

# Human Resource Capacities for Inclusive Education in the Northwest Region of Cameroon

Tsangue Glory Tchiazé<sup>1</sup>, Louis Mbibeh<sup>2,\*</sup>, Awa Jacques Chirac<sup>1</sup>, Ndintek Kennedy Nonki<sup>1</sup> & Tih Pius Muffih<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services, Cameroon

<sup>2</sup>The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

\*Corresponding author: The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

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## Abstract

Research around inclusive education has paid more attention on practice to the detriment of human resource capacity prerequisites necessary for its implementation. Many actors are providing education to children with disabilities in the Northwest Region of Cameroon (NWR) but little is known about their human resource capacities. Based on these premises, the necessity to fill the gap, motivated this action-based research aimed at identifying the human resource capacities available for inclusive education practice in the NWR of Cameroon. A mixed method design was adopted for data collection and analysis using a comprehensive survey and in-depth key informant interviews. The data analysis grounded on a human rights perspective focused on human resources available, including special teachers, mainstream teachers, different stakeholders and training for inclusive education. The findings show that there is disaggregated information related to human resource capacities for the implementations of inclusive education in the NWR and diversified human resources with each stakeholder implementing to the best of their individual abilities and a wide gap in collaboration amongst stakeholders. The study thus proposes strategies to enhance collaboration that is crucial for IE to succeed and concludes that there is need to build an institutional framework for collaboration that will help to harness the diversified practices. A CoP developed as a result of this research has for the past 3 years implemented 80% of the key findings. The research thus serves as an empirical baseline for projects related to inclusive education and also for researchers and stakeholders interested in the development of inclusive education in Cameroon.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, human resource capacities, children with disabilities, communities of practice

## 1. Introduction and Background

Disability is an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations or participation restrictions (Stake 1995). It is an evolving concept resulting from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on equal basis with others (United Nations, 2006) Disability is not an “attribute of a person” but is rather a whole concept with varying considerations especially depending on the environment, context and situation. Social participation and the environment are important aspects of the definition of disability. Inaccessible environments create barriers to participation and inclusion (WHO, 2011). In developing countries, meeting the needs of Persons with Disabilities has been a welfare issue and has not been given significant priority in planning (Roberts & Babinard, 2004). Persons with Disabilities still face more socioeconomic challenges and poverty because of the several barriers to healthcare, rehabilitation, education, employment opportunities and because of exclusion from everyday life activities (WHO, 2011).

This study within the above context identifies inclusive education practice as one of the areas that need an evaluation of baseline data with focus on the human resources available as well as their capacities in implementing inclusive education. Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) promotes full and effective participation of PWD and inclusion in society. This precept is embedded within the Sustainable Development Goals, precisely within the Goals 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17, which are all promoting accessible and inclusive environments for all. However, advancing towards the achievement of these goals cannot be attainable without focus on inclusive education to build capacities of persons with disabilities. Those who are at the center of capacity development are human resources for inclusive education and therefore the need to determine what human resources are available in the context of Cameroon in order to propose strategies for developing such capacities.

In defining inclusive education, Mbibeh (2013) summarizes definitions from various authors and the UN and concludes that the centrality of inclusive practice is specific in different contexts in the world. He however insists that no matter the specificities, inclusive education should involve giving children with disabilities the possibility to learn together in a regular classroom like their peers without disability thereby exposing them to diversity. This is the consideration that is adopted for this study. In the same light, human resource refers to the workforce that is available to ensure the implementation of inclusive education and the different capacities. Human resource capacities are the availability of knowledgeable, experienced, and skilled individuals in an organization or institution, who perform precise tasks and responsibilities. In the case of this study, it will be referring to capacities that are related to effectively implementing inclusive education.

The current picture of inclusive education in Cameroon shows that there is emerging attention to inclusive education for children with disabilities in Cameroon yet many children are still not able to realize their educational and social rights (Cockburn et al 2017). It is also true from research that children with disability in African contexts are less likely to start and attend school, and to transition to higher levels of education (Filmer 2008; Hashemi et al 2014; Mbibeh 2013,

