

Circle of Friends
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Under the theme, "Enabling Inclusion: Addressing Disability Challenges," this side event aims to highlight specific barriers encountered by individuals with disabilities (PWD) in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The event is facilitated by Circle of Friends Inc. Dominica, in partnership with the Antigua & Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities, St. Kitts & Nevis Association of Persons with Disabilities, St. Vincent & Grenadines Society for the Blind, Advocacy Grenada Inc, LEAD Center for PAJS, and the Caribbean Consortium for Sustainable Regional Change, Development & Innovation.

Our goal is to cultivate more inclusive and resilient societies, wherein every individual can realize their potential and contribute to sustainable development, foster meaningful dialogue, share knowledge, and facilitate networking among participants dedicated to advancing systematized and sustainably equitable and inclusive disability rights and social justice in SIDS.

To say that the experiences of and outcomes for PWDs in SIDS are significantly different and distinct from that of their counterparts across the globe (and even regionally to some degree) is absolutely not an understatement. Also, of particular significance and note here is the fact that approximately 80% of the barriers and outcomes that PWDs encounter extend beyond just physical impairment.

This sobering and persistent reality is an ongoing area of a robust, holistic, and intersectional response. This must necessarily include a sustainability framework, mandates, and supports that systemizes these changes and innovations as part of a strategic, longitudinal approach to excellence in governance, public policy, development, and change. An essential component of this sustainable change and development paradigm requires a way to pinpoint sources and pain points alike.

What research there is posits a number of psychosocial and sociocultural causative factors, including the continued propensity for reliance on antiquated colonial era norms around public policy priorities and allocation and investment of resources (sustainably). Also, the influence that smaller population sizes can have on personal and public willingness and/or capacity to change, as well as the mindset of PWDs themselves can present barriers.

Whatever those causative factors, the reality is that SIDS-based PwDs consistently encounter distinctive hurdles and impacts concerning prioritization, accessibility, inclusion, and the debilitating effects of systemic and societal stigmatization. These barriers impede their full engagement in society, such as curtailed educational, employment, and socioeconomic opportunities and progress.

Despite the fact there is indeed much work to be done, its also important that we point out areas of success and efficacy that can be built upon. Case in point, regional adoption of Horticulture Therapy as a programmatic intervention. Led by Antigua and Barbuda, St. Lucia, and St.

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Kitts-Nevis, the recent national strategic implementation of this community development strategy for PWDs and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) has borne good fruit.

As outlined in the WHO CBR-CBID Guidelines and CBR Matrix, this intervention met with significant success in the Caribbean. notably, as stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD), nations are now committing time, funding, and other resources in prioritizing facilitation of support and scalability for sustainable inclusion in SIDS. Among the specific objectives of this Side Event, is that it will:

1. showcase successful initiatives and exemplary practices that have effectively tackled disability-related issues while championing the rights and empowerment of people with disabilities.
2. delve into innovative approaches and strategies for bolstering accessibility, inclusivity, and support systems for individuals with disabilities in SIDS, including the leveraging of technology, advocacy for policy reforms, and community involvement.
3. analyze how disability issues and maximizing the capabilities of individuals with disabilities correspond with the significance of investing in human capital within Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
4. serve as a platform to convene diverse voices and perspectives, facilitating deliberations on issues affecting people with disabilities; hence providing an opportunity to raise awareness, stimulate dialogue, share best practices, formulate recommendations, empower stakeholders, and galvanize action toward the promotion of disability rights and the establishment of resilient societies where every individual can realize their potential and contribute to sustainable development.

The disability forum panel discussion will highlight the significance of integrating disability-inclusive policies and practices into broader development agendas and provide opportunities for collaboration and partnership among governments, civil society organizations, international agencies, and other stakeholders will be explored. Panelists will engage in a dynamic exchange of ideas and valuable insights on the following topics:

1. Shaping Minds: Empowering Disability Representation in the Popular Press
2. Navigating the Waves: The Antigua and Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities - A Tale of Advocacy, Resilience, and Legislative Triumphs
3. Exploring KOBO Data Collection & Horticultural Therapy: Insights from Antigua & Barbuda
4. Fostering Inclusive Education in Small Island Developing States (SIDs).

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5. Empowering the Visually Impaired: Leveraging Potential in SIDS Communities
 6. Advancing Inclusivity: Progress in Accessibility Building Codes in SIDS
 7. CBR /CBID catalyts community inclusion for PWD and national development Social Model of Disability in SIDS
 8. To Include or Not Include: A Holistic Approach to Transformative Public Policy and Sociocultural Change

As a direct outcome of this Side Event and the SIDS4 Conference, we strongly urge governments and allies across the globe to take immediate action to taking a person-first approach by ensuring the full, unimpeded participation of PWDs in all development, implementation, and sustainability spaces and fora. This requires robust implementation of the UNCRPD in the decision-making, implementation, and process improvement efforts related to all public policies and programs. This can be seamlessly implemented by leveraging the mechanisms of the WHO CBR-CBID and the CBR matrix.

These actions will foster a culture of 21st Century approaches, good practices, and transformative strategies that inform intersectoral and multidisciplinary collaboration and partnerships. This will not only help guarantee that PWDs have a prominent and permanent seat, voice, and vote at each decision-making table, but lends itself nicely to realization of the Sustainable Development core Goal of "Leaving NO ONE behind".