

Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development for persons with disabilities

Executive summary

Decade of Action: Our Expectations

"We will fail to achieve the new international development agenda if we don't consider disability inclusion at the starting point. To advance towards development that is inclusive of all, the CRPD and the SDGs should be used as mutually reinforcing tools"¹ - Catalina Devandas, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In response to the Decade of Action to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities (SGPWD) provides Member States and the UN system the following recommendations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for persons with disabilities around the world.

Of utmost urgency in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities, we call on governments and the UN system to act immediately to protect and ensure the rights of persons with disabilities.

Data: We call on States to increase disability data collection and disaggregation, and include the Washington Group Short Set of Questions (WG-SS) in all household surveys and censuses to ensure that policymakers address gaps through evidence-based policymaking. Statisticians must start collecting data in priority areas using the WG-SS, inform policymakers, who in collaboration with DPOs in line with Article 4.3 must enact new regulations and laws to ensure inclusion and equal participation of persons with disabilities in society.

A rights-based approach to development finance: We call on States to introduce a rights-based approach to development finance to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are reflected in all fiscal policies and related programs aimed to reduce inequalities.

Underrepresented groups: We call on States to ensure that policies and programs are inclusive of intersectionality and underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are incredibly diverse in their

¹ DIAUD, World Enabled, & CBM. (2016). *The Inclusion Imperative: Towards Disability-inclusive and Accessible Urban Development*. From: https://www.cbm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/The-Inclusion-Imperative-Towards-Disability-Inclusive-and-Accessible-Urb....pdf

identities, and those who experience intersecting forms of discrimination are at further risk of being excluded from society. All persons with disabilities, and particularly those from underrepresented groups, in rural and urban areas, including persons with albinism, persons with leprosy, persons with psychosocial, intellectual, sensorial, and developmental disabilities, people with cognitive disabilities (or people with dementia) as well as children, youth, women, older persons, indigenous peoples and others with disabilities must have equal opportunities to contribute to sustainable development to truly achieve the SDGs.

Accessibility: We call on States to ensure that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others to the built environment, information and communication, technology and systems and other facilities in line with the CRPD and 2030 Agenda. To uphold this, the Secretary-General launched the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy to achieve sustainable and transformative change toward disability inclusion throughout the UN system.

Capacity building: We call on States to support DPOs with increased capacity and resources to fulfill the growing demand to provide technical expertise to governments and to follow international processes. UN Country Teams also should establish joint programs to bring governments, DPOs, and UN entities together to achieve the SDGs at the national level, especially for those most left behind.

Humanitarian action: We call on States to integrate the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action in all humanitarian action.

COVID-19 and Persons with Disabilities

We write at a time with no equal in all of history. A virus, far smaller than most of us can imagine, has shaken the global order to its core. No nation is immune, no border is respected, and no longer can we behave as if our current institutions are sufficient for our needs. This nearly invisible scourge has the power to transform our world at scales previously unimagined. For the worse, unfortunately, at first, but perhaps, like the United Nations arising from the ashes of World War II, we will rise to this challenge and articulate a visionary path for humanity.

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacts persons with disabilities, and thus we call on governments and the UN system to act immediately to protect and ensure the rights of persons with disabilities by carrying out the following key recommendations² during and post-pandemic:

² From the International Disability Alliance. (2020). <http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/covid-19> and Catalina Devandas. (2020). <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25725&LangID=E>

- Persons with disabilities must receive information about infection mitigating tips, public restriction plans, and the services offered, in a diversity of accessible formats with use of accessible technologies;
- Additional protective measures must be taken for people with certain types of impairment;
- Rapid awareness raising and training of personnel involved in the response are essential;
- All preparedness and response plans must be inclusive of and accessible to women with disabilities;
- No disability-based institutionalization and abandonment are acceptable;
- During quarantine, support services, personal assistance, physical and communication accessibility must be ensured;
- Measures of public restrictions must consider persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others;
- Persons with disabilities in need of health services due to COVID-19 cannot be deprioritized on the ground of their disability;
- Organizations of persons with disabilities can and should play a key role in raising awareness of persons with disabilities and their families;
- Organizations of persons with disabilities can and should play a key role in advocating for disability-inclusive response to the COVID-19 crisis;
- Public advice campaigns and information from national health authorities must be made available to the public in sign language and accessible means, modes and formats, including accessible digital technology, captioning, relay services, text messages, easy-to-read and plain language; and
- States need to establish clear protocols for public health emergencies to ensure that, when medical resources are scarce, access to healthcare, including life-saving measures, does not discriminate against people with disabilities.