Uchem, Ngwa and Asongwa 2014; UNESCO 2005; UNICEF 2004). While access to education is an inalienable right to all children including those in developing nations like Cameroon as well as children with disability, it is regrettable that human resources seem to be a staggering domain where little is known about the capacities. Vygotsky (1978) WHO & World Bank (2011) observe that child wellbeing is highly dependent on education. The legal frameworks backing inclusive education are enormous (Mbibeh, 2013, Cockburn et al., 2017). The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Articles 7 and 24 (UN Enable, 2006), and United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Articles 2 and 23 (United Nations, 1990) state that all children have the right to develop their potential and access education. The drive towards education for children with disability is relatively new and has for the past decade been in the hands of non-governmental organizations in Cameroon. Anecdotal literature shows that with the advent of the decades for disabilities in the 80's, the Northwest Region of Cameroon recorded the emergence of special schools for children with visual impairment and later in the 2000s, special education for children with hearing impairment was introduced. In order to ensure continuity for learners from special schools, linkages were established with specific mainstream schools in the catchment areas where the special schools were found and teachers from special schools provided continuous support to learners with impairments integrated in mainstream environments until their graduation (Cockburn et al., 2017). With a commitment to improve the participation and performance of children with disabilities in education, in 2010, education stakeholders in the region under the leadership of The Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services (CBCHS) and the coordination of the government, launched the first inclusive education pilot initiative called; The 14 School Initiative (Benu 2012; Mbibeh 2013) which focused on initiating and developing inclusion in some government primary and secondary schools.

In August 2019, the Government of Cameroon and development partners revised the sector strategy for education (SSE – 2020 to 2025) which focuses on inclusion, access and equity, quality and relevance among other key priorities. This strategy was complemented by:

- 1) The creation of 68 pilot primary schools for inclusive education which are being equipped, remodeled and staffed with resource teachers through local government units.
- 2) The national policy on inclusive education (currently in review).

The Local Education Group (LEG note 1) plans to support government in revising the Education Management Information System. The LEG consists of the World Bank (donor agency), UNESCO (lead organization), UNICEF, PLAN, CRS, Sight Savers, Nascence Solutions, UNHCR, WFP, MINEDUB, MINESEC, Ministry of Youth and Civic Education, and teacher trade unions in Cameroon. Its objective is to support education sector planning, policy development, implementation and monitoring through joint sector reviews. While system strengthening brought through the actions of the LEG remains relevant, specific project initiatives to develop good practices in inclusive education in Cameroon are equally relevant to inform possible models for replication. For this to be effectively analyzed, there is need for a baseline analysis of the current situation to constitute a basis for future analysis.

With the much sensitization that has been made, there is a current burning desire for inclusion and to educate children with disability in the region. Whether or not the systems in place understand inclusive education is a conjecture but the visible fact that there is a proliferation of schools with the nomenclature inclusive schools leaves much to be desired. There is need to examine the situation and evaluate especially the human resource capacities available for the implementation of inclusive education in the context. The collection of relevant information for supporting research on disability as well as inclusive education is strongly recommended by the international community (WHO Global Disability Action Plan, 2014). Documenting and evaluating what has been done so far within the framework of stakeholder capacities to implement inclusive education will contribute to filling up the information gap on the subject of inclusive education. Finally, documenting the current situation is important to provide an essential empirical baseline for future analysis of progress in inclusive education development in the region by development and educational stakeholders.

It is based on this background that the current paper explores human resource capacities necessary for the implementation of inclusive education in the Northwest Region. The paper begins with background of study, then defines the area of study with specific population before defining the method of data collection and analysis. After this, the paper further presents the analysis of data and the key findings thereof before providing the conclusion.

### *1.1 Area of Study*

This study is carried out in Mezam Division of the Northwest Region, one of Cameroon's English-speaking regions with a population of about 2 million inhabitants consisting of over 60% youths. The regional capital is Bamenda which is found in Mezam Division. By implication, Mezam is the administrative seat of the region hosting all regional authorities including education authorities. This area is chosen because its disposition is suitable for meeting the action research project's objectives for which this baseline is undertaken. As regional capital, it also plays host to most of the inclusive education initiatives in the region. There are currently 35 functional secondary schools in Mezam with total enrolment of 24772 students as at September 2022. 17 of these schools are government schools. In terms of DPO representation, the Coordinating Unit of Association of Persons with Disabilities (CUAPWD) is a regional DPO based in Mezam and coordinates 88 registered associations of people with disabilities in the region. Amongst their cross-cutting activities is advocacy for the education of children with disability.

### *1.2 Problem and Rationale for Study*

To this date, very few studies on inclusive education have been carried out in Cameroon and in the Northwest Region (Lynn et al 2017). There is a paucity of information regarding the practice of inclusive education and related statistics. Similarly, no formal baseline research on this thematic area has been done to draw a basis for further analysis. Besides, many education actors are providing education to children with disabilities in the Northwest as mentioned above. However, little is known about their capacities to effectively implement inclusive education. Being action research, this baseline survey supported the development of an inclusive education community of practice by the Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services

(CBCHS) and permitted the identification of loops related to human resources and further development of capacities to fill the gap and the development of support systems for experience sharing and learning within this community of practice. IE is crucial for Cameroon given its specific context of crises in different regions resulting in the acquisition of different disabling conditions.

