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Ministry of Education,  
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2018

# Assessing Inclusive Education in Practice in Namibia

Challenges and opportunities  
in leaving no child behind



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# Abbreviations

<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>ECD</b>	Early Childhood Development
<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>EMIS</b>	Education Management Information System
<b>DSPS</b>	Division: Special Programmes and Schools
<b>GRN</b>	Government of the Republic of Namibia
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MGE CW</b>	Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education (former name)
<b>MoEAC</b>	Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
<b>MoHSS</b>	Ministry of Health and Social Services
<b>NIED</b>	National Institute for Educational Development
<b>NDC</b>	National Disability Council
<b>NFPDN</b>	National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NSA</b>	Namibia Statistics Agency
<b>NSL</b>	Namibian Sign Language
<b>NTA</b>	Namibia Training Authority
<b>NUST</b>	Namibia University of Science and Technology
<b>OPDs</b>	Organisations of Persons with Disabilities
<b>UIS</b>	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
<b>UNAM</b>	University of Namibia
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNCRPD</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VTCs</b>	Vocational Training Centres
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

*“Inclusive education can be seen as a process of strengthening the capacity of an education system to reach out to all learners. It is, therefore, an overall principle that should guide all educational policies and practices, starting from the belief that education is a fundamental human right and the foundation for a more just society.”*

**UNESCO, 2008**

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# Foreword

Namibia places enormous value in her children, especially the most marginalised. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Namibia remains committed to ensuring access to quality and integrated services for all her people. Namibia has developed national legislation and policies which promote the rights of children with disabilities. In particular, the *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education*, the *Child Care and Protection Act, 2015* (Act No. 3 of 2015), the *Education Act, 2001* (Act No. 16 of 2001) and the *National Disability Act, 2004* (Act No. 26 of 2004) are aimed at strengthening the capacity of the education system to provide a rights-based approach to education.

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture is committed to addressing the barriers faced by children with disabilities and those from vulnerable and marginalised communities through the implementation of the *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education*. This report, *Assessing Inclusive Education in Practice in Namibia*, identifies a range of barriers and challenges faced by children with disabilities in Namibian schools. These include, for example, lack of institutional capacity, negative cultural norms, lack of partnerships between critical ministries and institutions, and inadequate human and financial resources. While Namibia has an enabling legislative environment for inclusive education, the report highlights challenges related to abuse, ignorance, cultural practices, stigma and discrimination that contribute to children with disabilities not accessing school or dropping out of school at a very early age.

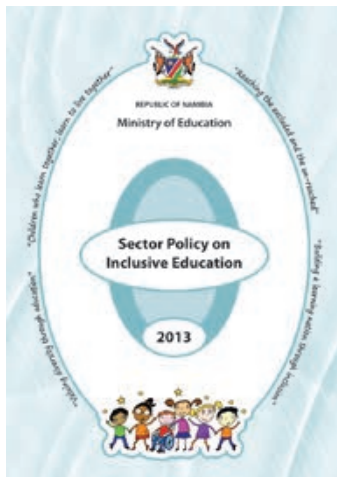
Findings of this study will help to tailor the Ministry's future interventions to ensure that children with disabilities, and those with other special needs in education, have equal opportunities and equal access to education.

We hope that this study will significantly bring us closer to the desired goal of *no child left behind*.

**Rachel Odede**

UNICEF Representative in Namibia, Windhoek, December 2017

# Preface



Namibia's *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education* (2013) advocates for the right of all children to quality education, irrespective of their circumstances. In addition, the Fifth National Development Plan, the Child Care and Protection Act, 2015 (Act No. 3 of 2015) and Goal 4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, promote the right of all Namibian children to quality basic education. Those who have special educational needs and those with disabilities are particularly reliant on the recognition and fulfilment of this right.

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, with financial and technical support from UNICEF, has conducted a rapid analysis of the implementation of inclusive education in Namibia, for the purpose of assessing the implementation of the *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education* in Namibian schools to date.

This analysis was conducted in February, March and April 2017 through an extensive literature review and primary data collection in four regions of Namibia, namely Hardap, Khomas, Kunene and Oshana. Consultations were held with education officials at the Ministry's head office in Windhoek, and with regional education officials, school principals, teachers, children, parents, non-governmental organisations and other relevant stakeholders in education.

The analysis found many improvements in the provision of inclusive education since the launch of the Sector Policy in 2014. However, the report highlights a number of challenges that children with disabilities still face in Namibian schools – examples being problems in the implementation of the curriculum, negative attitudes towards disability and special needs in education, inaccessible infrastructure, lack of access to appropriate teaching and learning technologies, and negative cultural practices. The report duly includes recommendations to be implemented by the education sector in particular and Namibian society in general, in the short, medium and long terms.

The report addresses matters relating to policy, the curriculum, and attitudinal, cultural, infra-structural and technological barriers to realising inclusive education in Namibia.

The findings recorded herein would not have been reached without the collaboration, hard work and dedication of education stakeholders, parents, teachers and children who provided input to the analysis. It is now up to the education fraternity to implement these findings and recommendations in the short, medium and long terms. Through practising commitment and dedication to the implementation process, we can ensure better educational outcomes for every Namibian child.

**Katriha Hanse-Himarwa, MP**

Minister of Education, Arts and Culture, Windhoek, December 2017

# Acknowledgements

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) has been implementing the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education since 2014. The Policy promotes an education system that is accessible, inclusive, equitable, efficient and of good quality. It calls for the participation of all children, with a specific focus on vulnerable children and children with special needs and disabilities, to benefit from quality education.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has been supporting the MoEAC in its effort to ensure that children in Namibia have access to quality education. In order to assess the impact of policy implementation, UNICEF provided both technical and financial support to complete a rapid analysis and documenting of the implementation of inclusive education in practice in Namibia. We thank UNICEF for being a committed partner of the MoEAC and for supporting this study.

The MoEAC recognises Marathon Management Consulting (Pty) Ltd, with Dr Emma McKinney as lead author of this report, for the contribution made to ensuring inclusive education in Namibia.

This study would not have been possible without the voices of all those who participated. The Ministry appreciates and thanks the children, parents, teachers, school principals and Regional Directors of Education who shared their stories and experiences.

We also appreciate the leadership of our colleagues from the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) and in our Directorate of Programme Quality Assurance.

*“Education should be valued as a key social investment and a means to reduce inequality. ... Inclusive strategies are needed to respond to marginal communities and students with special needs. Education legislation is committed to making education a right and making explicit the link between education and improving human capital and economic development.”*

**Namibia’s National Agenda for Children 2012-2016**

(Government of the Republic of Namibia 2011):

Commitment 2 – on equal access to quality integrated education



# The Fieldwork Regions



## Inclusive Education



### Strategy 1

**Integrate the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education into all other legal frameworks and policies of the education sector.**

(page 16)

### Strategy 2

**Raise awareness of the constitutional right to education and foster attitudinal change.**

(page 20)

### Strategy 3

**Support institutional development by developing human and instructional resources.**

(page 22)

### Strategy 4

**Review the National Curriculum for Basic Education to reflect the diversity of learning needs of all learners.**

(page 25)

### Strategy 5

**Widen and develop educational support services.**

(page 27)

### Strategy 6

**Develop teacher education and training for paramedical and support staff.**

(page 30)

### Strategy 7

**Strengthen and widen in-service training for stakeholders.**

(page 33)

### Strategy 8

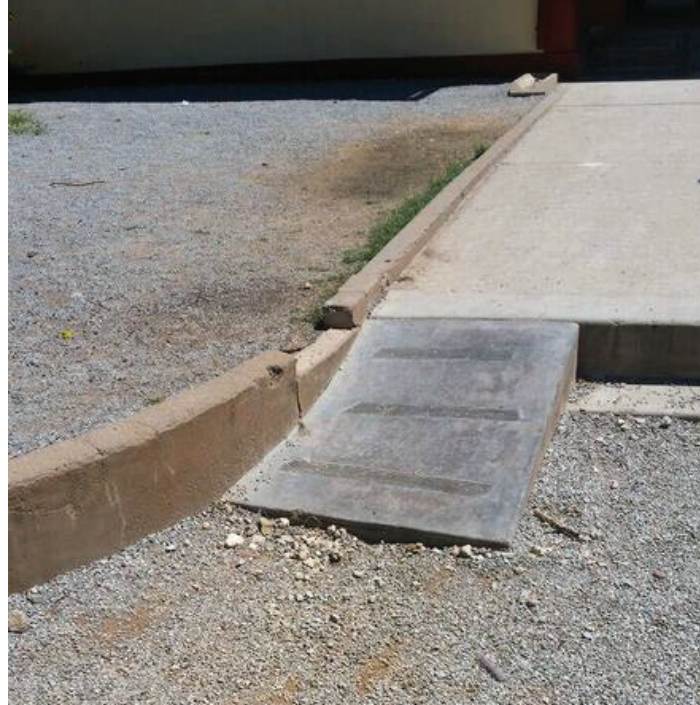
**Develop a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education.**

(page 34)

## Section

# 1

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## Introduction

Globally, children with disabilities are more likely than others to be out of the school system or to leave school before completing primary or secondary education (UIS, 2017; UNESCO, 2009). Research conducted by the World Bank indicates that 30-40% of the approximately 115 million children worldwide who are not in school are children with disabilities (Peters, 2003). Among the small number of children with disabilities who do attend school, many experience barriers, are excluded from the classroom, fail and/or drop out of the education system (UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2016; Florian, 2008; UN, 2006a). This is despite countries adopting international policies and initiatives for inclusive education.

The Population and Housing Census of 2011 found that over 21 000 children in Namibia between 6 and 19 years of age have a disability, representing 3.3% of the national population of that age range. About 65% of the 21 000 attend school. Considering these statistics against the 79% of able children without disabilities attending school, it can be implied that there are close to 5 000 more children with disabilities who are not in school. Namibia being a developing country, it is likely that these statistics are in fact significantly higher, with the national population of children aged 6-19 with disabilities ranging between 10 and 15% (WHO and World Bank, 2011; UN, 2006b).

The rapid analysis reported on herein was commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) and UNICEF to examine the needs and barriers facing children with disabilities in Namibia. Article 20 of the *Namibian Constitution* confirms that all persons have the right to receive an education, and that primary education shall be free and compulsory. This is reflected in the government commitment to ensuring access to inclusive quality education for all children and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Namibia's Vision 2030. Being a signatory to the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)* and the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, Namibia is committed to implementing and monitoring the implementation of these Conventions. Although Namibia has made progress towards achieving "Education for All" goals as set out by the UNCRPD, and is implementing the *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education* ("the Sector Policy"), progress in implementing the inclusive education principles has been slow. As a result, children with disabilities still have many needs and experience barriers in accessing and remaining in education in Namibia (UNICEF, 2016).

The research for this rapid analysis was conducted from 27 February to 21 April 2017. As this study is aimed at serving children with disabilities mainly, only literature and data relating to this selection of children were used in the study and are referenced in this report. Fieldwork was conducted in 4 of Namibia's 14 regions, namely Khomas, Hardap, Kunene and Oshana. Data was collected via visits to a total of 15 schools – 5 in Khomas, 4 in Hardap, 3 in Kunene and 3 in Oshana – including resource schools, learning support classes in mainstream schools, mainstream schools that accommodate or have previously accommodated children with disabilities, and schools with hostels. Interviews with individual key informants and focus groups were conducted in each region. The interviewees included:

- children with disabilities;
- children without disabilities;
- teachers;
- parents of children with disabilities;
- school principals and hostel staff working in schools that accommodate or have previously accommodated children with disabilities;
- officials of the MoEAC;
- officials in the Directorate of Disability Affairs in the Office of the President;
- representatives of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the area of disabilities;
- representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs); and
- members of the National Disability Council.

Four main themes emerged in the findings: attitudes towards persons with disabilities, disability sensitisation and awareness raising; training and resources; schools accommodating children with disabilities; and partnerships, collaboration and support.

## **Attitudes towards persons with disabilities, disability sensitisation and awareness raising**

Disability sensitisation training is needed to address barriers emanating from the widespread lack of awareness about disabilities and negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities. Such training should cover paradigms of disability, appropriate language and terminology, dos and do nots, and ways to address myths and misconceptions. It should also convey general information about disability.

## **Training and resources**

All teachers need specific training on disabilities to enable them to help prevent barriers relating to training and resources. This training should be both theoretical and practical, and must provide information on the following topics:

- practical classroom modifications;
- curriculum adaptation and differentiation;
- classroom management;
- accessing and using assistive technology and devices;
- accessing accessibility audits, inclusive and disability-specific teaching methodologies, and disability sensitisation of the whole school;
- environmental preparation;
- nutrition, hygiene and sanitation in relation to disability; and
- specialised higher education training on disability teaching and learning.

## Schools accommodating children with disabilities

Recommendations for schools accommodating children with disabilities include the following:

- Strengthen relationships and collaboration between stakeholders.
- Make schools and hostels fully accessible and equip them with appropriate learning and teaching support materials.
- Build and equip more resource schools and learning support classrooms in mainstream schools.
- Equip workshops for vocational training in resource schools.
- Reduce learner-teacher ratios in inclusive schools and hostels.
- Ensure that inclusive schools and hostels are fully accessible, adequately equipped and safe.

## Partnerships, collaboration and support

Study participants emphasised the need for schools to strengthen collaboration and partnerships with parents, communities and other stakeholders, and the need for conducting disability-specific studies in Namibia.

Recommendations for preventing barriers and for strengthening partnerships, collaboration and support – with all stakeholders working together – include the following:

- Conduct ongoing research on disability-related topics to ensure availability of accurate and up-to-date data and information.
- The MoEAC needs to budget and allocate specific funding for monitoring the impact of the implementation of inclusive education.
- The MoEAC needs to re-evaluate the promotion policy which allows a learner to fail only once per school phase.
- The MoEAC needs to re-evaluate the challenges of getting a learner placed in a resource school or learning support class.
- The relevant officials of the MoEAC and other ministries – especially the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and Ministry of Health and Social Services – need the appropriate training and skills to support schools in implementing inclusive education.
- Inter-ministerial collaboration, more resources and budget allocations are needed to support and develop schools in implementing inclusive education.
- More therapists and healthcare workers need to be employed within the MoEAC.
- To provide the therapeutic services needed, the therapists employed in the MoEAC need to be given the appropriate materials, assistive technology and devices, and resources.
- Partnerships between NGOs, OPDs, schools and the private sector need to be strengthened for both funding and possible future employment opportunities for learners with disabilities.
- School principals need training from both the MoEAC and NGOs on how to support the parents of learners with disabilities.
- Novice teachers should be equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge to support learners with disabilities, and unqualified teachers need in-service training on how to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.
- Teachers and parents need to understand their role in implementing therapists' recommendations.
- Parents need to be supported in implementing and following the referral process and transfer policies to get their children with disabilities into schools, and in turn the MoEAC needs to assist parents who are unable to get to urban areas to complete the referral documentation.



## Section

## 2

# INTRODUCTION



Research has shown globally that children with disabilities experience many challenges in accessing and remaining in education (UIS, 2017; UNESCO, 2009 and 2015). Children with disabilities constitute 30-40% of the 115 million children who are out of the school system (Peters, 2003). Among the minority of children with disabilities who do attend school, most experience daily challenges and barriers, such as being excluded from the classroom, failing and dropping out of the education system (UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2016; Florian, 2008). While countries around the world have adopted policies on inclusive education, the majority of children with disabilities experience barriers due to weakness in policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

In Namibia, statistics show that there are over 21 000 children with disabilities, constituting about 3.3% of the country's total population, and 65% of these children are attending school (UIS, 2017). Considering that Namibia is a developing country, it is likely that the number of children with disabilities is significantly higher, ranging between 10% and 15% of the national population (WHO and World Bank, 2011; UN, 2006b).

