

National Inclusion Project Final Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Inclusion Project, managed by a Consortium of four organizations, aimed to address the isolation and marginalisation experienced by people living with disabilities, which is enrooted in the nationally adopted social sector policies. The design and submission of the project was a genuine attempt at addressing the problem.

The Project was launched to empower people living with disabilities and families to advocate for their rights in instituting inclusive policies, to reinforce the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schooling, and to disseminate and promote inclusive policies and culture.

In order to realize these objectives, activities were designed in the educational, social and vocational fields, working on 3 components, namely institutional development, capacity building and public awareness.

A management team was put in place to manage the large number of activities and ensure the active participation of all stakeholders. This made the project a success and a cornerstone to build on in the process of working towards an inclusive society.

In conclusion, the project had developed the necessary infrastructure in terms of building a channel of communication with relevant stakeholders, and providing the encompassing all inclusive model. The project had also built leadership and nurtured partnerships among the stakeholders including the public sector which, if followed up, can ensure expansion and continuity.

The consortium is committed to pursue the process that was just launched through the project.

1. The background

The National Inclusion Project was the outcome of the joint efforts of a Consortium of four organisations (namely, Youth Association of the Blind, Lebanese Down Syndrome Association, Lebanese Physically Handicap Union, Save the Children-Sweden), who aim at promoting a better life for persons with special needs by introducing change at all levels, and mainly at the decision making level, building on its extensive experience in promoting Human Rights knowledge, values and culture.

Though the main focus of the Consortium members is the benefit of people living with disability, project managers were fully aware of the fact that change in the knowledge, values and culture, will be in the interest of the community at large and will surely contribute to the social and economic development of the society. In this process, the Consortium has adopted the inclusive approach, which is indeed an effective rights based development approach.

In the context of the Lebanese NGOs dependency on international and external funding, it was difficult to fund raise for a project which objectives focus on values and culture. And, funding gets close to impossible when the expected changes do not fall among the priorities of the donor community. In this context, the social development project, funded by the World Bank (which promotes inclusion in its literature), and the distinguished management of the Council of Development and Reconstruction provided a window opportunity for the inclusion project. The project was supported as it develops the necessary infrastructure that allows the adoption and implementation of inclusive policies, and hence the introduction of cultural change.

The Consortium aimed to address the isolation and marginalisation experienced by people living with disabilities, enrooted in the nationally adopted social sector policies, which were the outcomes of the negative social attitudes towards people living with disabilities. These originated in the prominent cultural and social systems that perpetuated inequality rather than the acceptance of differences among people. Accordingly, the design and submission of the project was a genuine attempt at addressing the problem.

2. The rationale

The main challenge faced at the onset of the project was the formulation and design of a project introducing cultural change at the same time affecting the practice. It was a real challenge for the Consortium to come up with a feasible project. But, the three national organisations have planned and implemented small scale joint ventures and have rich and varied experiences covering a spectrum of interventions, including project management, service delivery and awareness raising and advocacy. Over and above, they all share the rights based vision. Therefore, the development of the project document only required the assistance of two volunteer consultants, and the technical guidance of the manual developed by the Council of Development and Reconstruction.

The second challenge faced was to decide on the implementation strategy and activities of the project. It was not easy to design the activities that would best meet the inclusive approach when the existing infrastructure perpetuates inequality. So, it was agreed to focus on the activities that fulfill the following outcomes:

- Building the human resources capacity in inclusion, which is essential for any progress in this respect in Lebanon, where these resources are short of providing the necessary basis for an inclusive infrastructure.
- Raising the awareness of the decision makers, and others, as the dominant mentality is clearly 'exclusive' and is far from promoting an inclusive approach.
- Convincing people of the feasibility of the approach, using the successful example of the existing inclusive schools.
- Ensuring the technical and professional development of the workers skills and competencies, through the development of written materials.

- Introducing change in the national social, educational and vocational strategies, which is a must for the promotion of inclusion in an exclusive policy environment.
- Supporting advocacy groups, among people living with disabilities, to follow up on these policies and promote their adoption and implementation.

