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2006 constituted a critical juncture for persons with disabilities globally. It was the year that the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations 2006). This came some 25 years after the UN had declared 1981 as the Year of the Disabled and constituted an ideational turn on issues relating to persons with disabilities. Since then, various activities have been taking place to help in driving the disability agenda. This included the formulation of the Standard Rules that were established in the 1990s to guide how persons with disabilities are treated across the world. But the Standard Rules, whilst a useful tool for advocacy, never had any binding effect as it was not a legal instrument. Consequently, the CRPD was born with the primary aim of giving some legal coverage against discrimination towards persons with disabilities.

The UN has put in place various reporting mechanisms to ensure that State Parties are adhering to the provisions of the CRPD. Countries are required to report two years after they have signed and ratified the Convention and thereafter, every four years. This reporting mechanism is an extremely important vehicle in the march to increase participation, inclusion and non-discrimination against persons with disabilities. It will also establish a credible global body of data on the population of persons with disabilities.

In the Caribbean, the efforts to implement the CRPD are very lackadaisical. Very few countries from within the region have submitted any report to the UN on the situation of persons with disabilities. This is a major challenge for the disability agenda within the region.

Recognizing this deficit, there are three efforts to drive the disability agenda and increase the reporting on situation of persons with disabilities in the Caribbean that I would like to highlight. The first has to do with the negotiations for the Convention on the Rights of

Persons with Disabilities. In 2002 Jamaica started to participate in the discussions to establish the CRPD. This came within the context of the country establishing the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities in 2000 and the fact that I was appointed to the Parliament of Jamaica in 1998 as the first blind person to become a member of that august body. I was subsequently promoted to the position of Minister in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security where I had among other things, executive authority for persons with disabilities. It must be noted that Jamaica practices the Westminster System of government and as such, there is a fusion of power with some governmental institutions. One can be a member of the legislature and the executive at the same time.

Recognizing this authority that was vested in me, I ensure that Jamaica participated in every session of the negotiation of the CRPD. We deemed this important because the country was committed at the time to driving the disability agenda and thus empowering persons with disabilities. We got the opportunity to make our contribution to the development of the first global treaty of the millennium and by 2007, became the first country in the world to sign and ratify the CRPD. It must be noted that whilst the negotiations were taking place on the CRPD, I took the opportunity to report to the community of persons with disabilities through the National Advisory Board that was established under the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities to advise the Government on matters relating to persons with disabilities. Furthermore, I took the opportunity to update the Cabinet and the Parliament on progress being made in the negotiations on the CRPD. This is why once the CRPD was adopted by the General Assembly in 2006 and made available for signature in 2007, I was able to affix my signature to this global treaty on behalf of the country.

The second issue that I would like to highlight as it relates to efforts on reporting on the situation of persons with disabilities is the adoption of the Declaration of Petion Ville by Caribbean countries in 2013. The Declaration of Petion Ville is a roadmap that was formulated by countries within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in Haiti in 2013. It came within the context of an urgent desire by CARICOM to improve the situation of persons with disabilities within the region (CARICOM 2013). Consequently, countries within the region gathered in Petion Ville, Haiti, to deliberate on the matter, with the result being the Declaration of Petion Ville.

One specific element emanating from this regional roadmap is the establishment of a special rapporteur on the issue of disability for CARICOM. This office was established by

CARICOM in 2018 and I have the distinct honour of being the first appointee to that position which I currently hold.

In executing my responsibilities as the Special Rapporteur on Disability within the Caribbean, I report directly to the CARICOM Secretariat and is guided by an advisory panel that was established specifically for this purpose. I have cited legislation, education, employment and public education on persons with disabilities as the major priorities for my tenure as Rapporteur. The Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean 2017 Report cites legislation as a major issue for persons with disabilities in the Caribbean (ECLAC 2017). Gayle-Geddes (2015) cites education is fundamental to the transformation and empowerment of persons with disabilities. Similarly, the ECLAC 2017 Report is pointing to approximately 90% of the population of persons with disabilities within the region being unemployed. Additionally, Morris (2019) points to the necessity of public education to sensitize citizens within the Caribbean of the needs of persons with disabilities.

But whilst there has been the signing and ratifying of the CRPD by Caribbean countries and the establishment of the Declaration of Petion Ville as a roadmap to drive the disability agenda in the region, the process of transformation continues to be lethargic. The ECLAC report points to a grim picture of programmes and policies throughout the region where persons with disabilities are concerned (ECLAC 2017). Furthermore, available scholarship from Morris (2019; 2016; 2015), (Anderson 2014) and (Gayle-Geddes 2015) are pointing to a lethargic effort to implement programmes and policies for the empowerment and transformation of persons with disabilities in the Caribbean. Recognizing this existential deficit, I formulated the Regional Disability Index (RDI) as an initiative from the UWI Centre for Disability Studies where I am the Director (UWICDS 2019).

