

22 February 2013

## **“Inclusive education policy and implementation plan”**

### **Remarks by Rigo Belpaire Head of cooperation programmes with Botswana Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Botswana and SADC**

It is an honour to have been invited here today for the launch of the Inclusive Education Policy by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development. The European Union has been involved, in drafting this policy, as we share the Ministry's ambition to secure - the right to education - for every child - in Botswana. Education is indeed a right in itself - and a value in itself -, every child has the right to be given the chance to develop and realize his or her full potential, no matter the background or gender or mental or physical capacities.

I would like to congratulate the (assistant)-Minister for the developed 'Inclusive Education Policy' which is a very comprehensible and a concrete policy document – in which, the overall goal and the underlying policy goals, are clearly stated, and which also lays out in detail the commitments and actions that will be taken to achieve these goals.

It is important to underline - that the policy is all-encompassing - as it not only aims at including children - who are currently not accessing the education system, but it also aims to improve the education system itself - so that children that are in school, but not benefitting from the education given in the best way possible, are better catered for. It focuses also on re-entrance of children and adults to the education system, and looks at specific needs of ethnic minorities. Regarding the latter, I am very pleased to see that the challenges in providing education for ethnic minorities are acknowledged in the policy. It is also proposed to increase the number of teachers who speak the ethnic minority languages. The language barrier is a very high barrier to overcome, as having no idea what the teacher is telling, is not conducive to improved learning outcomes. So I hope that this measure will be put in place as of day one.

The inclusive education policy is all-encompassing also in the sense that it targets not only students and children, in and out of school, but also teachers and parents, and people involved with children in all facets of society, such as social workers, NGO's, health and education officials at all levels.

In summary, this means that - each one of us has a role to play. To reach the overall goal of an inclusive education system, it needs amongst others involved parents, dedicated teachers and fellow class mates encouraging their peers. 'It takes a whole village to raise a child', is a saying, and to make inclusive education a reality on the ground, we need the whole village involved, and more.

As we all know, Botswana has to be recommended for the tremendous progress made over the years in increasing access to its education system – but – we can not be complacent as the progress made it is not enough - still a substantial part of children and adults in Botswana do not obtain full basic education. In 2011, the number of drop-outs at primary level was over 3200, meaning that every school day more than 10 children in Botswana drop out of school for different reasons.

Every child that drops out of school, without having received the support and backing they were in need of, is a system that fails them. We have failed them. Not seeing and detecting their circumstance and not providing for a solution that would have enabled them to continue, should be considered a failure. Therefore, I would like to underline again - the clear need for - and importance of - the inclusive education policy and its implementation plan.

We are aware that the Ministry of Education and Skills Development has introduced strategies already to reduce school dropouts, and these include: Standard One Induction, Mobile Schools and Hostel Management. These strategies are very welcome and will need to be closely monitored in order to measure their impact in reducing school dropouts.

The policy is launched today, which means that real work will now begin; putting the policy document into practice. For the implementation plan, I have learnt that this is still work in progress, that it will be developed further with input from different stakeholders. Some work on it has been done this morning in your consultative meeting with stakeholders. I will be very eager to see the result of this morning's work.

I also hope that the guidelines for implementation, expressed in the policy document, will be fully integrated into the implementation plan. It clearly outlines that there is a need to define and assign very precisely the responsibility for the actions to an identified individual, with a specific timeframe set for the achievement of the designated activity. Further the Policy sets out that an annual report will be produced, again something that I am very pleased about. We need to follow up and monitor closely the implementation of the policy and provide feedback. The annual report will be interesting reading for everyone involved in the sector, including the European Union. We are also willing to offer support if needed to develop and strengthen this important aspect of the implementation of the policy.

Today the policy is launched; it is now time to move to action to make the policy objectives a living reality for every child in Botswana. I can assure you that the European Union, as a longstanding partner in Education, will continue to support you where it can in this important and challenging endeavour, as every child has a right to education.

Please check also the following web sites:

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For more information please contact:

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Delegation of the European Union  
to Botswana and SADC  
Phone: +267 391 44 55  
[bester.gabotlale@eeas.europa.eu](mailto:bester.gabotlale@eeas.europa.eu)