3. The Project

3.1 Objectives

The overall objective of the project is to establish the appropriate infrastructure for social, educational and vocational inclusion in Lebanon. And the immediate objectives are:

- to empower people living with disabilities and families to advocate for their rights in instituting inclusive policies,
- to reinforce the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schooling,
- to disseminate and promote inclusive policies and culture.

In order to realize these objectives, activities were designed in the educational, social and vocational fields. It is worth noting, however, that the project adopted a result driven by multi - sectoral approach. Though 50% of the activities were focused in the education field, while 30% covered the social aspects with 20% in the vocational field, the outcomes of the different activities were interlinked and cumulative.

Based on the implementation monitoring and aftermath evaluation of the project, it was obvious that the project has, to a large extent, realized its objectives. The project is also appreciated for instituting long lasting effects in promoting an environment receptive for the inclusion of people with disabilities, which can be measured after some time.

3.2 Indicators

The project achievements are a measure of the following indicators:

3.2.1. At the institutional development level

The establishment of local committees comprising advocates, persons living with disabilities, families and community resource people and the enhancement of their capacity in organizing awareness raising and advocacy activities in their local communities. These committees include about 60 self advocates which make them a good platform to promote inclusion. All committees' members are able to work on a rights based advocacy approach and have earned organizational and communication skills.

The founding of the inclusion network, based on a partnership between self advocate organizations, and specialized institutions. The network was supported to develop its constitution and learn about inclusion. Now, the network members participate widely in promoting inclusion, to the extent of being considered a reference and resource in the field of inclusion. The networks bring together, to all its meeting, 34 societies, institutions and representatives of government bodies.

3.2.2. At the capacity building level

The labeling of 10 schools in Lebanon as inclusive schools, accommodating for more than 100 students with additional needs, and receive increasing demand from the local community. In addition, the project had generated the interest of other schools who are contacting the members of the Consortium, calling on their support to build the school capacity in including students with additional needs.

The availability of the specialized support services that allow for including children with additional needs and that facilitate their social integration in the school life. In each of the schools, there is a specialized teacher, in addition to a social worker in some of them. Some of these schools have also contracted specialists to assess or manage the students who have learning difficulties. The mere availability of the special teacher focusing on the inclusive education of the children with additional needs, make these schools pioneers and examples to follow. In addition, the Consortium member organizations had provided Brail prints for blind students and guidance manuals for schools and teachers. These have contributed to the information resources that would develop the school workers skills and develop the school systems.

3.2.3. At the public awareness level:

Citizens in Lebanon have received the message about inclusion. More than 200 thousands citizens have received messages about inclusion from different channels. This would certainly effectuate a change in people's culture.

All stakeholders are now supportive of inclusive policies, and even promote them. This support was explicitly expressed by some employers, owners of private schools and directors of public schools, representatives of public administration and of Ministries of Education, Social Affairs and Labor, in addition to some specialized resource people who carried the flag of inclusion. For instance, some of the institutions that have ever promoted exclusion expressed their support to the inclusive approach. All of this was obvious during the closing session (conference) of the project, where they presented their vision and future role in realizing inclusion in their spheres of work.

4. The Methodology

The implementation of a project, with a large number of activities, outputs, objectives, domains and stakeholders, adopting a participatory approach and aiming to promote an inclusive and human rights culture, required the appropriate methodology.

The methodology adopted and practiced in the implementation of this project was based on quality management. A well structured management team was established. It consisted of the core staff, namely the project manager, social development specialist, executive secretary, advisors (who also represent the three national associations of the consortium), one educational consultant and the media consultant.

This team undertook the responsibility of implementing all the activities of the project. A term of reference was established for this team where each member, at a certain point, was selected as a manager for one activity or a set of activities. Each activity was viewed as a subproject, and was designated, in addition to the manager, one assistant from the members of the management team, secretary and/or support group of the project.

The responsibilities of the activity manager included:

- Preparing an action plan for the designated activity.
- Coordinating and supporting the implementation of the activity after it is approved by the project manager.
- Practicing participatory approach with all concerned parties in all his/her responsibilities.
- Writing periodical or final report on the implemented activity.
- Participating in the monitoring and evaluation process of the activity and of the project.

