How Can Children with Disabilities be Included in School Education?: A Case in Sierra Leone

Mikako Nishimuko

Center for the Study of International Cooperation in Education, Hiroshima University

Abstract

Based on the author's field research, this paper reviews the current status of education for Children with Disabilities (CWD) in Sierra Leone and examines the obstacles to their learning in school and where they should be educated. Committed to achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE), Sierra Leone has enacted policy reforms. However, the government's effort in education for CWD was untouched until very recently. This study finds that education for CWD has moved forward in the direction of favoring that these children should receive education in mainstream schools. Arguing that policy reforms should be swiftly reflected at a practical level, tackling challenges in finance, teacher guidance, accessibility to and within school, and discriminatory attitudes of family and community toward CWD, this paper contends that these processes need to involve various actors working together for social learning and transformation toward building an inclusive society.

Introduction

Achieving poverty reduction and sustainable development in developing countries is the foremost goal for the international community. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are mutually interdependent, and education is posited as playing a significant role in reducing poverty and inequality, improving child and maternal health, and increasing job opportunities and strengthening democracy, in addition to being a right in itself. In order for all children to get benefits from education, Education for All (EFA) and Universal Primary Education (UPE) goals need to be achieved not only in terms of increases in enrollment, but also progress needs to be made regarding quality, equity and sustainability of the provision. According to UNESCO (2009, p.6 and 8), "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 achieving EFA," and "the ultimate goal of inclusion in education is concerned with an individual's effective participation in society and of reaching his/her full potential." Presuming that "the aim of inclusive education is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability" as argued by Vitello and Mithaug (1998) (as cited in Ainscow and Miles, 2008, p.16), it is necessary to keep in mind that inclusion

and exclusion are two sides of the same coin as people's attitudes work according to their values involving processes of social learning. Therefore, they could be tolerant or exclusive. The EFA and MDG campaigns have made significant progress, particularly over the last decade. However, according to Save the Children (2008, p.1), more than half of the 72 million out-of-school children worldwide live in conflict-affected fragile states, while UNESCO (2009, p.5) points out that Children with Disabilities (CWD) account for one third of all out-of-school children. Unless these children are included in education, not only achieving the international goal of UPE, but also poverty reduction and sustainable development of these countries cannot be achieved and CWD cannot participate in various activities in society and fulfill their goals and dreams.

One of the poorest countries, Sierra Leone, is one such country that has faced many difficulties related to the legacy of the civil war they experienced from 1991 to 2002. While its prevalence is moderating, 52.9% of the population still lives in poverty, with wide gaps in poverty rates between rural (66.1%) and urban (31.2%) areas (GoSL, 2013, p.13). In the post-conflict country, people with disabilities are prevalent and face challenges in having access to basic services and economic opportunities. It is observed that people with legs and/or arms deformed by polio or amputated by the rebels, beg people sitting on the ground or on wheelchairs in streets. It is necessary for these people to be included in every aspect of life in society. However, in Sierra Leone it has been uncertain for CWD whether they could be educated, and also where they could receive education. This is because education for CWD is in isolation, lacking access to public information regarding education for CWD and leaving it as a personal and/or family matter.

The government has been in the process of rebuilding and developing the education sector as education is key to development, in consonance with EFA and UPE goals. The government has enacted policy reforms aimed at bringing about education renewal and achieving the internationally set goals of EFA and UPE. Among them, a Free Primary Education (FPE) policy has led to primary enrollment becoming nearly double from 659,503 in 2001/02 to 1,194,503 in 2010/11 (MEST, 2007, p.x; MEST, 2012, p.27). Currently, 74% of school-aged boys and 77% of school-aged girls go to primary school. Yet, the progress remains uneven concerning equity and quality of education, due to poor public services, governance difficulties, inadequate infrastructure, poverty and significant inequality. The legacy of the war is severe and according to the 2010/11 School Census Report (MEST, 2012, p.17), about 60% of all classrooms are in need of repairs. About 40% of teachers in primary schools are Untrained and Unqualified (UU) teachers, and many of them have low motivation due to dissatisfaction with the working environment and conditions such as low salary and having to control over crowded classrooms. Although Nishimuko's earlier research (2010) does not include the "invisible" existence of CWD, she points out how girls, children from impoverished families, rural dwellers, and mature pupils who started their education late due to the war are marginalized groups in educational institutions. There is FPE in policy, however, there are some indirect costs