This rapid analysis, commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and UNICEF, examines the implementation of inclusive education relating to children with disabilities in Namibia. The research was conducted between February and April 2017. Data was collected in four of Namibia's 14 regions: Hardap, Khomas, Kunene and Oshana.

Namibia's national policy on inclusive education, called the *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education* ("the Sector Policy"), was adopted in 2014. This policy advocates for the right of all children to receive quality education, and is in line with the Namibian Constitution and international policies. The purpose of the analysis was to assess the implementation of the Sector Policy in Namibian schools. While Namibia has made progress towards achieving the Education for All goals as set out by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and with the development of the Sector Policy, it has been slow to implement the principles of inclusive education. The result is that children with disabilities are still experiencing challenges and barriers in accessing and remaining in education in Namibia (UNICEF, 2016).

# Section 3 GLOBAL CONTEXT



## 3.1 Persons with disabilities

Article 1 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) describes persons with disabilities as “those who have long-term, physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” This working definition of disability acknowledges the importance of the context and environment in enabling or disabling people from participating effectively within society.

According to the World Report on Disability, approximately 15% of the world’s population will experience a disability at some point in their lives (WHO and World Bank, 2011). This results in approximately one billion people around the world currently being or becoming persons with disabilities (WHO, 2011).

## 3.2 Views of disability

Within the disability movement there are two ways in which disability is seen, namely the medical and social models of disability. The medical model traditionally views disability as something negative, to be pitied and ‘fixed’ or cured. The focus would be on what a person with a disability is unable to do and how he/she differs from people without disabilities. Internationally, in line with the medical model, children with disabilities were segregated and placed in special schools, away from their friends and families without disabilities.

The social model of disability was developed in opposition to the medical model, and as a result of the Human Rights movement, where all people are seen as having equal rights. Here the focus is on identifying and addressing the barriers created by society and the environment that prevent people with disabilities from reaching their full potential and being independent. Inclusive education falls within this view of disability, wherein changes to how society sees, educates and accommodates children with disabilities need to be made in order to embrace diversity and to provide equitable and quality education for all children, including those with disabilities. In line with the social and rights-based model, an inclusive approach is supported, whereby children with disabilities are encouraged to attend their local neighbourhood schools where all children are educated in the same classrooms. In this inclusive approach, emphasis is placed on providing each learner with support according to their individual learning needs.

### 3.3 Children with disabilities

Research has shown that children with disabilities are among the most marginalised and most excluded groups of children, and are most likely to be excluded and denied their right to quality education (WHO and World Bank, 2011; UNESCO, 2017; McKinney and Swartz, 2016; UIS, 2017). In a UNESCO status report to the United Nations Development Group relating to the progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Director-General of UNESCO stated that 98% of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school (2009: 7). Children with disabilities are more likely to be victims of abuse and less likely to have access to medical services.

Global research shows that children with disabilities are more likely to be out of the school system, or to leave school before completing primary or secondary education (UIS, 2017; UNESCO, 2009). Their vulnerability becomes more evident when taking into account that children with disabilities constitute up to 40% of the 115 million children worldwide who are not in school (Peters, 2003). Furthermore, children with disabilities who do attend school have lower attendance rates and are less likely than those without disabilities to complete a primary education (WHO and World Bank, 2011; UNESCO, 2017).

### 3.4 Inclusive education

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) defines inclusive education as follows:

*“... a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.” (UNESCO, 2008)*

Establishing inclusive schools is widely regarded as desirable for equality and human rights, and it has educational, social and economic benefits (UNESCO, 2001).

All children will benefit from schools which develop ways of teaching that respond to individual differences while educating children together. Inclusive education is justified as a social matter because educating all children together assists in changing society’s attitudes towards diversity, which will have the positive knock-on effect of developing a just and non-discriminatory society. Lastly, there is an economic justification for having inclusive schools, being that they are less expensive to establish and maintain than building a complex system of segregated schools would be (UNESCO, 2001).

### 3.5 Educational placement options for children with disabilities

Previously around the world, children with disabilities were either educated in segregated special educational systems, often away from their peers without disabilities, and placed in segregated resource schools or unit classes, or excluded from the education system completely (Ainscow, 2005; McKinney & Swartz, 2016). While some children in these segregated schools or classes felt a sense of community and shared identity as a result of being with other children with shared



experiences, in general, many experienced barriers including feelings of isolation and exclusion (Lomofsky and Lazarus, 2001; Lourens, McKinney and Swartz, 2016).

For other children with disabilities who lived in areas away from special schools or did not have access to special learning support classes, the only option was to attend mainstream schools. Many of these children were mainstreamed by default without having been assessed or diagnosed, or without being provided with any support. Many of these children repeatedly failed and eventually dropped out of the education system completely (Ainscow, 2005; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; McKinney & Swartz, 2016).

Over the last two decades, in line with global policies including the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 1994), *Rule 6 of the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, the *Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All* (1990), the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), the *Dakar Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2000) and the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006), there has been a move away from segregated education for children with disabilities towards a more inclusive setting (UNICEF, 2001; WHO and World Bank, 2011).

In an inclusive setting, children with disabilities attend schools in their local communities with their families and friends. Within this inclusive education model, there may be a role for resource schools to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities, with high levels of support in the short to medium term in some countries (Ainscow & César, 2006; UNESCO, 2017). If these children's individual needs cannot be accommodated in an inclusive school, they should be given the option of attending a resource school (Ainscow, 2005; Ainscow & César 2006; Lourens et al., 2016; McKinney and Swartz, 2016; UNESCO, 2017).

While inclusive education is an important long-term goal, in practice many countries are currently unable to meet the individual needs of all children in inclusive schools. This may be due to a lack of clear policy, resources, accessible schools or teacher training and skills.



# NAMIBIA COUNTRY CONTEXT

## 4.1 Background

The Namibia Population and Housing Census (NPHC) of 2011 found that 3.3% of all children aged 6-19 have a disability. This represents over 21 000 children with disabilities, of whom only 65% were attending school. The NPHC (2011) also found that 79% of all children without disabilities were attending school. This comparison suggests that there are almost 5 000 other children who were not attending school because they have a disability. Although these are the official figures recorded by the NPHC (2011), it is important to note that Namibia is a developing country which does not have up-to-date data regarding children with disabilities. The lack of accurate statistics presents a constant challenge to planning and budgeting for disability issues. Furthermore, it is quite probable that the prevalence of children with disabilities is higher than recorded and closer to 10-15%, in line with figures suggested by the United Nations (2006b) and the *World Report on Disability* (WHO and World Bank, 2011).

The Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA) has reported that the estimated number of persons with disabilities in Namibia increased from 42 932 in 1991 to 98 413 in 2011, a substantial increase which the NSA deems to be a “national health concern” (NSA, 2016: xii). The number of children with disabilities aged 0-4 excluded from Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes increased from 3 359 in 2001 to 5 135 in 2011 (*ibid.*), which is concerning and calls for policy interventions. Regarding school attendance of children with disabilities aged 5 and older, statistics show that in 2011, 28.9% had never attended school (*ibid.*). A further concern is the proportion of persons with disabilities without any formal education living in rural areas, at 82.3% compared to 17.7% in urban areas (*ibid.*). These statistics are in line with global research which shows that children with disabilities are more likely to be out of the school system or to leave school before completing primary or secondary education (UIS, 2017; UNESCO, 2009).

The MoEAC acknowledges that children across the country experience many barriers, including systemic, organisational, pedagogical, curriculum-related, environmental, financial, societal, cultural and attitudinal barriers (MoE, 2013: iii). The Ministry further states that there is a need for flexible and holistic approaches to budgeting, programme planning and development, and also a need to monitor and evaluate purposefully with a view to creating and implementing an inclusive education system in Namibia (MoE, 2013).

The *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education* (“the Sector Policy”) (MoE, 2013) states that participation and collaboration of all stakeholders assists in developing new approaches and resources which





will improve the quality of education in all schools. All teachers and principals have to ensure that they take responsibility for educating all children, and that learning is indeed occurring. For this reason, consultation, collaboration, communication and well-defined roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders must take place. To effectively implement inclusive education, the Sector Policy states that all schools must have access to resources, including specialist support for addressing barriers, and that teachers need to be given advice and support. In addition, the policy highlights the need for a shift in attitude towards difference (MoE, 2013: 7).

Namibia is one of the few African countries with a comprehensive and entirely government-driven social protection system. The Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) provides universal basic state grants (pensions) to people as from 60 years of age and to adults who have a disability. In addition, child welfare grants are provided to orphans and vulnerable children, and children with disabilities. Additional grants are given to people with disabilities who become parents in order to help with child care. The coverage of child welfare grants has rapidly expanded over the past decade, and they now benefit some 145 000 children. However, only 17% of the children with disabilities are receiving a disability grant.

## 4.2 Namibia's legislative and policy framework

To ensure that Namibia is an inclusive country, the Government has embraced the philosophy of inclusive education and is guided by the following nationally enacted legal frameworks:

- *Namibian Constitution (1990)*;
- *National Policy on Disability (1997)*;
- *National Policy for Educationally Marginalized Children (2000)*;
- *National Policy on Adult Learning (2003)*;
- *Namibia Vision 2030 (2004)*;
- *National Disability Council Act (2004)*;
- *Education Sector Policy for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (2008)*;
- *Education Sector Policy on Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy (2009)*;
- *National Agenda for Children (2012-2016)*;
- *Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education, 2012-2017 and 2017-2022*;
- *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education (2013)*;
- *Education Act, 2001 (Act No. 16 of 2001) (under review)*; and
- *Child Care and Protection Act, 2015 (Act No. 3 of 2015)*.

The aforementioned policy and legislative documents have been published and widely disseminated, but the implementation remains a challenge in Namibia, which will be discussed later in this section.

Namibia is signatory to, and has also ratified, a number of international conventions and agreements, such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD), and the *2015 Education Agenda* including the *Millennium Development Goals* (2000) which speak of a right-based education and inclusion. In 2015 Namibia became a signatory to the *Agenda for Sustainable Development* with its 17 *Sustainable Development Goals*.

The MoEAC remains committed to creating an education system that is inclusive, sensitive and responsive to the needs of all children, including those with disabilities. The *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education*, which is based on international inclusive education trends including *Education for All*, was adopted and published in 2013 and launched in September 2014. The focus of this policy is primarily on ensuring that the whole education system at its various levels of functioning is inclusive. In essence, the policy also places specific emphasis on children and young people who are educationally marginalised. This group includes children with disabilities.

UNICEF has been supporting the MoEAC to ensure that the rights of all children in Namibia are honoured through the development, review and implementation of legislation and policies aimed at ensuring quality, inclusive education for all children in Namibia. To operationalise the equity agenda and enhance the school participation of children with disabilities, a high number of whom are educationally marginalised, UNICEF's *Strategic Plans 2014-2017* and *2018-2021* include indicators on inclusive education that address the rights of children with disabilities. UNICEF has also included children with disabilities within its other programmes, and has ensured that these programmes are fully inclusive – including child health and nutrition, child protection and social protection.

The Ministry's Special Programmes and Schools Division under the Directorate of Programmes and Quality Assurance, in collaboration with the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), completed national sensitisation training workshops on the Sector Policy. This training ran for one-and-a-half days and was completed by the end of 2016. Out of a total of 27 886 teachers in Namibia in 2016 (MoEAC, *15<sup>th</sup> School Day Report*, 2016), these workshops involved only one teacher and the principal from each primary school in the country, with a total of 1 268 participants sensitised. Participants in these workshops expressed interest and willingness to ensure that inclusive education is realised at school, but several expressed reservations as to:

- how practical it would be to embrace diversity;
- how to ensure that the educational needs of each child are addressed, given a number of barriers existing at school level, such as overcrowded classrooms;
- lack of instructional resources;
- lack of parental involvement;
- lack of support from regional offices;
- rigidity of the curriculum, considering the examination-driven nature of the system; and
- lack of training on inclusive education, with emphasis placed on lack of knowledge and skills for teaching children with disabilities.

### 4.3 Understanding inclusive education

When it comes to educational placement options in Namibia, there are currently three: resource schools; learning support classes or resource units within mainstream schools; and inclusive schools. With the introduction of the Sector Policy and other inclusive education policies, special schools have been renamed *resource schools*.

- **Mainstream schools with learning support classes:** There are mainstream schools which have separate segregated learning support classes where learners requiring medium to high levels of support are educated separately, though following the general education curriculum. If a child is able to, he/she will return to the mainstream classes.
- **Inclusive schools:** These are schools that welcome and accommodate all learners in the same classrooms regardless of the level of support needed, and all are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school.
- **Resource schools:** These are segregated schools that accommodate children requiring high levels of support. Most of these schools are disability-specific and some follow the general education curriculum. In the case of learning disability, resource schools follow a tailored-made curriculum specific to the learning needs. The role of these schools has now broadened to include supporting inclusive and mainstream schools.

The Sector Policy states that all children should be educated in the least-restrictive education setting and in schools in their neighbourhood to the fullest extent possible (MoE, 2013).

## 4.4 Exclusion of learners with disabilities from the general education system

The Sector Policy acknowledges that a broad range of learning needs exists within the child population of Namibia, and that when these needs are not addressed, learning breakdown occurs. The policy also acknowledges that learning needs stem from a range of factors, including intrinsic factors such as impairments and differing abilities, and extrinsic factors such as life experiences, poverty, negative attitudes, inflexible curriculum, language of instruction/learning, inaccessible or unsafe environments, issues relating to policies and legislation, and education managers' and teachers' lack of skills or inappropriate skills (2013). In addition, the MoEAC recognises that *all* children need educational support, and that this support should be an integral part of the entire education system. This support needs to be provided at every school and by every teacher (2013). The aim of this is to ensure that all children are educated in the least-restrictive education setting, ideally located within the children's own communities.

The main objectives of the Sector Policy are to expand access to and provision of quality education, especially for those who are educationally marginalised, and to support the abilities and needs of individual children (MoEAC, 2013). Educationally marginalised children would be included in a long list that would also include children of farm workers, children in remote areas, 'street' children, girl-children, child labourers and children with disabilities (MoEAC, 2013). As this rapid analysis is aimed at children with disabilities, the literature will relate only to this selection of children within the marginalised group.

The UNESCO document entitled *A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education*, which relates to access to education for children with disabilities, states that there is a significant shortage of resource schools that are able to accommodate children with high levels of support needs across the whole of Namibia (2017: 8). This remains a significant challenge in the implementation of inclusive education, especially for children requiring high levels of support.

To effectively implement the principles of inclusive education, countries need to ring-fence funding. This funding is important for building schools, training teachers, purchasing specialised equipment and so on. Effectively, financial planning cannot occur unless accurate statistical data is available (UNICEF, 2016: 2). For this reason it is important that reliable and up-to-date statistics relating to children with disabilities in Namibia are made available.

The Sector Policy provides clear guiding principles for changing the current education system. It acknowledges the importance of:

- identifying and addressing the challenges and barriers in the education system;
- developing capacity at national, regional, circuit, cluster and community levels;
- applying a cross-directorate approach to planning, development and implementation;
- reorienting teacher education (i.e. improving both pre- and in-service teacher training);
- inculcating flexible and differentiated teaching and learning approaches;
- providing institutional support;
- engaging schools and communities on the issues of human and educational rights;
- expanding access to education across all levels;
- diversifying the curriculum and creating a positive climate for diversity;
- applying flexibility in assessing and examining; and
- developing collaboration and support on inclusion. (MoEAC, 2013: 4)

To conclude, international and Namibian policies on inclusive education state that all children require support and have the right to receive quality education, and that education systems should embrace diversity and meet the individual needs of every child. For these reasons it was necessary to commission a study to identify the needs of children with disabilities in Namibia and the barriers facing them, and to provide recommendations to address and prevent these. It is hoped that this will result in children with disabilities being fully included and able to contribute to “building a learning nation through inclusion” (MoEAC, 2013: front cover). The next section of this report examines the research methodology used in this rapid analysis.



