

# COMMONS

Revista de Comunicación y Ciudadanía Digital

Publicación bianual

Volumen 6, Número 1 pp. 130-147

ISSN 2255-3401

Mayo 2017

## **COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE: INFLUENCING SOCIAL NORMS FOR AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY IN MONTENEGRO**

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Fecha de envío: 29/10/2016

Fecha de aceptación: 10/01/2017

# COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE: INFLUENCING SOCIAL NORMS FOR AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY IN MONTENEGRO

## COMUNICACIÓN PARA EL DESARROLLO Y EL CAMBIO SOCIAL: INFLUENCIA DE LAS NORMAS SOCIALES PARA UNA SOCIEDAD INCLUSIVA EN MONTENEGRO

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### Abstract

UNICEF and the Government of Montenegro implemented a communication strategy "It's about ability" to challenge the existing, exclusionary practices and promote new, inclusive social norms for children with disability. Drawing on communication for development principles and social norms theory, a 2010-2013 nation-wide campaign mobilized disability rights NGOs, parents associations, media and private sector to stimulate inclusive attitudes and practices towards children with disabilities. As a result, the percentage of citizens who find it acceptable for a child with disability to attend the same class with theirs increased from 35 before the campaign to 80 percent at the end of it. Similarly, the percentage of Montenegrin citizens who find it acceptable for a child with disability to be the best friend of their child increased from 22 before the campaign to 51 percent at the end of it. The campaign was participatory, audience-centred and guided by the key communication planning principles.

### Resumen

UNICEF y el Gobierno de Montenegro implementaron la estrategia de comunicación "Se trata de la habilidad" para desafiar las prácticas existentes y excluyentes y promover nuevas normas sociales inclusivas para los niños con discapacidad. Basándose en los principios de la comunicación para el desarrollo y las normas sociales, una campaña nacional del 2010-2013 movilizó a las ONG de derechos de las personas con discapacidad, asociaciones de padres, los medios de comunicación y el sector privado para estimular las actitudes y prácticas inclusivas hacia los niños con discapacidades. Como resultado, el porcentaje de ciudadanos que encuentran aceptable para un niño con discapacidad asistir a la misma clase que los suyos aumentó de un 35%, antes de la campaña, a un 80% al final de la misma. Del mismo modo, el porcentaje de ciudadanos montenegrinos que encuentran aceptable que un niño con discapacidad pueda ser el mejor amigo de sus hijos incrementó de un 22% anterior a la campaña a un 51% al final de la misma. La campaña fue participativa, centrada en el público y guiada por los principios clave de planificación de la comunicación.

### Keywords

Social norms; children with disabilities;  
 Montenegro; Eastern Europe; UNICEF

### Palabras clave

Normas sociales; niños con discapacidades;  
 Montenegro; Europa Este; UNICEF

## 1. Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities call upon the governments to ensure that all children, irrespective of their abilities, enjoy their rights. However, children with disabilities are often discriminated against and have little voice in public dialogue. Most countries lack proper health,

social protection and education services to support them. Due to the physical, cultural, economic and communication barriers, these children are mostly invisible: they are hidden at home, kept in institutions and enrolled in special schools (UNICEF, 2013).

The invisibility of children with disability starts with the lack of data about them. As pointed out by UNICEF (2013a), this is caused by several factors: out-dated definitions and measures of disability; inadequate resources and statistical capacities; families denying having children with disabilities; etc.

According to a 2007 review of the literature in low -and middle- income countries, child disability prevalence varies from 0.4% to 12.7% depending on the study and assessment tool (Maulik & Darmstadt, 2007).

Montenegro, a small country in Eastern Europe with a population of 620 029, of which 23.6% are children 0-18 (MONSTAT, 2014), has no reliable data on the number of children with disabilities.

Like in the neighbouring countries, in 2010, Montenegro's response to the situation of these children was largely limited to placing them in institutions and segregating them in special schools. Development of inclusive health, education and child protection systems was the priority of the ongoing reforms<sup>1</sup>.

However, in 2010, an attempt to establish the first small group home, which imitates family environment for children without parental care and with severe disabilities, failed due to the hostility and prejudices against these children by the hosting community<sup>2</sup>. This was, in many ways, a manifestation of the existing and dominant social norm that contributed to the stigma and discrimination of children with disability. Promoting a new, inclusive social norm was necessary for creating public support to making the education, health and child protection systems inclusive.

