

Opening Statement: Commission for Social Development (55th Session)
High Level Panel Discussion on “Leaving no one behind: Poverty and Disability
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INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITY IN GLOBAL POVERTY ERADICATION EFFORTS: No Greater Need or Potential

As moderator, allow me to begin this session with a short statement regarding Poverty and Disability:

I would argue that the Commission for Social Development has never considered a group with greater need OR greater potential.

Efforts to include persons with disabilities in global poverty eradication programs have evolved over past decade. We now recognize that such efforts are: **Vital**, and can be **Efficient** and **Effective**. Let me take each of these in turn:

- **Vital** – It is now clearly established that few of the key anti-poverty objectives outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals will be reached unless people with disabilities are included. These 1 billion people, who make up 15% of the world’s population, are disproportionately poorer and more marginalized than their non-disabled peers. The Millennium Development Goals did not include any mention of disability and the result was a lost opportunity for both people with disabilities themselves and their communities.¹ The Sustainable Development Goals offers a new chance to ensure inclusion through its commitment to ‘Leave No One Behind.’

Moreover, disability is a cross-cutting issue – whether your ministry or organization works on water and sanitation, HIV/AIDS, micro-credit or urban planning – you should be regularly working with and providing services to disabled individuals and groups. If not, the question is why not - and what can you do to change this?

- **Effective**– There has been a significant shift over the past decade with an increasingly rapid pace of development of new knowledge, insight and experience about the lives of people with disabilities that allows us to better target and provide advocacy, support and resources for this large and largely overlooked population.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) has served as a starting point for a human rights architecture for disability inclusion on the broader global stage. But to this has been added:

- A rapidly growing **evidence base** – A growing body of research and data that not only has more clearly established the links between poverty and disability but importantly, the scope and nature of such links and increasingly, how, where and why interventions can be more effective.
- **New conceptual frameworks** to understand disability within broader socio-economic and development frameworks
- **Stronger legal architecture** at local, national and regional levels to ensure that the work of inclusion is carried on in many domains – (health, education, employment, social protection, civic participation) – actualizing the rights contained in the CRPD itself and promised through the SDG’s commitment to ‘Leave No One Behind’.
- **Expertise** – an increasing body of people have experience working on disability issues and working with the disability community:
 - **Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) and Non-governmental organisations** working as or on behalf of persons with disabilities now have decades of experience working on disability and development concerns in many countries and on the global stage.
 - **Governments** now find within their ranks an increasing number of people in Ministries and administrative positions who have experience with disability concerns. From National Statistics Offices through Departments of Education and Transportation, while there are still serious gaps, it can no longer be said that disability is invisible or that no one within the government has thought about disability issues. How governments address and prioritize disability remains a question of serious concern, but in growing numbers, governments acknowledge and respond to the fact that they are aware of their responsibilities to equally serve and provide resources to disabled populations. This trend should only increase as governments rally to respond to the SDGs.
 - **Civil Society:** There is growing awareness of and concern about the inclusion of persons with disabilities in civil society. Again, there is far to go and such inclusion will vary from community to community – but in many countries, there are dialogues at all levels about the need to increase inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities.
- **Efficient** – growing experience allows us to begin to design increasingly effective methods to identify the number of persons with disabilities in populations and better define their needs and concerns. Until recently, little data was collected on persons with disabilities and what was

collected was often small in scale and methodologically unsound – allowing governments and the development community to say that there was not enough data to allow inclusion of persons with disabilities in broader development efforts.’ This lack of a solid evidence base also limited DPO and NGO advocates from making a stronger case for why disability should be included in development outreach efforts.

Fortunately, times have changed. New methodologies now allow quick, inexpensive and efficient collection of disability data.

For example: The UN Statistics’ City Group – the Washington Group on Disability Statistics’ Short Set of Questionsⁱⁱ allows collection of vital data on a range of disabilities, through 6 key questions on functioning that take less than a minute and a half to administer. These questions, when used in broader censuses, surveys, evaluation or research projects, can be disaggregated and when combined with accompanying data on health, education, employment, civil participation & etc. to yield information with precision and insight. (How many deaf women have not finished primary school/ how many physically disabled men earn less money than their non-disabled peers). The Washington Group Short Set of Questions has been enthusiastically endorsed by UN agencies and the disability community and the Washington Group is developing a range of other tools. Additional data collection instruments, such as the WHO Model Disability Survey are now in development that will add to government and civil society efforts to generate usable data that can better inform development efforts.

In Conclusion

Governments, UN agencies, bi-lateral organizations and civil society must all be involved in the inclusion of persons with disabilities. They must do this not only because it is the right thing to do in a human right’s context or because it is called for under Sustainable Development Goals. They should do it because it is the *smart* thing to do – unless people with disabilities are routinely included in poverty and development efforts, few of the Goals, Targets or Indicators will successfully be reached.

To return to the point I made at the outset of these introductory remarks, I would argue that the Commission for Social Development has never considered a group with greater need OR greater potential. The time to act is now.

ⁱ Groce N, Kett M. 2013. The Disability and Development Gap

ⁱⁱ Washington Group on Disability Statistics website: www.washingtongroup-disability.com