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EDITORIAL

Leaving no child with disability behind

In Latin America and the Caribbean there are over eight million children with disabilities under the age of 14, representing one of the most excluded, discriminated and vulnerable population groups in the region. Among them, girls with disabilities and indigenous children with disabilities are subject to multiple forms of discrimination. It is estimated that seven out of ten children with disabilities do not attend school, and that at least 50 000 children and adolescents with disabilities are deprived of their family environment and live in residential institutions, representing 20% of all children living in residential care in our region.

Protecting the rights of children with disabilities has been an integral part of UNICEF's work since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in 1989, and this has gained further momentum with the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), in 2006. According to the CRPD, disability is an "evolving concept", and persons with disabilities include "those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others".

The main goals of the UNICEF disability agenda, which is guided by a human rights-based approach and the inclusive development framework, are to mainstream disability across all its policies and programmes –both in development and humanitarian action– and to develop leadership on the rights of children with disabilities, *inter alia* by building capacity among staff and partners. UNICEF is currently drafting its new Strategic Plan 2018–2021, which will be perfectly aligned with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its commitment to "leave no one behind", prioritizing integrated,

cross sectoral support to children with disabilities to overcome the structural barriers that prevent them from realizing their full potential and their rights.

Achieving the inclusion and full participation of children and adults with disabilities in the society requires a twin track approach comprising both disability-inclusive and disability-specific initiatives. In other words, while public policies and development programs must include a disability perspective and be fully accessible to persons with disabilities, disability-specific needs and situations must also be addressed through targeted interventions in order to enable access to mainstream development processes.

Although article 31 of the CRPD requires States Parties to collect adequate information to enable them to formulate and implement policies for persons with disabilities, the lack of reliable data in this sector represents an obstacle in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of successful programs and policies. At the global level, the quality and quantity of available data vary greatly due to the use of different definitions of disability and/or different methods of data collection, among other causes. Disability in childhood is even more difficult to assess since the population is heterogeneous and includes all children, from infants to adolescents; the development milestones can be reached at different times without necessarily implying a delay in development; and because the measurement of child disability is typically conducted through the parent or adult filter, and parental knowledge and expectations about the child's performance may vary and influence the reported information.

In order to address these difficulties, UNICEF has been collaborating with the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG) on establishing international

standards for the measurement of child disability. As a result, a “Module on Child Functioning and Disability” has been designed and validated, and it is already being used in censuses and household surveys across the whole world. The module is based on the definition of disability contained in the CRPD, as well as on the areas of functioning established in the World Health Organization’s International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). Mexico has been a pioneer in implementing the UNICEF/WG Module in Latin America, incorporating it into the National Survey on Children and Women 2015 (ENIM). The module has also been successfully implemented in disability-specific household surveys in Guatemala and El Salvador, and it will continue to be used in the coming years in other countries as part of the sixth round of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). It is expected that a wide use of the “Module on Child Functioning and Disability”

at the country level will allow national governments to design and implement evidence-based public policies so that children with disabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean can fully enjoy their rights on an equal basis with children without disabilities.

And finally, for success in the disability inclusive track, children and adults with disabilities must not be seen just as recipients of public policies, but rather as development actors and equal members of society. Hence, their participation must be guaranteed at every stage of the public policy cycle –from its definition to its evaluation– in accordance with the motto of the international disability movement: “Nothing about us, without us”.

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