim, because the foster care and adoption systems are not yet functioning to full potential, particularly due to the financial crisis) and these are services essential to supporting children in need.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs further plans to expand the reform of orphanages and reduce their current number. Unfortunately, approximately 90% of the children placed in orphanages are considered “social orphans”, despite a 2005 decree that deems that only parentless children can be placed in orphanages. Currently there are 8 orphanages in the country, two of which receive only children with severe disabilities, for a total of 864 children. The two orphanages for children with disabilities are divided by age: one receives children ages 0 to 6 years old, and the second receives children 7 to 18 years old. The second orphanage is currently adding a new wing that will house students over the age the 18. Orphans with mild/moderate disabilities are sent to special boarding schools. The children currently placed in the six other orphanages attend mainstreamed schools, sports clubs and extra-curricular activities in the community and are much less isolated than previous to 2005.

In 2006 the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs started a project of de-institutionalization in one marz and transferred socially vulnerable children and social orphans to their own families by providing families with financial support, wrap-around services and teaching prevention to families. Each year 40 children are placed with their families and NGO’s are collaborating with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs with regards to educational placements. Again, the expansion of this project has been halted due to budgetary constraints.

Child Development Foundation - Yerevan

The Child Development Foundation was borne out of work initiated by World Vision International and it is now working with more or less independently from them, although based on the same principals and the heritage left from their work with almost 500 children.

The Foundation serves children from pre-school up to 19 years of age, both with and without disabilities. The Foundation is set on the principal of Inclusive Education, defined as the provision of an equal starting point for all children, and equal opportunity for children with and without disabilities. They further espouse a Child-Friendly policy which they wish to see extended to all academic settings, and provide support to both children and their families, and engage in pre-school, academic support, extra-curricular, and transitional activities both with schools and other services.

In order to be registered, children undergo a needs-assessment process which involves a social history as well as psychological and medical evaluations, done by a Social Worker, special educators, a psychologist, and various other staff members. Each child is then provided with an Individualized Educational Plan and a report of needs and suggested activities that can be shared with receiving schools and other organizations.

However, the Foundations' greatest concern is what is perceived as the inability by mainstream and Inclusive Schools to provide adequate services to children that come from them, an Inclusive environment. They report that some school principals are reluctant to provide adequate services to all children, and that there needs to be a broad-range, systematic, and age-specific reform at all levels of the educational system in order to support Inclusive Education throughout the country.

Community Center – Ijevan

The Community Center in Ijevan works with 162 children and their families, of which, 72 are children with SEN. The Community Center is funded by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs as well as Bridge of Hope, and the occasional funding from the municipality.

Their goal, since 2003 has been to promote and implement the integration of children with and without SEN in development projects, as well as identify, and promote the integration of children with SEN in schools. They further concentrate on specialized services that would not otherwise be available, awareness training regarding children with SEN and parental involvement. Furthermore, they offer a variety of services and extra-curricular activities such as art, art therapy, drama, debate, etc., despite the extremely poor infrastructure.

The Community Center makes referrals for additional services to the municipality, schools, educational centers, and occasionally the Hearing and Visual Impairment Schools in Yerevan. The Community Center works closely with School #3, attended the same training opportunities provided by UNICEF/Bridge of Hope and supports in the development of Individualized Educational Plans and parent involvement. Furthermore, the Community Center is involved in monitoring School #3 and providing training as needed. The Community Center is also involved in the identification of children that, although registered, do not attend school. Most of the absenteeism cases are due to: extreme poverty, lack of parental involvement, children working, and mental illness in the family.

The staff at the Community Center has a deep understanding of Inclusive Education as a process of systemic change and reported that the greatest hurdle, the integration of children with SEN in neighboring schools has been overcome. They report that now the initial phase is completed they will concentrate on moving towards Inclusive Education and the provision of quality education to ALL the children in the school and the Community Center. The Community Center is involved in the process of enabling 50 more schools in the Tavush Marz to apply for "Inclusive School" status which also involves the study of each surrounding community, needs-assessment, training requirements, data-collection ability, etc.

