An investigation of Residential Special Schools in Providing Literacy for the Blind Children: the Case of Sebeta Special School for the Blind

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Department of Curriculum Instruction

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List of Acronyms

ACPF: African Child Policy Forum

ACRWC: African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

CP: Child Participant

CRBA: Child Rights-Based Approach

CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child

CRPD: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CWD: Children with Disabilities

CWVI: Children with Visual Impairment

FDRE: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

MoE: Ministry of Education (Ethiopia)

MoLSA: Ministry of Labor, Social affairs (Ethiopia)

PWD: Persons with Disabilities

RSS: Residential Special School Sebeta School for the Blind

UN: United Nations

Contents

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Abstract

International and regional human rights instruments, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) recognize the right to education of Children with Disabilities (CWDs). However, CWDs are one of the groups that are highly excluded from education, particularly in Ethiopia. Provision of Education for CWDs in Ethiopia is inadequate. Significant proportions of in-school are attending school in a segregated environment. This paper explores the situation of RSSs in provision of literacy to CWVs, whether the services provided were [human] right based and the challenges of RSSs in provision of literacy and residential services.

For this study a qualitative study approach was adopted. Hence, data collection, sampling and analysis carried out in line with the above mentioned set of proceedings. Focus group discussion, interview and document analysis were used to collect data. 24 blind students and 4 teachers were made to participate in the research. To pinpoint some findings, though, there exists conducive legal and policy environments or frameworks to educate CWVs, research participant CWVs indicated that they were excluded from and with in education ahead of coming to SSB. They were denied to enroll or forced to withdraw due to inconveniencies of; poor quality or non-availability of learning aids and the unwelcoming school social and infrastructural milieus.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Background of the Study

Children are expected to be producers of wealth and active participants in society's developmental activities in their maturity ages. To be productive they need knowledge and skills which they can apply to different situations to obtain desired results. It is in this light that literacy education is accepted as a right and an essential part of the human right of every individual as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 2003).

According to Global monitoring team on Education for All (UNESCO, 2003), literacy strengthens the capabilities of individuals, families and communities to access health, education, political, economic and cultural opportunities and services. The study done by the monitoring team showed that education goes beyond literacy and encompasses the entire spectrum of learning process that lead to the development of abilities, knowledge, attitudes and improvement of technical skills. Despite the advantages of Education, the report estimates that in 2000 there were 862,000,000 illiterates in the world (UNESCO, 2003).

Together with the rest of the world, Africa started literacy programmers to eradicate the problem of illiteracy. However, serious campaigns' started after research figures on population, growth, wealth and death rates showed that poverty, disease and illiteracy go hand in hand (Townsend, 1988).

As early as 1965, UNESCO organized the Tehran Conference of ministers of education. The main concern of the conference was to deliberate on ways and means of combating illiteracy. In April 2000, 164 countries attended the world education forum held in Dakar, Senegal. Among the goals to be achieved by 2015 was 50% improvement in levels of literacy and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all.

Education plays a fundamental role in human, social, and economic development of humans' life. It is also a human right granted in many international and regional human rights instruments. These laws entail an obligation on states to provide quality education for all their citizens without discrimination of any kind. The right to education, beyond a single right, is also fundamental for the exercise of all other human rights, particularly social and

economic rights (UNICEF 2007: 7). However, not all humans have a chance to education in this world due to several reasons. Disability is one of the reasons hampering people from acquiring education in general and quality education in particular.

More than one billion people around the world, of whom nearly 93 million are children, live with some form of disability (WHO 2011: 29). Nearly 124 million children across the world were out-of-school in 2013 and UNESCO has estimated that Children with Disabilities (CWDs) account for one third of all out-of-school children (2009: 5). While these CWDs are excluded from education, many more are provided education in isolated settings separated from their non-disabled peers (Committee on the Rights of PWDs G.C No.4 2016: 2).

Data pertaining to the prevalence and the situation of persons with disabilities in Ethiopia are fragmented, incomplete and sometimes misleading (MoE 2006: 5, MoLSA 2012: 2, Lewis 2009: 9). Even the government policies and strategies are based on estimations (Lewis 2009: 9). Figures from the 2007 Ethiopian national census report show a prevalence rate of 1.09 % and a total number of 805,492 people with a disability out of which 232,585 were under the age of 18 (CSA 2007: 159). Persons with a Visual Impairment take the highest proportion of the total population of PWDs with a number of 248,649 (ibid: 139).

However, many believe that the Census underestimated the prevalence figure by, unlike the previous 1994 census, excluding homeless people and people with some forms of disability such as limited hearing and vision problems, leprosy, and epilepsy (ACPF 2011: 4). The doubt on the survey seems valid considering that the prevalence rate based on the 1994 Census Report was 1.95 % and the number of school aged CWDs was more than 691 thousands (Tirussew 2006: 59). Ethiopia has made a remarkable progress in the provision of education for its citizens in the last two decades. However, the exclusion of CWDs from and within education in the country is still very high. For instance, in 2010/11 academic year the national average enrolment rate at primary level was 96.4%, while the rate for CWDs was around 3.2% (MoE 2012: 12). This shows more than 96% of CWDs are still out-of-school. With regard to the number of CWDs in school, only 60,789 CWDs were able to get education in primary and secondary schools in 2013

(FDRE 2013: 28). Save the Children pointed out that "negative attitudes to disability are, arguably, the single biggest barrier to disabled children accessing and benefiting from

mainstream education" (2002: 27). Similarly in Ethiopia, as Tirussew mentioned, disability is erroneously understood and associated with curse or wrongdoings of parents, and consequently parents tend to hide their CWDs and subvert the ability of the child to learn (Tirussew 2006: 58, MoE 2012: 9-10).

Some literature shows that education for PWDs in Ethiopia has a long history and dates back to the introduction of Christianity in the country (Zelalem 2014: 83). Education for People with Disabilities (PWDs) has been mainly provided by Churches and Mosques before the introduction of modern special education in 1925 (ibid). Following the introduction of modern education, education for children with obvious sensory impairments such as Children with Visual Impairment (CWVI) has been provided in special schools which were established by foreign missionaries (Tirusew 2006:59). Currently, education for CWDs in Ethiopia is provided in special schools, special classes attached to regular schools, and regular classes and the services are provided by the government, NGOs, and charity organizations (FDRE 2012: 28). One of them is the Sebeta SPECIAL School for the Blind.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Ethiopia, in addition to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) constitution, has ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (2002), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2010), African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (2002) and other relevant international and regional human rights instruments which commonly grant the right to education for CWDs. Furthermore, national policies and strategies have been adopted by the Government for the implementation of quality education for CWDs. These legal and policy frameworks promote inclusive education system for CWDs in which CWDs get educated in regular schools and their segregation in Special Schools is discouraged (FDRE 2013: 29).

Most in-school CWDs are attending school in regular classes and 300 special classes/units are attached to regular schools (FDRE 2013: 28, MoLSA 2012: 28). On the other hand, despite the inclusive direction of Government, there are still 15 Special Schools in the country in which CWDs get education isolated from their non-disabled peers (MoLSA, 2012: 28). More than half

of these Special Schools are Residential Schools in which CWDs live and attend classes in a single school compound. These regular, integrated and special facilities are under-resourced and characterized by a lack of teaching-learning materials, trained teachers, and disability friendly environment (MoE 2012: 9-11, Tirussew 2006: 59).

In addition, most of the special classes/units and schools are highly concentrated in urban areas (Lewis 2009: 36, MoE 2006: 7). Due to these factors, most CWDs do not have access to schools which can accommodate their special needs in their localities. This forces CWDs and their parents to migrate to towns far from their home area in search of education (Tessema 2011: 23). As relocation of a family is not an easy decision, placing the CWDs in Residential Special Schools which provide both residential and education services would become the best, perhaps the only option. Accordingly, a significant number of CWDs, particularly CWVI are attending RSSs (FDRE 2013: 28, MoE 2006: 41).

Though these RSSs in Ethiopia are still educating many CWDs, such segregation tends to strengthen discriminations and exclusions of the children and negatively affects their social development and inclusion. RSSs cause "separate cultures and identities of disabled people, and isolation from their homes and communities" (Save the Children 2002: 10). This in turn "… weakens family bonds, alienates them from family life and future employment in the community, and can lead to abandonment. Disabled children, especially girls, are more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse" (ibid). Similarly, UNESCO"s Salamanca Statement and framework for action stated that

> *"regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all"* (1994: ix).

