Chapter 6 Improving the Quality of Inclusive Education by Facilitating Learning from Experiences among Educational Actors

Chapter 4 and 5 provided insight in the process of mutual learning towards disability inclusive development in the community of NGOs brought together in the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities. In these chapters we showed how the different levels of development cooperation engage together to learn about disability inclusive development in a structured process of experimentation and reflection. In this chapter we will zoom in on one of the field practices of the TLP on inclusive education (IE) to learn about the process of change in schools in Ethiopia as an example of disability inclusive development. We will explore the constraints on IE, a key component of the Education For All strategy, for children with disabilities in Ethiopia and how they can be addressed by stimulating learning from grass-root level experiences.

Inclusive education was chosen as an example of disability inclusive development since most countries have committed themselves to achieving Education For All (EFA) by 2015. This is very challenging, especially in low- and middle income countries. To study IE in field practices in Ethiopia, we applied an internationally agreed framework for understanding quality education to the context of Ethiopia to identify, from the perspective of multiple actors, the main constraints for IE for children with disabilities. We then attempted to address the most important constraints by stimulating learning from the experiences of all actors involved, trying different approaches in three different schools. The constraints, related to inadequate teaching methods, disruptive peer effects and lack of community awareness, were found to be positively affected by tools that consisted of exchanging lessons learned through an intermediary, developing an eye-opener workshop and performing a play. We conclude that using these tools at least diminished the constraints through enhancing dialogue and reflection and stimulating vicarious learning. The focus on learning from experiences at school level enabled the transfer of lessons learned through different levels of education.
6.1 Introduction

Since the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994), Inclusive Education (IE) has been a key operational component of the strategy to implement universal education for all (EFA). The EFA movement is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children. At the World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000), 164 countries pledged to achieve EFA by 2015 (UNESCO, 2000).

Pursuing universal EFA is most pressing and challenging in low- and middle income countries, as education is strongly linked to (economic) development. The majority of children that drop-out from education live in low- and middle income countries (S. Miles & Singal, 2010; UNESCO, 2013). Another major challenge is to include children with disabilities in EFA, ensuring that they are also part of the development process in their countries. UNESCO (2013) estimates that as many as one third of the 72 million out of school children have a disability. Therefore, scholars and policy makers underline the urgent need for special attention for educational enrolment of children with disabilities in low- and middle income countries (amongst others: Lei & Myers, 2011; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2013; S. Peters, Johnstone, & Ferguson, 2005; WHO, 2011).

The Global Partnership on Children with Disabilities was established in 2012 to focus on Disability IE. This partnership stresses, amongst other things, the importance of collaboration amongst educational actors from different levels, including children with disabilities, to develop interventions that support education for children with disabilities in mainstream schools (Riordan, 2012; Task Force on the Global Partnership for Education, 2012). Therefore, IE is described as ‘a dynamic process’ towards a philosophy wherein networking with multiple actors is of great importance to learn from each other’s initiatives (S. Miles, Fefoame, & Mulligan, 2012; S. Peters et al., 2005).

Several participatory tools have been developed that stimulate learning between different actors. For example, tools that identify and explicate shared challenges, tools that facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience among participants, and tools that aim to increase the participation of all actors in the learning process (Veen, Bunders, & Regeer, in review; Veen, Liesveld, Regeer, & Bunders, 2013). In this chapter we explore the constraints on IE for children with disabilities in Ethiopia and how they can be addressed by stimulating learning from grass-root level experiences.

In order to assess the main constraints for EFA that is inclusive for children with disabilities, we first describe the framework of understanding quality education that was developed by
the EFA movement. All elements of the framework are discussed in relation to children with a disability. In addition we discuss the actors involved and their role in realizing EFA. Next, we apply this framework to the context of Ethiopia. We assess the main constraints from the perspective of the various actors involved. In three different primary schools in Ethiopia we aimed to address the most important constraints by facilitating a learning from experiences among the actors involved. Finally, we offer some concluding remarks on this research.

6.2 Quality of IE

In the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, UNESCO presented a framework for understanding quality education (see figure 6.1) as the worldwide standard for evaluating the quality of EFA. This model describes four elements - learning characteristics, enabling inputs, outcomes and contextual requirements - which need to be realized for EFA. Although the model is applied worldwide to evaluate the quality of IE, it does not specifically refer to the inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities. Other scholars have discussed (several) elements of the framework and their impact in relation to children with disabilities (amongst others: Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011; Barrett & Chawla-duggan, 2006). Peters (2005) developed the Disability Rights in Education Model to address the needs of children with disabilities in IE. In this chapter we chose to apply the EFA framework for understanding quality education, because the model is very widely used to evaluate the quality of IE (e.g. Barrett & Chawla-duggan, 2006; Gordon, 2010; Tikly, 2011). However, we also take into account the findings of other scholars and the Disability Rights in Education Model with respect to additional difficulties for children with disabilities.

