

**STUDIA**

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**Exploring the Social Milieu of Disability:  
Themes of Poverty, Education, and Labour Participation**

A disability affects every sphere of human existence. It follows that the conditions encapsulated within the term *disability* are cross cutting and involve an array of issues spanning health, education, social welfare, and employment. In the global North, disability and its various forms and discrete needs have long filled an important niche in legislative action, academic research, education programming, and professional treatment. A large empirical literature from multiple disciplines covering disability, legislation and its consequences, schooling, services, employment, and other facets is readily available.

The opposite is true in developing nations where, until quite recently, concerns about people with disabilities were largely neglected. Although approaches to disability are slowly moving from issues of social welfare and protection to become part of the overall development and human rights agenda, the literature base remains sparse. Studies in developing countries tend to be sporadic and provide few theoretical or methodological insights to guide investigation about the status of disability. Collection of data is still at an early stage in many nations which makes globally comparable data on disability notoriously difficult to obtain. Current development practices largely exclude persons with disabilities which increases the equity gap between disabled and mainstream populations. The plight of disabled children and youth has

merited little debate in terms of access to education, the outcomes associated with it, or the degree of exclusion from schooling. Few common frameworks to provide health, education, and social services are in place.

Despite a lack of coherent and workable data, disability in the global South deserves a central place in discussions about social and education reform and efforts toward poverty alleviation. Multiple areas demand attention. This paper centers on the direct and strong links between disability and poverty. Because disability, poverty, education, and social exclusion are entwined, the discourse on disability and poverty is related conceptually to the discourse on exclusion from schooling which, in turn, leads to issues concerning the economic status of persons with disabilities. These particular and intermeshed topics – disability, poverty, and appropriate schooling for those disabled – are contested and have undergone significant development and mutations in the past decade. Disability is referred to as “an evolving concept”<sup>1</sup>, ongoing research is clarifying the disability–poverty cycle<sup>2</sup> the UN initiatives of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have generated numerous academic and political debates among analysts<sup>3</sup>: schooling for children and youth with disabilities in the global South is being examined and critiqued<sup>4</sup>. Employment is barely touched upon. Recent analyses of the World Health Survey provide the first cross-sectional international survey to measure disability and employment with reliable and internationally comparable data in developing nations<sup>5</sup>

This descriptive paper assembles current research related to nations of the South. The explicit unifying theme holds that poverty, disability, and exclusion from education create dramatic negative impacts on the social and economic health of persons with disabilities. Implicitly, it is in the interest of nations to

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<sup>1</sup> Preamble. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol*, United Nations, New York 2006.

<sup>2</sup> J. Braithwaite, D. Mont, *Disability and poverty: A survey of the World Bank Poverty Assessments and implications*, “European Journal of Disability Research” 3, 2009, p. 219–232.

<sup>3</sup> A. Tarabini, *Education and poverty in the global development agenda: Emergence, evolution and consolidation*, “International Journal of Educational Development”, 30, 2010, p. 204–212.

<sup>4</sup> M. Winzer, K. Mazurek, *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Reconstructing identities and reimagining education*, [in:] *Handbook of research on diversity in special education*. eds. M. Hughes & E. Talbott John Wiley, New York 2015 (in progress); M. Winzer, K. Mazurek, *Intersecting the CRPD and EFA: Dilemmas of invisibility, exclusion, and poverty*, Unpublished paper: University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge 2015.

<sup>5</sup> S. Mizunaya, S. Mitra, *Is there a disability gap in employment rates in developing countries?*, “World Development” 42, 2013, p. 28–43.

break the disability-poverty cycle and to promote education leading to effective participation in the work force.

### The synthesis of disability and poverty

Of the roughly 180 countries in the world tracked by the International Monetary Fund, the great majority (about 145) are developing<sup>6</sup>. People under age 15 account for 42 percent of the total population in these countries<sup>7</sup>. Extreme poverty is heavily concentrated among the young; 47 percent of the world's poor are aged 18 or younger<sup>8</sup> the majority in the global South. Germane to this paper, disability affects vulnerable populations in a disproportionate way so that significantly higher disability prevalence rates are found in developing nations as compared to developed nations. More than 80 percent of persons with disabilities live in the developing countries of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Middle East. Of the 93 to 150 million disabled children under 14 years of age, 85 percent are found in the South<sup>9</sup>. Approximately one in ten children in developing nations has an educational special need<sup>10</sup> yet only about 2 percent of disabled children receive education<sup>11</sup>.

