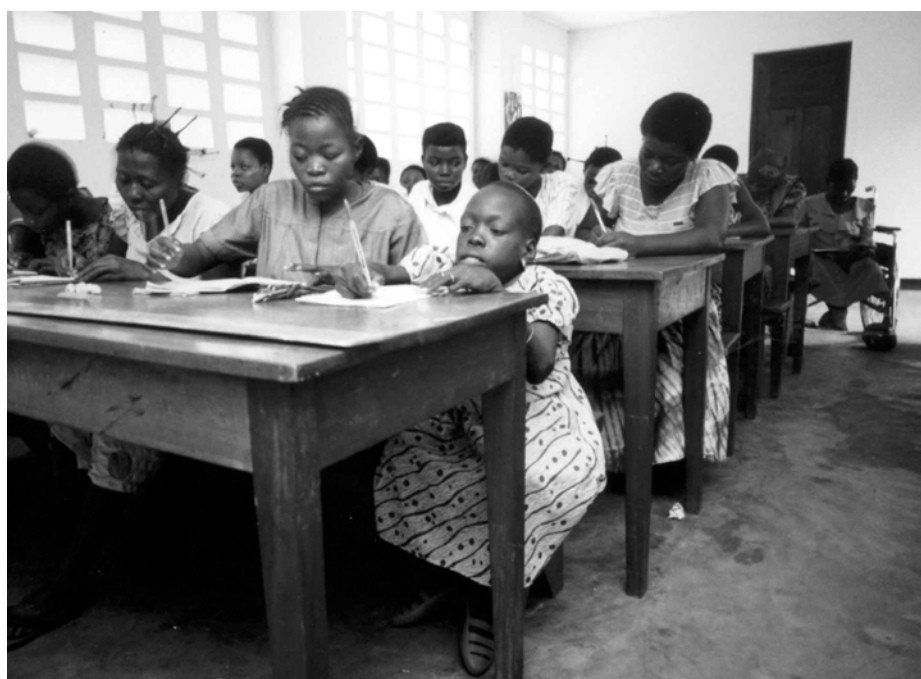


## **Towards greater attention for disability in international policies for basic education**

**Position paper**

**DCDD working group on education**



By the year 2015 all children everywhere must have access to basic education - that is one of the Millennium development goals of the United Nations. Many efforts are indeed made to reach children who are neglected, but it is concerning that children with disabilities seem to be 'invisible'. DCDD advocates an inclusive approach in which basic education is set up and organized in such a way that ALL children are reached. This means paying more attention to children with disabilities in basic education.

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[www.dcdd.nl?2012](http://www.dcdd.nl?2012)

## **The purpose of this document**

The purpose of this document is to describe the principles and position of the DCDD education working group. The working group was set up in 2003 to focus attention on children with disabilities<sup>(1)</sup> in basic education in developing countries. The paper describes the background, composition, objectives and methods of the working group, and also includes a brief problem analysis.

## **DCDD's mission and objectives**

The working group is an integral part of the Dutch Coalition on Disability and Development (DCDD). The mission of the coalition is to improve the position of persons with disabilities. It engages in development aid from a human rights perspective to promote equality of rights, communal care, responsibility, and social integration. DCDD bases itself on the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities adopted by the United Nations (New York 1993).

DCDD strives to have disability placed on the agenda of development cooperation as a structural component. It follows a four-track strategy to: (1) Extend support for emancipation and integration of people with disabilities in development cooperation; (2) Clarify and influence the relationship between disability and poverty; (3) Strengthen the role of the disability movement in developing countries and in the Netherlands; (4) Improve disability policies in development cooperation.

## **The problem**

Socio-economic circumstances in developing countries make it more difficult to develop basic education that is also accessible to children with disabilities. Effective poverty alleviation which also takes persons with disabilities into consideration is a boundary condition for effective education of children with disabilities. Conversely, accessible primary education which includes children with disabilities is a precondition for poverty reduction. However, specific problems concerning children with disabilities that have to do with the nature of the disability make access to basic education more complicated. For example, schools may be difficult to reach for children with physical limitations, teachers may not have the necessary additional training, or there may be a lack of teaching materials in Braille for blind children, etc..

