

Contribution to access and quality of education for children with Visual Impairment in Addis Ababa

Teshome Assefa

Integrated Unit program coordinator

German Church School

Addis Ababa

Ethiopia

American Missionaries formed the first school for The Blind in Ethiopia in the town Dembi Dolo in 1925. In 1948 Sweden Missionaries established another School for The Blind at Entoto, around Addis Ababa. Government in collaboration with Mennonite Missionaries also founded another School for The Blind in Addis Ababa Kasanchis area. The school started its operation by catering 18 Visually Impaired children. Teaching materials were being imported from America. After three consecutive years the numbers of students became 60, beyond the institution became over crowded and understaffed. Thus, the students were obliged to attend class at a school, called "Asfaw Wosen" integrated with non- Visually Impaired students, at that time, a new idea and proposal to change the localities of the school to a larger area, which can cater a lot of VI students, and located out of town with calm environment in Sebeta town in 1963, its called Sebeta Special School for the Blind, now days this school is giving education for Visually Impaired children at boarding setting and the only center giving training in the area of special needs at certificate level, in addition 5 boarding schools and some units those are giving education at integration settings at lower grades for visually Impaired children in different regions of the country.

In our country with majority of children residing in different villages and rural areas, there is no hope of helping all the children with disabilities through special schools.

Though the program helps some disabled children who are able to access the service, majority of them stand outside the school life.

Understanding and determining the causes, prevalence and trend of disability in a country is essential of various reasons. Among others, its importance for policy formulation, planning different preventive and rehabilitative programs and budgeting are

most pertinent. ¹ In Ethiopia, the presence of diversified pre-, perinatal and postnatal disabling factors (like the health of prospective mother, difficulties related to delivery, childhood infectious diseases, lack of proper child management, traditional harmful practices, under nutrition, malnutrition, civil strife and periodic episodes of draught and famine) and the absence of early primary and secondary preventive services in the country at large has brought a phenomenal increase in the incidence of disability. The problem still remains as a serious challenge to the country

Prevalence of Disability in Ethiopia

Data pertaining to the incidence, prevalence and the situation of persons with disabilities are fragmentary, incomplete and sometimes misleading. According to the report of the Housing and Population Census of the Ethiopian Government Central Statistics Authority (CSA, 1998).

The number of persons with disabilities constitutes 1.9% of the total population. On the other hand, the 1995 focused – baseline survey of the persons with disabilities in Ethiopia, the first of its type in the country, revealed that the prevalence of disability is about 2.95%.

The finding of this study further revealed that the profile of the magnitude of specific disabilities in the country is as follows.

Persons with the Visually Impaired (Blind and low vision)	30.4%
Persons with the motor Disability	41%
Persons with the hearing with the cognitive disability (referred to as mild, moderate and profoundly mentally retarded)	14.9%
Persons with the speech and language impairments	2.4%
Person with the behavioral problems	2.4%
Persons with the multiple disabilities	2%

According to this survey, persons with motor disorders comprise the largest group followed by persons with visual and hearing impairments.²

¹ Sebeka School for the Blind historical background Group report 2005 (un published)

² Tirusew Tefera, *Disabilities in Ethiopia: Issues, Insights and Implications*, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Printing Press, 2005. pp. 5-7.

Age of categories	Percentage
1-14	15.9%
15-25	23.3%
26-39	17.7%
40-54	14.4%
55 and above	28.6%

Socio-cultural perspective

Some families may not have been willing to disclose that they have a child with disability out of fear of stigmatization or other negative consequences. Furthermore, families may not have been in a position to recognize mild impairments such as low vision, hard of hearing, mild developmental delays and speech disorders. This is particularly true in rural areas where such impairments may not necessarily limit the daily activities of persons'. For instance, if one goes to the rural areas in Ethiopia, one observes persons with low vision, hard of hearing or persons with mild developmental delays leading an independent life engaged in farming activities. One may not need to attend school in order to accomplish one's daily tasks in agrarian society where most of the inhabitants are uneducated, even in the urban area lack of awareness so many families are not to send there disabled children's to school.

It can be argued that if the impairment does not impose or limit the daily activities of the person, it should not be considered a disability. That means, the definition of disability needs to be based on the environmental context within which the individual functions. Studies indicate that there is wide variation in the estimated disability rates reported by the developed and developing countries. The variation depends, to a large extent, on the definitions of disability used, which either expand or limit the disability groups covered in the survey.