The *World report on disability*<sup>12</sup> estimated that one billion people, or about 15 percent of the world's population, live with some form of disability. Populations are not homogeneous: disabled people live within multi-layered forms of social difference and diversity of social and economic contexts. Nevertheless, disability intersects a variety of common markers of identity that are formed on multiple bases- race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national ethnic, indigenous or social origin, property, birth, age, or other status

<sup>6</sup> R. Sharma, *Broken BRICs: Why the rest stopped rising*, "Foreign Affairs Newsletter" 2012, November 16–18.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?*, Paris 2008.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF, *The state of the world's children*, Geneva 2013.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, *Realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities towards 2015 and beyond*. Res/65/186, United Nations, New York 2011; UNESCO, *Global monitoring report: Teaching and learning – Achieving quality for all*, Paris 2013/2014.

<sup>10</sup> E. Dawson, S. Hollins, M. Mukongolwa, A. Witchalls, *Including disabled children in Africa*, "Journal of Intellectual Disability Research" 47, 2003, p. 153–154.

<sup>11</sup> D. Coulby, D. Zambeta, *World yearbook of education 2005: Globalization and nationalism*, Routledge Falmer Oxford, Oxford 2005.

<sup>12</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank, *The world report on disability*, <http://whqibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/078924068215.eng.pdf> [access: 2011].

<sup>13</sup>. In many cultural contexts, for example, women tend to be devalued. Disabled women – who account for the majority of persons with disabilities- are multiply disadvantaged, vulnerable to many aggravated forms of discrimination on account of both gender and disability. Poverty is a perennial marker. One in five of the poorest people in the world has a disability<sup>14</sup>.

Poverty is measured using non-health per capita expenditure (PCE) which is applied to calculate poverty rates at international poverty lines of US\$ 1.25 a day (extreme poverty) and US\$ 2 a day (poverty). Disabled people are among the poorest of the poor – those who live on less than a dollar a day and lack access to basic necessities such as food, clean water, sanitation, and clothing (DFID, 2000). Among an officially estimated 83 million people with disabilities in China, for example, more than 40 percent are illiterate and at least 15 million live on less than US\$ 1 a day<sup>15</sup>.

Levels of impairment appear highest in low-income countries where disability is associated with multidimensional poverty. Correlational evidence in a cross-country analysis of household surveys from 13 developing nations suggested that adults with disabilities typically live in poorer than average households: disability is associated with about a 10 percentage point increase in the probability of falling into the two poorest quintiles<sup>16</sup>. Mizunaya and Mitra<sup>17</sup> used World Health Survey data collected by the World Health Organization from 2002 to 2004 to investigate the economic status of working age persons aged 19 to 65 with disabilities in 15 developing nations. They found that, as a group, persons with disabilities experience multiple deprivations at higher rates and in a higher breadth, depth, and severity than persons without disabilities.

The evidence points to causal links from poverty to disability and from disability to poverty. However, while the synthesis of disability and poverty is widely accepted as “dynamic and intricately linked phenomena”<sup>18</sup> the links between disability and poverty are complex, nuanced, and not fully understood.

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<sup>13</sup> Preamble. *Convention on the Rights of Persons...*, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> S. R. Barriga, *Addressing a missed opportunity*, <http://www.org/news/2010/21/addressing-missed-opportunity-2010> [access: 16.09.2013].

<sup>15</sup> M. Wang, *Chinese children with disabilities denied access to education*. *South China Morning Post*, <http://www.hrw.org> [access: 16.09.2013].

<sup>16</sup> D. Filmer, *Disability, poverty, and schooling in developing countries: Results from 14 household surveys*, “*World Bank Economic Review*” 22, 2008, p. 141–163.

<sup>17</sup> S. Mizunaya, S. Mitra, *Is there a disability gap in employment rates...*, op. cit., p. 28–43.