The RDI was established as a mechanism to track and rank the progress of countries within the Caribbean in terms of their efforts to implement the provisions of the CRPD. It was formulated with the assumption that if the provisions of the CRPD were to be implemented by countries within the Caribbean that have signed and ratified this global instrument, then real empowerment and transformation will take place in the lives of persons with disabilities within the region. The RDI is to be published biennially and is scheduled for a period of ten years. The first result from the RDI was published in September 2019 and can be seen at www.cds.mona.uwi.edu.

In order to develop this regional index, a carefully designed methodology was crafted. This was done to ensure the capturing of accurate and relevant data. Consequently, the main instrument for capturing data was a questionnaire.

In developing the questionnaire, we used the various articles as spelt out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to formulate the questions. The questions were coded and the answers were given a score. The scores were tallied in order to contribute to the ranking.

A mechanism was established for the pre-testing of the questionnaire. This was to ensure that the questions asked were not offensive to persons with disabilities. A pilot program was initiated to test the project and commence in the English-Speaking Caribbean.

In conducting the survey two (2) sets of institutions were targeted in each country: A government institution with responsibility for persons with disabilities and the other being a non-governmental institution with independence from the governmental apparatus. The scores from both of these institutions were added and the average used as the final figure to give the ranking on the index for each country. In some instances, only one response came from particular countries and this has impacted on the final score since we used the average from each country.

We commence the collation of the data in March 2019. In collating and analysing the data, due consideration was given to the general principles articulated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These included: Legislation, Discrimination, Gender Discrimination, Child Discrimination & Justice, Awareness, Accessibility, Access to Information, Justice, Education, Health, Employment, Social Protection, Political Participation, Data Collection, International Cooperation and Monitoring.

In implementing this initiative, we are working in close collaboration with the CARICOM Secretariat to ensure that countries within the region are making progress in advancing the disability agenda from the perspective of the Declaration of Petion Ville, CRPD and the SDGs.

Only 15 questionnaires were returned: two from Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent & the Grenadines, while one was returned from Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis and Trinidad & Tobago. Several follow-up calls were made to Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis and Trinidad and Tobago for the

additional questionnaire but these efforts were futile. The Bahamas and Antigua were also contacted to participate in the RDI but no response was forthcoming from the respective governmental and NGOs.

Based on the data gathered, an index was created to assess the countries implementation of the CRPD. An arithmetic operation was done to create an ordinal performance strength scale which is represented by Excellent (192-225), Very Good (154-191), Good (116-153), Average (78-115) Poor (39-77) and Very Poor (0-38). The following therefore constitutes a summation of the findings from the survey:

REGIONAL INCLUSIVENESS RANKING, STANDINGS AND RATIFICATION

COUNTRIES	AVERAGE SCORE	REGIONAL INCLUSIVE RANKING	STANDINGS	UNCRPD
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	134.5	1	Good	Not Ratified ^(a)
Jamaica	124.5	2	Good	Ratified
Barbados	113	3	Average	Ratified
Guyana	104	4	Average	Ratified
St. Lucia	82	5	Average	Not Ratified
Grenada	46.5	6	Poor	Ratified
Montserrat	31.5	7	Very Poor	Ratified
Dominica	25.5	8	Very Poor	Not Ratified
Trinidad & Tobago	18	9	Very Poor	Not Ratified
St. Kitts & Nevis	17	10	Very Poor	Ratified

The table above shows the ranking based on the average score that each country gained with effort. The highest possible score on the completion of the list of questions was 225.

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	U N C R P D	Le gis lati ve Ar ticl e 4	Disc rimi nati on Arti cle 5	Gende r Discri minati on Article 6	Child Discrimin ation and Justice Article 7	A wa re nes s Ar ticl e 8	Acc essi bili ty Art icle 9	Access to Infor matio n Articl e 9	Ju sti ce Ar tic le 13	Ed uc ati on Ar ticl e 24	He alt h Ar ticl e 25	Em plo ym ent Art icle 27	Soci al Prot ectio n Artic le 28	Politic al Partici pation Articl e 29	Dat a Coll ectio n Arti cle 31	Internatio nal Cooperatio n Article 32	Mo nit ori ng Art icle 33	T o t a l
St. Vincent & the Grenadi nes	Not Rati fied ^(a)	Average	Good	Good	Very Good	Very Good	Good	Good	Good	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Very Good	Very Good	Good	Very Good	Poor	
		15.5	18.5	6.5	8	8	13.5	2.5	19.5	10.5	6	7	5.5	4	5	1.5	3	134.5
Guyana	Ra	Go	Ave	Poor	Poor	Av	Poo	Good	Av	Go	Go	Ave	Good	Good	Poor	Very Good	Po	