1. Media release by UNICEF Montenegro in relation to the concerning situation of children with disabilities in 2010 is available at [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media\\_14430.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media_14430.html)

2. Media releases by UNICEF Montenegro in relation to this is available at [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media\\_14430.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media_14430.html) and [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media\\_14656.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media_14656.html)

3. UNICEF or the United Nations Children's Fund promotes the rights and wellbeing of children worldwide since 1946.

Consequently, in September 2010, UNICEF<sup>3</sup> and the Government of Montenegro launched a campaign, entitled "It's about ability", to challenge the existing exclusionary practices and promote new, inclusive social norms. The campaign was aimed at increasing awareness about the rights and abilities of children with disabilities and stimulating inclusive attitudes and practices towards them.

At the same time, UNICEF continued supporting the government to establish and spread new, inclusive services and improve accessibility and quality of the existing ones, as long-lasting changes cannot be realized "without the improvement of structural conditions and services" (Waisbord, 2014: kindle loc. 4064 of 13775). The campaign promoted inclusive services by explaining to people what they are about, why they are needed and what benefits they have for the local community and the entire society.

In this paper, we report on the implementation of this comprehensive campaign (2010 – 2013) to promote the inclusion of children with disabilities in Montenegro. After the introduction on the conditions of children with disability in the country, we explain campaign's theoretical background, key components, results and implications for future communication efforts to address stigma, discrimination and exclusion of children with disability, which may be considered across countries around the world.

## 2. Theoretical background

In order to fulfil the rights of these children, apart from reforming the health, education and social protection systems and providing adequate services to families with children with disabilities, countries need to work on the promotion of new, inclusive social norms.

Bicchieri (2006) defines a social norm as a rule of behaviour such that individuals prefer to conform to it on the condition that they believe that most people in their reference network conform to it (empirical expectations) and that most people in their reference network believe they ought to conform to it (normative expectations).

If we apply Bicchieri's definition to analyse exclusion of children with disabilities, we see that many parents isolate these children because they believe that people around them would do the same (empirical expectation). They also think that other parents and people around them believe that they should do so to protect them, avoid bullying, stigma, etc. (normative expectation).

Creating a new social norm, according to Bicchieri (2006), requires changes in people's personal and factual beliefs, introduction of sanctions for non-compliance with the new norm and promotion of new normative and empirical expectations. In this way, with time, a critical mass is formed and reaches a tipping point, where it becomes the majority in the country. The new behaviour which it promotes becomes the social norm that everyone is expected to follow. Communication plays a critical role in challenging existing and promoting new norms that may lead to inclusiveness (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Kincaid, 2012).

While behaviour change communication approaches have been widely used across different fields, a focus on social norms has been less intentional. For the most part, behaviour change communication approaches seek to influence behaviours which will eventually lead to the predominance of particular behaviours that become the norm (Kincaid, 2012). In the social norms approach, the assumption is that changing a norm or introducing a new norm accelerates the predominance of a particular behaviour (Bicchieri, 2006).

From a theoretical standpoint, Montenegrin campaign drew on the social norms theory as described above. While the literature on norms speaks of the importance of harmonizing different types of norms – cultural, legal and social, this campaign focused primarily on the social component of norms. It focused on the promotion of a social norm in favour of inclusion, which, in a few years, could reach a tipping point, as the campaign built the “momentum to a point where change gains strength and becomes unstoppable” (McKee, Becker-Benton & Bockh, 2014: kindle loc. 7363 of 13755).

4. Information on UNICEF C4D approach is available at [http://www.unicef.org/cbsc/index\\_42148.html](http://www.unicef.org/cbsc/index_42148.html)

At conceptual level, Montenegrin campaign drew on UNICEF's Communication for Development and Social Change principles. They focus on participation, dialogue, engagement of communities, appreciation of context and use of theory and evidence to guide design, implementation and evaluation of communication components<sup>4</sup>.

