

Role of Inclusive Education in Promoting Sustainable Development in Kenya

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Abstract

Education is a right for all children as recognised by several international instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948. However, disability is one of the major barriers that hinder children from achieving their educational goals, creating the largest single group of children who remain out of school since they have been excluded from general education system. Kenya just like other countries in the world adopted inclusive education policy in 2008 as a way of achieving the millennium development goals through education for all. Inclusive education has been found to be the most ideal approach to achieve quality education for children with special needs. Inclusive, learner friendly environments are important in education for they lead to sustainable developments that are much needed in Kenya. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to establish the role of inclusive education in promoting sustainable development in Kenya by examining the extent to which implementation of inclusive education in Kenya has improved access to education and promoted life-long learning opportunities to children with disabilities. It will also establish the extent to which inclusive education has improved access to opportunities of children with disabilities in order to attain meaningful employment that will help them out of poverty. The secondary data was obtained from government reports, published journals, textbooks, and other documented research reports. The data was analysed through quantitative and qualitative techniques. This paper is expected to give insight and enlighten various stakeholders who are mandated with the implementation of inclusive education in Kenya. It will also trigger debate that can inform policy formulation in this area. The paper will also add value to the existing body of knowledge on the area of inclusive education and sustainable development.

Keywords: Inclusive, Education, Sustainable, Development, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

The right to be educated within the regular school setting and devoid of discrimination is highlighted in various international conventions and instruments such as the World Declaration on Education for All [1], UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities [2], UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child [3] and Dakar Framework for Action [4], amongst others. They highlight the particular rights of groups such as the girl child, indigenous people and those with special needs (including those with disabilities), among others. The right to inclusive education of persons with disabilities involves the reorganizing of the educational system which has the purpose to eliminate discrimination and ensure access to education on an equal manner for all students [5].

Kenya's Special Needs Education (SNE) Policy 2009 has been the driving force behind the transition. Progress has been made in providing specialized equipment, creating environments without physical barriers, and building capacity by incentivizing staff to attain the right skills to handle children with special needs. Kenya signed the CRPD in 2007, and ratified it in 2008. After years of monitoring and review by the UN Committee on the Rights of

Persons with Disabilities in Geneva; Kenya ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on 19th May 2018 creating an obligation upon Kenya to respect, protect and fulfil the provisions in the Convention [6]. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities established inclusive education as a legal right. Persons with disabilities have the right to the highest attainable standard of education without discrimination on the basis of disability [7].

Statement of the Problem

Education is the right of all children and inclusive education aims at ensuring that all children have access to an appropriate, relevant, affordable and effective education within their communities [8]. However, one of the major concerns of the people with special needs and human rights activists has been the issue of access to education. Inclusive education is challenging in Sub-Saharan Africa and individuals with disabilities have, on average, poorer health, lower levels of employment and earnings, and higher poverty rates. Exclusion, poverty and disability are linked. Exclusion from education can result in a staggering loss of freedom and productivity in the labor market. The international community has therefore recognized inclusive

education as a fundamental child right that can also redress exclusion [9], [10], [11].

In Kenya, 4.6% of Kenyans experience some form of disability according to the Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities [12]. Children with disabilities are often stigmatized and excluded from education due to a mixture of fear, shame, and ignorance. To address the marginalization of children with disabilities, and its limiting outcomes, the Kenyan government committed themselves to inclusive education [13]. Education is perceived as one of the principal motivating factors behind national economic development and considered as one of the most effective ways in which individuals can ever hope to achieve better opportunities and a higher standard of living. For these reasons Kenya has invested heavily in inclusive education over the past few years.

Education remains an inevitable pillar in any kind of development in Kenya. It is considered as an important milestone to achieve not only the country's Vision 2030 but also the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is evident (from research studies such [9], [14], [15] that inclusive education and sustainable development are highly related. However, in Kenya, very little is known on the role that inclusive education plays in promoting sustainable development. This confirmatory study sought to explore the role of inclusive education in promoting sustainable development. This was accomplished by highlighting the critical relationship that exist between inclusive education and sustainable development, challenges of learners with special needs and evaluating measures in place by the government to address problems faced by these learners.

Research Objective

The objective of this paper is to examine the role of inclusive education in promoting sustainable development in Kenya. More specifically to:

- a) Understand the importance of inclusive education in Sustainable Development;
- b) Explore the challenges faced by learners with special needs; and
- c) Examine measures put in place by government to cushion learners with special needs.