At the same time, some specific areas of activities or specific entities required the establishment of a supporting group. For example, a media group was established to support the implementation of all media activities in the project. On the other hand, a coordinating group was established for each selected school in the project to coordinate the implementation of all planned activities and services. The coordinating group for each school was chaired by the social worker and had the support educator as member along with at least one teacher/representative from the school.

Therefore the project ensured the active participation of the project staff, representatives of the national associations of the consortium and in some cases members and volunteers of these associations. Meanwhile, additional formats were adopted and practiced to involve the beneficiary groups in the implementation of the project.

The involvement of people with disabilities and of parents of children with disabilities was achieved through the meetings of local committees in the five regions, the general meetings of the members of the national associations of the consortium and the focus groups established for a specific planning or assessment of some activities. Meanwhile, the targeted children with disabilities in the selected schools were involved through meetings with the project's social workers or support educators.

The involvement of NGOs working in the field of disability took place through the meetings of the Inclusion Network, which was established and supported by the Project. The general assembly of the Inclusion network conducted regular quarterly meetings, while the executive body of the Network had monthly meeting. During such meetings, project plans and reports were presented for discussion and feedback.

On other level, the involvement of targeted stakeholders to benefit from the activities was achieved by different approaches. The staff of the selected schools was involved through information baseline research conducted by the educational consultant in the project to assess the present development of the school towards inclusion. The school staff prioritized their needs for professional development. While, the employers targeted by the activities of the project were involved through the regional seminars conducted by the project to present guidelines and get their suggestions to improve the recruitment of people with disabilities in their companies and institutions.

The involvement of governmental stakeholders took place through different procedures. During the social assessment in Phase I of the project all of them were targeted to present the plans of the project and request them to cooperate according to their mandates. Also, main governmental concerned bodies were invited to attend all the meetings of the Inclusion Network where the project plans were presented and discussed. Meanwhile, many governmental representatives were participating in the preparation of some activities in the project upon their personal interest.

Project management was aware that the involvement of all these groups and stakeholders contribute to the development of their capacity to become active partners in promoting inclusion. At the same time, the other partner in this project, the Council of Development and Reconstruction (CDR) was developing the project's team professional skills by providing ample information and consultancy. The formal relationship with CDR was stated in the terms of the contract. Upon these terms the following commitments were fulfilled through the involvement of CDR:

- the amendment of the original plan by the end of phase one,
- the monthly and quarterly planning of activities,
- the discussion of monthly and quarterly reports,
- the regular submission of contractual documents, and
- the preparation of national activities in the project.

It is important to note that the 'open channels' relationship with the team of Social Thematic Project in CDR was very efficient to the project's daily work. They received phone calls, reviewed the publications of the project, even official letters or invitations issued and timely responded to the need for information or advice at any time. This relation contributed to the wider public outreach and official impact of the project.

5. The Achievements of the National Inclusion Project

The major achievement of The National Inclusion Project is the comprehensive mobilization of beneficiary groups and governmental and non- governmental stakeholders for inclusion. The need of joint efforts was obvious. Therefore, the project has targeted beneficiaries, human resources, specialized welfare institutions and stakeholders in the educational, social and vocational domains.

The project's achievements are distributed here below according to the 7 major intervention areas. It is important to note that in order to highlight the importance of the achievements, the situation before the implementation of the project is supplemented.

5.1. Advocates

The individual advocates for inclusion before the project were the members of the 3 national associations of the consortium. The majority of the persons with disabilities and the parents were either members of anti-inclusion associations or passively suffering in their own families.

On the organization level, the associations of persons with disabilities on the Consortium were the sole advocates for inclusion. Whereas, all specialized welfare institutions working for persons with disabilities were against inclusion.

Regional Committees of 60 advocate members sharing the same vision and mission are well organized and actively initiating plans and implementing activities.

A Network of 26 member organizations of persons with disabilities and specialized welfare institutions along with representatives of inclusive schools and resource persons, in addition to representative of Ministries of Education, Social Affairs and others are advocating for social and educational inclusion. The Lebanese Inclusion Network is characterized by having a clear identity, with structured internal policies, an executive committee and a secretariat located currently at the Youth Association of the Blind offices. In addition, the Network has its information and services posted on the website, with a capacity to spread inclusion awareness since it is the biggest network in this field and a good reputation.