The campaign is in line with the socio-ecological perspective, as it complements work undertaken across different levels. The application of the socio-ecological model posits that change is often needed at individual, community, policy and social level (McKee, Becker-Benton & Bockh, 2014). For instance, at policy level, disability needed to be systematically approached in line with the social model of disability instead of the traditional medical one, which sees it as a "problem" of an individual and not as a problem of the society, which needs to remove barriers to include all its members. At service provision level, services alternative to institutions and special schools which allow children with disabilities to live with their families and attend mainstream schools needed to be established all over the country. In this context, the campaign contributed to changes at individual, community and social level, as changes in social norms affect behaviours across all these levels.

We argue that this campaign is an example of strategic communication for development and social change which is participatory at the same time even though "traditionally, in the field of communication for social change... strategic communication has been seen as the opposite of participation" (Tacchi & Waisbord, 2015:98). Children with disabilities were the campaign leaders from the beginning. In addition, the campaign actively "listened" to the audiences through formative research and interactive activities. Together with the parents associations, disability people's organizations, child rights NGOs and other relevant stakeholders, children with and without disabilities were included in the strategic thinking, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Hence, the campaign adopted from the beginning a participatory approach, which led to the social change planned by its communication strategy.

### 3. Methodology

The campaign implementation followed cyclically the standard steps included in many communication planning models (Puggelli & Sobrero, 2010; McKee, Becker-Benton & Bockh, 2014, etc.): listening, planning, pretesting, implementing, monitoring, evaluation and revising. We next describe them.

#### 3.1 Listening

Listening was two-fold: it drew on mixed research methods including surveys, qualitative research and participatory activities with stakeholders and communities.

The formative research component was based on the KAP (Knowledge, Attitude, Practices) survey related to inclusion of children with disabilities conducted in August 2010. The data was collected through 30 min face-to-face interviews in households on a nationally representative sample of 18 years and over. The sample included 1,014 respondents. As shown in the table 1, this baseline research revealed that a majority of citizens was in favour of exclusion of children with disabilities. Only 35 percent said that they would accept a child with disability to attend the same class with theirs. Twenty percent said that they would accept a child with disability as the best friend of theirs. According to the survey, the most discriminating citizens had no information and personal experience with these children.

**Table 1.** Data from the KAP survey conducted in August 2010 before the campaign

% of citizens who said they would accept a child with disability to attend the same class with their child	<b>35%</b>
% of citizens who said they would accept a child with disability as the best friend of their child	<b>20%</b>

Source: [https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/keyfindingsforwebsiteandpartners-enversion-101112080948-phpapp01\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/keyfindingsforwebsiteandpartners-enversion-101112080948-phpapp01(1).pdf)

Nationally representative KAP surveys with the same methodology were repeated every year to obtain feedback from audiences, monitor and evaluate the impact of the campaign and plan its new phases.

5. Reports from campaign quantitative and qualitative research are available online at [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_24043.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_24043.html)

6. From the survey on the impact of school parliaments, slide 2, available at <https://app.box.com/s/llkzcj1orcdtpq-9grlgrmb5n3kap58xf>

Qualitative research was carried out at a later stage of the campaign, when it focused on community mobilization. At that point, focus groups and interviews with children with and without disabilities, their parents and teachers were conducted in order to assess the impact of school parliaments and youth inclusive volunteers' clubs on promoting inclusion in the mainstream schools and local communities<sup>5</sup>. This research showed that around one third of students still thought that children with disabilities should attend special schools due to the still low quality of inclusive education<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative research indicated that exclusion of children with disabilities was essentially the norm.

### 3.2 Planning and Design

The planning stage was participatory. A task force was established with representatives of UNICEF, government, child rights and disability NGOs, children with and without disabilities and their parents, teachers from mainstream and special schools, psychologists and representatives of relevant international organizations. Communication strategy, drafted by UNICEF based on the research, was finalized with the task force. During the strategy implementation, monitoring and evaluation, the task force was informed about the progress and involved in the discussions about the best ways to overcome challenges. In addition, consultations with parents and children with and without disabilities were held continuously through informal meetings and various campaign activities.

The plan was open for changes at all stages depending on the feedback that was coming from different audiences, partners and the task force through social media, emails, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, research, etc.

### 3.3 Pretesting

Pretesting of messages and promotional materials (TV commercial, billboards, etc.) in focus groups helped maintain the audience-centred approach. In this way, the task force learned about the possible reactions of the audiences to the campaign before finalizing its messages.

