

BUILDING A GLOBAL MOVEMENT FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Today persons with disabilities are marginalised, treated unequally and excluded in countless ways. There are people with disabilities across the world, across all sections of society, and in all stages and areas of life who face discrimination. But there is a diversity to this experience: there are many different impairments; there are vastly varied contexts in which people experience disability; and there is a huge diversity of persons with disabilities themselves. Despite these differences, every single person with a disability, like anyone else, has the potential to participate fully and equally in society.

Civil society has a responsibility is to help see this potential recognised and realised.

INCLUDING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Societies, cultures, economies and political systems exclude a great many people to different degrees and in different ways. To fully address how these systems and their institutions marginalise persons with disabilities, we need to understand how they interact with all marginalised groups of people in different ways, and how these different relationships overlap, merge and reinforce each other. We can gain this understanding through inclusion.

We in civil society can address marginalisation by making systems and institutions more inclusive. We can also lead by example, by improving our own programmes and investments to better include different voices. This does not mean offering tokenistic surveys or photo-ops. It means including the perspectives of everyone who faces exclusion in discussions and decisions that shape their lives.

Too often programmes to make goods and services accessible, or inclusive of an otherwise marginalised group, are siloed. We too often hold an over-simplified picture of who constitutes a group of people. This means that when decisions are made, the inclusion of diverse perspectives from within a group is overlooked. This allows for unsubstantiated assumptions and broad brush approaches which undermine programmes that ought to be widely accessible.

Women's crisis centres, legal aid, scholarships, emergency response systems, political representation: persons with disabilities need access to each of these. It has been well documented, for example, that women and girls with disabilities are more likely to be targeted by violence than the general population of women and girls, and yet they are less likely to have access to support services available for victims of violence.¹

Similarly, those of us who work on programmes and services that aim to be specifically inclusive of persons with disabilities must also recognise that more needs to be done to ensure accessibility for the full diversity of persons with disabilities.

The disability rights movement already shares much in common with other civil society movements. We combine journeys of recognition and inclusion with struggles for redistribution and empowerment. We face institutional, communicational and attitudinal barriers. Many of us face physical obstacles in myriad forms, and discrimination and marginalisation throughout our whole lives. These inequalities and discriminations have excluded us from society and, all too often left in poverty: a staggering 82 per cent of persons with disabilities worldwide live below the poverty line.² The need and opportunity for collaboration is clear, but deciding which of us should collaborate, and how, are critical for our legitimacy and effectiveness.

NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US

Our movement's approach is 'nothing about us, without us'. History has been full of well meaning - and not-so-well meaning - people who have tried to speak and act on our behalf. The disability rights movement has found, as have others in civil society, that achieving real progress requires self-organisation and self-representation. Building this trust and openness is possible when we collaborate as members of our own communities as well as working for them: self-advocate to self-advocate.

In terms of effectiveness, our movement has found that consistency and timing are crucial. Retrofitting buildings, reorganising systems and redefining narratives take exponentially more time and resources than getting it right the first time. Participation from the initial designs of a programme, and throughout its implementation, monitoring and evaluation, is critical.

Collaboration between movements of people who advocate for their own interests have succeeded in many local and national contexts. But now, in 2016, we have an opportunity to do this globally.

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

2016 is the first year of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with goals setting the world on course for inclusive sustainable development.³ Persons with disabilities were completely left out of their precursors, the Millennium Development

1 'Interpersonal Violence and Women with Disabilities: A Research Update', Laurie E Powers, Rosemary B Hughes and Emily M Lund with contributions from Mary Wambach, National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women, 2011, <http://bit.ly/1NrYnY8>.

2 'Why a disability perspective should be included in all poverty reduction projects', CBM, <http://bit.ly/1VUMA7m>.

3 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Ep648>.

Goals (MDGs), so we were left out of its programmes and achievements. If the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are going to be met for everyone, we need to establish how each policy and investment is going to work for everyone. We can't work on women's issues one year, children's the next, migrants' after that, and persons with disabilities' another. Each of our movements must collaborate from day one of every project, participating throughout the design, implementation and evaluation to ensure meaningful, comprehensive inclusion is engrained in the DNA of the SDGs' implementation, across each country, and throughout the regional and global review processes.