Response to the Global Sustainable Development Report

The Global Sustainable Development Report recognizes that “13 years after the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, progress in its practical implementation remains quite limited.” The Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities welcomes the report and appreciates that persons with disabilities have been included throughout. Nevertheless, the information included on persons with disabilities is more of a reflection and repetition of previous advocacy documents and fails to provide concrete actions

to ensure the realization of the SDGs for persons with disabilities. Positively, the report recognizes that there is an imbalance across the three dimensions of sustainable development, resulting from lack of addressing the interlinkages. It is only when these interlinkages are taken into account that the desired transformative change will take place.

The report identifies critical areas for the call to action in the next decade. These six entry points include: strengthening human well-being and capabilities; shifting towards sustainable and just economies; building sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns; achieving energy decarbonization with universal access to energy; promoting sustainable urban and peri-urban development; and securing the global environmental commons.

The aforementioned entry points provide an analysis of the underlying systems and are not new clusters of Goals and targets. Yet, we are concerned that the report's scientific approach is limited for the 2030 Agenda. Additionally, the logic of the new approach is complex, making it difficult to communicate beyond the global level. The report also fails to embrace the 2030 Agenda's key principle of leave no one behind, the overarching inclusion of the gender lens and important Goals and themes are left out (e.g., employment). Finally, the action points tend to be general and selective, thus limiting the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda in its entirety.

Persons with disabilities have been included in the entry points in the following way. With respect to human well-being and capabilities, persons with disabilities are acknowledged as a population group exposed to extreme poverty, overlapping and concentrated deprivation, social, economic and political barriers, and impacts of climate change. In terms of urban development, inclusive, sustainable and people-centered cities with pro-poor development must be built for the full and equal participation of 1 billion persons with disabilities globally. Science and technology are introduced as means to enable increased access of persons with disabilities to education, employment, community activities and other services in order to leave no one behind. However, the inclusion of persons with disabilities in governance and decision-making processes are neglected. Persons with disabilities are not considered political agents to be empowered, but rather as a marginalized group facing inequalities. The climate change section lacks a human-rights approach with marginalized groups included as "potential agents" in generating solutions only because of their exposure to climate change effects.

As such, in the following chapters we provide concrete reflections and recommendations on how each entry point around a call to action - as identified in the report - should further consider and address the situation of persons with disabilities.

Chapter one - Human well-being and capabilities

Persons with disabilities comprise an estimated 15 percent of the world's population with more than 80 percent living in poverty³, with an estimated 800 million in developing countries⁴.

Persons with disabilities face widespread exclusion from all areas of economic, political, social, civil and cultural life, including employment, education and health care. Persons with disabilities experience higher rates of poverty and deprivation and lower levels of income than the general population. This stems from pervasive discrimination and stigma, unequal opportunities, and physical and attitudinal barriers. And these same factors also mean that the rights of persons with disabilities are not adequately addressed in poverty-reduction programs, social protection floors or development programs and funds. Yet in many countries austerity measures have been imposed, which reduce government expenditures on human rights, development and social welfare when and where they are most needed, and persons with disabilities are often among the very hardest hit.

A rights-based response to economic crises could lift persons with disabilities and their families out of poverty, and contribute to the achievement of inclusive growth and sustainable development. A rights-based approach is when persons with disabilities are able to participate in all spheres of society on an equal basis with others. The 2030 Agenda embodies a commitment to include those furthest behind and to reduce their risks to economic, social and environmental shocks.