### *1.3 Study Questions and Objectives*

Based on the problem identified above, two research questions will guide the data collection;

1. What are the human resource capacities available for the implementation of inclusive education?
2. What are the gaps in human resources capacities for the implementation of inclusive education by the stakeholders?

## **2. Methodology**

This study used a descriptive survey research design. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. The quantitative design permitted us to identify relevant figures related to the number of human resources available to ensure inclusive education in the region while qualitative data permitted us to analyze and describe facilities, enablers, challenges and gaps related to the domain. Such data was collected through desk review of literature related to the topic and in-depth key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. All these permitted the research team to collect a cross section of data that is useful for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. As action research, the issues identified by the study were implemented within an IE community of practice set up as a result of this study.

### *2.1 Study Population and Sampling Strategy*

The study population involved three groups of respondents selected through purposive sampling from the targeted institutions in the area of study. The strata included teachers, Parents and education Stakeholders including duty bearers and government representatives. The strategy applied for this method was an emphasis on similarity (Palinkas et al. 2015), which in this case corresponds to the fact that each informant had been in collaboration with an inclusive education structure for at least one year. Collaborators selected who were involved in activities related to Inclusive education for less than one year were excluded from the study given the limited experience they might have had.

The following groups constituted the population of study;

- **Group I:** Teachers and administrators in inclusive education structures and schools
- **Group II:** Stakeholders involved in inclusive education in the Division
- **Group III:** Duty bearers and government representatives and Leaders

With regards to institutions, a total of 31 institutions took part in the survey. Among these were 16 primary schools, 11 secondary and high schools and 4 special schools. Special schools enroll

children with specific impairments.

### *2.2 Data Collection Process*

The data collection process was sequential beginning with a survey using a comprehensive questionnaire developed by the research team. Research assistants recruited for the purpose were trained on education, research ethics and the data collection procedures to carry out this exercise and they moved to the different institutions and actually collected the data. Some of the items involved observation of facilities and confirmation of what the institution was doing with regards to IE. This was followed by focus group discussions with key stakeholders on policy implementation. These focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted by the research team. As noted above, the questionnaire used for this purpose was developed by the research team to respond to the prerequisites of the community of practice identified by the study as key to developing capacities for human resources in inclusive education. The questionnaire, investigated different levels of capacity including number, competences, educational background, parent involvement and collaboration. Both online tools and physical paper questionnaire were used as the case may be. In effect, the same questionnaire was available in both hard and soft copy so that in case of any field challenges such as insecurity, the soft copy was used. To ensure the consistency and quality, data from both tasks was analyzed as a whole taking into consideration the different methods used in data collection. The counseling services of the CBCHS were available in case any sensitive issues that needed their attention were noted from the respondents.

### *2.3 Data Analysis Method*

The data collected was analyzed in two phases.

Quantitative data collected using the survey was analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2015 to identify recurrent frequencies and descriptive statistics was used to identify the occurrences.

Qualitative data collected through desk review of relevant literature, Focus Group Discussions and In-Depth Interviews was transcribed and coded using traditional qualitative data analysis. The Thematic Analysis method was applied, and themes were identified in an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved a description of the collected information and an interpretation on the basis of existing literature.

### *2.4 Ethical Considerations*

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Board (CBCHB). Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and informants reserved the right to consent to participate or not without any prejudice on their collaboration with the CBCHS. To protect the rights and privacy of participants, interviews were done at the comfort of the respondent without coercing them and they reserved the right to continue the study or not.

### 3. Study Results

This section presents and discusses the key findings from the study. It permits us to identify the current capacities of educational institutions in terms of human resources in leveraging inclusive education in the Mezam division of the Northwest Region of Cameroon giving a vivid picture of the current situation. The results informed the existing gaps that the Community of Practice designed as a result of this research solved.

#### 3.1 Personnel and Staff Capacity

The implementation of inclusive education is bound to fail if there are not available and trained personnel. This survey collected data related to the capacity of and availability of personnel in inclusive schools in Mezam. This was measured in terms of the capacity and competences of teachers across institutions in key IE domains such as competences in universal design for learning, competences in lesson differentiation, design of individual education plans, learning styles, identifying multiple intelligences and competences in planning and teaching inclusive lessons. It is believed that if teachers pose these qualities and actually use them, inclusive education will be possible.