Equality is essential to sustainable development. While significant progress has been made in pursuing the MDGs for many, it is still important to recognise that this was not the case for persons with disabilities, as it was not for other at-risk groups. Not being included meant being left behind, and this actually intensified inequality. It bears repeating, as the Preamble to the 2030 Agenda recognises, that more than 80 per cent of persons with disabilities live in poverty. This is not acceptable, yet it reflects the current global status quo. We have to accept that business as usual at the global level is unsustainable.

Encouragingly, the new 2030 Agenda dedicates an entire goal to reducing inequality within and among countries, in which persons with disabilities have been explicitly included. Less encouragingly, we are missing from the first goal on poverty reduction. The 2030 Agenda is a powerful tool, but it cannot be our only tool. What are needed are blueprints for countries to use in the implementation of the SDGs that will guarantee inclusion through human rights principles. For persons with disabilities, we already have one: a comprehensive treaty spanning human rights and development, which has already been ratified by 162 governments, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).⁴ If development and human rights are to be united in practice, their respective institutions and processes need to be linked. Currently, however, global development processes largely continue to be separated from global human rights processes. This is the key issue that the UN, governments and civil society must change, if we are to end the business as usual approach to sustainable development.

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MAKING THE SDGS INCLUSIVE THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

The CRPD, along with other international human rights instruments, should serve as a guide for implementing the 2030 Agenda. For states party to such treaties, they are legally binding. We can also address, for example, how we prepare for and manage natural disasters and humanitarian crises inclusively through the Sendai Framework, the new UN disaster risk reduction agreement.⁵ We already have many instruments and structures in place for a human rights-based, non-discriminatory and equitable approach for global sustainable development. We need to make sure that all these tools mutually reinforce each other, with each serving to enhance the implementation of the others.

⁴ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <http://bit.ly/1ebQdup>.

⁵ 'Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction', UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, <http://bit.ly/1hj93Jk>.

As an indication of what this could look like, for almost 10 years, persons with disabilities have used the CRPD to achieve substantial progress, including with respect to development. There are many linkages between this Convention and the SDGs. Some Articles in the CRPD relate to specific Goals of the SDGs, and others are cross-cutting and relevant to multiple Goals. This means that as each of the 162 countries that have ratified the CRPD begin to plan and implement the SDGs, they must use the blueprints laid out in the CRPD.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

One example, of many, of how this ought to work relates to Goal 4 on quality and inclusive education. As governments plan to achieve this SDG, Article 24 of the CRPD on education must serve as a foundational guide to all national education policy and implementation. Additionally, all other related CRPD Articles, such as Five (equality and non-discrimination), Six (women and girls with disabilities), Seven (children and youth with disabilities), Nine (accessibility) and 19 (living independently and being included in the community), must feature in specifically relevant areas. This will help ensure equal access across all levels of education and vocational training for persons with disabilities, so that all children, and all adults, have access to:

- quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education;
- complete, free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education;
- affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

The CRPD obliges governments to invest in education specifically by building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive. Only once inclusive and quality education is accessible at all levels for all children and adults, including persons with disabilities, and with relevant and effective learning outcomes, can a government legitimately claim to have achieved Goal 4 of the SDGs.

CIVIL SOCIETY COORDINATION

Many across civil society have been engaged in the UN's human rights processes: treaty bodies, special processes and the Universal Periodic Review process of the UN Human Rights Council. If we are going to achieve the SDGs for everyone, and really leave no one behind, civil society needs to link the global review of the SDGs to these existing global human rights review processes. The UN is working on developing these linkages itself, but civil society's essential role as the external accountability mechanism for governments means we have to coordinate ourselves; we can't wait for others to direct us. Across the disability rights movement, we have access to the expertise, experience and resources to link the 2030 Agenda review process to the CRPD to help ensure that money spent for development is done so inclusively of persons with disabilities. Across our entire global civil society, we have the combined expertise and experience to link the 2030 Agenda to the entire international human rights infrastructure. This has the potential to lead to the greatest political, infrastructural and resource investment for realising human rights in history.

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We must coordinate within our movements and we must coordinate among our movements to make this happen. We must coordinate globally, to ensure that the SDGs are linked to global human rights processes as each country's progress is reviewed. We must cooperate regionally, to share information, resources and training, and manage funding. We must collaborate nationally, so that as governments plan and implement policies and reforms to achieve the goals, all members of civil society are represented and heard throughout.

There are one billion people with disabilities today, but we are not one billion identical voices. We must listen to one another and listen to others in civil society. Dialogue builds understanding and, with this understanding, we can build a movement of movements, for everyone, by everyone.