such as transport fees, exam fees, tuition fees, uniforms, textbooks, etc. for schooling, and this is a serious burden for many parents. Parents make a rational choice considering whether the quality of education provided is worth paying such fees. When the family is larger, depending on their financial situation, some (often boys) are prioritized and others could be left out, and these cases are seen more in rural areas than in urban areas (Nishimuko, 2010). The government continues its efforts with development partners; however, there are too many challenges, and it is clear that Sierra Leone is unlikely to meet the UPE in the MDGs and EFA. In fact, they have a longer-term vision, aspiring to achieve an inclusive, green, middle-income country by 2035, and includes as one of its features, free and compulsory education for every child (GoSL, 2013, p.1). Unless CWD is a prioritized area, Sierra Leone's UPE and poverty reduction cannot be achieved. If CWD are deprived of their rights to education, the society becomes distorted and far from the vision of an inclusive society, that is defined as "society for all in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play (UN, 2010, p.3)."

Various research and censuses have been conducted for the last several years, although there are serious problems with data reliability and validity. For example, according to the Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2005 (Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF Sierra Leone, 2007, p.65), 23% of surveyed children demonstrated at least one of the nine surveyed disabilities[1], with a note recommending further research due to the very high rate. The 2010/11 School Census Report (MEST, 2012, p.50) captures enrolled primary school students with special needs as shown in Table 1. Since the ratio of CWD in school is too small - just 0.8% of the total national enrollment, and also because the survey schools were only required to report on blind and deaf/dumb pupils, pupils with visual and/or hearing problems were under-reported. Thus it could be said that these statistics do not adequately reflect reality. However, this confirms that CWD are "invisible" in education settings.

Table 1. Percentage of Enrolled Primary School Pupils with Special Needs

	Blind		Deaf/Dumb		Mental Retardation		Others		Polio		All		
Sex	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	Both
%	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.9	0.7	0.8

(Source: MEST, 2012, p.50)

Furthermore, a survey conducted in rural Kambia found that 60% of the school-aged-CWD were not attending school and 40% were "left alone in the house" during the day (Children in Crisis et al., 2012, p.10). A very small portion of CWD go to special

---

[1] 1) delay in sitting, standing or walking; 2) difficulty seeing; 3) appears to have difficulty hearing; 4) difficulty in understanding instructions; 5) difficulty walking or moving arms; 6) has fits, becomes rigid; 7) does not learn to do things like others; 8) cannot speak or be understood; and 9) appears mentally backward or dull

schools such as the schools for the blind and the deaf and dumb, another small portion of children with physical disabilities go to mainstream schools, and many CWD are kept at home. The state of education for CWD has not been well-studied. Education is a fundamental human right. It is also a powerful tool through which people can be lifted out of poverty and participate in economic and social activities. This is backed by the fact that Sierra Leon's Education Sector Plans (ESPs) are aligned with the education sector part of the PRSP. It is necessary to identify these CWD who are often invisible and to include them in education and society, while identifying and getting rid of any barriers to education.

The purposes of this paper are to review the current status of education for CWD looking at policies and to examine what the barriers for CWD are to learning in school and where these children should receive their education. Through examining these, this paper discusses whether the current government attempts at inclusive education could lead to the country building an inclusive society. This paper first explains the methodology used in this study. Secondly, the recent education policy reforms which focus on primary education for CWD are reviewed. Thirdly, based on the author's field research, this paper discusses the obstacles to their learning in school for CWD and teachers' views concerning where CWD should receive their education. Finally, since education is a tool for empowerment and also plays a key role in transforming societies, overcoming various exclusions, this paper argues for the importance of sharing values of inclusive education in communities and in the society as a whole, so that it could lead to the building of an inclusive society in the long term, along with suggestions for policy implementation.

Methodology

The study uses mixed method design with quantitative and qualitative approaches combined so that it can benefit by the approaches complementing each other. This study involves a literature review, document analysis, observation of classes and schools, questionnaires and interviews. Field research was conducted in September 2013 in Freetown, Sierra Leone. This is a still preliminary analysis; however, the collected data were processed with Excel and/or transcribed. The data were coded, compared and synthesized according to categorization that was made based on questions and themes examined.