#### 3.2 Number of Trained Teachers on IE in MEZAM

According to statistics from the regional delegation of secondary education, there are currently 35 functional secondary schools in Mezam with a total enrolment of 24,772 students as of September 2022. 17 of these schools are government schools. Results from the survey show that with regards to staff capacity, the ratio of trained versus untrained teachers in inclusive education is 2:10. Just a minimal 20% of staff across institutions is trained on inclusive practice. This includes those who have had Teachers Grade I certificate, those with a Bachelors Degree, those with crash courses on individual bases, those who have had in -service short term training as illustrated by the table below.

**Table 1.** Staff and Capacity

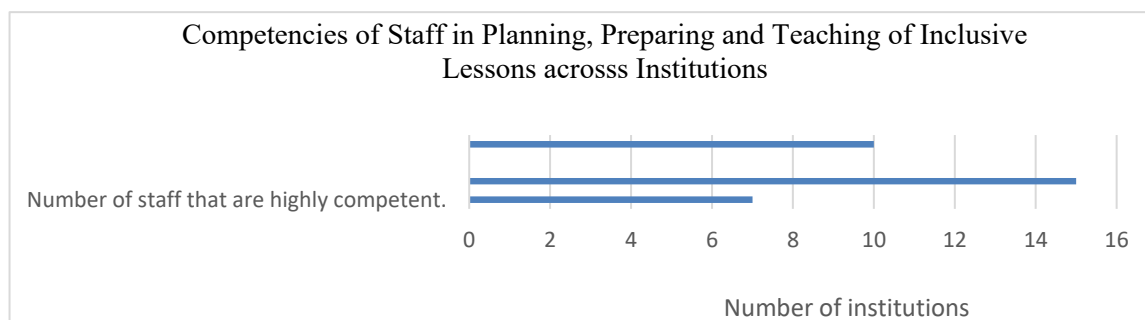
Staff and Capacity	
Staff with CAPIEM (Teachers Grade I Certificate on IE)	20
Staff with Bachelor's Degree (IE)	10
Staff with special Education Certificates	7
Staff with crash courses on IE	10
Staff ready to implement IE with little or no knowledge	84
Total	127

From the 31 institutions surveyed, the total number of learners with impairments was the table above shows that the quantitative capacity of teachers trained in inclusive education is nothing to write home about. A total of 47 teachers out of the 127 surveyed giving a percentage of 37% had either got formal training or informal crash course. This for a total of over 593(Note 2)

students, disaggregated into 362 boys representing 61.04% of all learners with impairments and 231 girls representing 38.95% of the students in the division. This is definitely very minimal compared to the number of students and thus the need for more training of teachers to meet the burning need. Given that this is not the mandate of the research to train teachers, the action that emanated from this research was capacity development that the Community of Practice developed as a result of this study set out to train. As of September 2023, over **83** additional teachers have been trained on IE and a further **50+** are anticipated to be trained. It is thus important to call on other stakeholders in charge of teacher training to increase the enrolment of student teachers in different schools to ensure a better ratio in the nearest future.

### 3.3 Staff Competencies

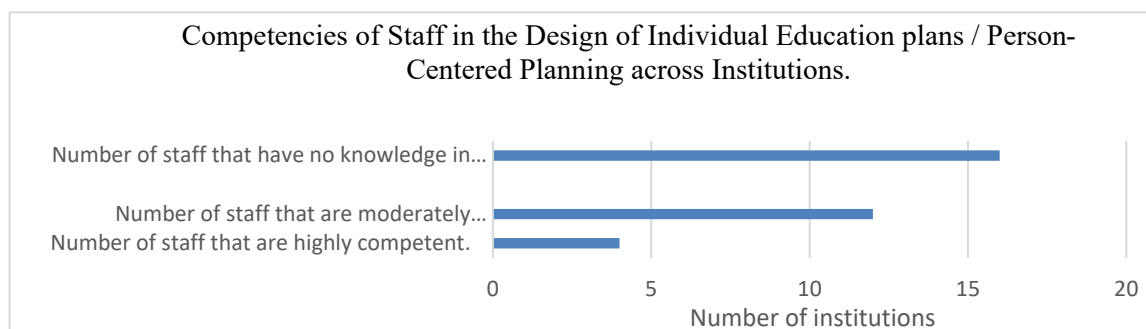
Away from the capacity in terms of numbers, a further inquiry was related to the quality of training received in key thematic areas related to inclusive education. These thematic areas mentioned above were selected based on the local realities and the need for teachers in the context to have a comprehensive mastery to implement inclusive education. In this light out of the five key areas evaluated, the domain with the highest number of teachers was in the domain of planning and teaching inclusive lessons. Results from this domain are presented on the graph below.



