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A Study on the Education of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) within the Age Group 6 – 14 Years with Special Reference to Kaliabor Education Block, Nagaon District (Assam)

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Abstract:

The concept of *Children with Special Needs (CWSN)* refers to those children whose needs are very different from those of the majority of children in the society. Education of CWSN means a specially designed instruction which meet the unique needs of the special child. In a democratic nation, the provision of education for CWSN is considered a human right and it becomes the duty of the nation, society and parents that they should provide special education for these children. If these children are neglected, they may become anti-social, mentally ill, mal-adjusted and burden in the society. In my paper, focus is made on these children who have the capacity to learn, but in a different way. Hence, it is the duty of the educationists, parents and teachers to understand the abilities, deficiencies as well as the complexities of these exceptional children and provide appropriate education best suited for them.

Keywords: CWSN, SSA, Disability, Education.

Introduction:

Education is the passport to greater opportunities in life. For the child with special needs, the prognosis of his/her adult life is highly depended on the quality of education in the pre-school and ensuing school years. Early identification and intervention are pivotal to the prognosis of the child with special needs. Many professionals believe that the first seven years of a child's life are critical windows for his/her development in intellectual, social and emotional sectors. The commonly-held view about CWSN is that early services to young children with special needs will enhance their abilities to develop their maximum potential, reduce later education costs to society, and improve their chances of both economic and living independence. Similarly, the quality of education during the child's formal school years beyond the age of 6 and the ensuing transition planning are believed to have a direct impact on whether he achieves maximum economic and living independence or not. Children with special needs are at much higher risk to be significantly unemployed and underemployed upon leaving school compared to their peers who do not have disabilities.

The meaning of '*special need*' is broad and includes both physical and mental health, development and other kinds of conditions and diagnoses. Children with special needs also includes those children who are '*at risk*' for disabilities such as those who have a

development delay. There are 70 million disabled people in India. One in every ten children or 3% of the country's total child population also falls in this category. The government itself admits that out of the total disabled population only 2% are educated. More than 75% of disabilities are preventable. Education being a subject in the concurrent list has to design strategies to help disabled persons in the area of education. The role of NGOs in imparting education to *CWSN* all over the world cannot be undermined. In fact, the education of *CWSN* began in India only with the setting up of special schools. The teachers and other employed go to the interior villages and organize awareness program and make survey for searching *CWSN*. They make awareness in the parents and try to enrol their children in that NGO. In fact, the NGO gives them scholarship so that the children can continue their education. *CWSN* are children with a variety of different disabilities covering health and mental conditions that require special interventions, services and support. Parenting a child with special needs can be particularly challenging.

My research paper provides evidence of similar arguments within the projected area under consideration. Unfortunately these may act as a barrier to improvement efforts. Reviewing the information for selected areas in Assam, this research also illustrates some other barriers to the improvement of educational opportunities for *CWSN* and to provide these opportunities in a way that allows the children to learn alongside others in their local community schools. It indicates how the depressed economic situation and the ensuing shortage of funds in most of the places prevent expenditure on initiatives that would shift provision away from separate special schools. This may be one reason why, in general, it is the richer countries that have been able to introduce a degree of integration into their educational provision, although it is the poorer countries where the eventual improvements in practice and possible cost-savings from effective integration efforts would be of greatest benefit. Furthermore, the lack of wider developments of education systems means that reforms in the special needs field are even more difficult. Finally, the inheritance of a dominant medical approach to assessment, categorization and intervention, continues to be a major barrier to experimentation of *CWSN*. Children with disabilities and many others who experience difficulties in learning are often marginalized within or even excluded from school systems. My research also considers the situation of *CWSN* in Assam and the nearby states, examining particular developments that have occurred in recent years and how these compare with overall trends nationally. This analysis suggests certain barriers to progress, including attitudes within communities towards certain groups of children, traditional practices in the field of special education, and the effects of the depressed economic situation within the area.

