



Physical Accessibility of Public Schools in the Asia Region

LINC Asia-Position Paper

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, Article 9 speaks about making buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces along with information, communications and other services including electronic and emergency services accessible to the persons with disability. Recognizing accessibility as a minimum standard the national laws in the countries of India, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Philippines has moved beyond from a narrow interpretation of least restrictive environment to the concepts of inclusive education and living and working in the community.

However, Children With Disabilities in these countries do not have full physical access to the educational services and are not treated on an equal basis with other non-disabled children who can access the educational services and facilities. Moreover, children with disabilities also experience stigmatized behavior in the perceptions towards their ability to attend schools and perform like their peers. As a result, they often drop-out of their schools just to find themselves trapped in the viscous cycle of poverty, child labour, and other kinds of exploitation. The national budget for education is not sufficient to bring about the desired changes and the teachers are not trained in dealing with the problems of Children With Disabilities. The gaps between policies and implementation is wide and needs to be addressed.

LINC-Asia affirms that the public schools should be made accessible to the Children With Disabilities in their countries which is also a major step towards attaining inclusive education. Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Key requirements for inclusive education are barrier-free school environments, especially in the public schools of the member countries. The accessibility can be implemented by adopting the Universal Design principles. This in turn will create opportunities for children with disabilities to be included in the mainstream educational system.

LINC-Asia also recognizes that the education of all children with disabilities begins at birth, and more emphasis should be laid on early education and development of all children with disabilities. Early childhood education can produce significant gains in children's learning and development. High quality early childhood education assists many children with disabilities in avoiding poor outcomes, such as dropping out of school. Although the benefits seem to cross all economic and social lines, the most significant gains are almost always noted among children from families with the lowest income levels and the least amount of formal education.

Additionally, it is required that emphasis be laid on modifying/building accessible school infrastructure.

In order to attain equality in education it is important to make the school infrastructure accessible to the children with disability. This includes wheelchair users, children with vision blindness, and any other form of disability. Again, in order to create more autonomy among children with disabilities, access to appropriate communication technologies, assistive devices and reasonable accommodation in schools is crucial. There needs to be change in the perceptions of parents, teachers, school managements and other community members with regard to Children With Disabilities ability to participate and learn effectively as their peers in school. This has a direct impact on enrollment of Children With Disabilities in schools. Moreover, it is



envisioned that Children With Disabilities have wider representations in the school related activities such as school parliaments, sports, extra-curricular activities, attendance, and examination. As a matter of rights of Children With Disabilities; their voice should be heard at various platforms like Disabled People Organizations (DPOs), School Management Committees (SMCs) as well as other community based systems.

It becomes a pre-requisite that schools ensure, that no denial takes place which increase the gender gaps in the opportunities given in schools. Any kind of discrimination with regard to participation, enrollment, denial of accessibility and reasonable accommodation, stigmatized attitude denying Children with Disabilities opportunities in schools shall be dealt in a more stringent manner.

It is essential, that the rights of Children With Disabilities to full and effective participation is recognized by the parents and communities, which means that they further take action to make this a possibility in their own communities. Local governance should also become part of this initiative so that there is alignment to the existing policies at the local, national and regional level.

Children With Disabilities have the same human rights as others and they need to be treated on the equal basis as other human beings. When educated these children are capable of contributing to the increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country through increment in the per capita income. Identifying and capitalizing on their talents and skills further empowers them and increases their chances to fully participate in society and be valuable part of the human diversity.

LINC-Asia is aware that in order to meet the above mentioned needs public schools, families, educators(teachers), community members and leaders along with policy makers must collaborate and work together at the state, community, building and classroom levels. All the stakeholders must affirm the basic tenets in these fundamental needs. Auxiliary, as system advocates, there is a need to address the following issues:

- Adaptation of accessibility features in the public schools of the countries of India, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Philippines is important to ensure enrollments, provide barrier free environment in schools and improvement in the transportation facilities to and from schools.
- Reduce social barriers by sensitizing communities including Children With and without disabilities and relevant educational authorities on inclusive education.
- Provide facilities of aids, equipments and rehabilitation support to Children with Disabilities with the help of government.
- Capacities of school management should be built on infrastructural dimensions based on the universal design. Also, knowledge and skills of teachers and special educators needs to be enhanced in order to provide diversity in the learning styles to meet the specific learning needs of children with disabilities. This can be best done by adapting Universal Design of Learning.
- Facilitation of interaction between students with and without disabilities will help in reducing stigma and bring in acceptance of children with disabilities among the other children who can become advocates for their peers.



- Participation of various stakeholders like educators, parents, and community members, children with and without disabilities, like minded organizations, schools, governments and media's participation at various platforms is required to bring in changes and the attainment of the goal of inclusive education.

LINC Asia pleads to the Governments of India, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Philippines:

- To develop disability inclusive legislation and policies in alignment with the universal design of infrastructure, that will ensure the right to physical access in the government/public schools for children with disabilities.
- To implement their legislation and policies accordingly and consistently. This will require also providing sufficient budget for infrastructural adaptations in governmental/public schools.

LINC Asia also pleads to other relevant stakeholders such as school staff, parents, communities and the civil society organizations:

- To adopt positive attitude towards these children as capable and talented citizens who can contribute towards more prosperous and diverse society.
- To provide necessary physical access and create opportunities for the children with disabilities to learn, gain confidence and participate fully in the education process.
- To gain more skills and competencies and facilitate inclusive learning among all children in the schools. Promoting physical accessibility under the umbrella of inclusive education LINC-Asia reaffirms that it will continue to advocate for the rights of children with disabilities and their families to higher national, regional and international levels.

“Physical Accessibility of Schools remain a Challenge for the Children with Disabilities”

LINC Asia's desideratum towards this position paper is that it can be referred to as a tool by its member organizations to do effective lobby and advocacy for the effective policy development and thereby implementation of the national legislations/policies/plan of actions regarding ***physical accessibility in public schools of the Asia region.***

Adopted by Chair, LINC-Asia, December 19, 2017.