**Figure 1.** Competencies of Staff in Planning, Preparing and Teaching of Inclusive Lessons across Institutions

Here, statistics across institutions show that more than 85% of staff across institutions are moderately competent in planning, preparing and teaching inclusive lessons. Even though this is reassuring, it is important to note that this is rather a general and basic characteristic and most teachers in inclusive schools will easily say they are able to plan and deliver inclusive lessons. The more detailed and specific questions related to competences in specific domains as shown on the table below did not get these results. For instance, as indicated on the table below, about 80% of staff had no knowledge in designing individual education plans. This is a specific skill that needs more attention and we are aware that for good inclusive lesson delivery teachers need capacity on designing individual education plans.





**Figure 2.** Competencies of Staff in the Design of Individual Education Plans / Person-Centered Planning across Institutions

This trend is reminiscent across other specific domains like lesson differentiation, universal design for learning. However, the fact that many more staff across institutions are moderately competent in these domains gives some hope and tells of the enthusiasm they have to implement inclusive education. But if this enthusiasm is not managed with more in-service training and continuous capacity building, it is susceptible that the little that they know may dwindle and finally disappear. It is high time stakeholders took this seriously to ensure not just the success of inclusive education but also its sustainability.

Based on these lopes, the IE community of practice that emerged from this study, used these key thematic areas as part of the curriculum in the training of teachers selected within three years. It is expected that by now all the more than 150 teachers involved in the IE CoP have acquired required skills in these domains.

### *3.4 Courses taken by Staff across Institutions*

While examining staff capacities, one key issue was training. The survey sought to know the type of courses undertaken by personnel in inclusive schools and the institutions that offer such courses. The table below shows the results obtained.

The statistics obtained show that up to 82 teachers out of 90 had not taken any course on inclusive education. This is understood given that the mainstream teacher training colleges in Cameroon do not have a course on inclusive education. Just a minimal 12 had taken training on inclusive education and a few more attended seminars and workshops. These may not be enough to equip the teacher to deliver inclusive lessons.



**Figure 3.** Profile of Training Courses Taken by Staff across Institutions

The courses offered ranged from braille, to sign language and special needs education from universities in Cameroon and abroad. The teacher training college SENTII trained many of the teachers surveyed in many of these schools and also provided the greatest number of certificates as seen on the table below.

**Table 2.** The Teacher Training College SENTII Trained many of the Teachers Surveyed in Many of These Schools and also provided the Greatest Number of Certificates

Many of These Schools and Provided the Greatest Number of Certificates	
Staff with certificates from SENTTI.	13
Staff with certificates from BTTC Ndop.	4
Staff with certificates from CBC Inclusive School Mbingo.	2
Staff with certificates the University of Bamberg (Germany)	2
Staff with certificates the University of Minnesota (USA).	2
Staff with certificates from ISTP	1
Staff with certificates from the University of Cape Town (South Africa)	2
Staff with certificates from SEEPD	4
Staff with certificates from SAJOCAH	2
Staff with certificates from Banso Integrated School for the blind.	2
Staff with certificates from SIEP	4
Staff with certificates from St. Andrew	2
Staff with certificates from TTC Tatum.	1
Staff with certificates from the University of Buea.	3
Staff with certificates from the International University of Bamenda.	1
Institutions that did not provide an answer.	84

### 3.5 Parent Involvement

Successful inclusive education as mentioned above is a conglomeration of different stakeholders and parents constitute a fundamental group of stakeholders. In effect, they are considered as an essential human resource for the development of IE. Parents have a significant role in following up teaching, preparing learners for school and accompanying them to school. The research found out that there was full engagement of parents in the education of their children with disability in schools. Unlike data from Mbibeh (2013) that proved the contrary this study showed that over 85% of parents whose children were found in inclusive schools in Mezam provided support to their children in different ways including provision of school materials, payment of fees, provision of feeding and transportation to school. While this is commendable, there is need to draw the dichotomy between parents whose children are already in schools and those who are yet to accept to send their children to school. Also, even though they agreed that they pay their children's fee, it is understood that in Cameroon there is a fee weaver for students with impairments and they only pay registrations. For children under Lilian Fonds (LF) sponsorship in private institutions the fees are paid by LF strategic partners.

