

Attitudes and policies in achieving equality in access to education for learners with visual impairments - Kenya experience

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

"There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals". Said Thomas Jefferson. Due to Physical or mental conditions that people with disabilities have, their capabilities to achieve certain things or functionings is itself limited. This therefore, calls for specially focused public programs and legislation to enable such people advance their capabilities, as do other people. It demands for the removal of the unequal social and political circumstances that generate unequal human capabilities and more so in education.

The goal of education is to provide equal opportunities for all children including those with special needs. Education is a human right and therefore each society must be sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable of their citizen especially the very young, old and those with special needs. This is in line with the African traditions in relation to family. A free society needs a mechanism of self-monitoring to ensure justice and fair play among its citizens. In line with the national policy of education, Kenya has put in a lot of emphasis in equality of access to Education disregarding ones status all the way from Early childhood, Primary, Secondary, post secondary education, University, Basic Adult Education, and last and not least Special needs education. In the recently passed children's Act 2001 in Kenya, specific provisions for education have been made, whereby its stated that every

Child shall be entitled to free basic education which shall be compulsory in accordance with Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (CRC).

In its Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS) 2003-2007, the Kenya government states some of the broad objectives of the Education Sector as the achievements of 100% net primary school enrolment rate and reduction of the disparity in access and quality of education including improvement of access and quality and reduction of disparities at all levels of education. It addresses the core principles of non-discrimination and equity in all aspects of education for all citizens including those with special needs which includes Visual Impairment. The Kenya Government has a goal of providing Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Education For All (EFA) by the year 2015.

Enrolment levels for children with impairments at both primary and secondary schools has generally remained low over the years but due to the introduction of Free Primary Education Policy in Kenya since 2003, there has been high enrolment in Primary schools and the number of learners with special needs has increased.

People with special learning needs are receiving a lot more attention than previously thanks to the efforts of lobby groups which have more intensively advocated the right to education for the learners with special needs in the society.

2.0 CURRENT SITUATION OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED LEARNERS IN KENYA

According to the Ministry of education, Kenya Integrated Education Program (KIEP) report, there are about 19 integrated programs in the country, initially covering as many administrative districts. However, while the number of integrated education programmes remained the same, the administrative districts have now been split and totals 32 districts.

Out of the 3770 children with visual impairment in both integrated education programmes and special schools for the blind, 2544 (67%) are within KIEP while 1226 (33%) are in special schools. Out of those in the integrated programmes 346 (14%) are blind and 2198 (86%) have low vision. Out of those in special schools 645 (53%) are blind and 581 (47%) have low vision. This gives a total of 991 (26%) blind and 2779 (74%) children with low vision in both special schools and integrated programmes making up the total of 3770 children with visual impairment by the end of 2004.

“It is estimated that there are therefore 27,592 Visually Impaired children out of school, comprising 9463 blind and 18,129 children with low vision. This massive variance underlines the need to aggressively identify visually impaired children who should be in schools near their homes is also becoming more apparent.

Visually impaired children have an equal right to access the same type of education as their sighted peers. There is need for schools, educators, communities and governments to recognize this trend and reciprocate in kind. Integration, while it is a move in the right direction, should nevertheless move a notch higher towards inclusive education, and ultimately into full inclusion of societies.” (*African Braille Centre- stakeholders workshop report, 2005*)

3.0 STATE OBLIGATIONS:

The key obligations arising out of the educational policies that relate to Right to Education includes the following aspects;

- 3.0.1 Ensuring non-discrimination in terms of access to Education;
- 3.0.2 Ensuring that it "takes deliberate, concrete and targeted steps" towards full realization of the right to Education;
- 3.0.3 Doing everything possible to guard against any retrogressive measures that may undermine current levels of achievements taken in the right to Education;
- 3.0.4 Prioritising the introduction of compulsory, Free Primary Education and
- 3.0.5 Establishing "minimum educational standards" to which all educational institutions are required to conform and also maintain a transparent and effective system to monitor such standards.

In general, among the targets the Ministry of Education has identified against which progressive realization of the Right to Education would be assessed is provision of special education and facilities together with others such as;

- 100% enrolment at primary level
- provision of free and compulsory primary education
- enhanced rate of retention and transition from primary to secondary school
- provision of accessible childhood education
- standardised teacher student rations at 1:40
- improved school governance
- increased number of opportunities for higher education and finally expanded opportunities for tertiary education.

