Chapter **6**

Cross-Cutting Recommendations and Framework for Action

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A significant risk during the COVID-19 pandemic is that children with disabilities will not return to school for various reasons, including parents' concern for their health. The learning gap has widened since the pandemic started, and persons with disabilities are often only afterthoughts at the end of programme planning. The challenges present opportunities to not just open schools again under the same system but to 'open better', with mechanisms to foster fully inclusive education. Ministry, school, and community practices can be evaluated.

Numerous challenges face students, administrators, and policymakers. Students are being asked to learn independently, which requires a baseline of skills development, such as impulse control, ability to stay focused on a task, and task initiation, amongst others, for independent learning, but the reality is many students with disabilities need feedback from teachers. Therefore, students may experience loss of learning as they are not in school. Teachers face many challenges as they are being asked to develop new protocols to assess students and use modalities that they might not have used before or might not have the competence to switch to quickly and effectively. As teachers work from home, they might not have the support and resources needed to develop new procedures to adapt to teaching.

When students return to school in person, administrators and teachers must not add anxiety related to student education assessments. The end-of-cycle assessments play a critical role in a student's future education pathway. School closures and assessments can increase anxiety in students with disabilities, causing other stresses and strains.

Cross-Cutting Recommendations

UNICEF has listed recommendations countries can adopt, based on the principles of inclusion.[2] Table 6.1 summarises the recommendations.

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[2] See *Education for UNICEF Every Ability 2020* (UNICEF, 2020), a comprehensive source of guidelines on how to use the principles of inclusion to assess current practices. The publication provides theories of change to address specific areas of need. Readers can use a comprehensive matrix to self-evaluate inclusive education systems through UNICEF (2015: 10–11).

Table 6.1. Cross-Cutting Recommendations Before and After Schools Reopen

	Before Schools Reopen	After Schools Reopen
Whole-system approach	Ensure information is in accessible formats, provide outreach to families, and ensure return of support services.	Strengthen parent–school committees or forums to increase outreach to households and increase efficiency of referral systems to include students with disabilities.
Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment	School closures may have influenced the mental health of students; set realistic goals for their return. Focus on remedial learning in a competency-based model through formative assessment as students regain knowledge and skills.	Strengthen the role of families in their child's return to school, to support learning at home and help students regain knowledge and skills. Continue to adapt curricular expectations to match the current needs of students.
Support teachers	Ensure that teachers are in a positive mental health space to return to work. Provide training to ensure that their skills and training support the inclusive return of students with disabilities.	Promote guidelines and best practices to support students with disabilities whilst maintaining social distancing and personal protection, particularly for students who need physical support in using washroom facilities.
Learning-friendly environment	Create child protection and safeguarding policies to ensure clear reporting and referral mechanisms as children with disabilities return to interacting with adults after a long break.	Peer relationships may have changed during school closures; ensure that a friendly environment for students includes time to strengthen friendships, and address signs of bullying.
Effective transitions	Review guidelines and support mechanisms to help students with disabilities transition between grades and school settings.	Consider reducing number and intensity of high-stakes assessments that help students transition to next grades.
Partnerships	Continue to strengthen partnerships with parents, organisations of persons with	Continue to recognise the role various stakeholders play in the education of students with

	disabilities, self-help groups, and parent committees. Ensure that committees address disability inclusion.	disabilities and continue to strengthen these bonds.
Data and monitoring	Create or strengthen data collection methods to ensure that data are comprehensive, robust, and can be disaggregated into disability metrics. Consider using holistic survey questions about functionality to understand current needs and inform planning.	During data collection, expand the types of questions to better understand presentation of disability in the school, to provide targeted education programming. Monitor students throughout the school year, not just at the return to school.

Source: Author's summary, UNICEF (2020).

Framework for Action

Table 6.2 recommends ways that countries can support inclusive education for students with disabilities. The recommendations can be adopted in phases, focusing on local and provincial development before moving to national implementation. The recommendations in Table 6.2 are made in alignment with the principles of the ACRF, which are focused, balanced, impactful, pragmatic, inclusive, and measurable (ASEAN, 2020).

Implementation of the framework for action should be consistent with internationally recognised principles and commitments, such as what inclusion means according to the UNCRPD, and ASEAN's commitments to achieving the SDGs. The framework is the result of thorough desk research, expert interviews, and reports on inclusive education.

Table 6.2. Framework for Action

Stakeholder	Recommendations
Schools	**Role of schools.** Schools are integral to the community. They are uniquely positioned to contribute to inclusive education as they can create as safe and welcoming learning environment and provide academic and social learning for current and future needs.
	1. As students return to school, reduce academic expectations of what students should have been learning whilst out of school. Schools should keep high-stakes assessments low. 2. Whilst learning should be monitored throughout the pandemic, measuring learning outcomes at a systemic level through nation-wide assessments is not necessary at this time. Instead,

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<tr><td></td><td>encourage monitoring and evaluation of learning through surveys at home, use of online platforms, or phone calls. In the classroom, a shift to formative assessments can provide meaningful learning insights in low-anxiety situations.

3. Ensure that any temporary assessment procedures have a high level of quality and include students with disabilities. If students are not accustomed to online assessments, and all assessments are online, students who are not familiar with or able to use this format will be left out. Assessment systems created recently might not have been tested for quality. Therefore, formative assessments through various information-gathering methods might be more inclusive.