The framework for understanding quality education

The framework for understanding quality education aims to enhance the quality of educational outcomes through analyzing learner characteristics, educational inputs and outcomes in the context of where education is implemented. Learner characteristics are an input factor for quality education, as how people learn is influenced by their capacities and experiences (UNESCO, 2005). It is recognized that, especially for children with disabilities, learner characteristics are important since they may be directly affected by the adverse effects of their impairment (Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2000). For example, Leyser and
Kirk (2004) describe how some parents are afraid that their child would be too behaviorally disruptive for IE leading to further stigmatization and segregation. Anthony (2011) describes how the disabled child can only be included when it can adapt to the expectations of a normative education environment.

The quality of education is also highly dependent on the **enabling inputs** that are made available to support the learning process (UNESCO, 2005). It consists of aspects that enable the learning and teaching process, such as e.g. teaching methods and materials. Especially for children with disabilities, environmental, physical and attitudinal accessibility is important for their participation in education (Barton & Armstrong, 2001; Peters, 2004). Furthermore, the teaching and learning process affects how these inputs are used and how effectively they are employed (UNESCO, 2005). In the reality of low-income countries, teachers are often not trained to apply teaching methods that address the special needs of children with disabilities (Ajuwon, 2012; Prinsloo, 2006; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; Tikly, 2011). Furthermore, teaching materials for children with disabilities are often not available (Ajuwon, 2012; Barton & Armstrong, 2001; Eleweke & Rodda, 2002).

The model describes that the **outcomes** of education should relate to the educational objectives of the country assessed (UNESCO, 2005). Education involves creative and emotional development, leading to social benefits, as well as the academic achievements of students. This broader purpose of education can be reflected in outcomes such as the teaching of humanistic values and meeting relevant cultural needs as well as the results achieved by individual students (Peters et al., 2005; UNESCO, 2005).

The **context** of society influences the quality of education. The context consists of aspects that relate to social, cultural, and religious values, policies and governance, community attitudes and values, and economic development. In a context where poverty is widespread, it is likely that the opportunities to increase resources are constrained (UNESCO, 2005). This usually results in an even lower priority for resources that are necessary to address the special needs of children with disabilities (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). As disability and poverty are closely correlated, children with disabilities are often not enrolled in education at all, due to economic constraints in their families and the fact that the education of healthy sons is prioritized (DFID, 2010; Peresuh & Ndawi, 1998). This shows the importance of parental support for children with disabilities in education, not only for enrollment but also for encouragement during education (Engelbrecht, Kitching, & Nel, 2009; Ferguson, 2008; UNESCO, 2005). Also community attitudes (Ajuwon, 2012; Tikly, 2011) and peer acceptance...
and support (Ferguson, 2008) are described as important for IE of children with disabilities, especially in low- and middle income countries.

Figure 6.1 Framework for understanding education quality (Source: UNESCO 2005, p 36)

**The actors**

A number of scholars argue that a multi-level approach, which involves all such actors, is needed in order to realize EFA. (Lehtomäki et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2005; Tikly & Barrett, 2011; UNESCO, 2005).

Tikly (2011) describes actors at three overlapping levels in education with responsibilities for the implementation of IE in low- and middle income countries: the *national level*, the *school level* and the *community level*. Peters et al. (2005) adds actors at the International level of organisations and policy makers that are dedicated to EFA and the rights for the child. Actors at the national level have an important role in formulating policy and legislation for education, which forms part of the *context* of quality education. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can also have a key role, at national level, in addressing the special...
needs of marginalised groups. Teachers, principals, special needs assistants, and students, at school level, play an important role in creating the enabling factors for inclusive teaching and learning. Actors in the community, such as members of extended families, neighbours and others, can create an environment in which students are encouraged to learn (Peters et al., 2005; Tikly, 2011; UNESCO, 2004). To create the conditions for quality education requires the right mix of inputs at all actors at the different levels simultaneously.

6.3 Inclusive Education in Ethiopia

In this section we first introduce how Ethiopia tries to realize quality EFA, and how the government addresses the needs of children with disabilities. Then we present our approach to exploring the facilitation of learning to stimulate IE in Ethiopia.

Research Setting

Ethiopia has experienced a huge educational reform since 1997/98, focussing on the accessibility of their school system to all Ethiopians (MOFED, 2002; Oumer, 2009). In particular, the abolition of public school fees made enrolment rates in primary education rise quickly; from 40 percent to 90 percent (Oumer, 2009). Unfortunately, statistics on enrolments rates of children with disabilities are limited. Estimates from 2000 and 2005 suggest very low educational enrollment rates for children with disabilities. On average, less than one per cent of children with disabilities could access primary education (Mengesha, 2000; Teferra, 2005).