It is expected that once the above targets are achieved, the most vulnerable group among which is special needs children will have easy

access to quality education first and foremost through the public education system.

4.0 THE KENYA DRAFT CONSTITUTION

The Draft Constitution of Kenya takes cognizance of the need to ensure participation of person with disabilities in the affairs of the nation as the following excerpts shows;

- 4.1 Chapter 2: *The state shall promote the development and use of Braille and other appropriate modes of communication for persons with visual and other impairments.*
- 4.2 Chapter 3: *The state shall progressively implement the principle that at least five percent of the members of elective and appointive bodies shall be persons with disabilities. (It is expected that people with visual impairments will be represented under this act)*
- 4.3 Chapter 5: *The state shall promote development of all forms of education and equal opportunity for individuals to attain the highest possible standards of education.*
- 4.4 Chapter 6: *Persons with disabilities have a right to access education, use of sign language, Braille and other means of communication.*

Should this legislation be enforced, its outcomes will most likely reduce the unequal circumstances that have hitherto afflicted persons with special needs in Kenya.

5.0 DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE AND POST INDEPENDENCE KENYA.

- 5.1 The goal of education is to provide equal opportunities for all children including those with special needs. However, the rapid growth of education sector since independence has not been reflected in the special education category. For instance, at 1999, there were only 479 special education programmes, which include 385 units and 94 schools including vocational and technical institutions. As at 1999, according to the Commission of Inquiry in the Education system of Kenya, Chaired by Davy Koech, only 2,208 children with visual impaired out of 220,000 were enrolled in educational programmes.

Although special needs Education has been in Kenya since 1940, there has not been Kenyan Oriented curriculum in most areas of disabilities.

Most special needs institutions were under the management of the missionaries.

Over the years since independence various commissions of education have come up with recommendations concerning education for the special needs education some of which have been adapted as policies.

5.1.2 PRE-INDEPENDENCE POLICIES

Pre-Independence policies of education (as reflected in the Beecher Commission of 1949 and Binns Commission of 1952) emphasized skill oriented education for Africans and an academic curriculum for Europeans and Asians in Kenya. No prominence was given to Special Education. Most of the education for children with special needs was catered for by the missionaries. A family to have a child who had challenges was a taboo. Education prepared the European and Asian learners for white collar professions while the African was inculcated with vocational skills to provide manual work. Such policies tended to produce in the African a negative perception of vocational education and training.

5.1.2 POST INDEPENDENCE POLICIES

Since independence there has been various committees that were mandated to recommend ways and means of enabling the education system to facilitate national unity, mutual social responsibility, industrial and technological developments, life long learning and adaptation in response to changing circumstances. The current trends in education of learners with Visual impairments is in three categories whereby learners are in residential special schools, integrated school programmes and an elaborate policy on inclusive education is the most current.

One of the most prominent Education committee reports that came up with various recommendations after independence was that of Kamunge and Koech, that came up with the following goals of education for special needs education;

- To facilitate the development of children with special educational needs spiritually, mentally, socially and physically
- to develop in the children the potential for analytical and productive abilities so that they may excel in learning and in their future careers

- To assist children acquire a suitable basic foundation for the world of work according to economic and manpower needs
- To assist children develop positive self-concept and proper attitudes towards life, based on moral and religious values
- To develop in children skills of coping and independent living aimed at habilitation, rehabilitation and adjustment to the society.
- To properly identify, assess, place children and also provide for early intervention.
- To integrate children with challenges that are mild or moderate to regular schools and institutions and with appropriate support and related services.
- To provide children with comprehensive and proper educational facilities, equipment, materials and accessible buildings including a cadre of trained teachers, professionals and support staff.
- To educate the public about the needs and potentials of children with special needs and the methods of integrating them in the society.

6.0 INCLUSIVE POLICY OF EDUCATION

Inclusive education means, that all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weakness in any area, become part of the school community.

Over the years the learners with special needs were trained in special schools or classes and used to be integrated in the regular class. Teachers were overburdened due to diverse needs of the children.

6.1.1 WHAT IS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

'Inclusive education is concerned with removing all barriers to learning, and with the participation of all learners vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation. It is a strategic approach designed to facilitate learning success for all children. It addresses the common goals of decreasing and overcrowding all exclusion from the human right to education, at least at the elementary level, and enhancing access, participation and learning success in quality basic education for all.' (UNESCO's- Section for Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 2000) .

