

Assessment and Placement of Children with Special Educational Needs in Rural Kenya: Emerging Constraints and Implications

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ABSTRACT

Educational Assessment Resource Centers (EARCs) play a pivotal function in increasing the educational prospects of children with special educational needs (SEN) in Kenya. Nevertheless, a marked insufficiency in funding, constricted number of personnel, lack of proper tools and traditional obstacles reduce the efficacy of services availed by EARCs. This article is derived from a study whose goal was to delineate and analyze the problems affecting EARCs in Siaya County, Kenya. The study used a multiple case study design within the qualitative approach. It involved 3 EARC centres and 3 Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs). Data was collected using interview schedules and site observations. Thematic approach was used to analyze the data which was then presented in narratives. It was found that the EARCs lacked resources, the officers rarely instituted educational programmes specifically designed to cater for children with special educational needs and that County Education Officers did not fully understand the role of the EARCs in their counties. It is recommended that the government should enhance training of officers and teachers, supply of adequate and modern equipment, create awareness to combat negative attitudes. It is also recommended that refined teaching programmes are aligned to the functions of the EARCs and a marked policy shift to ensure learners with special educational needs are assessed and placed professionally.

Keywords: Educational Assessment Resource Centers, learners with special needs, Identification, analysis, challenges, Assessment

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Education for All (EFA), which represents an international commitment to ensure that every child and adult receives basic education, is based both on a human rights perspective, and on the generally held belief that education is central to individual well-being and national development. Emphasis on ensuring inclusive, equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all is well documented under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Number 4. Protocols and systems for identifying students with disabilities and determining whether they qualify for special education services vary dramatically worldwide. Some countries, such as the United States and Finland, rely heavily on the identification of a specific disability or set of disabilities in determining the education support a student will receive, and this reliance on identification is embedded in their national inclusive education laws (Björn, Aro, Koponen, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2016).

Unfortunately, many countries have also historically required students to have an official diagnosis to attend segregated disability-specific schools, such as schools for students with hearing impairments or schools for students with visual impairments. For example, Belgium requires that children be assigned diagnostic criteria and medical labels before being able to attend a segregated school (Mortier & Vandelanotte, 2017). In some countries, children with suspected disabilities must also receive a diagnosis before attending inclusive schools. This trend of requiring a diagnosis as a precursor to school enrollment in both inclusive and segregated schools continues today in many countries, including China, Ghana, Greece, Kenya, Turkey, and Zimbabwe (Avoke & Hayford, 2017; Cavkaytar, Uyanik, & YucesoyOzkan, 2017; Chitiyo, Chitiyo, & Charema, 2017; Deng & Wang, 2017; Kartasidou & Pavlidou, 2017).

The underlying principle behind the 2030 sustainable development goals is the recognition of human dignity and the quest of not leaving anyone behind. The Kenya Institute of Special Education (2018) conducted a national survey on children with disability and special needs in education that estimated disability prevalence among children at 11.4%. One of the objectives of the survey was to determine the quality of programmes and services offered by EARCs. Findings revealed an imbalance in the distribution of staff in EARCs whereas; the majority had training in the four traditional disability areas posing a challenge in the assessment of other disability areas. It was concluded that there is need to strengthen and empower assessment offices in support of inclusive practices, enhance specialized training on functional assessment and the value of inclusive practices in decongesting special schools.

The Basic Education Act of Kenya, 2013 seeks to increase access, enhance retention, and improve quality and relevance of education for all children. The Act further seeks to strengthen early identification and assessment and ensure equal opportunities in providing education for children with disabilities (Republic of Kenya, 2013). Article 46 (1) of the Basic Education Act requires that EARCs be established in every county. The National Education Sector Plan (NESP) 2013/2014-2017/2018 report points out that there were 73 EARCs to assess and place children to special education centers while the Kenya Institute for the Blind (KIB) and Kenya Institute for Special Education (KISE) are mandated to produce instructional materials for children with visual impairment and training teachers in special needs education (Republic of Kenya, 2014). Although various policies and legal frameworks have been put in place in favour of children with disabilities, implementation has not been realized to ensure that all children with disability are supported. This could be attributed to among other factors, the fact that limited funding is allocated to the sub-sector to enhance various support services (Republic of Kenya, 2015). It can be argued that these policies need to be reviewed to find out why the implementation process has been a problem and set structures to ensure implementation.

