



Discussion paper on Access to Quality ¹Educational Activities for Children with Disabilities in Conflict and Emergency Situations

Submitted by the IDDC to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Day of General Discussion on Education in Emergencies

Overview

This paper is intended as an introduction to a discussion on access to quality inclusive² education for children with disabilities in emergencies. It illustrates how 'windows of opportunity' for quality education may arise in emergency situations vis-a-vis disadvantaged children who prior to the emergency situation did not attend schools. Central to this discussion is the right of every child to protection and equal opportunities in emergencies. We argue that taking an inclusive approach to educational activities for children with disabilities in emergency situations will not only bring us closer to meeting the rights of children with disabilities and their families but will also improve the quality and inclusivity for all children in the affected area. We recommend that concrete action is needed to include children with disabilities in educational activities, but that **inclusion** should be seen with a broader lens paying attention to **all children who are likely to be excluded**.

Specifically this paper intends to

- explain the need for and the obligation to ensure that all educational activities in emergency situations should be inclusive, of high quality and fully available, accessible to children with disabilities
- explain how this will have a positive impact on all children and feed into a longer term inclusive education strategy in any given community
- introduce some approaches that are being used to achieve this
- suggest first steps for any organisation carrying out educational activities in emergencies

Outline of this discussion paper:

1. Introduction
 - 1.1. Children with disabilities are particularly at risk in emergency situations
 - 1.2. Children may acquire disabilities during emergencies
 - 1.3. The vast majority of children with disabilities have no access to education under ordinary circumstances
 - 1.4. Quality inclusive educational activities have added value for all children

¹ Quality education is education which is inclusive, child-centred and academically effective, diversity and gender responsive, relevant, participatory, protective and transformative (Save the Children Fund)

² Inclusion in education or inclusive education is a process of enabling all children, including previously excluded groups such as children with disabilities, to learn and participate effectively within mainstream school systems. It thus challenges exclusionary cultures, policies and practices in education, while acknowledging individual children's needs and potential.

- 1.5. The legal framework for inclusion of children with disabilities in educational activities in humanitarian situations
2. Existing guidelines on the inclusion of children with disabilities in conflict and emergency situations
3. Recommended first steps for humanitarian actors

Annex 1 Organizations responsible for developing and those supporting this position paper and contact details.

1 Introduction

1.1 Children with disabilities are particularly at risk in emergency situations

Due to differences in the definition of disability, invisibility of persons with disabilities and their exclusion from national censuses it is often difficult to give a reliable estimate of the numbers of children or adults with disability in any given population. However the European Commission has estimated that over 200 million children live with serious disabilities and that 10% of children are either born with an impairment, or become disabled before the age of 19³. Children with disabilities are amongst the most stigmatized and excluded of all the worlds' children. Misunderstanding and fear of children with disabilities can result in their marginalization within their family, community, at school and in wider society. The discrimination they face leads to poor health, affects their self esteem, limits their access to education and puts them at higher risk of abuse and neglect⁴. According to current estimates children with disabilities are 1.7 times more likely to be subjected to violence and abuse than their non-disabled peers⁵.

In an emergency situation it must be born in mind that there are children who have pre-existing disabilities and also children with impairment or disability caused during or as the result of the emergency. For all these children, disability is known to be a risk-aggravating factor in emergencies.

Children with disabilities are exposed to greater risk of being separated from their families, of being unable to recognize and escape from danger, finding their way to safety or identifying their families⁶.

In Iraq recent media reports have revealed that children with intellectual disability were enrolled (in return for money to their parents) in terrorist groups and trained as suicide bombers⁷.

In humanitarian crisis, both children and adults with disabilities tend to be overlooked in emergency registration systems, and therefore they fail to receive such basic entitlements as food, water, clothing and access to educational activities. Children who

³ Communication from the Commission 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child'

⁴ UNICEF programme Guidance April 2007 ; Children with disabilities, ending discrimination and promoting participation, development and inclusion

⁵ American Academy of Pediatrics. 2001. Assessment of Maltreatment of Children with Disabilities. Pediatrics, 108:2:508-52. See also

http://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/PDFs/UNICEF_Violence_Against_Disabled_Children_Report_Distributed_Version.pdf

⁶ Early Childhood Matters : July 2005 , No 104. Disabled Children in Conflict Situations, Marlies van der Kroft Disabled Children's Rights-a practical guide, Save the Children, Sweden, 2001

⁷ IRIN Humanitarian news and analysis. IRAQ: Mentally handicapped children used in attacks April 2007

have previously had access to support services and have used assistive devices or mobility aids such as hearing aids, wheelchairs, etc may have lost these during the crisis reducing their previous level of functioning or independence⁸.