- Enact new laws and regulations that address discrimination and inequality, which are key barriers for persons with disabilities to participate equally in society.
- Ensure that the new laws and regulations that empower underrepresented and marginalized groups within the disability community that face multiple barriers in participating in society.
- Allocate resources in the national budget to ensure inclusion and to provide reasonable accommodations on an equal basis with others.
- Base policies and programs on data, increase data collection and disaggregation by disability using the Washington Group Short Set of questions.
- Make all levels of existing healthcare and social protection systems inclusive.
- Make public healthcare policies, programs, facilities and information accessible for persons with disabilities and based entirely on the free and informed consent of the person concerned, including provision of disability-related extra costs, financial risk protection, access to quality

³ UN General Assembly (2015). Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 23. Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

⁴ K. Georgieva. (July 24, 2018). World Bank. Global Disability Summit, United Kingdom.

essential healthcare services and access to safe, effective and affordable medicine, assistive products and vaccines.

- Eliminate laws, policies and practices such as institutionalization, forced treatment and denial of legal capacity that segregate persons with disabilities, as well as those from underrepresented groups, from society, and reinforce such persons' personal and economic dependency on others.

Chapter two - Sustainable and just economies

With the 2030 Agenda's clear commitments to leave no one behind, it has been consistently recognized that increased funding alone does not always appropriately finance or advance the issue, as mainstream (mainly market-based) economic policies and practices can conflict with human rights-based approaches and constrain the successful implementation of commitments on (investment in) human rights, including the rights of persons with disabilities.

Preliminary findings from the International Disability Alliance's Global Survey on DPO participation in development programs and policies⁵ suggest that the majority of DPO respondents remains dissatisfied with the level of engagement with their government, and that support to enable DPOs to participate is largely insufficient. Furthermore, DPOs are still lacking capacities to engage in disability-inclusive development and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The global community therefore needs to come together to discuss how to establish a space for strategic coordination and consultation and ensure that rising demands for DPO contributions are matched with relevant investment in developing their capacities to be recognized as trusted development partners.

In addition, globally, persons with disabilities have disproportionately high levels of underemployment and unemployment as well as lower pay-scales for performing the same work as individuals without disabilities⁶. Economic costs of exclusion can affect all of a society leading to a loss of 3 to 7 percent of Gross Domestic Product, if persons with disabilities do not participate fully in their communities and countries.

- Call on the global community to come together and ensure that rising demands for DPO contributions are matched with relevant investment in developing their capacities and as such become recognized and trusted development partners.
- Accelerate investments by UN entities and its financiers toward implementation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy recognizing it is a prerequisite for full and effective engagement of persons with disabilities

⁵ International Disability Alliance. (2019). Global Survey on DPO participation in development programs and policies <http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/global-survey>.

⁶ World Health Organization & The World Bank. (2011). World report on disability: World Health Organization. Retrieved from http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf.

in development policies, programs, practices at global, regional and local levels.

- Ensure that accountability and funding mechanisms including eligibility criteria for grants supporting sustainable development programs and that practices meet accessibility and inclusion standards in line with the CRPD.
- Ensure that equality, human rights, sustainability, participation, inclusion and accessibility are core principles in line with Article 27 of the CRPD, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and ILO Convention 159 to promote full and productive employment and decent employment for all persons with disabilities.
- Consider a flexible combination of income security and disability-related support by States in order to support labor market participation of persons with disabilities.
- Ensure disability-inclusive mainstream entrepreneurship development training and microfinance systems.

Chapter three - Sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns

The link between how our food is produced and consumed across food systems, communities and geographies has profound nutrition implications. Households with a person with a disability can experience material hardship, including lack of access to safe water and sanitation and food insecurity³ and are faced with extra costs due to disability-related expenses and thus persons with disabilities are at increased risk of food insecurity and as a result poor nutrition.