Despite their many successes and the attitude and perception transformations they have accomplished, the Community Center faces many challenges, among them the lack of ability to provide specialized services, such as Speech Therapy and Social Work support. The staff at the

Community Center was emphatic in stating that more governmental support is needed to ensure sustainability and that monies earmarked for social services are not being made available. Furthermore, they reported a lack of initiative from the municipality, lack of monitoring systems, as well as difficulties in adjusting to systemic reform. In the next 5 years, besides infrastructure renovations, the Community Center would like to be involved in a needs-assessment of state and municipal resources in order to determine their benefits and challenges, and how these affect budgeting and planning.

Community Center-Noyemberyan

The Community Center in Noyemberian, is in the center of the village and relatively well equipped with an exterior ramp for wheelchair accessibility, a physical therapy room, a computer room and two arts and crafts rooms. The Center serves approximately 150 children and their families, out of which 60 are children with special needs, and have 20 staff members. They are also in the process of providing support to a refugee family with 3 children. They have been in the area for 4 years and initiated services through a child-seeking process although most families now seek their services. The Community Center is funded by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (salaries), by the municipality and Bridge of Hope.

The Center works collaboratively with the neighboring schools but more closely with the Inclusive Education school, and provides after school support, tutoring and extra-curricular activities. Some planning is done jointly with the inclusive school but the same collaboration is difficult with mainstream schools. The staff works continuously with all schools to raise awareness and is knowledgeable about Inclusive Practices.

With regards to Inclusive Education, the Center reports various needs to be addressed in the community. Those needs are centered on: 1) amendments to the curriculum so that accommodations can fully reflect children's attainment; 2) training targeted at ALL teachers in order to ensure their ability to work with ALL children; 3) bi-lateral cooperation between the Community Center and IE schools in order to distribute expertise and assure a continuum of services. The Community Center reported that some school principals and staff (mainstream schools) are reticent in accepting students with special needs for fear that they will lower the total school achievement rates.

The parents interviewed at the Community Center seem to be pleased with the services provided but their knowledge of the work being done in both Inclusive and Mainstream schools was, at best, tentative. Despite an understanding of disabilities, the parents seemed content with the services from the Community Center but unable to comment on the services provided by the Inclusive Schools, with the exception of provisions of food. The staff at the Community Center is highly knowledgeable of inclusive practices and willing to extend their knowledge and expertise to both parents and newly developed Inclusive Education schools.

Child Protection Unit – Gavar - Gegharkunik Marz

Child Protection Units (CPU) are financed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and are under the supervision of the Department of Women, Children and Families Protection. The CPUs in each marz are constituted of a 5 member team: Social Worker, Psychologist, Doctor, Lawyer and Pedagogue. The CPUs are responsible for receiving the special educational

needs assessments provided to the families by the Yerevan Psychological, Pedagogical, and Medical Assessment Center, providing families with the required marz statement of special educational need and making recommendations as to the best school placement for each child. The CPUs cooperate with the receiving schools and maintain a system of monitoring the children, both in school and at home. Furthermore, CPUs also make referrals for assessment of special educational needs, since many parents consider disabilities as stigmatizing and tend to hide the need for services and/or the children.

CPUs also work closely with special schools and orphanages, and try to place children in foster care. In the past year, 10 children with Mental Retardation were placed at the Special School in Gavar and 25 children were sent to the Care Center in Dilijan. The CPU representative interviewed was well aware of the work done in Inclusive Schools and expressed the wish for more Inclusive Schools in the marz. The CPUs in general are, at this time, facing several challenges: 1) lack of certified social workers; 2) method of child visitations and observations is not conducive to the true assessment of needs/services provided.

4.3.3.1. Support Programmes - Strengths

From among all the support services the greatest strength comes from the potential of the Community Centers to develop and implement change and reform efforts alongside Inclusive Schools. The Community Centers not only understand the need for a continuum of services, but are also extremely knowledgeable about the communities they serve.

4.3.3.2. Support Programmes - Weaknesses

The greatest weakness of the support services is their lack of collaboration and common vision. Because services are not closely monitored and provided in collaboration, there are lapses in provisions, and also some overlap, which results in the inappropriate use of resources.