Participants of this study include a director of the Special Needs Unit of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), directors and/or staff of organizations supporting the disabled such as Sightsavers Sierra Leone, Leonard Cheshire Disability Sierra Leone, Education Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues (SLUDI), and teachers and/or head teachers of schools. Since this paper focuses on teachers' views, types of schools and attributes of teachers are shown in Table 2 below. The total number of teachers in this study is 65. Considering that most teachers in this study are qualified despite the fact that about 40% of primary teachers are

UU, it could be pointed out that there is a possibility of some head teachers suggesting that only teachers with certain qualifications fill in the questionnaires. Regarding the selection of schools, this study looked for both special schools and mainstream schools. Since there are only a limited number of special schools in Sierra Leone, one school for the blind and one school for the deaf and dumb in Freetown, these were automatically selected, while other schools were chosen by a recommendation of the Special Needs Unit director of the MEST. That is, consequently, there are two special schools and two mainstream schools that will "officially accept" CWD in the next academic year, as well as two mainstream schools that will not officially accept CWD, but there are some CWD. "Officially accept" in this context means that the government was involved in, and supports the CWDs enrolment in the schools and will provide the schools with necessary equipment and will provide assistance to teachers from the following academic year. All schools are government-assisted (public) schools, meaning thereby that these schools are provided capitation grants and that teachers' salaries are paid by the government and that the FPE policy applies to children's education.

Table 2. Types of Schools and Teachers' Attributes (Teachers N=65)

School Categorization (SC)1	A.School for the Blind	B.School for Deaf & Dumb	C.Schools that will officially accept CWD	D.Schools that will officially accept CWD	E.Schools that will not officially accept CWD	F.Schools that will not officially accept CWD
Currently having CWD	Yes (fully blind)	Yes (deaf & dumb)	Yes (physical)	Yes (visual &physical)	Yes (visual & physical)	Yes (visual & physical)
SC 2	Government-assisted schools (public schools)					
SC 3 (teachers' recognition)	Special school	Special school	Inclusive school	Inclusive school	Mainstream school	Mainstream school
No. of teachers for the study	6 (M:4 F:2)	13 (M:5 F:8)	13 (M:0 F:13)	15 (M:12 F:1 N/A:2)	8 (M:1 F:7)	10 (M:4 F:4 N/A: 2)
Teachers having qualification	Yes: 6	Yes: 5 No: 1 Others[2]: 7	Yes: 13	Yes: 15	Yes: 8	Yes: 8 Others:1 N/A:1

(Source: Author's field data)

However, running special schools, particularly schools for the blind, costs a considerable amount of money due to costs of equipment and maintenance of facilities such as talking computers, braille machines and printers, etc., and for consumables such as braille papers. The school for the blind in this study is assisted by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Sightsavers Sierra Leone and Helen Keller International, as

[2] "Other" means although it is not a teaching certificate, teachers have certificate(s) related to their teaching subject, such as agriculture, computer skills, hair-dressing and tailoring.

well as with contributions made by individuals. This school is a boarding home catering to primary school children, and provides them with clothing, food, learning materials and so on. The school also has a sole resource center in Freetown and the resource center is open to the public and blind people can get access to the facility including braille machines, talking computers, printers, textbooks, teaching and learning materials and books in braille. It is noteworthy to briefly introduce an NGO, Sightsavers Sierra Leone. The international NGO started their service in the 1950s. Situated in a hospital, they have provided eye care, including examinations, treatments and operations, visited schools for eye screenings, assisted in projects aiming to prevent blindness and for the blind to lead independent lives, and funded projects for training health workers. When a pupil wants to enter the school for the blind, s/he needs to have an eye examination as part of the admission procedures, and s/he must be diagnosed with necessary care and advice. Sightsavers has also supported the school through the provisions of equipment and teaching and learning materials and so forth.

Recent Education Policy Reforms with a Focus on Primary Education for CWD

Sierra Leone's recent UPE initiatives were implemented in 1993, following the influential EFA conference in Jomtien in 1990. Under the initiatives, the new education system of 6-3-3-4 was adopted until it changed in 2013 to 6-3-4-4, which entails six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary education, four years of senior secondary education and four years of tertiary education. Sierra Leone's current education structure is shown in Figure 1 below. At the end of the sixth year of primary education, pupils take the National Primary School Examination (NPSE) in order to enter junior secondary school (JSS). Those who cannot pass the NPSE need to repeat the final year and prepare for the examination the next year. The NPSE is designed by the West African Examination Council and is a common exam with other Anglophone countries of West Africa.