According to Dr. Mellisa Heston, Associate Professor, UNI, "Inclusive education operates from the assumption that almost all students should start in a general classroom, and then, depending on their needs, moves into more restrictive environments. Research shows that inclusive education helps the development of all children in different ways.

Inclusive schools don't ask, "how does this student have to change in order to be a fourth grader?"but rather, "How do we have to change in order to offer full membership to our students with disabilities?"

(INTASC CORE STANDARD COMPETENCIES---
[HTTP://www.ccsso.org/intrascst.html](http://www.ccsso.org/intrascst.html)

6.1.3 BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Attitudes

Societal attitudes are some of the barriers to inclusive education. There is a lot of discrimination due to negative attitudes which leads to serious barriers to learning. When a teachers gets over burdened by the large number of learners in the class who require individual attention due to their disabilities, sometimes they may show outright negative attitudes towards the learner. This applies in all areas of disability including to those with visual impairments.

Physical Barriers

Most learning centres and institutions may not be accessible to many learners with disabilities. The problem is that the initial design of such facilities was not meant for children with disabilities like visual impairments. Many schools are not equipped to respond to special needs. Environmental barriers such as doors, passageways, stairs and recreational areas are common in inclusive school settings.

Curriculum

Curriculum is one of the major setbacks in inclusive education because of the diverse range of different disabilities in the learner. The curriculum is usually not flexible and therefore unsuitable for big range of learners. Due to lack of suitable curriculum, equal access to quality education is denied to children who are visually impaired and other disabilities.

Teachers

One of the major barriers is the ability of the teachers handling children with various disabilities in the same classroom setup. Teachers have not been given proper training to cope in all areas of disabilities.

Other barriers to inclusive education are, Language and communication where by learning and teaching takes place through a language which is not the first language of some learners. Socio economic factors, Lack of funding and policies as barriers have also contributed to poor development of inclusive education.

7.0 CHALLENGES FACED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF KENYA IN PROVIDING EQUALITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR SPECIAL NEEDS (VISUALLY IMPAIRED INCLUSIVE)

- 7.1.1 Lack of early identification and intervention have long been seen as the highest contributing factors for lack of rehabilitating of children with special educational needs to suitable educational institutions. Sometimes proper identification, assessment, placement in suitable educational institutions has been a challenge especially to children with low vision.
- 7.1.2 Unsuitable learning materials and educational support for children with Visual impairments is seriously lacking in their educational institutions. One commission on education going round to collect views on special needs witnessed a case where students and teachers at certain school for the blind were recycling Braille papers in order to re-use them.
- 7.1.3 Lack of proper survey as to the number of children with visual impairments, hence lack efficient data bank of children with visual impairment.
- 7.1.4 Lack of adequate number of trained teachers, professionals and support staff is a challenge in education for Visually Impaired. Introduction of Free Primary Education in year 2003 encouraged many parents of children with special needs to enroll the children to schools hence overstretching of the already scarce facilities in the schools. This has denied Learners who are visually impaired to quality access to education and unless appropriate measures are taken children may get frustrated and drop out of school and one of the key intervention is the provision of specially trained teachers in specific.
- 7.1.5 The existing education Act is out of date as it neglects crucial areas of education including development and education for those with special

education needs among others. The Kenya government is set to review this Act so as to come up with an Education act that is relevant to the modern society.

- 7.1.6 Lack of adequate curriculum especially for post school education to enable learners with Visual Impairments develop their full potential for analytical and productive abilities so that they may excel in learning and in their future careers that are relevant to the economic and manpower needs in the job market.
- 7.1.7 Negative societal attitudes that discourage children with Visual Impairments to develop positive self-concept and proper attitudes towards life, based on moral and religious values have also denied children proper access to quality education hence the high drop out rate in school children after enrolment.
- 7.1.8 Some societal attitudes and practices also deny the learner ability to develop skills of coping and independent living aimed at habilitation, rehabilitation and adjustment to the society. Some members of the society encourage dependency syndrome to Visually impaired persons who are sometimes seen begging in the streets even after going through education in basic and secondary level.
- 7.1.9 Lack of adequate number of positions available for learners in schools, has led to children being turned away from schools due to lack of spaces. In some cases teachers view children with visual impairments among those with other challenges as a burden to the school.
- 7.1.10 It is very expensive to finance special education and therefore its necessary that financial constraints of the Government do not hamper the development of special education. It is therefore implied that there is need to establish a special education funding system.
- 7.1.11 The fact that most of the graduates of the Special schools do not find any employment was also said to be a source of discouragement to sending children with impairments to schools. Parents argue that they need to see role models who have gained employment through education for them to be convinced that investing in their own disabled children's education is beneficial.
- 7.1.12 Integration of disabled learners in normal schools is viewed with misgivings since such schools do not have the facilities necessary for