<sup>18</sup> S. Mitra, A. Posarac, B. Vick, *Disability and poverty in developing countries: A snapshot from the World Health Survey*, SP discussion Paper no. 1109, World Bank, Washington 2011, p. 10.

The relationships stem from multiple sources to which it is not possible to assign a single, or even a simple cluster of causes. The impacts will be mitigated and links will vary across disability types, environments, the age of onset of the disability, and whether the condition is permanent or temporary. Cultural contexts are primary: disabilities have an objective reality but the overall consequences are largely determined by associated social meanings. Different societies and cultures make a judgment as to whether a specific individual is different, disabled, or deviant so that what makes a person a pariah in one society imposes only minor limitations in another.

Poverty and its determinants create disabling conditions through several pathways<sup>19</sup>. Poverty is a threat to daily life activities and closely related to poor health; relatively high exposure to malnutrition and disease; inadequate public health interventions, such as immunizations; poor living conditions, such as lack of access to clean water; and environmental exposure, such as unsafe working conditions. For example, hunger, malnutrition, disability, and poverty are inextricably intertwined. Malnutrition in its various forms is the underlying cause of more than 45 percent of child deaths as well as 20 percent of impairments (DFID, 2000). HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria are responsible for about 6 million deaths worldwide each year, mostly in transition and developing countries, and also present the most important challenges in terms of treatment costs, equitable vaccine access, and long-term impairment<sup>20</sup>. One in 10 children suffers neurological impairment after cerebral malaria, including epilepsy, learning disabilities, and loss of coordination.

The global burden of disease is shifting away from infectious causes toward chronic conditions. The more visible disabilities such as visual and motor impairments account for the majority of disabled persons in developing nations<sup>21</sup>. Sensory and mobility impairments are high in many African countries<sup>22</sup>, the result of vitamin A deficiencies, water-borne blindness, trachoma, measles, tuberculosis, and leprosy. Low and middle-income

<sup>19</sup> A. Eide, B. Ingstad, *Disability and poverty: Reflections on research experiences in Africa and beyond*, "African Journal of Disability", 2, 2013, p. 2–9.

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?..., op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> M. Kalyanpur, A. Misra, *Facing the challenge of inclusion in India*, [in:] *International practices in special education: Debates and challenges*, eds. M. Winzer, K. Mazurek, DC: Gallaudet University Press, Washington 2011, p. 193–216.

<sup>22</sup> G. Solarsh, K. J. Hofman, *Developmental disabilities*, [in:] *Disease and mortality in sub-Saharan Africa* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), eds. D.T. Jamison, R.G. Feachem, M.W. Makgoba, DC: World Bank Washington 2006, p. 125–147.

countries carry about 90 percent of the burden of the world's road traffic injuries<sup>23</sup>. Some of the poorest states are those affected by conflict which can directly cause impairment through injury and also exacerbate the socio-economic conditions that increase impairment<sup>24</sup>.

Disability leads to poverty through multiple exclusion processes. People who are poor and marginalized cannot get access to services because they are discriminated against or because they cannot afford them. Disability may lead to lower living standards and poverty through adverse impacts on employment earnings and increased expenditures related to disability. Disability may prevent school attendance. Among health concerns, for example, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria are having a devastating impact on school systems, especially in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>25</sup>.

Most significantly, those with disabilities are subject to *social exclusion*, a term that refers to a complex set of processes whereby people are barred from economic opportunity, political voice, and social and cultural recognition and usually associated with unfavorable attitudes toward difference<sup>26</sup>. Much poverty, therefore, is the direct and indirect result of the exclusion and marginalization of persons with disabilities<sup>27</sup>. Obstacles are not the result of inherent incapacities but rather the physical and attitudinal barriers that are socially and politically constructed within certain societies. In many nations, disability is "the quintessential marker of hierachal relations used to rationalize inequality, discrimination, and exclusion"<sup>28</sup>. Commonly-held ideas that are cultural and social in origin persist; deficit-based identification and arbitrary labeling are rampant. People with disabilities face traditional patterns of rejection and prejudice and "are often subject to multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination"<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> J. Lord, A. Posarac, M. Nicoli, K. Peffley, C. McClain-Nhlapo, M. Keogh, *Disability and international cooperation and development: A review of policies and practices*, World Bank, New York 2010.

