

2. What is happening about children with SEND in Sierra Leone?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was passed in 2008 and ratified by Sierra Leone in 2010.

The UNCRPD states that children with disabilities should be able to participate in the general education system. Some key points from the UNCRPD are as follows:

- Governments should ensure the development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential
- Children with disabilities must not be excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability
- Persons with disabilities must be able to access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live
- Reasonable accommodation of the requirements of persons with disabilities should be provided
- Persons with disabilities should receive the support they require, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education. This support might include specialist resources, specialist teaching or other forms of specialist support, for example:
 - Braille, sign language or other alternative forms of communication
 - Support with mobility
 - Peer support and mentoring
 - Specialist teachers (e.g. teachers qualified in sign language and/or Braille)
 - Specialist training for staff working in schools

In 2007 the Government of Sierra Leone published the following commitments*:

- To directly tackle the problem of out-of-school children with targeted responses which break down the barriers preventing children from going to school, and thereby reach those children who have special needs, come from underserved rural areas or live in extreme poverty
- To provide six years of good quality universal primary education to all children of primary school-going age (6-11 years) and the over-aged who have missed out – including those with special needs – and ensure that they all complete with necessary knowledge and skills
- To ensure that the vulnerable and disadvantaged children including orphans, children in institutions, those with special needs and in need of protection, enrol and stay in school
- To ensure provision for the mentally challenged at primary school



What can you do as a teacher?

- You should know about the global commitments to the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- You may find it helpful to refer to these commitments when you talk about the needs of pupils with disabilities in your class with fellow teachers, the head teacher or other professionals.



Task: Read again the 4 commitments above. Which of these do you think is the most important in your community? Talk to your fellow student teachers, teachers and parents about these needs.

References:

Adapted from: United Nations – Disability, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Article 24: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html>

*Government of Sierra Leone, Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2007) Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan, A road map to a better future 2007-2015.

[Online] Available from:

<http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/8b1b32249f3ad5a0c6ef5a64cf3301ce2d494092.pdf> [Accessed 14 September 2018]

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