accommodating particular disabilities. Most of these schools have no specialized teachers to handle specific disabilities. Construction of building and other physical facilities does not take into consideration the needs of learners who have disabilities; and many institutions do not have the special learning equipment needed by learners.

8.0 ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN PROVIDING FOR ACHIEVING EQUALITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

It is appreciated that various stakeholders play a pivotal role in provision for achieving equality in access to quality to education for learners with visual impairments.

Some of the stakeholders to name but a few are, the policy makers (The Ministry of Education), The curriculum Designer and Developer (Kenya Institute of Education, KIE), The curriculum evaluator, (The Kenya National Examinations Council, KNEC), Other stakeholders are those in advocacy groups as members of Non-governmental organizations, churches among others. In this paper, the role of some of the stakeholders who contribute in a great way to the education for visually impaired is discusses as follows;

8.1 ROLE OF POLICY MAKERS (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY)

8.1.1 The demand for services for children with special needs at all levels in Kenya has increased as a result of the government's commitment to Universal Primary Education. The implementation of Free Primary Education as a policy has created an opportunity for a large number of children to enroll in the already existing 18,000 public primary schools including those with special needs.

8.1.2 One of the main goals of the government is to develop clear policies and laying down of specific strategic plans to be achieved in effort to develop equality to access to Education for learners with special needs. Such a goal is to develop an efficient education system that provides conducive learning environment of children with special needs. With funds being available, the number of children with special needs will increase and equitable opportunities for them be provided. Other government strategies that have become policies are:

- Strengthening of Educational Assessment and Resource Services (EARS) would continue offering educational assessment service with each assessment centre being manned by appropriately

trained personnel. This will enhance early diagnostic and intervention for children with visual impairment and this will enable their placement to appropriate educational institutions and be provided with suitable learning materials. It is assumed that through awareness creation, parents will take their children with challenges to schools and also to the Assessment Centres.

- Kenya Institute of Education that is mandated by the government to develop a suitable curriculum suitable for learners with Visually Impaired among others to embark on developing and standardizing diagnostic assessment tools to facilitate proper identification and intervention. The KIE should develop a flexible curriculum to suit learners with special needs. The government is ready to support this venture.
- Its a government policy that all the public schools should provide suitable materials, equipments and physical facilities to enable Visually Impaired learners to be able to get equal education with the regular learners in the same institutions without secluding them in their own special schools.
- Under the FPE, additional capitation grants are provided to Visually Impaired learners to be enrolled in special education institutions and units attached to regular primary schools . Initial support has also been provided to each public primary school to begin removing existing barriers that make the school environment not friendly to Visually Impaired learners and other learners with various impairments. Each special unit has been given a grant to facilitate procurement of the necessary teaching/learning materials and equipment.
- The government continues to train primary school teachers in special education as well as training teachers at university level in order to improve the necessary national capacity to handle special needs education, Visually Impaired learners included. There are many teacher training programmes for special needs education such as, Kenya Institute of Education has a Certificate, and Diploma Teacher training programmes for Visually impaired. Kenyatta University has also got undergraduate and post graduate programmes for teachers of special education some of which specialize in teaching learners with visual impairment.

- Despite the current initiatives by the government, access and quality in education for those with special learning needs remains limited. In order to increase access and improve quality, it is in the governments policy framework to;
 - strengthen the assessment programme in order to facilitate identification and placement of learners with special needs;
 - integrate special education programmes in all learning and training institutions and ensure that the institutions are responsive to the education of learners with special needs
 - collaborate with and co-ordinate other providers of special needs education;
 - provide instructional and materials through the waving of duty on specialized equipment and materials as well as provide incentives for local production of such equipment as a way of reducing the cost of providing special needs education
 - Develop a national policy that comprehensively defines areas of all special needs and the specific needs identified like Visually Impaired.