CRPD Article 28.1 calls States Parties to recognize the right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions, and shall take appropriate steps to safeguard and promote the realization of this right without discrimination on the basis of disability. Additionally, the SDGs (targets 2.1 and 2.1) call to end hunger and ensure access by all people to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round and to end all forms of malnutrition by 2025.

Keeping in line with the CRPD, the 2030 Agenda, and the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition we call on governments and all other relevant actors to support and promote the transition toward food systems for healthy diets that promote sustainable use of resources and safeguard the environment. To achieve this there must be policy coherence, knowledge and innovation, joint programming, and localized solutions.

The dynamics, diversity and uniqueness of food systems across geographies means solutions will be enacted at the local. We encourage Member States to empower local leadership and governance and to require local authorities to

reach out and meaningfully and effectively include people of diverse needs and backgrounds, including children, youth, women, older persons, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities through participatory processes where the messages of the less powerful are heard and taken into account. The ultimate goal is achieved when food security is realized for persons with disabilities everywhere.

- Eliminate all the challenges in accessing food in different contexts, in humanitarian situations or geographical settings (urban/rural).
- Recognize and invest in persons with disabilities as small farmers.
- Pay particular attention and address through inclusive programs and policies the effects of climate change on the food system, particularly for persons with disabilities.

Chapter four - Energy decarbonization and universal access to energy

The majority of persons with disabilities and their families lives in poverty and faces a heightened risk of fuel poverty. Most persons with disabilities live in poor quality housing and encounter challenging decisions on how to spend money, for example, choosing between energy consumption and other basic needs, such as food. At the same time, very often persons with disabilities have additional living costs from having a disability, including essential extra fuel cost. Related, the groups most likely to experience particularly negative health impacts from fuel poverty include older persons, infants, persons with disabilities and those living with long-term illness. In countries in which a disability living allowance is regarded as general income in calculation of fuel poverty, persons with disabilities entitled to the benefits are always considered better off, yet they require extra income to achieve a better standard of living similar to others. Additionally, access to electricity is important for persons with chronic illness who use medical equipment and persons with disabilities who use electrically-powered communication tools.

- Ensure universal access from States to affordable, reliable and efficient energy services for persons with disabilities, including the use of alternative energy facilities where warranted by the local situation, limiting in particular the frequency of power cuts; in line with CRPD Article 28, e.g. access to electricity and/or affordable alternative green sources of energy.
- Guarantee from States, through providing social security benefits or safety nets, that essential extra fuel costs do not impose additional living costs and as a consequence negative health effects on persons with disabilities.

Chapter five - Sustainable urban and peri-urban development

Over the next 35 years, cities will shape every aspect of global development, including the way in which fundamental human rights are promoted, protected and realized. Half the world's population now lives in cities, and this is projected to increase to 70 % by 2050, making urbanization one of the most important global trends of the 21st century⁷. In addition, by 2050 nearly one billion women, men, girls and boys with disabilities will live in cities and over 20% of the world's population will be 60 years or older⁸. The unprecedented scale of urban expansion, particularly in low-income countries, demands a radical rethinking of what cities are, and who they are for.

An inclusive and accessible city is a place where everyone, regardless of their status and identity, is enabled and empowered to fully participate in the social, economic, cultural and political opportunities that cities have to offer⁹. While successful initiatives have been adopted by governments, challenges remain to align urban development policies, budgets, programs and practices with the CRPD and achieve quality standards for inclusion and accessibility. The lack of financial, institutional and human resources including limited planning and design capacity compounded by the lack of inclusive and participatory budgeting. Data, research and information, including lack of disaggregated data are available in a limited way, and indicators to measure and monitor accessibility and inclusion rarely exist, despite relevant global indicators. There is a significant lack of inter-agency coordination at all levels of government resulting in siloed initiatives and planning and noncompliance with accessibility standards. The participation of organizations of persons with disabilities in urban planning and decision-making is also missing, although if they were involved it could result in awareness and technical know-how from decision makers, planners and designers about legal obligations, frameworks, and tools to support inclusive urban development strategies.

