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HIWAR



HIWAR Project for “Strengthening the Role of Disabled Peoples’ Organizations in Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue for Democratic Change in Jordan, Egypt and Occupied Palestinian Territories”

Funded by the European Union

Extended Summary of a National Study from a Human Rights Perspective of Disabled Persons’ Organizations in Palestine on

“Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Primary Education in Public Schools”

June, 2016

This national study was conducted through the disabled persons’ organizations in Jordan, Egypt and Palestine as part of HIWAR regional project activities. The study received technical support from Handicap International in partnership with the Information and Research Center – King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) – Jordan, and the Center for Continuing Education in Birzeit University – Palestine, and was funded by the European Union.

Acknowledgment

The disabled persons' organizations involved in the implementation of the study are grateful to [Handicap International](#) for its financial and technical support without which conducting this study would hardly have been possible. The appreciation is also due to:

- [Rola AbuRub](#)– Project Manager
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We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to the [Technical Committee](#), represented by the [Center for Continuing Education – Birzeit University](#), the senior research coordinator, [Maurice Backleh](#), and the policy revision and analysis expert, [Mahmoud Alawneh](#), for the technical and logistical support it has provided throughout the various stages of the study. Last but not least, we would like to thank the [Revision Committee](#), comprised of the following representatives from ministries and civil society organizations:

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HIWAR Project

In partnership with the Information and Research Center at the King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF)/ Jordan, and the Center for Continuing Education at Birzeit University/ the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Handicap International is implementing a three-year regional project (2013-2016), funded by the European Union, in Jordan, Egypt and Palestine. The project aims at promoting the participation of disabled persons' organizations as active, reliable and qualified representatives in revising and analyzing the national policies with the public authorities and civil society organizations.

The implementation of this project is planned to end by September 2016. The project is expected to support disability mobilization in the Middle East through improving the participation of the persons with disabilities in both economic and social fields in Jordan, Egypt and Palestine. To this effect, all the policies and programs satisfying and enhancing the capacities and rights of persons with disabilities will be developed and implemented.

Project Objectives:

- 1- Ensure that disabled persons' organizations enhance their potentials as civil representatives in the context of regional transformation through capacity-building to raise awareness, support the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and ensure they can fully enjoy all human rights and basic freedoms.
- 2- Enhance and support scientific research and the issuance of national and regional reports on the status of implementing the current policies, develop advocacy and lobbying strategies and translating them into leading national initiatives to advance the rights of persons with disabilities and support their participation in the reshaping policies dialogues amongst key stakeholders.
- 3- Strengthen the capacities of civil society organizations and public authorities on the rights of persons with disabilities, promote their inclusion mechanisms within their organizations' policies, and activate the sustainable impact respective to the importance of dialogue.
- 4- Monitor and identify the good practices of the capacity and impact of disabled persons' organizations in the policy-making process and the importance of their participation in disability mobilization, civil society and public authorities at both national and regional levels.

Project Activities:

- 1- Implementation of national and regional training courses to develop the capacities of disabled persons' organizations in the areas of organization development, basic qualitative and quantitative research methods, analysis of disability related policies and advocacy for change in the rights of persons with disabilities;
- 2- Development of an online accessible training e-learning curriculum supporting capacity building programs;

- 3- Analyzing policies and preparing the national and regional reports thereof;
- 4- Supporting disabled persons' organizations in preparation of the national advocacy strategies and implementation of local and national advocacy initiatives and campaigns;
- 5- Implementing exchange visits in the MENA region to expand outreach, networking and sharing of good practices amongst representatives of targeted disabled persons' organizations;
- 6- Conducting regional seminars and workshops for representatives of public authorities and civil society organizations for exchanges on inclusive disability related policies and mainstreaming disability strategies within their organizations;
- 7- Conducting roundtable and follow up meetings and dialogues for representatives of disabled persons' organizations, civil society organizations and public authorities;
- 8- Update "Mubadara" website which serves as a data bank, capturing all project progress and disability related initiatives in the Middle east;
- 9- Consolidation of the project's lessons learned and good practices at local, national and international levels;
- 10- Conducting the closing workshop to discuss policy gaps in the field of inclusive disability related policies in the MENA region and internationally to promote exchange of experiences mechanism and networking amongst disabled persons' organizations, civil society organizations and public authorities.

Capacity Raising Component

Persons with disabilities are being subjected to discrimination and face barriers on a daily basis; as a result, their participation on equal ground with others in society is hindered. Even worse, they are deprived of their rights to inclusion in terms of public education and employment, living independently in the society, and freedom of movement, etc. In order to bridge the protection gap and ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy the same standards of equality, rights and dignity enjoyed by all non-disabled persons, Jordan adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006. This Convention has come to indicate the transformation from adopting traditional charity and medical based approaches to a human rights-based approach.

Capacity Building approach through stakeholders-participatory activities and dialogue:

Underlining frameworks and approaches specifically directed to improving technical capacities and empowerment. Methodologies and approaches adapted by Handicap International, these approaches include::

- A- **Building capacities of disabled persons' organizations** due to the significance of this approach in support of the disability movement through:
 - Institutional development of organizations for persons with disabilities through training on teamwork mechanisms, governance, community based needs assessment, mobilization of resources, applications for proposals and writing projects;

- Communication of persons with disabilities' demands through enhancing dialogue mechanisms with the civil society and public authorities at the national and regional levels;
- Monitoring violations against persons with disabilities and analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to have a cause of intervention, such as studying a case and model for change and expression of views on priorities;
- Advocacy in order to make change, raise awareness and gain support of the civil society concerning the need for change.

B- Observing the principles of human rights approach:

- **Twin-track:** Case studies and programs showed that removing obstacles and barriers only is not enough to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in their communities on an equal basis, but persons with disabilities must be supported at the same time by providing supporting and specialized services, particularly in the field of claiming rights and identifying the policies that promote claiming these rights;
- **Participation:** Persons with disabilities and their organizations were included in the study in terms of participation in planning, selection of tools and development of field action-plan, as well as the development and implementation of the technical study plan;
- **Equality and non-discrimination:** The principle of equality and non-discrimination was taken into account in all stages of the research, and at all levels, whether the research team or the targeted persons;
- **Ownership:** Persons with disabilities and their organizations must feel they own the study and its results. This may only occur by participation and decision-making on several levels.

B- Networking and Exchange of Experiences:

A mechanism for networking, exchange of experiences and best practices amongst disabled persons' organizations themselves and between them on the one hand and civil societies and government organizations on the other hand at the national and regional levels should be developed as a viable way to exchange knowledge and information concerning needs and solutions, experiences and benefits, as well as contribution to disseminate, circulate and translate them into real procedural plans, in addition to unifying trends, intervention strategies and increasing influence in negotiations and pressure. Networking, participation, teamwork and dialogue have developed ways to enhance democratic performance and activate the developmental role of disabled persons' organizations in their endeavor towards an independence of decision and capability to claim their rights.

"HIWAR" project and empowerment of disabled persons' organizations

Due to the significant role of disabled persons' organizations and their representatives in support of claiming rights, and to ensure achieving the objectives and the vision of their organizations and their active role in their communities as direct representatives, groups, associations, coalitions and advocacy networks in

making the desired change to ensure that persons with disabilities obtain their right of good and safe life equally to their non-disabled peers. Handicap International activities focusing on human rights were based on international and national charters in order to be the key pillar in change process. Mechanisms followed by the project team to develop capacity are as follows:

1. Raising awareness concerning the Convention on the Rights persons with disabilities, and the national policies and laws.
2. Framing using institutional capacity-building approach that is always seeking to ensure efficient and programmed management on sound bases in establishing sustainable entities capable of influencing their societies. Training on institutional development included training beneficiaries on the skills of leadership, entrepreneurship, good governance, planning and organizing institutional activities, fundraising, analyzing needs and problems, preparation for projects, communication, coalition-building and time management. First stage training aimed at setting the bases to launch the deepest training series that is directed to intervention and dialogue in the next stage.
3. Training on the principles and bases of qualitative and quantitative research, as well as an introduction to policy analysis. Beneficiaries were introduced to empowerment of disabled persons' organizations and mechanisms and procedures of connection amongst disability movements, scientific research and policy analysis until gaining advocacy and lobbying. Training activities included an introduction to a quantitative and qualitative research approach with training on identifying the research problem, tools and methodology and the mechanism of gathering, coding, analyzing information, as well as concluding and drafting results up to recommendations.
4. Regarding the section on policy analysis, training activities included addressing the issues of persons with disabilities and the rights based approach and policy analysis. Training activities led the teams of organizations' groups to analyze disability status in each targeted country in addition to analyzing stakeholders such as decision-makers, civil society organizations, service providers and persons with disabilities. A set of social and economic issues on education, health, rehabilitation and labor were provided in order to reach with unanimity and agreement, after voting of 35 representatives of the disabled persons' organizations in Jordan, Egypt and Palestine, to the theme and course of change and intervention as a practical and effective model for the next stage, namely to guarantee the right of students with disabilities to have inclusive education with opportunities equal to non-disabled students pursuant to the provisions of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
5. Handicap International supported the disabled persons' organizations to conduct a research study on difficulties and challenges faced by people with motor, visual and hearing disabilities concerning inclusion in public schools. The study sought to identify "obstacles and barriers facing inclusion of persons with (hearing, visual, motor and mental) disabilities in public schools in Jordan, Egypt and Palestine.

