

## **How to ensure effective integration of national institutions/mechanisms working on the disability issues as well as persons with disabilities in the implementation of the SDGs**

### **Introduction**

Ensuring the effective integration of national institutions and mechanisms working on disability as well as persons with disabilities covers a number of key areas. I've chosen to focus this contribution on answering how we could get organisations and advocacy groups working at the local level and nationally focused disability groups to buy into and participate in the SDG process. Leonard Cheshire Disability believes that this merits careful consideration, as well as thoughtful and creative approaches to ensure good and representative participation.

### **Background**

Over the past two decades there has been increasing involvement in international development and global health efforts by national Disabled Peoples Organizations (DPOs) and other representative groups. However, the groups engaged in the global agenda usually only constitute a small percentage of the number of organizations and programmes which target children and adults with disabilities at local and national levels.

The priority for many of these national institutions, and governmental and voluntary organizations is not international but national issues. A number of national institutions, including government programmes and academic training programmes for rehabilitation professionals, teacher training and social worker programmes, DPOs and parent advocacy groups, as well as mechanisms such as national and local social protection schemes and outreach services - are designed specifically to provide immediate or long term service delivery to individuals and their families.

While there are some larger organizations that deal with both service delivery/ community based advocacy and broader development concerns, the majority of such services and advocacy groups concentrate on issues of immediate concern to their members. The people who work within such organisations are often already underfunded, overworked and focused on pressing local or national concerns. They frequently have little or no experience thinking about global development or overarching issues addressed by the SDGs and few resources to do so if they chose to.

This is unfortunate, because such local organizations and nationally focused programmes are often uniquely situated to be able to identify where needs, concerns and issues among persons with disabilities are directly linked to the SDGs. Such organisations can identify where SDG-related efforts can be most effective at the community level. Knowing the local situations, such local and national groups may find it easier to identify where SDG related programmes and interventions could have the most immediate or substantial benefit for the local disabled population. Finally, such local groups are also uniquely situated to be able to measure the impact of SDG related interventions on the local population.

Linking in-country disability institutions and programmes – for example, those that span the range of advocacy from grassroot to national public education campaigns – with the implementation of the SDGS could provide unique insight into how SDGs are best implemented at the local level.

## Moving forward

What then can be done to tap into this large – and largely overlooked body of expertise? Here I make some initial suggestions, but this question would benefit from an on-going advisory committee within the UN system to further develop these ideas and the required material. But let me start with a few ideas here:

1. In order to better involve national organizations and mechanisms, people who participate in such organizations – (for example, educators working on inclusive education efforts or the disabled woman who runs the local DPO) - need more information about not just the SDGs, but about the relevance of the SDGs to their daily work and the populations they serve. Materials/ talks/ videos focussed on ‘*What do the SDGs mean to you*’ would be helpful to bring information regarding the SDGs to persons with disabilities and people who provide services and support to persons with disabilities.
2. Tapping into local and national expertise involves more than just providing information about the SDGs as noted above. These are often very busy people to begin with, so although information is a start, there will need to be mechanisms put in place - advisory groups, national committees etc. that can help organize this body of local knowledge. This need not be a top down exercise – such SDG advisory groups could be organized from the local level up. But some organizational effort will need to be made – (and ideally some funds available for transportation, phones etc.) – to keep these efforts up and running
3. Advisory groups/ national committees on the inclusion of disability in the implementation of the SDGs are important HOWEVER these groups need to be talking to and in direct touch with broader national SDG-focussed groups – otherwise, you have a group of disability-focused advocates, talking to themselves, but not communicating effectively with key UN, government, NGO actors charged with implementing and evaluating the SDGs.
4. Local *internationally oriented* DPOs, DPO umbrella groups and other disability-related NGOs can be supported to help educate actors charged with implementing and evaluating the SDGs about disability and identify points of intersection; where local disability related information can best be linked to national SDG efforts. This could include:
  - a. Every country will submit an annual report on progress made towards the SDGs – representatives from disability related national institutions/ national mechanisms should be called on to be members of advisory boards, committees etc. linked to these efforts. They will have access to local information, regional reports and insights that can provide information and input regarding local progress – (or lack of progress) in the inclusion of people with disability in SDG related efforts
  - b. The disability community itself – (advocates and DPOs, disability related NGOs etc.), in each country should consider establishing an SDG sub-committee – with links to those in government responsible for preparing and submitting the annual national SDG report. This is different from the recommendation above of having people from the disability community *on* SDG advisory committees. A disability lead SDG committee could serve as an oversight committee, reviewing and encouraging government groups and other key actors to ensure that disability remains a key focus.

- c. The disability community could approach or call upon local academics/ researchers/ other NGOs working on social justice issues to encourage their support for local/national level efforts to include disability in all their SDG related work as well.

## **Conclusion**

The ideas offered here are specifically targeted towards knitting together grassroots level disability advocates and local/ nationally disability organizations and advocates with broader efforts to implement the SDGs.

Again, there is often a wealth of knowledge, expertise and experience available at the grassroots, local and provincial levels on the lives of persons with disabilities and their families. This information is largely untapped in broader development efforts<sup>1</sup>. This was certainly the case under the MDGs. In fact, in many cases, people with disabilities and those who provided services and support for them, were unaware of the MDGs.

It is vitally important that these groups are not left out of the SDG process. They are critical to our ability to keep a ‘finger on the pulse’ of how the SDGs may be improving the lives of person with disabilities, and equally important, they will know better than any others if people with disabilities are NOT being reached by efforts to implement the SDGs – and they may have particularly good insight into what can be done to fix this lack of inclusion. Global disability efforts to ensure inclusion in the SDGs will be the poorer if we over look this critical link in the chain.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Cheshire Disability has a deeply rooted network of over 200 Leonard Cheshire Global Alliance members in 54 countries. Collectively and individually Alliance members have helped to effect substantial change for persons with disabilities and we continue to contribute and strengthen national and global development agendas.