# Section 5 THE STUDY

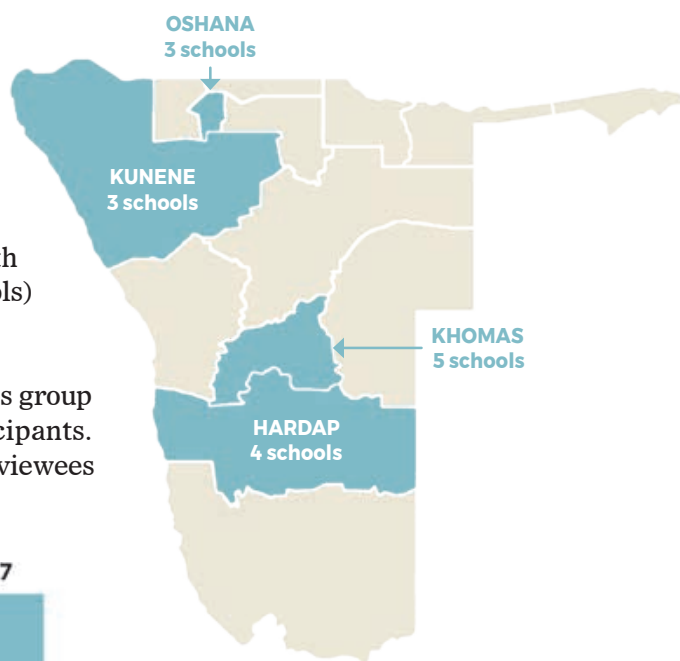


Namibia's Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC), supported by UNICEF, contracted Marathon Management Consultancy to assess the provision of education to children with disabilities by means of a rapid analysis and documenting of the implementation of inclusive education in practice in Namibia.

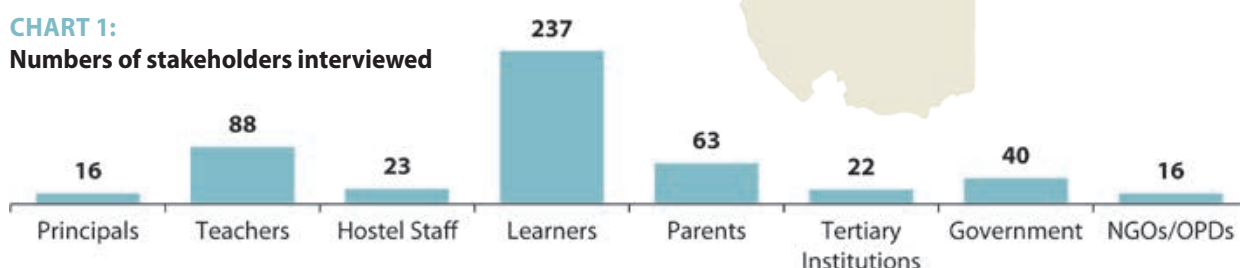
## 5.1 Site and sample

Interviews were conducted in four of Namibia's 14 regions: Hardap, Khomas, Kunene and Oshana. A total of 15 schools (resource schools, mainstream schools with learning support classes and inclusive schools) were selected for the analysis.

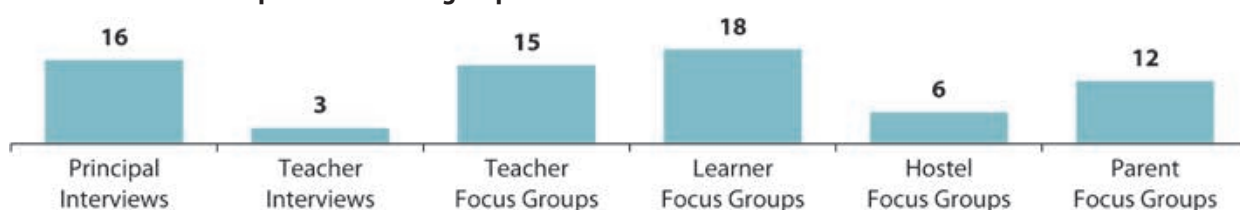
In total, 82 individual interviews and 54 focus group interviews were conducted with 505 participants. The charts below show the numbers of interviewees and interviews per stakeholder group.



**CHART 1:**  
Numbers of stakeholders interviewed



**CHART 2:**  
Number of interviews per stakeholder group





A total of nine disability-focused NGOs and government bodies participated in the analysis:

- Association for Children with Language, Speech and Hearing Impairments of Namibia;
- Autism Namibia;
- Down Syndrome Association of Namibia;
- Namibia Association of Children with Disabilities;
- Namibia National Association for the Deaf;
- National Disability Council;
- National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia;
- National Federation for the Visually Impaired; and
- National Organization of Youth with Disabilities.

In addition to the NGOs, a variety of individual disability activists participated.

A total of 13 campuses of tertiary institutions participated:

- University of Namibia (UNAM);
- Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST);
- Vocational Training Centres (Valombola VTC and Eenhana VTC);
- Community Skills Development Centres (COSDECs); and
- Namibia Training Authority.

## **Categories of participants**

### **Schools**

Principal; Acting Principal; Head of Department; Teachers; Teacher Assistants; Children with and without Disabilities; Hostel Staff, Matron(s); and Parents.

### **MoEAC Head Office**

Deputy Minister; Permanent Secretary; Director; Deputy Director; Head of the Centre for Communication and Deaf Studies; Education Planner; Chief Education Officer; Psychological Counsellor; Education Psychologist in training; and National Institute for Educational Development.

### **MoEAC Regional Directorates for Education**

Director; Deputy Director; Education Planner; Senior Education Officer; Inspector of Education; and Translators.

### **Directorate of Disability Affairs in the Office of the President and Ministry of Health and Social Services**

Deputy Minister and Rehabilitation Officers (in both institutions).

### **Tertiary Institutions**

Associate Professor; Senior Lecturer; Disability Unit Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator; Students with and without Disabilities; Inclusive Education Lecturer; Manager of the UNAM Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning (CODEL); Ondangwa COSDEC; Valombola VTC Financial Manager; and Instructor/Trainer.

## NGOs and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)

Director; Chairperson; Volunteer; and Disability Activist.

The Marathon research team liaised with UNICEF and the MoEAC to secure the site visits, and written permission was obtained from the MoEAC before the visits. UNICEF and the MoEAC were responsible for arranging and confirming the dates and times for the individual focus group interviews, and for sending, printing and obtaining all consent forms from participants prior to the interviews. Staff of both UNICEF and the MoEAC accompanied the Marathon researchers in visiting the sites and conducting the interviews. The research team visited each site for a period ranging from a few hours to a full day to complete the interviews.

## 5.2 Recruitment and selection

The MoEAC sent out information letters and consent forms, and invited parents to participate in the focus group interviews for parents. Schools were asked whether there was a need for Sign Language interpreters, and forms in accessible formats for learners, teachers and parents with visual impairments were made available. Consent for children to participate in the study was obtained from their parents, and consent was obtained from all remaining participants.

### 5.2.1 Motivation for the inclusion of vulnerable groups

The inclusion of learners with disabilities was justified as the data would assist in the development of recommendations for preventing barriers and better meeting the needs of this vulnerable group. The motivation for including learners with disabilities was to hear their voices with regard to curriculum implementation, accessibility, attitudes of the school community and so on. The set of ethical principles in the Declaration of Helsinki concerning research into vulnerable groups was followed.

## 5.3 Data collection

In order to gain a holistic overview of the situation facing children and learners with disabilities in relation to inclusive education in Namibia, three forms of data collection were used, namely document analysis, structured questionnaires, and in-depth individual and focus group interviews. International and Namibian documents, policies and statistics were used to develop a literature review relating to inclusive education and children with disabilities.

The in-depth qualitative individual and focus group interviews were conducted from 27 February to 21 April 2017 in the four selected regions: Hardap, Khomas, Kunene and Oshana. The selected schools included resource schools, learning support classes in mainstream schools, and inclusive schools – a total of 15 schools. A range of interviewing techniques was used in the individual and focus group interviews to gain participants' views, with the aim of identifying and gaining an understanding of the needs of children with disabilities in Namibia and the barriers to their access to quality education and full participation in the education system. In addition, participants were asked to provide information on what steps would be needed to address and prevent the needs and barriers identified, as well as provide examples of best practices. In-depth interviews were used as they assist in gaining insights into the needs and barriers facing children with disabilities in Namibia. Semi-structured interview guides were used to guide participants and to allow for participant flexibility. These guides were designed in collaboration with UNICEF and the MoEAC, and ensured that the research objectives were met.

In addition to individual interviews, structured questionnaires were given to MoEAC officials and school principals before their interview and collected at the start of the interview. Ministry officials were asked about: the number of differing educational placement options available for children with disabilities in their region; training provided on inclusive education and disability; and how they support schools. The structured questionnaire given to principals included questions relating to: the numbers of teachers and children and learner-teacher ratios; placement options for children with disabilities; enrolment and placement procedures; hostel, school and classroom facilities; and support and training received.

The interviewers sourced were experts in the field of inclusive education. They were trained on using the interview guide, and each was provided with a brief of the study. The interviews were conducted in English, with a Namibian Sign Language interpreter provided on request to children and other participants who are deaf. Some participants made use of a language interpreter who translated the questions and answers from English into Afrikaans or the preferred indigenous Namibian language. The research team included interpreters for the languages spoken in the regions and localities visited.

## 5.4 Interviews

### 5.4.1 Individual interviews

Individual, qualitative, face-to-face interviews were conducted with principals, MoEAC officials, the National Disability Council, the National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia, OPDs, NGOs, civil society organisations and those working in vocational training centres and higher education institutions. These interviews were guided by semi-structured interview guides. In each region the interviews were held at the selected schools and the Regional Education Office. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded to ease the process of interview transcription and to prevent any loss of information.

### 5.4.2 Focus group interviews

At each school, separate focus group interviews were conducted with learners, teachers, hostel staff and parents. Interviews and questions used for the focus group interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide contained generic questions posed to all participants and specific questions relating to each category of participants.

## 5.5 Limitations of the rapid analysis

The limitations of the study included the following:

- Being a rapid analysis, the scope of inclusion in this study was limited in terms of the number of regions, schools and participants.
- Due to the requirements of the assignment, only data relating to learners with disabilities in the four identified regions was included.

# section 6

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



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The needs and barriers relating to the implementation of Namibia's *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education* taken from the findings of this rapid assessment are summarised in this section, together with the recommendations suggested for addressing and preventing these needs and barriers.



## 6.1 Attitudes towards learners with disabilities

Some teachers, principals and MoEAC officials viewed disability in a positive way and focused on the strengths of the learners with disabilities and how disability is part of diversity and something to be valued. On the other hand, some participants spoke of how many community members and other stakeholders have a negative view of disability, with some viewing disability as a curse or witchcraft and as something to be hidden away. During the interviews some teachers, principals and ministry officials showed attitudes of still seeing children with disabilities from a medical model perspective, in which the barriers are located within the child and the focus is on what they are not able to do. Many participants lacked insight into the social model of disability or the human rights view. A number of participants spoke of the need for both teachers and principals to have a positive attitude towards disability and inclusive education.

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### PRINCIPALS

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The attitude of the principal towards disability, inclusive education and children with disabilities often has an impact on the teachers as well as learners at the school. Several principals admitted that they did not have the appropriate skills or training for inclusive education. They felt that they were at a loss and did not know how to accommodate the needs of some of the learners with disabilities in their schools. The study revealed that this lack of knowledge and skills has a deep and negative impact on many learners with disabilities.

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*“You just see them during break, they are just sitting there alone. They don’t fit in, so now and then they answer you if you ask questions, but it is as if they don’t fit in anywhere.”*

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Many principals also highlighted that they did not feel empowered or supported by the Ministry. Although they had been informed of what they should be doing, they were not provided with a budget, materials or practical implementation strategies. They spoke of a lack of support from parents and parental involvement as being a major barrier.

Furthermore, it appeared that some principals had lost hope and motivation, or did not want to invest in the learners with disabilities or their teachers at their school. This was found to have a negative impact on the culture of the school in general. In these schools, staff morale was low, and learners and parents spoke of uncaring teachers and an absent principal.

A few principals expressed a far more positive outlook regarding their learners with disabilities. To them, despite the numerous challenges they faced, working in a resource school was more than just a job; it was a calling. They appeared to genuinely care about the learners’ wellbeing, both at school and in the long-term future. They spoke of how they needed to motivate their learners and how proud they were when employment was found for those who had completed their schooling. Many spoke of the great sacrifices that they and their teachers made for the learners. They showed genuine concern for the learners’ wellbeing and future, and set a positive culture within the school.

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*“What is their future? That is why we are here. We are working on moulding them on their future. We need to give them a purpose in life.”*

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Several principals also felt that they had a role to play in educating the community and future employers about disability and the learners at their schools. They were aware of the challenges faced by their learners with disabilities when they left school, and therefore motivated them to



work harder to prepare for employment in the real world. They encouraged the learners to go the extra mile to prove that persons with disabilities can also work hard – if not harder than those without disabilities. They recognised that this would help to change the perceptions of employers and other employees about disability. One principal mentioned that some community members believed that all persons with disabilities require additional time to get to and from work as well as to do their job, and that it was his duty to change this perception.

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*“If the boss comes there at 8 o’clock, he must see that the boy with the blue overall is already sitting in front of the gate on time.”*

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In some cases the personal relationship built by the principal and employers had a positive impact in the community in terms of more learners being accorded employment opportunities. Certain schools had developed a positive reputation, and employers in the community had developed a good working relationship with the school and had jobs ready and waiting for the learners with disabilities once they left school.

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*“There are companies who wait for us every year because we built up a reputation.”*

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The principals who were making a difference were generally in a supportive environment. They were grateful for the support they received from their Head of Department, and for the commitment of their teachers who really cared and wanted the best for their learners with disabilities.

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*“They are committed and I am very positive!”*

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## **Recommendations regarding principals**

- To change the way that principals view, treat and accommodate learners with disabilities, it is important that they receive disability sensitisation training. This training needs to focus on: the differing views of disability (namely the medical model and the social model); the dos and do nots when it comes to disability; which words and phrases are appropriate and which are not; addressing the myths and misconceptions; some basic information about disability in general; and what inclusive education means and how principals can implement it in their schools; what their role is in building an inclusive school and community; and how to partner with NGOs, OPDs and the private sector in order to obtain support and build relationships.
- Training needs to be conducted by suitably trained ministry officials in collaboration with higher education institutions, NGOs, OPDs and consultants.
- The MoEAC should provide principals with a budget for the resources and materials that they require to implement inclusive education in their schools.
- Principals need to coordinate ongoing meetings and workshops with other principals in their communities to share best practices and devise possible solutions to challenges when they arise.
- The Ministry should support, motivate and encourage principals, as well as ensure that they are held accountable in implementing inclusive education and accommodating learners with disabilities in their schools. The Ministry must build strong relationships with schools rather than only visiting schools when there are problems.
- The Ministry must recognise and acknowledge those principals who are doing good work, and use them and their schools as examples of ‘best cases’.
- Principals must be encouraged to build relationships with their local communities and schools. This can be done through, for example, open days, celebrations of International Disability Day, school cultural events such as plays and concerts, and inter-school sporting events, where others can learn more about the school and disability and change their perceptions about disability.

- Principals must develop and nurture relationships with local businesses, just as two of the principals from two resource schools have done. They need to encourage businesses to assist with practical job-placement training, and to make a financial contribution to support the school with funds for resources and assistive technology and devices, and to employ some of their learners when they have completed their education.

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## TEACHERS

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The study found that the outlook of the teacher towards disability could either cause or prevent barriers for learners with disabilities in their classrooms. Many teachers, especially those working in learning support classes, seemed very warm, caring and nurturing, and had a very positive attitude towards learners with disabilities. It was clear that they cared deeply for the learners in their care. They felt passionate about working with learners with disabilities and regarded this as the right thing to do. Many of them devoted extra time to the learners in their classes. These teachers were motivated and tried their very best, despite the numerous challenges they faced.

