



PRESS RELEASE

See the child – before the disability

Inclusion of children with disabilities benefits society as a whole

Maseru, 30 May 2013 – Children with disabilities and their communities would both benefit if society focused on what those children can achieve, rather than what they cannot do, according to UNICEF's annual *State of the World's Children's* report.

Concentrating on the abilities and potential of children with disabilities would create benefits for society as a whole, says the report released today.

"When you see the disability before the child, it is not only wrong for the child, but it deprives society of all that child has to offer," said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake. "Their loss is society's loss; their gain is society's gain."

The report lays out how societies can include children with disabilities because when they play a full part in society, everyone benefits. For instance, inclusive education broadens the horizons of all children even as it presents opportunities for children with disabilities to fulfil their ambitions.

More efforts to support integration of children with disabilities would help tackle the discrimination that pushes them further into the margins of society.

In Lesotho, children with disability are disadvantaged at an early age, being denied access to basic services such as healthcare, education and participation in community life.

Said Nkhasi Sefuthi, Human Rights and Advocacy Officer, LNFOD: "Despite the fact that Lesotho signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability in 2008, people with disability are amongst the poorest and most marginalized groups in Lesotho. Studies show that children with disability aged 5-10 are only half as likely to be enrolled in school as other children. Families of children with disability have lower than average incomes and a higher dependency ratio because there is no disability specific social protection. There are no services for early childhood interventions or identification of disability."

"The community based rehabilitation program offers an opportunity to close the gap between people with disability and the rest of society. We appeal to the Ministry of Social Development to speed up the implementation of the program which has lagged for eight years already. It is our responsibility as a nation to ensure that ALL children can access their basic human rights," concluded Mr Sefuthi.

For many children with disabilities, exclusion begins in the first days of life with their birth going unregistered. Lacking official recognition, they are cut off from the social services and legal protections that are crucial to their survival and prospects. Their marginalization only increases with discrimination.

"For children with disabilities to count, they must be counted – at birth, at school and in life," said Mr. Lake.

The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disabilities says that children with disabilities are the least likely to receive health care or go to school. They are among the most vulnerable to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, particularly if they are hidden or put in institutions – as many are because of social stigma or the economic cost of raising them.

The combined result is that children with disabilities are among the most marginalized people in the world. Children living in poverty are among the least likely to attend their local school or clinic but those who live in poverty and also have a disability are even less likely to do so.

Gender is a key factor, as girls with disabilities are less likely than boys to receive food and care.

"Discrimination on the grounds of disability is a form of oppression," the report says, noting that multiple deprivations lead to even greater exclusion for many children with disabilities.

There is little accurate data on the number of children with disabilities, what disabilities these children have and how disabilities affect their lives. As a result, few governments have a dependable guide for allocating resources to support and assist children with disabilities and their families.

About one third of the world's countries have so far failed to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The report urges all governments to keep their promises to guarantee the equal rights of all their citizens – including their most excluded and vulnerable children.

Progress is being made toward the inclusion of children with disabilities, albeit unevenly, and *The State of the World's Children 2013* sets out an agenda for further action.

The report urges governments to ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to support families so that they can meet the higher costs of caring for children with disabilities.

It calls for measures to fight discrimination among the general public, decision-makers and providers of such essential services as schooling and health care.

International agencies should make sure the advice and assistance they provide to countries is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They should promote a concerted global research agenda on disability to generate data and analysis that will guide planning and resource allocation, the report says.

It emphasizes the importance of involving children and adolescents with disabilities by consulting them on the design and evaluation of programmes and services for them.

And everyone benefits when inclusive approaches include accessibility and universal design of environments to be used by all to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation.

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To read *The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disabilities* and see additional multimedia material, please visit: http://weshare.unicef.org/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&PSID=2AM4GJKZZUU&IT=Thumb_Grid_M_Details_NoToolTip

For broadcasters, b-roll and other video material on children with disabilities is available at:

<http://weshare.unicef.org/SOWC2013Media>

About LNFOD:

Established in 1991, the Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) is an umbrella body of organizations dealing with disability in Lesotho. Its mission is to protect the rights of people with disabilities in Lesotho by providing support for disabled people's organizations and empowering their members with life-skills, financial and material resources and representing their needs to the government, development partners and wider society. Its membership consists of the Lesotho National Association of Physically Disabled Persons (LNAPD) Lesotho Society of Mentally Handicapped Persons (LSMHP), Lesotho National League of the Visually Impaired Persons (LNLVIP) and National Association of the Deaf in Lesotho (NADL).

For further information, please visit www.lnfod.org.ls

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in more than 190 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: <http://www.unicef.org>.

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