Executive Summary of the Study in Palestine

Introduction:

The twentieth century witnessed significant changes in attitude towards persons with disabilities. This attitude changed a lot of concepts as persons with disabilities have capacities and potentials qualifying them to integrate with their non-disabled peers in public schools.

The rights of persons with disabilities are addressed in a number of international declarations and conventions, in which there is a strong emphasis on their right to enjoy the human rights and prohibition of discrimination due to disability. This is considered a significant step towards the rights of persons with disabilities and an implicit recognition of the importance of this social class taking its role in bringing about political, economic and social development processes in its communities.

At the international level; the international law did not recognize the human rights of persons with disabilities directly, but rather in two stages. Each stage was characterized by certain characteristics, consistent with the development of such law. Conferring legal protection upon persons with disabilities was the first stage in which the international law recognized the human rights of persons with disabilities. However, this stage conferred the protection of this law upon some people without being one of its themes. The second stage was, on the other hand, characterized by the international law recognizing the rights of a group of people, sometimes referred to as "*persons with disabilities*, and other times *the disabled*, and sometimes *persons with special needs*".¹ The various international conventions and declarations urged the various states and public and private institutions to take the rights of persons with disabilities into account, on the basis of participation and equal opportunities. This was clear in a number of international conventions.

Recently, the Middle East has experienced some significant shifts in the perception, philosophy and actions taken by states towards the vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. Drafting and approving the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 were achievements made by the world to advance the status of such groups, achieving equality for them and stopping discrimination. This convention mainly aims to "enhance the dignity and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and to ensure they enjoy all human rights and basic freedoms."

At the Palestinian level; the internal legal system addressed inclusive education for persons with disabilities, on both constitutional and internal legislative frameworks. Initially, concentration should be made on the protection tool for all public rights and freedoms represented in 2003 Amended Basic Law, involving the trends on the major legislative policies emanating from the supreme general

¹ Madyous Al-Rashidi, the Role of International Law in Recognizing and Approving the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Attitude of Kuwaiti Legislations thereof, Journal of Rights, p. 226.

policies of the state in order to be translated later in the form of sub-legislative policies at the level of specialized laws in certain areas, including for example, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Law No. 4 of 1999. Internal legislations having the level of secondary laws or legislations should be considered to determine the orientations of the Palestinian legislature towards persons with disabilities, especially in terms of inclusive education.

Provisions of 2003 Amended Basic Law tackled the system of public rights and freedoms, including equality, non-discrimination, privacy and other rights. It also stated a special and explicit provision concerning the rights of persons with disabilities, including the protection of persons with disabilities in the services of education, health and social insurance.

According to the statistics issued by the Central Bureau of Statistics in 2011, the percentage of persons with disabilities by the broad concept in Palestine reached 7% in the West Bank; one third of which never attended school i.e. 37.6% of persons with disabilities who are 15 years old or more never attended school; with a percentage of 35.5% at the West Bank and 42.2% at Gaza Strip. On the other hand, 33.8% of those individuals received education but dropped out with a percentage of 37.0% in West Bank and 27.1% in Gaza Strip. Results also showed that 53.1% of them are illiterate, with a percentage of 51.5% in the West Bank and 56.3% in Gaza Strip. As these percentages do not comply with the provisions of the International Convention, we think it is our duty and the right of persons with disabilities to highlight the difficulties and obstacles hindering their inclusion in education, which is one of the main reasons leading to the deprivation of their right to education.

Methodology:

Since its establishment, the Palestinian National Authority has paid attention to persons with disabilities and their inclusive education in society despite a variation of inclusive education methods according to the type and degree of disability.

Significance of the study:

Teaching is one of the most honorable professions. It is a noble message to humanity due to its impact in creating a generation capable of facing challenges.

Middle Eastern states recently have experienced some significant shifts in their perception, philosophy and actions towards the vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. Drafting and approving the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 were achievements made by the world to advance the status of such groups, achieving equality for them and stopping discrimination.

The significance of this study stems from presenting inclusive education for students with disabilities as one of their rights that are guaranteed by the international conventions and national constitutions. Depriving persons with disabilities of their right to education represents a loss for the individual and

society, as they are actors capable to perform. Since they are an important part of society, neglecting them is considered a moral and material loss threatening the nation's economy. Inclusive education for persons with disabilities is of most significance in special education due to the difficulties facing inclusion and its impact on them and their non-disabled colleagues.

This study is also of great importance for decision-makers; it helps them to identify the weaknesses, obstacles and difficulties hindering the inclusion of students with disabilities in public schools, and evaluate the policies thereof. This study is also of important for researchers and institutions dealing with persons with disabilities, since they provide services to this category and so need to study aspects of development.

Study objective:

This study aimed specifically at highlighting the status of inclusive education for students with various disabilities in public schools, and disclosing the difficulties they face in public schools from the perspective of "principals, teachers, students and parents."

Questions of the study:

In this study, we attempted to answer some questions concerning the trends and challenges facing inclusion by going deeper into the education status of persons with disabilities and the difficulties they face in this regard. We tackled this issue in field by approaching experts, principals, teachers and students with disabilities and their families, and monitoring the status of school environment through observation.

This study will try to answer the following key question:

"What is the status of inclusive education for students with disabilities in public schools in the State of Palestine, and what are the obstacles and difficulties facing their inclusion from the point of view of principals, teachers, students and parents?"

To answer the main question, the following questions needed to be addressed:

1. What are the obstacles and difficulties facing including students with disabilities in public schools in the State of Palestine from the point of view of principals, teachers, students and parents?
2. Do obstacles and difficulties facing inclusion of students with disabilities differ depending on the type of disability (simple mental, motor, visual, speech, simple hearing, learning difficulties, double disabilities)?
3. Do obstacles and difficulties facing inclusion of students with disabilities differ depending on the category of respondents (principals, teachers, students, parents)?
4. What are the teachers' attitudes regarding inclusion of students with disabilities in school?

5. What are the existing and applicable policies "laws and regulations" in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education concerning inclusion of students with disabilities in public schools at the following levels:
 - State "public order and legislation"
 - Regulations, policies and ministry procedures
6. What is the extent of appropriateness of school environment for all disabilities?

To achieve the objectives of the study and answer the aforementioned questions, the **qualitative method** of data collection on status, views, difficulties and obstacles facing inclusion of students with disabilities from the perspective of parents and students, we conducted **focus-groups discussions**..

To collect data on difficulties and obstacles from the perspective of principals, teachers and experts, the research adopted an **in-depth interviews method** in addition to **using the form as a tool to collect data on teachers' attitudes** in schools on the inclusion of students with disabilities in public schools. To analyze school environment and the extent of appropriateness for students with disabilities based on the internationally recognized standards, a **physical inspection** was made on the status of school environment and communication amongst students, identification of obstacles and challenges facing the inclusions of students with disabilities in education..

General Setting

Time and place: The timeframe of this study is represented in the period during which the research was conducted, beginning of July 2014 – end of April 2015. The study was conducted in the following governorates: Nablus, Qalqilya, Jenin (north Palestine), Ramallah (central Palestine), Hebron and Bethlehem (South Palestine).

We could not conduct the study in Gaza Strip, the second part of the state due to the political circumstances in Gaza and hence could not conduct the research in field.

Human sample: The study included students with disabilities (simple mental, all types of motor disabilities, hearing, speech and vision disabilities, learning difficulties and double disabilities) while students with severe disabilities were excluded. This is mainly related to the restrictions of a short period of time within which the study was conducted. Research in the fields of inclusive education for persons with severe disabilities needs to design additional search tools and to expand the study sample, as well as this subject has global challenges.

The study was also limited to public schools performing inclusive education for some students with disabilities from grade 1 to grade 10, principals, teachers and parents of students in those schools.

Descriptive analytical method and collection of data on the status, views, difficulties and obstacles facing inclusive education of students with disabilities from the perspective of parents and students were used through the method of focus groups.

To collect data on difficulties and obstacles from the perspective of **principals, teachers and experts**, research adopted in the in-depth interviews method in addition to the use of the form as a tool for data collection.