As long as marginalized groups of the population are still excluded from basic primary education, achieving EFA by 2015 will remain a challenge for Ethiopia. Therefore, from 2005 onwards, improving IE became a cross cutting issue for the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MoE) (Ayana & Lehtomaki, 2006). After this commitment the MoE laid out a programme in collaboration with the Finnish government on Special Needs Education (SNE), to expand and improve IE for all children (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010). Alongside government programmes, International and National NGOs are also involved in EFA, especially NGOs which focus on IE for children who are ‘hard to reach’, including children with disabilities (Rose, 2009).

Despite all the efforts of the MoE and (international) NGO’s to improve the inclusion of children with disabilities in education, estimates from 2012 show only a small increase to
around 3% of children with disabilities who have access to education (Ministry of Education and UNICEF, 2012). This indicates a slow process of implementation and scale-up.

In 2010 a group of nine NGOs in Ethiopia formed an alliance to systemically and collectively learn from each other about the constraints that hamper, and solutions that stimulate, disability inclusive development. Five of these NGOs were specifically interested in IE and together formed the basis for a forum on IE. The forum on IE was led by a disability-specific NGO with ample experience in advocating for IE at different levels. In this forum the NGOs exchanged experiences from grass root level and invited national educational actors to participate and learn from their experiments. The Ethiopian NGOs, which are supported financially, strategically and through capacity development by Dutch donor organisations, participated in a Thematic Learning Programme (TLP) on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, from January 2011 to December 2012. The authors of this chapter facilitated the process of learning in the TLP and at their partner organisations in Ethiopia. They were therefore involved in the Ethiopian forum on IE as facilitators of change. Through this research, the forum on IE, the Dutch donor organisations, and the researchers sought to acquire insight in the current practices and constraints of disability IE at the grass root localities of the NGOs involved. The NGOs wanted to learn from each other’s good practices, especially in rural and hard to reach localities that implement IE, and thereby to be able contribute to on-going reforms at national level.

6.4 Methodology

This research involved three educational NGOs from the forum on IE, active at national level, which were also engaged in work in rural areas. Each NGO chose the school with which it worked which had the highest enrolment rates of children with disabilities to collaborate with the research. At the schools, the researchers approached the community and family members that were closely involved with the school to get insight at the level of the community.

The first part of the research explored the constraints encountered during the implementation of IE. In this stage we reflected on the framework for understanding quality

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3 The other two NGOs in the Inclusive Education Forum of the TLP were not included in the first part of this study, because their projects were either located in urban areas or areas that were recently under periodic attacks by rebel groups.
education. To avoid bias, we did not introduce the framework for understanding quality education directly to the respondents. After deriving the obstacles mentioned by the respondents themselves, we related their answers to the framework to see whether these were reflected in the framework. Respondents at three levels were interviewed to give insight in their experienced constraints with regards to inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education (see table 6.1).

At national level this was done through interviews with the NGO directors and programme staff involved in the forum on IE.

At school level the principal was interviewed and a group interview was conducted with teachers. Furthermore, children with disabilities and their peers were observed in the classroom during one day to determine their participation in education in comparison with their peers. The observations were consolidated by additional interviews with the children with disabilities, their teachers, friends and, if possible, their parents.

At community level, parents of children with disabilities, both those who were and those who were not enrolled in education and parents of the school board committees were consulted in 2 focus group discussions and 15 interviews.

Table 6.1 Respondents to explore constraints of disability IE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Research participants</th>
<th>NGO 1</th>
<th>NGO 2</th>
<th>NGO 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National level</td>
<td>NGO director</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NGO programme staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Level</td>
<td>Local NGO staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observations in the class room</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community level</td>
<td>Additional interviews with:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>children with disabilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>friends of children with disabilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teachers involved with IE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parents of children with disabilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents of children with disabilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents of school board committees</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second part of the research entailed experimentation with tools that facilitate learning to improve disability IE. The local NGO staff members, principals, teachers and researchers jointly identified the constraints that might be addressed by tools that stimulate learning through exchange of experiences. In each school one tool was applied during a one week visit of the researcher, in close collaboration with the local educational and NGO staff. Afterwards, the outcome was evaluated directly with the actors at school and community level through meetings and interviews. An evaluation meeting was also organized with the actors at national level on return from the field trips. Furthermore, after three months, the lasting effects of the results were discussed in interviews with all actors involved at the different levels.

Figure 6.2 Schematic representation of the exchange of lessons learned to improve disability IE

Lessons learned were documented carefully by the researchers in detailed case histories and field visit reports. This information was exchanged with actors at national level in reflective interviews within the forum on IE with the researchers as intermediary, with actors at school level through direct exchange, and with the donor NGOs at international level through a newsletter in the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities. Figure 6.2 gives a schematic representation of the exchange of lessons learned.