4.3.3.3. Support Programmes - Challenges

As is the case with special schools, the greatest challenge faced by support services is the required need for collaboration and sharing of expertise, which involves a transformation of the professional role of many of the stake-holders, as well as the need for inter-disciplinary collaborations.

5. DISCUSSION OF POLICY AND PROGRAMS

Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the government policy and provision of services to students with special educational needs constitute the main focus of this evaluation, both with regards to students in special schools and students in general education placements. The scope of the evaluation took into account internal developments to date, and the possible comparisons to global trends, both regional and global, with regards to the overall impact on individuals, communities and institutions.

5.1. Relevance

- *What is the relevance of the government inclusive education programmes in Armenia with regards to four criteria, i.e. availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability of education?*
- *What is the value of the programmes in relation to primary stakeholders' needs, national priorities, national and international partners' policies and global references such as human rights and in particular, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Concluding Recommendations of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child made to Armenia?*
- *What is the relevance of inclusive education for families and children with special needs?*
- *For UNICEF, what is the relevance of the inclusive education programme in relation to the 2010-2015 country programme and its contribution to the Education Reform?*

The existing Inclusive Education programmes are highly relevant. They certainly represent the willingness of the government in complying with international guidelines and policies and are considered an essential part of the general purposes declared in Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals. In a country with a very recent history of democracy, inclusive education programmes denote a strong initial commitment to ALL children and a complement to the efforts already in place with regards to the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

However, because special schools continue to be maintained and endorsed by a large portion of the governing bodies and because Inclusive Education as been introduced as alternative to special and mainstream educations, relevance of these programmes is often compromised. Inclusive Schools are not widely available, and scaling plans do not encompass all marzes which, will likely contribute to the image that Inclusive Schools are only for a certain sector of the school population. Even in the cases where Inclusive Schools are available, they are not

accessible to all students, either because of lack of adequate infra-structure, lack of resources, or lack of adequate services.

While the Inclusive Schools visited were excellent examples of community strengthening and attitudinal change, many of those not directly related to Inclusive Schools had an obvious difficulty envisioning the purpose on Inclusive Education. Acceptability of Inclusive Schools is a theme being discussed at length at all levels of governance but, greater efforts are needed in expanding that discussion to a nation-wide platform. While the Law on Education stresses the need for a variety of settings in order to provide parents with adequate choices, choices are not possible unless all the parameters of all three types of schools (Special, Mainstream and Inclusive) are clearly understood. The families that have either been involved in the transformation of mainstream schools into Inclusive Schools, or that have been introduced to the work done in Inclusive Schools, are satisfied with the schools mission and accomplishments. However, only a small percentage of families have the availability of Inclusive Schools in their neighborhoods.

Finally it is important to consider the issue of curriculum and adaptability. While the language of the Law of Education is broad enough to allow for Inclusive Practices to flourish, other pieces of legislation counter this possibility (see discussion in 4.1.1. above). Furthermore, because ALL students, regardless of placement or severity of disability are obligated to follow the same National Curriculum, many students are effectively prevented from graduating or pursuing upper and post-secondary education. All those interviewed, with one exception, pointed to the inflexibility of the curriculum and exiting requirements as the greatest impediment to Inclusive Education.

UNICEF has a central role in promoting Inclusive Education in Armenia, particularly with regards to the 2010-2015 Country Programme. Inclusive Education is not only the driving force behind Education For All, but is also the mechanism identified to implement Millennium Development Goal 2 – Universal Primary Education.

In the 2010-2015 Country Programme Draft UNICEF clearly outlines the needs in the areas of rights or women and children, child nutrition, HIV awareness, inequalities in pre-school, upper secondary and quality of education, meeting the obligations of the CRC, and institutionalization. Inclusive Education cuts across all these issues and can provide forums, mechanisms, and collaborative opportunities to address all these issues nationally.