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*“I make time. Break time I will tell them, ‘Okay, you didn’t finish writing so you and I are going to sit, or after school we are going to sit a few more minutes ...’.”*

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On the other hand, there were a number of teachers who held a more negative outlook regarding learners with disabilities. They stated that the learners caused them stress and frustration, and that they would prefer not to teach them. It also emerged that some teachers lacked motivation, or had simply given up, or were very negative towards learners with disabilities.

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*“Because if my heart says no to inclusion, it’s just not going to happen.”*

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There were also teachers with both positive and negative views of learners with disabilities within the same school. These mixed views towards disability occurred even in schools whose principal had a positive outlook on inclusive education. It was found that while the principal was open to teaching and accommodating learners with disabilities in the school, many teachers would resist the change towards inclusion. This would upset many of those teaching learning support classes, because these teachers generally embraced inclusion as a life philosophy and cared a great deal for the learners with disabilities.

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*“You know inclusion; it grows on you and it becomes part of your heart and how you look at children. It’s almost your philosophy.”*

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When asked about how they felt about having learners with disabilities in the same school and classes as learners without disabilities, the majority of teachers in inclusive schools stated that they felt that learners with disabilities would be accommodated better in resource schools or learning support classes. The teachers generally felt that these learners would be better off in resource schools because they would have specialised teachers and smaller classes, and would be surrounded by learners with similar disabilities.

Teachers in mainstream schools which provided learning support classes indicated that learners with disabilities would be better accommodated in learning support classes or resource schools rather than in their mainstream classes. Some teachers admitted that they were afraid to teach learners with disabilities – especially learners with psychosocial, learning and ‘severe’ physical

disabilities. Their other concerns were that they would not be able to get through their curriculum on time and did not know how to teach learners with disabilities, and that these learners would be bullied by learners without disabilities. The overall response from all teachers interviewed in all of the differing school types was that there is a lack of knowledge and specialist skills to teach learners with disabilities, even in resource schools.

A number of teachers highlighted the importance of the attitude of the principal. The teachers in learning support classes, who seemed happy and were passionate and motivated, all had supportive principals who believed in inclusion and in the value of the learning support classes, the teachers of those classes and the learners themselves.

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*“I am getting support from the principal ... that helps! I really feel like I can go to her anytime. My kids can go to her anytime.”*

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A number of other teacher-related concerns were raised in interviews with teachers, principals and learners. Firstly, there seemed to be a pervasive lack of care or accountability for ensuring that learners with disabilities are accommodated. One example was a teacher who forgot to Braille a student’s final examination paper, which negatively impacted on this learner’s ability to write her examination, yet there was no recourse for this.

Learners with and without disabilities in seven separate interviews spoke of teachers having beaten, teased, belittled and bullied learners with disabilities. Some of the much younger learners with disabilities shared that they had been teased and bullied by their teachers because of their disabilities. Some of the older learners with disabilities were of the view that the attitudinal barriers were attributable more to the teachers than to their peers without disabilities. Many who had attended learning support classes or mainstream classes spoke of being verbally abused and being called derogatory names by their teachers, with some being told that they were bewitched.

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*“My first-class teacher’s attitudes was very bad.”*  
*“You do nothing, you are just stupid.”*  
*“You have been bewitched so you must get out of my class.”*

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Numerous participants, particularly principals and teachers, spoke of teacher stress and the matter of corporal punishment. Despite corporal punishment being outlawed in Namibian schools, this study found that many learners (with and without disabilities) are still being subjected to this form of abuse in schools and hostels. Learners spoke of being beaten on the head, upper back, arms or other parts of the body, often with objects such as whips, chalkboard dusters, metal pipes, hosepipes, canes and rulers, and they shared how they felt when beaten.

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*“very bad”, “sad”, “makes me want to cry”, “angry”,*  
*“I want to cry but we cannot cry. If you cry she will beat us.”*

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## **Recommendations regarding teachers**

- To change the way that teachers, view, treat, teach and accommodate learners with disabilities, it is important that they receive ongoing disability sensitisation training through in-service programmes. This training needs to accord with the principals’ training, with an additional focus on their roles as teachers in implementing inclusive education in their classrooms and schools.
- The training must be conducted by suitably trained MoEAC officials in collaboration with NGOs, OPDs and consultants, with *all* teachers targeted.

- The Ministry as well as principals should recognise, acknowledge and support all teachers who are effectively implementing inclusive education and successfully accommodating learners with disabilities.
- Teachers who have positive views and who are modelling ‘best practice’ must be encouraged to share what they are doing by sharing practical ideas and their stories with other teachers, principals and ministry officials through regular meetings and workshops and in publications.
- Teachers should be encouraged to have quarterly extensive meetings with teachers from other schools within their local communities, where they can share best practices and devise possible solutions to challenges when they arise
- Therapeutic briefing sessions are needed for teachers at resource schools.
- Teachers need training on how best to accommodate learners with different disabilities in their classrooms, and how to access or make assistive technology and devices to help these learners in the classrooms.
- Teachers should be given clear guidelines as to how to refer the parents and their children with disabilities to healthcare or other services that they might require, such as a disability grant from the State.
- The Ministry and principals should support, encourage and motivate teachers so that their attitude towards disability improves.
- In turn, the teachers must be held accountable and be dealt with appropriately if misconduct occurs.
- A reporting mechanism needs to be put in place allowing for learners to report teachers for misconduct. An SMS service is one possible reporting mechanism.
- Teachers need further sensitisation on the *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education*, the *National Disability Policy*, the Sustainable Development Goals (as they relate to inclusive education), the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

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## MINISTRY OFFICIALS

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One of the duties of MoEAC officials is to support schools. The attitudes of these officials towards disability and inclusive education will have a ripple effect on the integration and retention of learners with disabilities in schools. The interviews with ministry officials brought to light a wide spectrum of attitudes within the Ministry towards learners with disabilities. Some of these interviewees appeared to have a negative, patronising and dismissive view of learners with disabilities and the ideals of inclusion.

However, a number of these officials were clearly passionate and wanted to make a difference and improve the quality of education for all learners. They showed genuine concern for learners with disabilities and spoke in great detail about these learners’ needs and the barriers they face. A number of these officials also admitted that although they cared about the wellbeing of learners with disabilities, they sometimes felt helpless because they did not know how to accommodate these learners.

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*“We don’t know what to do and it is actually very disheartening. ... maybe one out of the 100 ... is a child who can be assisted to function in a mainstream school and excel. But most of them ... it’s like a dead-end street.”*

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*“It’s very frustrating for us and it sometimes feels like you are just swimming. There’s no end in sight. And you are not really making a difference.”*

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## Recommendations regarding ministry officials

- To change the way that MoEAC officials support schools which accommodate learners with disabilities, and the way that the officials themselves provide services and support for these learners, it is important that they receive disability sensitisation training. This training needs to accord with the principals' training, with an additional focus on the roles of ministry officials in providing training, support, monitoring and evaluation in the implementation of the Sector Policy.
- Training should be conducted by suitably trained ministry officials in collaboration with higher education institutions, NGOs, OPDs and consultants.
- Ministry officials should recognise and acknowledge those (principals, teachers, NGOs, OPDs, and others) who are effectively supporting schools in implementing inclusive education and successfully assisting learners with disabilities.
- Ministry officials in collaboration with NIED must review training materials and policies and ensure that they are in line with the social model and rights-based approach to disability within an inclusive education framework (ensuring that terminology is appropriate, examples are relevant, etc.).
- Ministry officials in collaboration with NIED and UNAM should develop standard operating procedures and guidelines to support teachers and principals in implementing all dimensions of inclusion.
- The Ministry needs to employ more therapists, school counsellors, inclusive education officers and other officials at both national and regional level to reduce burnout among teachers and to better assist schools and persons with disabilities, especially in rural areas.
- The Ministry should collaborate with other line ministries and consider outsourcing to the private sector to fill these much-needed roles.

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## PARENTS

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A significant barrier identified by a number of teachers of learning support classes as well as principals and NGOs was the attitude of parents towards the education of their children with disabilities. They stated that many parents, particularly those in rural areas, still believe that disability is a curse, an embarrassment or a result of something that they themselves did during their pregnancy. The stigma attached to disability remains an enormous obstacle to many parents' acceptance of their child's disability. Many teachers explained that there was a level of stigma attached to having a child with a disability, whether physical or intellectual, and that sometimes children with disabilities are hidden away. They said that children with the physical features of autism and/or Down syndrome are kept away, out of public sight.

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*"They're not brought out. People don't want them to be seen."*

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Being hidden away has had a negative effect on the education of many children with disabilities. Some had been kept away from school completely, and others had arrived at school at a very late age. Teachers stated that some children were already 11 years old when they came to school for the first time. One consequence of children losing out on the foundational years of education is that it is more difficult to teach them.

A number of teachers expressed sadness in relating that learners with disabilities in their classes had dropped out of school because their parents had no hope for them and thus removed them from school. Some of the parents interviewed felt that these children would never learn to support their parents financially when they were older.

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*“The one plainly told me, ‘You know what, I will keep my child on the farm; he’d rather help me with my goats!’”*

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Linked to the stigma, among different stakeholder groups interviewed there was a strong denial of disability. Some of the children with disabilities said that their parents did not believe that they had difficulties or a disability. When the children explained that they were struggling to see or to walk properly, for example, their parents would ignore them or call them a liar.

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*“My parents, they also didn’t believe so they would just say, ‘You are lying ... they only believed when they were told by my teacher.’”*

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On the other hand, some teachers shared that there were parents who were very accepting of their children’s disability, and who also cared about the wellbeing of other children with disabilities. Many of these parents were actively involved in the School Boards and some had also founded a parent support group or an NGO. The study revealed that many parents considered their child with a disability to be a special gift. In the interviews with parents it was evident that many parents care deeply for their children and would do anything to help them.

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*“She is a blessing and gives me so much joy.”*

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It was sometimes difficult for these parents to find a school which, and/or a teacher who, was able and willing to accommodate their child adequately, and some parents expressed their feelings of anger and frustration with teachers whom they felt were not giving their children with disabilities the support or education needed.

## **Recommendations regarding parents**

- To change the way that parents view disability, including how they care for, support, accommodate and encourage their own and other children with disabilities to attend school – it is important that they receive disability sensitisation training. The language and content of this training needs to be linguistically and culturally sensitive and appropriate for parents residing in differing areas of Namibia.
- Advocacy via national radio, television and printed media to inform and support parents of children with disabilities needs to be conducted.
- Training needs to be conducted by suitably trained MoEAC officials in collaboration with NGOs, OPDs and consultants. In addition to training, messages about the rights of children with disabilities to education and other services should be conveyed through the different language radio channels, on television and through print media.
- Where applicable, disability sensitisation can also be facilitated through the traditional leaders.
- Parents should be encouraged to contribute to school activities and to join NGOs or support groups in order to share this information with other parents in their communities.

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## **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

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Linked to the attitudes of parents, numerous interviewees spoke of a lack of involvement and participation on the part of parents of children with disabilities, and how this negatively impacts on the education and wellbeing of the children concerned. Principals and teachers spoke of such parents’ lack of attendance of parent-teacher meetings. The following is a quote from a principal.

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*“I would say at least 95% of the cases we have totally uninvolved parents. Most of them are really not there.”*

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Communication between the school and parents was said to be a constant challenge for most of the schools visited. Principals and teachers stated that the parents of learners with significant challenges and difficulties would not attend meetings or respond to calls and letters. This was a cause of great frustration to the teachers and left many of them feeling angry.

A number of teachers and hostel staff mentioned that many parents dropped off their child at the school hostel at the start of the year and were never seen again for the rest of the year. Principals spoke of how they had to contact parents to remind them to collect their child, or sometimes had to take children home in their private vehicles. Some teachers said that they had never met some of the parents who had arranged for their child to be dropped off by a taxi at the start of the year – with an envelope requesting enrolment and a small bag of clothing and no toiletries. Principals also spoke about parents who had dropped off their child at the school hostel at the start of the child’s school career many years ago and either were not seen again in years or had never been seen again.

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*“We have hostel kids, and we never see their parents in years.”*

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When asked for possible reasons for this lack of involvement, the teachers, principals and NGOs explained that the parents were generally either embarrassed about their child’s disability or did not care about their child, or believed that it is the school’s responsibility to educate and look after their child. On the other hand, a number of these interviewees felt that the parents simply did not know better or were dealing with socio-economic factors such as unemployment, HIV/AIDS, violence, substance or alcohol abuse, a lack of literacy or the additional responsibility of raising a grandchild or child of a family member.

A number of children said that their parents had left them at the hostel and never visited them. Some added that they had stayed at the hostel for the entire year and then were given the chance to go home for only a few days (e.g. five days) during the holidays. They felt very hurt by this lack of parental involvement in their lives.

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*“... sometimes you can just stay the whole year without going at home – only going at holidays.”*

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Some parents explained how they wanted their children to interact socially with other children in order to learn from them and be motivated to function at a higher level.

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*“Because they learn so much better by looking at other kids.  
‘Oh, I do it like that ... I can also do that.’”*

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Interviews with parents also revealed that some parents felt disempowered and that they were made to feel inferior by teachers and principals who appeared to be making decisions on their behalf without their input. Several parents highlighted that teachers and principals came across as being “superior” to them and dismissive of their views. Parents also spoke about how some teachers and principals used “large” words and terms which they did not understand, and they were too embarrassed to ask for clarification, or otherwise were worried that their child might be stigmatised if they questioned the teachers.

Interviews with parents highlighted the many challenges that they face in raising a child with a disability in Namibia. Many parents resided in areas where there were significant socio-economic barriers including alcohol and substance abuse. A number of them had no hope for themselves and wanted to send their child far away to a school with hostel facilities so that the child might have more opportunities and be protected from the negative socio-economic factors within his/her own community. A number of interviewees spoke of how many children were slipping through the cracks because they could not access education or had dropped out due to a lack of support and accommodations, or had been placed in a school or class that was not meeting their needs.

With regard to the challenge of parental involvement, one teacher working in a learning support class stated that she would not give up on her children (as she referred to them), and made sure to develop and maintain a relationship with each of the parents. She had obtained the telephone numbers of each parent, and then created a WhatsApp group for making regular contact with each parent. She ensured that she did not make contact only when there was a problem, but also to let the parents know when their child had achieved something or had done something good. The following is a quote from this teacher.

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*“I would call them if my child comes to school dirty. I will take a picture. I’ll WhatsApp it to the parents [saying] ‘Is this a child I must teach?’ I hold the parents accountable. Then they would apologise and you see, I push them.”*

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At times she made the effort to personally visit a child’s home, especially when concerned about an issue relating to the wellbeing of ‘her’ child, such as parental illness and no food.

One finding of the study is that creating awareness around disability and providing support for parents are necessary interventions of major importance in Namibia. Teachers referred to the cultural context and explained how blame is attached to the parents if they have a child with a disability, and often the parents are perceived as being bewitched. Some findings, however, were encouraging, such as a case where a teacher had raised awareness around a child’s disability and the mother had become involved and had taken responsibility for her child.

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*“... she started seeing [son’s name] and how I was handling it and how I related to him. And slowly but surely she got out of her bubble, and [child’s name] is doing most preciously, wonderfully well.”*

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## Recommendations regarding parental involvement

- It is important that parents are supported by schools, NGOs and OPDs, and that they understand that their involvement and participation directly influences their child’s education and wellbeing.
- Parents need to receive disability sensitisation training, which, it is hoped, would assist them in accepting their child’s disability and would lead to be more actively involved in building relationships and supporting their children and their education.
- Teachers must encourage parents to attend meetings where their child’s strengths as well as challenges will be discussed, so that parents feel more motivated to attend.
- Teachers must build and maintain closer relationship with parents. They can do this in person or via written messages, phone calls, SMSs or even, as one teacher did, a WhatsApp group to keep all of the parents up to date on what is happening with their children. This is especially important for parents whose children stay in the school hostel.
- Schools must hold regular meetings with parents, and must network and partner with MoEAC departments to ensure that parents know about and can access the support services needed.