The researchers recorded and transcribed verbatim all (group) interviews and focus group discussions. Furthermore, an observation logbook was maintained with reflections on the participation of children with disabilities in the class room. The data analysis was discussed with several actors involved on national level. Both Methodological and Investigators triangulation (Denzin, 1970) were applied to increase the validity of the results.
6.5 Results

We started this study by exploring the constraints that actors experienced in working towards inclusion in education in Ethiopia. In the first part of this results section, we discuss the identification of constraints that surfaced when working on inclusion experienced by actors at different levels, and how these relate to the framework for understanding quality education. This selection formed the foundation for the second part of this study. Here we will elaborate on our experiments with tools that stimulate learning through the exchange of experiences from grass-root level in the field of IE.

Constraints for Inclusive Education

Constraints on IE can be understood as factors that hamper the implementation of quality EFA. The framework for understanding quality education aims to enhance the quality of educational outcomes through assessing educational inputs and learner characteristics in the context of where education is implemented. When assessing the constraints in practicing IE, the Ethiopian educational actors mainly referred to indicators of quality education in the domain of enabling inputs for education and in the context that influences quality education. Below we will show how the constraints experienced by educational actors in Ethiopia relate to the indicators in the framework for quality education (presented in italic) in the relevant domains. Figure 6.3 summarizes our findings.
Constraints in the context of EFA

One of the constraints mentioned by all respondents is that the developmental and economic conditions in Ethiopia are not always conducive for IE. As a NGO director emphasises ‘A problem is the costly infrastructure. Most of the Braille and Audio devices are not produced locally and need to be imported. We rely on NGOs to bring them, but this happens irregularly and insufficiently.’ Besides, the low economic status of the majority of the population in Ethiopia reduces their abilities to increase the level of inclusion in quality education. This relates to the link between poverty and disability that is seen in literature (Bines & Lei, 2011; Lei & Myers, 2011; Swartz & Maclachlan, 2009; WHO, 2011). In the framework for understanding quality education this constraint fits the indicator Economic and Labour Market Condition.
Another constraint brought up by all respondents is the perceptions on disability shared by people in the community. A NGO director explains ‘The attitudes [of people in the communities] are shaped by historic and religious patterns. A notion commonly expressed is that ‘disability is related to a curse from God.’ This is in accordance with studies showing how the lack of awareness in the communities results in children with disabilities being hidden in their homes and stigmatized, thus hindering IE, especially in low- and middle income countries (Agbenyega, 2007; Ajuwon, 2012; Tikly & Barrett, 2011). However, it is difficult to address attitudes rooted in historic and religious patterns and we should be wary of jumping to conclusions on how this relates to decision making for IE. Indeed the attitudes of people in the community, sometimes supported by religious belief patterns, can cause stigma and shame among people with a disability. However, this does not necessarily interfere with the decision of parents to send their children with disabilities to school. This became clear during one of the focus group discussions in which parents indicated that part of them indeed believed disability was a punishment of God. this did not affect how they felt about their child’s education. No matter what their ideas on the origin of their child’s condition were, they wanted their child to go to school. Here we see how the attitudes related to the indicator of conditions in the community are based upon socio-cultural and religious factors that may influence the parental support for IE.

Furthermore, we found in our study that ‘awareness of the community’ is interpreted differently in different contexts. By NGO staff ‘community awareness’ is often used as a comprehensive concept to address the awareness of different members of society, including parents. On the other hand, the results on grassroots level indicate that the awareness among different social groups can differ and has different implications. Several respondents distinguished between the awareness of different members in the community, such as parents, peer students and teachers. This distinction is also found in the framework for understanding quality education, in which a distinction is made between Parental support, Peer effects, and Philosophical standpoints of teachers. Below we will describe the constraints in these three areas.

The NGO staff, teachers and members of the school board committees explained that parents often do not see the value of sending their child with a disability to school. However, parents of children with disabilities who were not enrolled in schools did not agree with this statement. They explained that they would definitely send their children with disabilities to school, if the school was more accessible and disability friendly. Thus, we realized that parental support has to do with the interrelation between schools and parents, and how
well schools respond to the needs of specific members in the community. This relates to Engelbrecht (2013) who, among others, describes the dynamic process of parents’ decision making to place their disabled child in a mainstream setting.

*Peer effect* was mentioned in the focus group discussion with parents who did not send their children with disabilities to school as one of the reasons to keep their child at home. Like one father explains ‘*The other children insult my child… they will make my child feel inferior.*’ Children with disabilities who are enrolled in IE also recognised this problem. For instance interview respondent Aragesh, one of the disabled students who is 18 years but studies in grade 4, often feels bullied and neglected by her classmates. Interestingly, teachers and parent members of the school board committee express not to see this indicator as a constraint. As one of the parents of the school board committee said:

‘...*Most children are nice to each other. Moreover we correct the children if they behave wrongly.*’

In our observations we have seen that these corrections are not subtle. Older children in primary school, parents and teachers are guarding with sticks to keep order. Ferguson (2008) observed in this respect that students with disabilities may be included ‘*in*’ the class, but often are not part ‘*of*’ the class in social terms and in terms of learning achievements. We also realize that questions on a sensitive issue, like bullying and other undesirable behaviour, may encourage answers which the respondent hopes will be socially desirable answers.

