

## Editorial

‘Social protection’ as defined by various international agencies like the World Bank, the International Labour Organisation and the Asian Development Bank among others, refers to policies and measures that help to reduce poverty and vulnerability, and enable people to deal with the economic and social difficulties that they face throughout their lives.

Many countries have policies to provide social protection for people with disabilities and their families, either through programmes meant for the general population, or through specific programmes meant for them. In low and middle income countries, social protection policies for persons with disabilities have tended to view them as incapable of earning income, and therefore as objects of charity, in need of ‘protection’. The policies tend to focus on providing a basic level of assistance to compensate for ‘inability to work’. However, this can actually be a disincentive to seek employment, and only serve to perpetuate the charity and welfare approach towards persons with disabilities. Such a narrow view of social protection has been criticised by stakeholders in the disability movement who have advocated for a rights-based view that provides persons with disabilities with equal opportunities to enable their inclusion and participation in their communities.

It is in this context that the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has played a significant role in bringing about a broader understanding of social protection that is rights-based. According to Article 28 on ‘Adequate standard of living and social protection’ in the CRPD,

1. States Parties recognise 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 realisation of this right without discrimination on the basis of disability.
2. States Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to social protection and to the enjoyment of that right without discrimination on the basis of disability, and shall take appropriate steps to safeguard and promote the realisation of this right.

Along with other key rights such as access to health care, education, employment or living independently in the community, the right to social protection contributes to the empowerment of persons with disabilities, and to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

The CBR Guidelines (2010) has recognised the importance of social protection and called for CBR to “facilitate the access of people with disabilities to mainstream or specific social benefits and promote the provision of social protection measures”.

Globally however, coverage of social protection measures across populations is less than adequate. According to the “*World Social Protection Report 2017/19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*” ([www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_601903/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_601903/lang--en/index.htm)), only 45 per cent of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social benefit, while the remaining 55 per cent, about 4 billion people, are left unprotected. The report states that only 29 per cent of the global population enjoys access to comprehensive social security, while the other 71 per cent or 5.2 billion people are not, or only partially, protected. In relation to persons with disabilities, the findings of the report show that **only 27.8 per cent of persons with severe disabilities worldwide receive a disability benefit**. The report calls for increased government spending, especially in Africa, Asia and the Arab States, to provide at least some basic social protection for all.

Today, international agencies are focusing on social protection as one of the priorities in their policy frameworks on persons with disabilities. DFID’s strategy for *Disability-inclusive Development 2018-2023*, has social protection as a strategic pillar, emphasising the need to advocate for more disability inclusive social protection systems, to increase the global and national focus on and support for disability inclusive social protection, and to build the evidence base around inclusive social protection and push for more data disaggregation ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfids-disability-inclusion-strategy-2018-to-2023](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfids-disability-inclusion-strategy-2018-to-2023)). In September 2019, the World Bank and the ILO, together with other leading development agencies, will meet during the 71st session of the UN General Assembly to present the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection.

Stakeholders working with and for persons with disabilities, especially those involved in CBR and inclusive development programmes in low and middle income countries, need to be aware of the importance of social protection as a current development priority and tailor their activities accordingly, in line with international frameworks.

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