Because of its recognition at all levels of governance, visibility among susceptible populations, and international expertise, UNICEF is in a privileged position to lead Inclusive Education efforts with a clear and concise direction, and support the government of Armenia in attaining the MDG by 2015. The main challenge to the future success of Educational Reforms in Armenia is the need for a clear vision, agreed upon all stakeholders, and the capacity to maintain reforms on track, even in the event of political dissent. Because of its objective and non-partisan standing, UNICEF can assume this leadership role and guide not only governance but all the involved stakeholders in creating an Inclusive Education System (see recommendations below).

5.2. Effectiveness

- *In general terms, the formative evaluation will measure the effectiveness of the project at school level in terms of school environment, teaching and learning methods, assessment methods, and identify key achievements and lessons learnt. In particular, the extent to which the inclusive education model has enriched and added value and relevance to the teaching and learning process of the mainstream environment, as well as improved the learning and socialization experience of children with special needs.*

The Inclusive Education programmes have been very effective in promoting social inclusion and demystifying stereotypes associated with disability. These are undoubtedly the greatest successes of the implemented programs. The programmes have shined the spotlight on children with disabilities and highlighted the need for compliance with the CRC as well as the need for a Child-Rights education approach.

The Inclusive Schools observed have very strong specialist teams, with the willingness and intent to implement inclusive practices. The schools have been able to provide children with disabilities with socializing experiences that 10 years ago would have been impossible to consider, and are constantly working towards ensuring that children with and without disabilities enrich each other's lives.

However, with regards to High Quality Education, the schools fall short in its practical implementations due to a variety of constraints, many of which outside of the schools control.

With regards to the School Environment, the difficulties are extreme in all sites observed. Infrastructures are poor, buildings are in disrepair, and renovations have not been sufficient to adequately address needs. All schools function with partial or total lack of water, sanitation, electricity, heating, or a combination, and leaky roofs, moldy walls, and single pane windows were observed in all visited sites. Many of the schools that serve students with motor difficulties have ramps built from the entrance to the ground floor or from the ground floor to the first floor, but classroom schedules still need to be adjusted to ensure that the students only attend classes in the accessible classrooms. This not only prevents these students from accessing the entire building but it also causes undo strain on the entire school's scheduling.

Many of the schools observed were decorated with child-friendly items and students work was displayed throughout. However, there were few play areas indoors and the outdoors playing areas were in considerable disrepair. All schools had a combination of old and new furniture, mostly provided by NGO's, and only a few computers. With the exception of the Special School for Children with Hearing Impairments and the Community Centers, there was no evidence of Assistive Technology available. The materials in use were those provided by the MoES and all schools reported the lack of expendables, Xerox machines, and support materials.

With regards to teaching and learning methods, all the sites observed, presented a contradiction in terms. On the one hand, it was obvious that the trainings already conducted provided both administration and special education teams with the confidence, knowledge, and skills necessary to implement strong inclusive programmes. All the stakeholders interviewed shared a common vision for their school and were willing to continue working towards inclusive practices. On the other hand, the "syllabus" teachers were either not involved in the trainings, not as confident in their knowledge and skills, or unsupported in their efforts. Because all current

teachers have had only little (or no) exposure to Inclusive Education, they feel unprepared to provide High Quality Education. While this is not a phenomena exclusive to Armenia it is, none the less, of crucial importance. While the specialists in each building are ready to provide services to children with disabilities in inclusive settings, the “syllabus” teachers responsible for educating the children are not. The end result is four-fold:

1) Children with disabilities are seen as Special Education children first, and the full responsibility of the Special Education Team;

2) Children with disabilities are seen as requiring “additional” work, effort, and time, as opposed to differentiated instruction;

3) Children with disabilities that attend “Inclusive Classrooms” do not fully participate in the lessons and are expected to do only partial or modified work that is neither appropriate nor challenging;

4) There is no sense of shared responsibility, distributed expertise, team-work among ALL school staffs.

