



## Integrating children with special needs into the formal education system—a pilot project in South Africa

### Major lessons learned

A large scale collaborative action research project succeeded in laying a strong foundation for operationalising inclusive education at school level - integrating children with disabilities into public schools in low income areas.

The impact of the project became less significant towards the district and provincial level. It is a challenge to provide schools with the support they need to sustain what has been started through the project

This challenge shows that inclusive education has to be addressed from a systemic perspective.

### Background

The Inclusive Education and Training System Framework has been in place in South Africa since 1997.

Danida granted the Danish Council of Organisations of Disabled People about Euro 600,000 to assist in developing the White Paper 6 on inclusive education and training, which was issued by the South African Department of Education in 2001. Soon after, the Department of Education submitted a proposal to Danida requesting support for implementation of the frameworks and for help with further development of inclusive education in South Africa.

### Main partners

- Department of Education at central, province and district level
- Universities in the three provinces
- NGOs and DPOs (Disabled People's Organisations)

#### Location:

KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Eastern Cape provinces, South Africa

#### Title:

Resource and Training Programme for Educator Development: Towards Building an Inclusive Education and Training system

#### Year of implementation:

2000-2001 (selected activities until 2004)

#### Funding:

DKK 16 mill (USD 2,5 mill) by Danida



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### Objectives of the pilot

- 1) To develop teachers' capacity for integrating children with special needs into the education system in three districts located in three provinces.
- 2) To build capacity in the South African Ministry of Education at national, provincial and district levels.
- 3) To establish and test models for action research, which can strengthen teachers' efforts
- 4) To ensure the dissemination of lessons learned from the pilot project with the SADC-countries.

The primary target group for the project were teachers, parents, NGOs and administrators of education.

### Main features of the pilot project design

The entire project was designed to be collaborative action research. This included not only collaboration between researchers, educators, learners, and Department of Education personnel but also Disabled People Organizations (DPOs) and parents in the pilot schools and their communities.

45 schools were involved covering early childhood schools (8), primary schools (25), special schools (5) and high schools (7).

Support teams were set up at school level, district and province level.



## Main activities

- Orientation meetings for the general population
- Training of 360 education administrators at province and district level.
- 12 administrators and 90 teachers working in the area of inclusive education have received scholarships and taken diploma courses.
- 36 seminars on the promotion and understanding of integrating children with special needs into the education system with more than 700 participants.
- One seminar for key decision makers.
- Establishment of two resource centres assisting teachers in integrating children into local schools.
- Strategy for collaboration within SADC regarding integration of children with special needs.
- Two regional seminars.

To strengthen prospects for sustainability, and based on recommendations from an end of project review, Danida extended support for workshops until 2004 for the Department of Education to document good practices and to begin to replicate the achievements of the project.

## Specific findings in the independent end-of - project evaluation

In all three provinces the pilot projects have had a positive impact on the policy implementation process.

- *The project has shown that it is possible to create a well functioning system for supporting inclusive education and continue to strengthen capacities for implementing inclusive education with a proven national, provincial and district support organisation.*
- *Decentralisation of funds to the district structures has led to greater ownership and more efficient and effective use of funds.*
- *The project has made good progress concerning educator development, community awareness and involvement, which is seen as crucial to the success of the project.*
- *In nearly all schools, Institutional Support Teams (ISTs) have been set up and are functioning well. These school level support structures have helped develop and maintain essential links with the available district support. Perhaps the greatest achievement of the project is that it has contributed to and laid strong foundations for operationalising Inclusive Education at the school level.*
- *Much more difficult and challenging has been the setting up of District Support Teams in the three provinces which have had mixed results. According to the White Paper 6, DSTs have a crucial role to play in strengthening education support services at the schools. However, there was a lack of understanding of the specific roles and functions of members of the DSTs and of the expected DST structure.*
- *There is an absence of well-documented guidelines in this type of innovative pilot project, especially in the form of operational and financial manuals. Good documentation will ensure that the legacy of the project is continued and will support sustainable outputs.*
- *The slow pace in developing and operationalising national, provincial and district exit plans was a threat to sustainability.*
- *Throughout the project lifetime there has been limited donor co-ordination.*
- *The project funds have been used efficiently. In the last year critical activities have been clarified and well defined (following the recommendations of the mid-term review) which has enabled high levels of disbursements. Financial transactions have been transparent and funds well accounted for.*



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## More lessons learned

- The key feature for the success of the pilot project is the enabling environment that includes a sound and strong national policy on inclusive education accompanied by strong leadership at the DoE and through dynamic project co-ordinators at the provinces. Indeed, the high sense of local ownership and commitment put in place by the pilot project co-ordinators has contributed to the successes whilst local needs have been prioritized and supported through decentralization of activities. It is clear that universities have played a major role in the successful capacity building
  - *From the outset, the project document needed to have clearly defined objectives, activities and procedures.* The project document was weak in defining intermediate objectives and describing clear associated activity levels from which to springboard project planning. The development of activity plans and guidelines has proved worthwhile later in
- the project in terms of fostering ownership and capacity building. *It is of great importance that the methodologies that support the building of inclusive education are thought through as thoroughly as possible in clear systemic and operational terms at the outset.*
- *The role of the consortiums (universities responsible for action research, capacity building, educator development, mobilisation and evaluation) has been important in building momentum.* In-depth training of educators in the pilot schools, including the development of the institutional support teams is an extremely valuable and worthwhile mechanism for the development of inclusive practices in the classroom and in developing awareness about the value of inclusive education, especially at the school level.
  - *A greater emphasis on decentralised management would have built more sustainable project management early in the project.* An important feature of decentralisation has been the change from a relatively centralised structure towards more local responsibility and accountability at the district level.
  - *An inherent challenge for the project was the time frame that had been set for the systemic change.* While the project teams appeared to be on track to complete the tasks that they had set for themselves, it was unrealistic to meet the overall project objectives fully within the prescribed time frame.

## Further Reading:

### **Danida**

[End of project evaluation, 2002](#)

### **Department of Education, South Africa**

[Education White Paper 6 – Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, 2001](#)

**Disabled Children's Action Group (DICAG)** (see end of project evaluation for other implementing partners)

<http://www.eenet.org.uk/parents/stories/dicag.shtml>

**Responsible authority in South Africa:**  
Department of Education

**Danish Embassy, Pretoria**  
<http://www.denmark.co.za/>

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