	tified	od 25.5	rage 12.5			era ge 7.5	r 6.5		era ge 12	od 7.5	od 4.5	rage 5.5					or 4.5	1 0 4
Jamaica	Ra tified	Go od 22	Goo d 17	Good 5.5	Very Good 7	Go od 6	Go od 13	Very Good 3.5	Go od 16	Go od 7.5	Ve ry Go od 5	Go od 7	Good 4	Very Good 3.5	Poor 1.5	Excellent 2	Po or 4	1 2 4 .5
Barbado s	Ra tified	Go od 25.5	Goo d 18	Very Good 7	Poor 2.5	Go od 5	Go od 14	Good 3	Av era ge 10.5	Go od 6.5	Po or 2	Ave rag e 5	Aver age 3.5	Very Good 3.5	Very Poor 0.5	Good 1	Av era ge 5.5	1 1 3
St. Lucia	No	Po	Ave	Averag	Very	Go	Poo	Very	Av	Av	Ve	Ver	Good	Very	Very	Good	Av	

	t Ra tifi ed	or 9.5	rage 13	e 3.5	Good 8	od 5	r 7	Poor 0.5	era ge 12.5	era ge 4.5	ry Po or 1	y Poo r 2		4	Good 4	Poor 0		1	era ge 6.5	8 2
Grenada	Ra tifi ed	Ve ry Po or 4.5	Poor 7.5	Averag e 4	Poor 2	Po or 3	Poo r 4.5	Poor 1	Po or 5.5	Av era ge 4.5	Av era ge 2.5	Ver y Poo r 2	Very Poor 1	Poor 1	Poor 2.5	Good 1	Ver y Po or 0		4 6 .5	
Dominica	Ra tifi ed	Ve ry Po or 6	Ver y Poor 4.5	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 1.5	Ve ry Po or 0.5	Ver y Poo r 0.5	Very Poor 0	Ve ry Po or 3	Po or 3.5	Po or 1.5	Ver y Poo r 0.5	Very Poor 0	Poor 1	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 0	Po or 3		2 5 .5	

Montserrat	Not Ratified	Very Poor 6.5	Poor 5	Very Poor 0.5	Average 3.5	Poor 2	Very Poor 2.5	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 4	Very Poor 1.5	Very Poor 0.5	Very Poor 1	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 0	Poor 0.5	Poor 4	31.5
St. Kitts & Nevis	Not Ratified	Very Poor 4	Very Poor 2	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 0.5	Very Poor 0.5	Very Poor 2	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 1.5	Very Poor 1.5	Very Poor 0.5	Very Poor 1	Very Poor 0.5	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 0	Poor 3	17
Trinidad & Tobago	Ratified	Poor 8	Very Poor 2.5	Very Poor 0.5	Very Poor 0.5	Very Poor 0.5	Very Poor 0.5	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 1.5	Very Poor 1	Poor 1.5	Very Poor 1	Very Poor 0.5	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 0	Very Poor 0	18

It is my informed view that over time, the RDI will assist in improving the situation of persons with disabilities as countries within the region will be working to improve their ranking on the index. No country wants to receive a poor score on any international measurement index. I therefore envisage greater efforts of these countries to improve the situation of persons with disabilities within the region.

Recommendations for Improvements in Reporting

In order for the UN to improve reporting on the CRPD and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), strategies must be put in place to force countries to provide credible data on the population of persons with disabilities. This is why it is being strongly recommended that the approach used in the Regional Disability Index should be adopted and used as a global instrument for tracking and ranking countries in accordance with the progress they have made to improve the provisions of the CRPD. A Global Disability Index (GDI) is therefore in order, as this will compel countries that have signed and ratified the CRPD to implement programmes and policies that will transform and empower persons with disabilities. No country wants to be given a poor global ranking and therefore will do everything to have a positive score on a GDI.

The United Nations will have to do more to encourage and support persons with disabilities to enter into politics. For the global mantra of “nothing without us, about us” to be realized, persons with disabilities must be at the decision making table where they will be able to impact on the programmatic and policy formulation of their country (Crowther 2007). That has been my experience in the Caribbean and I am urging the UN to include this in their strategic approach.

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