To analyze school environment and its appropriateness for students with disabilities based on the internationally recognized standards, physical inspection was made on the status of schools with respect to the following:

School environment and communication between students in order to identify the obstacles and challenges facing inclusion of students with disabilities

The research adopted the development of monitoring trends form through the form of trend measurement, which aims at identifying teachers' trends in schools regarding inclusive education of students with disabilities in public schools, in addition to exploring the extent of teachers' knowledge using educational methods and tools of inclusive education, related laws and legislations.

The study included several tools, namely:

1. **Examine appropriateness of the schools' environment for inclusive education of persons with disabilities in schools**
2. **In-depth interviews with principals**
3. **Focus groups with parents**
4. **Focus groups with students**
5. **In-depth interviews with teachers**
6. **In-depth interviews with a group of education, academic and human rights experts**

Population:

The population included all public schools in the following governorates: "Qalqilya, Nablus, Jenin, Ramallah, Hebron and Bethlehem", principals and teachers of those schools, students and their parents.

The number of students with disabilities in the West Bank is "5557 " male and female students, distributed as follows:

- "1375" students with total or partial vision disabilities
- "842" students with total or partial hearing disabilities
- "1128" students with physical and motor disabilities
- "1739" students with speech disabilities
- "473" students with mental disabilities (Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2014-2015)

Sample:

The sample included **"16" public schools** selected under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education or in coordination with the General Administration of Guidance and Special Education.

Sample of principals: School principals were selected by the Ministry. There were "16" male and female principals.

Sample of teachers: There were "30" teachers selected based on a purposive sample method as teachers who teach students with disabilities and the teacher responsible for the resource rooms, if any. There are four teachers who were coincidentally selected. It should be noted that some of the teachers selected have not taught students with disabilities.

Sample of students with disabilities: There were "74" male and female students who were selected using the purposive sample method by nomination of principals. A group of students from outside the identified schools were selected and interviewed at the one of the associations.

Sample of parents of students with disabilities: "30" fathers and mothers were selected in a simple random manner where they were telephoned by the search team and set a date to conduct the interviews. Parents who were able to attend the interviews were approved.

Distribution of Students with disabilities by sex and type of disability

Type of Disability	Males	Females
Motor	10	9
Hearing	6	7
Vision	11	12
Motor + hearing	1	2
Simple mental	-	4
Others (epilepsy and multiple)	2	2
Speech	1	2
Mental and motor	-	1
Learning difficulties	2	2
Total	33	41

It is apparent in the disabilities distribution table above that the most common disabilities were visual then motor impairments, followed by hearing disability. The least common disabilities were cerebral palsy ones. The percentage of males in the targeted sample was 44.6%, while females were 55.4%.

Key Results of the Study**Part 1: Results of policy and legislation analysis of persons with disabilities in the field of primary education**

In light of the quick review for the status of persons with disabilities' rights in the field of education, especially legal and policy aspects, a number of results were indicated as follows:

The study of the legal frameworks governing the rights of persons with disabilities showed a number of legal gaps in these legislations whether in terms of constitutional documents or domestic legislations. These gaps were represented in the variable definitions of persons with disabilities, and inconsistency of domestic laws, especially those issued during the Jordanian era, with the internal system as they are very old. This inconsistency was evident in a number of discriminatory references in the laws, and not to set specific authorities for implementation.

Definition of persons with disabilities

The definition included in the "Palestinian Law No. 4 of 1999 on Persons with Disabilities" refers to the person with a disability and focuses on biological disability and the functional deficit, and their impact on the limitedness and effectiveness of his/her activity; as the definition of the disabled states: "Any person suffering from permanent total or partial disability whether at birth or otherwise affecting any of his/her senses, or motor, psychological or mental capacities to the extent of limiting his/her ability to respond to his/her living needs under the same circumstances as lived by the non-disabled",² which is not consistent with modern trends in defining disability as contained the International Convention,³ as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defined persons with disabilities as "those who have long-term motor, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others", since this definition affects the nature of government actions and policies that could be enacted and designed to meet the requirements of only health-centered disability.⁴ The law also used the term disabled, which is contrary to the provisions of the Convention, which referred thereto as persons with disabilities. This will force the national decision-maker and legislator to amend the provisions of this law according to the terms of the Convention signed by the President of PNA. Anyway, it is fair to say that the provisions of the Law of persons with disabilities preceded the Convention leading to inconsistency with the Convention, but this is not a justification for the continuation of such provisions, and they must be amended as soon as possible.

Law No. (4) of 1999 on the Rights of the Disabled and Implementing Regulations thereof

² This definition is consistent with the definition stated in the International Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons of 1975 as a total or partial disability preventing him/her practicing personal, social or normal life due to disability at birth or otherwise in his/her physical or intellectual capacities.

³ The Supreme Council for Persons with Disabilities, the Strategic Plan for Persons with disabilities, p. 15

⁴ The previous reference, p. 15

It is the way this Law tackled inclusive education of persons with disabilities in the field of education is what we are interested in, and what procedures were stipulated for by such law. If we considered the Articles of the Law, we find that Articles (10, 14) have particularly tackled inclusive education of persons with disabilities in the education environment, where Article 10 states that the Ministry is responsible for coordination with all concerned parties to care and rehabilitate persons with disabilities in the following fields:

2. Education:
 - A. Ensure that persons with disabilities have access to equal opportunities to join educational facilities and universities within the curriculum framework applicable in such facilities.
 - B. Provide educational assessment required to determine the nature of disability and its degree.
 - C. Provide appropriate curricula, educational means and facilities.
 - D. Provide education of various types and levels for persons with disabilities according to their needs.
 - E. Qualify persons educationally to teach persons with disabilities according to their disabilities.

Article 14 stipulates that the Ministries of Education and Higher Education must provide an environment that is adequate for the needs of the disabled in schools, colleges and universities. The executive regulations of the law on the rights of persons with disabilities detailed some issues related to education, as Article 3 of the executive regulations of the law stipulated for the disabled card, including a package of health, social and educational inclusion services.

Article 12 of the executive regulations is one of the most important Articles included in the law with respect to the educational aspect and inclusive education for persons with disabilities, as it stipulates for "The Ministry of Social Affairs shall, in coordination with the competent authorities, care and qualify persons with disabilities in areas such as education through the Ministry's application of the Compulsory Education Law within the philosophy of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, taking into account the situation of children with disabilities and his/her mental, motor, sensory and psychological abilities. Specialized education shall only be supported in the cases in which education within the normal environment is not applicable. The Ministry of Education shall prepare schools, centers and educational institutions to be appropriate for persons with disabilities". Article 16 of the Executive Regulations assured the need to secure learning environment appropriate for the needs of persons with disabilities as it stipulates that both Ministries of Education and Higher Education and Scientific Research should secure an environment appropriate for the needs of persons with disabilities in schools, colleges, universities and institutes by having roads and pathways paved and suitable for the use of persons with disabilities, and providing an electric elevator suitable for use by persons with disabilities and appropriate school seats for persons with disabilities.

The law lacks monitoring mechanisms, and the Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities of 2006 included monitoring and grievance mechanisms. In spite of the attempt to remedy this in the Presidential Decree on forming the Supreme Council for Persons with Disabilities No. 3 of 2004 and its amendment No. 1 of 2012 which stipulated that the duties of the council shall include controlling and monitoring plans and achievements of ministries and all institutions related to persons with disabilities to ensure the development of the government's performance in this regard, and assess the achievements of all governmental and non-governmental parties operating in disability field, and develop the necessary quality standards for the quality of programs and services provided for persons with disabilities.

There is a lack of obligation in most provisions of the law as the law lacks mechanisms of accountability and control systems ensuring full implementation thereof.

Education Law, No. 16, 1964

This law was issued during the Jordanian era, expressing a legislative philosophy and thought which may be quite different from today, especially in terms of looking at this category. The use of certain terms to describe this category of people indicates the philosophy adopted by the society in that period, such as the use of the term "disabled persons". When comparing this law with the law of the rights of persons with disabilities, we find inconsistency with each other whether in terms of terminology used or legislative philosophy on which both laws are legislated.

1. Policy-making is often characterized by lack of unified coordination between the related parties. This is evidenced by the lack of a unified strategy combining the official institution with civil society institutions under unified trends. This is also evidenced by the multiple strategies on the persons with disabilities, as there is a strategy for the Ministry of Education and another for the Department of private education, and a third for the Supreme Council for persons with disabilities. This disperses the efforts to reform these policies and reduces its effectiveness.