In line with the pretesting results, the tone of the campaign was positive, emotional and engaging, but never pathetic. The messages consistently pointed out to the potential and abilities of children with disabilities<sup>7</sup>.

### 3.4 Implementing

As Servaes (2002) explains when proposing the framework of multiplicity, there is no one best, single approach for empowering people and achieving social change. Therefore, the campaign included a strategic mix of activities clustered around advocacy, social and community mobilization, and behaviour change communication, each designed to influence different levels across individual, community, institutional and policy level.

This was in line with the socioecological model for change (McKee, Becker-Benton & Bockh, 2014):

... SBBC should ... encourage communities to be agents of their own change; promote dialogue ...; emphasize ... interactions...; and focus ... on social norm change, policies and culture to unfold sustainable change in communities and among individuals. (McKee, Becker-Benton & Bockh 2014: kindle loc. 7255 of 13775)

Specific activities undertaken for each campaign component are detailed below<sup>8</sup>.

#### 3.4.1 Advocacy

Through the participatory approach, the campaign managed to place and keep the rights of children with disabilities on the top of the public agenda. It gave face and voice to children with disabilities in line with the thesis of many authors like Quarry and Ramirez (2009), who underline that advocacy, should promote the voices of the marginalized ones and facilitate their active engagement in the process of making decisions that influence their lives. At the same time, the campaign actively advocated for establishing quality inclusive services throughout the country.

7. Campaign billboards are available online at [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_17178.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_17178.html)

and [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_17177.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_17177.html)

; campaign TV commercials and other promotional videos are available online at [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_17190.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_17190.html)

8. Stories and videos about various campaign activities are available online at [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_15881.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_15881.html)

9. A story and a video about the presentation of one min juniors made by Montenegro's children with and without disabilities at the International TV festival happening in Montenegro in 2011 is available at [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_18405.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_18405.html)

10. More information and a short video from the National Parliament session on inclusion with active participation of children with and without disabilities from all municipalities are available at [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_18541.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_18541.html)

11. Stories and videos about the municipal parliament sessions are available online at [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_20108.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_20108.html) ; [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_20099.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_20099.html) ;

For the first time in Montenegro's history, people could see and listen to children with disabilities speak about inclusion on the most popular media<sup>9</sup>.

Through special sessions in municipal and national parliaments and other campaign activities all over the country, children with and without disabilities, parents, teachers, celebrities and politicians were seriously engaging with the issues of children with disabilities for the first time. For example, children asked the Ministers in the National Parliament about inclusion. Among other things, they demanded access to quality inclusive education<sup>10</sup>. In municipal parliaments, children with disabilities and their parents sparked a discussion about building inclusive communities through the establishment of the day care centres for children with disabilities and making all public spaces accessible to all children<sup>11</sup>.

#### 3.4.2 Social and community mobilization

To harness public support, partners from all sectors of the society were drawn into a broad coalition for social change. They include international organizations, human rights and disability NGOs, media and private sector.

The fact that so many organizations from all sectors of society joined the campaign acted as a social pressure for change. It seemed like everyone was part of it. Logos of different members of the coalition appeared at the end of the campaign TV commercials and on billboards all over the country to remind people that everyone supports inclusion and expects them to do so. In this way, empirical and normative expectations in support of the new, inclusive social norm were spread across the country.

Identifying the champions of disability (i.e. celebrities, government officials, ambassadors, etc.) and mobilising their influence in the community by giving them a platform to speak out against discrimination facilitated the process of promotion of a new, inclusive social norm. People are more likely to follow it when they see their opinion-leaders, friends, colleagues and neighbours do so (empirical expectation).

Community mobilization happened through partnerships with disability and child rights NGOs and schools. School parliaments organized presentations about inclusion in their local communities where individuals could meet children with disabilities. This was significant given that the research indicated that most citizens who discriminated against children with disabilities never met any of them. People's empirical and normative expectations started changing, as they saw that these children could go to mainstream schools and even be members of school parliaments. Citizens felt under pressure to support inclusion, as it seemed like everyone else in the community supported it.