- Ensure compliance of Regional and Local Action Plans for implementation of the New Urban Agenda with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - including Article 9 and General Comment number 2 (2014) on accessibility – and in line with agreed recommendations and priority actions outlined in United Cities and Local Governments' (UCLG) Policy Paper on Inclusive and Accessible Cities.
- Generate disaggregated data regularly and undertake city-wide assessments to collect appropriate information – including statistical and research data – to systemically understand and address the barriers that limit inclusion and accessibility and enable formulation and

⁷ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2018). The World's Cities in 2018—Data Booklet (ST/ESA/SER.A/417)

⁸ UNDESA (2015). "World Population Prospects The 2015 Revision: Key Findings and Advance Tables", Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN, New York.

⁹ United Cities and Local Governments (2019), Policy Paper on Inclusive and Accessible Cities, Durban.

implementation of inclusive urban development policies, programs and practices.

- Establish inclusive, accessible and participatory processes and consultations to ensure that all stakeholders including persons with disabilities and their communities can actively engage in the development, implementation and monitoring of inclusive urban and planning policies and programs.
- Engage in Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) to progressively share progress on inclusion and accessibility with the global community underlined by participatory and accessible processes open to a diversity of constituencies.

Chapter 6 - Securing the global environmental commons

Climate change continues to accelerate and has the largest impact on the world's poorest people. It also has the power to push more than 100 million people back into poverty by 2030¹⁰. Furthermore, projections indicate that by 2050, climate change will have displaced at least 200 million people¹¹. Given their overall levels of poverty, persons with disabilities and their families are among the groups most affected by each of these issues. Extreme weather events can have multiple effects on the lives of persons with disabilities, including injury, loss of accessibility, or damages to assistive devices, which can severely impact their livelihoods and employment. Furthermore, additional consequences include: increasing humanitarian emergencies; declining food, energy and water security; declining access to shelter, infrastructure and basic services; increasing displacement or being left behind in degraded environments; declining health; and reductions in human security, with increased vulnerability, due to competition and conflict over increasingly limited resources, as climate change accelerates and populations increase¹².

The wide range of issues outlined above demonstrate that empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality needs a broad approach with their full participation in the development of socially-inclusive climate change policies, which recognize climate resilience as part of broad socio-economic transformation, not simply as infrastructure or technological fixes. This empowerment needs to be accessible for persons with disabilities in diverse formats, including for deaf people in sign languages, for blind people through alternative formats, including Braille and electronic formats, and for persons with intellectual disabilities with easy-read materials. Furthermore, persons with

¹⁰ World Bank Group. (2018). *Climate Change Solutions for the Poorest Countries*. Retrieved from: <https://ida.worldbank.org/content/climate-change-solutions-poorest-countries>.

¹¹ Relief Web. (2017, August 21). *Climate Migrants Might Reach One Billion by 2050*. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/climate-migrants-might-reach-one-billion-2050>.

¹² World Economic Forum. (2017, October 9). *Climate, migration and conflict in a changing world*. Retrieved from: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/10/climate-migration-and-conflict-in-a-changing-world/>.

disabilities need to participate in the development of, and benefit from socio-economic resilience strategies aimed at reducing vulnerability to climate risks.

- Apply the CRPD to the climate change dialogue. The CRPD, despite preceding the human rights framing of climate change, provides the legal framework for a broader response to climate change and its impact. It provides for a response that ensures the rights of persons with disabilities are adhered to by decision makers, emergency responders and by families and communities.
- Ensure close consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all efforts to raise awareness on climate change and its impact on persons with disabilities, and in all mitigation and adaptation efforts in line with Article 4(3) of the CRPD and SDG 13(b).
- Increase the visibility of issues faced by persons with disabilities in global climate policies.¹³

Chapter 7 - Key messages from Youth with Disabilities

This chapter provides key messages that youth with disabilities would like to share with Member States and the UN system in light of the Decade of Action.

The Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities carried out a survey asking youth with disabilities about societal barriers and inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for two weeks in February and March, 2020 in English, French, International Sign, and Spanish. It was shared on Twitter, IDA listserv, IDDC listserv. We received 133 responses from individuals with a variety of disabilities with an age range from 9 to 63.