5.2. Awareness Raising

The concept, values and benefits of inclusion were either unknown to the Citizens of Lebanon or under-estimated.

More than 2,000 students and 300 parents have received the message on inclusion through the activities implemented in the schools and the festival.

Several potential employers are ready to employ persons with disabilities and/or train them and make the necessary adaptation on the job place and environment.

The message on the benefits of inclusion and the importance of tolerance and respecting differences reaches a wide range of people in Lebanon.

5.3. Human Resources

The available human resources for social, educational and vocational inclusion were those of the staff of the 3 associations of the consortium. Whereas, there were many human resources that have specialty or experience in working directly with persons with disabilities, yet, these human resources were either the staff of specialized welfare institutions or working on a personal basis as psychiatrists, physiotherapists and speech therapists.

Qualified personnel with sufficient experience in educational, social and vocational inclusion are available to pursue the process of inclusion. These are the support educators in inclusive schools, social workers, teachers in the inclusive schools and vocational consultants.

Specialists and consultants become experts with regard to specific educational, social or vocational inclusion fields addressed by the project through training teachers, support educators, parents and people with disabilities, writing guidebooks and/or carrying out research studies.

5.4. Information Resources

Before the project, those who were advocating and working on inclusion were suffering from a huge lack of Arabic information and guidelines.

The compiled, written, published and distributed specialized resources are available to facilitate and improve educational, social and vocational inclusion. Some of these resources covered awareness-raising, while others focused on skill building. These resources were produced in different formats, including guidebooks, media and electronic materials.

5.5. Service Systems

Before the implementation of the project, services for persons with disabilities were provided by the specialized systems of the welfare institutions. These systems provided services only for the residents of these institutions. A few systems were available outside these institutions but did not provide services with an "inclusion" perspective.

An early intervention system suitable for application in educational institutions and easily adopted and applied by teachers is suggested and published.

A recruitment system is put into operation in an established employment office for people with disabilities.

The presence of printing school books in Braille is established and put into operation.

An administration and service providing system is suggested and submitted to the Ministry of Education to undertake the responsibilities of including children with additional needs in the public schools.

5.6. Policies

The Social Thematic Assessment conducted in Phase I of the project showed the gap in the national policies in promoting social, educational and vocational inclusion.

A policy paper with a set of recommendations is available to promote and implement inclusive education at national level.

Recommendations for updating and refinement to estimate the prevalence of disabilities in Lebanon and their social and geographical distribution are available.

5.7. Consortium Capacity

One of the main achievements of the project, contributing to future sustainability lies in the capacity of the 3 national associations of the consortium in the following areas:

- Consorting efforts in promoting inclusion in Lebanon
- Leading and mobilizing the stakeholders at national level to advocate for inclusion
- Managing projects at national levels
- Managing budgets and accounting in partnership with entities, like the World Bank and the Council of Development and Reconstruction.

6. Constraints

The implementation of the project was constrained by national systems and policies, level of cooperation of Ministries, current political situation, legal and financial measures, inclusion as a "concept", and the availability of relevant personnel and materials.

6.1. Current systems and adopted policies

The current systems and adopted policies in the public and private sector do not favor inclusion. This fact was established before the onset of the project, and was therefore taken into consideration in the planning stages, but practical "on the ground" implementation had disclosed an unexpected magnitude and range of difficulties in the various project domains.

6.2. Cooperation of targeted ministries

Before the onset of the project, promising contacts were initiated with the ministry of social affairs. MoSA lacked the personnel and was not prepared for working with non- governmental organizations although they should have been the main actor on the project. Their policies and programs do mirror the inclusive vision. But, cooperation levels became acceptable, once the project started to prove its importance, and this is expected to last hereafter.

6.3. The political situation

In July 2006, a massive war took Lebanon by surprise. Activities were stopped during the summer and through the early months of the school year. This has disturbed the original plans and implied new slower plans which affected the results.