To summarise, according to UNICEF, in times of insecurity, children with disabilities tend to be the first to be abandoned by families and the last to receive emergency relief and assistance; they also face a higher risk of becoming victims of abuse and neglect than other children, and are more likely to be exposed to the risk of longer term psycho-social disturbances that this may give rise to⁹.

It cannot be assumed that emergency relief, assistance and protection mechanisms will adequately include children with disabilities, and effective actions need to be undertaken to seek out, identify, protect and provide for children with disabilities in humanitarian disaster situations¹⁰.

1.2 Children may acquire disabilities during emergencies

Above we have described the risks faced by children with existing disabilities in emergencies. In addition to this, emergency situations themselves cause disability. According to Save the Children at least 6 million children have been permanently impaired or seriously injured as a direct result of armed conflict between 1990 and 2005¹¹. Conflict and natural disasters are a significant cause of childhood impairment due to a range of factors, including increased rates of injury (i.e. from landmines, small arms injuries etc), as well as lack of medical care, and disruption of preventive health care programmes (i.e vaccination campaigns)¹².

1.3 The vast majority of children with disabilities have no access to education under ordinary circumstances

Due to factors already mentioned in section 1.1 it is difficult to get clear estimates of the number of children with disabilities being denied their right to education. In the Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2007, UNESCO has estimated that over one-third of out of school children are estimated to be children with disabilities¹³¹⁴; and that globally, only two per cent of children with disabilities receive an education¹⁵.

⁸ Disability and Conflict, IDDC Seminar report, 2000
http://www.iddc.org.uk/dis_dev/key_issues/dis_confl_rep.doc

⁹ UNICEF programme Guidance April 2007 ; Children with disabilities, ending discrimination and promoting participation, development and inclusion

¹⁰ Early Childhood Matters : July 2005 , No 104. Disabled Children in Conflict Situations, Marlies van der Kroft, UNICEF programme Guidance April 2007 ; Children with disabilities, ending discrimination and promoting participation, development and inclusion

¹¹ Protecting Children in Emergencies Escalating Threats to Children Must Be Addressed; Save the Children, Policy Brief, volume 1, No 1 2005

¹² Disability, Equality and human rights: a training manual for development and humanitarian organisations, Haris (A.) and Enfield (S.), Oxfam publication, Great-Britain, 2003.

¹³ Balescut, J. and Eklindeh, K. 2006. Historical perspective on education for persons with disabilities. Background paper for EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006.

¹⁴ UNESCO (2006) Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007.

¹⁵ http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=38522&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Disability is one of the factors which lead to exclusion from education; other important dimension of discrimination and exclusion include poverty, ethnicity and gender. It is important to note that many children face multiple dimensions of discrimination.

‘Geographic disparities within countries persist and multiple causes of marginalization often limit the benefits of basic learning for many groups, including girls and women, children engaged in labour, members of particular ethnic and minority groups, and the disabled.’ EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008

We have shown that children with disabilities are at high risk in emergency situations. Furthermore we have highlighted the fact that under ordinary circumstances children with disabilities are excluded from education. Given that educational activities in crisis situations are a means of child protection as well as social interaction, learning and psychosocial support, these activities must include all children and especially reach out to those who are at most risk.

As well as protecting and responsive to the individual child, including children with disabilities in educational activities has the added value for the family, giving them more time for other essential activities.

1.4 Quality inclusive educational activities have added value for all children

If steps are taken to make educational processes inclusive of children with disabilities, this can have positive affects on the learning environment for all children. If the capacities of teachers and child care workers are developed, learning methods are made more child centred and versatile, and classrooms are made more accepting of difference, this improves the learning environment for all children. In particular, in emergency situations, there may be many children who have missed out on part of their schooling and be under significant psychological pressure. An inclusive adapted environment will also contribute to their ability to take part in educational activities.

1.5 There is a legal framework for inclusion of children with disabilities in educational activities in humanitarian situations

The Convention on the Rights of the Child- 1989

The CRC and its overarching principles of non-discrimination, participation, best interests of the child, protection also apply in situations of emergency, conflict or natural disaster. Article 2 explicitly includes non-discrimination on the basis of disability and Article 23 goes into more detail on the rights of children with disabilities to a full and decent life, including access to education. However it is not alone Article 23 that applies to children with disabilities. Children with disabilities have equal rights in all aspects of the CRC. Articles 28 and 29 on education apply equally to them.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities- 2008

Because of the discrimination faced by persons with disabilities globally in 2006 the UN General assembly adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The CRPD came into force in May 2008.

Article 7 of the CRPD deals with the particular rights of children with disabilities- their right to all rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others, their best interests, and their right to express their views on all matters affecting them. Article 11 of the CRPD obliges governments to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. Article 24 recognises the right to education that is inclusive and Article 32 calls for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in International Cooperation.