The *teachers’ attitude* was mentioned as a constraint for IE, by local and national NGO staff and directors. However, in the schools we visited, most teachers seemed to be aware of the importance of IE for children with disabilities since they were trained on disability IE in the context of the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities. In group interviews we thoroughly discussed the benefits of IE, and teachers often expressed that, regardless of the benefits, inclusion is first of all a human right that needs to be addressed.

**Constraints in the enabling inputs for EFA**

Despite the teachers’ awareness of the importance of disability IE, addressing the special needs of disabled children in practice is something different. This constraint is especially addressed by the teachers who express their ‘lack of appropriate teaching skills’ to support children with disabilities in the classroom. It was also found that in the often large class sizes, differentiation techniques were hardly used to respond to different learners. The importance of enabling teachers to address the special needs of children with disabilities in
an integrated way is widely described in literature (Ajuwon, 2012; Ferguson, 2008; Prinsloo, 2006; Sharma et al., 2008). This relates to the indicator teaching methods in the framework for understanding quality education.

The ‘physical accessibility of education’, was mentioned as an important constraint by all respondent groups. Schools are often insufficiently accessible for children with disabilities and have insufficient teaching materials to address their needs. Parents, in particular, mentioned inaccessibility as a barrier preventing them to send their children to school or mentioned it as a reason for withdrawing their children from school. For example, the infrastructure around the school is not always accessible and parents have to earn their daily wages and therefore lack the time to bring their disabled child to school. Local and national NGO staff is concerned by the challenge of managing the scarce resources for supporting the special needs of children with disabilities. This constraint was also observed in the classrooms and confirmed by the teachers. All these constraints are also described in literature by several scholars (Ajuwon, 2012; Barton & Armstrong, 2001; Eleweke & Rodda, 2002) and relate to the indicators physical infrastructure and facilities, lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials, and, indirectly, to school governance in the framework for understanding quality education.

We noted which constraints were encountered by actors at different organizational levels. Some constraints were shared by all actors, while others were mainly experienced by actors at one level. However, this does not relate to the severity of the constraints experienced, since all constraints, at whatever level, are hampering the realisation of IE.

**Tools that facilitate learning on Inclusive Education**

In each school a tool was explored to facilitate learning by exchanging experiences on a particular constraint encountered (see table 6.2). Together, the relevant actors at school and community level and the researchers developed appropriate tools to enhance learning on the constraints that were most important for the actors involved. This relates to UNESCO’s (2005) plea to address diversity in education through interventions at grassroots level that aim to overcome barriers for the participation of children with disabilities. The lessons learned from these experiments were dispersed through the whole network of the forum on IE in Ethiopia and the Dutch donor organisations in the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities. In this section we will describe the experiments and their contribution to quality IE for children with disabilities.
Sharing of an experience by a mediator to stimulate appropriate teaching skills

At school level the constraint of ‘lack of appropriate teachers’ skills’ was addressed in one of the schools. The experiment used to target this issue has to do with responding flexibly to the learning situation of children in the classroom. In this case, it involved a boy Fentawhn, impaired with low vision, in a first grade class (Box 6.1 shows some observation notes). The researcher and teacher of the class observed that Fentawhn was not fully participating in class, due to his impairment, and agreed that the teacher did not yet apply differentiated teaching methods to address his special needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constraint</th>
<th>Tool to enhance learning</th>
<th>Actors involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of appropriate teaching skills</td>
<td>Sharing of an experience by a mediator</td>
<td>Student with a disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some peer students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer effects</td>
<td>Eye-opener workshop</td>
<td>Student with a disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Class of peer students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community awareness</td>
<td>Theatre performance</td>
<td>Disability club (disabled and non-disabled children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All peer students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community at large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sharing of an experience by a mediator to stimulate appropriate teaching skills

At school level the constraint of ‘lack of appropriate teachers’ skills’ was addressed in one of the schools. The experiment used to target this issue has to do with responding flexibly to the learning situation of children in the classroom. In this case, it involved a boy Fentawhn, impaired with low vision, in a first grade class (Box 6.1 shows some observation notes). The researcher and teacher of the class observed that Fentawhn was not fully participating in class, due to his impairment, and agreed that the teacher did not yet apply differentiated teaching methods to address his special needs.

**Box 6.1: observation notes grade 1, Fentawhn (low vision)**

During a particular English class a series of words was written on the blackboard and children in the class had to come to the board, one by one, to read the words out loud. When it was Fentawhn’s turn, he positioned himself close to the board and read the words. He had a few more problems than the other students but managed to finish the assignment quite well. Next, the students took their notebooks to write the words portrayed on the blackboard, except for Fentawhn, who was holding his notebook under the table, like he was shy. He seemed to be waiting till everyone was finished, while pretending to write.

