

Editorial

After the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities came into existence, there have been more efforts to promote inclusion of persons with disabilities across different streams of development, through various international development agreements. Inclusion of disability-specific targets and indicators in the Sustainable Development Goals is a major step forward. The 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction includes persons with disabilities. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the same year looks at inclusion of persons with disabilities in the areas of social protection, employment, education, infrastructure, financial inclusion, technology and data. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit had a Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. In October of the same year, the New Urban Agenda of Habitat III recognised the need to address discrimination faced by persons with disabilities along with other vulnerable groups.

All of these are positive developments. However, progress on the ground has been patchy. The Disability and Development Report (2018) of the United Nations, the first of its kind, has reviewed data, policies and programmes; identified best practices; and outlined recommendations to promote the realization of the SDGs for persons with disabilities. According to the Executive Summary of this report, “despite the progress made in recent years, persons with disabilities continue to face numerous barriers to their full inclusion and participation in the life of their communities. It sheds light on their disproportionate levels of poverty; their lack of access to education, health services and employment; and their underrepresentation in decision-making and political participation. This is particularly the case for women and girls with disabilities. The main barriers to inclusion entail discrimination and stigma on the grounds of disability; lack of accessibility to physical and virtual environments; lack of access to assistive technology, essential services and rehabilitation; and lack of support for independent living that are critical for the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities as agents of change and beneficiaries of development. Data and statistics compiled and analysed in the present report indicate that persons with disabilities are not yet sufficiently included in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs”. (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/publication-disability-sdgs.html>)

Of particular concern are the findings related to higher levels of poverty, lack of access to education, health services and employment, in relation to persons with disabilities. CBR/CBID practices across the world have been working to address these issues to achieve the goal of inclusive development for over two decades now, but obviously it has not been enough. As noted in the Seventy-fourth session of the UN General Assembly in November 2019 (Agenda item: Social development: Promoting social integration through social inclusion), “the three core themes of social development, namely, poverty eradication, full and productive employment and decent work for all and social integration, are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, and that an enabling environment therefore needs to be created so that all three objectives can be pursued simultaneously...”

At the same meeting, it was also noted “that social inclusion and equality are intrinsically linked and that focusing on and investing in the most disadvantaged and excluded populations, which may include, children, women, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants and indigenous peoples, is critically important for the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals...” (<https://undocs.org/A/C.3/74/L.17/REV.1>)

As we look ahead at the new decade before us, we need to recognise the continuing challenges in promoting inclusive development for persons with disabilities and to direct more efforts towards reducing poverty and improving access to education, healthcare, employment and social protection. If not, the Sustainable Development Goals will remain out of reach for persons with disabilities.

Dr. Maya Thomas

Editor-in-Chief

Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development