8.2 STRATEGIES TO BE EMPLOYED TO ADDRESS KEY POLICIES IN RELATION TO SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

To implement the above policies, the government plans to employ the following strategies in Special Education investment programme in the year 2005-2010 as follows;

- Develop a programme to create public awareness on the need to send children with Visual Impairment among other impairments for early assessment and placement. Under this programme, the government plans to spend about 16million approx.(\$228571/=) in the first two years for development of materials for induction and creation of awareness. About 85 field officers and 200 parents/community members will be induced. Training of Trainers will also be done.
- The government plans to create a database for all the children who have impairments by carrying out a national survey and equipment inventory for future planning so as to improve equality in education. This survey will also include training and education.
- On teacher training the Kenya Institute of Special Education has one of its main strategies to in-service teachers from regular and special schools as well as training assessment teachers in 5-year strategies. This programme started in the year 2005.

- The government has in her strategic plan for this period, to strengthen and improve the capacity of educational assessment and resource centres to enable them carry out early assessment, placement rehabilitation and habilitation of children with special needs. This is part of 5year investment programme to strengthen the existing assessment centres and sub-centres through staff development and provision of equipment. The overall aim is to provide modern and appropriate assessment equipment and improve the assessment tools in all existing assessment centres and sub-centres. For the programme to succeed, it is planned to be carried out by the District Education Boards including all the stakeholders in the regions and the community around them.
- Provision of equipment and learning materials to regular primary schools and special needs schools is part of government strategy in providing equality in access to education. The objective of this component is to enhance learning through provision of teaching learning materials by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology. This funding is being done in all regular schools as well as in special schools. The grant provided is for making the environment especially in regular primary schools disability friendly. By doing this the governments objective is to increase access, retention and transition rates among children with disabilities by removing barriers.

8.3 ROLE OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS IN PROVIDING EQUALITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS (KENYA INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION) (KIE)

KIE is the National Curriculum Development and Educational Research Centre in Kenya. The Institute is a specialized semi-autonomous government Agency under the Ministry of Education Science and Technology. It is charged with the responsibility of developing curriculum and curriculum support materials for all levels of Education and training except the University. The Vision of KIE is to provide leadership in quality curriculum development and research for relevant and suitable education training in Kenya.

The functions of the KIE is to conduct research, prepare teaching and evaluation materials, preparing of syllabus, In-service training, workshop and seminars for Teachers, Inspectors and teachers' training college staff and education officers on developed materials, preparation of distance

education courses, coordination of educational research and finally transmission programmes through the mass media.

One of the divisions of KIE is Special Education among others.

SPECIAL EDUCATION DIVISION

This division started operating in 1978 as a section under primary education division but in 1997 this section became an independent division with several sections catering for different areas of disabilities. Visually Impaired is one of the sections, and it has the following areas;
-Pre-primary, primary, secondary, developmental and survival skills and Braille.

Curriculum development adoption, adaptation and education research in the area of Visual Impairment is carried out in the section. Under the Kenya Education Sector support programme, the curriculum developer (KIE) has a responsibility to develop a flexible curriculum that meets the demands of learners in Special education including learners who are Visually Impaired.

8.3.1 SYLLABUSES DEVELOPED BY KIE FOR THE LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS FOR TO ENHANCE ACHIEVIEVEMENT TO EQUALITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS.

The Kenya Institute of Education has developed and adapted the following syllabuses to suit learners who are blind;

- Primary Mathematics
- Social Studies
- Primary Physical Education
- Primary Science
- Secondary Mathematics
- Secondary Biology
- Secondary Home Science
- Secondary Physical Education

The Institute has made the following guidelines and recommendations for effective implementation of the syllabuses for the Visually Impaired Learners;

- Primary Mathematics, Primary Social Studies, Primary Science and Primary Physical Education are now under implementation since this year, 2006 in Std 1-8. As per the recommendation of the newly developed syllabuses, The Kenya National Examinations Council would examine candidates who are blind using adapted syllabuses this year 2006.
- Secondary Mathematics, Secondary Home Science, Secondary Geography and Secondary Physical Education has been implemented in the year 2006. The curriculum developer recommends that KNEC examines these subjects using adapted syllabuses from this year, 2006.
- The Biology syllabus for Learners who are blind, would be implemented in the year 2006 in Forms 1, 2 and 3. This means that the subject shall be examined by KNEC at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in the year 2007.
- The Learners who are blind in Form 4 of secondary education are taking Biological Sciences in 2006 and it is recommended that the subject be phased out thereafter.
- The Agriculture syllabus for learners who are blind be implemented gradually as follows;

YEAR	CLASSES
2006	Form 1
2007	Form 1 & 2
2008	Form 1, 2 & 3
2009	Form 1, 2, 3 & 4

This means that the candidates would continue being exempted from taking Physics and Chemistry subjects.

