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# SPOTLIGHT

## STATUS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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### Key Points

- There are a number of policies and practices in place to support inclusive education (IE). However, there are significant disincentives to IE in Papua New Guinea.
- There is a need for a clearer understanding of the differences between special education, integrated education and IE.
- Teacher training programs and practice need to shift away from the current teacher-centred pedagogy to a child-centred (learner) pedagogy.
- It is necessary to increase funding of IE in the education sector budget.
- There is a need for more awareness on the rights of people with disabilities.

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## STATUS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

By Jeremy Goro

Education as a human right has been recognised and affirmed in various national and international declarations, such as the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; the 2000 Biwaka Millennium Framework and the 2013 Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Papua New Guinea (PNG) has a National Special Education Policy, which is also enshrined in the PNG Vision 2050. The approach to the education of children with disabilities (CWDs) is critical. It is necessary to have a clear understanding about how to provide essential education services to CWDs effectively. The implementation of inclusive education (IE), which provides opportunities for CWDs to access education, has been problematic in PNG. This report analyses the current implementation of IE in the country. While the Government of PNG (GoPNG) ostensibly supports improved access to IE through its policies, and indeed has signed a number of human rights treaties to support these rights, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, these have not resulted in inclusion of CWDs in mainstream schools. Special Education Resource Centres (SERCs) are key to the delivery of education for CWDs. However, numerous challenges remain.

### Special, integrated and inclusive education (IE)

While the general approach to the education of CWDs is critical, the need to have a clear understanding of the terms used is also paramount in order to demarcate and provide essential education services to CWDs. It is necessary to differentiate between special education, integrated education and IE.

*Special education (SE) typically refers to the method where CWDs are educated separately from the mainstream* (Myers & Bagree, 2011). They may receive specialist education at home, or are educated in other places, such as a hospital or SERC, where CWDs are given special treatment separate from the rest of the children. SE can be necessary to support children with multiple disabilities and reflects the thinking of orthodox medical models of disability (Myers & Bagree, 2011).

Such notions can treat the education of CWDs as medical remedies for correction or repair to their impairments.

*Integrated education refers to the integration of children into mainstream schools regardless of their disabilities.* However, the focus is still on their disability. Children with disabilities can be seen as problems in integrated mainstream schools.

*The IE approach is about the child's rights to participate and benefit from education on an equitable basis with the other children* (Myers & Bagree, 2011). Inclusive education stresses the importance of schools providing basic needs, such as adaptive devices for CWDs to learn. A premium is placed on full participation by all students including CWDs, and upon respect for their educational and wider social, civil and cultural rights. Resources are used to encourage this participation rather than to provide additional and separate activities (Myers & Bagree, 2011). Inclusive education approaches refocus onto the schools so that they provide for equitable participation of children together and uphold the rights of all to education.

### Challenges of IE in PNG

There is a lack of oversight and management of SERCs. For example, SERCs are not included in the National Department of Education (NDOE) management structures or plans. There is no accurate, extensive or reliable national data of CWDs at the moment in mainstream schools. This fragmentation in Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) leads to under-reporting of educational services to CWDs. An EMIS focus on segregation of school and SERC can lead to confusion and under-reporting. Moreover, data is not often disaggregated to identify the individual needs of the child at school level. Other challenges include the following:

- *School preparedness* – currently school inspections focus on teachers, but this should be expanded to include access, awareness, and safety and security to increase school and teacher preparedness to support the delivery of IE in an appropriate and accessible environment. More research is needed on this, particularly around those who are least safe and most excluded.

- *Teachers' training and preparedness* – Teachers' training modules revealed that pre-service teachers are not given enough units on special education. Furthermore, teachers are still trained to teach using a syllabus and to complete the units for the prescribed program. This is teacher-centred pedagogy and it is not recommended, especially in IE approaches.
- *Financial challenges* – Most of the educational services provided to CWDs are through NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and funded by donors such as the European Union (EU), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Australian Aid (AusAID). The UBE Plan of 2010–2019 showed that only 0.34 percent of the national education budget was appropriated for IE. Special education and IE require more resources for teaching. The current oversight in budget for IE is translated to other resource problems experienced in SERCs and mainstream schools.
- *Poor implementation of IE* – Inadequate resources lead to poor implementation of IE in mainstream schools coupled with ambiguous policy statements and inadequate funding.

## Recommendations

*Shift emphasis to inclusion rather than special education across education policy and practice.* Research (Kett et al. 2016) found that the current methods of teacher training (unintentionally) perpetuate disincentives to inclusion. Teachers are overwhelmingly positive to the idea of the inclusion of CWDs in mainstream classes, but rarely experience them in practice. There is a need:

- to harmonise and standardise IE as part of the pre-service and in-service teacher training curriculum;
- to improve specialist teacher training and ensure all SERC teachers have a qualification in special education. This should focus on a shift from the current teacher-centred pedagogy to child-centred pedagogy;
- for more awareness on the rights of PWDs rather than on impairments. The national policy on disability calls for the “removal of barriers and make rights real” through:
  - o promoting the rights of PWDs by networking with NGOs, CSOs, the PNG Assembly of Disabled Persons and other disability organisations;
  - o improving intervention by early identification and assessments of disabilities through child clinic

programs;

- o involving PWDs in regular sport and community engagement programs.

*Build more inclusive facilities in mainstream schools.* There should be more inclusive facilities in school and public amenities to improve access by PWDs. The Government should work together with the other stakeholders and service providers to implement infrastructure improvements that would enable all children to participate in school.

*Increase funding for inclusion.* For new plans and policies to be implemented successfully, funding is the key element. The Government through the NDOE should allocate enough funding for IE and mainstreaming. Funding should be made available for:

- the Special Education Gazette for capacity building for teachers;
- inclusive curriculum, and instruction technology and assistive devices;
- inclusive infrastructure in schools;
- setting up a Special Education unit as a subject in school;
- improving SERC functions and capacity building.

*Provide provincial focal points for PWDs.* There is a need to have greater collaboration and cross sectoral linkages in order to move away from the onus on the education sector taking most of the responsibility for CWDs. As the research by (Kett et al. 2016) indicated, most CWDs are unlikely to be formally assessed in the education system in the first place. The National Disability Act suggests having Provincial Disability Committees, but we suggest taking this a step further and having Disability Focal Points (DFP) in each province. This will help mainstream disability issues across sectors including health, early child development and education, and community development. This would support earlier identification and assessment of CWDs, as well as earlier intervention and support.

*Teacher training should shift from teacher-centred pedagogy to child-centred pedagogy (needs-based pedagogy).* The Government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG) through the NDOE needs to review the current National Special Education Policy and revise the context using a collaborative and consultative process. It should develop an action plan, allocate resources, and instigate regular reviews with accountability mechanisms. This should be in line with existing commitments to international human rights frameworks.

## Conclusion

A number of issues affect the inclusion of CWDs in education as highlighted in this paper. This includes teachers' training and preparedness, such as teachers' training curriculum; schools' preparedness, such as access to classrooms and appropriate teaching and learning materials; financial challenges, such as not enough GoPNG's funding in the budget whilst all education of CWDSs are carried out by NGOs and CSOs, and poor implementation of IE in mainstream schools. The Government through the NDOE needs to review and revise the current National Special Education Policy and Plan using a collaborative and consultative process working with NGOs and CSOs. It is also necessary to develop an action plan, allocate resources to build inclusive infrastructure, and instigate regular reviews with accountability mechanisms. This should be in line with existing commitments to international human rights frameworks which the State is already party to. This has the potential to improve the access of CWDs to education in PNG.

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## About the Author

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