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## CHILDREN WITHOUT DISABILITIES

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The way in which children without disabilities treat those with disabilities is often influenced by their teachers, parents and communities. Many learners with disabilities shared that they were teased by learners without disabilities in the school. During one focus group interview, a 12-year-old boy with a severe learning disability in an inclusive school began crying uncontrollably and said the following.

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*“They say I’m in special grade. Special grade children are mad.”*

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Most of the learners with disabilities said that they played only with their peers with disabilities, to avoid getting hurt and/or teased by learners without disabilities. This was confirmed by teachers who had created separate playgrounds for the learners’ protection.

A number of the teachers further explained that many of the learners are teased and provoked and experience cruelty from the learners without disabilities. They spoke of some cases where learners with disabilities had run away from school or even tried to commit suicide. From that point of view, some teachers felt that inclusion was not currently working, and that it will take a long time for people to stop teasing learners with disabilities.

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*“Because those kids get teased ... . They get really treated very badly.”*

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### Recommendations regarding children without disabilities

- To change the way that children without disabilities view disabilities, interact, socialise and support their peers with disabilities, it is important that they receive disability sensitisation information messages and training.
- This training must be integrated into their life skills programme at school.
- Training must also be adapted and modified to be appropriate for the children’s ages, level and understanding.
- The training should be as practical and informal as possible, where the children feel comfortable to ask questions.
- Adults and youth with disabilities from NGOs and OPDs or previous learners with disabilities should be encouraged to share their stories and answer learners’ questions.
- Disability-related days including the International Day of Persons with Disabilities should be commemorated through school activities such as writing poems, sharing stories and producing plays.

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## HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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In interviews with lecturers, support staff and student teachers with and without disabilities in higher education institutions, it became evident that disability sensitisation training is needed in these institutions. What made this evident was the language used and the concepts alluded to in referring to disability.

Past and current students with disabilities shared that they felt that many of their lecturers did not know how to accommodate their needs, and some felt discriminated against and unsupported.

Teachers mentioned that they did not gain practical experience in schools that accommodate children with disabilities when they were being trained to become teachers, and therefore felt that they did not have the practical skills needed for working with these children. Asked about the content of the inclusive education and disability course, both student teachers and lecturers replied that it is superficial-level content and does not contain sufficient detail to fully equip students to teach learners with disabilities.

Regarding the perceived attitudes of higher education institutions towards disability, students and some staff opined that it was merely “*an add-on, a nice-to-have, not a priority*”, and that these institutions were not giving disability the attention it deserves.

In interviews with teachers and principals it was said that newly qualified teachers were not receiving practical training on how to meet the needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms, and that the training they did receive was purely theoretical. A number of teachers and principals felt that lecturers at higher education institutions did not have a good understanding of the real needs and challenges that teachers face when teaching children with disabilities. Further, principals were of the view that newly qualified teachers should collaborate amongst themselves and visit schools to acquire first-hand knowledge of the real needs and challenges faced by learners with disabilities in schools. This will help to provide feedback to improve the quality of teacher training programmes so that they can meet the requirements of learners with disabilities.

Lecturers need to be aware of the language and terminology that they use when lecturing and developing their curriculum, lecture content, methodologies and materials, and in establishing relationships with schools for teaching practice and designing their research. If the lecturers continue to hold the medical-model view of disability, they will not be able to equip newly qualified teachers when they enter schools.

## **Recommendations regarding higher education institutions**

- To change the way that lecturers and support staff in higher education institutions view, treat, teach and accommodate student teachers with disabilities, it is important that they are trained and specialised in the field of disability and inclusive education. In addition, the lecturers should continue to upgrade their knowledge and skills on inclusive education so that they can support the Ministry in conducting continuous professional development for teachers.
- Lecturers need to include modules on disability and inclusive education in their curriculum for all student teachers, not just for those who are going to teach in resource schools.
- Higher education institutions must conduct further research into the implementation and impact of inclusive education in Namibian schools.
- These institutions should develop a curriculum focusing on the training on the various types of disability and how teachers should work with individual children with disabilities.
- These institutions need to partner with schools on a regular basis in order to keep up to date with what is happening on the ground.
- These institutions must ensure that student teachers visit schools to see inclusive education in practice, rather than just being given the theory.
- Research into inclusive education needs to be conducted and findings published in academic peer-reviewed journals.
- Tertiary training institutions need to engage with communities and initiate discussions on topics relating to disability.
- Students need to be encouraged to complete their teaching practice in schools that accommodate children with disabilities so that they are better equipped once qualified.
- The MoEAC, NGOs and OPDs should collaborate with higher education institutions to develop and share resources, materials and training programmes that equip student teachers to teach children with disabilities and to implement the principles of inclusive education.

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## COMMUNITIES

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The attitude of a community will have a direct impact on how parents and their children with disabilities are treated, protected, included and integrated within that community. In various interviews it was said that many communities in Namibia, especially those in rural areas, still viewed disability as a curse and as something that should be hidden away. Parents shared that, as a result of this view, they feared for the safety of their children, especially those with intellectual disabilities and visual impairment.

Teachers, principals and NGOs spoke of how difficult it was to get community members to talk about and identify their children with disabilities. They said that this was due to fear, ignorance and the stigma attached to disability, especially in rural areas. NGOs and MoEAC officials spoke of the urgent need to run sensitisation programmes, particularly in rural communities, to educate all communities about disability so that more children with disabilities can access education.

Many teachers also referred to the extreme vulnerability of the children, and expressed their concern for the children's safety when they walk to school and back home.

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*“They are at risk. They are in danger. Sometimes we lie awake at night-time because our child is probably alone in the streets now.”*

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Teachers highlighted that some of their learners with disabilities were subject to discrimination by fellow passengers making use of public transportation. Others spoke of taxi drivers refusing to transport learners with albinism, other visual impairments and other physical disabilities. A number of teachers and parents highlighted the issue of a lack of accessible transportation for children who are wheelchair users. Some taxi drivers refuse to stop and transport these children or charge a double fare for the child and the wheelchair. Many children spoke of no one wanting to help them to transfer into the taxi and fold and lift the wheelchair into the taxi. This made life incredibly difficult for the parents of children with disabilities. Even if they wanted to go out with their child, their options were severely limited, or they simply could not go out.

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*“Some of them charge them extra and that is what makes it so difficult for the parents ... . They cannot take their child out.”*

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### Recommendations regarding communities

- To change the way that communities view disability, interact, socialise and support persons with disabilities, it is important that they receive disability sensitisation information via mass media including radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and the use of community and faith-based leaders to advocate the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Communities need to receive linguistically and culturally appropriate advocacy and sensitisation information messages from all stakeholders, including schools, NGOs, DPOs and ministries.
- The training should be as practical and informal as possible, where the community members feel comfortable to ask questions.
- Adults and youth with disabilities who work for NGOs and OPDs, and those living in the community, should be encouraged to share their stories and answer the community members' questions about disability.
- Communities need to be encouraged to protect and look after their children with disabilities by working in partnership with the relevant departments of various line ministries.



Photos on this page: © Down Syndrome Association of Namibia (Photographer: Willem Vrey)

**“Children are not disabled because they cannot walk, hear or see. They are disabled by a society that excludes them.”**

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)





## 6.2 Language, words and phrases relating to disability

From the language, words and phrases used in interviews, it appeared that many interviewees lacked understanding of the apposite terminology relating to disability and inclusive education. Interviewees also lacked awareness and knowledge about different disabilities, especially non-visible disabilities such as learning and psychosocial disabilities. They were not aware of what is appropriate and not appropriate when speaking about disability. Numerous interviewees made use of outdated and derogatory words when referring to disability and children with disabilities. Terms used by teachers, principals and MoEAC officials in interviews included the following.

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*“the special ones”, “the diversity children”, “children with special education needs”, “disabled/disability children”, “the normal ones and the others”, “the spastics”, “slow learners”, “the deafs”, “the deaf and dumbs”, “the special class children”, “the hearing aid ones”.*

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Children with disabilities shared that teachers, other learners and community members referred to them as *“the ‘dom’ [stupid] ones”, “the others”* and *“slow learners”*, and also used local-language phrases that refer to disability as an object or animal. The identification of the words and phrases caused a number of children to become emotional in retelling their experiences.

### Recommendations on language, words and phrases relating to disability

- To change the language, words and phrases used when referring to disability, specific training is needed for principals, teachers, ministry officials, children without disabilities, parents, officials of higher education institutions, and communities.
- This training should show the trainees how their view of disability will influence the words they use, and will have a direct impact on their actions and how they treat, interact with, integrate and teach children with disabilities.
- This training can be included in the disability sensitisation training, to impart a widespread understanding of the origins of the derogatory words, why they must not be used, and what words are more appropriate.
- A reference guide on acceptable and unacceptable language should be developed and disseminated to all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, children, NGOs, OPDs, the media and government officials.

## 6.3 Lack of awareness on when, where and how to access support and services

Many parents and teachers spoke of their lack of awareness of how to access support, services and assistive technology and devices to assist learners with disabilities. In interviews it was apparent that parents lacked clarity on how to access referral pathways to healthcare for their children. Parents spoke of having to spend large amounts of money on transport to, and accommodation in, larger towns where the medical facilities are located. Often the process of travelling to a town to see a range of healthcare professionals took a number of days, which was problematic for those who had jobs. Parents spoke of long queues at local clinics and hospitals, and of health professionals being unable to assist them. Asked about specific assistive technology and devices to assist their children, many parents were not aware of what is available or how to access the available items.

Therapists spoke of feeling despondent when a parent or family member arrived with a child with a disability expecting to have an assessment conducted without having made an appointment

as they did not know the procedure. One therapist shared that she would “make a plan” as she knew that if she sent the parent away, the chances of the child being assessed and enrolled in a school would be very slim. Parents said that they and their children would have benefited from receiving this form of support had they been aware of such services.

NGOs and OPDs stated that they lacked the resources needed for regular outreach programmes, especially in rural areas. This caused enormous frustration as many of the children represented by these organisations urgently required early interventions. They spoke of the need for funding to support early intervention programmes and disability-specific training and support for parents and teachers. A mother who had established her own NGO shared the following.

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*“There are parents who just don’t know what to do. They have no knowledge about what is out there for them, how they can get help, what can be done for them. The whole thing about special needs ... people are afraid of it. They think it means that this person can’t do anything, function in any way. Money is also a problem because you must understand that our people can do basic assessments but only for certain things. And there are very few ... there are no other psychologists in the rest of the country with the Ministry of Education.”*

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In addition, many teachers interviewed in resource and inclusive schools and learning support classes were not aware of how to access additional support for their children with disabilities, especially relating to assistive devices and medical interventions. There appeared to be a lack of collaboration between healthcare professionals, paramedical teams, NGOs, parents and teachers which negatively impacted on the health, wellbeing and education of children with disabilities.

## **Recommendations regarding lack of awareness on when, where and how to access support and services**

- The MoEAC, in collaboration with other line ministries including Health and Social Services, should run awareness programmes and provide parents, communities and teachers with clear referral pathways to access the support and assistance needed.
- A database of available services and how to access them should be developed by the MoEAC in collaboration with the MoHSS, and should be made available to schools.
- A flowchart showing how to conduct screening and referral processes should be developed and disseminated to all relevant institutions.
- The MoEAC should hire more therapists with experience and a working knowledge of children with disabilities, and should also provide outreach programmes and screening in rural areas.
- NGOs and OPDs should build networks and partnerships with local businesses and the wider private sector to fund outreach and early intervention programmes, especially in rural areas.
- Parents should be encouraged to act as community resource persons who assist other parents of children with disabilities by sharing with them information on how and where to access referral and intervention services.

## **6.4 Lack of specialist disability knowledge, practical skills and resources**

Teachers and principals shared that they did not have the specialised disability knowledge and practical skills necessary to meet the needs of the learners with disabilities in their classrooms. The vast majority of the teachers in resource schools and those teaching learning support classes and inclusive classes had not received any additional training. Many of them expressed feelings

of frustration, exhaustion, being overwhelmed, wanting to give up and being unsupported, simply because they did not have the basic skills, knowledge or materials to screen, identify, assess and support learners with disabilities.

The Sector Policy requires teachers in resource schools to serve as resource persons for other schools, but those interviewed in this study said that in reality they did not have the specialised training, knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of learners with disabilities in their own classes, let alone serve as a resource to other teachers and schools.

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*“We try our best, but we don’t have the training or skills to teach the children. We just don’t know what to do.”*

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A senior official in the MoEAC stated the following.

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*“The teachers are not trained for special education but are teaching at a special school.”*

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Many teachers working in resource schools spoke of the lack of training and resources as being a significant barrier.

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*“They don’t have the resources. They don’t have the skills.”*

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Some teachers said that although they lacked specialised training, knowledge, skills or materials, they had found, or were willing to try to find, creative ways to teach learners with disabilities. One teacher had found shops in her town which offered a free Wi-Fi connection, and she would spend afternoons in these shops using her mobile phone to Google ways to help the children in her class. She said that she was not willing to give up on her children like the rest of her school had done. Other teachers spoke of networking with colleagues and making their own resources from recycled materials. They felt that many teachers made excuses about not helping learners with disabilities as they were scared, overwhelmed or at times too lazy.

Many teachers stated that they were unable to effectively implement inclusive education because they lacked the requisite resources. On the other hand, a few teachers of learning support classes and some of those working in two resource schools were of the view that a lack of resources is just an excuse, since teachers should be resourceful and share ideas amongst themselves.

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*“The excuse is, ‘We don’t have money to buy the stuff’. So then you show them what you can do with recycled materials. They need to explore, work with the resources, play with the resources in order to buy into it, and I think by getting that kind of confidence, they will feel more able.”*

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## **SKILLS NEEDED**

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A number of principals and teachers working with children needing high levels of support shared that they lacked the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the learners. Teachers working in schools for the deaf, or those with children with hearing impairments, spoke of the lack of trained audiologists to test the children’s hearing, or a speech and language therapist to provide therapy and repair and test equipment such as hearing aids.

Several schools were in possession of donated equipment which either was outdated or the school did not have a staff member trained to use it – an example being fitting a hearing aid correctly. Teachers stated that they did not have the specific skills and knowledge needed for teaching deaf learners. Most teachers had also never heard of global trends such as the Bi-lingual Bi-cultural model. Furthermore, the majority of teachers working in resource schools for the deaf were not fluent in Sign Language and had a very limited understanding of deaf culture.

Rather than learning Sign Language, some teachers in schools for the deaf were using Teacher Deaf Assistants to deliver the actual teaching in their classrooms. Some of the Teacher Deaf Assistants interviewed expressed frustration about teachers who write notes on the blackboard and then expect the Teacher Deaf Assistants to teach the deaf learners while they sat marking papers or even left the classroom. These Teacher Deaf Assistants had no teaching background or qualifications, and some had not completed their own education. Some of the interpreters who interpreted for deaf learners in Grades 11 and 12 had only a Grade 8 education themselves, hence they lacked knowledge of the content that they were signing.

There were teachers working in schools for learners with visual impairments who were unable to read Braille, or did not know how to modify their teaching to accommodate children with low vision, or did not know about or use assistive technology and devices.

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*“They [teachers] didn’t even know what a magnifying glass was. They didn’t even know that I had to sit closer to the board so that I can see. They would usually write in these tiny, tiny font sizes so that I can’t see. It was so challenging.”*

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Many teachers emphasised the need for disability-specific training for teachers to accommodate the specialised needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms.

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*“We need to be given a training that is relevant to this specific type of disability and type of learner that we having.”*

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## **PRACTICAL SKILLS NEEDED IN THE CLASSROOM**

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Therapists, psychologists and MoEAC officials felt that teachers lacked training and practical skills relative to classroom management and modification, teaching style, teaching methodologies, developing teaching and learning resources, and curriculum adaptation. In addition they said that teachers appeared to be unaware of assistive technology and devices or how to access these.

