



## **Equitable social development: the inclusion of people with disabilities**

As Catalina Devandas-Aguilar describes it in the report presented on August 9, 2016: "People with disabilities are subject to great inequalities around the world and are more likely to experience poverty and other forms of social exclusion." Despite of the great advances in the recognition and observance of the human rights of people with disabilities, a long process of effective inclusion must still be carried out, allowing them to enjoy their full rights. It is for this reason that greater efforts are required to facilitate access to information on their rights, accompanied by comprehensive training that allows people with disabilities to acquire the necessary tools for their empowerment and subsequent inclusion.

Likewise, it is necessary to promote social awareness in a way that reduces the effects of discrimination towards people with disabilities in society, recognizing disability as a reason for exclusion in different areas of daily life, from the classrooms to the professional spheres, since only from this realization measures for non-discrimination of the collective can be implemented.

Thus, it is not only a matter of providing information and implementing holistic pedagogical methods. There needs to also be a social and political commitment on the part of society to adapt the environment to people with disabilities, promoting awareness programs in the community and especially in the business environment.

In this sense, it is necessary to carry out a joint work with the educational entities, the business sector and the media, because it is through the latter that the community might ultimately perceive one way or another the issue of disability and from myths around disability can be dismantled.

The third sector has faced this difficult task during the last years, progressing little by little in the development of new methodologies that allow the full participation in the society of people with disabilities. This is the case of the non-governmental organization, led by its founder María Luisa Piraquive, which proposes a method called "Discovering the capacity: an opportunity", to strengthen the social development and to break with the cycles of poverty and exclusion that many people in situations of disability currently face. This approach is based on the recognition of disability, not only due to any loss/lack of organs but also due to anatomical or functional deficiencies, but also due to shortcomings in the different areas of society that are not well prepared to guarantee the rights of this population.

The method identifies barriers in communication, education, health, accessibility or infrastructure and social or cultural acceptance of persons with disabilities, and later focuses



on collective recognition and social fabric building, participatory rehabilitation, access to information and mobility, Skills and competencies and income generation.

It is considered that the most powerful tool to achieve inclusion and to promote the autonomy of the population with disabilities, is the construction of environments for employability and income generation, where not only people with disabilities but also their families and their communities, entrepreneurs and the state entities can recognize the capacities of people with disabilities, discovering in them competencies that due to stereotypes are not easily visible.

Thus, in communities where disability impedes the ability to see the capacities and the active role of each member, this program has promoted a change of vision that allows the adequate integration of people with disabilities.

In addition, the María Luisa Piraquive International Foundation acted as the organizer of the I and II Ibero-American Forum for the social and productive inclusion of people with disabilities. This Forum, which has been held in Bogota (Colombia), has been shown to be a scenario, which for two consecutive years has strengthened the design of new initiatives, sharing good practices achieved with officials of the governments of Chile, Panama, Spain, and Colombia. As a result of these Forum, several public entities have decided to include people with disabilities within their staff, so they have chosen, among other inclusion actions, to be trained in Sign Language to give better attention to employees with disability.

The Miraism International Association believes that the goals set for 2030 require the effective inclusion of people with disabilities, especially if we consider that 4 of the 17 sustainable development goals relate to people with disabilities.

This successful experience demonstrates the possibility of strengthening social development, with integrative approaches for people in situations of disability, to the social and economic life of our nations. Thus, once obstacles to the inclusion of people with disabilities have been eliminated, they can play an active part of the community and make great contributions to social development.