National policies on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in education

Public policy-making in the Palestinian legal system is governed by a number of legal documents. The first is represented in the Palestinian Basic Law of 2003, including its directions in this field, especially when referred to the ministerial statement stating the program and policy of the government,⁵ and the role of the Council of Ministers in the development of public policies in light of the ministerial program, and implementation of policies that are approved,⁶ as well as the authority of each minister to propose the public policy of his/her ministry and oversee

⁵ Article 1/66, Amended Basic Law of 2003

⁶ Article 69, Amended Basic Law of 2003

implementation thereof after approval,⁷ and ending with each minister submitting detailed reports about his/her ministry's activities, policies, plans and achievements compared with the objectives set for the ministry in the framework of the general plan of the Council of Ministers, as well as proposals and recommendations concerning policy in the future. These reports are submitted on a regular basis, every three months, so that the Council of Ministers has sufficient information about the policies of each ministry and its activities.⁸ In addition to the Amended Basic Law of 2003, there is a number of relevant laws referring to the process of making public policy indirectly as the law No. 4 of 1995 concerning Procedures for Preparing Legislations, and simultaneously there are secondary legislations referred to some issues directly related to policy-making process, including the Council of Ministers' decision No. 44 of 2004 on Job Description for Senior Positions in the Ministries, and the decision of Council of Ministers No. 5 of 2003 on the Bylaws of the Council of Ministers, the decision of the Council of Ministers No. 91 of 2004 on the Establishment of Council of Ministers' Affairs Units in all ministries, and the decision of the Council of Ministers No. 43 of 2005 on the financial system of the ministries and public institutions.⁹

In terms of the status of national policies related to inclusive education for persons with disabilities, the strategic plans and attempts developed in order to integrate persons with disabilities in the education environment, whether by the official or non-official government parties represented in the civil society. The following are the strategic plans set in this field, and the actual interventions made in order to include persons with disabilities in education.

A. The National Plan of the Palestinian National Authority for 2011-2013

The national policy agenda of PNA included commitment to develop the social service sector and maintain an advanced level guaranteeing citizens obtaining the basic services in both education and health sectors, providing basic social protection in order to alleviate the burden of poverty and to protect vulnerable groups. The plan also confirmed achieving equality and social justice for Palestinians. This is the first time in which the national plan addresses the issues of disability, indicating that disability issues began taking part, even if it was simple, in the national plans and strategies and for decision-makers.¹⁰

B. The Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education

According to the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education included under the title *the Third Strategic Plan for the Development of Education 2014-2019*, of which logo was, "Towards Palestine, Educated Nation in 2020," a number of references to the persons with disabilities were mentioned. According to the strategic plan, the number of students with disabilities enrolled into inclusive

⁷ Article 71, Amended Basic Law of 2003

⁸ Article 72, Amended Basic Law of 2003

⁹ For more information, see the study enclosed with the report on the subject.

¹⁰ The Independent Authority of Human Rights, a previous reference, p. 62.

education in public schools was 5702 students in northern governorates, 3805 students in the southern governorates, with a total number of 9057 students.¹¹

A number of committees were formed to oversee the review of certain educational field. They were 14 committees, including a strategic committee dealing with persons with disabilities.¹² The inclusive educational system the ministry is going to adopt was also referred to in this plan. It was included in the first sectorial objective in the strategic plan under the title Guarantee Secure and Fair Opportunities to Join Education for all at all levels of the system, and under the item of relevant key policies and strategies "Providing ways to include more students with disabilities in schools and focus on all categories, including the gifted, in a national strategy framework defining the relationship between all the partners in this regard, the role assigned to each partner, and the requirements necessary to achieve inclusion.

System of Monitoring, Assessment and Review in the Ministry for the Education Sector

It uses a number of tools to perform review, including the annual review of the education sector, the system of monitoring and assessment, and a narrative report on the progress of implementation, and procurement reports.¹³

C. The Strategic Plan of Persons with Disabilities – the Higher Council for Persons with Disabilities

In this item, the most important strategic trends and the policies adopted in this plan, and their relevance to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the education environment will be discussed as follows:

The first strategic trend is represented in effective policies oriented to integration based on the rights of persons with disabilities and a number of policy trends are derived therefrom, representing the first policy trend to "lead inclusion of persons with disabilities using clear, approved and announced policies ensuring the satisfaction of the rights and needs of persons with disabilities. The second trend is represented in "that disability sector is led by a system of oriented policies to guarantee rights and integration.¹⁴

The most significant current and future interventions with respect to inclusion of persons with disabilities in education under this policy are as follows:

Current interventions

¹¹ The Ministry of Education, Summary of Third Strategic Plan for the Development of Education 2014-2019, February 2014, p. 9.

¹² The previous reference, p. 13

¹³ For more details regarding monitoring and follow-up system, see the Ministry of Education, Summary of Third Strategic Plan for the Development of Education 2014-2019, February 2014, p. 26-27, and see the extended study enclosed with the report.

¹⁴ The Higher Council for Persons with Disabilities, the Strategic Plan for Persons with Disabilities, p. 65.

- Publish and declare the educational policies and their associated programs (inclusion policies of persons with disabilities in education, the educational programs for mental disabilities, programs of inclusion in public education, and policies of inclusion in higher education).
- Publish and circulate the policies of appropriating infrastructure and public facilities.
- Clarification policies of the bases and mechanisms of providing services to persons with disabilities to ensure expanding the beneficiaries of the service.
- The development of field intervention policies to ensure the dignity of persons with disabilities and their families.¹⁵

Future interventions

- Activation of the role of the Supreme Council of disability in the field of developing and following up the implementation of policies.
- Activation of the role of the Supreme Council for Disability in the development of a national policy to deal with disability sector to lead the activities of the public and civil sectors, disability organizations, and originating from the human-rights development concept and based on participation to bring about essential changes in policies.
- Activation of the supervisory role of state institutions, and under the supervision of the Supreme Council for Disability on the private sector through oriented, controlling and encouraging policies for civil liability.
- Development of funding policies for the sector consistent with the implementation and commitment to the strategic plan.
- Development of clear and declared policies for accounting and accountability to develop the mechanism of accountability for errors and the policy of prevention.¹⁶

The second policy of the plan was represented in an integrated system of participation, while the main outcome was represented in a clear-cut system of inclusive education based on participation. This policy included a number of current and future interventions for the implementation of this policy and was represented by enhancing participation in coordination between the institutions related to persons with disabilities.

The third policy in the plan was represented in a framework and principles leading policies in the disability sector, and the main outcome was launching all policies from principles and consistency of policies relevant to principles, to start from the human-rights principle that rights-based policies can be inclusive or directive to inclusive education contrary to policies based on traditional concepts that promote the principles of exclusion, dependency, charity and helplessness,¹⁷ and starting

¹⁵ The previous reference, p. 66

¹⁶ The previous reference, p. 65

¹⁷ The Higher Council for Persons with Disabilities, the previous reference, p. 67

from the positive bias, and the supporting system in its concept leading the inclusive education.

The second strategic trend was represented in legislations ensuring the rights and equality, and the main outcome was represented in reviewing the Palestinian legislations to an in-depth review based on the concept of human-rights developmental concept and on the obligations associated with the International Convention of 2006. Most prominent current interventions in this direction were as follows: the definition of the disability concept to be consistent with the International Convention and the principle of rights, circulation of the concept and unification of its use and reflecting this in the policies and programs, review of legislations from a gender perspective, inclusion of the specifics of both sexes therein, and emphasizing the sovereignty and independence of the Supreme Council for Disability. Future interventions were represented in reformulating the Disability Law based on rights and in consistency with international conventions and the changes in the sector, the development of Palestinian legislation in consistency with the new law, and the development of mechanisms to monitor the implementation of policies, legislations and procedures, and the institutionalization of monitoring process.

Other policy trends focused on activation of rules and regulations and development thereof, work procedures, accountability and ensuring the implementation of legislations and subsequent regulations, systems and procedures, and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the development and economic policy policies, and expansion of access to work.

One of the strategic trends is what was launched under the title a positively understanding and accepting community of disability as social variation. Most policy trends within this trend focused on society transmission into acceptance, promoting participation of persons with disabilities, enhancing positive practices to reduce negative trends and practices within the institutions hindering inclusion of persons with disabilities, and development of a package of measures based on accountability of public institutions and community institutions restricting access of persons with disabilities to their services. To build on preference base (positive bias) is among future trends by opening higher education for students with disabilities, and to provide government grants for people who are unable to pay, with the emphasis on the importance of the principle of appropriation and the adoption of global standards in terms of the supporting tools to the quality of services and subordinate tools received by persons with disabilities enhancing their access opportunities and relating to scientific and technological development.¹⁸

The sixth and last trend in this plan is to enable active institutions in the disability sector to perform their mission in policy trends represented in submission of all

¹⁸ According to the strategic plan, current interventions were specified with two years at most, and future ones within five years.

parties in the sector to the base of active partnership and participation and clear distribution of roles within the overall interest of the sector itself, and investment and construction in the capabilities of institutions operating in the disability sector.

D. Policy plan of persons with disabilities and obstacles of implementation – special education department.¹⁹

Contents of Special Education Department Policy:

2014 is considered the year of launching policies on inclusion. Currently, while this report is being prepared, these policies are being translated from English into Arabic for publication, as operational and procedural plans will be prepared for these policies. It is worthy to note that before this year, persons with disabilities and inclusion were treated through individual attempts or instructions by the Ministry and did not reach policy level.