1.2. Justification of the Study

though, Ethiopia has ratified the CRC, ACRWC, and CRPD which recognize CWDs" right to education in an inclusive setting, studies and government reports show that the practice remains poor (FDRE 2013, MOE 2006 & 2012, Tirussew 2006, Lewis 2009). Many of the CWDs are totally excluded from education and those who are in-school are learning in under-resourced and

unfriendly regular and special schools (ibid). CWDs that learn in RSSs are the most segregated from their non-disabled peers and the society. Though there is sizable literatures with regard to education of CWDs" in Ethiopia, the role of RSSs in the provision of education for CWDs and their ability and status in providing rights-based residential and educational services to the children is hardly studied. This mainly motivated me to engage in this study.

Furthermore, as a children's rights promoter working for the National Human Rights Institution, the issue of children, especially those marginalized, always is my interest. Hence, the researcher is of the opinion that studying these issues and documenting views and experiences of CWDs and other stakeholders will contribute a lot in analyzing the overall situation of CWDs in Ethiopia. That in turn will contribute to take appropriate measures in proper delivery of education to CWDs and promote an inclusive, quality education for them. Though the provision of education for CWDs in a segregated setting (RSSs) is inconsistent with the children's right to inclusive education, it is still very important to ensure that any implementation/provision of education for CWDs is in line with the general principles of human and children's rights, which is what CRBA is about. These general "principles need to underpin *all actions* to promote the right of children with disabilities to education (UNICEF 2012: 24]. Moreover, the RSSs, beyond educator, are careers of the CWDs providing residence, food, health care, and other basic needs. Indeed, the CWDs have an inherent right towards these services and to enjoy a decent life. These rights entail an obligation on careers (RSSs) to ensure that their services are adequate, quality, and delivered in a way that respect the children's rights. Thus, The researcher ponders a CRBA will provide a better lens to explore situation of the CWDs in the RSSs and the status and capacity of the schools in providing rights-based accommodation and education.

1.3. Research Questions

What role do Residential Special Schools play in the provision of literacy skill for CWVI in Ethiopia and what is their ability to provide rights-based residential and educational services for those CWDs?

The research also aimed to answer the following specific -research questions:

1. What are the views and experiences of CWVI towards their literacy education and RSSs in view of applying the acquired knowledge in real life interaction?
2. How RSSs contribute for inclusion and/or exclusion of CWVI in/from education and the society?
3. What constitutes a CRBA for rights-based residential and educational services?
4. What are the challenges of RSSs in the provision of quality residential and literacy educational services?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General objective

It is to assess the institutional commitment of residential special schools in the provision of literacy skill for CWVI in Ethiopia.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

- To investigate the ability and status in providing rights-based residence and literacy education services for these CWDs.
- To explore the challenges of RSSs in the provision of quality literacy, residential and educational services.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Findings of the study will be of help to improve the implementation of various government policies, review or redesign the education process in general and the literacy expansion in particular in order to make it relevant, current and geared towards the desired benefits of nowadays. It may also serve as a source of information for various researchers, practitioners and stakeholders.

1.3. Scope of the Study

This study has specifically focused on literacy skill provided for CWVI in RSSs in Ethiopia. The reason to particularly focus on these groups of CWDs is, first, as mentioned above in the introduction, Visual Impairment is the first type of disability with the highest prevalence rate

(CSA 2007: 139). Second, CWV is among the groups of children who are most marginalized from and within education in Ethiopia (Lewis 2009: 12: Tirussew 2006: 65). Finally, almost the majority RSSs in Ethiopia are for CWVIs. Though focused on these groups, the study, in the discussion of literatures, will discuss the topic from a broader perspective of CWDs in general. This mainly would help to discuss the common features of disability and these groups of CWDs which in turn contributes for a better understanding of the context.

Accordingly, the study was conducted in 1 RSS: Sebeta School for the Blind. Sebeta School for the Blind has been selected for the study because it is the earliest existing RSSs with age- long experience of providing education to CWVI. Indeed, its proximity to my hometown, Addis Ababa has also been considered in the selection.

1.5. Delimitation of the Study

The study is delimited to Sebeta Special School for the Blind which is located in Oromiya Administrative Region State of FDRE. In due process of carrying out this study, the researcher came to know lack of disaggregated data on CWDs and their education in the country was one of the challenges for this study. It was very hard to get up-to-date data as to the number of RSSs and CWDs enrolled in these schools at the country level. The special schools including RSSs in the country are administered by either the Regional Governments or NGOs or National Associations of PWDs. Furthermore, the study was carried out in one RSS. Due to financial, human and time limitations. Because, the study is not a full time engagement. Because the researcher was obliged to work to win his daily bread.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Disability, literacy, CRBA and Social Exclusion/ Inclusion

2.1. Understanding Disability

It is hard to get any particular definition which can give a complete meaning to the term "disability". Even the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) doesn't define disability in definitive words; rather it explicates different categories of disabilities. It stated that

> *"Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."* (CRPD, Article 1).

Partly, the difficulty to have a clear-cut definition is attributed to the fact that "disability is a complicated, multidimensional concept" (Altman 2001: 97). Accordingly, disability has been conceptualized from different perspectives. The main approaches of understanding are the Medical, Social, and Human Rights models. Models of disability may be used to serve two different purposes, separately or both at a time (Silvers 2010: 22). First, to "characterize disability identity and sometimes also to determine who is eligible to assume this identity" (ibid). Second, a model of disability may be used to explain why individuals are disabled (ibid).

The Medical, sometimes called individual, Model sees disability as caused by biological "malfunctioning" of something inside the person (D"alessio 2013: 97). It identifies the problems faced by PWDs as a consequence of internal factors comes out from the "dysfunction". Thus, medical rehabilitation for the impairment (freeing individuals from biological "dysfunction") and economic support are seen as solutions for disability (ibid).

On the other hand, the Social Model has been created in reaction to the shortcoming of the Medical Model (Combrinck 2008: 300). This model makes a distinction between impairment (as a biological condition) and disability (as a social condition) and understands disability as a socially constructed phenomenon (ibid).

It asserts the problem rests not with the individual or his/her impairment, but with the society as a result of the society's reaction or lack of reaction to PWDs. Thus, "it is necessary to go beyond the impairment to look at the disabling conditions of society that affect the lives of disabled people" (ibid). The social model seeks a solution by adjusting the institutions and the society in which the individual lives by removing societal disabling barriers and challenging discriminatory policies and cultural biases (D"alessio 2013: 96).

The social model, after its introduction a couple of decades ago, has been widely accepted by disability actors (Silvers 2010: 19). However, it's now being subjected to criticism of its shortcomings by some disability studies scholars (ibid, Carol 2004). Citing Shakespeare, Watson, Bury and Williams; Thomas Carol (2004: 577) wrote "the social model of disability is fundamentally flawed because it denies the impact of impairment on disability". These cited authors commonly agree that "impairment and chronic illness have direct causative effects on the daily restrictions of activity that constitute disability" (ibid). Likewise, WHO stated that "disability should be viewed neither as purely medical nor as purely social" (2011: 4). Carol, underlining the importance of social relational understanding of disability, proposes his own definition in order to fill the element missed by the social model.

> *"Disability is a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional wellbeing."* (Thomas, 1999:2004: 580).

Elaborating the definition he argued "disability only comes into play when the restrictions of activity experienced by people with impairment are socially imposed" and those non-socially imposed or impairment resulted restrictions do not constitute "disability"; rather they should be understood as "impairment effects" (Thomas 2004: 581). Nevertheless, the social model still enjoyed a firm acceptance from both disability activists and disability studies scholars (Silvers 2010: 19) and "the social advances achieved [with the Social model] by oppressed groups are always of much greater significance than any loss in the clarity of ideas along the way" (Thomas 2004: 581).

There is a strong link and agreement between the Social and Human Rights model of disability (Chilemba 2013, Combrinck 2013).

The human rights model is based on the very basic principle of human rights that “all human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity” as declared in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With similar premises as the social model, the human rights model asserts the problem of disability caused by “lack of responsiveness by the state and civil society to the difference that disabilities represent” (Combrinck 2008: 301). Consequently, the approach asserts the inalienable equal right of all human beings irrespective of their disabilities and identifies the state as a duty-bearer to remove the barriers (Chilemba 2013: 11). As Combrinck noted “the end goal of the human rights approach to disability is therefore to build societies that are genuinely inclusive, that value difference and respect the dignity and equality of all human beings regardless of difference” (2008: 302).

These models, beyond conceptualizing disability from different angles, propose different remedies to address it in various aspects of life. In other word, the conceptualizations have a capacity to determine the approaches used to address the issues of disability and PWDs in various sectors. On the other hand, understanding disability as social or human rights model calls for the inclusion of CWDs in regular schools environment by avoiding social and interactional barriers (Chilemba 2013: 10).

2.2. The Concept of Literacy

According to Dubin and Kuhlman, literacy has many meanings that go beyond the simple definition of 'reading and writing’ they acknowledge that the word literacy itself has come to mean competence, knowledge and skills. For example, common expressions such as 'computer literacy,' "civic literacy,' 'health literacy,' and a score of other usages in which literacy stands for know-how and awareness of the first word in the expression (Dubin F & Kuhlman, 1992).

