# Sightsavers Submission – our celebration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities

*By Marion, Policy Advisor at Sightsavers
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Sightsavers is an international NGO working with partners to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote equality of opportunity for persons with disabilities in Africa and Asia. We focus on eye health, neglected tropical diseases, social inclusion and inclusive education. Sightsavers has been actively involved in the post-2015 discussions and we are now committed to work on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local, national and global levels, while supporting the monitoring of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Our commemoration of this year's International Day of Persons with Disabilities in light of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the UN CRPD is aligned with our commitment to disability inclusive development through the following three key areas:

## Sightsavers’ Social Inclusion Strategy

Sightsavers’ [Empowerment and Inclusion Strategic Framework 2015](http://www.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Strategic-Framework-2015_ACCESSIBLE.pdf) sets out our approach on social inclusion and identifies our main areas of work. It explains our rights-based approach of mainstreaming disability throughout our programming and operations and it complements our other global strategies on eye health, inclusive education and research. The strategy also explains our aim to support targeted interventions which address inequalities experienced by persons with disabilities in developing countries. We work with women and men with disabilities in order to support their efforts to claim and realise their rights through strategic activities that contribute to individual and collective empowerment. For instance, in western Uganda, we are actively engaged in a European Union funded project to support employment in four districts of the Bunyoro sub-region. Over the past four years, we have facilitated 324 young people to go through skills training and gain employment placements thanks to “Connecting the dots”. More information about this programme is available here: [www.sightsavers.org/connecting-the-dots/](http://www.sightsavers.org/connecting-the-dots/).

On the 3rd December, Sightsavers is exploring the feasibility to organise the following activities in a number of countries where we work:

* **Bangladesh:** Sightsavers Bangladesh along with the Ministry of Social Welfare and other NGOs will organise a week-long fair (3-10 December) to celebrate International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The event will include cultural activities and a series of seminars to discuss issues related to disability and development.
* **India (Bhopal):** Sightsavers India is looking into organising a panel discussion on disability inclusion in the context of health care, the creation of traditional tribal mural artworks to raise awareness on inclusive eye health and a disability pride parade to celebrate diversity.
* **Liberia:** Sightsavers Liberia will be supporting the activities of the National Union of Organization for the Disabled (NUOD). December 3rd will be celebrated with a one day workshop on the rights and responsibilities of persons with disabilities; a parade in the main streets of Monrovia as well as talk shows on the radio to raise awareness about disability.
* **Mali:** Sightsavers Mali will organise with partners a conference to raise awareness about disability and HIV, a parade in the streets of Bamako, a press conference on inclusive education and a festival with musical performances.
* **Pakistan:** Sightsavers Pakistan and our partners will organise with the Directorate General of Special Education a day of activities with a gala in the morning and a joint round table in the afternoon.
* **Senegal:** Sightsavers Senegal, along with partners, is involved in a workshop to share the national disability plan as well as a job fair for persons with disabilities.
* **Sierra Leone:** Sightsavers Sierra Leone is part of the National Commission for Persons with Disability planning committee for activities on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, alongside other partners and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs. Together, they will organise a symposia about “Leaving No one behind” as well as a children’ s conference to discuss the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that relates to inclusion and disability. A march is also being prepared as well as an award ceremony to recognise and award INGOs, local/national NGOs, individuals and DPOs for their work on disability.
* **Uganda:** Sightsavers Uganda is part of both the National and District Organising Committees to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The theme this year in Uganda, is “skilling people with disabilities: a tool for alleviation of poverty”. Sightsavers is likely to contribute to an exhibition of a project highlighting the economic empowerment of women and men with disabilities as well as a screening camp to check the eye health of children.
* **Zambia:** Sightsavers Zambia is participating in the organisation of a special activity, with plan to invite the President to officiate at this year’s event.

## Put Us in the Picture campaign

[Put Us in the Picture](http://www.sightsavers.org/campaigning/) is Sightsavers’ campaign calling on world leaders to make global development inclusive of persons with disabilities. Our vision is the full inclusion and active participation of the one billion people worldwide living with disabilities, most notably the 800 million persons with disabilities in developing countries.