Figure 1. Structure of Education in Sierra Leone
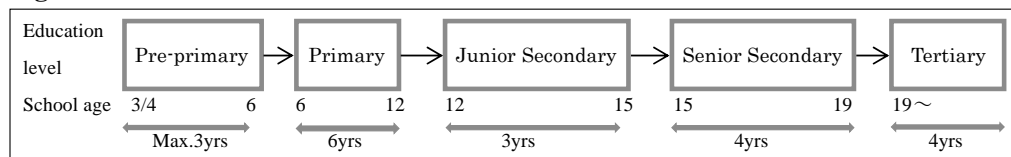
(Source: Author made based on Education Sector Plan 2014-18 (MEST, 2013b))

In order to achieve UPE, the government introduced a policy of FPE in 2000. Under the policy, the government began paying tuition fees and providing teaching and learning materials and core textbooks to all children in classes 1-3, extending this to classes 4-6 in 2002. Since 2001, the government has borne the cost of the NPSE fees. The Education Act of 2004 was also passed by parliament to replace the one enacted in 1964.

A significant stipulation in the Act is that basic education composing primary and junior secondary education should be free and compulsory for everyone with punitive measures for a parent or guardian who does not send their child to school. The Act clearly states that every citizen of Sierra Leone shall have the right to basic education (GoSL, 2004). It is worth noting that the government proposed pre-primary/Early Childhood Education to become an integral part of basic education; however, "free education" being committed in the policy and implemented in practice is at the primary level only, and in reality many parents experience "school fees" under FPE policy (Nishimuko, 2010).

The Education Sector Plan 2007-2015 (MEST, 2007) lists disabilities/special needs in their prioritized issues among others, including gender and HIV/AIDS with health and sanitation, as well as stating challenging issues in providing for those with special needs such as adapting and building facilities, training teachers for special needs students, and providing special needs equipment and materials to ensure all children entering primary schooling at the age of 6 years in "every district be provided with at least one special needs school for varying disabilities" (MEST, 2007, p.8 and p.135). However, the ESP does not mention any specific strategy, concrete timeframe or budget allocation. The Child Rights Act enacted in 2007 reflects the content of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, stating every child has the right to life as well as access to health care and a free basic education. It also has a section on treatment of disabilities and states that "a disabled child has a right to special care, education and training wherever possible to develop his maximum potential and be self-reliant" (GoSL, 2007, p.16). It could be said that the Persons with Disability Act enacted in 2011 is regarded as a great step in moving disability issues forward. In the Act, concerning the right to free education, protection from discrimination in educational institutions, and courses for instruction of persons with disabilities to be introduced in public educational institutions with government scholarships or grants are mandated (GoSL, 2011). However, although the foregoing FPE assists primary education and tertiary education is assisted with government scholarships or grants stated in the Act, the middle of JSS and Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) are not currently free. Disabled students who completed their education up to SSS can have access to free higher education. However, it should be pointed out that it is not easy for many parents to send their children to JSS and SSS in the country as still more than half of people live in poverty and JSS and SSS are not affordable for the majority. This view is supported by the enrollment rates of JSS (15%) and SSS (7%) (MEST, 2012, p.26).

However, on the bright side, the government has launched teacher training for inclusive education in 2013. This project started with targeting teachers in Freetown. The government sent a letter to all municipal and government-assisted schools in Freetown, requiring that one teacher from each school participate in the workshop for about two weeks. They attended the workshop to learn about children with some "differences", including children with disabilities and children from minor ethnic groups and how to identify, respond to and teach them. Cascade method was used and teachers were required to share what they learned with their colleagues after they returned. Because of

this training, all the schools called for a staff meeting to select a teacher to send to the workshop, and this was a starting point for all the schools to understand the government direction concerning education for CWD and share the value.

The Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP) for the years 2014-16 also shows tangible intervention plans with key activities, an output indicator, timeframe, estimated yearly cost and responsible institutions, although funding partners of some activities are not clear in the document. The ESIP shows the government view of education for CWD, stating as a strategic objective that "the education system identifies children with special educational needs (for emotional, mental or physical reasons) and is able to provide them with suitable support, where possible within a normal mainstream school environment" (MEST, 2013a, p.29). The ESIP's key activities in inclusive education are as follows:

1) Build professional capacity within the universities, teacher colleges, etc. to strengthen inclusion components within teacher training and lead the work of identifying and accommodating children with special educational needs.

2) Develop national tools and systems to identify children with special needs and classify their needs.

3) Develop guidance for teachers to identify children with hearing or visual impairments (MEST, 2013a, p.45).