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global monitoring report 2010; Reaching the marginalized*, Paris 2010.

<sup>25</sup> UNESCO, *Global monitoring report: Teaching and learning – Achieving quality for all...*, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> See D. Petrova, *Racial discrimination and the rights of minority cultures*, [in:] *Discrimination and human rights: The case of racism*. ed. S. Fredman, Oxford University Press, New York 2001,

<sup>27</sup> A. Eide, B. Ingstad, *Disability and poverty...*, op. cit., p. 2–9.

<sup>28</sup> D. K. Reid, N. G. Knight, *Disability justifies exclusion of minority students: A critical history grounded in disability studies*, "Educational Researcher", 35, 2006, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations, *Realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities towards 2015 and beyond*. Res/65/186, United Nations, New York 2011, p. 2.

Assumptions about disability that carry the imprint of traditional intolerance and impact the social and economic well being of disabled persons in general society are inevitably mirrored in education policy and in the schools. As we discuss in the following section, lack of educational attainment is central to the mutually constitutive relationship between poverty and disability. When school enrolment is restricted, curtailed, or simply denied, it often marks the beginning of a lifetime of exclusion from mainstream society for persons with disabilities and means that they are more likely to remain poor.

### **Education for children and youth with disabilities**

In recent decades, education has become the preferred mechanism to rethink development practices and has acquired increasing international legitimacy as a preferential strategy in the fight against poverty<sup>30</sup>. The preoccupation with the importance of education to alleviate poverty is constructed on the understanding that education increases levels of knowledge, skills, and capabilities and diminishes inequalities in access that limit social mobility and skew income distribution. Increasing education will lead to a decrease in poverty and the aggregate result will have positive repercussions on economic growth and national development<sup>31</sup>. The poverty dialogue is reiterated and enhanced in a global education architecture. International agencies structure a normative project of what education development should be, largely encapsulated in two frameworks developed and promoted by UN agencies – the Education for All initiative (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The EFA agenda established a unifying set of development objectives for the global community: it sought to end the cycle of exclusion from education associated with chronic poverty and endow the world's poorest and most vulnerable people the social and economic benefits of schooling. The MDGs, the centerpiece of the world's development agenda, have an explicit focus on the benefits of investing in education for poverty reduction.

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<sup>30</sup> A. Tarabini, *Education and poverty in the global development agenda...*, op. cit., p. 204–212.

<sup>31</sup> K. Lewin, *Why some Education for All and Millennium Development goals will not be met; difficulties with goals and targets*, [in:] *Education, growth, aid and development: Toward education for all*, eds. L. Chisholm, G. Blach, & B. Fleisch, University of Hong Kong Comparative Education Research Centre, Hong Kong 2008, p. 49–73; A. Tarabini, *Education and poverty in the global development agenda...*, op. cit., p. 204–212.

Commitments from the world community were drivers of change that provided impetus to provide schooling for all. But although the importance of fighting poverty became a commonplace in the discourses, programs, and policies for achieving development, and the link between disability, poverty, and exclusion is strong, the synthesis was ignored<sup>32</sup>. Although the central aims of the MDGs are inextricably linked to disability in their targets of poverty alleviation (MDG1), improved education (MDG2), and increased health status (MDG 6), they did not reference disability or make the connections between disability and poverty. Education for All, an ambitious international movement to expand learning opportunities for every child and youth, is explicitly pro-poor and should improve the chances of participation of those from the lowest household wealth quintiles. Yet the EFA rhetoric of 'all' also overlooked disability: in the genesis of EFA, issues surrounding disability were not articulated, much less accounted for.

The original EFA goals envisioned universal primary education by 2010; this changed to 2015 in the mid-1990s. Since 2000, global initiatives have seen substantial progress toward universal primary education and gender parity in developing countries but progress remains uneven and insufficient. Not a single goal will be achieved globally by 2015<sup>33</sup>. A wide gap remains between enrolment and completion rates; subnational disparities in school participation persist between regions, provinces, or states, and between urban and rural areas; the gender parity goal has been missed; and major concerns are emerging about the quality of education. As well, EFA has failed to reach the poorest and most disadvantaged children. Together with child labor and ill health, UNESCO<sup>34</sup> pointed to disability as a major barrier to achieving the goal of universal primary education.

