Disability Disaggregation:
Envisioning Inclusive Development

Introduction

Inclusion is the guiding principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes the pledge to leave no one behind and to create a "just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met". The commitment to inclusion specifically addresses persons with disabilities and is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Adopted in 2016, the CRPD affirms equal rights for all people, regardless of their disability status, and puts forth a development agenda for ensuring full inclusion in all aspects of society.

Ensuring that no one is left behind requires accurate and timely monitoring of the populations most likely to be excluded from development, including, among other vulnerable groups, people with disabilities. This requires the routine collection of disability indicators, both those relating to the specific concerns of people with disabilities, and also the disaggregation of all person level indicators by disability so that outcomes of people with and without disabilities can be compared.

The Way Forward

Including a succinct set of disability questions on existing data instruments allows for disaggregation by disability for SDG indicators without the need for additional surveys. All indicators produced from a given data instrument (e.g., a Demographic and Health Survey or Living Standards Measurement Survey) can be disaggregated by disability simply by adding a few questions on disability.

A well-tested set of questions suitable for this purpose exists and has, in recent years, experienced growing acceptance. Known collectively as the Washington Group Disability Questions, the questions are the result of global efforts to develop and test internationally comparable tools for identifying people with disabilities in censuses and surveys. Designed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG), the measures were specifically constructed not only to be internationally comparable but also to be efficient, low cost, and easy to incorporate into national statistical systems, making them highly sustainable and suitable for disaggregating the SDGs by disability.

The Tools

The WG has designed a variety of disability data tools. The Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS) is comprised of six questions, identifies people with disabilities, and is the recommended tool for disaggregating the SDGs. The UNICEF/WG Child Functioning Module is recommended for identifying children with disabilities in surveys and for disaggregating the SDGs that apply to children. For countries wanting to have more complete data on upper body and psychosocial

disabilities the WG-SS Enhanced set can be used, and for disability surveys collecting more detail on functioning the WG Extended Set on Functioning (WG-ES) is available.

All WG question sets are designed to identify the population at greater risk than the general population of experiencing restrictions in social participation (such as in employment, education, and civic life) because of functional difficulties in one of six core activities – seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, communication and self-care.

The WG questions were developed over the course of several years in conjunction with many national statistical offices (NSOs), and have undergone several rounds of cognitive and field testing in a variety of low, middle, and high-income countries. Since then they have been used by many NSOs and other development agencies in over 60 countries. Experience shows that the WG-SS produces internationally comparable data for populations living in a variety of cultures with varying economic resources.

The WG-SS has been included in the United Nations Statistics Division, as well as the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Council of European Statisticians Recommendations and Principles for the 2020 Round of Censuses as the method for collecting information on disability. At the 2017 Conference of State Parties to the CRPD 24, countries endorsed the use of the WG-SS for the purpose of disaggregating the SDGs. The Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network has also endorsed the questions. The WG-SS was endorsed in 2014 by a Disability Data Expert Group, under the auspices of the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs, as the means to disaggregate the SDGs by disability status.

In addition, USAID has developed a module on disability that includes the WG-SS in its Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). The WG identification tools have been incorporated in UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), in many World Bank surveys, and in many censuses and surveys around the globe. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is currently testing a disability module for labour force surveys that incorporates WG questions as well.

Resources

The WG website (www.washingtongroup-disability.com) has extensive guidance on the development and use of the WG questions. The WG is conducting a set of regional workshops to help build the capacity of national statistical offices to use the WG questions. In addition, the website has been updated to include extensive supporting material. A field guide is near completion.

About the Washington Group…

The WG, a city group established under the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2001, was constituted to address the urgent need for cross-nationally comparable population-based measures of disability. Its mandate is the promotion and coordination of international cooperation in the area of health statistics focusing on disability data collection tools suitable for censuses and national surveys. WG members are representatives from NSOs around the world. Over 130 countries have representatives. WG meetings are also regularly attended by a variety of UN and other international agencies and Disabled People Organizations.

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http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/