



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Disability and Development Report

Realizing the Sustainable
Development Goals by,
for and with persons
with disabilities

2018



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Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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Chapter I. Overview of the history of the work of the United Nations towards disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable society and development

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the achievements of the international community and to set its course for the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Background

Prior to the establishment of the United Nations, the League of Nations discussed nascent ideas for basic human rights, including promoting rights for minorities, religious freedoms, women and labour. However, the international community saw the beginning of a new era for universal human rights in the United Nations Charter – a result of an International Organization Conference in 1945 – which placed human rights as a core principle of the organization, committing to uphold the dignity and worth of all human beings. The commitment of the international community to promote the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society and development is deeply rooted in the principles of the United Nations Charter.¹² In 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)¹³ which promotes the right to life, liberty and security of all persons in society, including the fostering of all such rights in the event of, among other circumstances, disability. Although it conceptualized disability as a condition, as opposed to a status or a result of a person's interaction with the way in which society is organized, the UDHR is widely recognized for establishing the core principle of equality for all.

The reference to disability in the UDHR as early as 1948, though overdue, provided positive and progressive steps to the advancement and rights of persons with disabilities. Global recognition of persons with disabilities as equals has progressed significantly since then. In 1976, the United Nations adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)¹⁴ and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),¹⁵ which alongside the UDHR formed a triad of international human rights treaties, and what is called the International Bill of Human Rights. The International Bill of Human Rights is applicable to all and provided a basis for the universal human rights of persons with disabilities.

A shift in perspective

While there was major progress in the corpus of international human rights law and the expansion of the United Nations human rights treaty system, disability largely remained a social protection and welfare issue. The General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its subsidiary body, the Commission for Social Development (CsocD), promoted the well-being and welfare of persons with

disabilities through technical cooperation, rehabilitation and vocational programmes. For example, the CsocD during its sixth session in 1950 adopted the reports entitled “Social rehabilitation of the physically handicapped” and “Social rehabilitation of the blind”,¹⁶ leading ECOSOC to establish rehabilitation programmes for persons with physical disabilities and blindness, respectively. Following the decisions by the United Nations organs in 1950, the United Nations and its entities, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), agreed to establish international standards for education, treatment, training and placement of persons with disabilities. This, in turn, led to a shift in focus in the way disability was conceptualized, moving away from defining the role of persons with disabilities as recipients of welfare and services to persons who are entitled to exercise their basic human rights. In 1969, the General Assembly adopted a declaration, emphasizing the need to protect the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities,¹⁷ thus calling for their full participation in society. The international recognition that it is society that creates barriers for the participation of persons with disabilities emerged during this period, leading to the adoption of the two international instruments on the rights of persons with disabilities.

The first was the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons, adopted by the General Assembly in 1971,¹⁸ a significant step in raising awareness on the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities and the importance of the role of education for persons with intellectual disabilities to reach their full potential. At the time, this Declaration was an important tool to advance disability as part of a global agenda – particularly the issue of intellectual disabilities. The Declaration, however, still retained a ‘medical/social welfare model’ approach to disability in some parts, referring to persons with disabilities as reliant on social security and welfare and requiring separate services and institutions.

A second declaration on disability followed in 1975 – the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons¹⁹ – which promoted the social integration of persons with disabilities, on the basis of their inherent dignity and human rights, setting standards for equal treatment and accessibility to services. Compared to the 1971 declaration, this second declaration reflected the transition from the ‘medical/social welfare model’ approach to disability to the ‘social/human rights’ model of promoting equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Building momentum

By 1980, the United Nations had garnered support from Member States to take further steps for the full participation of persons with disabilities in society and development, which resulted in the designation of 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP).²⁰ The IYDP promoted the full integration of persons with disabilities into society, increasing awareness and encouraging the formation of disability organizations to give an active voice to persons with disabilities worldwide. During the year, a great many conferences, symposiums and events at global, regional and national levels were held to commemorate

the progress made in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and to strengthen policy innovation. The IYDP was therefore a pivotal year for the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities in society and development.