Literacy is also defined as 'an individual's ability to read, write, communicate, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society.'

This is a broader view of literacy than just an individual's ability to read, the more traditional concept of literacy (Workforce Investment Act, 1998).

As information and technology have become increasingly shaped our society, the skills we need to function successfully have gone beyond reading and literacy has come to include the skills listed in the current definition. This definition is important as it looks at literacy, at least to some extent, from a more contextualized perspective. The definition of 'literate' then depends on the skills needed within a particular environment.

Therefore, literacy is the collective responsibility of every individual in the community; that is to develop meaning making with all human modes of communications to transmit and receive information (Copeland & Keefe, 2007). Literacy could also be defined as both task-based and skills-based, the task based definition focusing on the everyday literacy tasks a person can and cannot perform without, whereas the skill-based definition entailed the knowledge and the skills a person must possess in order to perform their tasks, ranging from basic, word level skills to higher level skills (White S and Mc Closkey, 2003).

Langer (1991) alluded that literacy can be viewed in a broader and in an educationally more productive way, as the ability to think and reason like a literate person, within a particular society".

Langer (1991) goes on to claim that it is the culturally appropriate way of thinking, not the act of reading or writing, that is most important in the development of literacy. Literacy thinking manifests itself in different ways in oral and written language in different societies, and educators need to understand these ways of thinking if they are to build bridges and facilitate transitions among ways of thinking.

According to Sheed and Ward (1974) to acquire literacy is more than to dominate reading and writing techniques, they articulated that it is also the consciousness to understand what one reads and also to write what one understands. Thus meaning acquiring literacy should be a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one’s context.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined literacy as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.

In addition literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potential to participate fully in their community and wider society (UNESCO Institute for Education, October 2012).

The notion of basic literacy is used for the initial learning of reading and writing which a person who have never been to school need to go through. Barton however states that although people may have the basic levels of literacy, they still need a different level to operate in their day-to-day lives (Blackwell and David Barton, 2006).

From these definitions it is clear that the definition of literacy has changed over time with the term literacy being increasingly used to refer to the basic education of a person rather than to strictly technical skills of reading and writing. The definition incorporates many other areas of skills behavior and knowledge in addition to reading writing and numeracy.

Illiteracy is therefore a relative concept. Someone can be literate but not functionally literate. A functionally literate person is one who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and community development (Heibert, 1991). Illiteracy is viewed by many as an indicator of poverty. It is a true reflection of marginalization, exploitation and oppression. Illiterate people are mostly poor people who live in rural areas in third world countries-Africa. There are not only unable to read and write but also hungry, vulnerable to illness and poor (Gillete, 1983). Other poverty indicators caused by high level of illiteracy are, lowered life expectancy, high infant mortality, high rate of malnutrition, poor health services, sparse communication systems and weak educational provision (Hutton B. 1992].

2.3. A Child Rights-Based Approach to Education for CWDs

A Child Rights-Based Approach (CRBA) is adopted as a theoretical framework to analyze the provision of residential and educational services of the RSSs. Accordingly, this section will discuss the approach, its contents and implications for education by CWDs along with the

substantive rights of CWDs to education and obligations in education as stipulated in international, regional, and national legal frameworks. What is CRBA?

A Human Rights-Based Approach "integrates the norms, standards and principles of international human rights into the entire process of development programming" (UNICEF 2007: 10). A Child Rights-Based Approach (CRBA) is an extension of a broader Human Rights-Based Approach which particularly focuses on children. CRBA recognizes the fact that children are different from adults in some aspects due to their special needs and vulnerability and the necessity of special treatment and protection for them (Save the Children 2005: 25- 26). This is the very reason for the presence of special international conventions on the human rights of children and the need for rights-based approach adjusted to the special needs of children (ibid). CRBA has its foundations on international, regional, and national legislations.

The core purpose of CRBA is establishing a relationship between the right holders and duty-bearers. The right holders are, as the name implies, are Children including CWDs. On the other hand, the main duty-bearer is the state and "parents and others who care for who care for children" can be regarded as Secondary duty-bearers (Save the Children 2007: 10). Thus, in the case of RSSs which look after residential students with a residential service, the schools are secondary duty bearers. "Other individuals and groups may have certain responsibilities for children, depending on the moral codes of the particular society or culture" (ibid). Accordingly, the approach urges the duty-bearers to respect, fulfil, and protect rights of rights-holders and support rights-holders to demand or claim their rights (Save the Children 2007: 9). Government, as a provider of public goods, is the primary duty bearer to ensure a situation in which all children can fully enjoy their rights, including the right to education, recognized in International, Regional and National laws (Save the Children 2007:10).

Thus, it is very important to look at the substantive rights to and obligations in education for CWDs in the international, regional and national legal frameworks before examining the content and implication of CRBA to CWDs" education.

2.4. The Right to Education of CWDs

The right to education is a universal right recognized in international and regional human rights laws for all humans including CWDs. The most important international and regional human right instruments for the protection of the right of CWDs to education are the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). In addition to these laws, other instruments, inter alia, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), African Charter on Humans and People's Rights (ACHPR) assert the universality of the right.

The CRC and ACRWC recognize the right of all children to education "on the basis of equal opportunity" (CRC art.28, ACRWC art. 11). Furthermore, the CRC states that the education of the child "shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest Potential" (art. 29 (1) (a)).

The CRPD provided detail provisions on the rights of CWDs to education and state parties' responsibility to fulfil the right. As persons with disabilities (PWDs) have exactly the same rights as the rights of other persons, the CRPD did not introduce new rights, rather "it reaffirms those rights and introduces new obligations on governments to ensure their realization" (UNICEF 2012: 24). With regard to the right to education, the convention stresses more on the obligation of states to insure "an inclusive system of education at all levels" and remove the barriers for the realization of the right (CRPD art. 24). The education provided to CWDs must be capable of developing their "personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential" (ibid, ACRWC art. 11(2)). Most importantly, CWDs have the right to get an inclusive quality education and attend primary and secondary schools within the communities where they live (CRPD Art.24 (2)).

The CRPD underlines the importance of learning life and social development skills to realize full and equal participation of CWDs (art. 24 (3)). The convention recognizes the need of special

arrangement in the provision of education for CWVI. It recognizes the significance of learning "Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support of full and equal participation of the children (ibid). Furthermore, duty-bearers have a responsibility to ensure "the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development" (ibid).

With regard to the Ethiopian legal system, the national legal framework combines national laws and ratified regional and international human rights instruments. The FDRE constitution (1995) recognizes citizens' equal right to access public funded social services including educational facilities (art.41 (3)). It also stated the State's "obligation to allocate ever increasing resources" to provide education to the public (art.41 (4)). Furthermore, Ethiopia has ratified the abovementioned relevant international and regional human rights treaties[1] and as per article 9 of the FDRE constitution, those laws "ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land". Consequently, the above discussed rights and obligations are also valid and binding in the country. Obligations to Ensure Right to Education of CWDs

Ratifying international human rights instruments and having national laws which recognize the CWDs" rights to education, consequently entails an obligation to realize. The government, as a primary duty-bearer, has an obligation to fulfil, respect, and protect the CWDs' right to education (Committee on the right of PWDs GC no.4 2016: 13, UNICEF 2012: 28). The CRPD requires States parties undertake measures to the maximum of their available resources to the progressive full realization of all PWDs" rights including right to education (art. 4(2)).

The obligation to fulfill dictates states to adopt appropriate legislative, administrative, and budgetary measures for the realization of CWDs' right to education (Save the Children 2007: 10). In addition, states have an obligation to provide quality education which meets the special needs of all CWDs.

The Committee on Rights of PWDs drawing on the interpretation by the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, has identified four basic features of ACRWC in 2002

(Proclamation no. 283/2002), CRC in 1992 (Proc no. 10/1992), CRPD in 2010 (Proc. No 676/2010).education that has to be met in order to fulfil this obligation (GC no.4 2016: 8). These are Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Adaptability.

The feature of Availability directs that "public and private educational institutions and programs must be available in sufficient quantity and quality" (ibid). This includes building schools and other educational facilities at all levels and everywhere to avail education for CWDS. Accessibility on the other hand refers that educational institutions and their services must be accessible to CWDs without discrimination. School buildings, educational materials, curriculum, teaching method, and language of medium of instruction including are among the services that must be accessible for CWDs. This requires avoiding all the barriers which hampers CWDs to access these components of education. The principle of Accessibility is recognized as one of the general principle of rights of PWDs under article 3 and 9 of the CRPD.

