Children in Difficult Circumstances (Education and the Children Who are Excluded)

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Author's Outline:

The CRC forces a definition of education which is of good quality and inclusive, allowing all children to learn in ways which are appropriate and easily accessible. Exceptions cannot be argued on the basis of "exceptional circumstances". The paper will attempt to shift the perspective away from looking at the problems children have which keep them out of school, towards considering the policies and practices of education systems, and society as a whole, which exclude them. It will consider the failure of the Jomtien "expanded vision" of education to take hold, to look at how education is part a broadly-based and intricate web of human rights violations against children, the interactive effects of which tend to pit education against other rights-related sectors rather than collaborating to reinforce children's rights.

The paper will take the perspective that exclusion is a systematic and progressive process, happening at every level of an education system and injuring children not just immediately, but in the long-term. It will not attempt to produce an exhaustive list of excluded categories of children, but rather to define the major features of some of these and any patterns in the types and impacts of interventions being made. It will consider the distinction between those children whom the system defines as "excludable" and those who define themselves as such by opting out, in terms of different strategies for drawing them into education.

In this way, the paper will try to develop a picture of the causes and settings of exclusion, and a systemic approach to moving the agenda forward from Jomtien through to the Convention on the Rights of the Child -- recognizing that the "final 20%" implies a difference in kind, not simply degree. Finally, the paper will consider the challenges for the next decade, stressing the importance of the "how" of mobilizing action to make education more inclusive of all children and particularly the most vulnerable: of stimulating demand and improving supply, of overcoming resistance to change, and of facilitating organizational and social learning.