After class, the teacher was asked why she thought Fentawhn did not write the words from the blackboard. She answered that he could write but maybe he could not see the board properly (even though he was already in front of the class).
In order to increase Fentawhn’s level of participation, the teacher, principal and the researcher decided that teacher would be assisted in designing a differentiated teaching method. The researcher, who at this point had learned from approaches in other school settings and could be considered as a mediator, shared the experiences of Yetnebesh, a successful blind woman who is currently the executive director of the Ethiopia Center for Disability and Development (ECDD), and a role model for many persons with disabilities in Ethiopia. The story is described more fully in Box 6.2. In summary, the researcher explained how the blind Yetnebesh as a child struggled to learn in a mainstream high-school, but how much her situation improved once she found a friend who could read for her.

**Box 6.2: The story of Yetnebesh on how support of a buddy can increase participation in education**

Yetnebesh started her educational career in a special boarding school for the blind. Here she learned to work with Braille, to read and write. She continued her education in a regular high school, which was not accessible to blind students and lacked appropriate learning materials. In those times she soon realized the importance of friends: “The government sometimes supports blind students financially, which I used to buy some Buna (coffee) or food for other students, so I easily made contact with classmates. Some became my friends and started to read for me. This was very important for me in a regular school because there was no Braille. Blind students in regular schools, that lack appropriate learning materials, need other students to read the homework and the class material for them.” This also benefits the child who is reading as they practice the assignments double and become very fluent readers. The friend, who was assisting Yetnebesh in high school, still mentions today that in her work she is benefitting from the fact that she was reading for her.

The story was shared with the teacher through the researcher. The researcher paid attention to the details and contextual factors, which helped to transfer the message of the story. The teacher extracted the importance of a buddy system for the child with a disability in her class. This may sound a very obvious solution, though in the context of Ethiopian teaching (they use a lot of reciting and classes are very cramped so teachers lack time to address individual needs) it had not crossed the teachers’ mind to think of such an easy solution. In this exploration different actors were involved, as the co-founder of ECDD (through an intermediary) at national level was able to share her story with a primary school teacher at school level. Consequently, the teacher showed her ability to derive the lesson
from the story and apply it in her own context, as is illustrated by further observation notes in Box 6.3.

**Box 6.3: Continuation observation notes grade 1, Fentahwn (low vision)**

The teacher was happy to hear about the story of Yetnebersh and immediately arranged a buddy for Fentawhn. She asked the students who would like to read for Fentawhn during the class and placed a smart girl next to the boy. The girl looked proud to support Fentawhn with his assignment and started reading. After class I [researcher] observed that Fentawhn had written all his words in the notebook and clearly looked relieved. His mother told me in an informal conversation that she also noted that he wrote better and praised him for it.

Three months later the researcher asked the teacher about Fenthawn’s progress. She expressed how - after the girl had helped Fentawhn for one month- she arranged a male buddy for Fentawhn. This was a better match since the boys are friends. Fentawhn has improved his writing since and is doing well, according to his teacher. The teacher explained how this example also helped her to think about solutions for other children with disabilities in her class. She also shared her practical experience with colleagues at school and local NGO staff, who also started to experiment with inclusive teaching methods.

This demonstrates how sharing stories through a mediator can stimulate learning and lead to improved quality of IE by addressing teaching methods. As the story of Yetnebersh was relevant for the situation of the teacher, she could effectively apply the lessons learned.

An eye-opener workshop to positively influence peer effects in Inclusive Education

In the second school, the principal, teachers and the researcher wanted to address the constraint of negative ‘peer effects’ that were observed in the school and stressed by parents and the students as a concern. Together with the principal, local NGO-workers and the researcher, an eye-opener workshop was developed for one of the classes that included a student with a disability. The aim of the eye-opener workshop was to stimulate learning in a class, based on the experiences of a student with a disability. This tool was chosen since it facilitates learning of ‘outsiders’ through reflection on the challenges, successes and learning experiences of ‘insiders’ (B Regeer et al., 2011; B. J. Regeer et al., 2009).

In the school involved, classes contain many children - on average around 50-60 students. There is not much time for addressing all the diverse needs in the classroom and education
is easily disrupted. Parents of children with disabilities stressed that bullying was a reason for them to keep their children at home. How children with disabilities experience this situation is hardly noticed by their teachers and peers. In such a setting, we wanted to create an opportunity for inclusion by contributing to awareness-raising within the classroom, which would hopefully lead to diminished bullying and exclusion.

