



## Executive summary

### **Caribbean Symposium on Inclusive Education (Kingston, Jamaica, 5-7 December 2007)**

The Caribbean Symposium on Inclusive Education, December 5-7, 2007 was organized by the UNESCO Office for the Caribbean; the Division for the Promotion of Basic Education (ED/BAS, UNESCO Paris) and IBE-UNESCO, in partnership with Ministry of Education of Jamaica. One hundred and ten participants including ministerial representatives, policy-makers, international organization experts and educators, attended and discussed the presentations of sixteen English-speaking Caribbean countries (Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; Argentina; Bahamas; Belize; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Commonwealth of Dominica; Grenada; Guyana; Jamaica; St. Christopher and Nevis; St. Lucia; St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; Trinidad and Tobago).

This symposium was focused on broadening the understanding of the theory and practice of inclusive education in the region while discussing how governments can develop and implement policies on inclusive education. As a main outcome, integrating country and thematic presentations, discussion within six international groups of the sixteen participating countries of the English-speaking Caribbean resulted in a regional road map useful for ICE 2008. Thus, the following outcomes can be presented, highlighting conceptions of inclusive education, challenges and policy initiatives:

Referring to the Caribbean as a diverse region in need of a general framework of inclusive education, an overall agreement among participating countries was reached in relation to UNESCO's definition of inclusive education as presented in the Guidelines for Inclusion, Ensuring Access to Education for All, UNESCO, 2005 (p.13). Perspectives discussed regarding the conception of inclusive education pointed out to the need of having education systems in which everyone in society receives a quality education regardless of their physical, intellectual, economic or social condition.

Policy proposals reflecting the region's challenges pointed out to increasing society's awareness of and support to inclusive education by identifying exclusion factors, with the aim of achieving an inclusive society. Countries recognized that national legal frameworks of education should be aligned with international conventions and agreements. There was an overall claim calling for policies to be implemented and laws to be enforced with the goal of preventing inclusive education from remaining only a rhetorical device of education reform. Inclusive education can be further clarified,

developed and sustained by training main stakeholders on the concept and practices of inclusive education (e.g. teachers and principals, parents, students and community actors); this would lead to self-reflection and a changing attitude necessary for inclusive education reforms. The excluded should also be involved in inclusive education policy-making and implementation. There should be education policies in place supportive of a free and compulsory early childhood education, primary and secondary education.

The importance of an early childhood education, as essential for basic education, and attending to the diverse needs of students, was reiterated as a key factor for inclusive education goals. Access to quality education should be for all and not for elite groups. An increase of budgetary allocations is required for inclusive education, especially at local school levels. Transparency, accountability and auditing are needed in relation to an efficient and equitable allocation and spending of educational financial resources according to identified needs. Poverty is a main barrier when considering priorities of inclusive education. Curricula should be revised to recognize and address multiple intelligences; it should be child centered, relevant to and inclusive of the diversity not only of learners but also of teachers. Overall, there was a strong call for revising assessment methods and standards. Keeping a curricular agenda of high standards and “testing” is a form of exclusion. One should pluralize standards and assessment, preventing them from becoming hegemonic. Assessment should be continuous, linking all education levels. Bilingual education is a key issue to address within inclusive education. Legal frameworks should support it and it should be included in the UN declaration for the rights of indigenous peoples.

Overall, teacher training was identified as not being conducive to inclusive education, and thus, in need of various reforms. As a starting point, values and attitudes underlying teaching objectives and practices should be revised in light of inclusive education. Common standards in teacher education programs regarding inclusive education should be considered, aiming to highlight commonalities in the region. Overall, the teaching profession has to be more highly valued in society. There was a strong call for more research-based policy proposals for inclusive education.