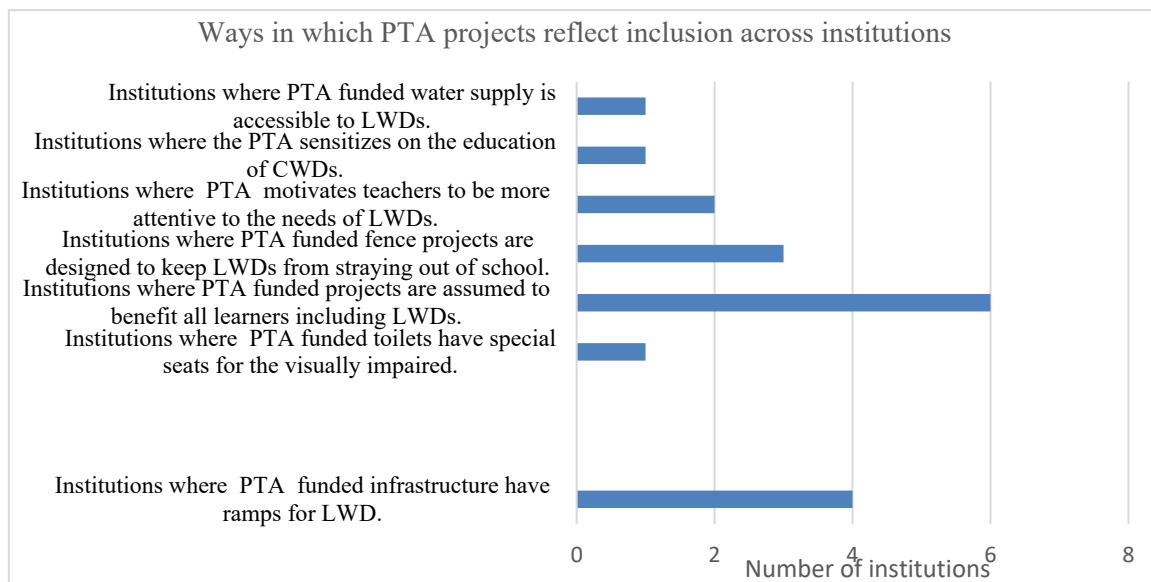
### 3.6 Collaboration amongst Parents

Within the school milieu, parents are organized into a group known as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). This study sought to know the number of institutions that have an organized PTA group, the type of projects they carry out and how inclusive the projects are. From the data it was interesting to note that 85% of the institutions had an active PTA and only 15% did not have. These PTAs were noted to be carrying out many projects ranging from purchase of stationary, providing motivations to construction of structures within the institution to accommodate more learners. The table below shows the list of projects that PTA s engage in.

**Table 3.** The List of Projects that PTA s Engage in

The List of Projects that PTA s Engage in	
Institutions where the PTA carries on construction projects.	16
Institutions where the PTA pays for mock and other exams.	1
Institutions where the PTA purchases School equipment.	9
Institutions where the PTA assists in the purchase of didactic materials.	5
Institutions where the PTA pays staff's salaries and motivate or give incentives to teachers	10
Institutions where the PTA sponsors teachers to seminars.	2
Institutions where the PTA does repairs of school infrastructures and equipment.	14
Institutions where the PTA provides writing materials to pupils/students.	1
Institutions where the PTA motivates pupils/students through prizes	1
Institutions where the PTA provides covid-19 kits.	1
Institutions where the PTA sensitizes parents on the need to send their children to school.	1
Institutions where the PTA provides administrative stationery.	1
Institutions where PTA does not carry out projects.	5

A further examination of these projects carried out by the PTA informed us on which one reflects inclusive practice. From the projects analyzed 15 projects reflected inclusion while 17 did not. We are aware that infrastructural modifications are always delicate. So, seeing that these schools were able to take on projects related to inclusion is a big plus. We were curious to further know which are such projects and this is what we found out on the table below.



**Table 4.** Ways in Which PTA Projects Reflect Inclusion across Institutions

### 3.7 Education Stakeholders

In this study, the key human resources that we considered stakeholders in inclusive education included four main groups. These groups constitute (1) Education Authorities, (2) Head Teachers of Primary Schools, (3) Principals of Secondary Schools and (4) Administrators/Coordinators of rehabilitation centers. Out of the 31 institutions that took part in the survey amongst which were 16 primary schools, 11 secondary and high schools and 4 special schools, all the authorities invited participated in the research. For educational authorities, the regional delegations of secondary and primary education and the secretaries of education of all confessional institutions participated at 90%. Only one of the educational authorities failed to respond to the call, and one head of a training institution did not show up. Those who did not show up were a minimal 5% of the general sample. This shows that there is high response of education stakeholders to issues of inclusive education. The motivation is there but there is need for more capacity to ensure strategic decision making at the level of the different institutions so as to ensure review of policy that will enhance inclusive practice. No doubt the CoP had to work with these key stakeholders within the period of implementation of the research findings and it is expected that more policy reviews will be done in the nearest future with regards to inclusive education in the region.