The causes of disability in children are many and varied and might often be prevented<sup>(2)</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Disability, according to the ICF classification, is a limitation in a person's functioning and/or activity resulting from a physical or mental disorder and/or a chronic disease. Disability is a broader concept than 'handicap', and serves as an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations or participation restrictions.

<sup>2</sup> Accurate figures on disability in general are hard to find, and quantitative data about education for children with disabilities even harder. This is because definitions of disability may differ (many researchers have their own definitions) and because of a fundamental lack of research into disability. The data quoted should be regarded merely as indicators of the problem. Furthermore,

- Every year 500,000 children lose part of their eyesight through vitamin A deficiency
- Every year 41 million babies are born who are at risk of a mental disability because of low iodine content in their mother's milk
- For each child killed in an armed conflict, three are handicapped
- Forty percent of the 26,000 people killed or wounded annually by landmines are children
- There are more than 10 million children who are psychologically traumatised due to armed conflicts
- Child labour, physical punishment, amputation and blinding of prisoners cause handicaps in children and may lead to mental disorders, physical and psychological disabilities, and problems at school and at work

Children with disabilities in the South receive hardly any primary education. UNESCO estimates that 98 % of children with a disability do not attend a (formal) school. We know that individuals with disabilities can lead a meaningful and productive life when given the chance. Without basic education they have considerably less opportunity to develop themselves, to grow, and to be of social and economic value to themselves, their family and society in general.

Dutch development cooperation pays relatively much attention to basic education and 'education for all'<sup>(3)</sup>. It is an important theme in the Dutch government's policy and for a number of Dutch development organisations. But in those cases in which education is an item of policy there is hardly any attention for children with disabilities. This shortcoming is the *raison d'être* of the working group.

## **The framework in which the working group operates**

The working group carries out its activities from a human rights perspective. Children with a disability have equal rights to (basic) education (and equal outcomes) as children without disabilities. This right has been laid down in many international conventions:

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989 and 2002)
- World Declaration for Education for All (UN, 1990)
- Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UN, 1993)
- Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994)
- Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000)

The working group takes these conventions and agreements as its point of departure. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, states that disabled children are entitled to effective access to education and to receive education in a manner which serves/promotes the fullest possible social integration and individual development (article 23). Article 28 states that children have a right to education on the basis of equal opportunity. Thus, equality of rights does not only relate to access to primary education but also to educational outcomes. As it is, a disabled child may need more attention than

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the figures on education relate only to formal education; even less is known about informal education. Most data above is from UNICEF.

<sup>3</sup> 'Education for all' refers to the millennium goals of the United Nations, specifically to the second one: "To ensure by 2015 that children everywhere will complete a full course of primary schooling."

a non-disabled child to attain an equal outcome. The goal of the Dakar Framework for Action is to achieve 'education for all' in 2015 - the second UN millennium goal. Achieving this goal is only possible if the right to education also extends to persons with a disability. The right to inclusive education is described well in the Salamanca Declaration, which can be regarded as an important turning point internationally. The Salamanca Declaration emphasises that schools should adapt and make the necessary changes.

The distinction between inclusive education and special education is an artificial one, in our view<sup>(4)</sup>. The working group regards both types of education as valuable, seeing them as the extremes of a continuum and as complementary to each other. Inclusive education is based on a rights approach, a social model in which the system adapts to the child instead of the other way around. Inclusive education depends on community initiative, it simply cannot exist in a society which excludes disabled persons. Then again, special education for children with specific disabilities, deaf children for instance, may be desirable in order to achieve equal education outcomes or just to provide access to education. Which type of education is suitable depends on a variety of circumstances, including the nature of the disability, the available means and resources and the social context (society). In the case of special education, a paternalistic attitude must be avoided and emancipation must be the prime goal. Education is a means, inclusion is the goal.

## **What the working group does**

Target groups of the working group in the Netherlands:

- Development organisations which support projects and programmes in developing countries in the field of basic education,
- The government; Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
- Parliament's committee for foreign affairs,
- Universities and other educational institutions with international links,
- Disability movement.

