



**Date:** January, 2016

## **Position Paper on SCA's Understanding of Inclusive Education**

### **Preamble:**

In a joint Education and RAD Programmes meeting on Inclusive Education held on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Dr. Khalid Fahim Ag PID Director raised a pertinent issue about our understanding of Inclusive Education as an organization. He suggested that a position paper (1-2 pages) be written to guide this understanding and more so, to show how our practice of inclusive education should look like. This paper responds to that suggestion. It must however, be borne in mind that the concept of inclusive education is still at its toddler stage in many countries including Afghanistan. It is imperative therefore that we get the concept of inclusive education right and then contextualize that concept into our Afghan situation. The reason for contextualizing inclusive education to Afghan situation is that this country has its own values, its norms, its cultures and diverse ethnicities which must be respected and upheld because they keep the society together.

### **Inclusive Education**

Inclusive Education means having children learn together in a friendly environment without any form of discrimination. It means appreciating the differences in children and their learning styles. Inclusive education looks at the potential of the child not the disability, not the poor background, not the ethnic group, not the religion, sex or any other thing that tends to categorize children and discriminate them against others.

Inclusive Education seeks to strengthen social cohesion, respect for human rights and equal access to education for all children with and without disabilities<sup>1</sup>. In an inclusive school setting, children learn at their own pace and according to their own abilities to achieve optimal academic, social, emotional and physical development<sup>2</sup>. All children learn in a child friendly environment with the understanding that no school can be child-friendly unless it is inclusive and no school can be inclusive unless it is child-friendly<sup>3</sup>. SCA places distinct emphasis on girls' education in this kind of environment. This emphasis is premised on the fact that girls' education in Afghanistan is faced with challenges such as poverty, early and/or forced marriages, insecurity, lack of family support, physical access to education e.g. long distance to schools or even lack of

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<sup>1</sup> Inclusive and Child Friendly Education Policy (Ministry of Education - December 2014)

<sup>2</sup> Concepts & Terminologies – Afghan Edition (UNESCO 2010) pg. 3

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school facility, lack of female teachers, poor quality of education, no “girls only” schools, harassment by boys or male community members, and lack of community support.<sup>4</sup>

In response to these challenges, SCA constructs schools that are girls friendly, for example, schools with perimeter walls, schools with toilet facilities for girls, provision of sanitary towels, increased recruitment of female teachers, establishment of close working relationship with community members, local government and religious leaders, gender advocacy programmes and improved quality of education through teacher training. SCA also provides school textbooks and other learning materials to supplement what the government is unable to supply particularly in Community Based Schools (CBS). SCA is emphatic on gender equality and equity, removal of barriers to girls’ education and creation of female teachers role models as strategies that address girls’ education. With this basic understanding, SCA’s pivotal role in actualizing inclusive education is to continue respecting and fulfilling its mission statement: *“to empower individuals, communities and local organizations, primarily in rural areas and with particular focus on women, girls, boys and vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, so that they may participate fully in society and influence their own development”*. This is the organizational position. One of the pathways of fulfilling the mission is through intensified inclusive education practices where children with disabilities including girls, children from minority groups, vulnerable and working children as well as children from pastoralist communities fully access education, are included in schools, participate in learning and achieve on equal basis as their non-disabled counterparts. In a nutshell, it means leveling the ground for access to education. How then does SCA understand inclusive education OR better still, how should we as an organisation understand inclusive education in order to contribute to achieving our mission?

### **SCA Understanding of Inclusive Education**

The bedrock of inclusive education is found in Article One of the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood”. This declaration is buttressed by UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), World Declaration on Education for All (1990), the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994), the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Guided by these documents plus the existing legal and education policy documents of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, International instruments on rights of children<sup>5</sup> and SCA Strategic Objective 2 (Equal access to quality educational opportunities) of the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan SCA understands Inclusive Education to mean: - A type of education that:

1. Makes education accessible to all children in Afghanistan regardless of their ethnic, religious, political, gender, or other backgrounds;
2. Removes all forms of barriers to education whether these barriers are social, cultural, economic or political in nature;

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.oxfam.org/files/afghanistan-girls-education-022411.pdf> pg. 11- 23

<sup>5</sup> Afghan Constitution ratified January 26, 2004 Article 43, National Education Strategic Plan 2014 – 2020; UN Convention on the Rights of Children 1989

3. Accepts the fact that children learn differently and can learn together in the same classroom under a caring qualified teacher, a dedicated teacher and in a conducive and friendly learning environment;
4. Challenges discrimination against any child who is pursuing quality education in all education facilities run either by the government or in all SCA learning facilities;
5. Takes place in a school setting that prepares and allows learners to participate fully in life within and outside the school set up;
6. Provides opportunities for all learners on equal basis boys and girls alike;
7. Enhances social cohesion and stimulates cordial relationship between and amongst learners for the betterment of their individual and collective lives;
8. Embraces innovative teaching, research in pedagogy and challenges our teaching methods in order to make improvements towards enhanced inclusivity and optimized learning outcomes in all academic, social, emotional and physical development of the child;
9. Identifies children's individual strengths and weaknesses and then works towards improving their academic achievements thereby bringing joy and satisfaction to the child's school life;
10. Embraces early identification of disabling conditions with a view to intervene at earliest opportunity hence reducing possible stigma as the child joins mainstream school later.

### **Strategies put in place that respond to our understanding**

SCA adopts the following strategies

1. Engage all programmes in removing all barriers to education and health services so as to facilitate participation in SCA's development agenda;
2. Make all SCA operational facilities accessible and friendly for all learners, children and adults with disabilities, girls' and children from pastoralist communities;
3. Equip teachers, community rehabilitation workers, orthopedics and health staff with adequate skills and knowledge that help mitigate against disabling conditions;
4. Conduct awareness campaigns about the potentials of children and adults with disabilities, girls in a bid to bring them to the mainstream society for gainful educational and socio-economic activities;
5. Work closely with government institutions, local authorities, religious leaders and communities in our areas of operation to uplift livelihoods and reduce poverty through education;
6. Work closely with Disabled Peoples Organizations, Community Based Organizations, and already established Associations to advocate for the rights of children and adults with disabilities and girls as they seek their rightful place in society;
7. Engage in continued capacity development particularly of teachers in Community Based Schools so that children with disabilities and those with special education needs are well catered for;

8. Carry out early identification and early assessment of children with disabilities and prepare them in advance through home based education programme to join mainstream schools later;
9. Provide equipment, teaching and learning materials to all education facilities in order to enhance smooth delivery of education services;
10. Work closely with the Ministry of Education in all aspects of education delivery system so as to create harmony in the government curriculum;
11. Motivate our service delivery through action and field research that will better inform our practice;
12. Strengthen our understanding of inclusive education through planning and/or participating in planned national and international seminars and workshops all of which will heighten and energize our response strategies to the specific learning needs of children with disabilities.

## **Conclusion**

This position paper is drawn with the aim to strategically frame SCA's understanding of Inclusive Education as a guiding mantra of our entire education programme thereby leading to contribute to achieving our mission. Achieving a mission requires tools, foresight, planning and determination. It also requires commitment to accept changes. It requires courage to face foreseen and unforeseen challenges. Driven by our three pillars of programmatic and development approach, i.e. service delivery, advocacy and capacity development, we are confident that inclusive education which is part of our Education flagship will sail through. Finally, this position paper has been compressed in point form to make it staff friendly and easy to read.

## **Endorsed by:**

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