Several teachers felt that learners with disabilities were not able to follow the same academic curriculum as those without disabilities. As a result, many resource schools had removed certain subjects, or certain content from some subjects, which they deemed unsuitable for children with disabilities. This is concerning as teachers have no authority to remove a subject or any section of the curriculum – this is done only at curriculum level. Other teachers stated that they ‘modify’ the curriculum by removing from their timetable certain sections of subjects, or at times even a whole subject, rather than making adaptations or using assistive technology and devices.

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*“Geography is having a lot of maps. A virtually blind learner won’t be able to do all this, so we know we have to remove some of the subject. We look at the subject that are very difficult. He won’t be able to cope with it, so we remove.”*

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The preceding quote conveys that principals and teachers have neither the training nor the skills to be able to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of all children in the school. They do not have access to resources and materials, nor the practical knowledge required to assist the learners.

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## ABILITY TO TEACH

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Getting through the curriculum before the national examinations was highlighted by teachers in inclusive schools and learners in senior grades as a major concern. Teachers felt that insufficient time was allocated to ensuring that children understand a topic before they have to move on to the next topic. Learners with disabilities felt that their teachers lacked motivation or did not have the skills or knowledge needed to adequately teach them.

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*“They give us free marks for things that they have never taught us about. You are asking, “Sir, please can you teach us about this?” No, she or he is ignoring, but when it comes to the examination, they are saying you must leave [those questions] out; I will give you free marks. And that’s unfair.”*

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On the other hand, a number of teachers in resource schools said that because they had not been trained on how to teach learners with disabilities, they had done their own research to glean what is needed. The common view of these teachers was that a positive attitude towards learners with disabilities is the most important thing that a teacher needs to be successful.

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*“You can have all the training and resources you need, but ... our attitudes are different. We have love and a heart for these children. We care about the children.”*

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Teachers also spoke of the need to collaborate and share best practices with each other.

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*“We give each other support. We are all here because we want to be here. We want to work with special children, otherwise we wouldn’t be here. That is what makes this easier.”*

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## KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO SCREEN, IDENTIFY, ASSESS AND SUPPORT

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Many teachers shared that they did not know how to identify or assess learners with disabilities. During a teacher focus group interview in an inclusive school, it emerged that one teacher who had taught a learner with a disability for four years had no idea that the learner had an extreme visual impairment. The others in this focus group seemed surprised that this teacher had neither noticed this impairment nor provided the accommodations and support needed. In the interview with this learner, she said that she’d grown tired of asking her teachers for accommodations and had given up. Instead, she would just sit and listen in class, and then ask her friends after the class to help her to make out what the teacher had written on the board.

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## HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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The vast majority of the teachers and principals interviewed felt that the teacher training that they received at higher education institutions had not adequately prepared them to implement inclusive education or meet the needs of learners with disabilities in the classrooms. Their common

opinion of the inclusive education module recently added to some courses was that it is a purely theoretical module that will not equip the students to accommodate or meet the needs of children with disabilities. Teachers said that this module had not given them the specialist knowledge or skills needed to assess, diagnose or teach learners with disabilities. This was highlighted by both teachers who had been teaching for many years and those who were newly qualified.

Higher education institutions (including the Vocational Training Centres) said that they lacked capacity, skills and time to devote to their courses as much as was needed.

A number of principals and teachers felt that many lecturers in higher education institutions did not have an understanding of the challenges of teaching children with disabilities and the real needs of the teachers concerned. This they felt was due to the lecturers not having taught in schools that accommodate children with disabilities, with the result that they were not able to equip student teachers adequately. A few principals and experienced teachers were of the view that the teacher training module covering disability does not provide the requisite training.

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*“It’s old information. It’s not relevant. It’s more theory.  
Teachers coming in are not able to meet the needs of the children.”*

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Another major challenge experienced by many in the more skill-orientated resource schools is the differing qualifications and teaching abilities of teachers and instructors. Many expressed frustration about teachers with teaching degrees being able to teach the theoretical components of the subjects, but not possessing the practical skills needed to teach the practical components. Conversely, the instructors (most of whom come from industry and/or VTCs) have the practical skills and knowledge to teach their subjects, but lack the methodological know-how and teaching ability as they have not undergone any formal teacher training.

In-service training on inclusive education and disability sensitisation training have been piloted in a few of Namibia’s regions, but the pilot was run for only two-and-a-half days and focused on theoretical issues relating to the Sector Policy rather than on the practical implementation of the policy as well as training to build disability-specific skills. Teachers spoke of trainers lacking the practical knowledge to answer some of their questions. Also there appeared to be confusion as to what should be covered in disability sensitisation training, since the pilot seemed to be focused on educating teachers about the Sector Policy rather than disability awareness.

Several principals spoke of problems related to using the scaffolding/cascade approach to training dissemination, whereby the teachers trained go on to train the rest of the teachers in their schools. Essentially, the trained teachers are not necessarily skilled enough and/or not confident enough to train others. Ministry officials spoke of capacity, time and budget restraints preventing them from providing more suitable training as well as monitoring and evaluation of the training. One MoEAC official said that the logistics pose another significant challenge to teacher training.

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*“The costs around training and getting teachers out of the school ... is always, always an issue.”*

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Numerous interviewees spoke of a lack of capacity of the Regional Education Offices to support schools and provide teacher training as effectively as planned.

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*“Even at regional level there are supposed to be some inclusive education officers and special education officers, but the regional school counsellors pretty much do all of that work. They [the regional offices] are not capacitated.”*

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## Recommendations regarding the lack of specialist disability knowledge, practical skills and resources

- The following training is needed:
  - **Pre-service:** All teacher training students need disability-related training while studying at higher education institutions, regardless of whether or not they plan to teach children with disabilities.
  - **In-service:** Working teachers require training on how to accommodate and teach the children with disabilities who are already in their schools and classrooms.
- Other stakeholders such as therapists and social workers should receive regular training.
- While a theoretical component is important during pre-service education, the practical-skills component is equally vital, as are training evaluation and ongoing monitoring of the impacts of the trainings.
- The training should be conducted by lecturers in collaboration with the MoEAC, NGOs, OPDs and consultants.
- This training needs to be built into the compulsory teacher training curriculum from first year for all teacher training students in higher education institutions.
- Lecturers should be well trained, and should possess both practical and theoretical knowledge, and ideally they should have worked with children with disabilities.
- In-service training needs to take place with well-trained and qualified officials of the MoEAC and higher education institutions, along with (if required) consultants who have the specific knowledge and skills needed to provide the training and answer participants' questions.
- The MoEAC needs to be provided with an adequate budget for implementing and rolling out the training within higher education institutions effectively.
- The curriculum and content of the training for teachers, therapists and social workers need to be developed with the participation and involvement of the Disability Sector (including OPDs), NGOs, parents, schools, the Ministry and consultants.
- All training and associated materials should be assessed regularly to ensure that they remain up to date and relevant.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the disability-specific training should take place on an ongoing basis.
- All schools need to have access to the Internet and computers, so that teachers can conduct their own research and learners can benefit from some of the opportunities that this technology offers – this recommendation being in line with the Fifth National Development Plan (NDP5) and the Harambee Prosperity Plan (HPP).

Disability-specific teacher training needs to include the following components:

- Conducting basic screening, identification, assessments, referrals and support.
- Planning intervention strategies, and developing classroom and teaching modifications.
- Gaining practical skills for accommodating different learning needs in the classroom.
- Understanding the specific accommodations needed for different types of disability.
- Gaining practical knowledge about the available assistive technology and devices (both low-tech and high-tech devices) and how to source these and other materials, and skills for making their own assistive devices using everyday locally sourced materials.
- Adapting lessons so that all learners are accommodated.
- Making the classroom physically accessible (seating arrangements, lighting, acoustics, etc.).
- Assessing children using alternative assessment strategies.
- Modifying classroom layout and teaching strategies.
- Using locally sourced and recyclable materials to create one's own teaching materials.
- How to adapt and differentiate the curriculum appropriately and plan accordingly.
- Modifying assessments and related accommodations.

- Practical training on accommodating children with high levels of support – i.e. reading and producing Braille, teaching children who are deaf using the Bi-lingual Bi-cultural model, and using alternative and augmentative communication.
- Teacher training students need to have practical teaching exposure in schools accommodating children with disabilities.

## 6.5 Lack of school resources, materials and assistive technology and devices

Teachers and principals in most schools shared that they did not have sufficient resources and materials to meet the needs of learners with disabilities in the classroom.

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*“The lack of resources is another major barrier. I think it is our biggest, or one of the most biggest barriers.”*

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Many of the resource schools either lacked or did not have the appropriate teaching and learning materials needed, ranging from concrete apparatus for teaching basic concepts such as counting, to visual and tactile materials.

Schools accommodating children with visual impairments highlighted that although some of them had equipment such as Perkins Brailers, a lot of equipment was broken and needed servicing or there was not enough paper. Other schools had received donations of computers, hardware and software, but these were outdated, broken or insufficient.

Other teachers shared that they had computers but did not know how to use them. One teacher shared her frustration of having to use the free-trial versions of computer software which her children urgently needed, as she did not have money to purchase the licenses for using these programmes. These free-trial versions proved unreliable and did not have the functions that the children required.

Other teachers and instructors working in resource schools that offered skills subjects spoke of having old and outdated resources and not having tools and equipment that matched those used in the industries where the children would go for their practical training or for employment after completing their training.

Teachers and learners spoke of the lack of assistive technology and devices in their classrooms. Magnifiers, computers, hardware and software such as large keyboards and screen-reading and enlarging products (e.g. JAWS and Zoomtext respectively), Braille embossers and brailers and other equipment and assistive devices that children with visual impairments required were identified as being urgently needed. Without these, many teachers are unable to provide the learners with study materials or notes, and children are forced to share equipment or to ask for additional time to complete their examinations. Children with visual impairments shared how this caused them great stress, especially around examination time when they felt that the unavailability of devices placed them at a disadvantage to perform their best. A principal shared the following.

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*“In terms of teacher aids, we have a list that we send to the regional directors then they say ‘OK, it’s fine.’ Some of the things are very expensive then we don’t know where to find them. No matter the government give us the UPE money, the visual impaired things are very expensive and we cannot afford them.”*

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## Recommendations regarding the lack of school resources, materials and assistive technology and devices

- The MoEAC needs to provide the schools with a budget for specialist resources, vocational equipment and tools in the latest technology, and for other teaching and learning materials, to enable teachers to meet the individual needs of learners with disabilities in the classroom.
- Funding allocations should be evaluated each year and adjusted accordingly.
- Maintenance, servicing and repairs should be included in the budget.
- Teachers need specific training on how to use the materials and assistive devices effectively.

### 6.6 Lack of classroom assistants and carers

A number of parents, NGOs and OPDs highlighted the need for classroom assistants and carers to help learners with disabilities in the classrooms and school hostels. Some children require assistance with physical tasks including feeding, toileting and moving around the school, while others need someone to help them to understand what the teacher is saying or to assist them with reading and writing tasks.

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*“One that is also the biggest challenge for the children is that some kids just need a support person or an assistant at school whereby the education system is currently not yet giving that.”*

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The study found that many children with physical and learning disabilities were excluded from the education system completely, only because they would not be provided with an assistant and their parents did not have the funds to pay for one privately.

## Recommendations regarding the lack of classroom assistants and carers

- The MoEAC must provide schools and school hostels with funding to provide hostel-based carers and classroom assistants for learners with disabilities who need additional assistance with classroom and daily-living activities.
- Schools should be given the flexibility to appoint parents or other caregivers in these positions, as paid employees or as volunteers.
- It is important that carers and classroom assistants are provided with training on how to meet the individual needs of learners with disabilities.
- Funding should be provided for materials such as linen savers, diapers, catheters, specialist feeding and seating equipment, or these items must be procured through the Ministry of Health and Social Services and mandated to the MoEAC’s Special Programmes and Schools Division.

### 6.7 Challenges in inclusive schools

The inclusive schools included in this study do not follow the principles of full inclusion as made explicit in the Sector Policy, whereby all children should be educated in the same classrooms. Further, the majority of learners with disabilities currently enrolled in these schools experience numerous challenges on a daily basis. Teachers said that no changes had been made in respect of teacher training, materials or facilities, and that only school names had been changed to reflect inclusivity.

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*“Just the added stress of having learners with disabilities in schools.”*

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**“All children should be a part of society, not apart from society.”**

**United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)**



Many teachers highlighted that they had very large class sizes and could not identify, assess or meet the needs of individual learners with disabilities in their classes. Several MoEAC officials shared that some learners had been placed in inclusive schools because the resource schools and learning support classrooms were full and their needs were not being met.

The researchers did not see many inclusive practices taking place in the majority of the inclusive schools visited. Teacher morale appeared to be low in most of these schools, and many teachers expressed frustration about the large class sizes and being expected to accommodate learners with disabilities. A number of these teachers stated that they would prefer not to have learners with disabilities in their classes, because they were holding the rest of the learners back and were affecting the overall pass rate of the class and the school. All of the teachers interviewed in these schools stated that they had not received any disability-related training and did not have skills to teach learners with disabilities. A few of these teachers expressed empathy for learners with disabilities, but the vast majority stated that they would prefer not to have these learners in their classrooms or that they should go to resource schools.

A few of the inclusive schools had embraced learners with disabilities and showed that inclusion can work if effected with the right approach. Three interviewees who were former learners with disabilities at an inclusive school said that although they had found school challenging, they were grateful for having received an education in an inclusive school as this had enabled them to go to university and to get a job. They indicated that this might not have been likely had they attended a resource school, due to the subject choices and grades offered in many resource schools.

A number of principals, teachers and MoEAC officials spoke of overcrowded classrooms in inclusive schools posing a significant challenge to the effective implementation of inclusive education in Namibia. Ministry officials and principals said that teachers are barely able to meet the needs of learners without disabilities due to the large class sizes as well as the extensive socio-economic challenges that those learners face.

There was a range of challenges experienced in inclusive schools across the regions visited. For example, many interviewees noted that learners with visual impairments were unable to see the blackboard due to overcrowding and poor lighting. The overcrowded situation also affected those learners with hearing impairments who were not able to lip-read or follow the teacher. Furthermore, learners who were wheelchair users did not have the space to move around the classroom or participate in break-time activities.

## **Recommendations regarding challenges in inclusive schools**

- Teachers and principals in inclusive schools must receive disability sensitisation training as well as disability-specific training to better equip them to understand their roles and responsibilities, and to accommodate, support and effectively teach learners with disabilities.
- Teacher-learner ratios need adjusting so as to lower the learner numbers to enable teachers to better meet learners' individual needs.
- The teacher-learner ratio needs examining to ensure that all children can be accommodated and have their learning needs met. If this is not feasible, then teaching assistants will be needed.

## **6.8 Challenges in resource schools**

While resource schools and learning support classes in mainstream schools are not seen as being the long-term goal of an inclusive education system in Namibia, they currently provide a better education to learners with disabilities than most of these learners in inclusive schools receive. Although the majority of teachers in resource schools have not had any additional training, they



appear to be more accepting of disability, and want to make a difference and are more motivated than the majority of teachers interviewed in inclusive schools.

As discussed earlier in relation to both mainstream and inclusive schools, there were concerns that some teachers in resource schools were mistreating some learners and had issues that needed to be dealt with.

A number of interviewees who were former learners in resource schools shared their enjoyment of attending such a school. A few of them mentioned that resource schools have a vital role to play in developing learners with disabilities' self-esteem and confidence. Deaf former learners said that they were grateful for having attended a school for the deaf as they had learnt Namibian Sign Language (NSL), had learnt about deaf culture and had socialised with other people from the deaf community, all of which they felt would not have happened in an inclusive school. However, they were concerned that the majority of teachers working in these schools were not fluent in NSL and that this remained a significant challenge.