The committee also stressed that education, beyond being available and accessible, has to be acceptable by all in its form and substance. Thus, Acceptability obliges to "design and implement all education-related facilities, goods and services taking full account of and respecting the requirements, cultures, views and languages of persons with disabilities" (ibid: 9). The feature of Adaptability recognizes that every student might have individual requirements and asserts that "curricula must be conceived, designed and applied to meet and adjust to the requirements of every student" (ibid).

The obligation to respect refers that states shall not interfere directly or indirectly in the enjoyment of the right to education by CWDs. For instance, "by avoiding any action that would serve to prevent [CWDs] accessing education, such as legislation that categorizes certain groups of children with disabilities as uneducable" (UNICEF 2012: 28). On the other hand, the obligation to protect binds government to take actions which prevent third parties from intervening in the enjoyment of right to education by CWDs. This may include protecting CWDs from violence, abuse, and bulling in their schools and eliminating all barriers placed by individuals and communities which exclude CWDs from education.

Though states are principally in charge of these responsibilities to fulfil, respect, and protect, the full realization of CWDs" right to education cannot be attained without an active involvement of

other actors/duty bearers such as parents, teachers, disability unions, and NGOs (ibid: 92). Contents and Implications of CRBA to Education of CWDs

A CRBA commitment to realize CWDs' right to education requires more than "business as usual" (UNICEF 2012: 30). As mentioned above, a CRBA primarily establishes a relationship between the rights holders and the duty bearers. UNICEF (ibid) pointed out three principal dimensions of rights-based approach towards CWDs' education that have to be taken in to account in the process to ensure that CWDs are able to realize their rights to education.

First, "[education for CWDs] necessitates a rigorous approach to establishing entitlement of every child to education . . . [and] . . . systematic approach to identifying and removing the barriers and bottlenecks that impede access" (ibid). This include adopting laws and policies which recognize CWDs" rights to education and providing accessible educational facilities, for instance schools which match the special needs of CWDs. Second, " it needs recognition that education provided must be of a quality and standard that provides a relevant curriculum, is delivered through a pedagogy which reflects the way children learn, and creates a learning space which includes rather than excludes children" (ibid). Employing, among others, disability friendly teaching materials including text books, teaching methods, qualified trained teachers, and appropriate language and non-discriminatory school environment is vital features of this dimension. Finally, "it needs to be delivered in an environment which is respectful of the cultural, protection and participation rights of children" (ibid). This dimension calls for a school environment in which CWDs are safe, their voices are heard and taken seriously, their physical wellbeing is guaranteed, and their culture is respected. In conformity with the Human Rights Model of Disability, a CRBA proposes inclusive education which would embrace the three dimensions (ibid).

A CRBA lays its basis on basic human rights and children's rights principles (Save the Children 2005: 26). In the context of Education for CWDs, the general principles of rights of PWDs are also very important to have an appropriate broader approach. General human rights principles, among others, include universality, inalienability, indivisibility, interdependence, non-discrimination and equality (ibid: 29-30).

On the other hand, Principles of PWDs" rights encompass respect for inherent dignity, non-discrimination, full and effective Participation, inclusion, equality of opportunity, accessibility, and gender equality (CRPD art. 3).

With regard to the principle of children's rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child identified four guiding principles of CRC to be implemented in the realization of all other rights of Children: Non-discrimination, Best Interest of the Child, Participation, and Survival and Development (in UNICEF 2012: 24). "These principles need to underpin all actions to promote the right of children with disabilities to education" (ibid). These four guiding principles of children's rights are discussed below. Though the previous principles are also equally important, space does not permit to pursue all here. In fact, these principles, directly or indirectly, have been or will be discussed in the paper. Non-discrimination

The principle of Non-discrimination asserts that all children are entitled to the enjoyment of all rights of children without discrimination of any kind (CRC art. 2, ACRWC art. 3). The principle urges all duty bearers to tackle discrimination in three main areas: "against individual children; against specific groups of children; and against the population group as a whole" (Save the Children 2007: 12). Children who are most marginalized and inclusion of them is the main focus of the principle (ibid: 32). As CWDs are one of the groups of children who are most marginalized, the principle of Non-discrimination has also been re-affirmed in the CRPD (Art. 3 and 5). Recognizing equality of all persons, the convention calls states Parties to prohibit all discrimination on the basis of disability and ensure reasonable accommodation is provided (Art.5).

Thus, state parties need to ensure that CWDs are enabled to access all facilities and services including education provided to the public taking their special requirements into account. To that end, they "must ensure non-exclusion from education for [CWDs] and eliminate structural disadvantages to achieve effective participation and equality for all persons with disabilities" (Committee on the Rights of PWDs GC no.4: 14). Participation

The CRC and ACRWC clearly assert that every child has the right to express her/his views freely in all matters affecting her/him (CRC art. 12, ACRWC art. 4(2) and 7). This includes communicating their views, opinions, and desires with regard to their education. For this effect,

children need to participate and be heard either directly or through their representatives (ibid). And their views shall be taken into consideration in accordance with the age and maturity of the children (ibid).

The principle calls up to the informed and willing involvement of children, including the most excluded, in decision making in the family, in school, in the community and at national and international levels (Save the Children 2005: 33, 2007: 13). CWDs should be able to participate in matters of their education to make their views and desires heard in the process of decision making process of their schools, family, and the government. The principle thus binds all the duty bearers to empower CWDs, build their confidence, and create space and opportunity for their voices to be heard at all levels (Save the Children 2007: 13).Best Interests of the Child

This principle implies that the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration in all actions concerning children undertaken by all persons, institutions and authorities (CRC art. 3, ACRWC art. 4). The principle is also adopted in FDRE constitution under article 36 (2). Parents/carers, community, the state, or other stakeholders may have roles in the final decisions of matters that concern children. However their interests shall not override the interests of the children (UNICEF 2007: 14). Prioritizing children's best interests requires involving children and taking account of their own views in order to know and serve the best interest of them. Therefore, maintaining children's participation and the other two principles is also very important to meet the objective of the principle of Best Interests. Survival and Development

The principle of survival and development affirms every child's inherent right to life and obligation of states to ensure children's development to the maximum extent possible (CRC art. 6, ACRWC art. 5). Children's development must be understood in a broadest sense with a holistic approach and it encompasses the physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual development of the child (Save the Children 2007: 11). Thus, creating an enabling environment in which children can use their capacity to develop must be the main responsibility of all duty bearers, primarily the state. This requires governments to provide basic social and economic services such as education and health for children; to respect their freedoms; and to protect them from harm, abuse and exploitation. The principle is therefore more of an outcome of fulfilling, respecting, and protecting all other rights of children.

Accordingly, a child- rights based education for CWDs should be provided in a way which is able to create conducive environment in which CWDs can develop themselves in all aspects of life. It is important to ensure that all public goods including schools are available and accessible for CWDs; the education environment is free from violence and abuse; and the education is to the highest quality and capable of realizing the mental development of the children to the maximum extent possible.

2.5. Social Exclusion and Education of CWDs

The concept of social exclusion is a very broad and multidimensional concept dealing with a wide range of social, economic and political aspects of life (Sen 2000: 1, De Haan 2000: 26). Social exclusion in its general sense refers to:

> *"A process and a state that prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic and political life and from asserting their rights." (Beall and Piron 2005: 9).*

Similarly, Walker and Walker defined social exclusion as "being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society" (in Macrae et al. 2003: 89-90). According to Amartya Sen, exclusion can be either "active" or "passive" (2000: 14-15). Active exclusion is when certain groups of people are deliberately (by laws or policies) excluded from a given social, economic, or political sphere (ibid). On the other hand, the exclusion is said to be passive when such "deprivation comes about through social processes in which there is no deliberate attempt to exclude" (ibid: 15).

Disability "generates a powerful barrier" for PWDs in general and CWDs in particular, to interact with the society (Klasen 2001: 216). Such limited interactions in turn can cause or deepen their exclusion. Children who are socially excluded because of their disabilities often also "suffer from deficiencies in other important capabilities, such as the ability to be healthy, well educated, well housed or well nourished" (ibid: 422).

Exclusion in education, as a multidimensional concept, might occur in different forms and does not only refer to "out-of-school children" (UNESCO 2012: 3). UNESCO (ibid) identified various forms of exclusion in education.

One of the most relevant ones in relation to the education of CWDs is "Exclusion from having the life prospects needed for learning" this happens, for instance, when CWDs "live under conditions inadequate for health and well-being" and are not able to adequately access basic needs such as food, housing, clothes, and so on (ibid). Second, there is "Exclusion from regular and continuing participation in school" occurs when a school or any other education program is inaccessible to CWDs, for example because they are located too far away from the CWDs' local area (ibid). Third, there is "Exclusion from meaningful learning experiences" such exclusion happens within education when the teaching method, language of instruction, and/or learning materials fail to meet the special learning needs of CWDs (ibid). This can also be caused by negative and discriminatory experiences or violence at schools.

