

# Sightsavers submission to consultation in advance of LDC5

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July 2021

## About Sightsavers

Sightsavers is a UK-based international development NGO working to prevent avoidable blindness, support equality for people with disabilities and advocate for change in more than 30 countries across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

In seeking to further our aims, Sightsavers' Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns work engages widely with UN agencies and institutions, treaty bodies, as well as Members States' Permanent Missions to the UN as well as other global organisations and national governments. This work takes place at both global and country level. Our programmatic work covers vision and eye health, work to eliminate a range of neglected tropical diseases as well as inclusive education, health, employment and political participation in conjunction with organisations of persons with disabilities.

## Input into the Zero Draft

We welcome the comprehensive nature of the zero draft which covers a number of areas of interest to Sightsavers including, inclusive education, Universal Health Coverage and gender equality.

However, we are concerned that the zero draft only mentions disability twice. Disability is disproportionately prevalent in LDCs and persons with disabilities are often amongst the poorest and most marginalised, facing significant barriers to services and discrimination.

This is especially true in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, as Secretary-General Guterres highlighted during his recent address to the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities we 'need to build back accessible' as well as better.

The UN Disability Inclusion Strategy launched in 2019 provides the foundation for sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion through all of the work of the United Nations. To ensure its full implementation it is vital that this ambition is reflected in all strands of the UN's work.

We would suggest the below areas be given more attention in the next draft.

## Strengthening of existing language on disability

The two references to disability within the document are welcome and highlight two critical areas for the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Paragraph 43 – while we welcome this reference, we would caution against only including persons with disabilities in a list of “the vulnerable”. The paragraph could be strengthened by using language in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Paragraph 290 – We welcome the recognition of the need for data to be disaggregated by disability. This section would be enhanced further by inclusion of the recommendation for use of the Washington Group Questions Sets or other internationally recognised methodologies. These methodologies ensure that accurate data is collected on disability.

### **Mainstreaming of disability throughout the document**

We would express some concern that disability is limited to these particular references despite the very wide-ranging nature of the zero draft. This will be critical if UN Member States are to meet obligations in the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and commitments in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Areas where this could be strengthened include, but are not limited to:

- Paragraph 34 – It will not be possible to achieve the target set out of achieving quality social protection for all without ensuring that social protection systems are disability-inclusive. We therefore suggest adding ‘disability-inclusive’ alongside gender sensitive in paragraph 34 to ensure progress towards the target.
- Paragraph 41 – We welcome the recognition of inequalities in access to education for girls. Alongside girls, children with disabilities make up one of largest groups of out of school children and therefore we suggest that a specific target is added on reducing the enrollment gap for children with disabilities. Paragraph 42 would be strengthened by including a recognition of the importance of accessible infrastructure.
- Paragraph 45 – We welcome the recognition of the importance of digital equipment. This is particularly important for many people with disabilities and therefore we would suggest including a specific reference to ‘inclusive and accessible’ equipment. This paragraph would also benefit from a specific reference to the provision of low-cost assistive technology, which is critical in facilitating the active participation of people with disabilities.
- Paragraph 51 – Women and girls with disabilities are at increased risk of violence compared to their non-disabled peers. However, GBV responses are often not accessible and do not take into account the particular risk factors that women with disabilities experience. Paragraph 51 would therefore be strengthened by recognising the need to reach and provide inclusive services for women with disabilities.

We would welcome the opportunity to share further suggestions of areas where disability inclusion could be mainstreamed in the zero draft.

### **Specific paragraph on of disability inclusion**

Given the significant levels of poverty that people with disabilities experience, and the barriers that they face in accessing many of the services and rights set out in the zero draft, we suggest adding a specific paragraph on disability – in line with those currently included on gender and youth. The inclusion of people with disabilities is necessary for development and recovery in LDCs and beyond.

This paragraph should recognise the inequalities and specific barriers that people with disabilities experience, the role that people with disabilities can play as active contributors and have specific targets and actions.

Targets and areas of action could include access to health, including sexual and reproductive, services; access to quality education; increased participation in decision-making; access to assistive technology; and the provision of disability-specific social protection mechanisms.

We would recommend consulting further with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in LDCs on their priorities for inclusion.

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