1. The policy includes inclusion, where access of education for all will be enhanced, and simultaneously trends will be changed, access to school will be enhanced by improving and appropriating the surrounding environment in terms of transport, communications and infrastructure of schools. Inclusion will include all categories, including (vulnerable groups, poverty, isolated regions, C regions, persons with disabilities). Lifetime inclusion was adopted in all institutions, not only in the context of education.
2. Develop and enhance the staff and provide the necessary expertise.
3. Educate the community on how to deal with these categories.
4. Provide the necessary budgets.
5. Amend the curriculum and the means of education and amend the environment.
6. Promote engagement with relevant institutions, in order to unify efforts, and coordinate in the implementation of programs, so that there is no conflict during implementation.
7. Provide a safe environment for students and vulnerable groups, free of violence.
8. Activate the relevant laws, and re-read these laws, leading to substantial modifications which, in light of the signing of the Convention on the Rights persons with disabilities.

Difficulties encounter progress in this topic:

There are a number of difficulties faced by the Special Education Department during the implementation of programs, whether in inclusion, resource rooms or resource centers, which destabilized the department's ability to continue some programs, and the most prominent difficulties in this field are:

1. Useless financial proceedings in the ministries; affecting the sustainability of planning and enforcement of national strategies.
2. Lack of cooperation and coordination between ministries and community organizations, leading to conflicts at work with partner institutions.

¹⁹ Information in this item was obtained by an interview with Shifa Abu Sheikha, director of special education department, Ramallah, 25/6/2015 and 2/7/2015.

3. Funding, in many cases, does not make real achievements, due to a number of institutions implementing the same programs and the intersection of their activities, especially when funding is directed to the sector or community, which may lead to problems.
4. Some workers (employees) in this field having negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities.
5. Parents sometimes have negative attitudes and in some cases students have negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities.
6. The society has a social stigma, despite this change has been noticed in the last ten years. There is a kind of awareness to these issues that can be seen through the difference occurring between 1997 and the current time. This change has emerged due to resource rooms.
7. Lack of preparation of the environment, including the infrastructure in many schools, especially that some schools do not belong to the government, but leasehold, along with lack of configuration in terms of public transport.
8. Development of curricula that does not take into account the individual differences of persons with disabilities.
9. Lack of diagnosis tools and experts.
10. The concept of public policy, how to deal with it, how to make policies and how to participate in making them, and what public policies are and their relationship to the legislative policy, are not clear to decision-makers in many institutions.
11. Incompatibility of law in general with the international conventions on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Part 2: Results of the field study investigating the trends, challenges and difficulties related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the primary education stage in public schools

School, access and internal environment

In order to analyze school environment and its appropriateness for students with disabilities based on the internationally recognized standards, a physical inspection on the schools' status was conducted through viewing the school environment, resource rooms and communication between students to recognize the obstacles and challenges facing the inclusion of students with disabilities, and meeting teachers and their parents.

1. School Environment and Access thereto:

A. School Services in General

Nearly half of the teachers think that some of the services at the school such as elevators, sanitation, signs and lanes are not available in most cases, posing a challenge to students with disabilities.

In one public school that has been visited in the north of Palestine, there were stairs in front of the health unit at the school, which is difficult to access for students with disabilities; accordingly, they do not use it and face many health problems.

In another school from the schools that have been visited in south Palestine, the school was old and not configured. It has many stairs not suitable even for students without disabilities. The rugged road and its remoteness from the city center made it difficult to access.

In one school, a female student with a motor disability told us that the bathroom at school is appropriate, but the research team discovered that there is an equipped health unit but closed and the student does not know about it.

Most teachers think that the provision of school environment designed for the needs of persons with disabilities encourages the process of inclusion. This will increase the motivation of parents to send their children with disabilities to schools and reduces their need for others, and will thus reduce the embarrassment they are exposed to.

B. School Entrances and Parking

Most schools do not include special parking for vehicles transporting persons with disabilities, as school yards are wide and the vehicle can transport students with and without disabilities, move and rotate easily although vehicles are strictly prohibited to enter school yards whether locally or internationally in order to preserve the students.

In addition, there are no sidewalks opposite to school entrances, and if available in some schools, they are not appropriate for students with disabilities, as was the case in "4" of "16" schools, while the streets leading to some schools are earth roads that are bumpy.

C. Playgrounds or School Yards

As to playgrounds/yards, they are wide and contain no columns or any other obstacles preventing students with disabilities to use them, except scramble at certain times. Most students with disabilities who were interviewed said that movement in yards is easy but sometimes becomes harder due to crowding. On the other hand, another two students with visual disabilities said that yards are not easy to use, as the first thinks they are crowded, especially at the break which was confirmed by one of the female students with a speech disability, and the other said he hits the theatre, columns and walls. Another student finds it difficult to move in the yard as it is sand yard with many bores. Theater halls and laboratories are located on the ground floor in most schools included in the sample, making access thereto easier, except one school where the lab is located in the first floor rather than the ground floor, hindering usage thereof by some students with disabilities.

D. Corridors and health units

Based on the notes of the research team, access to upper floors at the school is difficult for persons with motor disabilities due to the lack of electric elevators. Corridors inside the school are to some extent wide through which a wheelchair may pass and they are appropriate in most schools. Some schools do not include health units equipped for students with motor disabilities, as it is difficult for students with motor disabilities to use health units at schools while persons with other disabilities have no difficulties using these facilities.

E. Canteens

School canteens are in general small. By field observation and as seen in the targeted schools, some canteens are located in the ground floor and some others are on the first floor of the school building with no elevators, making it difficult for children with disabilities to access, in addition to other obstacles such as stairs and the height of the purchase outlet.

As for purchases from school canteens and from the perspective of students, purchase includes several difficulties such as overcrowding and assigning one outlet for purchase amongst others, so students with disabilities are obliged to ask their brothers or colleagues to purchase, leading to blackmailing students with disabilities and taking their own money as mentioned by students with motor and visual disabilities. One student with visual disability said that in the past he was allowed to get out for a short time before the break, but now it is neglected and thus he is obliged to buy after the break.

F. Offices and classroom

Access to administrations room at some schools involves some obstacles such as stairs, chairs and others as apparent from the visits made by the search team. Most students think that it is easy to reach the class, while some others think that there is crowding when entering the class which in turn indirectly affects entering the classroom peacefully. Other students said they reach the classroom with the help of their friends.

G. Access of students with disabilities to schools (Transport)

Findings of the research show unavailability of transportation designed for persons with disabilities, particularly motor disabilities, even the streets are unpaved in some areas and contain a lot of holes hindering students' access to schools; especially persons with disabilities who need help to reach school due to the nature of some disabilities and the long distance between school and place of residence of many students. This worries parents for their children with disabilities from accidents and bad weather.

It is worthy to note that some drivers do not allow some students with disabilities to use public transportation so as not to bear responsibility and their complaints of the difficulty of students getting in and out of the vehicle and hence delay.

H. The status of inclusive education for students with disabilities in public schools included in the sample

Some schools are concerned in receiving students with disabilities, provided that the disability is simple. However, there are extensive attempts of many schools to adapt the school environment to meet the needs of students with disabilities as much as possible.

Some schools are not adapted for inclusive education for students with disabilities in terms of school environment, especially for students with motor disabilities.

With regards to visual disability, a Braille-based curriculum is supplied by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, but delivered too late to students affecting their education negatively. It should be noted that these books are exchanged between students from year to year affecting their quality.

With regards to hearing disability, there are great difficulties for not adapting the teaching staff to deal with them, unless the hearing disability is simple and hearing aids are available.

Resource rooms as element of school environment

1. Resource rooms were established to serve most categories of persons with disabilities (learning difficulties, slow learning, mental disability, simple mental disability, ...), 108 resource rooms were fully established and they are all currently operating as one room per school. Support is provided to these categories when a student moves from regular classroom to resource room, as needed. Pre-tests are conducted by specialists in the field for the student,

- and each student has his/her own plan as needed. Students may attend individually or in small groups of 3-5 students. Such rooms were provided with most means to be spacious (learning by playing). They are typically selected in the front part of the school aimed at making parents familiar to it. All parents supported this idea. Actually, efficacy of such rooms was assessed and the Ministry has included them in its strategic plan. However, it is better to have a center for resources and early detection.
2. At the time of preparing this report, statistics provided by the Director of Special Education Department at the General Administration of Guidance and Special Education at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education that 60 resource rooms were ready for operation in the West Bank schools but still needed teachers. Lack of human cadre is one of the problems which this sector suffers.
 3. Resource centers: Three resource centers were established; two in the West Bank in Ramallah and Hebron, and one in Gaza. The center's work nature differs from the resource rooms'. The center includes five specialists (physical, functional, pronunciation, language and psychological treatment), in addition to assessment tools. Such centers target in particular the marginalized areas aimed at supporting students in need until inclusion is completed. The staff in these centers provided service to schools where no resource rooms were available to train parents, students and staff at schools. More than one specialist may actually work with one student depending on the nature of the case. Ten specialists are now available covering 17 directorates involving 1800 schools. This is incompatible with the ability of this staff and the burden upon it, as they cannot cover this huge number of schools. Actually, these centers were established in 2004 -2005 supported by a Swedish foundation, but at expiry of the project, the ministry was not ready to take over these centers. As well, the ministry was not able to cover the staff salaries in such centers which results in some employees heft such centers.