### *3.8 Cooperation amongst IE Stakeholders*

In the discussion of the problem of this research we mentioned the fact that many stakeholders are implementing or claiming to implement inclusive education in the Northwest Region. We noticed a proliferation of institutions with a change of nomenclature to inclusive institutions. This was not a problem as in all those schools there is something related to the inclusion of children with disability in the place. Many of these efforts were noted to be singlehandedly done without a pause to see what others are doing. Each stakeholder feels they are the best and there is a visible difficulty collaborating as each stakeholder wants to be the sole beholder of the norm. The data collected for this study thus involved a discussion with all the key stakeholders on the possibilities of collaboration and the challenges thereof as well as ways forward. These stakeholders met in focus groups to examine the current state of collaboration among inclusive education stakeholders and to explore ways to improve collaboration. Four groups comprising (1) Education Authorities, (2) Head Teachers of Primary Schools, (3) Principals of Secondary Schools and (4) Administrators/Coordinators of Rehabilitation Centers engaged in discussions that were guided by 7 questions. This section delves into the different challenges stakeholders have collaborating with each other, the causes, stakes and ways forward to improve collaboration amongst inclusive education stakeholders in the Northwest region of Cameroon.

### *3.9 Causes of Lack of Collaboration among IE Stakeholders*

The challenges that hinder Inclusive Education stakeholders from collaborating with each other to implement inclusive education include:

A. The lack of a central coordination unit of inclusive education stakeholders, leading to isolated efforts in the implementation of inclusive education in the Northwest Region. (2 of 4 groups share this view / 50%). Though the ministry of basic and secondary education is there to coordinate education action in the region the specificity of inclusive education needs further collaborative action. It is interesting to note that the above ministries now have focal persons in charge of inclusive education given the recent decisions creating pilot inclusive education schools. It is expected that in the nearest future this situation should change with the input from these key stakeholders. While this is being done from an administrative perspective, there is need for a more liberal coordination community to harness actions and deliberate on matters regarding inclusive education while the government bodies provides the legal and administrative framework for functioning. That is why the North West Regional Inclusive education community of practice was created as a professional coordination and learning group.

B. Stakeholders have divergent objectives and strategies in implementing inclusive education. While some stakeholders focus/specialize in serving children with visual impairments, others focus on serving children with intellectual impairments or mobility impairments. These differing strategies of specialized service delivery to children with specific impairments limits the ability for collaboration among stakeholders from a comprehensive perspective. From an intersectional perspective it is important to consider individual learner specificities especially related to different impairments. However, the need to collaborate and share experiences is still very imperative. This is because there is no world reserved only for the blind or the deaf. There

is thus needs for stakeholders involved in handling specific disabilities to have a framework of cooperation so that their learners and themselves find ways of working together with others.

C. The presence of a spirit of competition among stakeholders, leading to non-acceptance of one another has hampered the collaboration. Some stakeholders want to be seen as the lone champions in matters of inclusion, so they do everything alone and do not want to work with others. Furthermore, religious politicking and bias among faith-based stakeholders is a challenge to collaboration, especially at the level of the administrative support needed to facilitate cooperation among internal organs of stakeholders. All participants (100%) share in this view. Competition in business is not negative as it gives quality and efficiency for partners but in social work like this there is need for more mutual support than competition. The aim of education is more for the wellbeing of society than individuals and that is why there is ample need for collaboration on non-competitive terms. It is hoped that the creation of a community of practice for inclusive education will help to reduce this competition and enhance development of inclusive education in the region.

D. One of the consequences of competition as discussed above is limited information circulation among stakeholders leading to ignorance about the strengths that other stakeholders have and which could be beneficial to them. Because people want to be the sole proprietors of knowledge, it was observed that they do not want to share. They believe if the information is shared then people will copy and may become more than them. It seems to be a mindset that needs to change given that *“what you think is good and you are hiding might even be wrong”*. A respondent in the focus group discussion confirmed.

