

Thanks very much for your kind invitation to speak in this panel.

To start, I would like us to reflect on where we are today- as a global population. A global heterogeneous population that includes women, children, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees, migrants, persons with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities, but also among them: women with disabilities, children, youth, older persons, migrants with disabilities, Indigenous peoples with disabilities, and so on.

We are diverse – each with our own lived experiences. Sometimes we face the same barriers, sometimes we face compounded barriers on account of our gender, age, background, type of impairment and other layers of identity.

That is why a ‘one size fits all’ approach to development is set to fail because it fails to recognise difference and diversity and our lived realities.

And the reality today is that we, people with disabilities continue to face significant inequalities: we have a greater risk of living in poverty, being unemployed, not receiving an education, having poorer health, experiencing violence and exploitation and generally being excluded- and this is true across the world.

For a long time, development has targeted marginalized groups including persons with disabilities. Yet we continued to be left behind and we remained among the furthest left behind.

The gap was not in attention, but in approach.

The medical model of disability continued to be the basis of interventions- focusing on fixing us, trying to make us fit in. And the charity approach built us special schools and institutions where we were managed and segregated from the rest of the community, our homes and our aspirations.

To truly leave no person with disability behind, a human rights based approach to disability is required. Because this approach not only calls on development to be inclusive – and we see this across the SDGs and the multiple references to persons with disabilities across the goals and targets- but because it is also founded on rights- that is : non-discrimination and participation.

So the answer to both questions on how to leave no one behind and what to do to ensure that is simple: look to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the CRPD).

The CRPD serves as a blueprint on how to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities. And it can be summed up by non-discrimination and participation of persons with disabilities.

By non-discrimination- this means making sure that persons with disabilities enjoy and exercise their rights on an equal basis with others as enshrined in art 5 of the Convention. To give effect to this, we need to prohibit disability-based discrimination and remove barriers embedded in law and practices that exclude us- for example, denial from voting or laws that mandate the substitution of our decisions such as our right to give and refuse informed consent.

By participation of persons with disabilities- this means ensuring that we can participate in society just like everyone else as set out in article 4(3) of the Convention. This requires removing

barriers that prevent our participation- physical, environmental, informational and attitudinal barriers that exclude us.

This is why accessibility is so important as it makes it possible for us to access services, to participate independently and benefit equally from development programs for education, livelihood, health, housing and so on.

Participation also requires support. Support can be provided through a person, through an assistive device, through accommodations. Support is an inherent need for us all, not only persons with disabilities. And it is a right recognized across human rights treaties including the CRPD. Development initiatives must factor in the provision of support services and devices to ensure that persons with disabilities, particularly those most marginalised, can participate in and benefit from programs on an equal basis with others.

And participation also means participation in decision-making. This is crucial to leave no one behind. The approach of development policies and activities will only be successful if they respond to individuals' lived realities. Eliminating the structural barriers that lead to our exclusion is not possible without our active participation : we as persons with disabilities know best what we want and what works for us. We need to be involved in the design of development policies and programs, as well as their implementation, monitoring and evaluation to make them operational for us.

A rights-based approach to disability will ensure for example that no child is denied education based on their disability or support needs. And that no child with disability is sent to a special school but instead will learn with other children in the regular system. Schools will be accessible and provide accommodations and support so every child, including those with disabilities, will enjoy quality education, free from discrimination. Further, children with disabilities, through their representative organisations, will be heard and participate in decision-making relating to the education system.

That's how we ensure no child with disability is left behind in education .

To summarise, we need to adopt a human rights based approach and be guided by the CRPD to prohibit disability-based discrimination, promote accessibility and the availability and provision of support, and embed the participation of persons with disabilities, in all their diversity, in decision-making and throughout all phases of development policies, programs and activities.

Thank you.

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