These show that the government's move forward to practice, however, these documents do not explain terminology and concepts of inclusive education and special needs education, while they have been used for strategies, objectives and activities without definitions. It is necessary to provide explanation of terms and concepts, draw a blueprint of inclusive education the country aims to achieve, and share them in documents.

Government commitments in achieving UPE are shown in their expenditures. As a portion of all government recurrent expenditures, education funding was more than 25%, which is higher than Sub-Saharan Africa's average of 22%. Priority is given to primary education, and in 2010, 49.3% of the recurrent expenditures were allocated to primary education. Yet, considering teachers' salaries account for 77.5% of primary recurrent expenditures, as the needed trained and qualified teachers are to be produced to assist quality educations the expenditures are likely to increase (MEST, 2013b, p.45-46). Sierra Leone's endeavors in education for CWD need to continue working in partnership with donors, NGOs and charities.

Findings

The government has set policy reforms, securing expenditures for the education sector to some extent as demonstrated above. However, in terms of education for CWD, for a long time there was a disconnect between policy reforms and their implementation at the field level, and eventually, they have moved forward to practice. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the barriers and issues that need to be addressed for improvement at the field level. This section, first, discusses barriers to CWDs' learning in school, followed

by teachers' views on where and how CWD should receive their education.

1) Obstacles for CWD to Learning in School

Nearly 60 potential obstacles such as accessibility of the school, accessibility within school, and bullying and discrimination were listed in the questionnaires which were distributed to 65 teachers.[3] Table 3 below shows the top ten barriers that stand in the way of learning in school for CWD. The respondents indicated the degree of their agreement with each obstacle item on a 5 point scale, the lower the average, the higher the agreement with the itemed obstacles.

Table 3. Obstacles that Stand in the Way of Learning in School for CWD (Teachers N=65)

Rank	Itemed obstacle	Average	Factor
1	Delay of receiving capitation grants	1.85	Finance Factor
2	Lack/insufficiency of teachers' workshop and training	1.88	Guidance for Teachers
3	Difficulties in going to school (Accessibility to school)	1.98	Accessibility Factor
4	Poor economic status of student households	2.01	Family Factor
5	Lack/insufficiency of teacher training (pedagogy) for education for CWD	2.11	Guidance for Teachers
6	Insufficiency of capitation grants from the government	2.12	Finance Factor
7	Insufficiency of teachers' evaluations	2.13	Guidance for Teachers
8	Lack of appropriate facilities and equipment needed for CWD	2.15	Accessibility Factor
9	Lack/insufficiecy of opportunities for teachers to seek advice and counseling services	2.25	Guidance for Teachers
10	Insufficient employment opportunities after study	2.28	Social Factor

(Source: Author's field data)

From the outcome, obstacles are divided into finance, guidance for teachers, accessibility, family and social factors. That is, in order to remove the barriers, the following could be pointed out: 1) ensuring adequate finance to run the school with adequate education; 2) improving opportunities for teacher trainings and workshops and guidance and supervision of teachers; 3) improving the accessibility and infrastructure outside and inside the school; and 4) tackling household and societal poverty and sensitizing the community that disabled people are part of society. Since the outcome is based on teachers' views, it could be different if questionnaires were administered to pupils. However, the outcome clearly shows that many teachers are not confident in

---

[3] The participant teachers from the school for the blind were all completely blind, and therefore, these six teachers were administered questionnaires through one-on-one oral sessions.

teaching CWD and are seeking opportunities for trainings, workshops and advice. Since teachers are key to providing a quality education, when they are not confident in their teaching, it could reflect in quality. The significance of the finance factor should also be emphasized, as the delay and insufficiency of capitation grants could lead to schools collecting unofficial school fees from parents or guardians, and this could result in further marginalization of vulnerable children. Furthermore, issues of accessibility within and outside the school involve great costs. However, difficulty of accessibility could lead to the school and society denying CWD of an education and participating in activities outside the home. The director of the Special Needs Unit stated that the MEST has just begun to improve the accessibility of school facilities. Therefore, improvements will gradually be seen in the classrooms, of which currently more than half are in need of repair. Yet, not only being provided by the government, but also at the school level, the school, for example, could call for cooperation from the School Management Committee (SMC) and the local community, seeking assistance in kind and/or labor, and this could lead to a great opportunity for community people to share the value of working toward building an inclusive education and society.