The trainings so far offered to the staff of Inclusive Schools have, for the most part, targeted attitudinal changes, stereotypes, and theoretical issues surrounding Inclusive Education. The members of the Special Education Teams have also participated in specific trainings regarding the various issues surrounding accommodations and modifications, Individualized Education Planning, and multi-disciplinary assessments. However, even when the entire school staffs were trained, the sessions were held separately and administration, special education teachers, and “syllabus” teachers were trained separately. This training model further perpetuates the perceived differences in expertise between the schools staffs, and justifies the continued strained power relations among multi-disciplinary team members. Furthermore, “syllabus” teachers that have been previously trained under the soviet model have no knowledge of the essential teaching and learning methodologies of inclusive settings: reflective teaching, shared construction of knowledge, curriculum pacing, differentiated instruction, classroom management, cooperative teaching, peer-tutoring, etc.

As with teaching and learning methodologies, assessments in use in Inclusive Schools are neither appropriate not adequate for ALL children. Children with disabilities were often referred to as falling under one of two categories: 1) children with no cognitive difficulties that can keep pace with the National Curriculum and pass exit exams; 2) children with cognitive difficulties that cannot keep pace with the National Curriculum and will not be able to take or pass exit exams. These determinations were, in many cases made early in a child’s life, accepted as unchangeable fact, and directed expectations and workloads. Furthermore, it was widely reported that children with disabilities in all placements and settings have little or no chance of becoming active and productive members of society, thus the continued need for governmental intervention in Special Schools, Care Centers, and Vocational Education.

5.3. Efficiency

- *What would be the most cost-effective way to reach the following result:*
 - *To introduce and implement inclusive education in 200 mainstream school by 2010*

- *To create conditions for sustainable systemic change and ongoing professional development for professionals working with children with special needs*
- *To develop clear mechanisms of students transfer from special and boarding schools to inclusive schools.*

The Inclusive Education programmes in existence have been highly efficient in introducing the philosophy and goals of EFA, promoting the need for de-institutionalization, introducing the processes and the mechanisms needed for systemic change. According to research conducted by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (1999) in 17 European countries, de-centralization of governance and per-capita financing of Special Educational Needs students are two of the most favorable conditions for systemic reform that targets Inclusive Education. The Republic of Armenia already has both. From a policy and legislative standpoint, education governance is already set up in a way that is conducive to expanding reform efforts. However, it is necessary to define parameters around de-centralization efforts, in order to prevent chaos and a breakdown in the channeling of funds and the adequate financing of services. De-centralization is not equivalent to lack of oversight, and monitoring mechanisms are essential to ensuring service provision.

The most cost-effective way of introducing and implementing inclusive education into 200 mainstream schools in 2010 would be by combining all the efforts of the government, the great variety of non-governmental agencies, and all international donors into one large effort, not a “project”. It is essential to conduct a nationwide, non-partisan needs-assessment initiative in order to ensure that the 200 new schools address the needs of all the marzes, address the needs of a variety of segments of the population, and ensure that the best positioned mainstream schools are targeted for reform. This needs-assessment effort should include the collaboration of Child Protection Agencies and Special Schools in order to assess existing expertise, and the potential for concurrent transformation of Special Schools into Resource Centers around which clusters of Inclusive Schools can be set up.

The above effort to develop 200 new Inclusive Schools should be concurrent with an effort to support the existing Inclusive Schools by providing the necessary conditions for the provision of High Quality Education. Professional Development efforts should occur with the collaboration of the Pedagogical Institutes and Pre-Service Teacher training, and work towards the long-term uniformity of teacher preparation standards that address Inclusive practices. Professional Development efforts must be combined to address the most pressing needs and include a component of teacher support and mentoring. While the Trainer-Of-Trainers model currently preferred is financially desirable, its efficiency and effectiveness should be considered.

The transfer of students from secluded to inclusive environments should be addresses concurrently with the above and carefully planned. While there is an urgent need to proceed with greater efforts to de-institutionalize children, transitions should be planned and implemented by a non-partisan organization such as UNICEF and with the full collaboration of both the MoES and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and consider the existing and short-term planned Inclusive Schools.