The researcher in collaboration with the local NGO staff and teacher applied the eye-opener workshop in the class by asking Aragesh, the girl of 18 years that studies in grade 4 and feels bullied and neglected, to share her experiences concerning peer effects as an ‘insider’ with her class, who were ‘outsiders’ to this problem. We hoped that sharing her story in an eye-opener workshop would lead to more positive attitudes towards her. Briefly, the workshop consisted of three different sessions, of two hours each, with play exercises around disability inclusion. To ensure that Aragesh’s openness about her experience would not lead to further segregation, there was much attention to building rapport in the class to create a safe environment. Since mutual trust in an eye-opener workshop is very important (Mierlo et al., 2010) Aragesh did not share her experience until the second session (see Box 6.4).

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<th>Box 6.4: observation notes grade 4, Aragesh (physical disability)</th>
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<td>As priority was given to first creating a safe environment for Aragesh, she shared her constraint with the rest of the class only during the second session:</td>
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<td>‘Just when I come to school and I enter the class, I would like to have a chair that is arranged for me and if there is no place, to have other children to allow me to sit down. Also people in the community sometimes bump into me but that knocks me over. And maybe if teachers can actively participate by giving me some extra attention when I have problems with writing, for example, that would make me happy. It would make me able to learn more.’</td>
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<td>After this open statement of Aragesh, which showed some nervousness in the short intonation and her appearance, the children reflected on her experience and thought about ways to diminish her problems in the future. Like one of the children stated: ‘I did not know I was hurting her, because I didn’t think about it. Now I would like to help her if I can.’</td>
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The discussion in the class after the statement of Aragesh showed that her peers could reflect openly, from their perspective, on the situation. For most this was an eye-opener since they did not realize how they were affecting Aragesh’s school experience. The
researchers noticed several socially desirable answers during the discussion but still, after the workshops, the children initiated a disability club to address peer attitudes towards disabled students. Furthermore, the teacher observed that Aragesh and the other students were studying together more often, sharing resources, and more generally that Aragesh’s classmates were more attentive to her needs as they provided seating for her or involved her in playing together during breaks. This may relate to a change in attitude among the students. Aragash herself also mentioned changes during the breaks. In the interview conducted after 3 months she indicated that she is playing games with other children and that the number of her friends had increased. Although she also felt that some classmates were still gossiping about her, she felt the eye-opener workshop had helped, especially concerning the specific things she mentioned when she shared her story.

Even though it is difficult to measure the level of awareness among children, the workshop has at least led to some positive change in peer effects. The fact that children can be stimulated to change their behavior, becoming more supportive to their peers with disabilities, shows how an intervention like an eye-opener workshop can result in further empathy and the will to solve problems together.

Drama to facilitate awareness-raising on Inclusive Education in the wider community

At grassroots level the ‘lack of awareness’ was addressed in one of the schools. Since 2009, the school in question has worked towards becoming more inclusive (visualized in figure 6.4). Different strategies were used by the NGO and school staff to create awareness on IE. As a result, parents have a better understanding of the value of education for children with disabilities. Still, according to the NGO and school staff, it is important to make sure all members of the community see the availability of IE in the community as a moral obligation and that all parents with children with disabilities see how local education can respond to specific needs. Therefore, continuous awareness-raising is required.
The researcher shared what other schools were doing to create more awareness in the community through role plays, discussion groups, poetry competitions and drama. The NGO and school staff decided that drama best fitted their context and possibilities, since the children of the active disability club (comprising of disabled and non-disabled children) were enthusiastic about engaging in such form of play. Playful drama is a means to start dialogue and reflection, and is especially used in the context of creating social change in community development (Sloman, 2011). Drama allows the participants and observers to re-experience a constraint in a new way and create a safe space to examine their cultural beliefs (Hinthorne & Schneider, 2012).

The researchers and teachers rehearsed with the children of the disability club a drama to perform for the wider community, with the ulterior goal of starting a discussion within the community about IE. The drama was based on the development of the school over the last three years and represented the lives of children with disabilities enrolled in education. It included detailed scenes on the past situation, showing how children with disabilities were excluded from education and hidden by their parents. It displayed the concerns of the school and the school board members who recruited children with disabilities in the last few years and how more children with disabilities were coming to school. The parents, as played by the children, learned that their children with disabilities were able to learn and get their diplomas. The play ended by showing the future of these enrolled children, for
example one had become a doctor. An important feature was that the drama provided a lot of detail and was recognizable for the community. The context was well drawn and a variety of emotional processes were enacted, which made the story very lively.

All students and teachers and about 150 community members came to watch the performance, which lasted an hour, and afterwards the researcher asked the community to reflect upon it. The men who stood up to voice their opinion about the play thought that it correctly and realistically illustrated traditional practices in the past with regards to children with disabilities. One member remembered ‘Hiding children was a serious practice in the community. There were many children with disabilities not exposed because of this cultural problem.’ Another community member reported that not just children with disabilities were excluded from education: many children were kept at home to work. In his view, the performance showed that education can improve the future prospects of the child and the family and that exclusion from education is unadvisable for any child. Two other members reflected that the drama was useful because it was detailed and showed the positive outcomes of education for a child.