Children with special needs have a right to free and compulsory education as provided for in international conventions to which Kenya is a signatory. These conventions include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989, the United Nations Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UNSREOPD, 1993). UN Rule 6 champions for the provision of education for children with disability to be done in integrated settings (Adoyo & Odeny, 2015). However, not all children with disabilities have been fully integrated in the education system in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2014).

In Kenya, learners with special needs also form a significant portion of overall school-going students and in the absence of special interventions, including appropriate identification, assessment and placement, to support this category of children, their fundamental right to basic education may not be realized to facilitate the realization of their inherent full potential (Mwoma & Pillay (2015).

More often than not, the educational prospects available to such learners are severely limited. According to Odongo (2018), learners with special needs in Kenya, more so those living in rural communities do not go to school. Not only does this infringe on the child's right to education but also contributes to underdevelopment due to untapped potential of the learners. To combat this drawback, the Government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Education, sought to create the EARCs. The primary objective was to alleviate this problem by ensuring that learners with special needs have as much educational opportunities as their non-disabled peers (Moyi, 2019). Also, EARCs are tasked with the responsibility of identifying children with SEN for placement in appropriate learning programmes.

According to Ysseldyke & Bob (2006), assessment is a multi-faceted process of gathering information using appropriate tools and techniques so as to make an informed decision about placement in appropriate educational Programmes. Gargulo (2010) terms assessment as a generic term that refers to the process of gathering information about learners' strength and needs using appropriate tools and techniques to make educational decisions. Assessment is an essential component in the educational programming for all children. Results of a comprehensive assessment involving a multidisciplinary team form a basis for making decisions concerning educational placement and development of Individualized Educational Programmes (IEP). For educational assessment to be comprehensive, it should employ combinations of various tools and techniques which are selected to be consistent with the aim of assessment (Angela, 2019).

In Kenya, the Educational Assessment and Resource Centers (EARCs) were established in 1984 by the Danish government in conjunction with the government of Kenya (MoE, 1984). The EARCs were established in new and existing special schools meant for children with disabilities, between ages 0-16 years, for psychological and educational assessment. Kenya has been experiencing several roadblocks to the goal of achieving meaningful and valid assessment due to various factors such as lack of necessary assessment tools, lack of basic equipment and lack of EARCs, which were supposed to be in every sub-county by 2015. Today, almost all the new sub-counties do not have the necessary resources in the EARCs (Republic of Kenya, 2021).

Special needs education often necessitates specialized interventions. In Kenya, the EARCs are supposed to assess learners by screening for and identifying possible cases, developing Individualized Education Programmes (IEPs), providing instructional plans, and directing placement. Also, EARCs are responsible for supporting schools that teach learners with special needs and providing guidance and counselling services to parents as well as offering training services to teachers (Juma & Malasi, 2018). Despite being the primary facilitators of this process, EARCs remain largely inept in the dispensation of their duties. According to Bonjo, Kochung, and Nyagara (2017), EARCs in Kenya perform very little regarding fulfilling their cardinal objective of assessing children with special needs. Similarly, EARCs rarely develop effective IEPs to enhance the learning experiences of children with special needs (Zigler, Lusweti, Macmbinji, Jumba, Kaggi, & Namirembe, 2017). Furthermore, despite the Government of Kenya having recognized new categories of learners with special needs, their degree of assimilation into specialized education programmes is severely wanting. This is mainly because the EARCs do not implement effective placement measures (Nyakundi, Awori, & Chege, 2016)

Parents and the community are primary in the identification process. They are the first contact with the child at birth and closely relate with the child during the early development processes. Development partners and other actors in the education sector play a major role in facilitating early identification, assessment and placement of learners and trainees with disabilities. The best practice to early identification is the use of a multidisciplinary team that comprises of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, nutritionists, social workers, Special Needs Education (SNE) educators with specializations that cater for various disabilities and medical practitioners with specialization in different and relevant fields (Juma & Malasi, 2018). This multidisciplinary process never applies in most instances due to the logistics and costs of assembling the teams.