As education is fundamental for realizing other human rights, exclusion of CWDs from and within education "can very easily contribute towards long-term social exclusion [and hamper them] to participate fully in society later in life" (Macrae ET al.2010: 90). On the other hand, inclusion in education contributes to reduce inequalities and exclusion. Thus, there is a need to include CWDs and to address their exclusion. According to Melinda Jones, inclusion is a simple principle which contends that "whatever benefits accrue to members of a society are the heritage of people, not just those who are able-bodied" (2011: 57). She also pointed at three relevant dimensions of inclusion of PWDs in various aspects of life: "a non-discriminatory attitude towards people with disabilities; the guarantee of access to participation in every area of life; and the facilitation of people with disabilities to limit the impact of disability" (ibid 2011: 58). According to Jones, the extent of inclusion is determined by the depth of attitudinal change of the society.

CHAPTER THREE

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Techniques

A qualitative research method has been employed in the data collection, sampling and analysis procedure to answer the research questions. The researcher mainly used qualitative interviews and focus group discussion to collect primary data. These qualitative methods are "flexible and fluid, and therefore, are suited to understand the meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences of vulnerable groups" (Pranee 2007: 7). In addition, facts of other studies and documents, as secondary data, have also been used in the analysis. I followed an explanatory research form which meant to uncover the experiences of CWDs in the RSSs, their views of educational/school setting and the views of different stakeholders towards the institutional commitment of RSSs in the provision of literacy education for CWDs.

3.2 Selection of Research Participants

The main group of research participants were CWDs from the RSS, Sebeta School for the Blind hereinafter referred SSB. All the participant children were between the age of 12-17 and students of grade 4^{th} – 10^{th}. The children were either fully or partially visually impaired. These children have lived in their RSS from 2 to 10 years. The other research participants who participated in the research are the Deputy Director of SSB and three experienced teachers.

I introduced myself and the aim of the study to the participant children of the school a week before the actual discussion has been conducted. During that week, I tried to create a friendly environment with the children by chatting and having lunch and tea together. Participant Children of SSB invited me to play football and taste their lunch in the school (SSB). During these times effectively helped me to create rapport in a very friendly and relaxed way which was vital to hear the views and experiences of the children with no limitations.

Participant school administrators/teachers and other informants have been interviewed after finishing the discussions with the CWDs. The views and experiences of the children gathered in the discussions served to further develop the interview questions to the rest interviewees. Other interviewees were contacted and interviewed in their own offices. In fact, the interviews with informants were not conducted easily. Some of them were not available for some time due to prolonged meetings and trainings they had elsewhere. However, all of them, on their availability, were very cooperative and have showed their keen interest in the research topic and cooperative.

The interviews lasted from 30 minutes – 1:15 hr. depending on the informant. In order to cross-check the translated data, the researcher gave the interview notes to the interviewees to read and confirm whether their words were translated properly.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

I have employed a combination of different data collection tools. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. In addition, literatures, reports and documents were used as a source of secondary data in accordance with their relevancy and importance to answer the research questions.

3.3.1 Interviews

The interview questions were designed in a semi-structured way. Semi-structured interviews allow getting interesting and unexpected data in addition to the intended data (O'Leary 2010: 195). All the primary semi-structured and secondary/incidental interview questions forwarded to the participants were open-ended questions except the introductory questions. This helped the researcher to get the experiences of research participants in their own words (Dawson 2007: 15-16). The interview questions to participants started with general introductory questions and smoothly entered to questions which invite to share their views and experiences. In terms of content, the focus group discussions with the participant CWDs were intended to know their views towards their education, RSS, their feeling about being in RSSs, and experiences and challenges in their education. On the other hand, interviewees were guided to find out their

thoughts on the role of RSSs in the provision of education for CWDs and the implementation of literacy education in this RSS.

The interviews conducted with interviewees helped me to discover the institutional commitment of the state in the implementation of literacy in RSSs.

3.3.2 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion is a rapid assessments or semi structured data gathering method in which a purposively selected set of participants gather to discuss issues and concerns based on a list of key themes drown up by the researcher (Kumar, 1987).

3.3.3 Document Analysis

Secondary data from academic literatures, laws, previously conducted studies, articles, and government reports in the study area were used to support primary data collected through interviews and Focus group discussion. All these secondary data were selected based on their relevancy to the topic and importance to answer the research questions.

3.4 Sampling

Sampling allows a researcher to explore groups of people and organizations that simply could not be accessed in their totality (ibid: 183). As a qualitative researcher, I did not look for representativeness rather my goal was rich understanding of the views and experiences of the research participants. Besides, effort has been made to the sample taken to include all the various elements/characteristics of the main participants (CWDs) and other stakeholders.

The researcher believed all CWDs of the schools are capable of being participant to this study. Thus the participant CWDs were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate. In addition due consideration was given to balance age and sex of participant CWDs. Accordingly, 12 (F=12 + M=24) residential students of SSSB were selected from the students who remained in the school.

A purposive sampling method has been used to select the research interviewees. Purposive sampling method helps to get particular expertise from research participants (Singh 2006: 91). Accordingly, informants have been selected by their attachment and knowledge to the topic and the research question. The Participants position in RSS has been considered to presume their expertise and knowledge in the area.

3.5 Analysis

A qualitative content analysis technique has been used to analyze primary and secondary data. A qualitative analysis technique is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1278). Thus, transcribed interviews and notes of observation have been first organized and were systematically drilled in order to build up categories of understanding. Then the analysis of primary and secondary data has been presented under different themes. Such presentation will help the reader to understand the outcome of the research easily and in an organized manner.

3.6 Positionality and Ethical Considerations

As a children's rights activist, I believed the participation of CWDs and exploring their views and experiences is vital in the research. Indeed, a research which involves children has to acknowledge their right to have a say on matters which affect them "including in the context of well-planned, ethical research" and to be heard (Graham et al. 2013: 18).

At the same time, as an adult who, has passed through the system of education I was aware of that my previous experiences, values, perceptions and biases might affect the research process and outcome. Hamersley and Atkinson (2007: 15) wrote "orientation of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including values and interests that these locations confer upon them". Accordingly, I told myself to be open so as to see out of my box and consciously understand the views and experience of the children participant as they present it.

It was also clear for me that my positionality as mentioned above would create a power difference between me and the research participants. "Power differences between adults and children, in particular, are widely recognized as one of the biggest ethical challenges for researchers seeking to include children in research (Graham et al. 2013:41). I tried to present myself as a student at different level thinking that sharing a character of studentship would help to minimize a potentially perceived power difference.

The existence of such challenges directs to give due consideration to the ethical aspect of the research. First and foremost, I had to ensure that the children's involvement does not cause any harm to them "from the outset of the project through its completion" (ibid: 30). Accordingly, highest effort has been made to design the research topic, interview questions and the research methodology in a manner that does not result in harm on the CWDs.

Second, it is always mandatory to get an informed consent of children and their parents/carers before involving children in a research (Powell et al. 2011 in ibid: 56). Thus, I explained the aim of the research to all CWDs and their school. I first obtained permission from the school as carers of the CWDs to discuss with the children and then all participant CWDs have been asked their willingness to participate/being discussants in the research process. In addition, they have been noticed their right not to participate in the research or to refuse to questions which they don't feel comfort with. However, no participant child has used this right and all of them have participated after they gave their informed consent.

Thirdly, the highest possible effort has been made to protect privacy and confidentiality all participant CWDs. As the location of data collection has an impact on the privacy and confidentiality (Graham et al. 2013: 75), In addition, the identity of participant CWDs has never been disclosed through the research process and outcome for confidentiality purposes. Similar ethical considerations have been taken into account with regard to other research participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis

This chapter mainly explores the views and experiences of students of Sebeta School for the Blind, a school principal and teachers. In doing so, it analyzes the institutional commitment of this school in including CWDs in literacy education and the implications this might have in terms of their social contribution and development. In addition, the ability of RSSs and status in providing quality education and residential service will be analysed using a CRBA perspective. Finally, the Chapter discusses the challenges and limitations of the RSSs.

4.1 CWDS, Teachers and a School Principal Views and Experiences with RSSS

In order to make education accessible for all, "first and foremost, states must invest in the infrastructure to create learning environments and opportunities for the education of every child. Provision of schools, teachers, books and equipment is a fundamental prerequisite of education" (UNICEF 2007: 56). Moreover, if CWDs' rights are to be realized, the education "needs to be sufficiently flexible and inclusive" to address their special learning needs (ibid).