In several municipalities, primary and high schools partnered with Parents' Associations and established inclusive youth volunteers' clubs<sup>12</sup>. This was essential for changing people's empirical expectations, as they saw that children of other parents are friends with children with disabilities. Their original, inclusive events with children's choirs in sign language, inclusive dances and theatre plays, provided opportunities for people to interact with children with disabilities and break prejudices by seeing their abilities.

### 3.4.3 Behaviour Change Communication

The campaign turned the children featured in the adverts into celebrities themselves and people wanted to meet them and talk to them personally. Citizens could easily interact with children with disabilities at campaign events all over the country. In this way, friendship with children with disabilities – the behaviour that the campaign promoted – started becoming a “normal” thing and empirical and normative expectations were changing. This part of the campaign strategy was in line with suggestions from scientists and field experiences that media and interpersonal communication should be integrated (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 1998):

The media have powerful effects only indirectly, by stimulating peer communication and making it possible for messages to enter social networks and become part of everyday interactions. Interpersonal communication is fundamental in persuading people about specific beliefs and practices... (Waisbord, 2005).

12. Stories and videos about inclusive youth volunteers' clubs are available at [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_21129.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_21129.html) ; [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_25428.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_25428.html) ; [http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_20715.html](http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_20715.html)

### 3.5 Monitoring, evaluation and revising

Thanks to media clipping reports and feedback from partners and audiences provided through different channels –social media, emails, phone calls, meetings, etc.–, the task force closely monitored the campaign and revised the communication strategy when needed.

Ideally, the evaluation of communication for social change happens within a participatory framework with seven key components: participatory, holistic, complex, critical, emergent, realistic and learning-based (Tacchi & Lennie, 2014). Although the campaign's evaluation did not have all of these components, it was systematic, thorough and allowed the campaign to be evidence-based.

Its impact was assessed through yearly, nationally representative KAP surveys. The same questions about inclusion of children with disabilities and people's empirical and normative expectations were asked every year. In addition, questions about different campaign activities and promotional materials were included to assess their effectiveness and decide on future activities. KAP surveys were discussed at the task force meetings and used to revise the existing plans and make new ones. This part of evaluation can be considered learning-based (Tacchi & Lennie, 2014).

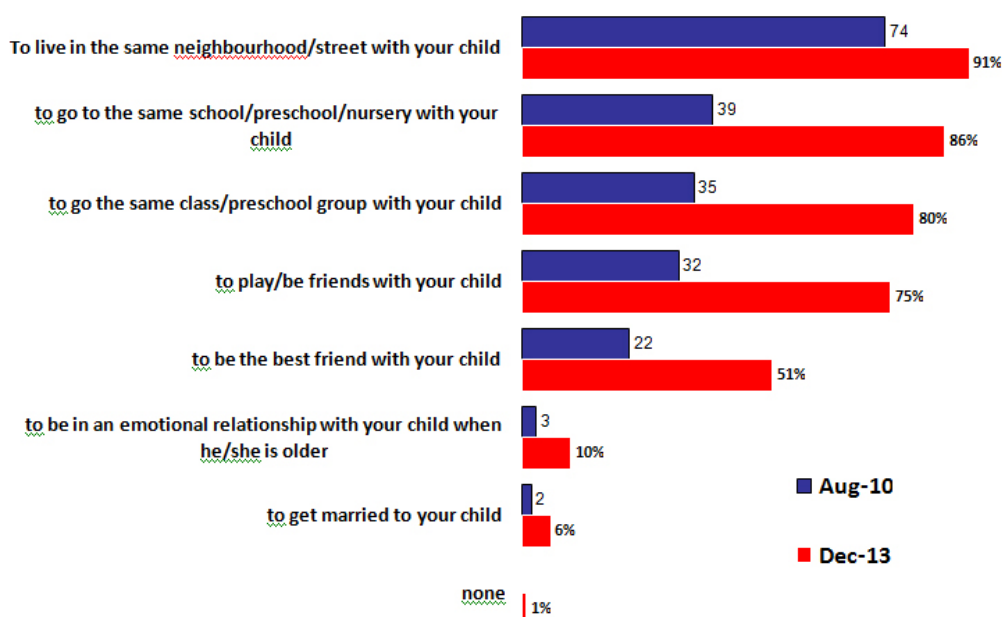
The most significant community mobilization happened through school parliaments and youth inclusive volunteers' clubs. Their impact was assessed through qualitative (focus groups and interviews) and quantitative research (KAP surveys in different municipalities) with children, parents and teachers. This part of evaluation can be considered participatory, as it included different audiences among which children with and without disabilities. It can also be considered as realistic and learning-based (Tacchi & Lennie, 2014).

