

**Panel, Observance of International Day of Persons with Disabilities - 'New Initiatives for Disability Inclusion', 3 December 2019, 11:35 am – 1:00 pm**

**Distinguished guests, partners, colleagues and panelists,**

It is a great pleasure to speak before you, once again, at the observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, particularly at this commemorative moment in time as we look ahead to 2020. I would like to thank **DESA** and today's co-sponsors for this opportunity to speak and share some of **UN Women's** work towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

**Point 1: Situation of women and girls with disabilities**

As many of you are aware, the average disability prevalence rate for women is 19.2 percent, compared to 12 percent for men.

Gender- and disability-based discrimination have deep and far-reaching consequences for the well-being and status of women and girls with disabilities. Women with disabilities fare worse than women *without* disabilities, and men *with* disabilities. Compared to men without disabilities, women with disabilities are **three times more likely to have their health care needs unmet; three times more likely to be illiterate; two times less likely to be employed, and two times less likely to use the internet.** There is a need for interventions that are both disability inclusive and gender-responsive at the same time.

**Point 2: UN Women's strategy**

One year ago, UN Women launched its corporate strategy on the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities. The strategy calls for an intersectional approach to ensure that all women and girls with

disabilities, in all their diversity, benefit equally from development and humanitarian interventions.

In 2019, 54 of our offices reported work with or related to women with disabilities across all regions. Examples include:

- A) UN Women's work in Pakistan to strengthen reporting on, and tighten the legislation of the Disability Persons Act, in close partnership with the Ministry of Human Rights;
- B) Collaboration of our regional office in the Europe and Central Asia Region with a local organization of women with disabilities to identify good practices regarding support services for women with disabilities who are survivors of violence;
- C) The co-organization here at Headquarters of a High-Level Meeting of Women with Disabilities in Political and Public Leadership together with the Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations on Disability and Accessibility, which led to the adoption of a declaration aimed to contribute to their development, advancement and empowerment.

### **Point 3: Looking ahead to Beijing +25**

Next year marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This historic agreement articulated a vision where *all* women and girls enjoy equal rights, freedom and opportunities in all spheres of life on par with men and boys; and a life free from fear and violence.

Preliminary findings from an assessment of the ways in which the UN system has supported the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action over the last five years, undertaken by the Inter-Agency Network

on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), a long-standing body made up of gender focal points in the United Nations system, show that 46 per cent of entities<sup>1</sup> took policy or programme actions to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of women and girls living with disabilities between 2014 and 2019. Encouragingly, the number of entities undertaking actions such as these increased by 27 per cent in this period, indicating that this is work which UN entities are increasingly prioritizing.

Realizing the vision of Beijing requires new partnerships, alliances and acts of solidarity, including within the UN System, in order to better realize the rights of also women and girls with disabilities. Women and girls with disabilities need to be involved; they need to sit at the decision-making table, and to practice their rights and communicate their needs.

#### **Point 4: The role of the UN System in empowering women and girls with disabilities**

As a standard setting organization, also championing the principle of leave no one behind that underpins Agenda 2030, it is important to ensure the equal and active participation of women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities, at all levels and in all fields of the UN's work. The UN Disability Inclusion Strategy can be no exception.

Accordingly, permit me to share a few lessons from the accountability framework for gender mainstreaming, known as the UN-SWAP. As you may know, UN Women pioneered it in 2012. Subsequently, the Disability Inclusion strategy drew heavily from it, emulating its methodology and structure.

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<sup>1</sup> 21 out of 46 entities

1. The system needs not only to set common standards of compliance through accountability frameworks. It then needs to also support compliance with technical assistance and resources. Directive alone, without more, does not suffice.
2. Accountability frameworks enhance visibility of the theme they address. They make matters measurable. What is not measured is invisible and what is invisible is lost. So it is very important to make matters visible.
3. Accountability frameworks can mainstream the issue at hand into institutions reasonably well, if properly supported. However, comprehensive mainstreaming requires both institutional accountability such as the accountability framework provides, AND programmes which allow for a targeted approach. Complimentary stand alone programmes pegged to corresponding outcomes in the cooperation frameworks are equally key.
4. Finally, accountability frameworks demonstrate certain indicators to be more catalytic than others. These include, to name some obvious ones - stand alone policies, a system-wide network or architecture of staff responsible for vigilance and guidance for implementation, a service oriented central coordination hub with resources to support needs across the system and a culture of and mechanisms that ensure responsiveness, agility and client orientation amongst both the wider network and the coordination hub.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, let me simply end by saying that we must recognize the pivotal role we can play as the UN System in order to facilitate the participation of women and girls with disabilities and cross-movement building to ensure that their rights are met.

As we enter 2020, let us support all women and girls with disabilities in their steadfast actions towards the future that they want for themselves.

Let us do so remembering that disability is no stranger to anyone. If we have not encountered it in our personal lives already, we are more than likely to do so in future<sup>2</sup>.

Disability is experienced at a personal level. Therefore, commit to it personally as well as institutionally.

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<sup>2</sup> Over 46% of people over 60 are estimated to live with a disability. (DESA).