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Matters related to the implementation of the Convention:

round table 1

Eliminating poverty and inequality for persons with disabilities

Note by the Secretariat

The present document was prepared by the Secretariat on the basis of available information to facilitate the round table discussion on the theme “Eliminating poverty and inequality for persons with disabilities”, to be held at the ninth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

* CRPD/CSP/2016/1.



Introduction

1. Available evidence indicates that, in many contexts, persons with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty¹ than persons without disabilities. A study analysing the prevalence of disability among poor households in 15 developing countries found that the economic situation of households that had at least one member with a disability was worse than that of households without any person with a disability. In addition, in 10 of those 15 countries, households that had at least one member with a disability had significantly fewer assets.² In a separate study, in 18 of 21 countries that are part of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), working-age people with disabilities showed higher poverty rates (defined as less than 60 per cent of the median-adjusted disposable income) than those without disabilities.³

2. Data from more than 50 countries surveyed in the *World Report on Disability 2011* showed employment rates among persons with disabilities to be over 10 percentage points lower than among persons without disabilities. Primary school completion rates among persons with disabilities were over 10 per cent lower. In addition, persons with disabilities were found to be 20 per cent less likely to be able to afford health care when needed.⁴ On average, across OECD countries, the income of persons with disabilities was 12 per cent lower than the national average and as much as 20-30 per cent lower in some countries in OECD.⁵

3. The extent of poverty and inequalities in all development areas experienced by persons with disabilities is often the result of shortcomings in the structural, social, political and cultural environments in which they reside: lack of accessibility of physical and virtual environments, institutional barriers, discrimination, exclusion and unequal opportunities. Such exclusion has costs for persons with disabilities, their families and communities, and society as a whole. For example, excluding persons with disabilities from employment costs societies not only the value of their lost potential productivity but also the expense of providing disability benefits and pensions. An International Labour Organization (ILO) pilot study of 10 low- and middle-income developing countries found that the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour market resulted in an estimated 3-7 per cent loss to gross domestic product (GDP).⁵

4. Poverty and inequality are intrinsically linked. Reducing the negative social, economic and cultural inequalities faced by persons with disabilities will empower

¹ Poverty has been increasingly seen as a multidimensional concept, which includes such social and economic elements as inadequate housing, poor health and lack of education. Income poverty is just one aspect of poverty. For national policy, most countries define their own national (income) poverty lines. At the global level, for international comparison purposes, the current global (income) poverty line is \$1.90, as set by the World Bank in October 2015.

² Sophie Mitra, Aleksandra Posarac and Brandon Vick, “Disability and poverty in developing countries: a snapshot from the World Health Survey”, Social Protection and Labor Discussion Paper, No. 1109 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2011).

³ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, “Sickness, disability and work: keeping on track in the economic downturn”, background paper for the High-level Forum, Stockholm, 14-15 May 2009.

⁴ World Health Organization and World Bank, *World Report on Disability 2011* (Geneva, 2011).

⁵ Sebastian Buckup, *The Price of Exclusion: The Economic Consequences of Excluding People with Disabilities from the World of Work*, Employment Working Paper, No. 43 (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2009).

them with the opportunities that they need to escape existing cycles of poverty. In turn, reducing poverty for persons with disabilities will contribute to further reduction in the existing inequalities between persons with and those without disabilities. Although the intersection of disability, poverty and inequality has been widely recognized, past national and global agreements and actions to combat poverty and inequality have not always adequately addressed the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities. However, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that the global efforts centred on the reduction of poverty and inequality should mainstream disability, and the needs of persons with disabilities, in order to be effective.

International normative frameworks

5. Since the adoption of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (1982), the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and, more recently, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the international community has been addressing the negative impact of poverty and inequality on persons with disabilities.⁶ In accordance with article 28 of the Convention, States parties shall take appropriate steps: (a) to ensure access by persons with disabilities, in particular women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabilities, to social protection programmes and poverty reduction programmes; and (b) to ensure access by persons with disabilities and their families living in situations of poverty to assistance from the State with disability-related expenses, including adequate training, counselling, financial assistance and respite care.

6. The Convention also outlines the essentiality of persons with disabilities as being equal with others in all spheres of society and development. The Convention includes equality of opportunities as one of its general principles and stresses equal opportunity in education (art. 24), equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value (art. 27), equal access to clean water services and to retirement benefits and programmes (art. 28), and equal access, for children with disabilities, to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities (art. 30).

7. In the outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities,⁷ held in 2013, it was reiterated that development policies concerning poverty eradication should take into account the situation of persons with disabilities, who can be subject to multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination. It was noted that, in this context, the right to equal opportunities in education, employment and social protection on an equal basis with others should also be further recognized.

8. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, Member States have taken greater account of the situation of persons with disabilities than in past development frameworks. Within the set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals at the core of the Agenda, disability is specifically mentioned in the Goals and targets related to education, growth and employment,

⁶ See e.g. preambular para. (t) of the Convention.