CWDs who participated in this study were asked whether they had a chance to learn in their localities before they came to their residential schools or not. Some of the interviewed children (CP 2, 6, 10, 13, 14 had never been in any other school before. These children mentioned the absence of a school in their local areas which could meet their special requirements as a main reason not to start education before, though they had reached school age. Even if there were some regular schools in the areas of CP 2 and 6, those schools were too far from the children's home which made it difficult for them to access the schools every day as the road to/from school was not comfortable and safe for visually impaired people. Besides the absence of schools, some parents tend to discourage or refuse to send their children to school. For instance, a child CP 14) recalled

"My parents used to tell me that I have to stay at home and that I couldn't make any difference even if I got education. They never allowed me to go out of home until they heard about this school and brought me here."

Tirussew already revealed that in Ethiopia the cause of disability often is perceived as a curse, a sin or wrongdoing by parents, ancestors, or PWDs themselves or the manifestation of other supernatural presences (Tirussew 2006: 58). This wrong perception "forces parents to hide their children with disabilities at home, to be ashamed of them and to undermine the child's potential to learn and lead an independent life" (ibid).

On the other hand, the majority of CWDs who participated in this study (CP 1,3,4,5,7,8, 9,10,11, 12 had a chance to enroll in local regular schools for some time (from one semester up to 3 years) before they came to their RSSs. However, all of them had either dropped out before joining their RSSs or left them to their current schools. All of these children expressed that they were unhappy with their prior bad experiences in the regular schools and depicted that they were not able to get a proper treatment and education in the schools. Accordingly, they were forced to drop out and/or look for residential schools elsewhere. Tirussew has noted that most problems and special needs of CWVI usually are not recognized in regular schools and that thus "they often suffer from psychological and academic difficulties, and most of them are destined to leave school early in life" (2006: 60). The main reasons for such bad experiences, as the children mentioned, can be summarized as lack of trained teachers, lack of resources, and the absence of a disability friendly environment in the regular schools.

In addition, the teaching methods of the regular schools are often not suitable for the children. Visually impaired pupils of SSB (CP 1, 3,4,5,7, and 8) noted that most teachers in the regular schools mainly use a blackboard to teach and give notes and that they had never been provided with any education material in Braille, including textbooks. That impeded them from fully participating in the education given and to get what their non-disabled peers were getting. According to CP 3, "I used to learn only 3 of the 5 subjects given in the regular school. I was not able to learn Math and aesthetics."

Furthermore, some of these CWDs also experienced discrimination and marginalization in the schools from their non-disabled peers (CP 5, 7 and 8). According to CP 5, "We were only three

blind students in the school. So, no one was caring about us. Other children used to insult me "*Ballaa" "Jaama"* [impolite/offending Oromiffa word to refer a blind person] without any reason. I felt very depressed and told my parents that I don't want to learn anymore and then dropped out." According to one of them: "other children used to laugh at me and beat me if the teachers are not around".

The abovementioned experiences show that the CWDs involved were, in one way or another, excluded from education prior to their going to RSSs. Some of them were fully excluded from education because of the absence of accessible educational facilities, or others were partly excluded from education because of the lack of "meaningful learning experiences" (UNESCO 2012: 3) because their schools did not meet their special requirements and could not offer a disability friendly school environment. According to Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities "Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organization, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion" (Committee on the Rights of PWDs 2016: 4). Such exclusions deprive the children from their right to get accessible, quality education "on the basis of equal opportunity" (CRC art.28-29, CRPD art. 24, ACRWC art.11.). This "can feed into [their] social exclusion" in general and can contribute to leaving rights and interests in other aspects of life unmet as well (UNESCO 2012: 2)

The children also shared their experiences and feelings being in RSSs. All the participant children, except CP 1 who was brought by her former teacher, are being brought to the schools by their parents or another member of their family. With regard to their feeling about being in residential school, all interviewed children generally have positive attitude towards their schools and expressed their happiness by comparing to their previous situations. Some of them (CP 1, 4, 6, 9, 14] even see their placement in a RSS as a "big chance" which cannot be gained easily.

As far as the education they are getting in their RSSs is concerned all participant children believe that they are being provided with a good quality of education, despite their concerns that will be discussed later. The children are generally optimistic about their future with their education and they believe they can succeed and become independent persons. Particularly some participants of SSB (CP 19, 22 and 24] have expressed their aspiration of success by mentioning a popular author, NGO founder, or musicians who passed through RSSs as role models of success.

Accordingly, it is very clear to see that the RSSs are playing a significant role in including CWVI in education and provide a better education and school environment than regular schools do. On the long term this might help to reduce their social exclusion better than they could otherwise do. Most of these children came from rural areas and very small towns, and thus normally would not have access special day schools that are concentrated in urban areas (Lewis 2009: 36, MoE 2006: 7). This makes the role of the RSSs further crucial for them.

However, placing the CWDs in such RSSs, which are designed to serve only children with a particular type of disability, reasserts the medical understanding of disability and undermines their ability to participate in the normal education system. Klasen has noted that "being placed in such a separate school system can become a form of social exclusion" (2011: 427). The children's segregated placement in the RSSs detaches them from their families and community. Some of the participant children's homes are even two or three days travel away from the RSS. Though the students of school are allowed and encouraged to visit their families during school holidays, the researcher recognized that a significant number of children in SSB remained in the school in a holiday period. One of the participant children from SSB has even not seen her parents at all for the past four years as they never came back after they brought her for the first time. According to the Deputy Director of the school: "Parents hardly visit their children in the school and some parents do not even want their children to come back home on school break times."

Furthermore, students of RSS live and learn in the same school compound without significant interaction in the social life of the outside community. This excludes them from that community and is likely to reinforce the misinformed attitudes in Ethiopian society towards the capability of CWDs to fully participate in social life. Participating informants have revealed that the children's interactions with their non-disabled peers at large is very limited. According to the Deputy Director of SSB:

> *"Even though, we let students to live outside the school after grade six, they do not want to engage themselves much in the outside life. They spend their whole time here in the school campus except their bedtime."(Own translation)*

Participant children from SSB (CP 15 and 17) who were living outside the school also conveyed that they had faced challenges to rent a room in the town of Sebeta just because some landlords were not willing to rent their rooms to blind people. CP 17 even mentioned an incident when her

brother (non-disabled) agreed to rent a room for her and the landlord declined his decision to rent after he became aware that she is blind.

These kinds of exclusion experiences of the children show that, even though the RSSs play a vital role in combating the children's exclusion in education, the schools are also reinforcing their social exclusion from various aspects of life of the society at large. UNICEF has pointed out that "Children who are educated alongside their peers have a much better chance of becoming productive members of society and of being included in their communities" (2013: 23) and this is likely to apply to CWDs in Ethiopia too. The pros and cons of RSSs will be further explored in the next sections of this paper.

4.2 Advantages of the RSSs

The RSSs have their own advantages for the beneficiary children and their parent/guardians. These advantages emanate either from the nature of the schools' setting (residential and special) and/or the schools' long time of experience. The main advantages, among others, are Concentration of Expertise and Resources, the Friendly School Environment, Extracurricular Trainings, and Accommodation. These advantages, in addition to the absence of educational facilities in the local areas of most of the children involved, are the main reasons behind the decisions of parents/guardians to place their children in RSSs.

4.2.1 Concentration of Expertise and Better Resources

UNICEF has noted that "A quality education, in which children want to take part, is dependent on the commitment, enthusiasm, creativity and skill of teachers" (2007: 93). SSB has an immense experience of teaching CWVIs. As all informants from the school confirmed, there is a much higher concentration of expertise among the staff in this RSS than there is in any other regular or special day school in Ethiopia. All teachers in the RSSs have at least basic training on SNE and some of them are themselves blind. The availability of qualified teachers enables the RSSs to deliver a better quality education than regular schools can. Participant children and teachers believe that the education provided by the schools is the most suited and best quality they could get in the country.

4.2.2 Friendly School Environment

Participant children and teachers see the placement of the children in special schools as a way to reduce the incidents of discrimination and marginalization they could have faced in regular schools. The participant children of school mentioned that they can play and chat with their peers in the RSSs without fear of discrimination. student from SSB expressed his happiness as follows. "I'm very happy here because we play football and cards, chat and study together with my friends. No one excludes me" (CP 5).

As mobility is one of the main challenges for PWDs, participant children from SSB have stressed the importance of a safe environment to move around and access all the services of the school without the help of others. In that regard, they all confirm the convenience of their campus to move. According to one Child (Cp4)

> *". . . here, I can go to my class, library, or to the dining room without the help of others. However, it was not possible to do so while I was in home. I always needed the help of my family to move anywhere". (Own translation)*

The researcher also came to know that all children mastered all the roads and passes in the campus and walked around even without the help of cane. Finally, RSSs allow CWDs, to develop identity, and culture living with their alikes (Alemayehu 2013: 23).

