

UNFPA Report on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

June 2011

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) works with partners at global and country levels to contribute to the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. This report documents the efforts, progress and obstacles encountered in the implementation of General Assembly Resolutions entitled “Realizing the Millennium Development Goals for Persons with Disabilities towards 2015 and Beyond”¹ and the “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto.”²

The UNFPA corporate plans and strategies reflect its commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The *UNFPA Strategic Plan 2008-2013*, which provides the overall direction for UNFPA support to countries in the inter-related focus areas of population and development, reproductive health and gender equality, places a special focus on marginalized groups while making an explicit reference to women with disabilities.

The *Strategic Framework on Gender Mainstreaming* and the *Reproductive Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health Framework*, which are the UNFPA corporate strategies for working with governments and partners in promoting gender equality and sexual and reproductive health, include components on persons with disabilities. In the latter, a specific area of focus is on the importance of advocating for access to and utilization of quality and voluntary family planning services for persons with disabilities.

At the global level, UNFPA is a member of the Inter-Agency Support Group for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. At the country level, UNFPA provides technical support for the incorporation of the disability perspective into health policies, programmes and national development frameworks, while advocating for

the participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes.

UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Office



The UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Office supports selected country offices in the region to conduct situation analyses on the extent to which women and girls with disabilities are able to realize their rights to reproductive health information services and protection from violence. A number of initiatives were conducted in 2010:

In the **Solomon Islands**, a qualitative study conducted to assess the sexual and reproductive health situation and needs of women living with disabilities found that in general, they have limited access to reproductive health information and services. Amongst those interviewed, as many as one in two women had been subject to repeated incidents of violence, including rape and sexual abuse, resulting in multiple pregnancies and births.

In **India**, a literature review was conducted to explore the degree to which women and girls with selected disabilities in parts of India are able to access reproductive health information and services and protection from violence. The Office of the Registrar General of India (ORGI), in collaboration with UN agencies, has

¹ General Assembly Resolution A/Res/65/186 of 4 Feb 2011

² General Assembly Resolution A/Res/64/154 of 26 Mar 2010

committed to enhancing the quality of data collected for the 2011 census round by 'genderizing' the census questions. UNFPA has placed specific emphasis on collecting data on women with disabilities as well as other areas such as women in the workforce, women's literacy and sex selection.

In **Afghanistan**, a question on functional difficulty was included in the Population and Housing Census questionnaire. The data collected will provide inputs for evidence-based planning for the welfare of persons with disabilities and will also serve as a sampling frame for future surveys to further determine the detailed characteristics and needs of persons with disabilities.

In **Cambodia**, UNFPA in collaboration with the National Institute of Statistics, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, produced a report analysing the census results focusing on disabilities.

In **Indonesia**, the 2010 census included data collection on persons with disabilities. The National Statistics office requested UNFPA support for the analysis of census data in the areas related to the UNFPA mandate. Future plans include UNFPA collaboration with the Ministry of Health to address the sexual and reproductive health of persons with disabilities.

There has been an increased demand for data on persons with disabilities by the Government of the **Lao People's Democratic Republic** for planning purposes. In 2011, the Department of Statistics, supported by UNFPA, will publish an analysis and profile of disability based on the 2005 census data. The Government has also requested UNFPA to coordinate the 2015 Census, which will include data collection on persons with disabilities.

Timor-Leste has included questions in its national census to collect data on the number of persons with disabilities in the country since 2004.

UNFPA supported the Government of **Vietnam** to conduct the 2009 census in which disability information was incorporated for the first time.

In 2011, UNFPA in Vietnam will conduct more in-depth analysis on disability for policy advocacy and response.

In 2011, more studies will be conducted in the Asia and Pacific region, including within Polynesia, Micronesia, the Philippines and China. The findings will be used to create awareness of the situation and needs of women with disabilities and support the efforts of the governments to incorporate the rights of persons with disabilities in national policies and programmes.

UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office



In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNFPA supports the governments and civil society organizations to undertake activities and programmes in favour of persons with disabilities.

In **Albania**, UNFPA supported capacity building activities for 240 staff and representatives from the local government, the private sector, civil society and communities on the subject of disability rights and how to mainstream them into local policies and programmes. This resulted in the preparation and launch of two local strategies with action plans and target provisions at the National Conference of Disabled Persons organized by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The census in Albania will, for the first time, include questions about persons with disabilities, resulting in comprehensive information that will contribute to adapting social policy.

In **Bulgaria**, UNFPA partnered with the Bulgarian Association of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities to develop a guide for parents on addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of their children.

