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Fluent in both Spanish and English, David is a vocal advocate for Spanish-speaking Americans across the continents. Given that 15 to 20% of the US population are Spanish Speakers, often disenfranchised, David's advocacy work is especially crucial. His commitment to fostering an inclusive environment through communication and international cooperation continues to drive his impact worldwide.

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Inclusive and Sustainable Development in Latin America: Implementing the SDGs with Global Cooperation

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Abstract

This article examines the critical role of international cooperation in supporting Latin America's efforts to implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It underscores the importance of a holistic approach in addressing the region's various challenges, including economic and social inequality, insufficient infrastructure, climate change, and political instability. The article advocates for continuous commitment, innovation, and adaptation in pursuing these goals and emphasizes inclusion's crucial role, particularly for people with disabilities. It concludes that despite its challenges, Latin America has the potential to make a significant contribution to global sustainable development, while also benefiting from international collaboration.

Keywords: SDGs, People with Disabilities, MDGs, UN, Development, Latin America, inclusion, sustainability, challenge, community.

Introduction: The importance of global cooperation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the inclusion of all

International Development Cooperation has its roots in the United Nations Charter, which in its Article 1 establishes the importance of global collaboration to solve international problems of an economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian nature, promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without any distinction (UN, 1945). However, throughout history, development has not always considered human rights, let alone the inclusion of historically neglected populations such as persons with disabilities (PwD).

During the first 40 years of the existence of the United Nations, human rights and development were addressed separately, focusing on the economic and political aspects of action but leaving aside the freedoms and rights of historically neglected populations (Acebal Monfort, Fernández Aller, & Luis Romero, 2011). This approach was influenced by the tensions between the UN members during the Cold War and the opposing positions they held on Civil and Political Rights (CPR) and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESCR). During this period, the development focus was purely economic, with social improvements expected as an automatic consequence of economic advancement and growth.

With the end of the Cold War, international cooperation began to change. In 1997, under the direction of Kofi Annan, the United Nations began to directly link development with human rights. In 2001, the first Inter-Agency Workshop was held at Princeton University, where it was decided to integrate human rights into development assistance programs and country evaluations, laying the foundations of what is known as the human rights-based approach (Acebal Monfort, Fernández Aller, & Luis Romero, 2011).

The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, subsequently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda has further strengthened the relationship between development and human rights. These goals, designed to be universally applicable, promote state accountability to their citizens and the financing and execution of existing development and human rights commitments (UN Costa Rica, Government of Costa Rica, 2022).

The human rights-based approach in international cooperation implies a profound transformation in the understanding and action on development. In this framework, the populations targeted by development efforts are not simply passive beneficiaries, but rights holders. This means they have the right to actively participate in decisions that affect their lives and demand accountability from those with the duty to fulfill and protect those rights. In this context, governments are not just service providers or benefactors, but take on the role of rights guarantors. They are obliged to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights, which implies taking positive steps to facilitate the enjoyment of rights, prevent rights violations, and provide redress when rights are violated. This shift in approach has profound implications for international cooperation, as it requires a stronger and more rights-focused commitment to the dignity of individuals in all development activities.

This leads us to reiterate that true development cannot be spoken of without including and empowering historically neglected groups, including the PwD community. These are fundamental aspects to achieve the SDGs, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) should guide their implementation (AECID, 2018). International development cooperation can only be inclusive

and accessible if a Human Rights-Based Approach is concretely and entirely applied in the planning, evaluation, and execution of projects and programs.

In this context, it is crucial to work together to ensure that countries in Latin America and the rest of the world progress in the implementation of the SDGs and protect our planet and all its inhabitants, promoting inclusion and ensuring respect for human rights.

In the following sections, we will explore the region's progress in implementing the SDGs, the challenges faced by Latin America, some key strategies, and the importance of international cooperation at both the regional and global levels to achieve significant development. This approach will encompass the Human Rights-based perspective and include historically neglected communities.

