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data for a diverse and equitable future



What is Capacity and Why does it Matter for Equity?

The second stage of the diversitydatakids.org policy equity assessment is capacity. Capacity refers to the ability of a program or policy initiative to fulfill its goals as intended. The logic of a program describes the resources and services needed to achieve program goals, i.e., to attain the desired outcomes. Program capacity describes the magnitude and reach of actual program resources, service delivery, and quality relative to the level needed to generate the desired program outcomes for the eligible population. An important step in assessing program effectiveness is to determine whether policies and programs have adequate capacity, that is, whether they have the adequate program components (program inputs) necessary to meet population needs and deliver services in a manner that is consistent with the program's logic.

diversitydatakids.org analyzes the capacity of policies and programs as defined above, as well as their capacity to address equity, defined as the reduction of disparities between the most and least vulnerable children.¹ This equity-focused assessment requires a detailed analysis of the program's capacity, not only overall, but for subgroups of children. We examine access, coverage, use, quantity and quality of resources, as well as implementation barriers, paying special attention to how they are distributed across subgroups. For example, we assess if there are subgroups of children who systematically face lower program coverage despite being eligible, or lower program quality.²

In order to determine if a program is effective in achieving equity-focused outcomes (such as addressing gaps in school readiness or in access to family medical leave by race/ethnicity and income) it is important to understand the characteristics of the targeted populations and any barriers they may face to participation. These barriers could be related to limited program resources or to service delivery issues that may prevent the program from reaching especially vulnerable groups (e.g., geographic or language barriers). Understanding the capacity of a program to deliver its intended services is critical when evaluating its ability to meet its goals and improve equity. Documenting the capacity of a program, not only overall, but also for subgroups of children, can help bring attention to program improvements needed to serve all children, including the most vulnerable, and lead to a more accurate assessment of program effectiveness.

Sources & notes:

¹ United Nations Children's Fund (2011). *Training Handbook on the Equity Focus in Programmes*. New York, NY: UNICEF.

² Ibid.; Chopra, M., Sharkey, A., Dalmiya, N., Anthony, D., & Binkin, N. (2012). Strategies to improve health coverage and narrow the equity gap in child survival, health, and nutrition (Equity in Child Survival, Health, and Nutrition 1 Series). *Lancet*, 380, 1331–40. doi: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)61423-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)61423-8).