Children with disabilities: Left behind or forgotten? Empirical evidence from Botswana using multidimensional poverty measures

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In line with the conference theme “Children’s Rights and Opportunities in an Unequal World: Research, Policy and Intervention”, this paper focuses on children with disabilities and the extent to which disability limits access to opportunities. The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development recognise the importance of disability in relation to multidimensional poverty. Its Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle and Sustainable Development Goal 1.2 calls for data on multidimensional poverty to be disaggregated by subgroup, including children and people with disabilities. By zooming in on a country case study – Botswana – we provide empirical evidence about the link between multidimensional poverty and disability among children. Although Botswana’s Vision 2036 and National Development Plan 11 stipulate that disability issues should be seen in terms of social inclusion, the relationship between disability and poverty has most often been considered based on monetary poverty. To date, no study has examined the link between childhood disability and multidimensional poverty.

We employ a mixed-method approach. First, we utilise the 2015/16 Botswana multi-topic household survey dataset, a nationally representative cross-sectional data collected by Statistics Botswana. Second, we collect primary qualitative data, including interviews and focus group discussions to augment the quantitative analysis and incorporate the views of children living with disabilities. We adopt the Washington Group (WG) definition to measure child disability. A child is identified as living with a disability if he/she reported any difficulty in at least one of the following functional limitations: difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking, remembering, communicating, self-care (use of hands). In addition, we compute multidimensional child poverty using the Alkire-Foster aggregation method. We use twenty-three child indicators from seven dimensions to measure multidimensional child poverty.

Despite the call by the LNOB and SDG 1.2, most studies on childhood disability and multidimensional poverty rely on the global MPI and use quantitative data. The study addresses this gap and uses country-specific multidimensional measures. Also, by conducting qualitative interviews, the study incorporates the views of children living with disabilities. The findings of this study will provide necessary evidence about the link between multidimensional child poverty and childhood disability. In addition, the findings of this paper will provide policy implications for childhood disability research and public policies in Botswana.