A further analysis of the prevalence of disability in Ethiopia, in terms of age and gender mix depicts the following profile.

The data when desegregated by gender portray that females with disability make up 44.2% of the population in the country. Furthermore, the age mix of the persons with disability identified in the study ranges from childhood to old age. The breakdown of the percentage across all age categories was found to be as follows:

That is, about 57% of the incidents occur during childhood, adolescence and early adulthood period. Unlike the developed world, disability in developing countries is not predominantly contingent on old age or aging. Studies corroborate that disability rate increases with age in developed countries.

(Tirussew Tefera, 2005)

The Need of Access and quality of education for children with visual impairment in Addis Ababa.

Providing block resource model is the most paramount solution for a country like ours.

To reach many disabled children with the an-inclusive education setting the block resource center program plays a significant role. The implementation of this program can be possible in collaboration with regional education bureau, zone educational office, Kebele or village officers, elementary education offices, NGOs and other educationalists.

For access and quality of education resource center special educators can help in preparing teaching aids materials, giving non-curricular activities such as for visually impaired children, mobility and orientation training, Braille reading and writing, daily living skills activities, pre Braille trainings, etc, in addition to giving training for general school teachers.

There is a good model program for implementing resource center program SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) its found in India Tamilnadu state Coimbatore District. It is well-organized program and implemented effectively. In this district, international Human Resource Developing Center for the disabled (IHRDC) Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, is the nodal agency for implementing the SSA program to mainstream children with the disables. The activities of programs are initiated and monitored by an advisory committee comprising of various officials at the district levels.³ This is the most essential model to be implemented in our country.

For implementing this program we will use the German Church School at the first block center in Addis Ababa, It was established as school and social service center in 1972. It provides access to education and basic needs support for children with visually impaired from the poorest parents thus education a benefited from the school integration program which is very important for their future life betterment.

German Church School

The GCS integrated education for the blind, was started as a pilot project 15 years ago. At present we have 42 visually impaired students integrated in the regular program of the school. These students get additional pedagogical support by the help of trained resource teachers. Seven of their impaired children are currently in the Universities, three Visually impaired students graduated from different colleges, one of them is a teacher, and he is working in Governmental school.

The German church School integration unit is giving a good integrating setting in Addis Ababa. This school is a model school of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya (IHRDC)

³ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan 2003 (un published)

International human Resource Development Center India, the German Church school sent one of the teacher for short term training in the area of Integration setting for visually impaired children before 15 years ago and after this training the school be-come a model integration school in the country.

The following activities are offered at the German church School.

- Giving regular education at integration setting for all sighted children, physically disabled children, totally blind and low vision children coming from destitute families.
- Financial and material support for all students.
- Social services.
- Full support for Visually Impaired children and low vision Children.
- Resource center activities (pre brail training, daily living skills, mobility and orientation, Braille reading and writing, computer training in jaws program, low vision program for low vision children's, audio program service for both visually impaired and low vision children's, abacus and mathematics and others activities)
- Tactile material production for the blind.
- Sport and other activities.
- Transcribing text books in to Braille and providing different Braille books and others.
- Pedagogical and laboratory serves for all students.
- Extra support for children those who came from the most needy families and children's with no family by providing house rent and financial support.

Strengths of German Church School

- Supporting students toward their education.
- Guiding children to get them self- supportive.
- Making students actively participate in the family and in the community.

Shortcomings of the German Church School

- The program focused only on visually impairment.
- The school compound is very small and the school is giving services only for a few pupils in the community.
- More materials that are usually being used by visually empire children and low vision children are imported ones.

Goals of the German church integrated program unit.

The German Church School Integration unit should be planned for improving inclusive education system and reaching Visually Impaired and Low vision children excluded from education.

1. Facilitating and advising Kebele or Zone educational office providing resource centers in Addis Ababa.
2. To introduce our experience to other any other schools about preparing tactile materials for Visually Impaired and Low Vision students.
3. Give training for general schoolteachers.
4. Give professional assistances for schools there are working in integration setting.

All these provisions were arranged to minimize the multi-various family problems that affect their well-being and deter good performance of the children.

Recommendations

- Creating a situation convenient for the Inclusion of Children with special needs.
- Creating equal Opportunities in Education for Children with Special needs.
- Creating awareness in the Community on the Capacity of People who are disabled.
- Providing Block Resource Center
- Creating Global Understanding on the Concept of Inclusive Setting