It is significantly important to involve parents and community people in working toward inclusive education. Although the recent EFA, UPE and FPE campaigns greatly increased access to primary education, the majority of CWD, failed to benefit, and remained "at home" and "invisible". There are many challenges here regarding education for CWD. From teachers' comments, the following issues need to be tackled at family and community levels; 1) Some families and parents do not value education for their children; and 2) People and peers are not disability-friendly enough to offer a hand on the way to and in school when necessary. These show that it is not only a matter for the school teachers, and the government, but also for families and the community. Every child has a right to education. Simple access is not about education, and every child has a right to participate in school life and achieve their goals through experiences. Promoting inclusion involves interactions with a large and wide variety of people, sharing knowledge, ideas and values to encourage positive attitudes. Any small efforts in removing the obstacles could lead to building an inclusive education. Sharing value through social learning with various actors could be an important step toward realizing an inclusive education.

2) Where and How CWD Should Receive their Education

As stated earlier, despite the recent EFA, UPE and FPE campaigns which greatly increased access to primary education, the majority of CWD have not benefitted, since they were at home and invisible. Although there are several special schools available in the country, these schools are however specialized for the blind and the deaf and dumb, and therefore only a small portion of CWD can benefit from them. As discussed above, while the government policy favors education for CWD in mainstream schools, there are many challenges at the field level. Teachers are the key to education in school. It is significant to

learn whether the government direction of education for CWD has the support of teachers. This study asked teachers where and how we should educate children with disabilities. Many teachers feel a huge responsibility and limitations and feel inadequate in their teaching and in recognizing accessibility issues; the outcome of teachers' views on where and how CWD should be educated is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Where and How We Should Educate Children with Disabilities?[4] (Teachers N=65)
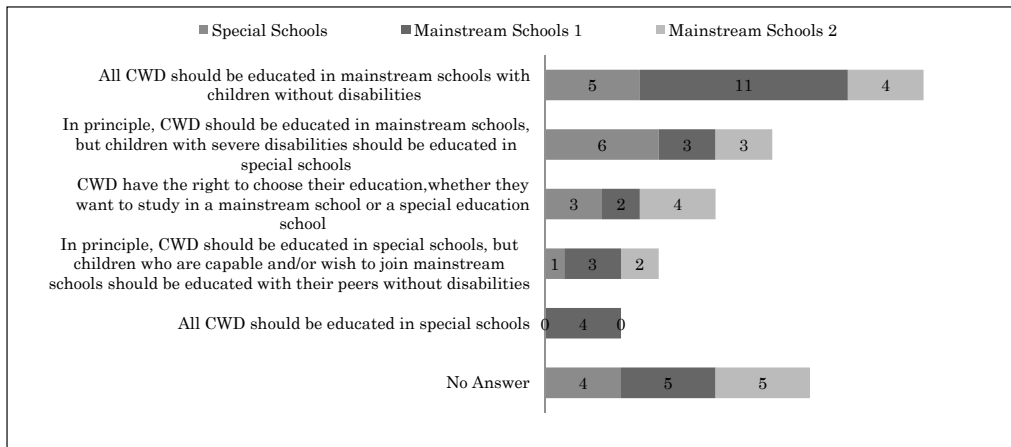
(Source: Author's field data)

Although teachers' views were divided, regardless of school categorization for teachers, educating CWD in mainstream schools with children without disabilities had more agreement, followed by the most popular view with a condition of severe disability cases to be educated in special schools. That is, many teachers think that CWD should be educated in mainstream schools and this is supported by the following teachers' comments.

i.   They should be encouraged to show that they also belong to the community and they have their right also to be educated like others.

ii. Those without disabilities may assist others with disabilities in many cases, such as crossing the road, carrying their books, etc.

iii. If they all attend mainstream schools with children without disabilities, they need special attention or they will need to form special classes for CWD.

However, when the above outcome was shared with the Sightsavers staff in the interview, they opined that these views are from teachers who are role models in society and if the same question had been asked in the community, prevailing views of discrimination and prejudice would have become apparent. This point coincided with

---

[4] Mainstream Schools 1 are schools that will officially accept CWD in the following year and Mainstream Schools 2 are schools that will not officially accept CWD in the following year. However, all these schools have children with minor disabilities (physical and visual impairments).

teachers' suggestions for improvement of education for CWD, which were as follows:

    i. Discrimination comes especially from the community – so if included in the upbringing of these CWD, better results would be achieved in the community.

    ii. Schools and the community should come together to help tackle some problems affecting disabled children, and encourage them to live together, and see that they are protected so that they cannot be discriminated against.

    iii. To sensitize the people to send their CWD to school, as learning how to read and write will empower them and make them self-reliant in the future.