Disability was identified within EFA and the MDGs in 2002 on the argument that the targets could not be achieved "without the inclusion of children with disabilities and young people in education"<sup>35</sup>. But despite ongoing promises of universal access under the EFA umbrella, children and youth with disabilities

<sup>32</sup> M. Winzer, K. Mazurek, *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities...*, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> UNESCO, *Global monitoring report: Teaching and learning – Achieving quality for all...*, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global monitoring report 2010; Reaching the marginalized*, Paris 2010.

<sup>35</sup> A. Croft, *Including disabled children in learning: Challenges in developing countries*, Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Enquiry. Pathways to Access Monograph, #36, University of Sussex Centre for International Education, Brighton 2010, p. 1.

have “remained relatively invisible in the efforts to achieve universal access to primary education”<sup>36</sup>. The commitments to education within the global agenda are largely rhetoric: schooling for those with disabilities “has been, at best, an afterthought on the global agenda for education”<sup>37</sup>. Accumulated data from Global Monitoring Reports on the progress of the EFA do little to credit the effectiveness of global commitments to universal primary education in securing access for students with disabilities. Of the 57 million children worldwide still out of school in 2011, more than one third are disabled<sup>38</sup>. Even the most basic supports and services are completely lacking and such students remain a radically marginalized sector of society. In all, only 2 to 3 percent of disabled students actually go to school<sup>39</sup>. Put another way, 90 percent of children and youth with disabilities are not attending school in developing nations<sup>40</sup>.

The great majority of out-of-school children who are disabled live in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States and North Africa<sup>41</sup>. In Africa, for example, fewer than 10 percent of children with disabilities attend school<sup>42</sup>. Studies from Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, nations that have large EFA programs for universal access, showed that the chances of a child with a disability not being in school were two to three times greater than for a child not disabled<sup>43</sup>.

Literacy is a foundation for achieving EFA and reducing poverty. Strong links exist between literacy and poverty with literacy rates in the poorest households substantially lower than in wealthier settings. Often, those with disabilities are excluded from literacy programs<sup>44</sup>; hence, examples on literacy

<sup>36</sup> UNICEF, *The right of children with disabilities to education: A rights-based approach to inclusive education*. Geneva 2012, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Inclusion International, *Better education for all when we're all included too: People with an intellectual disability and their families speak out on inclusive education. A global report on Education for All, disability, and inclusion*, London 2009, p. 42.

<sup>38</sup> UNESCO, *Global monitoring report: Teaching and learning – Achieving quality for all*, op. cit.; UNESCO, *Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?*..., op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> World Bank, *You think but do you know?*, <http://youthink-worldbank.org/issues/disabilities> [acccsess: 2009].

<sup>40</sup> United Nations, *Realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities towards 2015 and beyond*. Res/65/186, United Nations, New York 2011, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> K. Kurtz, T. Shepherd, *Reflections on meeting the needs of children with disabilities in Ethiopia*, “Journal of International Special Needs Education”, 14, 2011, p. 23–31.

<sup>42</sup> World Vision, *Education's missing millions: Including disabled children in education through EFA FTI processes and national sector plans*. World Vision, Milton 2007.

<sup>43</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?*, Paris 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

rates among young people with disabilities are rare. Groce and Bakhshi<sup>45</sup>, however, estimated that only about 20 million of all persons with disabilities in the world are literate.

Continued and pervasive exclusion for children and youth with disabilities reflects the combined effects of poverty, social stigmatization, discrimination, lack of awareness of children's rights, cultural practices, negative public attitudes about students with disabilities, and a concerning and persistent lack of support from the general public about their schooling<sup>46</sup>. It echoes the failures of international education policy to provide opportunities for the most disadvantaged populations: disability is one of the most neglected areas in EFA monitoring reports.

A solid and robust body of research demonstrates that high quality education can unlock access to the right to health, to gender equality, decent paid work, political participation, and much more. That said, current practices for children and youth with disabilities as we outlined above overlook the disadvantages of exclusion. In essence, is the lack of education and not their disabilities that limit opportunities for disabled people. Restricted or absent education and the concomitant illiteracy results in lost employment prospects, diminished access to vocational training, employment, income generation, and business development, and the failure to acquire the human capital that will allow persons to earn higher incomes. Ultimately, it leads to limited employment opportunities and reduced productivity in adulthood and a spiral of economic and social exclusion<sup>47</sup>.