The Project selected schools were working under the pressure of the political situation which implied delays in project activities. On the other hand, local committee members' movement was restricted by fear and the national ministries were busy in planning and implementing early reconstruction and reform plans.

This situation made the project management demand for an extension of 3 months to make up and plan for the execution of the remaining project activities and overcome difficulties with the help of the CDR.

6.4. Legal and Official Measures

A couple of legal financial measures surprised the Consortium in the implementation of the project. These included the need to declare the consortium (a non-profit organization) for the 'Value Added Tax', and to submit bank insurance in order to get the first installment. So, the management team got a personal loan to start implementing the project.

6.5. Inclusion as a "Concept"

The project involved the introduction of a new concept, inclusion. For instance, some people have never heard of inclusion, others equalized it with rehabilitation for people with disabilities

and others thought it had to do only with disabled people. In addition, directly related stakeholders such as Welfare Institutions for persons with disabilities and other officials in various ministries misunderstood inclusion, and thought it was such a complex and hard operation requiring a lot of efforts, which in turn made their cooperation slow at the beginning of the project.

6.6. Needed Personnel and Materials Resources

At the beginning of the project, project management had to expand their personnel. The new team did not have the experience or specialty in the inclusion domain since Lebanon lacked experience in this domain. So, time and efforts were invested in training the team to carry on their tasks. In addition, Arabic material was not available and effort was spent in translation of papers to be used during implementation by team members.

Difficulties in general, may have made things slow in the beginning, but the perseverance of the project team members, and their systematic work all along to find solutions and alternatives made it possible to overcome all these hurdles and achieve satisfactory results.

7. Sustainability:

The sustainability of main activity components of the project was thought of since the planning stage of this project. During the informal evaluation process, at the end of the project, the Consortium main players decided to sustain 5 main activity components. These include the regional committees of advocates, the national inclusion network, the pilot 10 schools, the employment office and the national policies and actions.

The above mentioned achievements, outputs and outcomes for each of these 5 activity areas may help predict the extent of self sustainability.

Here below, are the description of the objectives, process and estimated budget for each activity component that the consortium is planning to undertake as a follow up to the project.

7.1. Regional Committees of Advocates

The consortium of the three national associations will pursue coordinating the meetings and activities of the regional committees and building the capacity of the committees. The social workers will carry on these tasks as was the case during the implementation of the national inclusion project. The main objective is to promote the formation of a national central committee with representatives of the local ones.

The budget estimates to cover for the part-time social workers will be equivalent to 15% of the disbursed budget on the main staff in the national inclusion project.

7.2. The National Inclusion Network

The consortium will continue to play leadership role within the national network body. The network will acquire the privilege of advocating for inclusion at national level. The consortium has to maintain supporting the secretariat of the network and the updating of the website.

The budget to be allocated for the part-time secretary is equivalent to 10% of the disbursed personnel budget in the national inclusion project.

7.3. The Pilot 10 Schools

Whereas five of the selected schools are able to provide the necessary resources to include students with disabilities, The consortium will continue working with the other five schools by

providing one support educator for each school to support the inclusion of a great number of students with disabilities in these schools and to provide consultancy to these schools to improve their inclusive quality education.

The budget to be allocated to the five support educators is equivalent to 35% of the disbursed budget on the main staff in the national inclusion project.

7.4. The Employment Office

The employment office established during the Project will start vocational rehabilitation programs for people with disabilities and continue linking un-employed persons with the potential employers.

The budget allocated to the staff of the office is equivalent to 5% of the disbursed consultants' budget in the national inclusion project.

7.5. National Policies and Actions

The consortium will plan for a national inclusion program by applying participatory approach with the different governmental and non governmental stakeholders. The program will include the expectations and responsibilities of each party to promote inclusion at institutional and national level.

The budget that to be allocated to the implementation of this component is equivalent to 10% of the disbursed consultants' budget and 25% of the disbursed logistics and consumables budget in the national inclusion project.

In order to implement the activities of the five components, a budget should be allocated to a management team, equivalent to 20% of the disbursed personnel budget in the national inclusion project.

The total budget that the consortium needs to allocate to continue working on inclusion for one year and a half is equal to US \$160,000.

