

Global Partnership on Children with Disabilities (GPCWD) Child Protection Task Force

Child Protection in the Sustainable Development Goals [March 2015]

The work of the Child Protection Task Force of the GPCWD, formed in 2014, is focused on the following areas where the child protection needs of children with disabilities are particularly acute: 1) Transition from large scale residential care to community and family based systems of care for children with disabilities; 2) Access to and effectiveness of child protection systems which are inclusive of children with disabilities; 3) Inclusive child protection response to children with disabilities involved in crisis, conflict and emergency situations.

This paper outlines the perspective of GPCWD Task Force on Child Protection on how the currently proposed Sustainable Development Goals should be improved.

To achieve lasting change and equity¹, the principle of “leave no one behind” should be at the heart of the SDG framework. SDG targets and indicators need to clearly outline the duty of all States to protect *all* children from harm. This can be achieved by setting up fully functioning, multi-disciplinary inclusive child protection systems. It is only then that proposed targets on inclusive education, violence and the rule of law can impact all children, including the most vulnerable and marginalised. To achieve equitable development child protection systems must address the specific vulnerabilities of children with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities. Children with disabilities are more likely to be placed in alternative and institutional forms of care that cannot provide the individual attention that every child needs to develop their full potential. Often these settings increase the risk of a child being subjected to violence and neglect causing severe harm, exacerbating existing problems and creating new ones. The specific risks and harm to children with disabilities during conflict and emergencies should also be directly addressed. During emergency situations, such as armed conflict or natural disasters, children with disabilities are more likely to be affected by the impact of such events, more likely to be exposed to harm and less likely to be able to access services which reduce harm and manage risk during these times.

In parallel, it is essential that indicators in the SDGs encourage the collection of disaggregated data about the numbers of children with disabilities and the numbers of children in vulnerable situations, including those living in alternative/institutional care.

Violence: A welcome target referring to the protection of children from violence and trafficking falls currently under the gender equality goal [5]. No reference is made to the specific needs and vulnerability of boys and girls with disabilities to such violence and abuse, especially in conflict and emergencies and when living in alternative care settings. The target, [16.2] "end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children" is welcome but it could be improved and clarified by adding a new target for countries to build effective child protection systems which acknowledge and act on the specific risks to children with disabilities and other vulnerable or marginalised children. Similarly the focus on building national institutions and international co-operation [16a] to prevent violence is welcomed but this should be expanded through targets and indicators which call for and measure co-operation on child protection systems across borders. In addition, nationally appropriate social and legal protection institutions and systems should be established for all, with a focus on expanding the coverage for the vulnerable and most marginalised and specific measures for the protection of all children from violence, harm, abuse, exploitation and neglect.

¹ Equitable development can be achieved if all children receive equal life-chances and goods and services are distributed according to individual children's needs.

Education: The call [4a] for non-violent and safer environments for all in education is welcomed however inclusive child protection policies in education are necessary to achieve this. In this context it is necessary to have an explicit understanding that "children in vulnerable situations" [4.5] includes all children in alternative care so that residential special schools are not seen as acceptable exceptions to the strategy, nor as appropriate long term options for care of vulnerable children, including children with disabilities.

Law: The focus in [10.3] on reducing inequalities in law, policy and practice is welcomed and needs to specifically refer to the needs of children with disabilities and the systematic failure of child protection systems to address their needs. [Goal 16] refers to establishing effective access to justice and accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels and also needs to address the specific exclusion of children with disabilities from justice and protection. The acknowledgment of the importance of birth registration is important as this is a major issue for children with disabilities in developing country contexts. [16.9] For reasons of child protection alone, a particular effort should be made to register all children at birth including those with disabilities.

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