



**High-Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on
Disability and Development
23 September 2013**

Backgrounder

Why is the General Assembly convening the High-level Meeting on Disability and Development (HLMDD)?

Historically, disability has not figured in most development discussions—even though there may be more than a billion persons with disabilities worldwide. There is no mention of persons with disabilities in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Yet persons with disabilities make up an estimated 15 per cent of the world’s population, of whom 80 per cent live in developing countries. And they face a greater risk of living in absolute poverty than any other group.

Taking note of this situation and recognizing that the world would be discussing, from now until 2015, how to build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals, the UN General Assembly called for the High-level meeting to ensure that disability is included in future development efforts and to make the achievement of the MDGs a reality for persons with disabilities.

Is this the first time the General Assembly ever called for a meeting on disability?

The HLMDD on 23 September 2013 will be the first meeting of its kind, but it is not the first time the General Assembly has spoken on the issue. Recognizing the need for greater inclusion of persons with disability in the international development agenda, the General Assembly has repeatedly called for the inclusion of disability in development efforts to make the achievement of international development goals a reality for persons with disabilities. At its High-level Meeting on the MDGs in September 2010, the Assembly adopted the resolution “Keeping the promise: United to achieve the Millennium Development Goals,” recognizing that “policies and actions must also focus on persons with disabilities, so that they benefit from progress towards achieving the MDGs”.

What will the meeting achieve?

At the meeting, Heads of States and Governments will agree on next steps to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of development and society towards 2015 and beyond. The outcome of the meeting will help inform the discussions on accelerating implementation of the MDGs and for the elaboration of a new UN development agenda that will include everyone.

The meeting itself will also serve to raise awareness of the issues that persons with disabilities face and the efforts of the international commitment to a disability-inclusive society.

What is the relation between the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the High-level Meeting?

The Convention is, first and foremost, a human rights treaty. While it does have major ramifications for development, it is a human rights framework that builds a legal regimen to enforce the rights of persons with disabilities. The international development agenda, however, is a comprehensive plan for promoting development and it is important that persons with disabilities are included. Studies have found that excluding persons with disabilities from jobs and employment not only deprives them of a livelihood but also hurts countries' overall development performance, reducing GDP by as much as three to seven per cent.

Furthermore, in all regions, persons living with disabilities are disproportionately represented among the world's poorest. They also often lack equal access to fundamental resources, such as education, employment, healthcare, transportation, social and legal support systems. While the Millennium Development Goals fostered collaborative action focusing on eight key development issues with a deadline to achieve those goals by 2015, disability was not referred to in the MDGs or in the new revisions currently under consideration.

The High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on Disability and Development is an opportunity to focus the attention of the international community on the need to incorporate the concerns of persons with disabilities into development planning, particularly as the world discusses means to accelerate action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and forge a post-2015 development framework.

Shouldn't development planning affect everyone? Why should some groups get special attention?

It is absolutely true that the sustainable development agenda should cover all people, regardless of their particular needs or circumstances. But in practice, in all societies,

there are barriers that prevent all people from fully participating, and because of this, the larger community cannot benefit from people's ideas, creativity and contributions. Removing these barriers is not difficult nor does it need to be expensive. It mostly requires a change in perspective that allows for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the life of the community.

What barriers are we talking about?

Barriers can take a variety of forms, including those relating to the physical environment or to information and communications technology (ICT), or those resulting from legislation or policy, or from societal attitudes or discrimination. The result is that persons with disabilities do not have equal access to society or services, including education, employment, health care, transportation, political participation or justice. (IDPD 2012: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1597>)

Women and girls with disabilities experience double discrimination, which places them at higher risk of gender-based violence, sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation. UNDP reports that global literacy rate is as low as one per cent for women with disabilities¹. The World Bank reports that around the world, every minute more than 30 women are seriously injured or disabled during labour and that those 15 to 50 million women generally go unnoticed².

Persons with disabilities also face discrimination in areas including HIV/AIDS awareness, disaster preparedness and areas of mental health. An estimated one in four people globally will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime. Almost one million people die every year due to suicide, which is the third leading cause of death among young people. Depression is the leading cause of years lost due to disability worldwide. Mental health conditions are among the ten leading causes of disability in developed and developing countries. The economic cost of mental health problems is vast, while reasonable investment in mental health can contribute to better mental health for people. Poor mental health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty, compromised education, gender inequality, ill-health, violence and other global challenges³.

What does a disability-inclusive society look like?

Key areas are bolstering the international framework: promoting accessibility for inclusive and sustainable development; addressing gaps in capacity building; and assessing, monitoring and evaluating the situation of persons with disabilities. In addressing those areas, the persistent gaps between policy and practice must be closed.

¹ <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=13&pid=1514#footnote%203>

² <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=13&pid=1514#footnote%204>

³ <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1545>

Key issues identified for a disability-inclusive post-2015 development framework are: improved data and statistics, participation in decision-making processes, capacity building, promoting international cooperation, gender equality, strengthening civil society organizations, disaster-preparedness and management, early education, employment and greater private sector involvement. Also needed are greater attention to persons with disabilities faced with multiple and aggravated forms of discrimination and the promotion of awareness-raising campaigns.