2 Existing guidelines on the inclusion of children with disabilities in conflict and emergency situations

[Guidelines on including children with disabilities in educational activities in emergencies](#) have been developed by the Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies INEE¹⁶. These guidelines include the following strategies:

- Address negative perceptions of disability
- Ensure that schools are prepared, and that facilities are accessible and modified for persons with disabilities
- Balance the need for integration and learning
- Use local resources and technology

The guidelines give an explanation for inclusion and a summary of key actions to take. Planning to ensure that children with disabilities are included according to the INEE guideline will involve such measures as ensuring the school buildings are physically accessible – including any schools being reconstructed; providing training and support to teachers; and awareness raising amongst teachers, parents, other children, communities, humanitarian actors and policy makers. In order to better address the issue of inclusion, INEE are doing further work in this area through a newly established working group.

For IDDC the inclusion of children with disabilities in educational activities begins with their inclusion in all humanitarian intervention processes, starting with identification, assessment, planning and monitoring. When children with disabilities and their families are recognised in the overall intervention planning they will have a greater chance of equal access to all child centred activities be it formal or informal. Children with disabilities and their families need to be given a voice at all stages of intervention and need to be included in all child-centered activities -health; education; child to child activities; play and sport. This will involve awareness-raising amongst all humanitarian personnel, training, and specific attention to ensure an accessible, safe and supportive environment.

Teacher training for education in emergencies must include issues around equality in education and how teachers can create learning environments where the participation and contribution of all children is sought and valued, where all girls and boys can feel secure, where stereotypical views are challenged and where children learn to appreciate difference and diversity. Equality in education does not mean that all children receive the same education in content or in form. Equality in education occurs when diversity is

¹⁶ <http://www.ineesite.org/page.asp?pid=1152>

accepted as a normal aspect of life and when e.g. curriculum and teaching methods are adapted to meet individual needs.

Monitoring of educational activities in emergencies should include data on enrolment, attendance, participation, achievement and drop-out, disaggregated by gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity and disability.

Families with children with disabilities should be consulted and taken into consideration when settlement areas are being planned, to ensure that all facilities including water and sanitation, health and educational activities are all accessible to them. Their inclusion in planning should also include steps to address the negative attitudes or stereotypes which might exist towards children with disabilities. They should be consulted in some detail about the layout of safe spaces, schools and child centred areas. Their accommodation should be close by and the physical structures should be built so they are accessible.

One further dimension which should be considered is to look for the resources which were/are part of the community previous to the emergency situation. This may include NGOs, disabled persons organisations, parent's organisations or special schools which may have had on-going contact, and have been a resource base for children with disabilities and their families. Not only will including these resources and actors potentially increase the impact, sustainability and effectiveness of the intervention but including them will also lead to more coherence between the emergency and reconstruction and development phases of intervention. These already existing resources can also be of key importance for identifying children with disabilities, providing expertise on education of children with disabilities and also for the return or provision of assistive devices, mobility aids or other forms of support to the child or family.

All child protection work must include a component on children with disabilities as they may be particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The heterogeneity of children with disabilities must also be recognised.

3 Recommended first steps for humanitarian actors

Situational analysis

- To what extent do our current policies and procedures ensure that all children, including children with disabilities are included in recreational and educational activities?
- Are all relevant staff aware of the provisions under the CRC and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) with regard to education in emergencies?
- Do a SWOT analysis of the current approach including issues of multiple discrimination
- Include persons with disabilities, children or family members or local disability organisations in your analysis

Action plan

- What do we need to do to ensure equal access for children with disabilities in our recreational and educational activities?
- Who is responsible for each action?
- Who do we need to partner with? In any given community we work in where are the usual support mechanisms for children with disabilities and their families? (Consider here both the family and community level as well as institutions such as disabled persons organisations, parents groups, special schools or NGOs)
- What are our priority actions? What is our timeframe?
- What are our resource requirements?
- How will we change our systems and procedures to ensure that children with disabilities are included at all stages of intervention from registration onwards?
- How will our work during the emergency phase contribute to the longer term goal of ensuring that all children with disabilities have access to education? ie what is our sustainability plan?

Annex 1 Authors, and contributing organisations

The paper is submitted by task groups of the International Disability and Development Consortium, a consortium of 20 non-governmental organizations and disabled peoples organizations supporting disability and development work in over 100 countries globally. IDDC's aim is to more effectively and efficiently promote the rights of persons with disabilities through collaboration and sharing of information and expertise. To achieve this aim, IDDC believes development policy and practice should be inclusive.

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To read more on Inclusive Education see.
<http://www.eenet.org.uk/>

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