

GCE-NL Workshop

Open Up! on inclusive education in development

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Don't get lost in all the barriers, but look for opportunities in inclusive education. That's one of the conclusions of the workshop 'Open Up!' on inclusive education in development and emergency situations. About 40 representatives of NGOs gathered for the workshop to discuss dilemmas in inclusive education and to learn more about EU funding opportunities.

Realistic arguments for and against inclusive education were discussed from different perspectives through a role-play. Afterwards the participants formulated the most important dilemmas in implementing inclusive education. Then the participants formed small groups and discussed the dilemmas in depth, exchanged tips and experiences and shared practical ideas. Below we describe the main points of the discussions.

Inclusive education or special education?

One of the dilemmas is whether to aim for inclusive schools or for special schools. As there are pros and cons to both systems, an answer is hard to give. Inclusive schools could provide better social skills and might improve inclusion in society as a whole. On the other hand, some disabled children might receive higher quality education in a special school. The choice between inclusive schools and special schools depends on many personal and societal factors and can be different for each country, region, school or child. A good advice of one of the participants is to look for opportunities instead of barriers. And often it is more important to just start somewhere before you get lost in the discussion. The situation will never be perfect.

Acceptance in the community

Another dilemma concerns the attitude of the community at large. In many countries communities are discriminating against disabled children and their families. Disabled children are often hidden or even locked inside the house. A powerful way to improve acceptance of disabled children is to increase their visibility. Give persons with disabilities the opportunity to speak up for themselves and to show they can contribute to society. Often communities don't realise that excluding persons with disabilities from education and the labour market also results in great economic loss for the community.

Where to start?

Then there are many practical dilemmas in implementing inclusive education. Where do you start? It is essential to first gather data about the local situation. Important to know is the number of children with disabilities, the kind of disability they have and where they live. Often these statistics are not available and have to be gathered by the NGO itself. Another key element in the start-up is to create partnerships with local NGOs, governments, teacher unions, etc. Get as much support as you can for inclusion of children with disabilities and create a common understanding of inclusive education. Browsing through best practices of inclusive education can point out creative opportunities.

Three steps to EU funding

Another practical issue is how to obtain sufficient funding for inclusive education projects. Lars Bosselmann, EU Liaison Office Advocacy Manager at CBM and speaker at 'Open Up!' emphasised that there are great funding opportunities for inclusive education at the EU. He shared a refreshing 3-step approach to apply for funding at the EU:

- (1) The EU's new Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) requires each partner country to make a list of the three sectors that should be given priority in development. The first step is to find out which three key sectors the country you are interested in has identified. Check whether education is one of the key sectors. And if not, look at other sectors that are connected to inclusive education, such as social services or human development.
- (2) Approach the EU Delegation in that specific country and ask for a meeting to exchange views on the topic. Lars Bosselmann explains, "The EU doesn't want to be seen as a development bank, but as a development actor. Therefore don't go there only asking for money, but talk about the opportunities for inclusive education."
- (3) The third step is to find any upcoming EU calls for proposals that match your project. And when writing a proposal, make inclusive education a big theme.

Participants, both beginners and experts at the subject of inclusive education, were inspired by the new opportunities they came across with. Project ideas were shared and even new partnerships were made.

'Open Up!' finished with music group Trio Triëst performing their new song about inclusion and acceptance, which they had composed especially for the workshop.

'Open Up!' was organised by the GCE-Nederland, The Dutch Coalition on Disability and Development, Gushi Foundation, Edukans and War Child Holland.

Report by Stephanie Gielen.