The early history of special education started with a school for hearing impaired as early as 1555 by the Spanish monk Pedro Ponce de Leon in Spain. In this school, a small number of such children were taught to read, write and speak and learn academic subjects. The first school for the hearing impaired in Great Britain was established in 1767 in Edinburgh by Thomas Braidwood, who combined oral and manual method for teaching alphabet and sign. In France, the first school was established in Paris in 1755 and the system emphasized training of the senses of sight and touch which gradually became the fore-runner



to Montessori's sensory training approach. In USA, Gallandet established the first school for the deaf in 1847 using the French method. Special education services expanded rapidly after World War II, both in numbers and types of children served. Vocational rehabilitation, occupational therapy, physical therapy was brought into the services of the handicapped.

In India, the first school for the visually impaired was established in Amritsar, Punjab in 1887. Growth of schools for the physically or mentally challenged persons in the sixty years until the advent of independence is extremely slow. By 1947, India had just 32 schools for the visually impaired, but the number rose to 170 in 1980. The number of schools for the hearing impaired was only 35 in 1947, but had risen to 180 by 1980. Schools for the mentally retarded were just 3 in 1947, but rose to 200 by 1980. The first school for cerebral palsied was started in 1973. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) has observed handicapped to be an inseparable part of education. In 1968, National Policy on Education suggested the expansion of facilities for physically and mentally challenged children and the development of an integrated programme enabling the challenged children to study in regular schools. Two decades later, the National Policy on Education stressed the removal of disparities in education, while attending to the specific needs of those who had been denied equality so far. In 2000, the government of India launched SSA seeking education for all by 2010, fully pleading that the SSA will ensure that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability is provided education in an appropriate environment. Through its 86th amendment of the Indian Constitution in 2002, government of India introduced a new article, 21-A: Right to Education, a major landmark in the history of education of the country. The constitution states that free and compulsory education should be provided for all children until they complete the age of 14 years. In 2005, a comprehensive plan for action for children and youth with disabilities presented by the minister for Human Resource Development clearly included education by envisaging all schools as disabled friendly by 2020. This has been followed by the recent arrival of a much needed policy named "The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities" in February, 2006, for the caring of education and rehabilitation of its disabled population, with an assurance of providing free and compulsory education to all citizens with disabilities up to the minimum age of 18 years by emphasising a need for main-streaming them through inclusive education.

From the analysis of various government reports and policy documents, it is clearly suggested that international mandates and policy frameworks have provided a significant impetus to efforts undertaken at the national level. The UN General Assembly's declaration of 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons; proclamation of 1983-1992 as the Decade of the Disabled by UN; followed by the UNESCAP Decade of the Disabled Persons from 1993-2002; and subsequently the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca in June 1994, have all played an important role in bringing the spotlight on to people with disabilities, especially on education as a vehicle for integration and empowerment. Not surprisingly, many of these mandates have shaped new national legislations and policies. Here are the following four legislations that have had a significant impact on the government and the NGO sector, of these the first three are specific to people with disabilities:

- *Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992)*: states that CWSN will be taught by a trained teacher.
- *Persons with Disabilities Act (1995)*: educational entitlement for all CWSN up to 18 years in an appropriate environment.
- *National Trust Act (1999)*: provides services and support to severely disabled children.
- *The 86th Constitutional Amendment (2007)*: provides free and compulsory education to children up to 14 years.

My area of study primarily is the Kaliabor Education Block of Nagaon District. Further, I have also interviewed some people of the Kaliabor Block office and headmasters of different schools to understand the education of CWSN. In this study, attempts are also made to associate the CWSN with the normal children regarding the achievement of universal education.

