in Sri Lanka? A preliminary look

BY Ashani Abayasekara

ONE in eight people worldwide experiences some form of disability. Children with disabilities are often excluded from educational opportunities, and are overlooked when it comes to school completion and learning outcomes. Evidence from 19 developing countries points to a worrying trend of increasing gaps in school completion rates and literacy skills, between children with and without disabilities.

The globally embraced, 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development reiterates the importance of ensuring that children with disabilities have the same opportunities for learning as other children, particularly in higher education.

As a signatory to many international conventions on protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and the introduction of its own National Policy on Disability in 2003, Sri Lanka has a well-established disability-specific legislation, covering many areas.

With respect to education, several circulars have been developed focusing on special access facilities for students with special needs and teacher appointments, training, and incentives. However, there is a lack of comprehensive data to examine the actual circumstances of persons with disabilities, while there is also little analysis done based on available data.

This blog takes a closer look at existing data on education for children with disabilities in Sri Lanka and highlights some key areas that require policy action.

Figure 1: Shares of students engaged in school education, 2012

- 99% with disabilities
- 80% with disabilities
- 73% with disabilities
- 45% with disabilities

5-9 years: 73% (with disabilities), 27% (without disabilities)
10-14 years: 45% (with disabilities), 55% (without disabilities)
15-19 years: 22% (with disabilities), 78% (without disabilities)

Figure 2: School enrollments by type of disability, 2017

- Hearing impairments: 41%
- Visual impairments: 43%
- Speech disorders: 16%
- Intellectual disorders: 9%
- Physical disabilities: 6%
- Behavioural problems: 2%
- Other: 3%


Figure 3: Special education teacher shortages and special education appointments not in special education service, 2014

- Total: 457
- National schools: 447
- Provincial schools: 10
- Special education teacher shortages: 23
- Teachers with special education appointments not in special education service: 21

Sources: Ministry of Education Sri Lanka, Non-Formal and Special Education Branch, 2015

Unbalanced representation at the collegiate level

Figure 2 indicates that the collegiate level is also marked by a skewed composition in enrollments by type of disability, compared to the primary school level. The share of students with disabilities increases at the collegiate level, with 45% for 5-9 years, 22% for 10-14 years, and 22% for 15-19 years.

Shortage of special education teachers

The shortage of special education teachers is another key contributor to the imbalance. In the last ten years, the number of special education teachers has increased by 50%, but the number of students with disabilities has also increased by 200%. This results in a shortage of special education teachers, with only 23 teachers in special education service.

Making education more disability-inclusive

Despite Sri Lanka's well-established legislation promoting disability-inclusive education, many teachers and schools continue to struggle with implementing policies. The lack of resources, training, and support for teachers is a major obstacle to achieving inclusive education.

Postings. Such monitoring should also take into account teacher training and appointments by type of disability, to ensure that children with all types of disabilities have access to competent teachers.

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