In 1982, the General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (WPA),²¹ to achieve the goal of the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities, with the central theme being the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities, and effective measures for the prevention of disability and for rehabilitation. The WPA was thus an important and pivotal shift towards a rights-based approach to disability as a global issue. It focused on how societal and other barriers – be they environmental or attitudinal – should be removed so that persons with disabilities can participate in society as agents of change and beneficiaries of development gains.

To advance the goal of the WPA, the General Assembly designated the Decade of Disabled Persons, spanning from 1983 to 1992,²² which spurred a number of activities designed to improve the situation of persons with disabilities, including better education and employment opportunities, and increasing their participation in the life of their communities and countries. During the Decade, a number of conferences took place, including the adoption of the “Tallinn Guidelines for Action on Human Resources Development in the Field of Disability” in 1989. The Decade resulted in the establishment of the International Day of Disabled Persons, to be observed on 3 December. It also resulted in the establishment of the first global network of persons with disabilities, Disabled People’s International, and subsequent formation of national and local organizations of persons with disabilities. The message of “persons with disabilities as agents and beneficiaries of development” thus started to take concrete forms in the international normative framework on disability and development as well as in global, national and regional policy frameworks and global networks of persons with disabilities to define their own rights, well-being and perspectives in society.

The Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities was one of the main results of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, bringing the importance of equalization of opportunities to the forefront of the global development agenda. The Standard Rules were adopted in 1993 by the General Assembly to advance the central objective of the WPA as a set of rules for action by Governments and other stakeholders. The monitoring mechanism of the Standard Rules included the appointment of a Special Rapporteur to report to the CsocD on the implementation of the rules.²³

United Nations development conferences

In addition to key milestones reached by the United Nations in advancing disability rights and development, international and world conferences held during the 1990s, following the Decade of Disabled Persons, emphasized the need for a ‘society for all’, thus providing scope to advocate for the participation of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society. Conferences promoted initiatives to improve health care, education, elimination or reduction of violence and the lessening of the poverty rate for persons with

disabilities, thus realizing their rights in all aspects of social, economic and cultural life. The World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 saw the generation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action,²⁴ adopted by the General Assembly to advance human rights in line with the changing scope of society. It recognized that the human rights and freedoms granted to all members of society unreservedly include persons with disabilities,²⁵ and for this reason, discrimination against them is a violation of human rights.

Additionally, the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 adopted the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development,²⁶ which stipulates that advances in economic, social and environmental dimensions are mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development. The declaration also noted that development cannot be accomplished in the absence of all human rights and without participation from all groups and representations in society. Though core human rights treaties were universal in their coverage, they did not address the specific barriers, needs and concerns that persons with disabilities faced, paving the way toward an international convention on disability.

The United Nations, in collaboration with Member States, organizations of persons with disabilities and academic institutions, further explored how the Standard Rules and the existing international normative framework on disability – consisting of international instruments on human rights and development – could advance the rights of persons with disabilities. For this objective, a number of technical meetings were organized throughout the late 1990s to early 2000s. A pivotal meeting was the United Nations Consultative Expert Group Meeting on International Norms and Standards Relating to Disability (1998), which explored specific ways to utilize existing norms and standards for the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities, including specific recommendations for mainstreaming disability in the United Nations development and human rights agenda, mechanisms, processes and resulting documents. The following year, a United Nations interregional conference on international norms and standards relating to disability was held in collaboration with the Equal Opportunities Commission of Hong Kong, SAR, China, which brought together global, regional and national leaders and experts in the fields of disability, development and human rights. The Conference adopted a set of recommendations for the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities at global, regional and national levels, including the possibility of promoting an international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.²⁷