Kaliabor is a sub-divisional town of Nagaon District which includes in the territory of the state of Assam. The sub-division is one of the three sub-divisions of the Nagaon District. The other sub-divisions are gradually Nagaon and Hojai. Kaliabor is situated in the middle part of Assam. It is situated at a distance of 48 kilometres east of Nagaon town. It was the headquarters of the Borphukans during the Ahom era. It was also the scene of several battles against the Muslim invaders. Kaliabor is regarded as the rice bowl of Assam. This place occupies an important place in the annals of the history of Assam. The term, 'Kaliabor' owes its origin to the word, 'Tun-Rung-Dam' which means 'a place of Black Big Trees' in the Tai language. Kaliabor is surrounded in the north by the mighty Brahmaputra, in the south by lofty hills of Karbi Anglong District, in the east by Kaziranga National Park under Golaghat District and in the west by Samaguri under Nagaon Sadar sub-division. In political identity, the place is a part of the Kaliabor Lok Sabha Constituency. Nearby the area of Kaliabor, the place Silghat is also situated. Silghat, located at a road distance of almost 7.2 kilometres from Kaliabor is a historical place of greater importance. The primary native language of Kaliabor is Assamese. Bengali and Bodo languages are also used in some villages of Kaliabor. The nearest railway station of Kaliabor is Silghat Town which is located in and around 7.2 kilometres distance. The nearest airport of Kaliabor is Tezpur Airport at a distance of about 23.9 kilometres.

Educational Institutions of Kaliabor Educational Block:

There are numbers of educational institutions under Kaliabor Educational Block. There are 134 numbers of provincialised LP schools, 19 LP schools and 1 pre-Madrassa school having financial aid, 10 govt. LP schools, 17 schools under tea garden management and 10 venture LP schools in Kaliabor Educational Block. There are 8 numbers of MV, 21 ME and 1 provincialised MEM (Madrassa) schools, 14 ME and 1 MEM having financial aid in the proposed area. There are 12 provincialised and 6 high schools having



financial aid with 5 higher secondary schools in Kaliabor area. There is only 1 provincialised college in Kaliabor sub-division. Besides, there are 5 junior colleges and 3 high schools under private sector.

Population and Literacy of Kaliabor:

According to the census report of 2011, the total population of Kaliabor sub-division is 1,95,713. Age 0-6 is not included in this calculation. Among the huge population, 1,20,029 are literate and rest 75684 are illiterate. The population of Kaliabor consists of different groups of community as Hindu, Muslims and Christians. The main language of this area is Assamese. But, many other dialects like Bengali, Hindi, Bhojpuri, Nepali and some indigenous tribal dialects like Karbi, Bodo, Tea Garden language are prevailing in this area. The society is basically agriculture-based, but some other means of livelihood like trading, service, crafting have their existence in the society. All these practices are performed with utmost interest and dedication by the common people of the area.

Major Findings:

After a close practical survey done upon the schools of different categories under the sub division of Kaliabor area, lot of information is collected regarding the status of CWSN in the present as well as the former years. Lower Primary, Upper Primary, High and Higher Secondary Schools are also surveyed during the research work. As received from the Education Block of Kaliabor, it is found that there are a total number of 622 CWSN as detected during the session 2015-2016. Among these CWSN, 559 have been enrolled in different schools of the area. 63 nos of CWSN are being provided education under home based education system. In my survey on the 30 schools under the Kaliabor Education Block, 94 CWSN are detected. Though large no. of CWSN are getting proper facilities from different sources, yet some are not having proper care and facilities from any of the sources whether it is the govt. or the NGOs. Therefore, it has become important that these CWSN who are not getting any care should be brought into the light and should be handled with adequate amount of privileges. There are lots of reasons regarding the drawbacks of CWSN towards performing their educational activities. It is also found out that attitudinal barriers prevent CWSN from coming to schools. Unless these barriers are effectively addressed, success in bringing significant number of CWSN to school may be difficult to achieve. Hence, it is important to undertake wide spread awareness on the need and importance of educating CWSN. In this regard, an attempt has been made by the Inclusive Education Programme of the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan mission. However, the program is observed to have little success in meeting its objectives because of the limited roles played by the Special Educators. Consequently, even in the limited areas where the programme is having additional manpower and institutional support, it is doing not as much for the children in need as desirable. So, everyone should come forward to assist these CWSN and help them with every possible facility.

