

Children with Disabilities



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Schoolchildren queue to enter their classroom in this 2007 photograph from the Syrian Arab Republic. © UNICEF/HQ2007-0745/Noorani

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2013

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FOREWORD

Is there a child who does not dream of being counted and having her or his gifts and talents recognized? No. All children have hopes and dreams – including children with disabilities. And all children deserve a fair chance to make their dreams real.

This edition of *The State of the World's Children* includes contributions by young people and parents who show that, when given that chance, children with disabilities are more than capable of overcoming barriers to their inclusion, of taking their rightful place as equal participants in society and of enriching the life of their communities.

But for far too many children with disabilities, the opportunity to participate simply does not exist. Far too often, children with disabilities are among the last in line for resources and services, especially where these are scarce to begin with. Far too regularly, they are the objects simply of pity or, worse, discrimination and abuse.

The deprivations faced by children and adolescents with disabilities are violations of their rights and the principle of equity, at the heart of which lies a concern for the dignity and rights of *all* children – including the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society.

As this report documents, the inclusion of children with disabilities in society is possible – but it requires first a change of perception, a recognition that children with disabilities hold the same rights as others; that they can be agents of change and self-determination, not merely the beneficiaries of charity; that their voices must be heard and heeded in our policymaking and programmes.

We contribute to their exclusion by failing to gather enough data to inform our decisions. When we fail to count these children, we are failing to help them count for all they should in their societies.

Fortunately, progress is being made – albeit unevenly. This report not only examines the challenges involved in ensuring that children with disabilities have the fair access to services that is their right. It also explores initiatives that show promise in such areas as health, nutrition, education and emergency programming – and in the data collection and analysis needed to improve policies and operations in all these fields. Other chapters also discuss principles and approaches that can be adapted to advance these children's inclusion.

Somewhere, a child is being told he cannot play because he cannot walk, or another that she cannot learn because she cannot see. That boy deserves a chance to play. And we all benefit when that girl, and all children, can read, learn and contribute.

The path forward will be challenging. But children do not accept unnecessary limits. Neither should we.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Lake'.

Anthony Lake
Executive Director, UNICEF

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