8. Conclusions and lessons learned

The changes the project accomplished with related stakeholders in the social educational and vocational domain facilitated the path for inclusion as part of a national strategic plan.

In order to reach an inclusive society, the rich and unique experience of the National Inclusion Project need to be sustained and pursued in the same direction.

All conclusions and lessons learned from the project cannot be contained in one single paper. However, it is important to point out the following:

8.1. A Channel of Communication with Related Stakeholders

Discussion and communication with related stakeholders, especially those resistant to inclusion prepared them to accept inclusion and even become advocates for it. Communication needs to be encouraged to allow these parties to meet on a regular basis. This channel of communication has been accomplished through the project's regional committees, the National Inclusion Network, national conferences, training sessions, among others.

8.2. An Inclusion Model

When new concepts are introduced, they require adopting a new culture with new policies. It is not enough to discuss inclusion on a theoretical level solely. There has to be a model of

inclusion to follow in the educational, social and vocational domains, among others. The project did provide these models for related stakeholders, which in turn convinced them more of the importance and goal of inclusion.

8.3. All- Encompassing Inclusion

When we discuss inclusion, we cannot fixate on just a part of it in order to facilitate it. For example, adopting an inclusive policy, on a school level, requires it to be comprehensive in nature in terms of school routines, tasks, students and personnel working in the school, among others. Inclusion cannot be successful unless it is comprehensive in nature. In turn, this applies to adopting inclusion on a national level. It is not beneficial adopting inclusion in one ministry and not the other or on an educational level and not the social level. An all-encompassing inclusion is one of the strong points of the project.

8.4. Leadership and Partnership Among Stakeholders

Tackling new issues requires big changes. These changes often start with the initiative of small organizations. In turn, the latter should possess leadership characteristics especially when it comes to reaching out to and convincing other stakeholders. Small groups should also partner with related stakeholders or else they will remain small, weakening the effects desired and hence making change almost impossible. In the implementation of the project, many stakeholders felt they were partners in the inclusion process initiated by the project.

8.5. Initiations of change

The Lebanese society is characterized by the central role of its private sector and civic organizations in educational, social and vocational domains, among others. Examples include the fact that the government does not have any social institution to care for people with disabilities. Two thirds of Lebanese children go to private schools instead of public schools. There are more than 50 institutions that work to improve environment, among others.

Ministries' policies are characterized by their fridity and lack of flexibility. Change has to commence in the civic society and its institutions and associations. The latter have to keep the continuity of their work and change in inclusion, so that later it becomes possible to change the policies of the government and related ministries.

Work in the national inclusion project showed that convincing officials in the ministries of the importance of inclusion is not sufficient to obtain change in the public sector. It rather requires a change in the ministries' policies, rules, personnel and budget. Since that requires a long time to happen, associations and civic society institutions will remain the main players in the change operation until it is adopted by the public sector.

8.6. Partnership with the Public Sector

Based on the reality of the Lebanese society that has been described here above, and at a time where the public sector has to be a partner in the change operation, partnership between the civic society institutions and the public sector is the most feasible choice to reach national inclusion. The experience of such partnership in the National Inclusion Project can be used as a leading experience with the rest of the ministries.

Unlike the Center for Development and Reconstruction, ministries in Lebanon do not have policies to allow partnership with non-governmental organizations and the execution of similar projects as the project at hand. Based on this, the only possible choice is to execute such projects by the lead of non-governmental organizations yet with partnerships with the related ministries until a policy change in these ministries is attained.

8.7. Continuity

The duration of the project, one and a half year, was not enough to invest in the project's achievements and measure their impact. The work of the Associations of the Consortium would guarantee this permanence after the end of the project. The Consortium bring together people fighting for a cause –to reach an inclusive society through following the guidelines of international conventions such as the United Nations Convention of Human Rights for People with Disabilities (2006).

In addition to the experience and development of their capabilities, these associations gained the support of international organizations, including the United Nations organizations.

Based on these conclusions and lessons learned, the Consortium Associations promise to pursue the process for Lebanon to become all inclusive. Associations of the consortium will build on the national inclusion project achievements to reach out and realize inclusion in all domains of the Lebanese society.