4. Reschedule data collection for international, regional, and national large-scale assessment until students have regained routine and learning patterns at school.

5. Provide in-service professional development opportunities for all school stakeholders such as teachers and special education assistants, amongst others, to form communities of practice.

6. Move from teacher-centred to student-centred learning to engage students. Viewing learning from students' perspective can help in problem solving and make learning accessible and meaningful. Differentiated learning allows a classroom teacher to teach different groups of students in the classroom in ways that match students' capabilities and learning styles, ensuring that all students learn. Teachers must spend time to understand how their students learn best and their strengths and weaknesses.

7. Involve parents of children with disabilities in their learning plans to increase parent participation and home programming.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>**Good practices in the ASEAN region.** In Singapore, more than 80% of students with special education needs learn in inclusive classroom settings in mainstream schools, which suggests a whole-school-system approach and attitude towards students with disabilities, including resource supports.</td></tr>
<tr><td>**Stakeholder**</td><td>**Recommendations**</td></tr>
<tr><td>**Ministry**</td><td>**Role of ministries.** Leadership that understands the culture of persons with disability and includes them in society can set a positive and holistic tone and support cross-ministerial integration of inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have different needs and speeds of learning, and their needs must be honoured. Ministries are uniquely positioned to help as they set the guidelines and polices for public and private schools and religious and</td></tr>
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	secular schools, directly affecting the development of the seven domains of inclusive education.
	1. Eliminate laws or policies that exclude children with disabilities from school. Whilst several countries have adopted a 'zero reject policy', a loose definition of disability and inclusion can lead to students' exclusion. A consistent and well-defined policy to include students will ensure no student is excluded based on disability. 2. Ensure that one ministry is responsible for students of the same age and level of education, including students with and without disabilities. For example, the ministry responsible for early education of children without disabilities should be responsible for early education of children with disabilities; the ministry responsible for primary education of children without disabilities should be responsible for educating children with disabilities. Consistency will help promote inclusion and policymaking that covers all students. 3. In a phased approach, reallocate funds that support segregated programming to integrated systems that foster inclusion. 4. Review education policies and approaches to make them inclusive at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels. 5. Provide pre-service and in-service training to all members of the school system, taking a whole-system approach, to strengthen the understanding of neurodiversity in all its forms. Doing so is crucial to persuade stakeholders that students with disabilities have the right to be in mainstream classes as per UNCRPD commitments. 6. Strengthen national and local programmes to improve the knowledge and skills of families, caregivers, and service providers regarding typical and atypical child development. 7. Encourage early detection of and intervention for children with developmental delays and disabilities. 8. Create inter-ministerial dialogue and policy coherence to offer coordinated services to students with disabilities and their families in their own communities. 9. Conduct regular accessibility audits of school facilities to ensure that all students have access to water and sanitation and equitable access to education materials and teaching methods. 10. Develop and implement pre-service and in-service teaching programmes on inclusive education for education professionals and staff and encourage networking and knowledge management.

Stakeholder	Recommendations
	11. Make education data disability-inclusive, including in education management information systems. Pay particular attention to out-of-school children with disabilities who are missed in school data. 12. Promote disability-inclusive and disability-specific sports and cultural programmes to integrate children with disabilities into community-based activities that promote their health and well-being. Enhance community awareness-raising activities to support disability-inclusive sports and cultural programmes.
	Good practice in the ASEAN region. Indonesia's 2019–2024 Master Plan on National Development of Inclusive Education aims to persuade parents, teachers, and other school members to be more open to inclusive learning. To this end, more pre-service teacher education trainings have adopted an improved curriculum that supports diverse learners in the classroom.
Stakeholder	**Recommendations**
ASEAN Member States	**Role of ASEAN Member States.** ASEAN members are able to implement recommendations to make primary and secondary schools more inclusive for students with disabilities. The ASEAN Secretariat can form a coalition to encourage collaboration in bringing a whole-of-community approach to post–COVID-19 recovery, promoting peer learning between countries, and sharing good practices.
	1. Revisit international commitments to inclusive education and incorporate them into regional frameworks that promote regional mechanisms and guidelines. 2. Enhance monitoring and evaluation of the ACRF's goals for inclusive education and ensure mechanisms to implement recommendations, particularly Broad Strategy 2, which includes students with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. 3. Encourage lead and other sector bodies to account for their actions. 4. Ensure implementation of inclusive education goals across all ASEAN Community Pillars by discussing updates at the Coordinating Conference for the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the Committee of the Whole for the ASEAN Economic Community, and the Coordinating Conference on the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. 5. Create disability awareness programming and campaigns to reduce disability taboos. This cultural shift will help improve reporting and data collection and shift national and sub-

	national policies away from segregated to inclusive models of education.
	Good practice in the ASEAN region. The ACRF Implementation Plan outlines steps ASEAN Member States can take for strong recovery and provides guidance across policy measures and responses, financing and resource mobilisation, institutions and governance mechanisms, stakeholder engagement and partnerships, and effective monitoring.

Source: Author, based on expert interviews and United Nations (1995), UNESCAP (2016), UNICEF (2020), ASEAN (2020).