Success Story
Georgia 2016

Students Participation in Implementation of Inclusive Education

The Georgian Coalition for Education for All (GCEFA) Achieves Great Success in the field of Inclusive Education in Partnership with at least 300 School Students

The coalition launched a program in order to increase the inclusiveness prospects of students with disabilities and with special needs, and considered that the involvement of students is crucial for several reasons, the most outstanding being the awareness that can be generated concerning this vital issue among all students, and the change that can be achieved based on this awareness.

“Researches conducted by the students in their respective schools indicated very interesting results. Along with students we discovered a range of issues. As it appears, unlike from lessons, persons with disabilities and students with special needs are less engaged in other non-formal activities, such as in games during the break, which is integral part of school and is necessary for social relations. These students do not know what is happening after the bell rings when the lesson is over. It was found that students with disabilities and special needs stay in classrooms and do not come out for different reasons. They interact with other students less”. Giorgi Demetreshvili, trainer, inclusive education expert from First Step Georgia

The plan was designed in order to provide the students with key information, about inclusive education, the role they can play, and the impact they can have. Moreover, it was important to give them the necessary knowledge and skills in order to be able to implement developmental activities, in this case action research.

Students received a two days training revolving about the following issues: What is inclusive education; What does student's engagement mean; What is practical research; How to change school's non-formal environment through the application of action research methods. The students where then requested to carry out their research focusing on implementation of inclusive education in non-formal environment of their respective schools, to portray the
situation during break periods between lessons, the recreational areas of the school, after lessons, outside school activities, parents’ perception of students with disabilities, etc.

Participation of 89 students aged 14-16 years (9th., 10th. and 11th grades) from 30 schools in 4 different regions of Georgia was attained, and at the end, students of 12 schools completed all phases of the designed plan, including attending the training, elaboration of action plan for school based activities, implementation of the activities (surveys, presentations, trainings, etc...) and elaboration of the reports according to a specific format received through an online support system, prior to the training. Although students from another 12 schools partially completed the whole program, and 6 did not produce tangible results, they too benefited and served the idea of the project at different levels. Overall, it can be said that their perception of inclusive education and their attitude towards it has changed positively.

“Our survey indicated, that at least 50% of students in our school don’t know what inclusive education is, they didn’t see their role in this process. Now we are planning to develop a project, which aims to engage students with disabilities and special needs in non-formal activities. We have several such students in our school. Because of lack of knowledge many have difficulties to communicate with them. I think, such projects will help in breaking down these barriers”.

Marita Basiladze, 10th grade student from #12 public school, Kutaisi
All of the participating students were requested to involve a minimum of 10 students from their schools in the implementation of the actions, and to fulfill this, they formed groups in their respective schools, and planned follow-up activities. To ensure proper support for the groups, regular communication was maintained with them by the trainer and the coalition.

During the implementation of the project, the coalition in order to maintain and increase the motivation of the students, contacted civic education teachers and school based civic clubs and asked them to provide the students with all necessary support in the implementation of their activities, established Facebook groups for each region in which students were participating in order to facilitate sharing of experience, reported activities, questionnaires, etc. Moreover, the coalition ensured media coverage of school based activities and informed students, that successful cases will be covered by national and regional media.
“As for practical research, we were studying what kind of information our peers had on the subject, do they know what is inclusive education, do they know in person people with disabilities, how they interact with them, etc. Our studies revealed, that not too many of them knew about it although most of them expressed desire to find out more about it. Our survey indicated that 80% of respondents had very low knowledge on the topic. We tried to change this and conducted the training, where our friends’ participation was very high, all of them seemed very interested. Theoretical knowledge I gained during 2 days trainings came very handy in practice. Practical research made me realize how much I grew up. I'm sure other participants have the same feeling. In my opinion these type of programs should be offered more often, so the students have more extensive information”. Ana Gagua, 11th grade student from #42 public school, Tbilisi

In addition to that, the trainer and the coalition representative provided on line support when students needed it, and the executive director of the coalition member DPO organization “Accessible Environment for Everyone”, conducted follow up visits to the schools, participated in the activities and motivated the students.

“What I personally liked is that the training was delivered to our age group. When people already are formed with wrong perceptions, it is difficult to change their mindset. Correct information received at our age helps to the formation of a right vision and attitude”. Mariam Libradze, 9th grade from Niko Nikoladze School Lyceum, Kutaisi

It is worthwhile noting that according to the final findings which are based on questionnaires filled by the students, in schools where extra curriculum activities are common, and school based civic clubs are active, students performed much better and were far more open to carry actions by their own, compared to peers from schools where such practices are uncommon.