- The Subject selection modalities at secondary school level for learners who are blind should be as follows:

FORM 1&II

(a) Eight (8) core subjects that include;

- Mathematics
- English
- Kiswahili
- Biology
- Geography

- History&Government
- Religious Education
- Physical Education.

(b) Four (4) Optional subjects from:

- Home Science
- Agriculture
- Business Studies
- Foreign Language (Arabic/French/German)
- Music

FORM III&IV

Students at this level will take a **minimum of seven (7)** subjects and a **maximum of nine (9)** subjects selected as follows:

(a) Three (3) Core subjects

- Mathematics
- English
- Kiswahili

(b) One (1) Science (Biology)

(c) Other subjects (minimum of 3 maximum of 5) to be selected from any of those a student studied in Form I&II.

8.3.2 Other measures the Curriculum developer has taken to improve access to quality education for learners with Visual Impairments are as follows;

- a well designed Diploma curriculum has already been developed awaiting approval by the Academic Panel ready for implementation for teachers who are training in Special needs. This will go along way in enhancing access to quality of education in Visually Impaired learners.
- adapted Primary Teachers Education curriculum for trainees with Visual impairments has also been developed among which Information Communication Technology has been developed awaiting approval and implementation among others.
- To enhance identification and further intervention for Visually Impaired, a Functional Assessment Tool has been developed and approved by Academic Board. The tool was being piloted at the Kenya Institute of Special Education after which the Directorate of Quality assurance

under the Ministry of Education Science and Technology would use it in EARC centres for assessment of children with Visual Impairment.

9.1.2 ROLE OF CURRICULUM EVALUATORS KENYA NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL(KNEC

The Kenya National Examinations Council was established by the Government of Kenya in 1980 an Act of Parliament, (Cap 225A) as a not-for-profit institution to conduct school and post school examinations and award certificates to successful candidates except the universities. The KNEC is mandated to conduct academic, technical, business and other examinations as it may consider desirable in the public interest. Education offered in the school curricular aims at providing the regular and special needs learners with skills which can enable them become useful members of the society. Curriculum evaluators play a significant role in the achievement of this goal. One of the measures to show the extent to which these skills have been attained is through the administration of national examinations, using assessment instruments which have been vetted for validity and relevance.

In line with the policy of Education for All (EFA) in Kenya, KNEC has the mandate to ensure that there is fairness and equity in assessment of all candidates including those with Visual Impairments. The vision of the KNEC is: - to ensure Efficient Testing and Evaluation for Quality Education. In carrying out its mandate, KNEC recognizes that the educational needs of impaired children are similar to those of the regular children. Guided by this awareness KNEC develops examinations for the children with Visual Impairments that are equivalent to and sometimes similar to those administered to regular learners so as to give equal access to quality education.

9.1.3 KNEC PRACTICES POLICIES AND ATTITUDES IN ACHIEVING EQUALITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

- KNEC develops questions either from the common syllabuses as is in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination or from adapted syllabuses developed for the learners who are Visually Impaired as in the case of some Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) subjects. The initial setting and moderation is usually targeted on the regular candidates where a syllabus is provided and then the same panel of setters and

moderators sits again to review the questions and adapt them to suit the visually impaired candidates.

The adaptation looks at the questions with diagrams, topographical maps, tables and any other stimulus materials.