Furthermore, teachers working for the school for the blind (a boarding school) stated that some parents think that leaving their disabled children with the school, frees the family of the burden imposed on them, and that such parents are negligent and not much interested in their children or in their education. According to teachers, there are still people who think that disabilities are associated with evil and punishment and that disabled people are stigmatized as witches and wizards.

Although many teachers chose "all CWD should be educated in mainstream schools," the family and the community are perceived by them as significant factors in the obstacles to education of CWD; it is of vital importance therefore to get rid of the stigma and social discrimination felt by people with disabilities and to advocate in the community that having a disability is just one difference among many others. In addition, it is worth being remembering that the launching of a workshop for teacher training by the government greatly influenced teachers and it could be said that, to a large extent, the response to this question reflects how teachers understand the government's direction. This in itself would not be bad. What is important is that this workshop gave teachers an opportunity to think about how to respond to and teach CWD, and many started to think that a child with a disability should be educated in a school where *the child* can have access to a quality education. Since there is a diversity of CWD, it could be argued that each child needs to be educated in school where s/he can participate in various school activities as well as enjoying academic and social experiences, so that s/he can execute her/his right to education.

Concluding Remarks

Sierra Leone has just set out to work on education for CWD. Without limiting it to education for CWD, concerning education in general, the country still has so many challenges to tackle: it is not unusual to see over 50 pupils in a classroom of a mainstream school and teachers struggling to "control" the class. About 40% of primary school teachers are UU; there are delays and an insufficient amount of capitation grants; there is a shortage of opportunities for teacher trainings; there is a shortage of teaching and learning materials; improvements of school infrastructure including classrooms, stairs, corridors, toilets, wells and playgrounds must be done; and there needs to be improvement

on teachers' working conditions and support. Although these sound like enormous challenges, if the school environment is friendly to CWD, it would also be suitable for other children. These are not particularly necessary only for CWD, but at any rate these need to be tackled to provide quality education for all children.

Starting with the workshop for teachers in Freetown, the government has planned to implement projects and research to promote inclusive education. The focus areas include needs assessment, improvements of school environment and teacher trainings. The strong commitment of the UPE over a decade ago, which included not only policy reforms such as FPE, but also the development of government partnership with various stakeholders such as international communities, CSOs such as international and local NGOs, Christian and Islamic Faith-based Organizations (FBOs), community organizations and media including radio stations and newspapers, has resulted in boosting the number of children going to school. When the government and CSOs work together for adopting a policy and/or achieving a goal, the collaborative partnership with their comparative advantage provides a mechanism that reflects the needs and voices of people at the local level (Farrington & Bebbington, 1993; Nishimuko, 2009). This point coincides with a Multi-Stakeholder Partnership (MSP) approach which is widely used as a main intervention strategy to promote local sustainable development. Considering that the merit of an MSP approach is that it serves to fill three existing gaps - traditional cooperation such as governance, participation and implementation and financing gaps (IFAD et al., 2013); in promoting education for CWD in Sierra Leone the government needs to show strong commitments and work with various actors in the relevant areas.

Many teachers in this study felt that CWD should be educated in mainstream schools together with children without disabilities. No doubt, attending the workshop and/or sharing what their colleagues learnt, helped teachers to perceive CWD as a coming reality. Since they take education for CWD seriously, teachers are hesitant about how to teach and respond to CWD, wondering what the right ways are and seeking opportunities for trainings, guidance and advice. The initial two-week teacher training workshop was organized in August 2013, but there is need for continuity and follow-up sessions. Needless to say, the continuity of workshops requires continuity of teachers' motivation and a keen attitude of participation, as well as collaboration among the government, teacher training colleges, NGOs and international organizations.

Through this study, it was indicated that society is not so friendly to people with disabilities and they are treated as a burden and as troublesome by those in the community who are prejudiced against them. However, the government's positive attitude toward inclusive education for CWD, disseminated to teachers, has obtained a wide consensus among them. The basic policy of education for CWD is that CWD should receive education, where possible within a mainstream school, with provisions of suitable support (MEST, 2013a). Therefore, regardless of type of school, both special schools and mainstream schools need to develop an educational environment in terms of facilities, accessibility, pedagogy, teachers' motivation and shared values of inclusion, so that

the schools can accommodate CWD and provide quality education. In the textbook of Inclusive Education used in the workshop for teachers, the targeted students include not only CWD, but also female children, orphaned children, and children whose academic performance is either too weak or too high (Leonard Cheshire Disability West Africa Regional Office, Year Unknown); that is, various "differences" are targeted for inclusion. Differences are neither superior nor inferior. After returning to their schools, teachers who participated in the workshop share what they learned with their colleagues. Teachers communicate that the differences are not about the cause of discrimination, but that schools provide opportunities to learn the differences and values of accepting, appreciating and respecting differences, which leads to building an inclusive society.

