

Summary: Education NGO Forum – 17 January 2005

The first Education NGO Forum for year 2005 was held at LINS, Oslo University College and the theme (in Norwegian) was: **Opplæring av funksjonshemmede: Rettigheter, inkludering og kvalitet i et internasjonalt perspektiv**. There were two presenters: Professor Monica Dalen and Associate Professor Siri Wormnæs, both from the Institutt for Spesialpedagogikk, University of Oslo. Professor Monica Dalen introduced the topic by outlining the main perspectives informing the discussion about the issues of Rights to Education, Inclusive Education and Quality of Education for persons with disabilities – ‘*Overordnede perspektiver om rettigheter, inkludering og kvalitet*’. She also outlined the interplay between the three aspects which was emphasised as necessary in understanding the contemporary developments in the field of Special Needs Education. It was observed that right to education for persons with disabilities is enshrined in various UN’s declarations and conventions, starting from the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Right and also is proclaimed in the EFA and Millenium Goals. Whereas, when it comes to the concept of inclusive education, the World Conference on Special Needs Education, at Salamanca Spain in 1994 was referred to have provided a paradigm shift in the education for persons with disabilities. Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action emphasises inclusive education.

Associate Professor Siri Wormnæs presentation focused mainly on the challenges in the international or global efforts to promote and strengthen the opportunities of persons with disabilities to a quality education. Here, it is clear that the progress, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, is not satisfactory at all, despite of the fact that data used in highlighting this trend are often insufficient and also unreliable. Thus, limitation on hard facts was pointed out to be the main challenge in this field. This fact is also acknowledged by UNESCO, in particular, in their EFA Monitoring efforts and also by the World Bank. Therefore, more research in the area is called for. In addition to data, classification of functional disability was also mentioned as another challenge, especially in distinguishing between disability - disadvantages– difficulties. In general, competence in special needs education was emphasised as crucial in improving the quality of education for persons with disabilities. Thus, the two presenters called for more investment in teachers since teachers’ competence is a decisive factor for quality education. The motto therefore is - ‘invest in teachers’.