The responses were regionally balanced with the following countries represented:

- Latin America and the Caribbean: Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Haiti, Mexico, and Peru;
- Africa: Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe;
- Asia-Pacific: Bangladesh, China (Hong Kong), India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pacific Islands, Pakistan, Philippines, and Sri Lanka;
- Middle East and North Africa: Egypt and Morocco; and
- Europe and other groups: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and USA.

¹³ CBM Global Disability Inclusion. (2020). Climate Change: This Century's Defining Issue: The 4 Ps for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities within Climate Change Plans: Personal, Programmes, Policy and Political.

Sustainable Development Goals

The majority of respondents in the aforementioned survey had never heard of the SDGs, a few respondents had learned about the SDGs via the radio in their country. If respondents were aware of the SDGs, they considered the Goals ideal with one person stating that if the SDGs were achieved “the world would look and feel like a home.” Despite this, many indicated that it is unrealistic to achieve the SDGs, or only possible if governments become directly involved in implementation efforts.

Main challenges in life

Many recurrent themes emerged as main challenges and barriers in the lives of the youth with disabilities. The responses are clustered below. Pervasive discrimination, inequality, indifference, marginalization, and stigma was the most common answer indicating that youth with disabilities overwhelmingly face attitudinal barriers throughout the world. Connected to this, many respondents indicated that they felt loneliness, isolation, had low self-esteem, and were not believed. One respondent captures this sentiment well of a main challenge of “being second-guessed by many people including my own parents as a self-willed individual capable of being independent in life.”

Barriers to accessing decent work, healthcare services, and education were very common responses, and are key areas in which to focus policies and programs. In addition, the lack of accessible built environment, transportation, communication, and information are also ubiquitous barriers. Additional challenges included lack of access to sign language interpreters, no recognition of national sign language, and the lack of independent living.

Intersecting factors also impact youth with disabilities, such as gender inequality, racism, and poverty, and environmental factors including lack of access to clean water and unsafe environments, and from this sexual and emotional abuse was indicated by some respondents. A respondent reflects this by responding that “I worry every day, including when I’m in school, that it should be a “safe place” but it isn’t.”

Main asks to government

Many respondents indicated that their governments neither listen, respond, or assist youth with disabilities, nor realize youth and/or disability rights. Additionally, a large number of respondents called for increased youth opportunities and empowerment. Creating an inclusive and accessible society was another top ask, including access to school and healthcare services, provision of sign language interpreters in public services, accessible housing, and increased budget allocation for persons with disabilities.

There was also a strong call for political participation, leadership positions for persons with disabilities and a stronger commitment to fully implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In line with this, one respondent called for governments to “consult persons with disabilities in all stages and to stop adopting the one-size-fits-all approach by tokenistically relegating the involvement of persons with disabilities in those consultations while at the same time trivializing their role.”

Inclusion and equal opportunities in society

Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that they were not equally included in society and also not provided the same opportunities as youth without disabilities. Some answers were heartbreaking such as one young person saying “I’m not included at all, that’s why am begging to sustain my living as my parents are poor.” There was indication of lack of information and connection to youth with disabilities, such as “I don't even know what opportunities exist, let alone have the opportunity to access them.” Youth with disabilities are not always treated equally with youth without disabilities as one respondent explained, “because societies have a tendency to look at youth with disabilities from the disability perspective, not from their ability to deliver on an equal basis with others.”

Additionally, there was a need to focus on youth with disabilities (and others) in rural populations who are greatly neglected. Also, there was a push to increase participation of youth with disabilities at global forums rather than the adults who continue to represent them.

Conclusion

The Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities is ready to actively contribute to the Decade of Action to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with Member States and the UN system. We must work together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for persons with disabilities around the world. This is even more paramount with the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities. A young person with a disability captures this sentiment well by stating that “we all can make the world a better place,” and indeed this is how we will leave no one behind.