Internationally:

- Platforms, networks and NGOs in the South (and Central and Eastern Europe)
- Other NGO networks, e.g. EENET, the International Working Group on Disability and Development, Inclusion International's global network for inclusive education, and the Global Campaign on Education

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<sup>4</sup> Disability and education jargon is rife with terms that can cause confusion. The working group will try to keep its terminology as lucid as possible. Some descriptions:

- inclusive education. Inclusive education acknowledges that all children have the ability to learn, recognizes that children's learning abilities vary, and develops educational methods and teaching aids to meet the educational needs of all children.
- mainstreaming education. Standardises education for children with disabilities but may obscure specific educational needs.
- special needs education. Comment: the needs of handicapped children are not special but basic.
- special education. Education which targets specific disabilities. Comment: may lead to exclusion instead of inclusion.
- integration. Comment: not the same as 'inclusion', "integration refers to a 'top-down', system-based approach, while inclusion refers to an individual, child-based approach."
- special units education. Special education units within mainstream education. Comment: may also lead to exclusion.

- Multilateral organisations, including UNESCO Flagship on Education for All and the Right to education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion, UNICEF
- International interest groups of persons with disabilities such as World Blind Union, World Deaf Federation, Disabled People's International.

**Goal:**

The goal of the DCDD education working group is to advocate basic education for children with disabilities with Dutch actors in development cooperation whose activities and/or policies encompass basic education ('education for all'). The aim of the advocacy is to change these actors' policies for basic education to the effect that they integrate disabled children's right to education.

Operational goals will be worked out by the working group for each individual actor. Priority is given to government policies and the policies of actors who are open to cooperation with DCDD.

**How the working group tries to achieve its goals**

Strategies which the working group employs or may employ are:

**Collaboration**

Collaboration is important, not only within the working group and the DCDD coalition but also with other organisations. Collaborations should have several effects:

- Increase of knowledge about exclusion of children with disabilities in primary education, and about the means and methods required to improve the situation
- For parties to get to know each other and learn from each other how to promote inclusion
- Support for inclusion grows

**Contacts with the South**

The input and the justification of the working group's activities is provided by the South. The working group will need to find ways of letting itself be inspired and guided by Southern contacts. Lacking the means to engage in such partner relationships, the working group will initially have to make use of existing networks, such as EENET, and the contacts of the working group's members through their own organisations.

**Provision of information and awareness-raising**

The main aim of the education working group's policy-advocacy activities is to raise awareness. The working group facilitates the production of information products which support the process of awareness-raising.

**Activities**

The activities of the working group will primarily address provision and exchange of information, awareness-raising, consultancy and policy advocacy. In the framework of the DCDD working plan it will be possible to organise at least one seminar annually. Additional activities will require external (project) financing.

## Composition of the working group

The education working group is composed of persons working in any of the following 'clusters':

- Development organisations
- Interest groups of persons with disabilities
- Educational organisations
- Universities and institutions of higher vocational education
- Consultancies

The working group has active members, defined as persons or organisations who actively participate in the meetings and activities of the working group, and associated members, defined as persons or organisations who support the goals of the working group, wish to keep informed about its activities, and receive minutes of meetings and other documents. The working group meets 3 to 4 times each year.

The DCDD office carries out the secretarial tasks of the working group. The DCDD coordinator and the chairman jointly draw up the agenda, the office staff writes the minutes and other documents, facilitates meetings and other activities, and coordinates subsidy applications on behalf of the working group. The office will also inform the working group of developments in other units of DCDD, including the DCDD Board, the Committee on Policy Advocacy and the CBR working group.

The working group will have at least one board member in its midst who will represent the Board. This member will report on the working group's activities to the Board. The working group's activities are described in the annual working plan, which is drawn up by the Board. This position paper has been discussed and adopted in DCDD's Board meeting of January 27, 2004.

The working group's working language is Dutch. Its main documents will be translated into English.

A list of current working group participants can be requested from DCDD's office.

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Photo opening page: A girls' school in the Democratic Republic of Congo (photo by Liliane Fund)