Considering the dissemination effect of the workshop, it is likely that steady activities such as sensitization and advocacy campaigns in the community aimed at learning about differences and sharing the values of accepting, appreciating and respecting differences could lead to overcoming people's views and attitudes of discrimination. Also, parents and people in the community need to have an interest in the education of the children in their community. They cannot have a passive attitude, but their active participation in activities of Community and Teacher Association (CTA) and SMC and their interfacing between the school and the community could lead to building an inclusive school. Promoting inclusion involves social learning. Interactions with a wide range of diversity of people, sharing knowledge, ideas and values can encourage positive attitudes toward various "differences". In the inclusive society, people and children with disabilities should not just be protected and provided for, but should receive an education, participate in various activities in the community, and live a life in which they feel themselves as part of society. Considering this, although Sierra Leone has just started down the path, this paper anticipates that the country's efforts in inclusive education could be a step toward building an inclusive society.

Although there is much that remains to be explored, this paper presents preliminary findings in anticipation of a more thorough analysis, and other studies to follow, which would include, not just teachers' views but also voices of community members, and of children with and without disabilities.

Acknowledgements

References

Ainscow, M., & Miles, S. (2008). Making Education for All Inclusive: Where Next? *Prospects*. 38, 15-34.

Children in Crisis, Visions for the Blind, & Powerful Information and Welfare Society

for the Disabled. (2012). *Report: Survey of Children with Disabilities in Kambia District, Sierra Leone*. Retrieved May 1, 2014 from
http://www.childrenincrisis.org/sites/default/files/images/programmes/12-12-07%20Kambia%20Disability%20Study%20Report%20FINAL.pdf.

Farrington, J., & Bebbington, A. (with Wellard, K. & Lewis, D. J.) (1993). *Reluctant Partners? Non-governmental Organizations, the State and Sustainable Agricultural Development*. London: Routledge.

GoSL. (2004). *The Education Act, 2004*. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.

_____. (2007). *The Child Rights Act, 2007*. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.

_____. (2011). *The Persons with Disability Act 2011*. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.

_____. (2013). *The Agenda for Prosperity: Road to Middle Income Status*. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.

IFAD, IOM, ITU, OHCHR, OHRLLS, UNCTAD, UNDESA, UNEP, UNFCCC, UNFPA, UNIDO, & WTO. (2013). *Analysis and Overview of New Actors and Formats for the Global Partnership for Development Post-2015*. Retrieved May 1, 2014 from
http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/thinkpieces/20_thinkpiece_analysis_newactors.pdf

Leonard Cheshire Disability West Africa Regional Office under its Inclusive Education Programme (Year Unknown). *Inclusive Education Training Module for Primary School Teachers in Sierra Leone*. Freetown: Self-binding.

MEST. (2007). *Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan: A Road Map to a Better Future 2007-2015*. Freetown: MEST.

_____. (2012). *Making Progress – Schools and Students in Sierra Leone: The 2010/11 School Census Report Vol.1*. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.

_____. (2013a). *Education Sector Implementation Plan for the years 2014-2016: Making Learning Real (draft)*. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.

_____. (2013b). *Education Sector Plan 2014-2018: Learning to Succeed (draft)*. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.

Nishimuko, M. (2009). The Role of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) in Achieving Education for All: The Case of Sierra Leone. *Compare* Vol. 39. No2. 281-295.

_____. (2010). A Threat to Educational Quality in Sierra Leone's Education for All, *Education, Language and Economics: Growing National and Global Dilemma*. Rotterdam: Sense Publication.

Save the Children. (2008). *Delivering Education for Children in Emergencies: A Key Building Block for the Future*. Retrieved May 1, 2014 from
http://www.ecdgroup.com/docs/lib_005985256.pdf

Statistics Sierra Leone & UNICEF. (2007). *Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2005 Final Report*. Freetown: Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF Sierra Leone.

U.N. (2010). *Analysing and Measuring Social Inclusion in a Global Context*. New York: UN

UNESCO. (2009). *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education*. Paris: UNESCO.