

**Chair's Summary**

**High-level panel discussion on:**

**Leaving No One Behind: Poverty and Disability**

**3 February 2017**

The Commission held a High-level Panel Discussion on “**Leaving No One Behind: Poverty and Disability**” under sub item 3(b) during its 55<sup>th</sup> Session. The following panellists elaborated on ways to include persons with disabilities and combat poverty among them: H.E. Ms. Ana Helena Chacón, Vice-president of Costa Rica; Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguilar, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the Human Rights Council; Mr. Steen Lau Jorgensen, Director in charge of Social Protection and Labor, the World Bank Group; Mr. Mosharraf Hossain, Director of Global Policy, Influencing & Research of ADD International. Prior to the panel discussion, discussant Ms. Maria Aparecida Borghetti offered her remarks. The discussion was moderated by Ms. Nora Groce, Professor and Director of Leonard Cheshire Centre for Disability and Inclusive Development, University of College London, United Kingdom.

**Executive Summary**

- Persons with disabilities are often affected by multiple reinforcing factors of exclusion.
- There is an urgent need for more, better and disaggregated data on disability. Yet, the lack of adequate data in certain fields must not be an excuse for failure to include disability in policy making for development and social protection.
- Rights, not compassion or hand-outs are the basis for all action on inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities. There is a need to fight the structural problems, not the symptoms. Empowerment is the ultimate goal.
- “Nothing about us without us.” Need to involve persons with disabilities as full partners.
- Global partnerships, including with employers and market-based solutions, have an important role to play.
- There is a need to mainstream this perspective into all development activities of Member States and the United Nations system. A system-wide action plan on disability within the UN system was called for.

**Measures to combat poverty for persons with disabilities**

Participants emphasized that combatting poverty for persons with disabilities will require enhancing their participation in society. Poverty is not due to disability but due to unequal access by persons with disabilities. Paramount in addressing this unequal access is the progressive realization of the

rights of persons with disabilities, including their empowerment towards their full participation in society. To enhance participation, access to basic services should be provided and key barriers should be removed, including by providing access to assistive devices and improving accessibility, such as in transportation and in the built environment. Universal design should be promoted. Reasonable accommodation should be provided and attitudinal barriers, stigma and discrimination should also be addressed.

Inclusive education was mentioned by panellists as key to promoting the rights and participation of persons with disabilities and to reducing their risk of falling into poverty. To achieve this, teachers must receive adequate training to teach all students, including those with disabilities. Access to information and ICT is also crucial. In addition to education, employment also gives persons with disabilities the opportunity to escape the poverty trap. Employers should be encouraged and receive training on how to remove attitudinal, physical and other barriers in the work place. Global partnerships for inclusion with governments, organizations of persons with disabilities and the private sector should be established to promote employment for persons with disabilities and search market-based solutions for integrating persons with disabilities. This should include inclusive markets which are critical because they promote human rights and independence, build resilience to shocks, improve livelihoods, increase tax bases and reduce public costs.

Governments must enable inclusive policies as legislation provides the needed framework for inclusion. It was recognized that the impact of poverty is higher for women with disabilities and therefore, legislation will be needed to address issues of women with disabilities. Creating awareness and ensuring inclusion is also fundamental for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Social protection was emphasized as essential to reduce poverty for persons with disabilities. Social protection programmes should consist not only of cash transfers but also contain elements which promote empowerment and participation in the labour market, while recognizing that some persons with disabilities will never be able to become self-sufficient and must receive social protection support. The costs associated with disability should also be taken into account when designing social protection programs. Good practices in social protection, from both developed and developing regions, should be shared, promoted and used.

It was highlighted that the participation of persons with disabilities in decision making processes needed to be promoted. Their participation leads to better outcomes in designing measures to promote development and combat poverty. In addition, disability should be mainstreamed in all poverty eradication and development measures and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which should be used in order to implement the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). South-south cooperation should be promoted to share and scale up best practices.

### **The role of the United Nations and of IFIs in advancing disability-inclusive development**

Panellists recommended the development of a United Nations System Wide Action Plan on Disability, which would contribute to a more coherent system-wide approach in mainstreaming disability. Resource allocation and accountability mechanisms in the United Nations could also be implemented to assess and ensure the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) throughout the organization. International financial institutions (IFIs) should be

inclusive of persons with disabilities in their projects and should provide support to countries to include persons with disabilities. The United Nations was also asked to provide more support in three key areas: (i) implementation of legislation for inclusion of persons with disabilities; (ii) implementation of the CRPD in order to contribute to the 2030 Agenda's "leaving no one behind"; and (iii) access to assistive devices.

Participants from non-governmental organizations asked for higher participation of persons with disabilities in the Commission's panels and in other United Nations meetings, including panels and meetings on themes other than disability. In this regard, it was noted that persons with disabilities may lack funds to participate in United Nations meetings and may need financial support. Participants also expressed the need for more accessibility in United Nations meetings, such as use of Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) and sign language.

### **Approaches to promoting inclusion and reducing poverty of persons with disabilities**

A number of States shared information about their efforts to advance disability inclusive development and reduce poverty among persons with disabilities. For example, in **Botswana**, the National Coordinating Committee on Persons with Disabilities ensures that every governmental department includes persons with disabilities. Its review of the Revised National Policy on Disabilities, which provides a blue print for mainstreaming disability into all sectors of society, had just been completed and presented to Parliament. **Botswana** has ensured that all programmes on poverty reduction are inclusive of persons with disabilities and has established affirmative action guidelines. The **EU** is working on a new initiative focusing on key issues to reduce poverty for persons with disabilities, such as inclusive social protection systems to promote employment. **China** conducted a nationwide survey in 2015 on rehabilitation and employment. The outcome of that survey serves as an evidence base for the development of poverty alleviation measures. **China** has also established an employment plan for persons with disabilities, and provides practical skills training and subsidies to support persons with disabilities. **Portugal** is moving away from a social protection system which covered only persons with disabilities with no autonomy and no access to the labour market to a system that takes into account the risk of poverty and the costs associated with disability. **Japan** encourages companies to reach 2% of persons with disabilities among their employees, by providing support to companies that achieve this goal. **Kenya** reserves 5% of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, both in the public and private sector. Its National Council for Persons with Disabilities has oversight roles at national and local levels.

### **Data and statistics on poverty for persons with disabilities**

A number of participants emphasized the need for improved data and statistics on persons with disabilities, particularly on poverty, and emphasized the importance of using the short set of questions developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics. Other approaches to collect data were mentioned. The **World Bank** informed the panel about its partnership with WHO on the Model Disability Survey.

As a gender perspective should be part of policy measures to reduce poverty among persons with disabilities, gender statistics for persons with disabilities are also very important. It was emphasized that countries need technical and financial assistance to collect data on persons with disabilities. A fast track may be needed to make sure the data needed to design policies to implement the 2030 Agenda for persons with disabilities is available. It was noted that, while there are still challenges

with regard to the quality and quantity of existing data, this must not be an excuse for failure to include disability in policy making for development and social protection.