5.4. Sustainability

- *Has the government's inclusive education programme appeared to strengthen or add value to the basic education reform effort in the education system of Armenia (introduction of 9-year basic education)?*
- *Are there a political will and available resources by MoES to bring the project to scale and mainstream further the inclusive education in the education system? How is this reflected in MoES annual and/or long-term programme planning and budgetary allocations?*

The Inclusive Education programmes have created an environment that is welcoming to de-institutionalization, good examples and model schools upon which to base the structure required for systemic reform of basic education, and has demonstrated a greater political will and commitment for systemic reform. However, because there is no clear vision and guidance from the government, and because there are a great number of non-governmental agencies and international donors involved in separate projects that do not have one main target, basic education reform efforts are inconsistent and temporary. The de-institutionalization efforts of the past 5 years demonstrate a clear commitment to education and inclusive practices, and an effort to align Armenian policies with international counter-parts. However, political will and personal commitments are insufficient to yield adequate practices. The lack of resources, the lack of distributed knowledge and expertise, and the conflicting or unclear policies and regulations in education make the current efforts ineffective in creating a climate of systemic reform. Furthermore, while the long-term planning of the Ministry of Education and Science has taken into account the needs of reform efforts, the budgetary constraints of the past two years have made implementation of Inclusive Education difficult.

Issues of sustainability of Inclusive Education reforms should be addressed by representatives of not only the Ministry of Education and Science but also with representatives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Health, international donors and non-governmental agencies. Because the issues surrounding Inclusive Education cut across a variety of governmental agencies, funding for Inclusive Education should be determined by a variety of stakeholders. A clear national plan based on a common vision, with short, medium, and long term goals to be carried out across a continuum of settings, would not only prevent overlap of services but also consolidate financial availability, and strengthens the platform for attainment of all 8 Millennium Development Goals.

In summary, while Inclusive Education programmes in the Republic of Armenia are highly relevant and have the potential to become effective, efficient, and sustainable, these efforts must be undertaken under the guise of a clear national vision for educational reform, and with the collaboration of all interested stakeholders. Because Inclusive Education reform encompasses all aspects of children's lives, both inside and outside of the school walls, Inclusive Education systemic reform is not exclusive to the Ministry of Education and Science and will require collaboration at all levels of governance.

6. RECOMMENDED INTERVENTIONS

The recommended interventions are being offered according to levels of perceived need and the parameters of this evaluation, and include short, medium, and long term interventions. While many of the recommendations are categorized headings or descriptors, they should not be seen as free-standing or exclusive to each. On the contrary, these recommendations should be seen as starting at the national level but infusing all layers of governance, at the marz, regional, community, local, and school levels. Furthermore, and unless otherwise specified, the recommendations below should not be read in rank order, as many should be carried out concurrently.

6.1. Short-Term Interventions

The short-term recommendations, to be started immediately, are as follows:

6.1.1. Governance

- a. Suspend all reform efforts (opening on new Inclusive Education schools, and closing of Special Schools) until an autonomous working group has been established according to the following parameters :
 - i. Identify committed and knowledgeable stake-holders at all levels of governance that can serve as the basis of capacity building.
 - ii. Develop an autonomous working group with representatives of all levels of governance, including education, social affairs, and child protection. This working group should include one representative of each of the following: UNICEF, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Health, World Bank, Mission East, Bridge of Hope and World Vision, as well as one Advisor to the National Assembly and a representative of the EU advisory Committee on Education.
 - iii. Provide the working group with the financial and human means to implement the agreed to reforms, according to ONE main vision, that of the Republic of Armenia. This working group should represent ALL children and be free of political and intellectual pressures.
 - iv. Allow the working group to develop a set of reform strategies, with short, medium and long goals, to encompass all areas of children's' lives: protection, health and education

- v. Allow the working group to strengthen existing data collection mechanisms and enhance them through the use of a data management system available to ALL stake-holders.
- b. Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all stake-holders considering their individual strengths, accomplishments thus far, and potential involvement.
- c. Develop a collaborative structure of communication and implementation of services that includes all stake-holders, considers their individual and group contributions thus far, and promotes their continued efforts under one single vision: that of the Republic of Armenia.
- d. Reflect upon the most recent accomplishments and design a plan that takes into account the successes of the past 10 years, as well as the challenges thus identified.
- e. Develop a clear vision for the future of the educational system in the Republic of Armenia and define short, medium, and long term goals and the required strategies, for attaining each.
- f. Clearly define Inclusive Education has the main mechanism towards attainment of Education for All, the Millennium Development Goals, and European Integration.
- g. Clearly define the mechanisms needed to uphold the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and involve children at all levels of decision-making.