- Questions that require use of sight or appreciation of colour are also adapted. During adaptation, it is ensured that the questions test the content area, concepts and those they maintain the same level of difficulty. As regards cognitive abilities, KNEC ensures that examinations for learners with special needs are virtually the same as those for regular candidates.
- KNEC provides for Braille and for low vision candidates, only large print is provided . It is clear that low vision varies in degrees and that each candidate should be given a font size commensurate with his/her degree of visual impairment. KNEC is still grappling with issues like colour of paper, lighting and classroom position which, have also been sited as factors that could affect performance. Development of a curriculum specific for the low vision learners will go along way in assisting KNEC adopt better strategies of dealing with examinations for learners with low vision.
- During registration, KNEC sends out information to enable the District Education Officers (DEO's) reach learners who have Visual Impairments among others, to register them for examinations. The information gathered is used to determine how their examinations papers would be adapted to suit their needs. In a case where the DEO does not declare the nature of Visually Impairment, then the candidate may get disadvantaged because they may not be able to get suitable examinations materials for them.
- KNEC has always worked very closely with the KIE the curriculum developer whose mandate is research and development of curriculum for educational institutions. KNEC is represented in curriculum development panels as a result of which suitable syllabuses for the Visually impaired have been developed and forward to KNEC for assessment. By KNEC use of the suitable curriculum for Visually Impaired, the learner is able to access quality education.

- By sensitizing her personnel who handle matters related to Visually Impaired, KNEC has been able to improve services to those who are Visually Impaired. This has been done through workshop, in-house training and providing officers with opportunities to attend conferences and seminars on the needs of learners with various disabilities.
- In the recent rationalization and review of the KCSE curriculum the minimum examinable subjects were reduced to seven (7) which makes it easier for the learners with special needs to meet the universities admission requirements as the subject cluster benchmark has been made easier to meet.

9.1.4 KNEC RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN THE AREA OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED CONDUCTED IN 2000.

- In the year 2000, teachers in a number of schools with learners who are Visually Impaired raised issues on how the Council develops examinations for the visually impaired. They indicated that:
 - The 30 minutes extra time give for every test is not proportional to the duration of individual papers.
 - The time allocated for practical the examinations is not adequate since a lot of time is used in identifying the various specimens.
 - Low vision (partially sighted) candidates sit for the same papers as sighted candidates without any adaptation and are not considered for extra time.
 - Diagrams are too complicated and lack distinct differences in texture and outlines for different features hence rendering them difficult to translate.
 - Papers with diagrams come in separate bundles and as such time is taken shuffling from one batch of document to the other. Test developers do not consider this time when deciding the duration of the test.

9.1.5 RESEARCH STUDY

- In order to address the above and other challenges that affect the learners with visual impairments, the Research Department commissioned a study based on the following:-

9.1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is the time allocated to the visually impaired candidates adequate?
- How much time would the visually impaired candidates require to complete a paper?
- Should the time allowed for the visually impaired depend on the subject?
- Do papers with diagrams require more time than those without?
- Do questions for the low vision candidates require adaptation?
- Do low vision candidates require extra time?

9.1.7 RESEARCH FINDINGS/OBSERVATIONS

- Blind candidates have difficulties when handling the bulky question papers, answer sheets, Braille machines and the abacus in Mathematics.
- In both English and Kiswahili language test papers, students were found to spend a significant amount of time attempting to identify the appropriate paragraphs referred to in the questions. Long passages and format in the language papers were found to be the main cause of poor performance.
- In Biological Science and Home Science papers, time was wasted in trying to locate the position of specimens and making movement manoeuvres.
- Blind candidates have difficulties in acquisition of concepts due to lack of visual stimulation e.g. visual aids and hence, it takes them longer to understand/comprehend diagram/information.
- In both KCPE and KCSE examinations over 70% of the low vision candidates were unable to complete the Mathematics papers. Is this due to the inadequacy of the time given? Or could it be due to poor knowledge of Mathematics.
- In KCSE Geography paper 1, the completion rate was about 50% while at KCPE level it was over 60% in Geographical History Civics & Religious Education.
- Extra time should be allocated depending on the degree of disability, and the length and complexity of the paper/subject.
- The allocated time should appear on both the question paper and the examination timetable.

- In the KCPE examination, the response options in English and Kiswahili should appear immediately after each question. The format should not be as for the sighted candidates.
- In KCSE Geography paper 1, low vision candidates should be tested using a tactile map, not the typical topographical map.
- The blind find it difficult to follow long statements in Mathematics. Questions should be short and to the point to avoid time being consumed in reading and re-reading questions so as to get the concept being tested. Since the objective is to test mastery of certain concepts, questions testing same skill/concepts should be minimised. For example, there is no need to have two graph questions.
- The albino candidates are affected by the white colour of some of the examination papers. Use of white coloured paper should therefore be avoided.
- To reduce errors in question papers, Braille specialists should participate in moderating and proofreading papers for the visually impaired.
- Words or phrases that need emphasis should be *italicized* and not *bolded* or *underlined*.
- In Home Science, terms that require sight perception should be avoided deep-frying, colour combination, height of flower arrangement etc.
- Grids on graph papers should be in bold.