A number of persons with disabilities from NGOs spoke of the benefits of being able to socialise with other children with the same disabilities and struggles. Some of the parents interviewed shared that they were happy that their child could attend a resource school as they felt that the teachers in these schools have a better understanding of how to accommodate these children. However, a few parents remarked that their child was not offered the same subject choices as the learners with disabilities in mainstream schools were offered, and that not all teachers in all resource schools were helping the learners to the extent that they should. Parents and principals expressed concerns that some teachers in resource schools were mistreating learners and had anger and control issues that should be dealt with. Other principals shared that their teachers did not teach all of the content of some subjects as they felt that the learners with disabilities would not be able to understand some of the content. Parents felt that although this may be the case for some children, others were being held back as a result. Various interviewees also noted that many learners receive little parental support due to the long distances between resource schools and learners' homes.

## Recommendations regarding challenges in resource schools

- Resource schools should continue accommodating children with disabilities, and should work with, support and collaborate with other schools that accommodate learners with disabilities – in effect acting as centres of excellence and support for other schools within their respective clusters and regions.
- Teachers need training wherein they are taught about the roles and responsibilities of all schools within an inclusive education model. Bearing in mind that resource schools will not close, teachers should be supported in accommodating learners who need high levels of support.
- Teachers working in schools for the deaf must be fluent in Namibian Sign Language and must also understand deaf culture, or they should be willing to attain this fluency and understanding through in-service training and socialising with members of the deaf community.
- Teachers of learners with visual impairments should understand how to read and produce materials in accessible formats.
- Resource schools need to carefully examine the subjects that they offer, and should be encouraged to adapt the curriculum and not leave out sections of the curriculum.
- Teachers should be trained on how to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of all children in their classes, and will need support in doing so.
- Resource schools should form closer bonds with the parents in order to improve the support available to the learners as well as the school. Technology could be used to send updates about learners to their parents, and to maintain regular two-way contact between the schools and parents.



## 6.9 Challenges in learning support classes in mainstream schools

Teachers and principals in schools with learning support classes felt that some parents were more prepared to send their children with disabilities to these schools. They said that parents believed that their children looked ‘normal’ when they wore the same school uniform, and could use the same school transport to the same schools as their friends’ children. These interviewees also mentioned that many parents felt embarrassed and ashamed about their child’s disability, and sought to hide the fact that their child was attending a learning support class. One parent said that having her child in a learning support class made the child “*look like everyone else*”.

Parents interviewed said that they were happy that their child would get the additional support needed in the learning support classes, and that these classes were smaller and the child could attend the same school as his/her siblings. Learners with disabilities interviewed who moved from a mainstream class into the learning support class shared that they were far happier in the latter. They were less afraid of the teachers and other children teasing and making fun of them, and they appreciated having teachers who are more patient and caring. Another significant challenge identified by a number of interviewees is the lack of support and learning support classes available to learners in higher grades, as these classes are currently limited to primary schools.

### Recommendations regarding challenges in learning support classes in mainstream schools

- Learning support classes in mainstream schools should continue to accommodate children with disabilities, and need to be strengthened in terms of resources and training.
- The management of the learning support classes should be strengthened through resource allocation, teacher training and support from the MoEAC.
- Consideration should be given to extending learning support classes and other interventions for learners to secondary schools, rather than limiting them to primary schools, so that more learners receive the support they require to be able to learn and to avoid dropping out of the education system.

## 6.10 Shortage of resource schools and learning support classes

All interviewees pointed to the need for more resource schools and more learning support classes in mainstream schools. There seems to be a significant shortage of resource schools available for learners with disabilities across Namibia, and few of the existing ones are located in rural areas. An MoEAC official provided the following details.

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*“We have 10 resource schools, and six of those schools are in Khomas, in Windhoek, alone. We have one in the south in Hardap and one in Omusati in the north. Then Eluwa in the Oshana region and Ohangwena region we have also another school. There is a need for more special schools in the regions.”*

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In these interviews, the shortage of resource schools was said to result in many children being turned away and excluded from the education system. A number of principals shared that while there was a limit to the number of children that the school could accommodate, they were prepared to accommodate more as they knew there was nowhere else for these learners to go. A principal

shared that having to turn away learners was “*soul-destroying*” for him, as he believed that these children would never receive an education. An MoEAC official shared this frustration in relation to a lack of resource schools to accommodate learners who need high levels of support.

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*“We get lots of our kids that cannot go into a mainstream school.  
But the waiting lists ... there is just no place for them.”*

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The few available resource schools and learning support classes in mainstream schools are located in large towns, away from the rural areas, where they are more urgently required. This prevents children who live far away, and who require high levels of support, from accessing these schools. As a result, the few children who do attend these schools have to leave their families and reside in the school hostels, or parents and families have to move from their community to the area where the school is located. Some children have to travel far distances using public transport, and this can put financial pressure on their families. Parents highlighted that having to pay for transport or hostel fees puts a great financial strain on their family income, and many learners expressed how they missed their family and friends when residing in the school hostel.

## **Recommendations regarding the shortage of resource schools and learning support classes**

- The MoEAC should establish more and geographically representative resource schools (i.e. build new schools or transform existing schools into resource schools) and add learning support classes to more mainstream schools, especially in rural and outlying areas.
- Access and entrance requirements including application forms that parents are required to complete in order for their children to be admitted into resource schools should be examined and amended as necessary to give more children in the regions access to these schools.
- These schools should be fully accessible, well-resourced and supported by the Ministry.

### **6.11 Accessible infrastructure**

The study found that the majority of the schools sampled were not fully accessible to children with disabilities – even resource schools. A few learners spoke of the challenges experienced by those learners with physical disabilities who are unable to physically access certain areas of the school and hostel. This lack of accessibility and of classroom assistance results in some learners with physical disabilities being carried by fellow learners, which is very unsafe and undignified. A lack of accessible toilet and washing facilities results in learners without disabilities having to assist those who need assistance.

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*“Everybody takes a day to carry the girls on your back, help them to the bathroom and then take again to ... so if it's coming from the hostel to the dining hall to the school block. We had to help them.”*

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Regarding accessibility of the school and its surroundings, a number of interviewees stated that this remained a significant barrier. Learners with physical disabilities spoke of the far distances they have to travel to get from one class to the next, and how they could not access certain areas such as the playground or bathrooms. Some schools had ramps, but these did not have non-slip surfaces or handrails, and the gradients were not suitable. Other schools had suitable surfaces for learners with mobility disabilities in certain areas, while other areas ended in steps or the ramps had eroded over time and were no longer safe.

Learners with visual impairments and former students with disabilities expressed concern about the poor lighting, a lack of accessible surfaces and tactile markers, and inadequate signage. They were also worried about tripping or walking into objects such as low trees, uneven playgrounds, and windows that open into walkways. Many classrooms were dimly lit, which makes it difficult for learners with impaired hearing to lip-read teachers and other learners.

## Recommendations regarding accessible infrastructure

- The MoEAC must source specialists to conduct full access audits of all schools and school hostels to ensure safety and accessibility.
- The access audits must include all areas of the school and hostel (including the classrooms, playground, other outside spaces and bathrooms), and must follow the international best practice of Universal Design.
- Recommendations from these access audits should be sent to the line ministries responsible, and follow-ups should be made to ensure that the changes are implemented and the schools become more accessible.
- The access audits should include information on getting to school and getting home, and the school grounds, surfaces, signage, lighting and acoustics in both the school and school hostel environments.

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## HOSTEL ACCOMMODATION

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As mentioned on the previous pages, the majority of the existing resource schools in Namibia are located in larger towns away from rural areas where there is a significant need for specialised support. This specialised support is required not only for learners with disabilities attending these schools, but also for teachers working in inclusive schools who urgently need support and training from those with specialist knowledge. In an ideal situation, there would be no need to have school hostels as children with disabilities would attend their local neighbourhood schools. However, this is not the situation for the majority of children in Namibia, due to the size and vast expanse of the country versus the small population size. Resource schools spoke of the urgent need for more hostel accommodation for their children.

While the hostels were clean, many of those visited accommodated far more children than they were built for, and the children's safety represented a major issue. None of the hostels visited were fully accessible for children with mobility disabilities, such as wheelchair users, due to a lack of wheelchair ramps, grab rails, accessible showers and specialised equipment.

Regarding hostel accommodation for children with visual or hearing impairments, poor lighting and inadequate signage (among other things) remained a challenge. Furthermore, hostel staff had not had any specialist training on how to meet the individual needs of children, and hostels were very understaffed.

The majority of bathroom facilities at hostels were far from ideal, with many not having running or warm water, or showers or toilets that were working. Many female learners and teachers spoke of parents being unable to afford to provide female hygiene products for their menstruation. The girls interviewed spoke of having to use recycled paper and newspaper as there were no sanitary pads available. Several children who did not reside in the school hostels spoke of missing school during their menstruation due to a lack of sanitary products, and this had a negative impact on their learning.

## Recommendations regarding hostel accommodation

- The MoEAC should build more school hostels, especially in rural areas.
- These hostels need to be fully accessible to all learners, and equipped and staffed.
- Girl children, especially those with disabilities, must be provided with female hygiene products.
- Bathrooms must be equipped with warm and flowing water, and all toilets should be in working order.

## 6.12 Research on disability in Namibia

A lack of reliable statistics on the numbers and types of disabilities and research in this area in Namibia remains a major difficulty. Limited data is available from the Population and Housing Census and the Education Management Information System (EMIS), however in both cases, the disability-related questions need to be better defined to enable the MoEAC and other ministries to better plan and budget. The lack of reliable data on disability emerged as a significant challenge. This lack results in the various ministries not being able to effectively plan, budget and resource appropriately for the implementation of inclusive education and the required support of learners with disabilities.

Higher education institutions shared that while they did not thus far have any completed research looking at disability and inclusive education, a number of their students had begun to research these topics.

### Recommendations regarding research on disability in Namibia

- Accurate and up-to-date statistics on the number of children with disabilities and types of disabilities must be collected and research needs to be conducted so that the MoEAC is able to budget and plan accordingly.
- The disability-related questions asked in the collection of data should be based on the international best practice, namely the *international best practice Washington Group* set of questions.
- Higher education institutions must encourage more students to undertake research on inclusive education and disability as part of their studies, and their findings should be shared through academic journals and other publications, the local mass media, community meetings and advocacy events.
- Research results should be shared through journal articles, publications, the local mass media, community meetings and advocacy events.

## 6.13 NGOs, OPDs and private sector involvement

NGOs and OPDs cited a lack of capacity, information, training, materials, assistive technology and devices, as well as large geographical distances and lack of funding by the MoEAC, as some of their challenges in supporting their members. Many spoke of the trauma of having a child with a disability in a country that offered no support to parents, and in communities which attach a stigma to children with disabilities. They described how the lack of formalised disability-focused NGOs in Namibia motivated them to start their own. They further described the need to be self-sufficient and to find their own answers and assistance.

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*“I had to look at resources on the Internet, books that were sent by my parents, being a sponge absorbing whatever I could in order to help her.”*

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All of the NGOs interviewed spoke of a lack of funding and very limited funding from the MoEAC, and how they had to keep “hounding” the private sector. They spoke of the difficulty of keeping going and staying motivated, but felt they had a “duty” to keep fighting for their children.

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*“We have not had great successes, but we are moving and I said to myself, as long as we move, we are doing okay.”*

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A number of interviewees spoke of the lack of collaboration between some of the NGOs and OPDs. Some of these organisations explained that this was due to their only having the time, energy and resources to make a difference to their own members, but they would be more than happy to share information if asked. A range of interviewees, including numerous MoEAC officials, principals, parents and NGOs, expressed frustration about the ineffectiveness of the Disability Council and its general lack of support and involvement.

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*“Yeah, the Disability Council. I don’t know what they do, honestly I don’t know.”*

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Several NGOs expressed frustration about both the MoEAC and MoHSS not assisting them with the upkeep of the assistive technology and devices that these ministries provide for children. They explained that there was a general lack of support from both ministries, but they did stress the importance of collaborating with principals, schools and higher education institutions. NGOs also highlighted the importance of early intervention, and spoke about the significant impact that this has on the education and future of a child with disabilities. They stated that the majority of these children are not assessed and diagnosed at an early age, due to a lack of access to basic healthcare and to early childhood development (ECD) programmes. The delay in assessing and diagnosing them results in a lack of early intervention, which is why many stakeholders are so focused on the issue of early intervention. Several interviewees spoke of their difficulties and challenges as well as their extreme frustration about the relaxed Namibian attitude towards ECD, and they strongly expressed the need to be proactive.

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*“NO, you can’t wait! You can’t wait for it to become fine, because it will never on its own become fine. You have to pro-actively, actively make interventions with your child. Do things physically with your child.”*

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## **Recommendations regarding NGOs, OPDs and private sector involvement**

- NGOs and OPDs must collaborate and support each other and other similar organisations in other countries to ensure that they have the most up-to-date training, knowledge and skills so that they can better support their members.
- NGOs and OPDs should network and partner with the private sector to obtain funding to be more sustainable and be able to offer the services needed.
- NGOs and OPDs should build relationships and referral pathways with various ministries (including Health and Welfare Departments), so that they can assist their members in getting the medical assistance, social support, early identification, screening, diagnosis and assistive technology and devices needed.
- NGOs and OPDs should promote the importance of early identification and referrals through ECD, and should advocate for parents to take their children to benefit from ECD before pre-primary education.

## 6.14 Lack of specialist human resources

The few therapists, clinical and educational psychologists and allied healthcare workers working within the MoEAC spoke of an overwhelming lack of capacity. This left many of them feeling that they were not able to make a difference or do their jobs as well as they could. They also expressed frustration about the lack of qualified and registered therapists employed in the MoEAC, who are much needed at national and regional level. The current MoEAC employment structure allows for one speech therapist and two audiologists at national level, and psychologists are appointed as education officers rather than in their professional category. This allows for the position to be less attractive to future applicants.

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*“We only have one speech therapist for the whole country and two audiologists that have to service the entire, the entire country.”;  
“... those [education officer] positions don’t exist within the ministry.”*

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It emerged that educational therapists were constantly hindered by a general lack of appropriate materials, assistive technology and devices, and resources. They spoke of difficulty and frustration when teachers and parents did not implement the recommendations.

Overall, this rapid assessment revealed a significant lack of sustainability relating to the retention and succession of therapists within the MoEAC. To begin with, therapists in general would not be drawn to the Ministry because of the low salary. Secondly, many of those who did apply and got the job were straight out of university and did not have the necessary experience. As a result of such challenges, they resign due to burnout or the low salary. Hence, positions are often vacant for many years.

### Recommendations regarding the lack of specialist human resources

- The MoEAC should employ more registered therapists, psychologists and other allied healthcare professionals to address the significant lack of capacity so that they can support children with disabilities and schools.
- Qualified therapists should be employed as “therapists”, not as “educational officers”, so that they can provide better services to those requiring them.
- The employment structure should allow for positions of relevant therapists (clinical psychologists, educational psychologists, audiologists, speech therapists, etc.), with salaries similar to, or sufficiently competitive with, those paid in the private sector, to mitigate the loss of therapists to the private sector and to draw therapists to the education sector.
- The Ministry should review therapists’ salaries and benefits so that more therapists will apply for positions and retention will be improved.
- Professional categories should be clearly stated as such, otherwise the essence of the profession is lost or subsumed within the “education officer” position.
- Clarity should be given to the term “therapists” in all documentation, as one can only be a “therapist” (whatever one’s field of study) if one registers and maintains registration with the Health Professions Council of Namibia (HPCNA), and because therapists in the public sector have to be provided with the appropriate materials, assistive technology and devices and resources needed to assist children and provide the best treatment and care possible.
- The Ministry should explore alternative employment modalities, e.g. allowing psychologists to work at the Ministry part-time and to supplement their salary with private practice.
- Therapists need support to visit regions and schools on a regular basis, or when requested by a school, and to provide specialist support at that level. These therapists should also initiate collaboration with MoHSS specialists in the regions to strengthen the regional support network.