A brief overview of Latin America's progress in implementing the SDGs

In Latin America, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has significantly advanced, although there is still much work to be done. The region has demonstrated its commitment to the global agenda by adopting laws and policies that address issues such as social inclusion, the environment, and the reduction of inequality.

One piece of data that reflects this progress is that all 33 countries that make up Latin America have signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), thus demonstrating their commitment to inclusion and human development. (UN, 2023)

A distinctive feature in Latin America has been the affirmation of the rights of PwD, with the implementation of legislation and policies aimed at ensuring their inclusion and well-being. Many of these laws originated in the 1990s (Stang, 2011), in parallel with the publication of the United Nations Standards on Equal Opportunities for PwD. This fact underscores the region's trend to align with initiatives and proposals led by the United Nations, such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, evidencing its persistent quest for international cooperation.

Latin American governments have worked to comply with what the United Nations has requested, as international cooperation has been crucial for the progress and development of the region's countries. Maintaining an excellent international reputation is essential for receiving cooperation, establishing international relations, and achieving the development goals proposed by the United Nations.

As we approach the 2030 deadline to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is clear that, although we have made progress, there is still a long way to go. According to the United Nations 2022 Sustainable Development Goals Report, interconnected global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and the conflict in Ukraine, have hindered progress towards the SDGs worldwide.

As for Latin America and the Caribbean, the situation is equally complex. According to the latest Regional Trends projections by ECLAC for 2030, the region shows mixed performance. One-third of the SDGs targets are on track to be achieved by 2030. For the remaining two-thirds, political actions are required to accelerate

current positive trends (46% of the targets) or to reverse stagnation or backsliding trends (22% of the targets). (ECLAC, 2023)

Despite this mixed performance in the region and the fact that a third are on track to be achieved, it is essential to admit that the reality is far from ideal. While current laws have been a valuable resource for civil society organizations committed to the inclusion of PwD to achieve their full potential, Latin America still faces significant challenges on its path to inclusion and sustainable development.

Indeed, there is a clear and concerning gap between policy formulation and its subsequent implementation, execution, and practical evaluation that allows a real impact on the lives of historically neglected populations. The title of the document published by ECLAC by María Fernanda Stang, "Persons with Disabilities in Latin America: From legal recognition to real inequality." (Stang, 2011), clearly encapsulates this reality, reflecting that, on numerous occasions, efforts to advance towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the guidelines proposed by the United Nations can become stagnant in the political arena, without achieving a tangible translation into improvements for these groups.

Challenges Faced by Latin America in achieving inclusion and sustainable development

As evidenced in the previous sections, Latin America's performance in adopting Sustainable Development Goals has been heterogeneous. This reality reveals that both governments and organizations committed to promoting sustainable development in the region are

facing constant and significant challenges. Among these challenges are:

- 1. Economic and social inequality:** *Latin America is characterized by high levels of income and opportunities (Lissardy, 2020). This reality limits access to basic services, such as education and healthcare, for a large population sector, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting human development potential.*
- 2. Insufficient infrastructure:** *The infrastructure challenge in Latin America focuses on the need for social investment and infrastructure as fundamental drivers for growth and shared prosperity, according to a World Bank report. Although the region's economies have recovered to pre-pandemic levels, low growth rates are expected for the coming years, which is insufficient to make significant advances in terms of poverty reduction. In addition, the region has to face global uncertainty caused by various crises, such as the war in Ukraine and inflationary pressures. (World Bank, 2022)*
- 3. Climate change and environmental degradation:** *The region is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as droughts, floods, and extreme events. In addition, it faces issues of deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and pollution that threaten the sustainability of its ecosystems and natural resources (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2020).*
- 4. Corruption and political instability:** *These factors undermine trust in institutions and hinder the implementation of effective and transparent public policies in critical areas such as education, health, and the environment. (STATISTA, 2022)*

5. Barriers in the inclusion of PwD: The inclusion of PwD, who comprise 14.7% of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean, is crucial for the region's sustainable development. According to the World Bank, the exclusion of this group can cause a loss of up to 7% of a country's GDP and perpetuates poverty. The challenges are even more significant for vulnerable groups such as women and rural and indigenous populations. Overcoming these barriers is fundamental to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. (World Bank, 2021)