⁷ General Assembly resolution 68/3.

inequality, and accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and monitoring of the Goals.

9. The eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequality are principle commitments of the 2030 Agenda. Sustainable Development Goal 1 calls for ending poverty in all its forms everywhere. With the existing disparities, achieving that Goal will require concerted effort in eradicating poverty among persons with disabilities. Goal 10 aims to reduce inequality within and among countries. Within that Goal, target 10.2 specifically focuses on persons with disabilities by aiming to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of disability.

Issues and challenges

10. Ten years after the adoption of the Convention, and despite growing attention to disability in the global development framework, many countries continue to face marked challenges to reducing poverty and inequality among persons with disabilities. Chronic levels of poverty, resource limitations and other capacity constraints continue to stymie country efforts. Many developing countries face challenges in creating enabling conditions and equal opportunity for access by persons with disabilities to health care, education and other public services, as well as to information and communications technologies, vocational training, employment and decent work.

11. Ensuring funding for the provision of universal basic amenities and services, such as access to housing, water, sanitation, food and such social services as education, health and nutrition, has been found to be critical to the reduction of poverty and the promotion of equality of opportunity. Although universal in scope, the design and the implementation of such programmes need to account for those factors that lead to the social and economic exclusion of groups of persons with disabilities. It has been shown that universal provisions that take into consideration the nuances of disadvantaged groups, such as persons with disabilities, tend to be more cost-efficient than targeted delivery.⁸

12. Successful policies to improve the situation and reduce inequalities faced by persons with disabilities tend to address structural barriers in multiple domains: economic, social, environmental and political. Those barriers are interrelated and are mutually reinforcing. Stigmatization of and discrimination against persons due to their disability also intersect with existing structural barriers and need to be addressed through targeted measures.

13. In some countries, the lack of reliable data relating to people living with disabilities makes it difficult to develop evidence-based policy for poverty and inequality reduction. Lack of data also makes it difficult to examine to what extent existing policies, in their form and implementation, address specific concerns of persons with disabilities. Research is therefore needed to determine the situation and needs of persons with disabilities. In particular, broader evidence is needed on the impact of poverty on disability and vice versa in order to target adequate resources towards tackling disability as part of poverty reduction efforts. More

⁸ *Inequality Matters: Report on the World Social Situation 2013* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.IV.2).

knowledge on the extent of inequalities between persons with and those without disabilities and the underlying causes of those inequalities is also needed to inform inequality reduction strategies. To be effective, such research efforts must be supported by improved data collection efforts, both by including persons with disabilities in national censuses and other mainstream statistical tools and by implementing periodic national disability surveys.

14. It is encouraging that countries are increasingly including the issue of disability in poverty reduction efforts and in reducing inequality between persons with and those without disabilities. Many countries have responded to the higher incidence of poverty and inequality among persons with disabilities with a broad range of policy interventions focusing on the social integration of persons with disabilities and their access to basic services.

15. The advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities through international cooperation programmes should be further strengthened in the context of the implementation of an inclusive 2030 development agenda. Projects financed by bilateral and multilateral agencies should be inclusive of disability and persons with disabilities and their perspectives and well-being. A number of bilateral agencies are making efforts to lead the way in that regard. Equally important is the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in other forms of international development cooperation, including South-South cooperation. Within the United Nations system, agencies have also addressed poverty and inequality of persons with disabilities in their programmes.⁹

16. The significance and value of increasing the participation of persons with disabilities has also been emphasized in several General Assembly resolutions, such as resolution 69/142. Governments and legislative bodies at all levels play key roles in promoting disability-inclusive development. Through public participation, engagement with citizens and stakeholders, particularly persons with disabilities and their organizations, and the provision of relevant information, responsive policies and programmes that target the underlying causes of poverty and inequality among persons with disabilities can be pursued.

The way forward

17. The inclusion of persons with disabilities in all development efforts is essential for poverty elimination and for the equalization of opportunities, which are essential to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

18. Prior to 2015, the General Assembly, in a series of resolutions, called for the realization of internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities.¹⁰ Through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the international community has recognized the urgency of addressing disability in efforts to reduce poverty and inequality.

19. There is increased awareness that the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their well-being and perspectives can be a driver for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

⁹ For instance, the Social Protection Floor Initiative, adopted in April 2009, has been one of the key instruments of joint action across the United Nations system.

¹⁰ General Assembly resolutions 66/124, 67/140, 68/3 and 69/142.

Questions for consideration

1. What measures have been taken by States and other stakeholders to reduce poverty and inequality for persons with disabilities?
 2. What measures have been taken by States and other stakeholders to mainstream disability in their national development policies and programmes on poverty and inequality reduction?
 3. To what extent do those measures taken, including policies and programmes adopted by States and other stakeholders, ensure that their poverty and inequality reduction strategies cover persons with disabilities and take into consideration their situation in economic and social development?
 4. What measures are crucially important to ensure that the 2030 Agenda addresses poverty and inequality of persons with disabilities through inclusive policies and programmes?
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