The drama on disability issues in the community provided an example of direct exchange, between the disability club (of the school) and the wider community. Although it is true that ‘theatre cannot solve problems, it can only illustrate and expose them’ (Boeren, 1992, p. 261) our experience shows how drama can provoke reflection and discussion about the issue underlying the performance. We have to be aware that perhaps only the more positive members of the community members were prepared to speak up, but subsequent reflections on the event indicate a general belief that drama can enhance learning on the importance of IE.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the constraints for IE for children with disabilities in Ethiopia and how they can be addressed by stimulating learning from grass-root level experiences. To this end, we first mapped the constraints these actors experienced regarding the inclusion of children with disability in education. In accordance with the literature, we found that the most important constraints related to enabling input factors (e.g. teaching methods, materials and facilities) and the context of society in which education takes place, especially parental support, peer effects and community awareness.
The experiments with tools that facilitate exchange of experiences across multiple levels to address constraints in quality of IE suggest good prospects, although we have to be aware of the possibility of socially desirable responses. In all examples, the constraint in question was lessened directly after the intervention. Three months later the effect was still visible. Furthermore, all the tools used promoted dialogue between the different actors involved.

In relation to teaching methods, a teacher learned about simple steps to facilitate differentiated learning. The focus on a solution in the example helped the teacher to think about a solution in her situation as well. Although it is questionable if small tricks like this will address the constraint as a whole, the results showed how the quality of education for the respective student with a disability improved and how a dialogue among teachers was initiated, reflecting on their practices to address special needs.

In relation to disruptive peer effects, a class of students came closer to a classmate with a disability through an eye-opener workshop. Through the honest and open atmosphere the student with a disability could express her personal difficulties, and her peer students got concrete examples on how to improve the situation. Although we can obviously not claim that these three sessions deeply changed the attitudes of all children involved, nevertheless the results showed that, three months later, the student with the disability felt more accepted in the class and felt that the other students showed more support for her, resulting in an improved learning environment.

In relation to enhancing community awareness, the disability club of a school performed a play for the school and the community that was detailed and honest in portraying progress towards inclusive practices. The recognisability of the story presented ensured that the community members could relate to it. The high turnout was evidence of the substantial interest in such activities. The results showed that the performance touched the hearts of the public, provoking dialogue and reflection among community members, and thereby enhanced awareness of the importance of IE.

The three experiments show that facilitating a learning experience can be relevant at individual, class and community level, thus demonstrating its wide applicability. Furthermore, all examples showed how tools for learning can elicit vicarious experience to develop new insights into a problem (see table 6.3). The rationale behind vicarious learning is that one can learn from the problems others encounter and especially from the way they solve or deal with these problems in a specific context (Cox et al., 1999).
In conclusion, our exploration shows that facilitating exchange of experiences at grass-roots level leads to a better understanding of the constraints as experienced by the participants involved and to changes in attitudes and behaviour. The results of exchanging lessons learned in a personal, honest and contextualised way, show that a change in attitudes and practice has started and that the actors involved feel confident to continue and spread their experiences. Furthermore, these experiences at school level were shared with the NGOs and national policy makers at national level. From there, they may influence other schools in their network to adopt the lessons learned. In addition, they might relate the lessons

<table>
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<th>Constraint</th>
<th>Vicarious learning</th>
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| Teaching skills    | • Experiences from a former student with a disability told by a mediator:  
• The detail in the story helped a teacher to reflect on her work  
• The orientation on a solution provided an action perspective to improve IE  
• The action of the teacher afterwards resulted in better learning outcomes for the student with a disability  
• The solution was communicated in the wider teacher community as an example for practicing IE |
| Peer effects       | • Experiences from a peer student with a disability shared in an eye-opener workshop:  
• The honest and open atmosphere showed the students how their behaviour affected the student with a disability  
• The personal and concrete story gave clear instructions on aspects for changing behaviour  
• The awareness raised in the class resulted in a better learning environment for the student with a disability |
| Community awareness| • Experiences from a community progressing towards IE, visualised in theatre:  
• The detail and honesty in the theatre play touched the community members at heart  
• The reference to recognisable practices ensured that the community members could relate to the story told  
• The time for reflection afterwards provoked a dialogue among community members on former practices and visions for the future. |
learned to other sectors of development wherein they carry out activities. Last, but not least, the Dutch donor organisations also accessed the lessons learned, through a newsletter with 'thickly described' (Geertz, 1973) case stories including a detailed explanation of the tool and the learning curve afterwards. They reported that this information gives them very important insight in practice which strengthens their support to National NGOs rolling out disability inclusive development (Veen, Bunders, et al., 2013). This possible chain reaction of learning is visualised in figure 6.5.

*Figure 6.5 Possible chain reaction of learning in the TLP*