Significance of the Study

This study contributed in in-depth understanding of inclusive education for sustainable development. It has highlighted the shortfalls and areas of improvement that if addressed by policy and decision makers will see more children with disability accessing education than before. The findings of this study can be helpful to stakeholders in education sector, especially those mandated to address

challenges faced by learners with special needs. The study have also shed light on various measures aimed at cushioning learners with special needs so as they are able to access education. If the recommendations given in this study are implemented by the government and other relevant stakeholders, increased number of children with special needs will access education which will translate into sustainable development in the future where no one is left behind.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive Education for Learners with Special Needs

Education is aspired for all learners regardless of their conditions and potentials. Everyone has equal opportunity to access education. In spite of the fact, some of the learners could not access good quality of education, due to physical and mental impairment or socio-economically disadvantaged [16]. The issue of disability is a complex and unlimited problem, and can occur worldwide. Disability can occur in poor communities with poor nutrition and inaccessible health facilities, but also in well-off communities with excellent nutrition and accessible health facilities [16]. According to a 2011 WHO and World Bank report, there are between 93 and 150 million school-aged children with disabilities globally [17]. The Education Commission Report [18] also estimates that there are close to 65 million primary and secondary school age children with disabilities, and that at least half of them are out of school.

Several factors that make the life of PWDs worsen are lack of community's understanding about disability, lack of community efforts to fulfil the rights of PWDs in various aspect of life, as well as the existence of stigma in the society that disabilities is a curse from God [19]. Therefore, many families cover up or hide their family members who are with disabilities. Level of education and employment are two significant factors related to the welfare of PWDs [20]. Unfortunately many PWDs still live below poverty line and have low level of education [19], [21]. Many facilities and services provided in the society are not accessible to PWDs. In addition, PWDs have no capacity to express their voice on the neglect of the society in fulfilling the rights of PWDs.

The concept of inclusive education is contained implicitly in article 13, paragraph 1, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and articles 23 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and expressly, inter alia, in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education adopted in 1994 by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality and the recently adopted Convention on the Rights of PWD,

which establishes the obligation of States to ensure an inclusive education system [22].

Inclusive Education and Poverty Eradication

Quality inclusive education helps break the vicious circle of poverty and disability. Increased access to education can contribute to reducing poverty. Acquired basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy, have a documented positive effect on marginalized populations' incomes. It increases the rate of return on the economy [23]. In the 2014 report by UNESCO, education is critical to escape chronic poverty and to prevent the transmission of poverty between generations. The rate of return is higher in low-income countries than in high income countries. Primary education has a higher rate of return than secondary education. Education also enables those in paid formal employment to earn higher wages: One year of education is associated with a 10% increase in wages [24]. Quality inclusive education fosters self esteem, skills in entrepreneurship and innovation while promoting full and productive employment opportunities [14].

Food insecurity and poor nutrition is due to poverty and unequal distribution of resources, but it is also due to insufficient knowledge of production methods and on nutritional facts [23]. Education also changes structures in food security. A study from 1980 that still is influential, analyzed the effects of primary education on agricultural production in 13 countries. It found that the average annual gain in production associated with four years of schooling was 8.7% [25]. Education becomes a catalytic force contributing to the turn of the tide of eliminating extreme poverty – in a sustainable way.

Inclusive Education and Gender Equality

Quality inclusive education helps achieve gender equality and empowers girls with disabilities, who often face double discrimination. It makes a difference to social and economic inequality when learners have equal access to schools with the right support [14]. For girls, the effect of education is particularly strong if they all had a secondary education, it would be cut in half, saving three million lives [23]. In addition, educated girls and young women are more likely to know their rights and have the confidence to claim them. In sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, nearly three million girls are married by age 15. If all young women in these regions completed primary education, the number of child brides would be reduced by almost half a million. Completing secondary education would reduce that number by two million [24].

The quality inclusive education also supports Goal 3 (good health and wellbeing) of the SDGs as it helps tackle discrimination against learners with

disabilities, enabling them to socialise with their peers, promote their wellbeing and make informed choices about healthcare [14]. Through inclusive education, marginalized people learn more about health and are better able to protect themselves and their children against diseases. The level of health among children improves if their parents have had an education. This in turn increases their likelihood of receiving, and benefiting from, an education. Improvements in one area, benefits several others, and we need to constantly look for the most effective synergies [26].

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was an analysis of the literature. Secondary data was obtained from analysis and review of books, journals, papers and other available literature on the issue under study. Desk review of relevant legal and policy documents was undertaken. The chosen research methodology was deemed sufficient considering the analytical approach to the study. The data was analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is a technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of responses. The results were presented under identified themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Access to Education by Children With Disability in Kenya

Approximately 1.7 million people in Kenya live with disability and the Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities [27] contend that only 39% of this population has attended a mainstream primary school and a mere 9% had attended high school. Recent statistics from Ministry of Education [28] shows that one in every 10 Kenyans below the age of 21 is disabled. This is as a comparison with the global estimates of about two out of 10 persons. Out of these, higher rates of disabilities (60%) were found among children in rural areas as compared to 40% in urban areas. Higher rates of disabilities were found among girls (54%) as compared to compared with boys (46%). The most prevalent disabilities in Kenya were found to be multiple disabilities (31%), visual impairment (20%), hearing impairment (10%) and physical impairment (9%) [28].