If implemented immediately, the above recommendations should be completed by the start of the 2010-2011 School Year.

6.2. Medium-Term

The recommendations to be started immediately upon completion of the short-term recommendations are as follows:

6.2.1. Policy

- a. Re-formulate all educational policies into a cohesive and single set of guidelines that has Inclusive Education (as defined by the Salamanca Declaration) as its main overarching construct, and not as an alternative school placement.
- b. Ensure the enforcement of the principles of the Law of Education by ensuring “a well-planned learning process for all learners” (p.6) and High Quality Education at all levels of compulsory education.
- c. Promote the use of the terms “Inclusive Education” and “Special Needs Education” as intended in the Salamanca Declaration and further promulgated by the 2008 UNESCO Education Summit, and extend services beyond the school walls.
- d. Define the model of service provisions more appropriate for the Republic of Armenia and the findings from the working group, and consider children as the main target of all efforts.
- e. Determine the need and adequacy of a categorizing system that is based on a medical model, and explore other avenues (see, for example, Florian et al, 2006).
- f. Provide parent education opportunities and ways to gather information that allows informed choices to be made.

6.2.2. Financing Models

Consider international research and data already gathered in *Costing services and forecasting the demand for services in the context of child care reform in Armenia*, a report completed in 2009 for UNICEF, and summarized below.

- Residential services are very expensive. Reallocation of children in formal care into cheaper – and more appropriate - forms of placement will create savings;
- Even if the savings are small, family placements result in huge social benefits for the child;
- Savings will permit to cover the costs of community based family and child support services and promote the reintegration of families.
- Better access to day care services will reduce the inflow of children into formal care.
 - a. Develop funding mechanisms that allow for the development of policies that envision the WHOLE child.
 - b. Ensure that the funding mechanisms chosen do not promote the excessive identification of children with Special Educational Needs by making the funds available to the provision of services that target the entire school population and not a particular group of students.
 - c. Ensure that each existing school/community/marz is utilizing the best prepared personnel for each task, and create mechanisms for addressing over-staffing (i.e. early retirement; re-training; role transformation; re-assignments, etc.).

6.2.3.. Infrastructure

- a. Implement school-wide needs-assessment strategies to access the strengths and weaknesses of each school building (inside and out), and prioritize infra-structural needs.
- b. Address the most immediate needs regarding sanitation, water, electricity, and heating, and consider combining two or three schools into one single building in order to maximize existing resources.
- c. Involve children and communities in the renovation efforts.

6.2.4. De-Institutionalization and Campaign of sensitization

- a. In collaboration with UNICEF continue to promote de-institutionalization
- b. In collaboration with UNICEF, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Ministry of Health, develop parent mechanisms to enhance de-institutionalization
- c. In collaboration with UNICEF develop external mechanisms to target child protection efforts
- d. Conduct un-scheduled monitoring visits to ALL special schools, care centers, and orphanages with the purpose of observing and documenting their daily work and introducing all stake-holders to the reality of such settings.
- e. 3) Identify 6 schools in the country, one for each medical disability, that can best service students with severe disabilities and concentrate all efforts in providing them with the infra-structure, specialized personnel and assistive technology to provide not only exceptional care but also high quality education
- f. Transfer all severely impaired students from all other schools to those identified above,
- g. Identify existing expertise within special schools and transfer them to potential IE schools.
- h. Develop a group within each of the 6 schools that can work towards providing training and specialized materials to be distributed to all schools thus transforming the existing special schools into resource centers.

