

Head Chair: Riona Sheik

Vice Chair: Manasvi Mehta

Legal: Nafeesa Karim

UNICEF: Protecting Children with Disabilities

Background

As of today, there are over 93 million children worldwide who suffer from disabilities; however, experts suggest that this number may be far higher. Children with disabilities face unique challenges as they often do not have the proper access to resources that they need to survive or grow intellectually such as an education, and financial as well as emotional stability.

In many third world countries, children with disabilities are often institutionalised, abandoned or neglected. Children who live in poverty-like conditions already have limited access to education or healthcare, but when a child is born with a disability, it is even more difficult to have those resources. The negative stigma surrounding disabilities is what results in discrimination, violence, abuse, exclusion from society, restriction, and negligence of basic human rights.

Gender is a crucial factor when considering children with disabilities. Young women who are disabled are often termed “doubly disabled” because not only are they confronted with the prejudices faced by women, but also the inequities faced by the disabled. Girls with disabilities are less likely to get an education, receive vocational training, or find employment than boys in similar conditions.

The fundamental aspect of this issue is attitude. Around the world, attitudes toward children with disabilities vary greatly. Children with disabilities are sometimes automatically

stigmatized and regarded to as inferior which often results in negligence by their peers and, in some cases, infanticide by their family. This negative perception often leads to isolation of children from the rest of society which results in them being severely overlooked and neglected. Little about this issue will change unless people begin to change their attitudes towards children with disabilities. The ignorance behind impairments and how they are caused leads to a dramatic underestimation of the capabilities of the impaired which only adds to the marginalization of the silenced disabled.

To combat this aspect of the issue, the key is inclusion. By shining light on the disabled community rather than keeping them in the dark, communities can bring sensitivity to the issue by reducing prejudice through interaction. This can best be done through social and political integration. Inclusive media through literature, popular culture, and mainstream media is also key to reducing this stigma. When children with disabilities are shown positively in the media, social perspectives are inevitable to change and reform.

Another key aspect of this issue is equity regarding access to assistive technology. In many parts of the world, children with disabilities do not readily have access to the technology that they need to survive or thrive in their daily lives. These products come in five categories including mobility, vision, hearing, communication, and cognition. Developing assistive technology that is universally designed and usable by all is a key component in resolving this issue.

UN Involvement

The United Nations uses two main conventions to protect the rights of children with disabilities. First, the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) ensures protection from all

forms of violence to all children. It is supported by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which proposes measures specific women and girls while recognizing that they are at a higher risk of facing discrimination due to their disabilities. By February 2013, 193 countries had ratified the CRC, and 127 countries as well as the European Union had ratified the CRPD.

The main focus of the UN is inclusion, meaning that children with disabilities should be recognized as full members within their communities. Inclusion in a society entails facilities, information, and communication being accessible to all so that children with disabilities can receive the support they need to properly practice their rights. Integration is also a crucial aspect of inclusion since it allows children to experience school and other activities with children without disabilities, leading them to grow up in an environment that does not neglect them for their condition.

Since 1995, UNICEF has openly supported countries in tracking progress in key areas of child and women's well-being. This is done through the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) which are nationally representative surveys conducted in over 100 low to middle income countries. After screening tactics such as MICS, UNICEF then leads into assessment where they assess how many children are at risk which eventually leads to action.

The first step UNICEF has taken to combat this problem is to sponsor the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol (CRPD) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which emphasize the commitments a country must make towards their children, especially those with disabilities. So far, 155 countries have signed the convention, 128 have ratified, and 27 have not signed nor ratified. A result of these conventions being adopted is

inclusion; these countries now actively recognize this issue and are making efforts to reduce the issue of neglect through physical infrastructure, information, and means of communication that can help these children.

Article 23 of the CRC specifically states that parties recognize that children with mental and physical disabilities are entitled to enjoy a full and decent life in conditions that ensure dignity, promote self reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. The CRC also has many other clauses that are applicable to children with disabilities as they begin with "without prejudice towards none" to specify that children with disabilities but be treated with equity and fairness.

The UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has promoted the inclusion of children with disabilities by recommending that all states adopt inclusive education at the world Convention on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain in 1994.

Questions to Consider

1. How has your bloc contributed to the development of rights for children with disabilities and how does your position promote or engage with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol (CRPD)?
2. Many parts of the world simply do not have the needed infrastructure to support assistive programs or technology for children with disabilities. How should we approach the issue of extreme poverty and how should we provide support to those in these situations?
3. A great deal of this issue comes from exclusion of children from education due to education and lack of awareness. How has your bloc contributed to the inclusion efforts and how do you plan to destigmatize children with disabilities?

Works Cited

World Health Organization and the World Bank, *World Report on Disability*, 2011, pp. 58–60.

World Health Organization, *Developmental Difficulties in Early Childhood: Prevention, early identification, assessment and intervention in low- and middle-income countries – A review*, WHO, Geneva, 2012; Thommessen, M., et al., ‘Feeding Problems, Height and Weight in Different Groups of Disabled Children’, *Acta Paediatrica*, vol. 80, no. 5, May 1991, pp. 527–533;

Sullivan, Peter B., ed., *Feeding and Nutrition in Children with Neurodevelopmental Disability*, Mac Keith Press, London, 2009, p. 61; Adams, Melanie S., et al., ‘Feeding Difficulties in Children with Cerebral Palsy’, pp. 878–888.

Ertem, Ilgi O., et al., ‘A Guide for Monitoring Child Development in Low- and Middle-Income Countries’, *Pediatrics*, vol. 121, no. 3, March 2008, pp. e581–e589; World Health Organization, *Developmental Difficulties in Early Childhood: Prevention, Early Identification, Assessment and Intervention in low-and middle income countries*, WHO 2012pp.1

World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund, *Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health for Persons with Disabilities: WHO/UNFPA guidance note*, WHO, 2009, pp. 5–9, 12, , accessed 31 January 2013