## Transitions

Very little is known about the economic lives of persons with disabilities in the global South. For example, Mizunaya and Mitra<sup>48</sup> reported that studies published in peer reviewed journals are limited: they found information that

<sup>45</sup> N. Groce, P. Bakhshi, *Literacy among adults with disabilities in the developing countries: An unexplored area of concern*, Leonard Cheshire Centre for Disability and Inclusive Development, Working paper #9, University College, London 2009.

<sup>46</sup> M. Winzer, K. Mazurek, *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities...*, op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> D. Filmer, *Disability, poverty, and schooling in developing countries: Results from 14 household surveys*, "World Bank Economic Review", 22, 2008, p. 141–163; S. Mizunaya, S. Mitra, *Is there a disability gap in employment rates in developing countries?*, "World Development", 42, 2013, p. 28–43.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

covered only eight countries. All found lower employment rates for persons with disabilities.

Data from the World Health Survey found that persons with disabilities experienced less economic and workplace activity than did non-disabled persons<sup>49</sup>. Similarly, UN documents point out that the majority of people with disabilities have negligible access to vocational training, income generation, and work: their unemployment rate is between 80 and 90 percent<sup>50</sup>. Problems in the area of employment arise from environmental, institutional, and attitudinal barriers that are compounded by gender, ethnicity, age, type of impairment, geographical location, culture, and lack of education. Pfahl and Powell<sup>51</sup> report that employers believe that school performance is the most trustworthy indicator of future labor market success and so may exclude persons with disabilities from the outset. In addition, programs to boost employment such as antidiscrimination legislation, workplace accommodations, and vocational rehabilitation are scarce or non-existent.

## Discussion

The majority of persons with disabilities live in developing nations which reflects the distribution of the world's population and the impact of economic disadvantage, material deprivation, poor nutrition, and inadequate health care. Poverty is endemic. A cycle exists in which poverty creates disability and persons with disabilities display high rates of poverty. Education is critical, seen to have the potential to contribute to breaking the connection between disability and poverty.

Persons with disabilities account for a sizeable proportion of the working age population in developing countries, suggesting that disability should be an important issue. Education for students with disabilities should similarly be viewed as a necessity with implications for individuals, their families, and the wider society and economy.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>50</sup> United Nations, *Enable: Disability and employment*, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=255> [access: 2013].

<sup>51</sup> L. Pfahl, J. Powell, *Legitimizing school segregation: The special education profession and the discourse of learning disability in Germany, 1908–2008*, „Disability and Society”, 26, 2011, p. 449–462.

The state must be concerned because “Reaching the unreachable and sustainable development are inexorably linked<sup>52</sup>. When education is viewed as a modernization project and a key component of efforts for nations to be competitive in an increasingly global marketplace, it is in the economic interests of governments to invest in the education of children and youth with disabilities. Exposing students to the broad goals of education such as intellectual development, acculturation, and preparation for participation in society produces citizens who are capable, productive, and able to play a part in society. It inducts people as effective members of the labor force and reduces welfare costs because the extra costs associated with disability when there are social welfare systems in place generally disappear once an individual enters the labor force.

When individuals are left out of the school system entirely or segregated or isolated from peers, this exacts a cost in the loss and inefficient use of human capital, reduced individual and national productivity, the loss of fiscal revenues, and increased fiscal costs. It is estimated, for example, that China loses as much as US\$111.7 billion, or about 3 percent of its GDP, as a result of lost productivity as a result of excluding people with disabilities from the workforce<sup>53</sup>. In the UK, improving the employment rate of persons with disabilities would boost the economy by \$27.1 billion<sup>54</sup> (UN, 2013). A study in Canada found that if persons with disabilities are kept outside the labor market, the production loss amounts to 7.7 percent of GDP (\$55.8 billion)<sup>55</sup>.