## 6.15 Officials of the MoEAC and other ministries providing social services

The first significant challenge relates to regions where there are MoEAC officials who do not have even general knowledge and skills relating to disability, and therefore cannot provide teachers and schools with the support urgently required. Interviewees stated that often the teachers had more knowledge and skills than those in the ministry whose duty it was to support them. Therefore, while the Sector Policy states that the ministry officials' role is to support schools, the findings of this study suggest that the opposite is happening in some regions.

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*“it’s actually reversed; the schools are actually doing the supporting of the ministry.”*

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The second significant challenge relates to regions which had been without any regional school counsellor for over two years due to retirement and the absence of a succession plan. This places an enormous strain on all concerned. On the one hand, the schools and teachers in these regions are forced to work with no support or assistance. On the other hand, the officials based at Head Office were overworked and did not appear to have the time to visit and support schools in the outlying and rural areas of the country. As a result, the officials themselves were experiencing burnout from the lack of collaboration and support.

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*“You know, there just comes a point where you have to say I can’t; you can’t do everything. So it’s very difficult.”*

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The MoEAC and MoHSS signed a Memorandum of Understanding relating to the implementation of the Integrated School Health Programme in 2016, but have been very slow to implement it.

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*“It’s in its beginning stages and implementation is always a problem ... that is where we fall short.”*

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Among the principals, ministry officials and teachers interviewed, there was general frustration about the lack of collaboration between, and support provided by, the MoEAC and MoHSS, and it was stressed that the children are the ones who suffer as a result. Teachers mentioned that although children’s eyes and ears are assessed and a referral letter is received when problems are identified, there is a constant lack of follow-up from the ministries.

In addition, while some principals felt supported by MoEAC officials, many of them spoke of the Ministry’s lack of involvement and lack of understanding of the challenges facing teachers. In this sense, the officials were regarded as being ignorant of the real challenges and as major barriers to the process of inclusion.

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*“They don’t really know what’s happening in school. And then they are the people who are now supposed to make plans and make decisions and come up with policies.”*

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Another key challenge identified in this study is the lack of monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Sector Policy by the Ministry, higher education institutions or, if required, consultants. Unless the MoEAC is aware of the challenges in implementing the Sector Policy, and develops recommendations to address these and prevent them from reoccurring, it will not be able to effectively implement inclusive education in Namibia. Without statistical and research data relating to disability and inclusive education, areas that need to be strengthened will not be

identified, and best practices in the Namibian context will not be realised and shared, and children with disabilities will continue to experience barriers in accessing and receiving an education.

A number of interviewees also shared that there was a significant lack of collaboration and support from ministerial departments of social services towards schools. It emerged that this is due to the small numbers of trained social workers in Namibia, a lack of resources provided to social workers, and the large geographical areas that they are required to cover. The key finding here is that social services are simply severely understaffed and under-resourced. These interviewees were extremely frustrated by the ineffectiveness of social services, and stated that the system was failing and not protecting the children with disabilities, especially in cases of sexual abuse.

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*“If a child is in very bad circumstances, we suspect severe neglect or sexual, physical abuse. Then the process is very slow and totally inadequate.”*

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While ministerial social services provide grants to assist children with disabilities, interviewees questioned whether the children were benefitting in terms of accessing education. Principals and teachers also shared their disillusionment about trying to contact social services: many had written to the highest ranks but received no reply or feedback. As a result, they felt they had no choice but to take matters into their own hands to keep the children in school.

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*“You can’t send them back to where you know the stepfather is going to rape them ... . No investigation. No intervention. That drives me nuts!”*

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## **Recommendations regarding officials of the MoEAC and other ministries providing social services**

- The MoEAC should employ suitably qualified and experienced regional school counsellors as a matter of urgency, so that support can be provided to schools in all regions.
- The various ministries and departments should collaborate so that services are not duplicated or excluded. This collaboration is needed between the MoHSS and MoEAC especially.
- Health checks and follow-ups should take place through the MoHSS in schools in an ongoing basis, so that conditions do not deteriorate and children can get the assistance they require.
- The Integrated School Health Task Force at the regional level should be strengthened to support the implementation of the National Safe Schools Framework and other regional programmes addressing the needs of learners with disabilities and those with special needs in education.
- Social services should collaborate and support schools within the Integrated School Health Programme so that children receive the appropriate services required.
- Policies that require both parents to be present in order to obtain a child’s birth certificate in order to access grants should be re-examined, as many fathers are absent.
- Employ more social and rehabilitation workers across Namibia, and give them the resources they need to effectively support their clients.
- Conduct research to assess the impact of the social grants on the lives of children with disabilities, to ensure that they receive the assistance they require.

## **6.16 Assessments, referral procedure and learner promotion policy**

For a child to be enrolled in either a resource school or learning support class, an application form has to be completed, without which the child cannot be placed. This application form has a number of sections, including a medical section to be completed by a medical doctor, who should



also report on hearing, visual and speech abilities. Any other reports of evaluations effected by speech therapists, audiologists, psychologists or occupational therapists are complementary to, not a prerequisite for, the application for a special needs placement. The last section of the form should be completed by the school in which the learner is enrolled, at the time of application. This last section relates to a psychological report which also has been completed. This referral procedure is problematic in a number of ways.

Firstly, many parents (especially those in rural areas) do not have access to healthcare facilities to get the medical section of the form completed. Thus, they have to spend money that many do not have on transport and accommodation in larger towns to access hospitals and clinics. Upon arrival, many are subjected to very long queues, with the child not always seen on the first day. Secondly, many parents simply do not have adequate knowledge relating to how the procedure works and how to access a psychological assessment thereafter. Thirdly, there is a significant lack of available therapists to conduct the psychological assessments.

There appeared to be some confusion as to whether regional school counsellors (if there were any employed in the region) could complete this assessment, or whether only the few therapists employed in the MoEAC could do this. Another possible option would be to have these assessments completed by private therapists, but most parents cannot afford the fee.

The study revealed that the learner promotion policy is also problematic. In Namibia, if a child fails for the second time in a school phase, the child is automatically 'promoted' to the next phase, as no learner can be held back for more than one year per phase. However, the study found that many teachers were not adhering to this policy, or may have been unaware of the newly revised learner promotion policy. Ministry officials explained that many children who fail are simply put back in the same grade without learning support or any investigation as to why they had failed. The officials felt that this was due to a lack of training and knowledge as well as the fact that there is simply not enough staff to serve the number of children who need attention. As a result, children are promoted because it is the easier option.

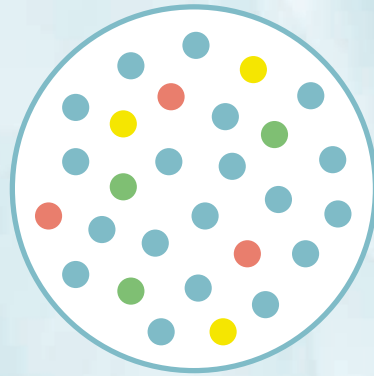
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*"They are not looking at why the child failed ... they just don't have the time for that; they are overworked ... it's easier to promote them to the next class."*

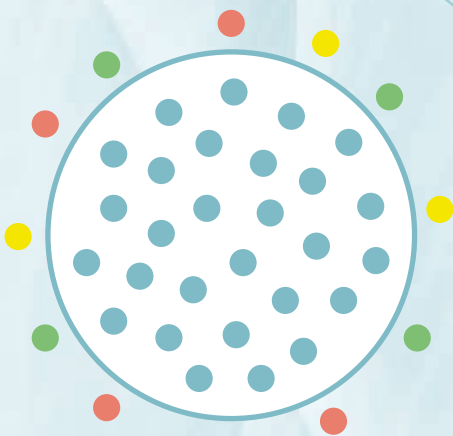
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## **Recommendations regarding assessments, referral procedure and learner promotion policy**

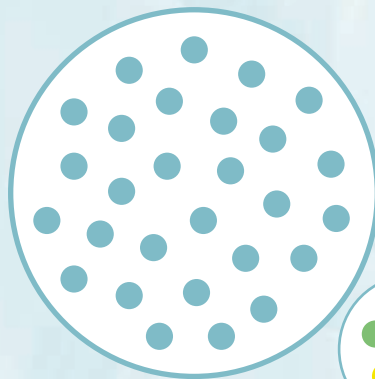
- Therapists, medical professionals, inclusive education officers and regional school counsellors should assist parents in completing the referral application form for a child to be placed in a resource school or learning support class.
- There should be extra support available for parents in rural areas to have their child with a disability assessed and to complete the application form properly.
- The application form for placement in a resource school should be reviewed.
- More skilled and qualified officials should be employed in both the MoHSS and the MoEAC at both national and regional level, to ensure that more children are assessed and referred for the support they require.
- Clarification is needed as to who is authorised to complete the assessment and referral documentation, to preclude confusion and to allow for more children to receive the assistance they require, and for the purpose of developing clear learner assessment and referral procedures.



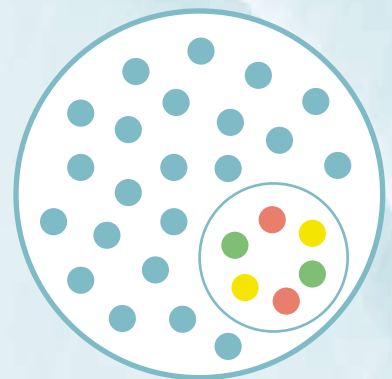
**INCLUSION**



**Exclusion**



**Segregation**



**Integration**

## Section 7

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Namibia has adopted, ratified and followed a number of international policies on disability and inclusive education, including the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)*, and the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture has published and disseminated its *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education*. However, this rapid analysis found that many learners with disabilities across Namibia still have unaddressed needs and still experience barriers in accessing and remaining in education. The barriers relate to: attitudes towards disability; disability sensitisation, awareness-raising and training; resources; and partnerships, collaboration and support.

While this study focused on the many needs and challenges facing children with disabilities in Namibia, the data shows that there is hope and a genuine willingness to improve the situation for learners with disabilities. Stakeholders need to change their attitudes towards disability, and this can be done by the relevant stakeholders providing continuous advocacy and sensitisation. Parents need to be supported by OPDs, NGOs and schools, and to be encouraged to invest in their children's education. NGOs, OPDs, schools and the MoEAC need to partner and work together by holding regular meetings, workshops and training sessions. Specific funding needs to be made available to provide and implement training, and to provide resources, materials, and assistive technology and devices. The Sector Policy strategies need to be effectively implemented, and statistical data must be updated and research conducted on an ongoing basis. If all this takes place, then the barriers highlighted in this report can be greatly reduced.

It is important that Namibia sets long-term goals with the overall aim of bringing about a fully inclusive education system, whereby all children with disabilities and special education needs are educated in their local neighbourhood schools with their friends and family members, and are fully supported, accommodated and integrated into all aspects of their schools and communities. A former learner with a disability shared the following.

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*“It’s very important as a human being, just for yourself and also for your self-esteem, to be integrated or to socialise with people that do not have your specific impairment so that you can feel accepted in society ... so that you can feel like you can do what they can do, stay where they stay, play where they play ...”*

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However, in the short-to-medium term, there is an urgent need to strengthen, equip and provide more resource schools, more learning support classes in mainstream schools, and more inclusive schools. Inclusive schools need to be appropriately equipped, supported and prepared in terms of resources, materials, teacher training, skills, awareness and sensitisation.

All this can be done by the following means:

1. Revising the tertiary teacher training curriculum so as to ensure that all new teachers are trained to effectively and practically implement inclusive education in their classrooms and accommodate children with disabilities.
2. Ensuring that all teachers (pre-service and in-service), principals, learners without disabilities, MoEAC officials, parents, communities and officials of NGOs, OPDs and higher education institutions receive disability sensitisation training.
3. Engaging in dialogue with parents and communities to promote their active participation in the schools and education system at large.
4. Producing accurate and up-to-date research findings on different types of disability, to assist with budgeting and planning for implementing, monitoring and evaluating inclusive education in Namibia.
5. Providing resource schools with equipment aligned with the designed Curriculum Framework for Inclusive Education and its implementation.

It is hoped that the findings and recommendations of this rapid analysis will contribute to the achievement of Goal 4 of the *Sustainable Development Goals* through what the MoEAC (2013: iv) states is a holistic framework for learning and participation for all children in Namibia, including children with disabilities.

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Children with disabilities are among the most marginalised and excluded groups of children, experiencing widespread violations of their rights. Discrimination arises not due to the intrinsic nature of disability, but rather due to a lack of understanding and knowledge of its causes and implications, fear of difference, fear of contagion/contamination, or negative religious or cultural views of disability. It is compounded by poverty, social isolation, humanitarian emergencies, a lack of services and support, and a hostile and inaccessible environment. Too often, children with disabilities are defined and judged by what they lack rather than what they have. Their exclusion and invisibility render them uniquely vulnerable, denying them respect for their dignity, their individuality and even their right to life itself.

**Access to education:** Children with disabilities have a right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equality of opportunity. The goal of universal access to primary education cannot be achieved without their inclusion, yet many remain excluded from education and its associated benefits – better jobs, social and economic security, and opportunities for full participation in society.

- Only 10% of all children with disabilities are in school, and only half who begin their primary education complete it due to gaining little from the experience. Hence, only 5% of all children with disabilities worldwide have completed primary school.
- Millions of children with disabilities are left out of education sector plans due to poor data collection and a lack of knowledge of how to include them.
- Children with disabilities in rural areas and poor urban neighbourhoods are particularly at risk of not receiving an education, and those in these areas who hail from nomadic, ethnic and linguistic minorities face a double jeopardy in this regard.

**Barriers to education:** Multiple barriers impede access of children with disabilities to education:

- Discriminatory legislation often fails to recognise or specifically precludes some children with disabilities from accessing education (e.g. some countries still have legislation declaring certain categories of children ‘uneducable’, and some place the responsibility for educating children with disabilities with ministries other than education, thereby marginalising them).
- Many children with disabilities are not allowed to start school as their parents have low expectations. If they do start school, many drop out due to stigma, prejudice and bullying on the part of teachers, parents and other children – *not* due to academic inability.
- Most schools are physically inaccessible (e.g. in terms of hygiene and sanitation facilities, communication systems, appropriate equipment and materials, and transportation).
- Parents with several children often prioritise those without disabilities in respect of paying for books or uniforms, assuming that education is less important for those with disabilities.
- The percentage of children with disabilities who access secondary education is strikingly lower than that of their peers without disabilities, due to, inter alia, a lack of: resources; teacher and parental support; and awareness of the importance of education for their future. The problem is compounded by standardised exam systems which pose insurmountable barriers to children with disabilities due to inaccessible administration and grading processes.

**Inclusive education:** There is growing recognition of the right of children with disabilities to *inclusive* education. “Education for All” partners have committed to promoting a goal of inclusion, and *an inclusive education system at all levels*, for these reasons:

- A growing body of data shows that with appropriate support, children with disabilities thrive in an inclusive classroom setting, and that the costs of inclusive education and special schools is largely comparable, but academic achievement in inclusive schools is significantly higher.
- Inclusion enables children to grow up in their own family and community rather than at a distant school.
- Inclusive education embraces the principle of schools adapting to and accommodating all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. Simply ‘mainstreaming’ children with disabilities into classrooms without understanding and addressing their individual needs does not guarantee them a full, equitable and inclusive education. Effective inclusion requires transforming policy, culture and practice in the school.
- Children who are educated alongside their peers have a much better chance of becoming productive members of society and being included in their communities. Studies on human capital formation affirm that there is a loss of GDP in low-income countries as a result of lack of education of persons with disabilities and their consequent non-participation in the economic workforce.



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA  
**Ministry of Education,  
Art and Culture**