METHODS

This article draws on a larger study that adopted a multiple-case study design within a qualitative research framework, which enables an in-depth exploration of complex, real-life contexts through diverse data sources (Yin, 2018). The study purposively targeted six curriculum support officers (CSOs), formerly Education Assessment and Resource Centre (EARC) officers, with three CSOs randomly selected to represent three centres in Siaya County. Data collection employed semi-structured interviews, site observations, and document analysis of relevant Ministry of Education policies. Thematically analyzed, the data were synthesized into narrative accounts to capture participants' perspectives and the operational dynamics within EARCs (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The EARC officers were asked for how long they had been in service. This was to determine their level of experience on identification, assessment and placement of learners with special educational needs. Two of them had been in service for more than 15 years. The situation changed in 2018 when they were reallocated duties to become curriculum support officers. One of them said;

I have been EARC from 2005 up to now. You know we were redesignated to be curriculum support officers. (CSO3)

The EARC officers, now Curriculum Support Officers, were in charge of assessing learners with special needs for placement in appropriate educational institutions. They were based in EARC centers throughout the country. When they were designated to become CSOs, their role was expanded to include advising teachers on the appropriate teaching and learning methods and resources, ensuring quality education through effective

curriculum implementation, assessing teacher's needs, training them, providing professional guidance and assessing learning outcomes among other responsibilities (Teachers Service Commission, 2015). The government of Kenya undertook to provide adequate human resources with requisite functional assessment skills, define the mandate and functions of EARCs, and create a vote head for financing the operations of EARCs (The Ministry of Education, 2018). Those undertakings have not been realized and instead, the EARC officers have been given expanded responsibilities while at the centres, there are no staff. The CSOs who double up as assessors are not able to move around to carry out assessment as they do not even have transport. The question is, how does this affect service delivery regarding assessment of learners with special needs?

The finding also underscores the pivotal role of experience among Educational Assessment and Resource Centre (EARC) officers in effectively identifying, assessing, and placing learners with special educational needs (SEN). The long tenure of officers—over 15 years in some cases, reflects the depth of institutional knowledge and practical expertise that is essential for delivering specialized services to this vulnerable group. However, the redesignation of EARC officers to curriculum support officers in 2018 potentially disrupted this continuity, raising concerns about the dilution of specialized support for learners with SEN. Recent studies emphasize that redeployment of specialized personnel without adequate replacement mechanisms can negatively affect the quality of inclusive education services (Mutisya & Makonye, 2022). Moreover, Onyango and Kathure (2023) argue that experienced SEN professionals play a critical role in sustaining best practices in assessment and placement, which may be compromised when their roles are redefined without clear succession planning. This highlights the need for policy frameworks that safeguard the expertise and institutional memory within EARCs to ensure consistent support for learners with special needs.

The EARC officers were specialized in specific areas/category of learners with special needs but they were expected to assess all categories of learners with special needs. They were motivated to the choice by different reasons. One of them said;

My area of specialization is Intellectual disability. I selected this area because I have a child with intellectual stability. Two, I thought that when it comes to disability issues many people are falling within that bracket though the levels may vary (CSO1).

Another one said;

The fact that I specialize in one area does not mean that I don't have proficiencies in other areas. Actually, during training, we touch on all these areas... The categories, these days given the sector on learners with disability, we have 11 categories... when am assessing, I focus on all 11 categories... CSO2).

Another one stated;

No please. I am not very adequate; I am not very competent to assess all these categories. But sometimes I consult, (CSO3)

These responses from the CSOs raise pertinent questions. Is it possible for someone specialized in intellectual disability to assess all categories of learners with special needs? What does it mean when an officer in charge of assessment says he is not competent to assess, and yet he is actually assessing? Could this affect the quality of assessment and consequent placement/wrong placement? The Ministry of Education (MOE, 2018), committed to collaborate with county governments and other ministries to establish and formalize a multidisciplinary assessment team. The structure was that each EARC should be comprising of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, vision therapists, speech therapists, social workers, nutritionists, psychologists, SNE educators with relevant expertise in various disability categories and medical practitioners with specialization in different and relevant fields.

The position of the ministry is clear, professional and appropriate. The confusion on the part of the EARC officials is contradictory because they are not totally in charge of the EARCs, they have an extra role. Secondly, the idea of a multidisciplinary team is just that, "an idea". The fact is that this assessment process that includes a multidisciplinary team does not exist anywhere in the country, unless people travel to the city at the Kenya

Institute of Special Education (KISE) which may constitute a team on given days. The result is that the placement of learners with special needs into learning institutions is inappropriate.

