Inclusive Education Vanuatu Report

Photo courtesy of Rita Naviti

Education Services
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1. Introduction

Since the last SPE-VI Biennial Conference in 2011 in Sydney, Australia, the overall general outlook for inclusive education in Vanuatu is a positive move forward giving reference to the Vanuatu Context. Therefore, the purpose of this report is to briefly give a general account of the education system and outline the progress the integration of inclusive education into the Vanuatu education system.

2. Background

Vanuatu, formerly New Hebrides, is an archipelago forming a “Y” shape stretching from Hiu in the north to Aneityum to the south with a total land area of 12,336 square kilometers.

Vanuatu has a population of 234,023 according to the 2009 census which is an increase of 47,345 from the 1999 census.

On 30th July 1980, Vanuatu achieved independence from France and United Kingdom. Vanuatu has abolished most of the dual systems but it continues to maintain two mediums of instructions in its education system. In the early post independence era, visibly, there were two systems of education but with gradual progress after 32 years of independence, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has continued to work hard to amalgamate the two systems and now there is only one system of education dressed in two official languages from year 1 to year 10 as guided by the Vanuatu Constitution. The senior cycle for the English medium adopts a regional program namely the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate (PSSC) for years 11-12 and South Pacific Form Seven Certificate (SPFSC) for year 13. The French maintains a purely Vanuatu home grown program from years 11-14. Both English and French have examinations at year 12 and 13 while French continues to year 14 where an examination is sat for tertiary entrance. English senior cycle does tertiary entrance at year 13.

The new curriculum developed for Vanuatu by Vanuatu is to see a common program running from year 1 to 13 or 14 maintaining the English and French mediums.

3. National Plans

The Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu in chapter 2 section 5 recognises, that, subject to any restrictions imposed by law on non-citizens, all persons are entitled to the following fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual without discrimination on the grounds of race, place or origin, religious or traditional beliefs, political opinions, language, sex but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and to the legitimate public interest in defense, safety, public order, welfare and health:

1 (k) equal treatment under the law or administrative action, except that no law shall be inconsistent with this sub-paragraph insofar as it makes provision for the special benefit, welfare, protection or advancement of females, children and young persons, members of
underprivileged groups or inhabitants of less developed area.

The category of underprivileged group is inclusive on disability, therefore, the constitution also provides for the protection and equal rights for persons with disabilities.

The National Education Act of 2001 (Act) in its objective emphasized strongly that; it is imperative to eliminate educational disadvantages arising from the gender or ethnicity of a child, or a child's geographic, economic, social, cultural or other circumstances; which includes children with disabilities

The Act for the first time prohibits against discrimination of a child that s/he is not to be refused admission to any school on account of his or her gender, religion, nationality, race, language, disability or age.

It is imperative to integrate Special or Inclusive Education into the Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy (VESS) as it serves to improve access to basic education and be hospitably equitable to peoples and groups with disability.

It is also most crucial for the children and teachers to comprehend and be aware of the fact that children with certain disabilities have a potential to learn and develop.

In 2006, the Government through the Ministry of Education adopted a new approach called Sector Wide Approach (SWAp). The process of SWAp entails mass consultations to the leaders within the six provinces of Vanuatu on on the new directions the Vanuatu Education System will take. The consultations were led by the Director General of Education and senior officers in the Cabinet and Department. The process culminated with the first ever Education Summit in October of 2006. VESS document was drafted and was approved by the DCO and the COM in 2007. VESS provided the authoritative plan to guide the directions and development of the Education Sector. This document contains the framework for National Develop Work Plans and begins on implementing selected VESS initiatives in 2007. This allowed time to continue the work on more fully costed work plans and to prepare VESS 2008 – 2017 for submission through the normal GoV planning and budget processes, and for donors to assess VESS and consider how they can pool funds into a long-term sector-wide approach commencing in 2008.

The VESS builds on the strengths of previous plans but also moves into a new future where ni-Vanuatu people take fuller control of the development agenda for education. One of the points in the vision, mission, goals and values is to ensure that; access and equity: targeted measures; address inequities in access and achievements, and a special focus on women, poverty alleviation, rural and remote areas, people with disabilities, and young people in urban settlements.

In 2008-2009 the VESAP initiated the concept of pooling funds from donors towards targeted projects that cannot be included in the Government education budget. In 2010, the Vanuatu Education Road Map (VERM) captures the entire government education programs and activities and arranged them out into an annual work plan (AWP) over a period of three years.
The VERM, a medium term plan, is now coming to the final year with a new package in process of development. The new package will come into play after the transition period from mid 2012 to mid 2013.

4. Policy

The Ministry of Education does have an Inclusive Education (IE) Policy which incorporates international, regional and national agreements and conventions.

The concept to develop an IE policy began way back in the late 90’s. However, it was in 2002 that Ministry of Education established within its structure a position of an Education Officer to the post of National Special Education Coordinator. From 2002, consultations were carried by the Officer among stakeholders to put together a policy however in 2009 a draft IE was developed. In 2002, the former Special Education Officer worked on guidelines to be integrated into a policy. Indeed, there are loose elements in the VESS and Education Master Plan. Also UN conventions like the Convention on the Right of Children, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and others that are signed and ratified by the Vanuatu Government. However, when the VESS finally gets its action plans going through the Education Task Forces the GoV through MOE will be more committed from its budget and donor funding arrangement.

The National Disability Policy and Plan of Action 2008 – 2015 is approved. The IE policy is now in its first year of operation. I like to highlight the initial achievements so far in the policy:

- Amendments to Education Act 21 of 2001 on progress of going before Parliament
- Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education (VITE) inserts courses in its program
- First graduations of 81 new teachers of VITE going through the program since 2010-2012 which includes IE program
- Tertiary training for existing teachers in regional institutions
- Parents initiative successfully lands one student with disability in tertiary studies under Government scholarship
- Workshops on awareness of IE Policy and simple screening in schools as simulation exercise for selected officers in the provincial education officers and teachers
- Vanuatu Education Management of Information System (VEMIS) continues to collect school data
- Facility Unit within MoE drafts plans of buildings to address accessibility and Takara School on North Efate is a good example with development partners assistance
- Primary 1-6 UPE school grants of 8,600 vatu per child
- The National Statistics Office is keen on improving the gathering of data if we parents provide reliable information
- Process underway to develop a disability act by the Ministry of Justice and Community Services
- Amendments to the building code act is in process
5. Statistics/Education Management Information System (EMIS)

The MOE collects data on the actual disabilities that are in school. When the position of the Special Education Coordinator was created in 2001 the officer prepared questionnaire form to collect data. The questions were incorporated into the VEMIS questionnaire forms. The returning of forms was good. VESS was approved in 2007 and the VEMIS was established with the help of donor funding that the form used included the existing data the MOE usually collects and the disability data was incorporated into the VEMIS form. The data and information charts and diagrams are the most recent ones.

The data are supplied by Head Masters or Principals of Primary and Secondary schools. This means that the children are not diagnosed by specialists to identify the actual status of the disability. There are challenges and barriers within the communities and schools that need to be broken so as to make schools more hospitable to IE such as cultural issues, ignorance, skills and tolerance. Therefore the statistics doesn’t show extreme levels of disabilities as is shown on the graph below.