In **Moldova**, UNFPA and its sister agencies advocated for the inclusion of a disability perspective in health plans and policies. In partnership with the UN country team and civil society organizations, UNFPA promoted the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2010, Parliament passed a law ratifying the Convention.

In **Kazakhstan**, UNFPA provides the government with technical assistance to build knowledge on disability issues. This entails collaborative research with a national disabled people's organization on the needs and challenges faced by persons with disabilities, particularly those with hearing and vision impairments, who are considered to be excluded from access to information, including information on reproductive health and family planning. In 2011, the research will also cover persons with motion impairments.

UNFPA Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office

In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNFPA supports the *Ven Conmigo* foundation in the elaboration of a situation analysis and a collection of best practices on the needs and rights of persons with disabilities in the region. The research found that one of the main challenges identified by organizations was accessibility to basic services for sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and gender-based violence. A peer education programme for youths with disabilities was established in 2010.

In **Jamaica**, UNFPA in partnership with the EU is providing technical assistance to civil society organizations working with persons with disabilities to develop tools to improve knowledge among health care providers, teachers and counsellors on the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents with disabilities.

In **Belize**, UNFPA supported the National Resource Centre for Inclusive Education in establishing a sexual and reproductive health programme for persons with disabilities. A South-South cooperation network was established to ensure that this programme drew from experiences of other Caribbean countries with similar programmes. It included training for parents and caregivers of adolescents and adults with disabilities to strengthen their capacities to identify, support and respond to the sexual and reproductive health needs of their young children. In 2010, UNFPA organized trainings for adolescents and adults with hearing impairments and supported a survey in the area of HIV and AIDS. The 2010 census included a question that specifically captures data on the number of persons with disabilities and their type of disability.



In the **Dominican Republic**, UNFPA is providing technical assistance for the establishment of a documentation centre specialized in disabilities.

In **Costa Rica**, UNFPA provided support to consultations with young people with disabilities aimed at informing the national policy for youth and is supporting programmes in favour of youth with disabilities. UNFPA supported the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC)* to incorporate the disability indicator in the census questionnaire.

In **Guyana**, UNFPA advocated for the integration of sexual and reproductive health issues into the National Policy on Disabilities. UNFPA has supported qualitative and

quantitative data collection on adolescents with disabilities including the development of a comprehensive information package on sexual and reproductive health of persons with disabilities.

UNFPA Arab States Regional Office



In the Arab States, particularly in **Syria**, UNFPA, UNDP and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour launched a joint programme to establish a national social welfare fund. By 2010, about 730,000 families were registered for assistance. The project aims at ensuring that most vulnerable households can benefit from this initiative, including persons with disabilities. UNFPA also provided support to the Ministry of Health for the rehabilitation of three primary health centers that will provide reproductive health services for persons with disabilities and for the establishment of a mental health and psychosocial programme aimed at assisting persons with disabilities. In order to have an evidence base on the needs of persons with disabilities, UNFPA provided technical support for a survey on disability in two governorates.

In December 2010, UNFPA, leading the United Nations Country Team Group on Persons with Disabilities, facilitated the Syrian Forum on "Disability: Reality and Ambition" to enhance networking and cooperation among various stakeholders involved in the integration of persons with disabilities into society. More than 350 representatives from various organizations and sectors, including persons with disabilities, participated in the event. The Forum proposed

concrete recommendations and an action plan on the integration of persons with disabilities in all aspects of societal life. UNFPA also provided training on information technology and modern technologies for Syrian youth with impaired vision in support of their prospective employment. This initiative received a national award in 2010.

Challenges

There are many obstacles to the implementation of the General Assembly resolutions referenced above. Legal and policy reform needs to be undertaken in a concerted manner. Furthermore, gender-neutral laws are not sufficient; States should adopt laws and policies that are aimed at ensuring that women with disabilities enjoy de facto equality, including temporary measures such as affirmative action. There is a lack of information and data on persons with disabilities – in particular, women with disabilities – which hampers interventions in their favour. It is imperative that efforts be made to ensure that there is enough information on persons with disabilities disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, rural/urban in order to reveal multiple discriminations and to adopt laws and policies accordingly.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides a basis for moving forward by finally lifting the barriers that have hindered persons with disabilities from enjoying their full and effective participation in society. It is important to acknowledge that the international goal to achieve universal access to reproductive health in MDG5 cannot be fulfilled unless persons with disabilities are included in policies and programmes to improve sexual and reproductive health.

UNFPA will continue partnerships at the global, regional and country levels to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities through the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, especially as they relate to the promotion and protection of women's rights and reproductive rights.