Mutungu & Nderitu, 2014; Brent, 2015 asserts that the individual's level of education and competency determines how best they perceive and deal with learners with special needs such as those with visual, hearing, physical, and intellectual disability. As such, all the curriculum support officers (CSOs) had acquired bachelor's degrees in specific areas of SNE. This implies that the sampled curriculum support officers (CSOs) had adequate training in definite areas of special needs. As such there could exist a possibility of improper assessment and placement of learners with special needs due to the lack of a multidisciplinary approach to the identification and assessment processes. This position concurs with the national education sector plan 2013-2018, which indicates that there is inadequate skilled and specialized staff for assessment, placement and management of children with disabilities and lack of enough in-service training institutions to capacity build personnel working with these children. Currently there is only one in the country based at the KISE (Republic of Kenya, 2015).

In a study carried out by Ayabei (2014) that analyzed the functions and the challenges faced by educational assessment resource centres in five selected counties in Kenya, findings showed few teachers referred learners for assessment of disabilities to the EARCs. What does that mean? We are now moving away from what the ministry recommends, that is, a multidisciplinary team, to EARC officers, who are currently CSOs, and having teachers assess learners for educational placement. Are teachers in any way bestowed with the responsibility to assess learners for educational placement? Are they trained for this responsibility?

Another concern was that the geographical areas covered by the EARC officers, who are now referred to as CSOs are so vast that they are not able to assess all children. They do not have statistics or data of trained teachers who may assist in the assessment. One of them said;

I am in charge of Siaya and Gem sub-counties with a total of 646 learners just in primary schools. There are teachers who may be qualified in different categories of learners with special needs but it is hard to get the statistics nor are they given the responsibility to carry out assessment (CSO3).

It is worthwhile to note that the number of students indicated above does not include those in secondary schools. It should also be noted that many special schools in Kenya are national in nature because they are few and admit students from across the country. The possibility is that learners in secondary schools already have assessment reports. Is it not good practice to have the assessment reports reviewed and if so, who does this, whose responsibility is it?

What happens when a student is not assessed but is expected to be in an educational institution? Let me refer to a study that was carried out in Zimbabwe (Mapolisa, T, 2015). The study established that students who miss assessment are unable to access specific educational programmes including modified classroom instruction, curriculum, tests and examinations. Learners with special needs can access these benefits only if they have been diagnostically assessed. This situation cannot be any different in Kenya. It is even worse that these learners find themselves in school without an assessment report.

Even after assessment, the assessment officers claimed that teachers are not prepared to receive and attend to these learners. The teachers claim lack of resources is the reason why they are not prepared while the assessment officers claim that the teachers are not willing to be innovative and creative. One of them said;

The level of preparedness to accommodate these learners is low, because one, even though many teachers have trained in the field of SNE, very few have the interest to support these learners. Two, given that learners... let me talk about resources. Given that the resources they require are more demanding and our teachers do not want to go that direction. When you ask them to be innovative, to be creative, they shut off. They want things that are ready made (CSO1).

The issues of lack of resources and negative attitudes towards education for learners with special needs is widespread. The teachers in special schools are trained and this should instill positive attitudes towards children with special needs. These teachers are paid better than their counterparts in regular schools. Can it then be

concluded that the motivation for the teachers to teach learners with special needs is the extra money and not passion for the profession? In a study I carried out in a rural context in Kenya that involved teachers, parents and education officials, (Omoke,2020), findings showed issues of “Special educators” and “special resources” had a significant contribution in undermining education for learners with special educational needs in rural Kenya. My argument, just like the CSOs, is that these are not reasons but excuses. Some teachers do not just want to go that extra mile to improve learning for these learners.

The area of intellectual disabilities is another tricky one regarding assessment. The CSOs were confident that they had the skills to assess learners with autism and those who are gifted and talented (GT). Autism is recognized as a category of learners with special needs in the government policy framework but not GT. When asked about assessment for the later, one of the CSOs said;

I think I can competently assess them. But because the teachers are not in a position to advise them, to come for assessment, we don't meet them. We know they are available. And really if you go these schools, there are very many learners with special needs that should be assessed, but because they do not know that they have needs, parents do not know that they have need, they are not directed to us for assessment. And because the assessment officers are few in the entire county, very few are assessed (CSO1)

Another one stated;

I know the GT learners are the ones who steal and burn schools, how can we create awareness so that stakeholders and teachers also understand because this one is also interfering with curriculum. Because these GT learners are different from those that could not understand themselves and express what they don't want, these ones that lead in strikes they know what they want. And if you really bring them closer and ask them what is your problem, tell me so that we know how to go about it, they will tell you ---(CSO3).