Views and attitudes of principals towards resource rooms

Resource rooms were available in some targeted schools since resource rooms are only available in basic schools up to Grade 4. All schools in which resource rooms are available also involve a special education teacher. Accordingly, secondary and preparatory schools contain no resource rooms.

Resource rooms in perspective of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education

- The staff responsible for inclusive education at the Ministry explained that resource rooms are selected based on specific criteria, such as: the school should be primary (Grade 1 up to 4), and surrounded by other schools in order to have benefit of them. "107" schools include resource rooms distributed on "17" Directorates of Education.
- As to mechanism of action in resource rooms, students (Grade 2 – 4) are annually nominated by the teacher. Transfer forms are filled at the end of the

- academic year, discussed at summer holiday, and students are selected after having written consents of their parents.
- Special training/education is provided for students, whether individually or in groups (not exceeding "5" students), and lessons are distributed over the week to improve their education and their social and psychological behavior.
- As to the experience and qualification of the resource room teacher, he/she must be specialized in special education, preparatory education, pronunciation and language therapy, or kindergartens.
- Concerning availability of a follow-up plan of inclusion implementation and how to perform such plan, staff responsible for the program said that no cadre for follow-up is available, and this task is only performed by the teacher.

Resource rooms in perspective of teachers

In a field visit carried out by the research team to the 16-targeted schools, only two schools involved source rooms. The first serves a group of 18-24 students with various disabilities divided into groups consisting of 4 students per each group based on the objective or disability, provided with services in Arabic, mathematics and life skills. The teacher working in the resource room is specialized in special education and participated in workshops on how to prepare teaching aids for the resource room, workshops on pronunciation, and a workshop on "instruction kits" application.

The second resource room only serves the school students, contrary to the condition indicated by the competent party that the basic requirement to establish a resource room is to serve several surrounding schools. Three other resource rooms are specifically available in Bethlehem serving students having the learning difficulties regardless of their disability.

Resource rooms from the point of view of teachers

Teachers have a unanimous opinion that education will be more effective when adequate resource rooms are provided in public schools on a complementary basis for lessons rather than on isolation basis. One teacher added that some materials, such as mathematics, need to be explained in isolation for students with disabilities as they need special technique. Teachers also have a unanimous opinion that providing facilities for students will reduce embarrassment they are exposed to.

Most teachers believe that resource rooms have positive impact on students with disabilities obtaining their right in education and that inclusion often contributes to the development of friendship with the students without disabilities. It also contributes to the development of teachers' capacities in teaching based on cooperation and sharing rather than competition. One teacher commented that the more the teacher deals with various disabilities, the more experience is.

Teachers believe that the most prominent problem is that the resource room only receives students up to grade 4, which is inconsistent with the interest of the

student who needs a longer period. According to the responsible parties, this was due to the lack of adequate budget for the directorates of education to support resource rooms in order to serve a larger number of students. On the other hand, most teachers believe that the special class (resource room) is not a means that is more effective than the ordinary grade, but it is complementary to it.

Attitudes of teachers, principals and other staff towards inclusion of students with disabilities in school education

Two-thirds of the teachers showed positive attitudes towards inclusion as one of the persons with disabilities' rights. However, some of them justified their opposition or reservation to insufficient time for students without disabilities, crowded classes, need for greater efforts, lack of capacities and facilities, inadequate qualification, training and skills of teachers to deal with this category.

Most teachers said that inclusive education can be applied to all simple disabilities, especially motor ones and some learning difficulties. Few teachers supported inclusive education for very simple hearing and speech disabilities. Most teachers believe that other disabilities are difficult to be included into the school education upon the current conditions of schools.

Among most prominent challenges faced by teachers in dealing with students with disabilities is the need for special teaching tools and aids not always available for them, and they cannot use them without training, in addition to time and expertise.

Most teachers said that they received inadequate training on inclusive education for students with disabilities in schools; while the other part only had training courses in learning difficulties, or seasonal guiding and theoretical workshops relating to persons with disabilities. They demanded training on disability assessment, dealing with persons with disabilities, teaching students, and development of resource rooms.

Half of the teachers believe that the current curriculum, in its size and content, is not appropriate for the potentials of students with disabilities, and does not increase the motivation of students with disabilities towards learning. Most teachers agree that the curriculum would be more effective when prepared in a convenient manner depending on the various teaching methods based on each individual disability.

Most teachers believe that it is needed to press upon authorities responsible for the development of curricula and environmental status of schools in order to improve the educational situation for students with disabilities.

Responses of teachers reveal that they have positive attitudes towards inclusion, as most of them believe that resource rooms have a positive impact on students with disabilities having their right in education, and that special classrooms are not more effective than the regular ones but complementary to them. They also unanimously agreed on the need to involve students with disabilities in the various classroom

activities, whether sports, social, artistic, trips and visits, while a teacher believes this depends on the type of activity and its appropriateness for the same disability.

Difficulties and challenges facing students with disabilities through inclusive education in schools in perspective of principals and experts

1. There is no special law for admission of students with disabilities, but the same law for admission of other students represented in bringing official documents and making a file for the student.
2. Principals believe that students with disabilities join school only at a lower primary stage after they are transferred by the Directorate of Education and meet a medical committee upon which he/she is transferred to inclusive education classes, resource room or private schools.
3. With regard to joining school mechanisms (registration), it was discovered that there is no difference between registration of students with disabilities and students without disabilities at school as procedures are standard and represented in the following: complying with the legal age which is "6" years, and bringing identification documents such as a birth certificate, father's or mother's identity card and vaccination card in order to have a file for each student provided that he/she does not have mental disabilities.
4. As to the assessment of the experiment, it was good according to the principals, but they unanimously agreed that the benefit of students with disabilities were not satisfactory. Some said that being at school was slightly better than being at home, reflecting a negative attitude towards the role of school at inclusive education for persons with disabilities.
5. Opinions varied on policies as some believe there is no need to make any amendments to the applicable policies because they think that persons with disabilities have their full rights. On the other hand, others believe it is necessary to analyze, review and change the policy and rules of inclusive education for students with disabilities at schools. It was also indicated that there is a need to make amendments relating to allocating special schools for students with disabilities, and the need to oblige parents to attend with their children with disabilities in the classroom.
6. It was indicated that participation of persons with disabilities in extracurricular activities is very limited, in addition to the lack of resource rooms except in a limited number of primary schools and up to grade 4 only.
7. Some principals are experienced in the mechanisms of inclusive education for students with disabilities and think of it as a good experience and they are completely satisfied with regards to this experience. Others think it is new and requires great efforts, and trained and qualified staff must be provided to deal with persons with disabilities in public schools.

The role of psychological/educational counseling in support of students with disabilities in public schools

1. Counselor encourages students with disabilities to provide them with confidence in themselves through engaging them in school activities and in school broadcast, and helps them to take responsibility such as leading a

- group and assign tasks they can perform and participate in extracurricular activities organized by the school.
2. Counselors have no special record for the daily activities of students with disabilities at schools and even students without disabilities, justifying that there is no exception for students with disabilities from others without disabilities.
 3. As for communication between the (counselor) or the social specialist and the parents of children with disabilities, it is made through individual meetings and interviews aimed at encouraging parents to accept and support the children with disabilities. Parents are sometimes contacted by telephone or in workshops and shared activities with parents.
 4. Meetings between the social or psychological specialist (counselor) and the teacher of the class attended by the student with disability are conducted. They discuss how to consider individual differences in the classroom, identify where to sit and include him/her in the classroom activities and provide him/her with opportunity to participate.

Results relating to teaching methods, curriculum and extracurricular activities

A. Teaching Methods:

1. Students unanimously agreed that no rooms are dedicated for them. Most of them said that there are no lessons specified for them or resource rooms to attend in. Two girls with total visual disability said they go to the lab with other students but as listeners with no participation in any experiment.
1. With respect to teachers' methods to interact with students with disabilities in the classroom, students' responses varied as some of them assured that some teachers sometimes re-explain and simplify the material while others do not pay special attention to teaching and interaction.
2. In schools where a resource room is available, this room only contained physical teaching means used by the teacher of resource room to simplify the material to make it easier to understand. Students with disabilities found no difference between their education and the education of students without disabilities.