6.2.5. Inclusive Schools

- a. Suspend the opening of IE schools in marzes were some already exist, and expand the identification of potential IE schools to ALL other marzes.
- b. Provide funding, infrastructure and training opportunities to each school that target High Quality Education for ALL students, particularly emphasizing the training of general education teaching staff, in collaboration with specialized staff in: curricular adaptation, differentiated instruction, lesson planning, classroom management and teaching methods.
- c. In collaboration with UNICEF, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and child protection units, develop strategies to search for, identify, and provide protection and education to ALL children in the surrounding communities.
- d. Identify model schools IN EACH marz
- e. Provide funding, infrastructure and training opportunities to each school that target High Quality Education for ALL students, particularly emphasizing the training of general education teaching staff, in collaboration with specialized staff in: curricular adaptation, differentiated instruction, lesson planning, classroom management and teaching methods.
- f. Provide opportunities for exchange of knowledge and expertise between staff at IE and staff at Special Schools.
- g. In collaboration with UNICEF, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and child protection units, develop strategies to search for, identify and provide protection and education to ALL children in the surrounding communities.
- h. Introduce and promote the use of school self-assessment mechanisms in ALL schools in order to determine potential for new Inclusive Schools, and identify Model Inclusive Schools whose staff might aid in the development of new sites.
- i. Conduct in-depth assessments (self and external) in each existing IE school in order to determine strengths and weaknesses in each, and target those for immediate remediation.
- j. Conduct in-depth needs assessment in each marz in order to better determine the placement of each new IE school
- k. Conduct in-depth needs assessment in each targeted community in order to better determine the placement of each new IE school
- l. 1. Facilitate workshops among the various schools and community centers already in existence, so that they can extend their knowledge-base, share collaborative practices and develop best-practices relevant to each region.

6.2.6. Special Schools

- a. Every year, for the next 5 years, identify 20% of the school population that can best be served in Inclusive Schools
- b. Initiate transition of the above 20% onto Inclusive/Mainstream schools with the support of a team from the special school, while continuing to provide boarding as needed. Preferably, children would be transferred to inclusive schools in their neighborhood, and with the support of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and MoH families would be enabled to provide care.
- c. Identify and support the transition of expert staff from special schools onto Inclusive Schools.

The recommendations included in 6.2.4., 6.2.5., 6.2.6. should be planned for and implemented concurrently.

6.2.7. Monitoring and Inspectorate

- a. Develop impartial and independent monitoring teams in each Marz responsible for ensuring the proper provision of services (composed of representatives from the municipalities, schools, and CPUs) along a continuum.
- b. Develop impartial and independent monitoring teams in each community responsible for insuring the proper provision of educational and wrap-around services, including the development and follow-through of Individualized Educational Plans.
- c. Develop school-monitoring teams responsible for insuring a continuum of services, proper infrastructure, and High Quality Education. The school teams should be composed of non-administrative staff and include parents and children.

6.3. Long Term

6.3.1. Curriculum Revisions

- a. Ensure transitional mechanisms among all levels of education and life after post-secondary education.
- b. Consider existing Vocational Education plans and enhance their access to ALL students.
- c. Consider alternative completion and existing processes that will allow ALL students to become active citizens and participants of a democratic society.

6.3.2. ICT and Assistive Technology

- a. Provide adequate technological support and training to enhance assessment, provision of services and teaching/learning.

6.3.3. Teacher Education, Professional Development, and Power Relations

- a. Provide Pedagogical Institutes with the ability to develop search for and secure expertise in Inclusive Education in order to become a resource for other nations in the region.
- b. Prepare ALL teachers to work with ALL students, both independently and in collaboration, and target the dissemination of skills and knowledge related to: curricular modifications/adaptations, differentiated instruction, classroom management, learning styles, individualized interventions, co-teaching, peer-tutoring, and grouping instruction, which target ALL students.
- c. Clearly define roles and responsibilities of ALL school staffs and ensure that clear collaboration/networking mechanisms are made available.
- d. Address the existing power relationships and devise strategies to equalize roles among ALL stakeholders.
- e. Encourage the sharing of expertise and inter-disciplinary collaborations.

6.3.5. Data Gathering and Management

- a. Consolidate the existing data gathering mechanisms into a centralized system that allows all stakeholders adequate data management tools to better plan for and provide services.

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