E. Informants in the focus group identified the absence of/limited training in inclusive education resulting in the lack of or limited knowledge in inclusive education and therefore weak/poor performance in inclusive practices. (3 of 4 groups share this view / 75%). In effect there is no official training for inclusive education in the region, those who are practicing have in a majority studied out of the country and through refresher courses. The University of Bamenda does not have a course on inclusive education where people can study. This is hampering continuity and the acquisition of knowledge. As such, there is weak understanding of the concept and importance of inclusion in education by stakeholders as well as government authorities, resulting in the lack of recognition and promotion thereof by government of the need for inclusion in the educational curriculum. This hinders stakeholders from taking full advantage of the already existing legal framework that supports the practice of inclusive education. (2 of 4 groups share this view / 50%).

F. Because of the limited knowledge on the advantages of collaboration, stakeholders think that collaboration in inclusive education is time consuming and not many stakeholders are willing to sacrifice time for meetings with other stakeholders. (2 of 4 groups share this view / 50%).

G. Insecurity at location sites of partner organizations. Within the context of the Anglophone crisis has also had untold consequences on education and has limited collaboration. Some stakeholders are located in areas where insecurity is high. For this reason, stakeholders don't feel comfortable engaging in partnership deals with stakeholders that are located in such risk zones. (1 of 4 groups share this view / 25%).

H. Vestiges of stereotypes and traditional beliefs that are associated with disabilities result to superficial understanding of the importance of inclusive education among teachers. (3.12% of the respondents from the baseline survey of June 2021 share this view).

### *3.10 Strategies to Promote Collaboration among IE Stakeholders*

Based on the challenges of collaboration amongst stakeholders that constitute human resources for IE in Mezam Division, a CoP was created to resolve some of these issues. The strategies listed below have been undertaken by the community of practice and are yielding fruit at different levels. These strategies include.

A. A commitment to design a clear Terms of Reference for collaboration was identified as very important to ensure collaboration. That is why the CoP took upon itself to bring together these key stakeholders to design the ToR. It is expected that the commitment taken will go a long way to improve collaboration and quality IE.

B. A framework for the training of teachers in inclusive education through in-service training programs, seminars and workshops was identified by the CoP as key to improve IE in the division. This has been done in collaboration with the universities and teacher training colleges around. That is why there has been the creation of CoPs in the different sectors for effective collaboration.

C. The study identified the need for a unique coordination and communication link for all IE stakeholders. The government ministries of basic and secondary education intervened to play this role which is reducing the hurdles noted above such as wanton transfer of teachers already trained, isolated actions and others.

D. Collaboration amongst different stakeholders is incumbent. The design of a platform for collaboration was identified as a measure to enhance pedagogic exchange visits and knowledge sharing amongst stakeholders. It is also within this perspective that a referral pattern was designed. It is within this light that there is an observable celebration of the success stories of each partner as a collective effort.

E. Data is very important in informing decision making. The ample need for coordinated action towards a data management information system was identified by the study as a means to harness all data related to IE. Data collection has been a key activity of the community of practice to ensure the availability of aggregated data on key aspects available at all moments for exploitation by development stakeholders and for any official use. It is expected that the improvement and development of this information systems by the CoP is gradually filling the loop.

F. Lobby and advocacy from a concerted perspective is very necessary. There was a lot of ignorance within decision making services and concerted action to lobby and advocate for IE. The CoP has engaged in concerted advocacy for IE with the aim of raising awareness and improving the status quo.

#### 4. General Conclusion

Based on the fact that there is a paucity of information regarding the practice of inclusive education as a whole and the observation that many education actors are providing education to children with disabilities in the Northwest but little is known about their capacities to effectively implement inclusive education. It is based on these premises that this study set out to conduct a baseline for inclusive education in Mezam Division of the Northwest Region of Cameroon. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to collect data through a comprehensive survey and in-depth key informant interviews. The data analysis grounded on a human rights perspective focused on the human resources available and their capacities to implement inclusive education. The findings show key limitations in capacities of human resources from quantitative and qualitative standpoints. There is a wide gap in collaboration amongst stakeholders and strategies were proposed to enhance this collaboration that is very necessary and needed. The study therefore highlighted the need to build an institutional framework for collaboration that will help to harness all these thoughts and practices. That is why a Community of Practice for inclusive education was initiated and continues to run as a professional platform to implement the key actions and recommendations of this study. Key stakeholders such as researchers, educators, governments, parents, stakeholders, and non-governmental organization engaged in planning about IE in Cameroon and elsewhere will find results useful.

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## Notes

Note 1. A LEG is a multi-stakeholder body usually convened by the government to support education sector planning, policy development, implementation and monitoring through joint sector reviews. LEGs ideally include government representatives, development agencies, donors, civil society organisations and teacher organisations.

Note 2. Statistics from the IE Community of Practice

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