B. Curriculum:

1. Half of teachers believe that the current curriculum, in its size and content, is not appropriate for the potentials of students with disabilities, and does not increase the motivation of students with disabilities towards learning. Most teachers agree that the curriculum would be more effective when prepared in a convenient manner depending on the various teaching methods based on each individual disability.
2. Most teachers believe there is a need to put pressure on the parties responsible for curriculum development to improve the educational status of students with disabilities.
3. With respect to reading texts in textbooks, they vary depending on the type of disability:

- Students with intellectual disabilities find it difficult to read and understand the curriculum alone and need special treatment by the teacher. Also, students with a hearing disability also need to repeat the word more than once or need special concentration and at least clear lip-movement by the teacher, and this is not available by the education staff as they are not qualified to deal with the various disabilities.
- With regard to homework, most factors hindering homework are subjective rather than objective ones such as: weak motivation, lack of interest or time factor.

Also, some teachers who ask students to perform homework do not have their part of receiving the homework and commenting thereon, providing many students with reasons for not performing homework.

C. Participation of students with disabilities in school activities:

1. Participation in extracurricular activities such as school forecast or the open day is limited and rarely takes place.
2. Participation of students with disabilities in physical education classes depends on the type of disability. Most students participate in such activities except students with visual and motor disabilities whose participation was limited, as students are separated in classes of physical education, laboratory or library.
3. Students with disabilities spend leisure time talking to their colleagues, playing with them or having their meals. Students do not participate in any school activity avoiding overcrowding, and so he/she is obliged to spend time sitting alone in the yard or with one of his/her colleagues.

Results relating to inclusion, students and community

1. Environmental adaptation

1. Most respondents think that school entrances are easy to use as they are flat ground with no stairs. One student with a visual disability said that her colleagues never leave walk. She enters the school with her cousin or a companion. One student with a motor disability mentioned that the wheelchair easily enters through the stairs and another student arrives into the yard using a car as he is a son of a teacher at the school and comes with him.
2. In one Ramallah school, one student with a motor disability said she completely depends on her brother to arrive at school. In many cases, she has to come late or even not to come depending on her brother's circumstances when he is sick, busy, etc. When her brother is late to take her home, the principal does.
One respondent with visual disability pointed out that the entrance of the school is difficult to use. He sometimes hits the door while entering or leaving school, as the main gate is opened late then he is late to enter or leave school due to difficulty to enter through the small gate which is inappropriate for students with motor disabilities.

3. One student with visual disability indicated that the entrance is easy to use as long as teachers do not use it to enter with their cars.

B. Resource rooms

As for the lessons and specialized classes students with disabilities go to, in addition to the regular classes, most students indicated that there are no special lessons or resource rooms to go to. In schools containing resource rooms, these rooms only contained physical education aids used by the teachers of resource rooms to simplify the material to make it easier to understand. Students with disabilities found no difference between their education and the education of students without disabilities, even if this takes place inside the resource rooms.

C. School curricula, teaching methods and examinations

1. Most students with visual, motor and speech disabilities do not face any problems in reading texts.
2. Students with visual disabilities face a problem represented in delayed receipt of the Braille school curriculum which are sometimes received after half of a semester and contains a lot of mistakes affecting their education performance. As well, they do not receive the curriculum of some subjects.
3. Some students with visual disabilities use magnifying devices in reading books. One student said that she sometimes uses it when the writing is in small size as she has a partial disability. She feels she is different from other students when using Braille books or a magnifying device so she does not like to and avoids using them as much as possible.
4. Three other students with visual disability said they lift the book very close in order to see the letters.
5. One student said that he cannot read English and there is none to help him. Another student mentioned that he cannot read all materials and this depends on the material itself, while a third student said that he is not interested in education.
6. Some students with intellectual disabilities believe that the curriculum is not appropriate for their abilities and potentials, while others have difficulty in reading. It seems that teachers do not consider the capabilities and levels of students in their classes.
7. A student with pronunciation disability said that she has difficulty in pronouncing English letters and none help her. There is only one student with a motor disability also having visual problems and he does not read texts but teachers at school and parents at home read for him.
Two girls with visual disability said they do their homework on a Braille typing machine but none checks their homework because teachers cannot read Braille language. Another student with a motor disability has his/her parents to write for him through asking him and writing his/her answer.
8. Opinions of students with disabilities varied on time adequacy in exams, as some of them believe they have enough time, while only one student said that the teacher gives him extra time if needed.

Others, mostly with visual disabilities, said that some teachers do not wait till the end of the exam, and that the end of the exam is related to the material and length of questions obliging them to be as quick as possible in writing. Another student said he uses a magnifying device and read the question more than once requiring a lot of time.

One student with visual disability said that she does not take sufficient time while waiting for arrangements to start writing in the exam, such as printing the answers on a Braille printer and then reading them to the teacher or having a teacher to tell her the answers to write for her or one student ends her exam and writes for her.

Another student with a visual disability added that she hopes to allow her using a Braille printer but the school refuses as the voice of the printer distracts and annoys students. Accordingly, she is obliged to depend on telling answers to another student after she delivers her exam paper which affects the grades of the student with visual disabilities as handwriting cannot sometimes be understood by the teacher and she becomes exposed to scolding from the teacher due to lack of handwriting clarity of the girl who wrote for her.

Discussion

A. Official policies on inclusion:

It is evident that there is no clear policy at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education that require principals to accommodate students with disabilities. Somehow, decision-makers lack clarity on how to deal with this category, due to the lack of clarity in policies and trends in some cases, with no specific entity to implement some policies or instructions, or the obstacle may be in having activities not aligned with the approved budget.

On identifying the needs of students with disabilities, it was found that there is also no clear policy regarding the assessment of the status of such students. In general, the common practice is to admit students with disabilities only in the lower primary school after being referred by the Directorate of Education and undergoing the medical check by the Medical Commission, which refers them to inclusive education, resources room or to private schools if their condition does not allow to be in regular public schools. They are usually promoted to the higher primary stage and secondary stage automatically.

Some policies and strategic plans lack comprehensiveness for some of the important issues in the process of inclusive education for persons with disabilities, like early diagnosis and diagnosis of disability, and the role of this process in helping in inclusion process. There is a shortage in establishing such centers in spite of their importance, which must be looked into through cooperation with the Directorate of Special Education of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

Assessment of students with disabilities is based on observation, which comes after enrollment and the beginning of school, delaying satisfaction of students' needs. As a

result, students motivation declines; they sometimes grow a sense of inferiority and irrelevance; leaving a long-term and short-term impact on their attitudes toward learning and school itself.

Within ministries, there are sterile financial measures that are dramatically crippling to work with, especially in relation to the financial complexities, and staff salaries' dependence on funders. Another problematic issue is that projects are implemented temporarily, leading to the inability to develop clear future plans and continuity in projects' implementation (most of the projects are within short to medium-term financing), which affects sustainability of planning and implementation of national strategies. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Ministry of Finance are responsible for the development of adequate allocations in their budgets for this category and not to only rely on projects.

Negative attitudes among some workers (employees) in this area towards the disabled require relevant authorities, on top of which the Department of Inclusive Education and the Supreme Council for Persons with Disabilities, to change these concepts when working with this category.

Negative trends also exist sometimes among parents towards their disabled children, as well as by students with no disabilities towards those with disabilities, affecting directly or indirectly the process of inclusion and the disabled access to their basic right to education.

Many schools lack the appropriate environment, including infrastructure, especially that some of them are not government-owned but leasehold, makes it difficult sometimes to being disabled-friendly; in addition, the absence of disabled friendly public transportation affects parents tendency to send their children to schools.

B. Family environment contribution in terms of family trends, characteristics and elements of its infrastructure such as the economic and educational situation of the family in contributing to the promotion of inclusion opportunities and support.

Results showed the following:

Lack of families awareness on the rights of their disabled children to education where the majority of families surveyed were not aware of a law that grants children with disabilities the right to education regardless of the type of their disability; impacting negatively on the provision of inclusion opportunities for their children.

Inability of some families to academically assist their children with disabilities, where those children (who are deaf-blind in particular) are not receiving the same academic attention as their peers who are without disabilities or with other disabilities, in terms of providing schools with their needed supplies (timely provision of teaching materials in Brill language, having a student with partial hearing disability sitting in the front of the classroom).

Inability of some families to academically assist their children leads to a high rate of school drop outs; where some of families surveyed said that their children with disabilities are being promoted automatically, which contributes to some extent to mitigate responsibility entrusted in parents, especially parents who are interested only in the transmission of their child with a disability from one grade to higher one successfully without any effort from them or their children to contribute to their learning. In fact, this would highlight the futility of the automatic promotion system and its negative effects on the teaching-learning process.

The bad economic situation of the majority of families reduces their children's access to education, because of the lack of appropriate public transport, and schools being distant from houses especially in marginalized areas that are far from city centers.

