**Background Note on Women and Girls with Disabilities**

There are more than one billion people with disabilities worldwide, and there are significant differences in the prevalence of disability between men and women in both developing and developed countries: male disability prevalence rate is 12% while female disability prevalence rate is 19.2%[[1]](#footnote-1). Moreover, there is a strong evidence to show that women and girls with disabilities disproportionally face greater poverty, lack of opportunity, denial of political and social rights due to the persistence of certain cultural, legal and institutional barriers, which makes them the victims of multiple and intersectional discrimination -- on the basis of both gender and disability. High rates of gender-based violence, lack of access to justice, and denial of access to information, goods, and services are particularly pernicious manifestations of the discrimination to which women and girls with disabilities are subjected.

The United Nations (UN) has sought to promote the empowerment of women with disabilities both within the context of its work to empower women, as well as in its work to advance the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and development. Notable progress has been made over the past decades towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, including through gender mainstreaming. Significant advances have also been made in the promotion of the rights and perspectives of persons with disabilities. However, significant gaps remain in terms of addressing the situation of women and girls with disabilities, who have been historically neglected in national legislature and policy development. The laws and policies that focus on women and the promotion of gender equality have traditionally failed to respond to disability issues in their implementation. This historic invisibility has continued to contribute to the multiple forms of discrimination that experienced by women with disabilities.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, protects and promotes the rights of all women and provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men. And the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) has developed a more concrete roadmap for the Governments not only to advance the gender equality in general, but also to give due consideration on women with disabilities[[2]](#footnote-2).Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted in 2006, as a benchmark document that works to ensure the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities, provides a twin track approach to the promotion of the rights of women and girls with disabilities, through mainstreaming gender as one of its overarching principles and by including a specific article (Article 6) on women with disabilities that singles out women with disabilities to support the strengthening of their voice, agency and confidence to act as rights holders on an equal basis with others.

Globally, these Conventions have received close to universal ratification.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, while these instruments provide an international normative framework to promote the inclusion of women with disabilities, they require public policies and effective implementation to realize real change. Responding to the intersectionalities and diversity of needs and perspectives of women with disabilities calls for new forms of collaboration, coordination and sharing of expertise beyond traditional spheres. Bridges need to be constructed to break down siloed agendas. In this regard, law and programmatic reform need to recognize and respond to the intersectionalities of gender and disability to effectively mainstream the rights and perspectives of women with disabilities into the landscape of the broader regulatory system as well as gender empowerment programmes.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers an opportunity to advance gender-responsive and disability-inclusive development. The 2030 Agenda recognizes gender equality and disability as cross-cutting issues that are integral and indivisible in all three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. The SDGs demand systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all Goals, with Goal 5 dedicated to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of all women. Disability is specifically included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data, monitoring and accountability. Effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda therefore requires an integrated approach to gender equality, women’s empowerment, and disability and development that responds to and addresses the rights and perspectives of women with disabilities throughout.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference,[[4]](#footnote-4) and agreed conclusions on “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development” adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2016, also provide guidance for the adoption of integrated measures to protect and promote the rights of all women and girls with disabilities, to ensure their full and effective participation and inclusion in society, and to address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they face.

Most recently, the General Assembly in its resolution on Inclusive development for persons with disabilities[[5]](#footnote-5) urges Member States, United Nations agencies and other stakeholders to design and implement policies and programmes to address fully the rights of women and girls with disabilities and to ensure that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be inclusive of and accessible to women and girls with disabilities. It recognizes the disproportionate impact disasters have on women and girls with disabilities.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges the negative impact that humanitarian crisis can have on development progress, and in building effective, accountable and inclusive communities. This has been further addressed in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030, which recognizes the need for, and [committed to](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/global-norms-and-standards#disasters), a strong focus on gender equality and women’s rights, as well as to disability inclusive disaster risk reduction. One of its guiding principles is that “a gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted”.[[6]](#footnote-6) Furthermore, it recognizes the importance of empowering women and persons with disabilities to take on greater leadership roles in response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.[[7]](#footnote-7) Similarly, the Agenda for Humanity calls upon stakeholders to reach everyone in situations of conflict, disasters, vulnerability and risk.[[8]](#footnote-8) Commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit (in May 2016), including increased funding to women’s groups, must be inclusive of women and girls with disabilities and their representative organizations. The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, endorsed by more than 140 stakeholders, contains commitments to the protection and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities in situations of crisis.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The Commission for Social Development, emphasizes the need for equal opportunities and for measures to ensure that all persons with disabilities are not subject to any forms of discrimination or stigmatization, in particular women, children, youth, indigenous peoples, older persons, migrants and refugees who continue to be subject to multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination, and to ensure that they are included in participation on an equal basis with others in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and other internationally agreed development goals.

In pursuit of the “operationalization” of the 2030 Agenda inclusive of all, there is a need for the international community to promote dialogue between regional and national experts and identify strategies and actions to empower women and girls with disabilities in the implementation of the new agenda.

1. The World Health Organization, World Report on Disability (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Beijing Platform for Action(1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As of 15 August 2016, CEDAW has 189 State Parties; CRC has 196 State Parties; and CRPD has 166 State Parties. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women: action for equality, development and peace, Beijing, China, 4-15 September 1995. (1995). Beijing: United Nations. The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action recognize disability as a barrier to full equality and advancement, and the enjoyment of human rights (paragraphs 46 and 225), and identify specific actions to ensure the empowerment of women with disabilities in various areas (paragraphs 60(a), 175(d), 280(c), 82(k), 106(c), 106(o), 124(m), 126(d), 178(f), 178(j), 195(a), 206(k), 101, 233(a), 233(b), 81(a), 278(d)). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A/RES/71/165. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030, Guiding Principles, paragraph 19 (d). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. Priority 4: Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction, paragraph 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/e49881ca33e3740b5f37162857cedc92c7c1e354?vid=569103&disposition=inline&op=view> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://humanitariandisabilitycharter.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)