Overcoming these challenges requires a comprehensive and sustainable commitment that involves cooperation between the governments of Latin America, civil society, and the private sector in conjunction with the international community at large. In this sense, strategies should include strengthening institutions and improving governance, investing in infrastructure and basic services, promoting education and skill development, and safeguarding regional ecosystems and natural resources. It is essential to ensure the inclusion and active participation of all parts of society, particularly PwD, in implementing and monitoring the SDGs. In the next section, we will address the role of international alliances on the path toward genuine inclusion and the response to the challenges we have identified.

The Role of international alliances in addressing Latin America's Challenges

Global collaborations are essential to confront Latin America's challenges and promote sustainability in the region. These

international links enable cooperation between nations and entities from various regions, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and resources. (OECD, 2019) The purpose is to strengthen public policies and development strategies, focusing on sustainability and overcoming development obstacles, emphasizing inclusion, and strengthening internal institutional capacities and human rights.

Collaborations can take multiple forms, from bilateral and multilateral agreements to partnerships between governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Forums and cooperative efforts where best practices, efforts, successes, and failures are exchanged are essential to ensure the sustainability of these advances. Through these alliances, Latin American countries can boost their development by benefiting from other countries' and international organizations' experience and resources, strengthening their capacities in vital areas such as education, health, environmental management, and social inclusion.

On the other hand, international alliances can play a decisive role in promoting the inclusion of PwD in Latin America. International cooperation is essential to support the efforts of countries, especially developing countries, to comply with the objectives of the CRPD.

Governments must adopt appropriate and effective measures to foster international cooperation among States parties, particularly South-South and triangular cooperation, in partnership, where appropriate, with international and regional organizations and relevant civil society organizations, especially organizations of PwD.

By sharing knowledge and best practices, countries in the region can learn from each other and the international community how to improve accessibility, ensure the rights of PwD and promote their full participation in society. (Devandas, 2020).

In conclusion, international alliances and global cooperation represent a strategic axis for sustainable development and ensuring inclusion in Latin America. Advances in these areas largely depend on the ability of the region's countries to leverage and adapt the experiences, knowledge, and resources available internationally. The diversity of existing collaborations and cooperative efforts is a testament to the vitality and potential of these exchanges.

In particular, the emphasis on including PwD demonstrates the region's commitment to a vision of comprehensive and equitable development. This perspective leads us to the next section, where we will explore key strategies for promoting inclusion and sustainable development, drawing on the rich experience of international cooperation and the lessons learned from existing alliances.

Key Strategies to promote inclusion and sustainable development in Latin America

To promote inclusion and sustainable development in Latin America, it is crucial to adopt a series of key strategies:

- 1. Institutional strengthening: To improve governance and the effectiveness of public policies, it is essential to strengthen institutions at all levels of government and promote transparency, constant evaluation, accountability, and citizen participation, including historically underserved populations.***

- 2. Investments in infrastructure and essential services:** *It is necessary to increase investments in infrastructure, such as transportation, energy, water and sanitation, and information and communication technologies, to improve access to essential services and promote sustainable economic growth for the entire population, including those in the peripheries and rural areas.*
- 3. Education and skills training:** *To break the cycle of poverty and promote inclusion, it is vital to improve the quality and accessibility of education and provide skills training opportunities for all, including PwD and all historically underserved populations, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or income level.*
- 4. Environmental protection:** *To ensure the sustainability of the region's natural resources, it is crucial to adopt policies and practices that promote environmental conservation, adaptation to climate change, and the transition to a green and inclusive economy.*
- 5. Active participation and regional collaboration:** **In the current context of global interdependence, it is essential that Latin America and the Caribbean actively engage in global conversations and actions around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The region has the opportunity to share its achievements and challenges, learn from the experiences of others, and contribute to the formulation of sustainable development strategies globally. This active participation and regional collaboration reinforce the region's capacity to address its unique challenges and meet its sustainable development commitments.**

Adopting the critical strategies outlined above and many others is imperative to achieve sustainable and inclusive development in Latin America. However, it should be noted that these strategies can be considerably strengthened through collaboration and support from the global community.

