

## PEER REVIEW HISTORY

BMJ Paediatrics Open publishes all reviews undertaken for accepted manuscripts. Reviewers are asked to complete a checklist review form and are provided with free text boxes to elaborate on their assessment. These free text comments are reproduced below.

### ARTICLE DETAILS

<b>TITLE (PROVISIONAL)</b>	Global Progress Towards Early Childhood Development for Children with Disabilities, 2013-2023
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Olusanya, Bolajoko Nair, MKC Wright, Scott Hadders-Algra, Mijna

### VERSION 1 - REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Dr. Simon Lenton
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	03-May-2023

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>This is a succinct overview outlining the relative lack of international progress to ensure children with disabilities receive appropriate preschool support to enable them to succeed in school settings. It is a personal view rather than a systematic review of the literature. I cannot judge whether this is a valid criticism of UNICEF as I have not have the necessary experience to make that judgement. However, the plight of children with disabilities and the inequity of provision should be highlighted as part of advocacy on behalf of this disadvantaged group.</p> <p>The article could be strengthened by referencing programmes in the literature that have succeeded in addressing the needs of disabled children together with some thoughts on some practical, verifiable measures to document their impact.</p> <p>I note that 5/15 references are by the first author of this paper, some of which cover similar ground to this article.</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Dr. Peter Rohloff
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	17-May-2023

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>Dr. Olusanya and colleagues at GRDDC have been producing a compelling body of commentary over recent years on the unmet needs of children with disabilities globally, and they have been calling attention to the policy and planning gaps that must be addressed to close the equity gap. This viewpoint contributes to that body of work in a timely and compelling way. I recommend publication.</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Prof. Roy McConkey Ulster university , Institute Nursing and Health research
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	29-May-2023

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>The short viewpoint article highlights an important topic as the authors are concerned to ensure that internationally, greater attention is paid to the early childhood development of children with disabilities within the framework of SDGs. They review the contribution that has been made by UNICEF in the past decade as the lead UN agency for child health and development globally but not the only one (e.g. WHO, UNW). As an admirer of UNICEF and having undertaken consultancies for various national programs, I read their analysis with interest. I was surprised that no mention was made of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys that UNICEF has supported internationally and the role that future surveys could play in evidencing the needs of children with disabilities and hopefully improvements over time. Also UNICEF's advocacy of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child deserves a mention and how the national reporting mechanisms built into the convention could be used to develop national policies and practices (see <a href="https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/implementing-monitoring">https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/implementing-monitoring</a>).</p> <p>I agree that UNICEF's Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022–2030 is a welcome addition to the foregoing efforts notwithstanding the challenges faced by LMICs. However the authors provide no analysis as to how "UNICEF would need to recalibrate DIPAS for sustainable impact" nor for their claim that "Donors and governments need clarity and guidance on the global commitment and agenda for children with disabilities - especially in LMICs. This would not only restore trust but equally forestall potential failures of current plans" (final para page 5). I have given two examples that could feature within DIPAS but hopefully the authors will draw on their experiences in LMICs for what more could be done. Without a more detailed and constructively critical analysis of UNICEF's record and intentions, this viewpoint article adds little to how SDG ambitions for children with disabilities and their families can be met in the coming 7 years and beyond.</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Dr. Raul Gerardo Mercer Social Sciences and Health
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	31-May-2023

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>It is a work on points of view in relation to childhood with disabilities considering that it is a population that has been historically marginalized and excluded from the global health agenda, as well as the progress made by UNICEF.</p> <p>Regarding to the outcome of the UNICEF forum, reference is made to the eight task forces to address specific issues affecting children with disabilities including early childhood development (ECD), including education, assistive technology, and nutrition. Why is there no reference to the other task forces?</p> <p>On repeated occasions, shortcomings are highlighted in the formulation of statements, strategies, goals. As are the following cases:</p> <p>..The target also underscored the need for a well-coordinated multisectoral program of early intervention across the health, education and welfare sectors for childhood disabilities.....</p>
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	<p>...The limitations of recent attempts to adapt the NCF for children with disabilities....</p> <p>...The need for a disability-focused global initiative...</p> <p>...The little progress that has been achieved to address the needs of children with disabilities...</p> <p>..virtually all the task forces established in 2013 are no longer active</p> <p>...clear educational pathway from birth to school entry for children with disabilities as envisioned by the SDGs has not been articulated...</p> <p>Faced with this succession of failures, deviations and lack of achievement of goals, I believe that the proposals for actions to follow should be reframed. In this sense, and faced with the final comments referring to: recalibrating DIPAS, ensuring long-term commitments independent of the current leadership, reorientation of the funding agenda by donors, recovering trust (loss of trust was not mentioned anywhere), preventing future failures...</p> <p>What can be done to avoid all these deviations to generate positive conditions for leadership, construction and realization of agendas. The comments should be more proactive and purposeful to reverse the historical trend that the authors clearly refer to.</p>
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### **VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE**

#### Reviewer 1

1. The plight of children with disabilities and the inequity of provision should be highlighted as part of advocacy on behalf of this disadvantaged group.

Reply: We agree with the reviewer and wish to confirm that the inequity faced by children with disabilities has been substantively described in multiple papers cited in this viewpoint (refs 2, 11, 13, 14). In so doing, their plight is acknowledged and given the space/word constraints we were hoping to minimize overlaps with prior publications.