#### 4. Results

As shown in the Graph 1, the percentage of citizens who would accept that a child with disability attends the same class with theirs increased from 35 before the campaign to 80 percent at the end of the campaign. This was a significant progress of one of the key indicators of empirical expectations.

Similarly, the percentage of citizens who would accept a child with disability as the best friend of theirs increased from 22 before the campaign to 51 percent at the end of it. This progress is related to another key indicator of changing empirical expectations.

**Graph 1.** Impact of the It's about ability campaign implemented from September 2010 to December 2013



Source: [https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns\\_24043.html](https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/campaigns_24043.html)

According to the KAP surveys and qualitative research, most people learned from the campaign that it is possible for children with disability to advance in their development. They also realized that these children could become successful athletes and artists. These results are important indicators of the changes in people's factual beliefs about abilities of children with disabilities in favour of the new inclusive social norm.

The campaign also raised awareness of citizens that children with disabilities can be true friends with peers without disability. Almost two thirds (64 percent) of citizens said to be willing to have their child join an inclusive volunteer's club and become friends with children with disability from the local community. This was an important result for changing people's empirical expectations.

Both in the qualitative and quantitative research, people who said that this campaign changed their attitudes explained that they made no difference between these and other children anymore.

Similarly, 25 percent of the citizens who said to have changed behaviour under the influence of this campaign explained that they communicated with children with disability more easily. This was another indicator of changes in empirical expectations.

The campaign raised awareness of the right of every child, including those with disabilities, to grow up in a family. The percentage of people who think that children with disabilities who are without parental care are better off in a foster family than in an institution increased from 51 before the campaign to 73 percent at the end of it. This was an indicator of changes in people's personal normative beliefs that it is in the best interest of children with disabilities to live in institutions.

In order for children with disabilities to grow up at home, their families need services like day care centres. The campaign advocated for establishing them in every municipality, as only one municipality had this service before the campaign started. At the end of the campaign, only 7% of citizens thought that the majority of people from their community would oppose the establishment of a day care centre or a small group home for children with disabilities in their neighbourhood (normative expectations). This is significant given the fact that the campaign started in 2010 because people from one community raised against having a small group home for children with disabilities in their neighbourhood. Thanks to the campaign advocacy and the child protection system reform, half of the municipalities were in the process of establishing day care centres for children with disabilities by 2015.

The campaign also advocated and created public support for inclusive education of children with disabilities. As a result, the number of children with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools was significantly greater at the end of the campaign than before it. This influenced empirical and normative expectations of parents in favour of inclusive education.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Bessette (2004) defines participatory development communication as a planned activity based on participation, media and interpersonal communication. Its objective is to establish a dialogue with different stakeholders, which leads to developing and implementing activities that contribute to the solution of a common development problem.

This campaign is an example of participatory development communication, as it mobilized children, parents, teachers, communities, local and national authorities and the entire society around inclusion of children with disabilities.

According to many authors, a local approach needs to be identified, as it is impossible to simply replicate a campaign that may lead to social change in one country elsewhere (Wilkins, K. G., Tufte, T. & Obregon, R. (Eds.), 2014). What can be replicated, however, is the application of communication for development and social change principles, the use of theory to guide communication strategies, and a strong focus on data evidence to document change and results. With UNICEF's support, this campaign is now being adapted in order to be replicated in other countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which share many similarities in historical and socio-economic backgrounds.

Finally, it is also important to think about the sustainability of these results. The greater the extent to which governments and civil society organizations can build on these experiences and integrate evidence-based, participatory, and systematic communication for development strategies in their work, the more likely countries are to address stigma and discrimination across a range of issues beyond disability.

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## Biographies

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Jelena has a PhD in Communication Science from the Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. She has been working in the field of C4D/C4SC for years as UNICEF Montenegro Communication Officer. In particular, the highlights of this work are the campaigns on inclusion of children with disabilities, preschool education and fostering.

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