9.2 OTHER PRACTICES IN KNEC FOR THE EXAMINATIONS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED CANDIDATES

9.2.1 During marking of candidates scripts, debrailing candidates' responses are carried out using experts in Braille transcription and writers. This practice has been criticized by some stakeholders who argue that:

- There is likelihood of introducing errors during debrailing, The reader may correct students' errors during transcribing or even introduce punctuations that were not in the original script, change of information may occur due to differences in the form of Braille grades, the reader and writer may be from different linguistic backgrounds and this may affect the way each perceives pronunciation of words.

KNEC is looking into this matter so as to be able to give candidates who are visually impaired fairness during marking of examinations.

- In developing of examinations diagrams are reduced as much as possible because the Visually Impaired candidates have difficulties in interpreting complex diagrams. KNEC ensures that any diagrams used in the question paper only contains information the Visually impaired need to be able to perform the desired task.

10.0 AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Despite limitations of learners with special needs, there has been intense pressure from stakeholders and lobby groups in advocacy for affirmative action for the learners who are visually impaired. As a result of this and in line with the proposed draft constitution, the Government of Kenya has come up with a policy of relaxing some requirements of special needs learners for admission in institutions of higher learning. For example, for entry at the Teacher Training colleges the learners who are Visually Impaired are admitted with a mean grade C- instead of C+ for regular candidates in Secondary school level.

11.0 ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN PROVIDING FOR ACHIEVING EQUALITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

It is appreciated that education for special Needs children is very expensive, more so for those with visual impairment. The government continues to encourage and intensify participation of voluntary, donor agencies and private sector to participate in funding and provide facilities and equipment for special education.

Such organisations are; Kenya Society for the Blind, African Braille Centre, Churches organisations, Blindenmission Society, Low Vision Unit (Kikuyu) Sense International. Kenya Union of the Blind, to name but a few.

The stakeholders from the Civil society have been able to support learners in Visual Impairments in many aspects as such;

- Providing funding for various projects and requirements like equipments,
- Some are watchdogs in the matters related to visual impairments, they carry out advocacy and lobbying for their rights.
- Provide technical support to the learners with visual impairments
- Provides free or subsidized medical care for those with visual impairments
- Sensitization to the community on matters related to visual impairments.

- The ministry of Education consults with stakeholders in various aspects of education.

The role in education for learners with visual impairments can not be overemphasized. They play a key role in providing for achieving equality in access to education for learners with visual impairments.

12.0 MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS ATTAINED IN IMPROVING ACCESS TO EQUALITY OF EDUCATION

Looking at the growth of special needs education in Kenya, one can see that major achievements have been attained in improving access to equality of education. This has been due to major contributions by major stakeholders of education for special needs and more so in the area of visual impairments as follows;

- 12.1.1 With free basic primary education, since 2003, enrolment for learners with visual impairments has improved.
- 12.1.2 The policy of inclusive education has been initiated in schools.
- 12.1.3 Crash programmes for training and in-servicing of teachers for Special needs in education and in disciplines such as visual impairments is being carried out.
- 12.1.4 A curriculum that is flexible for the learners with visual impairment has been developed in most of the main subjects in both primary and secondary schools.
- 12.1.5 Sensitization to the society on change of attitude towards learners with visual impairments has been beefed up with support of the civil society, churches and other stake holders.
- 12.1.6 The government of Kenya has come up with clear policies on the way forward for development of special needs education is in place and funding of various aspects of such education is in place.
- 12.1.7 The Draft constitution is also giving a lot of prominence on the area of persons with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

Every child has the fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. It is in this light that an attempt has been made to discuss various aspects of attitudes and policies in achieving equality in access to education for learners with visual impairments.

It is not easy to discuss this topic for learners with visual impairments without engrossing on special needs education as a whole. The goal and policies of education related to

special needs have been discussed in details. The role of various stakeholders as key players in the achievement of access to quality education for learners with visual impairments have also been prominently highlighted as well as the challenges related to policies of education for special needs learners such as inclusive education.

In general this paper has given an overview of current Educational practices, policies and cultures and the relationship to provision for achieving equality in access to education.

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