As noted by the 2013 State of the World's Children report, "A society cannot be equitable unless all children are included, and children with disabilities cannot be included unless sound data collection and analysis render them visible." [29]. In regard to this, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has adopted several guidelines on the provision of education to all (inclusive education). The most recent ones being the FPE policy [30], the SNE policy [31], the Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012 on reforming education and training sectors in Kenya. Kenya is also a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of PWD (CRPD), and

therefore should adhere to the provisions in the Convention which is to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The key provisions in these policies relate to relevance, inclusivity and quality of education.

Accessibility to education by children with disability cannot be effective without the availability of infrastructure, specialised training of teachers, educational aids, curriculum and examination reforms [32]. A review of the availability of infrastructure in delivery of inclusive education shows that physical infrastructure and resources in many schools are not adequate and relevant for learners with disabilities. A report by Ministry of Education [28] shows that though most schools had infrastructure facilities such as toilets and classrooms, some of the facilities were inaccessible to children with disabilities due to the absence of ramps and adapted desks, toilets and doors. However, the children with disabilities had functional assistive devices to support the teaching and learning process.

On teachers training, the specialisation that had the highest percentage of trained teachers was inclusive education (25%), followed by hearing impairment (23%) and intellectual and cognitive handicaps (17%). Only 1% special needs education teachers had acquired specialised training in the multiple disability categories. This shows that there is limited number of teachers with specialised skills to handle children with disabilities, which is key for effective implementation of inclusive education. These findings corroborates with those of Mugambi [33] who also found out that despite the emphasis on inclusive education, its implementation faced many challenges. This include inadequate learning infrastructure for instance classrooms, poor learning environment which fail support the needs of different learners.

Despite the above challenges, studies from National Gender and Equality Commission [34], Ministry of Education [28] also revealed that, inclusive education in Kenya is hindered by factors which are both home-based and systemic. The home-based factors included parents keeping their children away from school for fear of exposing them, high levels of poverty, lack of assistive devices such as wheelchairs and lack of hearing aids. The systemic factors included lack of proper means of transport to school, inadequate number of special schools within the communities, and lack of enough trained special needs education teachers.

Inclusive Education and Promotion of Sustainable Development in Kenya

Education remains an inevitable pillar in any kind of development in Kenya. Earlier educational Policy frame works such as the Sessional Paper No. 14 of

2012 on reforming education and training sectors in Kenya have advocated for self-development through qualitative education and training as a key to human capital development. It is evident that inclusive education and sustainable development in Kenya are highly related. A study by Wamusala [35] which focused on inclusive education on development in Kwale County, established that inclusive education can highly contribute to sustained development. The study established that inclusive education can eliminate poverty, can be a means of eliminating diseases and ignorance and improve Kenyan citizen's standards of living to achieve sustainable development. Education on persons with disabilities is believed to increase individual's productivity by imparting skills and attitudes that are favourable to work.

A study by Chomba *et al.* [36] on education for students with disabilities in Kenya established that education is a critical tool to liberate the mind from the shackles of poverty and ignorance because it helps an individual to evaluate a problem and come up with alternative solutions. Educated parents can handle a child with disabilities better than their counterparts without education, which improves their health and wellbeing. Education can reduce social and economic inequality. Inclusive education is believed to address equity issues like gender disparity and persons with disabilities. In addition, A survey conducted by Ministry of Education and Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) Jitolee in 2014, also established that inclusive education among persons with disabilities leads to greater access to maternal and child health.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that inclusive education is an important exit route from poverty. Education for all (inclusive education) in Kenya play a role in reducing economic inequalities as education raises their productivity and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. In addition it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution. This way, the citizen's standards of living including those in with disabilities is improved hence there is achievement of sustainable development. Other than reducing poverty, inclusive education plays a role in eliminating diseases and enhancing improved knowledge on health which subsequently improves improve health and nutrition, as well as maternal and child health. Through inclusive education, marginalized people including those with disabilities are able to attain knowledge, essential for them to better their health and to protect themselves and their children against diseases. In addition, inclusive education play a role in promote gender equality which is one of indicators of sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Role of inclusive education to effectively promote sustainable development in Kenya, the government reach out to families in rural areas where there are higher rates of disabilities, as well as conduct a nationwide study on disability prevalence among children in order to inform equitable resource allocation. There is also need to increase special-needs teachers and harmonising their distribution so that they are in institutions that are appropriate to their skills. Teachers should be adequately trained to prepare the school environment for disability inclusion, with appropriate infrastructure teaching and learning materials and assistive devices. The government should also provide adequate funding, modern equipment and qualified skills among education assessment and resource centres, as critical human resource for early identification, assessment and placement of learners with special needs. Adequate government support in inclusive education realizes and achieves education for all, which impacts on others goals, and subsequently leads to achievement of sustainable development the country.

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