Lack of availability of appropriate environment in some schools reduces chances for some families to send their children with disabilities to school.

C. Contribution of teachers' background, attitude, experience and other characteristics in dealing with persons with disabilities and its impact on the opportunities of inclusion and support.

Lack of training and qualification of the teaching staff resulted in the lack of access of students with disabilities to the right to education that commensurate with their abilities and potential; thus, students' achievement of learning expectations depends on the insistence of teachers and adaptation of methods they deem appropriate.

Teachers have simple and general experience in inclusion and dealing with persons with disabilities in general. Even those who support inclusion, they do so because, as known among the general public, it is their right. A number of teachers said they face difficulties in dealing with students with disabilities, especially who are deaf-blind, others said they face difficulties in giving the student with visual impairment the right to education.

Many teachers do not have the knowledge of tools, means and methods needed by students with vision disabilities and other disabilities to get the best level of education, which affects the equal opportunity to get an education compared to their peers who are without disabilities. Students who are deaf-blind, and sometimes having movement disabilities if accompanied by mental problems, need more time than what is allocated for class periods and examinations. This in turn affects access of students with disabilities to equal opportunities in education as students without disabilities.

D. Impact of teachers' attitudes on equal opportunities for students with disabilities

Most teachers believe that students with disabilities have the right to access adequate education. Yet, we find that some of them are trying to find alternative

solutions to the problems that hinder such right, such as providing a Braille printer to one of the students with visual impairment to record observations during the class. Other teachers said they are forced (to ignore) students with disabilities (hearing, movement and sometimes visual impairment) or not to give their right during the class; affecting equal opportunities for students with disabilities to access a quality education as their peers who are without disabilities. Many teachers, on the other hand, hold negative perspectives towards inclusion, which no doubt will be reflected on methods of dealing with students with disabilities.

E. Sources of funding for inclusive education and their impact on equal opportunities for students with disabilities and their peers who are without disabilities:

Lack of sufficient or non-existence of budgets or a policy and directives that are supportive in spending stands an obstacle to all aspects of inclusion in education. This includes spending on appropriate facilities, all elements of school environment, opening source rooms and equipping them, supporting available rooms with adequate materials and tools, training and qualifying teachers and others. This is reflected in the weakness of equal learning opportunities between students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities.

1. Recommendations

10-1 *Recommendations on policy and legislation for students with disabilities in education primary*

Recommendations related to harmonize legislations, which regulates the rights of persons with disabilities with the international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities especially with regard to the inclusion in education through:

1. Review and amendment of the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. "4" for 1999 in effect. Particularly provisions relating to education to be in harmony with the International Convention for Persons with Disabilities and to require the competent authorities to enforce it.
2. Unify the definition of persons with disabilities in all legislations, whether the Palestinian Basic Law or the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and laws regulating the work of relevant ministries (labor, health, and social affairs).
3. Emphasis on the independence of the Higher Council for Disability and its legal personality and to have its financial disclosure independent from the Ministry of Social Affairs to ensure carrying out its mandate.
4. Establish clear mechanisms for accountability and control systems so as to ensure full implementation of the law, including the activation of monitoring and grievance mechanisms.
5. Revision of Education Law in effect through drafting legislative policy amending the new law; ensuring the inclusion of students with disabilities in public and private education.

6. Activation of punitive or criminal measures and actions in cases of default and negligence by the executive authorities.

A. Recommendations relating to policies

1. The need to adopt and abide by the strategic framework for rights of persons with disabilities especially with regard to educational policies contained therein with emphasis on human rights perspective to the issues of disability.
2. Ensure harmonization and provision of tools necessary for persons with disabilities by the relevant and competent institutions both in harmonized materials and curricula for all categories of persons with disabilities and not to restrict them to one category without the other.
3. Enhance the role of public educational institutions and relevant departments, promotion of human staff and provision of the necessary budgets.
4. Develop policies and mechanisms of early diagnosis and diagnosis of disability established by the Ministry of Health.
5. Harmonization of financial and administrative regulations and procedures in force at relevant ministries and institutions.
6. Harmonization of the educational process to take into account the individual differences among persons with disabilities.
7. Ensuring the implementation of the inclusion-related policy for persons with disabilities in the work and plans of local bodies.
8. Ensuring the implementation of the inclusion policy which was developed and approved by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.
9. Promotion of disabled persons' organizations participation and/or persons with disabilities and/or their families in stages of policy-making to ensure development of policies responsive to their needs and priorities.
10. Development and implementation of a media policy for media institutions and institutions relevant to persons with disabilities to serve the issues of disability.
11. Allocation of adequate budgets for the education sector in order to serve and facilitate access of persons with disabilities to the right to education.
12. Influence on national policies related to the educational aspect of persons with disabilities through lobbying and advocacy strategies.
13. Provision of educational opportunities for all students with disabilities who are of school age and in accordance with the degree of their disability through development of legal measures and actions that ensure inclusive to students with disabilities.

A. On the level of access, diagnosis, intervention and awareness mechanisms:

1. Development of an updated and inclusive database of persons with disabilities at school age, which can be referred to in order to improve their living conditions and their access to full rights in education by 2016.
2. Adoption of an approach to rehabilitation and awareness of the community to achieve comprehensive social inclusion of persons with disabilities in the context of their communities.

3. Adoption of clear detailed plans by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to improve ways of inclusion of students with disabilities in education to insure a decent life for them.
4. Activation of the supervisory and oversight role by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education on inclusive schools or universities and to monitor violations against students with disabilities.
5. Setting a unified evaluation system on basis of individual capacities and differences of students.
6. Review and re-designing personal enrollment cards applicable in schools to ensure they determine whether the student has a disability; if so, what is its nature, degree and what special needs that may require collaboration with the Ministry of Health.
7. Creating an enrollment system for new students to show difficulties, problems and needs.
8. Provision of transportation appropriate for persons with disabilities that offer training for drivers on how to deal with persons with disabilities in public transportation.
9. Education of families of students with a disability on the rights of children to education and relevant laws.

B. On the level of curricula, teaching methods and staff:

1. Development of capacity of staff in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and equip them with skills, mechanisms and methods, especially in dealing with students with disabilities gradually.
2. Provision of competent, trained and qualified staff to work in resource rooms to deal with students with disabilities.
3. Urge Palestinian universities to adopt a special education program in coordination with the Ministry of Higher Education.
4. Adoption of awareness workshops for students in schools to educate them on how to deal with students with disabilities.
5. Provision of resource centers in all departments of education and higher education that include specialists in physiotherapy, functional therapy, speech therapy and special education.
6. The necessity of curricula to be simple, clear and fit for various disabilities, and to be available in Braille language to serve students who have visual impairment since the beginning of the academic year.

C. Extent of harmonization of school environment:

1. Commitment of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to adopt environmental harmonization in schools for all types of disabilities.
2. Review of the engineering "code" of construction and ensure responsiveness or observance of all disabilities.
3. Provision of resource rooms equipped and prepared with all teaching aids and tools necessary to work with students with disabilities and ensuring their activation.

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Annex – Research Team – Palestine:

Representatives of disabled persons' organizations:

1. Association of ASWAT in Support of Persons with Mental Disabilities / Nablus:

The Association seeks to develop capacity of persons with mental disabilities to defend the rights of their children and support them, and contribute to the realization of the principle of equal opportunities, social justice, protecting rights of persons with mental disabilities, and improve their chances to meet their needs in the context of their communities.

- Montaha Odeh: Vice Chairman of the Board
Montaha Odeh (Muntaha_cbr@hotmail.com)
Tel:

2. Association of Insight Forum for the Blind / Jenin: -

The Association seeks to improve the quality of life of the Palestinian with visual impairment at the various social, economic, cultural, scientific and practical levels, according to humanitarian needs, and based on their rights stipulated by international conventions and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Law No. 4 of 1999.

- Mustafa Hohari: Former president of the association
Bffb Bffb (Bffb.ps@hotmail.com)
Tel:

3. Hope Charitable Society for the Deaf / Qalqilya: -

The Association seeks to be a pioneer association that is based on professional basis in activation of productivity, sports, education and awareness, social and women programs aimed to serve people with hearing disability, release of their development energy and promote their involvement in the community by achieving greater societal recognition of their role in this area.

- Waleed Nazzal: Director General of the Assembly
Deaf Deaf (Paldeaf61@yahoo.com)
Tel:

4. Stars of Hope Society to enable women with disabilities / Ramallah: -

Stars Hope Association was established in order to eliminate discrimination based on disability or gender; empowerment of women with disabilities to achieve equality and access to inclusion; claim their rights through the implementation of existing rights-based programs and projects; advocacy for the implementation of, follow-up and evaluation of laws, regulations and policies based on human rights and international agreements framework; and the need to improve the situation of women with disabilities.

- Safia Ali: Board member, secretary-treasurer and lobbying and the advocacy officer.
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