4.2.3 Additional Extracurricular Trainings

SSB used to give various technical, vocational and other life skill trainings for the children in addition to the regular academic subjects. For instance, It used to provide trainings of mobility, handicraft, music, and cooking. Moreover, the children also learn basic skills of home economics, buying stuff from the local market, and getting grains grinded in small local milling firms by going with the school staff in a shift. An interviewed teacher explaining the importance of these trainings, said that: "Even if the children are not successful in their education, they can be employed and help themselves with their vocational knowledge."

Interviewed children and teachers also underlined the significance of such extra academic skills in the future life of the children. They have also mentioned that vocational trainings cannot be

available in the regular schools unless one joins the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program after grade 10.

4.2.4 Accommodation

All Students in the RSSs are provided with all-inclusive accommodation with meals, a dormitory and healthcare for free. Though not all kinds and enough, the schools provide the CWDs with various disability aid and educational materials. For instance, SSB provides Braille stylus, slates, paper, white canes and so on for the children. Participant children and teachers are happy with getting all these services in one place and see it as a major advantage of the RSSs. According to the Deputy Director of SSB:

> *"Most parents cannot afford to fulfill all the needs of their disabled children and caring for such children is always difficult. Thus, they feel a great relief when they send their children to our school. Some parents want their children to stay here even in the school holidays." Most teachers noted that parents of CWDs in Ethiopia lack financial capacity to fulfill all the needs of their blind children. A teacher said that "most of the children [CWVI] come from a poor family that cannot afford to buy all their special needs like Braille slates, stylus, paper, and white canes". The Deputy Director of SSB also mentioned that even if some parents can afford to buy the aiding materials, they are hardly available in the country's market." (Own translation)*

4.3 Exploring the RSSs from a CRBA Perspective

> "Because children and young people are the holders of rights and have a legal entitlement to their rights being secured, it is also essential that those responsible for delivering these rights are identified and made accountable and responsive." (Save the Children 2005: 30)

A CRBA holds duty bearers accountable for all their actions concerning children. SSB, as a government school, can be regarded as a primary duty bearer and should be responsible and accountable to provide its services in line with the rights of the children. as far as the school has involved in providing a right (education) and is looking after the CWDs (right holders). This section examines the RSSs' ability and status in providing a rights-based education and residential services. Accordingly, the fundamental principles of children's rights: non-discrimination, participation, best interest of, and survival and development of the child have been used to analyze these issues. These principles are crucial to realizing other rights of children

and thus "need to underpin all actions to promote the right of children with disabilities to education" (UNICEF 2012: 24).

As knowledge of one's own rights is fundamental to claim one's right from the duty-bearers (Save the Children 2007: 9), the participant children have been asked about knowledge of their rights. It turned out that, they all have at least basic awareness of their rights including the right to education. They were also able to list some of their rights. For instance, they mentioned, among others, the rights to get free education, to be cared for by their families, to play, to be free from physical punishment and the freedom of expression. They told me that they got this awareness from their school education, particularly from the subject "civic and ethical education".

4.3.1 Non-discrimination

State parties to the CRC have an obligation to ensure that all CWDs enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Convention equally (Committee on the Rights of the Child 2007: 3). Discrimination on the basis of any ground is capable of destroying the capacity of CWDs to benefit from educational opportunities (Committee on the Rights of the Child 2001: 4). It is necessary to ensure that all CWDs have equal access to quality education without any kind of discrimination. Accordingly, the government RSSs, as primary duty-bearers, have an obligation to provide their services and treat all relevant CWDs indiscriminately. As argued above the same should apply for private RSSs.

Due to their limited admission capacity, SSB use a quota mechanism to limit the number of students coming from the same region or zone. Moreover, some of these criteria used in their admission process impede some groups of CWDs in enrolling in the schools. For instance, SSB admits only children who are under the age of 12 and have no additional disability. As the Deputy Director of the school explained, the reason not to admit children above 12 is the difficulty of keeping them with other lower age children in the school residence especially when they get older until they reach grade six (i.e age 18). The school also uses an entrance exam for new applicants and admits only those who scored best.

These administrative limitations of the admission procedure tend to exclude some group of CWDs from education given by the RSSs on the ground of age, disability and knowledge. From

a child rights-based perspective the excluded children, particularly those excluded on the ground of knowledge and age have an equal right to education and care.

With regard to the treatment inside the schools, all interviewed children from both residential schools confirmed that they do not feel being discriminated. They receive equal treatment from the schools' teachers and other staff. They also affirmed the absence of difference in getting the education and residential services of the schools.

4.3.2 Participation

Children have the right to participate in decision-making and express their views in all matters affecting them (see CRC art 12). This entails that their views must be heard and considered in all aspects of decisions taken by all duty bearers. As Save the Children has pointed out, "in situations where children are denied their participation rights, other rights, such as the right to life, health, education or protection, may be weakened" (2005:33). SSB has its own structures in which CWDs express their views and are involving in the decision making process of the school. Students of SSB have a students' committee. The committee has twenty members elected by the students from each of the five dormitory blocks. Five of them make the executive committee and represent the students in different committees of the school. These committees, representing the other children, are responsible for being involved in the decisions of the school which concern their interest. For instance, they check the quality of the meal provided to all students. In addition, they are involved in decisions of the school's Discipline Committee to ensure, together with other committee members, that students who are alleged with discipline offences are treated properly and a fair decision has been made.

With regard to individual participation, all participant children of SSB revealed that they do not face any problem to forward their views or interests in the school. However, they mentioned that the school administration does not always take action on their concerns. According to CP 23: "Anyone can go to the office and forward his ideas or needs. They [school administrators/teachers] always say 'ok' or 'we will see it'. But most of the time, they do nothing." Apart from this the Deputy Director stated that:

> *"The children do not hold back their needs and feelings to come and express. Let alone for themselves, they even question why other blind children are not being accepted in the school because of the quota while the right to education is equal for all." (Own translation)*

Some of their executive representatives participate in the periodical meetings of teachers and forward the students' views and interests in the teaching-learning process. All the participant children of the school also confirmed that they can directly communicate to the school administrators, teachers or other staff to express their complaints or views. From the interviews, it seems that they are more or less satisfied with the responses and consideration of their views by their school. However, particularly CP 11 and 13 said that the reactions to their views or complaints are not always timely.

Generally, the student's individual and representative participation in school is encouraging. However, the children's right to participate is not only about making their voice heard, but also it entails an obligation on the schools to take their views and concerns in to account "in accordance with the age and maturity of the child when they make decisions" (CRC art. 12).

On the other hand, the participation of students of the school in government decisions which take place outside the schools is very limited. Students and the RSSs themselves hardly participate in curriculum and policy design. The Committee on the Rights of PWDs, referring to CRPD art.4 (3), has stated that "States parties must consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations (OPDs), in all aspects of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education policies." (Committee on the Rights of PWDs 2016: 3). Such failures of the government are tangibly affecting the children's interests and disregarding their special requirements. For instance, some textbooks and assessment methods are not friendly to the children's impairment. Consequently, the children sometimes are not able to learn/understand all the contents of the text books or examinations. The use of such unsuited education materials substantially denies equal opportunity for the CWDs in education, as explained by SSB' Deputy Director:

> *"In the newly designed text books for grade 1- 4, there are some sections which ask students to see a picture and explain it. Even these kinds of questions were included in the regional examination for grade 8 students. Thus, our [blind] students had to skip 5 or 6 questions without answering." (Own translation)*

4.3.3 Best Interests of the Child

The principle of best interests aims at ensuring both the full and effective enjoyment of all the rights recognized in the CRC and the holistic development of the child (Committee on the Rights of the Child 2013: 3). This principle implies that whenever decisions are taken that affect children's lives the impact of that decision must be assessed (Save the Children 2005: 32). The FDRE Constitution also include this principle in Article 36(2) as follows

> *"In all actions concerning children undertaken by public and private welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the primary consideration shall be the best interests of the child."*

As mentioned in the above sections, participant children of RSS are generally happy with their placement in the RSSs. The RSSs' resource level, the concentration of expertise, and the friendly school environment enable RSSs to deliver a better quality of education for the CWDs. Moreover, the children who are benefiting from the schools' provision of education are those who would not otherwise have a chance to education. These grounds may lead to the conclusion that the schools are serving the best interests of the CWDs.

However, the RSSs' provision of education in a segregated setting which excludes the children from their non-disabled peers and the society is inconsistent with the children's right to inclusive education as recognized in the CRPD art. 24. Besides, their segregation alienates the children from their families and hampers them in getting the love and care of their parents. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, the placement of the children in the RSSs far from their family and community is not necessarily their first choice but rather may be driven by the absence of other good options. Thus, as the children's best interests can be served only with a holistic realization of all other rights, despite the quality of education and care provided, the way in which the children are being educated is the RSSs is not fully in the best interests of the CWDs.