Our campaign calls for the UK and its development partners, including the World Bank and the UN, to not only make inclusive development a priority but also to take a rights-based approach to development. We are calling for:

* Development agencies to develop and implement coherent, measurable approaches for disability inclusion
* The engagement and participation of persons with disabilities in development programmes, to address the underlying causes of exclusion
* A rights-based approach to inclusion which recognises disability as a human rights issue in line with the UNCRPD
* Better data collection on the situation of persons with disabilities. Millions of persons with disabilities are invisible to official statistics. Where data is available, it is often unreliable and inaccurate.

**Dublin, Ireland:** On November 30th an evening reception will be organised at the National Library of Ireland to bring together Irish NGOs, Ministers, other elected representatives and senior officials from Irish Aid. The event is organised by Sightsavers Ireland with the Dóchas Group - the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Organisations.

**London, UK:** On December 3rd, we will be holding our first ever campaigner event with inspirational speakers and interactive training workshops to equip our supporters to take action for our campaign, particularly around engaging with their Members of Parliament. More information can be found on our Campaign Day website: [www.sightsavers.org/december3](http://www.sightsavers.org/december3).

### Policy and advocacy

Our global policy and advocacy work seeks to influence the progression of disability inclusive development that: addresses barriers presented by stigma and discrimination, promotes the national and regional implementation and monitoring of Agenda 2030 and UN CRPD and endorses both the principles and programmatic examples of Sightsavers’ Social Inclusion Strategy. At a global level, we look to work with the World Bank, DFID and their partners as we believe they can drive the change required to make disability-inclusive development a reality. We advocate in this way as we are striving to ensure an inclusive and equitable world while promoting knowledge in lined with Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. At the national level, Sightsavers engages with partner organisations, governments, and other stakeholders, to support the rights of persons with disabilities.

This year is the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the UN CRPD. The international community is rightly celebrating the progress that has been achieved over the past ten years. However, there is still much progress that needs to be made.

* First and foremost, the implementation of the UN CRPD must be taken on board by all countries. It means we must achieve universal ratification to further promote the adoption of laws and policies to realise the rights of all persons with disabilities.
* Second, the Articles of the UN CRPD must be implemented and monitored nationally, with a clear country plan of action.
* Third, we must mainstream the provisions of the Convention and link them to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. To truly leave no one behind and keep the level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda, Member States have to actively involve persons with disabilities and Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) in their development work.

We seek to support these objectives by promoting evidence from our work, particularly through the following initiatives:

#### Voices of the marginalised

Sightsavers, HelpAge International and ADD International have conducted a participatory research study, Voices of the Marginalised, to understand the perspectives of persons with disabilities and older people living in developing countries. We trained persons with disabilities and older people to analyse stories they collected in their communities. Our aim was to share their experiences in terms of social, political and economic inclusion in order to influence national and global policymakers, while strengthening efforts to provide accessible quality services at a local level. The study was first conducted in Bangladesh and then in Tanzania. More information is available at: [www.sightsavers.org/voices](http://www.sightsavers.org/voices).

#### Everybody counts

In 2014, Sightsavers launched a pilot project to test disaggregating data by disability. We have been learning what works – and what doesn’t – and finding out how best to integrate disability disaggregated data collection in development programmes. We have been using the [Washington Group Short Set of Questions](http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/washington-group-question-sets/short-set-of-disability-questions/) and our findings have allowed us to evaluate and improve the accessibility of our own programmes. They also help us contribute to the debate on how best to collect data on the inclusion of persons with disabilities as a step towards their greater inclusion in development programmes. This in turn will ensure a wider understanding of how to collect better, more accurate and comparable data. More information is available at: [www.sightsavers.org/everybodycounts](http://www.sightsavers.org/everybodycounts).

#### Inclusive Eye Health

Sightsavers is currently piloting an Inclusive Eye Health (IEH) initiative in Bhopal (India) aimed at improving accessibility to eye health services for women and men with disabilities, and marginalised people living in urban informal settlements. The IEH initiative fosters partnership and collaboration with local stakeholders, and active engagement of persons with disabilities, women and other groups of individuals through participatory approaches. Data is disaggregated by age, sex and disability to inform the project strategy. Capacity of eye health personnel and community health workers is built around disability and gender inclusion, and the accessibility of infrastructure and communication materials is improved to reach and include all people in the community. Ultimately, the IEH initiative aims to support the government and other decision-makers in the provision of more inclusive health services. More information is available at: [www.sightsavers.org/inclusive-eye-health/](http://www.sightsavers.org/inclusive-eye-health/).

*For questions about this submission or any other aspect of Sightsavers’ work, please contact Marion Steff:* *msteff@sightsavers.org**.*