

INFORMATION NOTE

The Right to Development and Persons with Disabilities

Current Realities

Persons with disabilities comprise an estimated 15 per cent of the world's population. Among other human rights concerns, statistics show that around fifty per cent of persons with disabilities cannot afford appropriate health care and carry a higher burden of costs for medical care, assistive devices and personal support than others in the community. They are also more likely to be unemployed than others. Further, because of costs associated with their care, persons with disabilities are generally poorer than other people with similar income. Overall, these and other factors, including discrimination, contribute to a situation where persons with disabilities often have worse living conditions and lower participation rates in public affairs than other groups.ⁱ

Realizing the right to development of persons with disabilities will require moving beyond the status quo of many current development efforts and addressing the challenges that persons with disabilities face in their daily lives. Development cooperation that builds segregated schools or promotes institutionalization of persons with disabilities denies their right to development and their right to live independently in the community. These types of efforts do not always respect the full diversity of impairments. Persons who are blind, deaf, or have any psychosocial or intellectual impairment tend to be disproportionately neglected in development –which only exacerbates exclusion.

International Obligations

Realizing the right to development of persons with disabilities

The Declaration on the Right to Development states that ‘the right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.’ It envisages a development paradigm that guarantees an enabling environment in which every human being has the right to realize his or her full potential, participate in and benefit from development.

Today, owing to poverty and other factors, this enabling environment does not exist for most persons with disabilities. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) highlights “that the majority of persons with disabilities live in conditions of poverty” and “recognize[s] the critical need to address the negative impact of poverty on persons with disabilities”.. In keeping with the spirit of the Declaration on the Right to Development wherein international cooperation is fundamental, States Parties to the CRPD have agreed to cooperate internationally with other States, with the UN and with organizations of persons with disabilities to tackle this problem, including through making development cooperation inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities (article 32, CRPD).

This is not only an imperative in itself. If persons with disabilities are not included in development efforts, international development goals will not be met, for instance, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 to “ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”. States must ensure inclusive education for all persons with disabilities without discrimination. Indeed, the SDGs and the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are about establishing an enabling environment for equitable, inclusive development that leaves no one behind.

The transformative vision of the Declaration on the Right to Development helped shape the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals and will be central to their achievement. Realization of the right to development for all requires full inclusion, without discrimination, of all individuals and peoples in development efforts, especially those groups historically excluded from development policy-making such as persons with disabilities.

'The inclusion of persons with disabilities (...) is not only a human rights issue, but also a crucial investment for development that States cannot afford to miss.'

Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Ms. Catalina Devandas-Aguilarⁱⁱ

Recommendations Moving Forward: Act together now

Fulfilling international obligations to persons with disabilities requires a twin-track approach to development. At times, disability-specific development programmes are necessary. But the rights of persons with disabilities must also be mainstreamed in development programmes in general. Building schools without ramps or assisting free elections without providing voting materials for persons with vision or hearing impairments excludes persons with disabilities from development – and denies their inalienable right to development.

Realizing the right to development of persons with disabilities requires the adoption of a human rights-based approach to disability which respects and allows for their active, free and meaningful participation in development, the fair distribution of resulting benefits, and their inclusion in society on an equal basis with others.

In addition, a gender and age perspective should ensure that development includes all persons with disabilities, men, women, boys and girls, so that it is truly inclusive. Development must be equitable, inclusive of and accessible to all human beings without discrimination. However, this objective is currently a distant reality for many including persons with disabilities. Making lives of dignity a reality for all, including persons with disabilities, will require the international community to unite to fulfil its commitments and mobilize the resources necessary for inclusive, equitable development that leaves no one behind.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights has a duty to promote and protect all human rights including the right to development for all without discrimination. OHCHR's information notes on the right to development seek to raise awareness, enhance understanding and promote dialogue on the human rights to development..

More information, including the text of the Declaration on the Right to Development, is available on OHCHR website:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Development/Pages/DevelopmentIndex.aspx>

or by contacting us at R2D@ohchr.org

ⁱ Source: WHO/World Bank, World Report on Disabilities, 2011. Available at:

http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/en/

ⁱⁱ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 26/20. Document A/70/297 of 7 August 2015, reissued for technical reasons on 2 December 2015.