4.3.4 Survival and Development

Children have an inherent right to life and the State shall ensure the survival and development of the child to the maximum extent possible (CRC art. 6, ACRWC art. 5). The principle of Survival and Development directs to recognizing the holistic nature of CWDs' development which

includes a wide range of aspects of physical, health, mental, cultural, spiritual, moral and social development.

As the researcher learned, there are no factors in the RSSs which put a threat to the life of the CWDs. All interviewed children, except one from SSB, have confirmed that they do not face physical violence in their schools by teachers or other staff. One (fully anonymized) CP from SSB has mentioned that "some teachers beat us when we failed to do our home work". The interviewed teachers from school depicted that the school has serious rules for their staffs which prohibit the physical punishment of CWDs. Every new employee get informed before they start their job. We all are very serious about this."

The schools' provision of food, health care, education and other services is very essential for the physical and mental development of the children. However, students of the school have complaints about the quality of these services. They indicated that the food they are being provided lacks variety and quality. In addition, as the researcher came to know in SSB and confirmed by the school's Deputy Director, the health clinic is not well equipped and doesn't have a laboratory. Children also expressed their discontent about the clinic's services saying things like "Sometimes, they prescribe same medicine for a child who has a headache and another one with stomachache" (fully anonymized CP) or "They do not refer us quickly to the town health center." (fully anonymized CP).

The researcher has also realized that the dormitories of SSB are very crowded and not clean. Some of the common toilets and bathrooms attached to the dormitories were out of service. Consequently, up to 18 children were forced to use only two bathrooms and toilets. Such poor quality services have negative impacts on the physical and mental development of the children and threaten their survival and development.

The practice of SSB to integrate the students in the community after grade seven by letting them live outside the school is a good way to shorten their segregation period. However, the residential students are afraid of the outside life as the stipend given by the school is very low and incomparable with the living cost of the town of Sebeta. The school gives a monthly stipend of 400 Ethiopian Birr and a onetime 200 ETB installment fee which is hard to sustain life on the ever increasing inflation. Consequently, up to four or five children are obliged to live in a single

room and share the costs. According to one of them: “we live four in a single room and we pay 600 ETB for the room. The money is not enough to live even if we get support from our families. I would say we are living because of the will of God” (CP 8).

In general, survival and development of the CWDs is determined by respecting and fulfilling their holistic rights including the above three fundamental principles: non-discrimination, participation and best interests of the child. Any failure to fulfill or infringe of any of the rights of those children has the potential to harm their survival and development.

The schools’ capacity to provide a better quality of education and residential accommodations for the CWDs is mainly limited by a decreasing financial capacity. Interviewed participants of the schools mentioned that the schools’ financial capacity is continuously decreasing due to lack of support from the government and lack of interest of NGOs to support RSSs, Deputy Director of SSB, stated that

> *“The school’s services are decreasing time to time because of insufficient budget allocated from the government and the absence of aid from NGOs. The school was able to distribute most kinds of Blind aid materials for the pupils. But now, we are able to provide these materials only for the pupils who are leaving the school’s residence at grade seven”. They also claimed that there is a tendency of, from the government side, discouraging RSSs and even sometimes a desire to close them.*

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

International and regional human rights instruments, particularly the CRC, CRPD, and ACRWC recognize the right to education of CWDs on the basis of equal opportunity. Ethiopia has ratified the main relevant international and regional human rights instruments, including these, which recognize the right to education of CWDs. The FDRE Constitution also recognizes citizens' equal rights to access education (art.41). Furthermore, Ethiopia has issued a number of policies and strategies which arguably require providing education for CWDs. Particularly, the 2012 Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy and the National Plan of Action of Persons with Disabilities (2012- 2021) are very important in setting goals and provide detail implementation guidelines for the inclusion of CWDs in education. By ratifying these international laws and by issuing these important policies, Ethiopia took encouraging legal and policy steps for the inclusion of CWDs in education. These policy and legal frameworks commonly seek to assure that CWDs are included in education.

However, the practice of provision of education for CWDs remains poor. Only a tiny portion of CWDs in Ethiopia are getting education. Moreover, many in-school CWDs are provided with poor quality education in regular schools or segregated in special day and residential schools.

This study has explored the experiences of CWVIs of SSB and analyzed the institutional commitment of the school in the provision of literacy education to CWDs. Accordingly, the study discovered that all participant children have been excluded from/within education in their local areas before they came to the RSSs. The children did not have a chance to enrol in schools or they were forced to drop out because of the poor quality of education they were provided with and/or the unwelcoming school environment. The children's prior exclusion experience implies that the primary duty-bearer, the government of Ethiopia has failed to fulfil its obligation to provide available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable education for CWVIs.

The research also showed that the children's prior experience of exclusion is the single biggest push factor for their placement in RSSs far away from their parents and community. In this regard, it has been analyzed that the RSSs are playing a vital role in reducing the exclusion of

CWVIs from and within education by providing education for children who would not have another option to get properly educated. However, due to the very nature of the RSSs, the practice of providing education in the RSSs alienates the children from their peers, family, and community. This tends to reinforce their exclusion from the society at large and marginalize them in the social, economic, and political life of the society.

The RSSs have their own advantages which enable them to provide a better quality education for the children. They also have some strengths in providing food, housing, health care and other basic needs for the children. However, the children's experiences showed that some educational and residential services of the schools lack quality due to limited financial capacity of the schools and lack of support from the government. These limitations, along with the schools' segregation setting, hamper the schools in providing a fully rights-based education and residential accommodation services.

In conclusion, given the schools' tendency to reinforce the children's social exclusion and inability to provide a holistic rights-based service, ultimately the schools are not the best places for the CWDs to live and get educated. Thus, this practice needs to be changed and the children have to be provided the best alternative to get education in accordance with their impairment and special requirements. This primarily needs the commitment of the main duty-bearer, the government of Ethiopia to take fundamental measures and the commitment of secondary and tertiary duty bearers to cooperate with.

Recommendations

Some of the issues that need to be underlined in this process are recommended here.

First of all, the provision of literacy education to the blind in RSSs in Ethiopia has hardly been studied and requires a systematic assessment. A child rights situational analysis of the schools and their services is crucial. The CWDs have to participate and must be heard in order to design and implement solutions which do justice to them.

The government should invest increasing accessible inclusive schools which can accommodate and fulfill the special requirements of CWDs. At the same time it should be recognized that "full inclusion of CWDs is difficult to ensure" (WHO 2010: 210) and in the interim special schools or

units in regular schools may still be the “most suitable education for the relatively small number of CWDs” (Salamanca statement 1994: 12)

Finally, and most importantly, it should be underlined that supporting and capacitating the RSSs until the children are provided a better alternative is very important. An immediate closure of the RSSs might totally eliminate their chance to get education. At the same time, as far as the RSSs are providing education and residential services, it is fundamental to assure that their services are of adequate quality.

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Appendixes

Focus Group Discussion Guidelines for Students of SSB

Date: _____ Name: _____ Sex: _____

School: _____ School grade: _____

1. Where did you come from? When did you start schooling in ___ RSS?
2. How did you come? Who brought you to this school?
3. Why you decided to learn here in ___ RSS?
4. Have you ever enrolled in any other school before you came to your current RSS? If yes what were your experiences?
5. How do you see the education provided by your RSS in view of letting you cope with poverty, diseases and understanding the World? How do you rate the quality of education I.E does It include Computer Technology usage?
6. How do you compare your previous educational experiences (If any) and your current education in RSS?
7. What kinds of residential services are being provided to you in the school? How do you see them and rate the quality of these services?
8. Do you participate in decisions of your RSS that concern you? Do you express your interests freely for the school administrators, teachers or other staffs? If yes, how?
9. How the RSS community (school administrators, teachers, careers, and other students) treat you? Have you ever experienced or observed any incident of physical violence/punishment or sexual violence in the school?
10. How do you feel being in this RSS in general?
11. What are the problems and challenges that you face in your RSS with regard to education and other services?
12. What solutions do you suggest for these problems and challenges?

Do you have any other comments you want to share?

Interview guidelines with school teachers/administrators of SSB

Date: _____ Name: _____

School: _____ Position: _____

1. How many students are being educated in the RSS?
2. How the school admits new students? What are the criteria?
3. What kinds of services does the school provide to the CWDs?
4. How do you assess the quality of these services of the school?
5. What are the strengths/advantages of RSSs?
6. Do you participate the CWDs in the school's decision that concern them? If yes, how?
7. Is the school environment safe and comfortable for the CWDs?
8. What role do you think RSSs play in the provision of Literacy Education for CWDs?
9. How the Government and other stakeholders support the school?
10. What challenges/limitations does the school face to provide quality services? How the schools come across these challenges? Do you have any other comments you want to share?