At the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, the Government of Mexico at its highest level proposed an international convention on disability to be considered by the General Assembly, based on the programme of action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Durban (South Africa) in 2001. The consultations on this proposal involved many new and traditional stakeholders in the field of disability, creating momentum for a new era of “disability movement” within and outside the United Nations. The General Assembly established the Ad Hoc Committee in 2001, which was initially set up for “considering proposals for an international convention to uphold the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities”. The

Committee engaged civil society (in its meeting in 2002), establishing a Working Group to prepare a draft text of a convention (in 2003), with final negotiations on the draft text and its Optional Protocol, which were both adopted by the General Assembly in December 2006.²⁸

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was envisaged from the very beginning as the instrument for inclusive development and for the realization of the universal human rights of persons with disabilities. It entered into force in 2008 and has established two monitoring mechanisms: i) the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and ii) the Conference of States Parties. While the Committee is part of the United Nations human rights treaty monitoring system, the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD is a unique global mechanism, which has no parallel entity in other human rights conventions. The Conference is established as a unique forum to exchange experiences and new ideas for the implementation of the Convention and to improve policies and programmes, with a focus on practical solutions to the obstacles encountered by persons with disabilities on the ground.

This landmark Convention is truly a benchmark instrument to ensure the equal enjoyment of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities. Together with other international human rights and development instruments, it provides a comprehensive framework for national policymaking and legislation, including international cooperation, for building an inclusive society, and for development. The international disability “architecture” constitutes a tool for strengthening legal protection, policymaking and planning for development. At the international level these instruments may be utilized to support disability-inclusive policies and practices. At the national level, they may be used to support the harmonization of national legislation, policies and programmes. The WPA and the Standard Rules focus on planning and strategic implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and adopt a different approach from the monitoring of an international human rights convention. The Convention adds the strength of human rights practice from the disability perspective to the existing international normative framework.

Broadly speaking, there are two core aspects to the implementation of the Convention: (a) harmonization of laws relating to disability and adaptation of policies and programmes; and (b) non-legal strategies in the innovative use of an international convention for advocacy and social change. Implementation of the Convention calls for the formulation of strategic options for policies, programmes and evaluation measures that promote the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in society and development.

While the international normative framework on disability was further strengthened by the Convention, the international community was facing a lack of information in data, statistics and analysis of the situation of persons with disabilities for mainstreaming disability in the development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As a response to this need, a flagship report was published by the WHO and the World Bank – the World Report on Disability (2011). The report estimated that there were 1 billion persons living with some form of disability worldwide and included an analysis which correlated disability with poverty, a lack of education, and an increased likelihood of harmful practices to health. The report

articulated that disability is a critical developmental issue, and that the global development agenda must include persons with disabilities in all sectors of development.

United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on Disability and Development and toward a disability-inclusive 2030 global agenda for sustainable development

As the international community was beginning its dialogues to develop an inclusive and sustainable global development agenda, the General Assembly called for a High-level Meeting on Disability and Development (HLMDD) to be held at the level of Heads of States and Governments in 2013,²⁹ under the theme: “The Way Forward: a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond”. At this meeting, Member States adopted an outcome document,³⁰ stressing the importance of giving due consideration to all persons with disabilities in the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. The outcome document *“encourages the international community to seize every opportunity to include disability as a cross-cutting issue in the global development agenda”*. At the meeting,³⁰ Member States emphasized the need to translate these international commitments into concrete actions and results for persons with disabilities.

The international community, on the basis of the outcome of the HLMDD, specifically addressed the interlinkages between disability and sustainable development in the course of negotiations for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It underscored the importance of a disability-inclusive global development agenda and successfully included references to disability in the draft document of the Agenda. The international community continued its review of and consideration for disability-inclusion in the indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda in 2016.