When asked if they felt learners with GT were at a higher risk of dropping out of school or being sent away from schools, The CSOs were very positive that these groups of learners were not understood and therefore services for them were very limited. One of them said;

It is true that we have lost some of our best brains and this one is happening every day. You have to understand the people you work with, understanding your learners. If you don't understand your learners you will keep on destroying them, you will keep on losing them. Actually, we don't provide for them. We don't understand them...(CSO2)

In its wisdom, the ministry of education in Kenya decided to remove children with GT from the list of learners with special needs meaning they do not require additional help or do not have special educational needs (MOE, 2018). What evidence informed this wisdom? The concern starts with assessment. How are learners with GT identified and assessed? Where are they placed? who is trained to work with this category of learners? Now that the government does not recognize learners with GT as having special educational needs, how are they going to be given special attention? This seems to be what the CSOs are referring to as “losing good brains”. Sharing her experience about her GT child in the Institute for Educational Advancement, a parent, Lisa Hartwig (2014) had this to say:

“My son had difficulty behaving like the model student his teachers and I wanted him to be. He is an intense child with a quick mind, excellent memory and excess energy. He got distracted when his teacher repeated a concept he already knew. He called out when the teacher introduced a subject that interested him. When he couldn't politely deliver on his academic promise, he believed there was something wrong with him”.

What does this mean? Does it mean that learners who are GT are disrespectful or misunderstood? I argue that the Kenyan ministry of education reconsiders the removal of this learners from the list of learners with special educational needs. I hold the position that these learners need modification in content delivery and general life skills to realize their potential and this must start from appropriate identification and assessment.

Another area of confusion on assessment and placement of learners with special educational needs is the tools of assessment. When asked about which tools they use for assessment, one of them said;

Alright there is background information tool where we capture details of the learner, then we have referral document, then we have screening tool where we can ask several questions to ascertain the area and level of disability (CSO1)

Another one had this to say;

At the time of assessment, the parent, the learner, the assessor and any other stakeholder, are valued and we expect them to give us information that we can use to make a decision. So, we also have jig saw puzzles as an assessment tool this one may be will help us to ascertain the level of intellectual ability... a teacher can also prepare his own. Then we have some equipment, like for the eye we have a pin hole... then we have the magnifying glass, the auto scope for the ear, the audiometer, (very expensive and very few institutions have) These things, an assessor who is serious and committed develops very many, even the beams, even the seeds, you can actually innovate (CSO3)

Asked about the adequacy of the tools, one of them said;

They are not adequate. Like I said some of this equipment are expensive and are not easily obtainable, where to store them. (CSO2).

There are many varied tools of assessment for learners with special educational needs but what can be deduced from the responses of the CSOs is a process that is not structured. Such tools include the physical equipment that are referred to by the CSOs and which they said are expensive and unavailable. There are other tools for assessing aspects such as intellectual disabilities that include Developmental Milestones Assessment, Observational Assessments, Adaptive Behavior Scales, Standardized Test, Play-Based Assessments, Family Input and Collaboration, intelligence scales, achievement test scales and Autism Rating scales. There is some confusion on this and it can lead to inappropriate placement of learners with special educational needs.

According to the ministry of education, the exercise of assessment and placement of children with special needs should be multidisciplinary, bringing together many stakeholders. When asked to comment on this, one of the CSOs said;

One, we collaborate with APDK (Association for the physically Disabled of Kenya),... but there is a challenge. When we were redesignated to CSO our independence went away. When we were simply EARC, and it was like our functions were ministry directed and we could plan independently and follow it to the letter, But these days it's different. We also have the children's department although their capacity is limited, also the medical team from the public hospitals. (CSO3)

What appears here is a very disjointed process of assessment that includes many irrelevant stakeholders with a poor structure of working together. There is confusion around what tools can be used for assessment, a multidisciplinary team that does not exist, lack of tools because they are expensive among other contradictions. The likelihood is a process that is inadequate and that may lead to wrong diagnosis and consequent intervention. The associations being referred to as collaborators, the APDK and children's department have no role in government structures regarding assessment.