Conclusion:

My research work provides evidence of similar arguments within the projected area under consideration, i.e. *CWSN*. Unfortunately these may act as a barrier to improvement efforts. Reviewing the information for selected areas in the state, the research also illustrates some other barriers to the improvement of educational opportunities for children with special needs and to provide these opportunities in a way that allows the children to learn alongside others in their local community schools. It indicates how the depressed economic situation and the ensuing shortage of funds in most of the places prevent expenditure on initiatives that would shift provision away from separate special schools. This may be one reason why, in general, it is the richer countries that have been able to introduce a degree of integration into their educational provision, although it is the poorer countries where the eventual improvements in practice and possible cost-savings from effective integration efforts would be of greatest benefit. Meanwhile, a degree of institutional inertia, including that arising from vested interests in the maintenance of the status quo, prevents reform in this area of educational provision. Furthermore, the lack of wider developments of education systems means that reforms in the special needs field are even more difficult. Finally, the inheritance of a dominant medical approach to assessment, categorization and intervention, continues to be a major barrier to experimentation of *CWSN*. Nevertheless, the indications are that there is considerable debate in many of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe as to how best to proceed in order to provide effective schooling for all children in these communities. Some of this has been stimulated by contacts that have occurred with individuals and groups from countries outside the region. On the other hand, it is also important to recognize that those in the region have themselves generated agendas for change as a result of internal review processes. Within these discussions very different positions exist, reflecting similar differences to those that exist throughout the developed world. It is also true fact that certain traditions that are peculiar to the region, particularly the emphasis on defectology, dominate the way of provision for children with special needs is conceptualized and organized. Thus, as reforms are proposed, it is inevitable that the overall national debates outlined in the early sections of the research work should manifest themselves in a form that seems likely to create further dispute. All of this is likely to lead to some confusion amongst those who are unfamiliar with this wider debate. So, for example, parents, administrators and politicians may be faced, on the one hand, with highly regarded specialists who argue for a policy push to reform mainstream schooling in order to make it more inclusive, whilst, on the other hand, there may be equally eminent voices arguing for an extension of separate specialized provision. And, of course, this seemingly contradictory advice has to be evaluated within a context of reduced budgets for education and an overall emphasis on raising standards in ways that can be seen to contribute to economic reconstruction. The research argues that those within the country who wish to encourage moves towards more inclusive practices need to be realistic in taking account of the barriers they face. These are likely to take the form of negative attitudes towards certain groups within the community seen as being different, curricula and assessment policies that lack the flexibility to respond to pupil diversity, and the actions of those who, for a variety of reasons, have a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo. In real terms, the work identifies traditions and experiences within the projected



area that provide important building blocks for further development. For example, the tradition of providing education opportunities for all members of the community in many of the places encourages an expectation that this is a matter of right. In addition, the strong emphasis placed on the importance of teacher education is a significant starting point. Then, more recently, the greater focus on community involvement in some parts of the state has fostered an atmosphere within which parent support groups can blossom.

Moreover, in the present study, a satisfactory progress was found about the enrolment of CWSN under Kaliabor Education Block. But it is a matter of unsatisfactory fact that 100 percentage enrolments at primary level were found including home-based education system. Undoubtedly, it is helping to increase the quantity of enrolment, but the quantity of retention in school and the quality of education is doubtful. Secondly, Kaliabor Education Block provides different facilities for CWSN. Thirdly, some barriers are found for the development of CWSN. Parents, teachers, community awareness are very essential for the development of CWSN. The CWSN are also a valuable part of the whole nation. They can work productively, contributing towards the progress of the country. To achieve the goal of national development, we must think about the education and employment of CWSN. Education being the most effective instrument of empowering the socially disadvantaged groups, all our efforts should be made to improve the educational status of these inclusive groups.

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