For the family, education may ameliorate the stigma associated with disability, reduce current and future dependence, free other household members from caring responsibilities, and allow them to increase employment and other productive activities<sup>56</sup>. For the individual with a disability, education, including technical training and adult education, contributes to feelings of self worth and independence. Education is critical to ensuring access to decent work which is not only key to income distribution and social mobility, but

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<sup>52</sup> UNICEF, *The state of the world's children*, Geneva 2013, p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> S. Buckup, *The price of exclusion: The economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work*, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/...ed\\_emp/...ifp...skills/documents/publication/wcms...119305.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/...ed_emp/...ifp...skills/documents/publication/wcms...119305.pdf) [access: 2006].

<sup>54</sup> United Nations, *Enable: Disability and employment*, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=255> [access: 2013].

<sup>55</sup> UNICEF, *The right of children with disabilities to education: A rights-based approach to inclusive education*, Geneva 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem.

in most societies is a strong determinant of social status and an important source of self-respect<sup>57</sup>. Two empirical studies that investigated the effects of education through life history interviews with disabled higher education students and graduates found education to be transformative in their social and economic situations<sup>58</sup>.

That being said, many societies still ignore or discount disability in terms of entry into and participation in the mainstream. Indeed, the rights of persons with disabilities to education, health, employment, an adequate standard of living, and social protection continue to be widely neglected and violated. Education is the right most frequently denied to children and youth with disabilities. The violation of the right to education begins a spiraling pattern of unmet needs. When children with disabilities are denied schooling, they are denied access to employment opportunities, independence, economic status, and quality of life.

## Conclusion

In many developing countries, disability is found to be significantly associated with higher multidimensional poverty as well as restricted access to schooling, lower educational attainment, lower employment rates, poorer health outcomes, and less political and cultural participation. This paper marshaled available evidence to overview the association of disability with long-run poverty and the inevitable spill over to restricted or absent education access and poor employment status. It posited a cyclic situation between disability and poverty.

Within the global compact on education for development the relationship between education and poverty occupies a central position; a coordinated effort recognizes education as one of the major tools for the eradication of poverty. While great strides have been made to improve access to primary schooling for typical children and youth, the goal of universal primary education by 2015 has been missed by a wide margin. Among many difficulties, countries cannot overcome the challenges of hard to reach children. Education arrangements

<sup>57</sup> United Nations, *Social justice in an open world: The role of the United Nations*, United Nations, New York 2006.

<sup>58</sup> T. Hammad, N. Singal, *Disability, gender and education: Exploring the impact of education on the lives of women with disabilities in Pakistan*, Paper at the 11<sup>th</sup> UKFIET Conference on Education and Development, Oxford 2011.

for such students are overlooked in part because indifferent participation from the EFA and due to pervasive cultural undermining that contributes to the frequent denial of the right to education to children and youth with disabilities. Inevitably, labor market outcomes are significantly lowered which is irrational from an economic point of view.

Evidence from this paper points to the need to particularly target persons with disabilities in poverty alleviation. As well, nations cannot afford to exclude disabled students because their exclusion from education results in their exclusion from opportunities for further development. The inter-connection of disability to a variety of institutions and agencies make transformative change difficult to achieve. Yet, if education is to be the basis for reducing poverty and empowering disabled individuals to achieve economic self sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion into all aspects of society, it seems absolutely necessary to broaden the objectives and to introduce policies that span agencies and development agendas in order to challenge inequality and marginalization.

**Abstract:** Although many specific aspects of the scope and functioning of disability remain insufficiently explored, it is clear that disability is systematically related to poverty in countries across the economic spectrum. Poverty among persons with disabilities is particularly acute in developing nations; it affects exclusion from schooling and, ultimately, access to the labor market. This paper takes a multi-layered approach to overview the synthesis of disability and poverty, restricted access to education, and constraints to economic participation. It finds that persons with disabilities face inequalities in all areas of life, throughout the life cycle, and that these inequalities lead to exclusion and discrimination and to situations of poverty. The underlying argument holds that disability combined with poverty creates dramatic negative impacts on the social and economic health of individuals. Educating students with disabilities is a good investment and international agencies and national governments must increase efforts to target such persons in education, development programs, and poverty alleviation efforts.

**Keywords:** disability, poverty alleviation, education access, labor market access

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