It appears that in Kenya, the decision to have a child assessed for placement lies with the parent. When asked how they get children for assessment, the CSOs said they use teachers, parents, public gatherings, church functions and collaborator/NGOs. One of them said;

We use the classroom teachers. If they suspect a learner with disability, they should talk to parent. Two in public gatherings or in churches or in barazas, occasionally, not quite often, but occasionally we visit those places and create awareness. Three is through our partners, the collaborators- APDK, NC. The problem is that parents can hide certain facts or give wrong information which may lead to misdiagnosis. We try to make parents feel at home so that they can volunteer as much information as possible (CSO1)

It can be noted that depending on parents to present their children for assessment is not adequate. There is need to consider issues of trauma due to negative attitudes. At the same time, having parents to value education for

these learners is not easy as education is seen as an investment, from where parents expect returns. This means parents have no motivation to take their children to school when it is evident, they will not be of much help in the future. This is why there are incidents, especially in rural Africa of parents hiding their children at home.

The finding that in Kenya parents largely determine whether a child undergoes assessment for placement reflects a broader global pattern where parental involvement is central to early identification. The World Health Organization (2011) emphasizes that while parents are often the first to notice developmental differences, stigma and lack of awareness frequently lead to underreporting or misrepresentation of disability-related concerns, which in turn affects diagnosis and placement outcomes. This aligns with the concern raised by CSOs that inaccurate parental information may contribute to misdiagnosis, despite efforts to gather information through teachers, NGOs, churches, and community forums.

Kenyan studies also highlight the influence of parental attitudes and decisions on disability assessment and placement. Moyi (2019) notes that stigma and mistrust of formal systems often cause parents to withhold critical information, thereby undermining effective placement and inclusive education efforts. Similarly, Mutua and Dimitrov (2001) found that cultural perceptions of disability inform parents' willingness to disclose information and seek support, with concealment delaying appropriate interventions.

There is concern that not all children with special educational needs are assessed for placement in relevant educational institutions. When asked about this, one of the CSOs stated;

In regular schools, majority have not been. I told you in these schools many of the learners have needs, but many of the needs have not been recognized. Many of them have not been assessed. In special schools and units, almost all 100% have been assessed. Because the requirement is you can't admit a child in a special unit or special school without assessment or referral. For those not assessed, this could be because a teacher makes a decision with a parent and places the child.

The finding that many learners in regular schools are not assessed for placement, while nearly all learners in special schools and units undergo assessment, highlights a significant gap in identification and referral practices. Globally, the World Health Organization (2011) stresses that early and accurate assessment is essential for appropriate educational placement and access to support services. When assessments are bypassed, learners with special educational needs risk being placed in settings that neither address their challenges nor optimize their potential. This discrepancy suggests that reliance on informal teacher-parent agreements, without professional assessment, may perpetuate under-identification and exclusion in mainstream schools.

It is evident from available data that the process of assessment for children with special needs has challenges. Asked to comment on this, one of the CSOs stated;

so many challenges. Like one, you go to the field to meet your client and you find your client locked in the house, and nobody is there. You find your client has soiled him/herself, the room smelly ..., but then you have to reach the learner and make them feel that somebody good has come and give him hope. Sometimes you have to carry him, you have to hug so that he also enjoys that human love, and In Nyamonye there we had one that never used to see the sunlight unless we go there. In Masala there there's one VI and at the same time ID, used to be locked inside the room. Again, another challenge, you want to reach your clients go for sensitization, but you cannot, because spending your money

This CSO summarizes the confusion that is in the assessment of learners with special needs, at least in rural Kenya. The lack of human and physical resources, the financing model, the negative attitudes, the strain of assessment officers among others. At this point, I would like to refer to a recent development, even if it has not been implemented. As mentioned earlier, there seems to be some war between the MoE and the TSC on the assessment process. This seems to be intensifying with the ministry now planning to establish 8 regional centres to assess learners with disabilities. This means the ministry wants to take over the task of assessment from the TSC. Many questions arise here: How will learners access the regional centres when it is already difficult to access the county ones which are closer to schools and families? What happens to the CSOs who have been

employees of the TSC but taking instructions from the ministry? If the existing EARCs had challenges, is the solution establishing other centres or strengthening them? Who was consulted in this process?

RECOMMENDATIONS

The curriculum support officers, who seem to operate between the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and the Ministry of education (MOE) should be redeployed back to the MOE and the EARCs

The assessment process should be designed in such a way that there are particular assessment days. This will enable the EARC officers share available resources and expertise.

There is need to design internationally recognized tools of assessment for all categories of learners with special needs. These can then be contextualized or “*kenyanised*”

The government should design deliberate parent support groups/programmes to create awareness among parents about the significance of appropriate assessment and placement of their children. This can also be an opportunity to guide and counsel parents, a process that can reduce stigma associated with disability.

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