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DISCOVERING THE ABILITY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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There are more than 2.7 million of disabled people in Colombia. As elsewhere, physical disabilities arising from accidents or diseases such as tuberculosis, measles and polio; and mental disabilities respond to various causes, some medically unexplained.

Another factor for disabilities, less common in other parts of the world, is civil war. In fact, the Programme of World Action for Disabled Persons, adopted in 1982, indicated that war is a leading cause of disabilities. Data showing the relationship between conflict and disability in Colombia is the one indicating that as of January 2016, 188,851 civil war victims¹, representing 7% of the total of such victims, have reported having a disability, with 11,243 cases corresponding to victims of landmines and unexploded ordnance, between 1990 and 2015². Thirty three years after that Action Programme, Colombia is on the verge of signing a peace agreement and close to give the opportunity to abolish civil war as a generator of disabilities.

Whatever the cause and type of disability, this condition is serious in itself. However, this condition is deepened because of the lower social value given to people with disabilities, reflected, among others, in the unemployment and economic marginalization of disabled people. Already in 1982, the Programme of World Action for Disabled Persons warned that "It would be necessary to focus on the ability of people with disabilities and not on their limitations." That lesson is still to be learned by countries like Colombia, where "...61 % of people with disabilities do not receive any financial assistance"³.

¹ Victims Unit . Retrieved on: <<<http://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/?q=node/107>>>

² Ministry of Post Conflict , Security and Human Rights. Landmine victims. Retrieved on: <<<http://www.accioncontraminas.gov.co/estadisticas/Paginas/victimas-minas-antipersonal.aspx>>>



The social impairment to recognize the capacity of people with physical or cognitive limitations is one of the elements that justify the priority theme of the Commission for Social Development: "Reconsider and strengthen social development in the contemporary world ", as a society should strengthened development, and should identify and build the capacity of people with disabilities.

A case study of the opportunity to strengthen social development by identifying the abilities of people with disabilities is given by the Maria Luisa de Moreno International Foundation, a non-profit organization that offers education, assistance and humanitarian programmes.

This non-governmental organization recognizes that disability is both a cause and effect of poverty in the world and that one day all people will suffer disabilities in one way or another. From these starting points, the Maria Luisa Moreno International Foundation developed a model called "Discovering the ability: an opportunity."

The type of intervention that the Foundation promotes the rights of disabled people in accordance with internationally recognized standards, striving to exceed the welfare approach that produces dependence. It also recognizes that disability is not only the absence or anatomic or functional impairment, but that it also derives largely from environments and societies unprepared to guarantee the rights of this population.

The model proposed by the NGO identifies barriers in communication, education, health, infrastructure and accessibility or social or cultural acceptance of people with disabilities. Besides, it focuses on the collective recognition and construction of social networks, participatory rehabilitation, access to information, mobility and income-generation skills.

The Foundation put this approach to the test in 2015, when in the city of Cali (Colombia) 11 communes were intervened, drawing the attention of more than 2,500 people with various types of disabilities. Six hundred and forty people and 770 companies were also given access to the program and about 330 people were given educational sessions on labor and social skills and on human values. Finally, the Foundation secured the employment of 81 people with physical or cognitive disabilities.

³ Registration for the localization and characterization of Persons with Disabilities - RLCPD. Ministry of Health and Social Protection. Link: <<<http://www.agenciapandi.org/en-colombia-el-61-de-las-personas-con-discapacidad-no-recibe-ningun-tipo-de-ingreso-economico-para-su-subsistencia-es-necesario-que-como-sociedad-les-brindemos-mas-oportunidades-laborales/>>>



This successful experience demonstrates the possibility of strengthening social development, with integrative approaches for persons with disabilities to our social and economic lives. To that end, it would be useful to update the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, with a focus on harmonizing each other, in accordance to the Objectives of the 'Millennium Development 2030'.