Institutional strengthening, investments in infrastructure and essential services, education and skills training, environmental protection, and active participation and regional collaboration are fundamental pillars to promote resilient and sustainable development. Through alliances and cooperation, the international community's involvement can act as a catalyst for effectively implementing these strategies.

The Latin America and Caribbean region, like other regions of the world, has an essential role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve these goals, it is vital that the region actively engages in global discussions and actions, sharing its achievements and challenges, learning from others, and contributing to the generation of sustainable development solutions globally. In this sense, international cooperation supports Latin America's efforts and strengthens the global capacity to address shared challenges and promote development that benefits us all.

The importance of involving the global community in supporting Latin America's efforts.

We cannot fail to reiterate that the involvement of the international community is an essential component to ensuring success in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Latin

America. As the UN rightly points out on its page dedicated to the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, the technical, financial, and political assistance of the global community is indispensable to strengthening the capabilities of Latin American countries and promoting the adoption of sustainable development policies and practices (UN, 2023).

In addition, the international community plays a crucial role in promoting the inclusion of PWD in Latin America. By highlighting the relevance of inclusion and the rights of PwD in global agendas, the international community can influence governments and other relevant actors to take concrete measures in this area, and the same can be done on all issues related to the SDGs; this push can have real effects on the lives of the most vulnerable populations.

The global community is also vital in supporting Latin America's efforts to address the challenges of economic and social inequality, insufficient infrastructure, climate change, environmental degradation, corruption, and political instability. According to the United Nations, international cooperation is a powerful means to help Latin American countries develop and implement comprehensive and sustainable solutions to these challenges (UN, 2023).

***While the global community has yet to solve all of its problems, cooperation with Latin America can greatly enrich these global solutions to global problems.* The technical, financial, and political assistance of the global community is indispensable to strengthening the capacities of Latin American countries in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, thus promoting sustainable development policies and practices. Working together, the global**

community and Latin America can develop and implement comprehensive and sustainable solutions, thus contributing to solving problems of global scope.

Conclusion: The Path Forward for Latin America and the World in Implementing the SDGs

Latin America has a clear path to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - one of continuous commitment, cooperation, innovation, and adaptation. To overcome the challenges the region faces, adopting a holistic and multifaceted approach that recognizes and addresses the interconnection between various aspects and stakeholders of sustainable development and inclusion is essential.

First, it is imperative that governments, civil society, and the private sector in Latin America continue to engage with the SDGs and work together to implement policies and strategies that promote equitable and sustainable development from a human rights-based approach. This involves strengthening institutions, increasing investments in infrastructure and essential services, improving education and skills training, protecting the environment, and fostering active participation of rights holders and the collaboration of duty bearers at the local, regional, and global levels.

Second, Latin America must make the most of international alliances and cooperation. Collaboration with the global community can enrich the region's development strategies, provide resources and technical and financial support, and help address shared challenges like climate change, inequality, and exclusion.

Third, it is crucial that Latin America continue to innovate and adapt in response to emerging challenges and opportunities in the context of sustainable development and inclusion. This involves staying abreast of scientific and technological advances, learning from the experiences of other regions, and adapting to the changing circumstances and needs of its population.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is essential that Latin America remains firm in its commitment to inclusion. This means ensuring that everyone, including people with disabilities, can fully participate in society and benefit from sustainable development. *Inclusion is not only a human right but also a precondition and the primary indicator of sustainable development.*

Despite the challenges it faces, Latin America has the potential to make a significant contribution to sustainable development and inclusion at the global level. At the same time, the region can greatly benefit from collaboration with the global community. The commitment to leave no one behind must be at the heart of these efforts. With conviction in this motto, we can work together to make the SDGs a reality for all, ensuring that each individual has the opportunity to thrive in a more sustainable and equitable world.

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