2. The article could be strengthened by referencing programmes in the literature that have succeeded in addressing the needs of disabled children together with some thoughts on some practical, verifiable measures to document their impact.

Reply: The reviewer's thoughtful suggestion has been incorporated into the revision, please find this idea reflected in the first paragraph on page 5. A comprehensive global review of ECD programmes is currently under development by GRDDC; this forthcoming publication will complement the recommendations on the ways forward.

#### Reviewer 2

3. GRDDC has been producing a compelling body of commentary over recent years on the unmet needs of children with disabilities globally, and they have been calling attention to the policy and planning gaps that must be addressed to close the equity gap. This viewpoint contributes to that body of work in a timely and compelling way. I recommend publication.

Reply: We thank the reviewer for this gracious comment.

### Reviewer 3

4. I was surprised that no mention was made of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) that UNICEF has supported internationally and the role that future surveys could play in evidencing the needs of children with disabilities and hopefully improvements over time.

Reply: We appreciate that MICS was raised by this reviewer. Of course, our brief commentary could not elaborate on all programmes. One reason that we did not prioritize MICS for inclusion was that the data generated from this tool (as reported by UNICEF [ref 8]) has significant limitations as it relates to the early identification of children with disabilities. For example, the child functioning module for children under 5 years in the MICS is still undergoing review as highlighted by UNICEF in their most recent report [ref 8]. MICS, like other tools, has not been developed for children under 2 years which has grave consequences for implementing ECD programmes as highlighted in previously published manuscripts (e.g., see: Olusanya et al. The conundrum of a global tool for early childhood development to monitor SDG indicator 4.2.1. *Lancet Glob Health*. 2021 May;9(5):e586-e587).

5. UNICEF's advocacy of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) deserves a mention and how the national reporting mechanisms built into the convention could be used to develop national policies and practices (see <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/implementing-monitoring>).

Reply: We agree with this suggestion and have now acknowledged the contributions of UNICEF to implementing the CRC since it was launched in 1989 (see page 3, paragraph 3). We wish to add that the focus of this paper is to report on the progress that has been made since 2013 in promoting early childhood development globally. This clarification has been added to the title of this manuscript.

6. I agree that UNICEF's Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022–2030 is a welcome addition to the foregoing efforts notwithstanding the challenges faced by LMICs. However, the authors provide no analysis as to how "UNICEF would need to recalibrate DIPAS for sustainable impact" nor for their claim that "Donors and governments need clarity and guidance on the global commitment and agenda for children with disabilities - especially in LMICs. This would not only restore trust but equally forestall potential failures of current plans" (final para page 5).

Reply: We thank the reviewer for this suggestion. Practical steps that are required to make DIPAS more impactful particularly within the SDG framework have already been described and reported in prior publications [references 2,7,11,12, & 13] (see page 5, paragraph 2). Highlights of these recommendations have been summarised in the newly added Box at end of the revised manuscript.

7. I have given two examples that could feature within DIPAS but hopefully the authors will draw on their experiences in LMICs for what more could be done. Without a more detailed and constructively critical analysis of UNICEF's record and intentions, this viewpoint article adds little to how SDG ambitions for children with disabilities and their families can be met in the coming 7 years and beyond.

Reply: Importantly, UNICEF's own report published in 2022 (ref 8) provides unequivocal evidence that little progress has been made since its 2013 State of the World's Children Report in addressing the needs of children with disabilities despite the disability-inclusive mandate under the SDGs. Our manuscript seeks to remind policy makers about the significant challenges faced by UNICEF and the disability community in addressing the needs of children with disabilities. There is a pressing need to support UNICEF financially and otherwise to implement their unfulfilled global commitment on early childhood development. The dire state of global funding for childhood disabilities has been addressed by GRDDC elsewhere (Olusanya BO, et al. Global investments to optimise the health and wellbeing of children with disabilities: a call to action. *Lancet*. 2023 Jan 21;401(10372):175-177). The revised manuscript further emphasises that DIPAS, if appropriately updated, provides a unique opportunity to

draw attention to these challenges and facilitate requisite intervention by donor organisations and developmental partners in global health.

Reviewer 4

8. Regarding the outcome of the UNICEF forum, reference is made to the eight task forces to address specific issues affecting children with disabilities including early childhood development (ECD), including education, assistive technology, and nutrition. Why is there no reference to the other task forces?

Reply: We did not report on the other task forces because they were not specifically set up for children under 5 years or for early childhood development but for all children and adolescents. In contrast, the ECD task force was set up specifically to address and coordinate all the issues relevant to children under 5 years with disabilities including nutrition, assistive technology and education. Some clarification has been added to the text (see page 2, paragraph 2).

9. Faced with this succession of failures, deviations and lack of achievement of goals, I believe that the proposals for actions to follow should be reframed. In this sense and faced with the final comments referring to: recalibrating DIPAS, ensuring long-term commitments independent of the current leadership, reorientation of the funding agenda by donors, recovering trust (loss of trust was not mentioned anywhere), preventing future failures.... What can be done to avoid all these deviations to generate positive conditions for leadership, construction and realization of agendas. The comments should be more proactive and purposeful to reverse the historical trend that the authors clearly refer to.

Reply: These issues and other practical steps that are needed to ensure progress in implementing the SDG mandate on ECD have been extensively addressed in the related papers cited in this viewpoint (references 2,7,11-13). Highlights of these recommendations are now summarised in a Box at the end of the paper.