Since the adoption of the Convention, which emphasizes the importance of mainstreaming disability as an integral part of relevant strategies of sustainable development,³¹ the rights, well-being and perspectives of persons with disabilities have garnered growing political commitments, especially in the post-2015 development agendas. In 2015, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, which recognize disability as a cross-cutting issue and explicitly address it in five SDGs, namely on education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, and data, monitoring and accountability. In addition, persons with disabilities are recognized among disadvantaged groups for whom progress must be particularly monitored, as Member States aim to achieve universal goals concerning basic needs, including the eradication of poverty and hunger, ensuring healthy lives and well-being, and securing access to clean water and sanitation.

Moreover, a series of post-2015 development frameworks incorporated the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities, and engaged the participation and contribution of persons with disabilities in the deliberation and development of relevant strategies, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway,³² Addis Ababa Action Agenda,³³ the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030,³⁴ the Paris Agreement, the New York Declaration for

Refugees and Migrants,³⁵ the New Urban Agenda,³⁶ and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, adopted at the Third United Nations World Conference in March 2015, emphasized the importance of disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction, calling for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards on disaster risk reduction, and for promoting the contribution of persons with disabilities in the process. The first World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul, Turkey, further increased the visibility of persons with disabilities in situations of humanitarian crises, with the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.

In the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, adopted at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015, Member States included a disability perspective in the context of financing for development. More specifically, this Agenda commits to providing access to quality education, including accessible and disability-sensitive educational facilities, employment, social protection and accessible technologies, as well as collecting and using data disaggregated by disability status for the monitoring and evaluation of the Agenda.

The New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development (Habitat III) in Quito in October 2016, underlined the connection between the urban development agenda and the 2030 Agenda, especially in Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities. Member States took a twin-track approach to promote inclusive urban development for all and pledged to eliminate discrimination; provide equal access to technology, employment and public services, including transport infrastructure, for persons with disabilities; and ensure their participation in decision-making processes in urban planning. The Agenda also supports science; research and innovation, including a focus on social, technological, digital and nature-based innovation; robust science-policy interfaces in urban and territorial planning and policy formulation; and institutionalized mechanisms for sharing and exchanging information, knowledge and expertise.

Conclusion

Since its inception, the United Nations has pursued the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities in society and development in close collaboration with Member States, organizations of persons with disabilities and other civil society organizations, academic institutions and the private sector, at local, national and global levels. Remarkable progress has been made over the past decades in this endeavour and the United Nations' commitment to promote the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities as agents of change and beneficiaries of development has been translated into concrete action. As previously discussed, there are a number of benchmarks, including the adoption of an international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities; disability-inclusion in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development and their processes, mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation.

“Persons with disabilities as beneficiaries and agents of change in society and development” – the central message of the work of the United Nations on disability³⁷ is therefore taking increasingly concrete forms in global, regional, and national development agendas. Persons with disabilities are advocating for their rights to actively participate in and lead their communities. Nonetheless, persons with disabilities still face many challenges for their full and equal participation in society and development. With the realization of the 2030 Agenda by, for and with persons with disabilities, the international community has an extraordinary opportunity to create an inclusive, accessible and sustainable world, which brings peace and prosperity for all.

Disability-inclusive development is an essential condition for a sustainable future. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, pledging to leave no one behind in the global efforts to realize the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Without the world's one billion persons with disabilities - 15% of the world population - being included as both agents and beneficiaries of development, these Goals will never be achieved. Yet, persons with disabilities are still invisible and often left behind.

This United Nations flagship report is the first publication to address, at the global level, the nexus between disability and the Sustainable Development Goals. It is also the first global analysis based on an unprecedented amount of data, legislation and policies from over 100 countries to understand the socio-economic circumstances of persons with disabilities and the challenges and barriers they face in their daily lives. This report examines new areas, like the role of access to energy to enable persons with disabilities to use assistive technology, for which no global research was previously available. And explores the linkages between the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as other international relevant norms and standards relating to disability. Against the backdrop of all the available evidence, the report identifies good practices and recommends urgent actions to be taken for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities.