

LETTERS TO EDITOR

Dear Editor,

The New Millennium Development Goals and Inclusive Development

Many readers of DCIDJ would be aware of the ongoing interest in, and activities aimed at, the revision of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2015. In many countries, discussions are currently under way regarding the goals set almost 15 years ago, the outcomes achieved in that time, and the form that future goals should take.

Readers would also be aware that disability concerns were largely excluded from the planning, structure and details of the original MDGs. It is clear that many international agencies, donors, governments and other development stakeholders did not recognise disability as a cross-cutting issue at that time, and gave its role low priority within the sphere of international development.

It is encouraging to observe that this situation will not be repeated. A number of key international agencies, NGOs, and coalitions within the disability and development sphere are actively seeking to participate in the formulation of the new goals. It is to be hoped that these agencies will state the view that any current or future MDGs will not be achieved unless there is a sustained and comprehensive response to the needs of people with disabilities, their families and communities. They are likely to emphasise the clear link between poverty and disability, and that poverty reduction and development in general will not be achieved unless the rights and priorities of people with disabilities are addressed.

Over the past decade, the importance of inclusive development is another issue that has been recognised in the field of disability and development. Indeed, the name of this Journal reflects the growing understanding that the active and comprehensive inclusion of people with disabilities and disability concerns, into mainstream development programmes, is vital.

My concern is that these two priorities may increasingly become confused. I am aware of a few instances where discussion regarding post-2015 MDGs has focused almost entirely on inclusive development. It appears that since the existing MDGs were so disappointingly exclusive of disability in development, many are of the view that our primary aim should be to establish disability inclusive development.

In my opinion, it would be very unfortunate if the post-MDG disability-related advocacy focused on inclusive development actions as “targets” or “indicators” for the goals. This would be to confuse strategy with outcome. Inclusive development is a strategy (and despite our commitment to it, we must admit that at this stage, it is a strategy with very little evidence in practice). Similarly, community based rehabilitation is a strategy. Strategies are not outcomes; they are simply potential means to an end. It seems to me that our response in the current debate should emphasise real outcomes in the lives of people with disabilities, their families and communities.

Our contribution must be to emphasise targets and indicators which amount to real improvements in the quality of life, participation and inclusion of people with disabilities and their families, in their local communities, schools, workplaces and society. If we confuse the means with the ends, and advocate for inclusive development as a goal, target or indicator, we risk tokenism. (It is much easier to add the rhetoric or appearance of disability inclusive development to a programme, than it is to ensure real change in people’s lives and communities.) We should be clear that improving the lives of people with disabilities is a prerequisite for meeting all MDGs. Multiple strategies will probably be needed to achieve that goal.

REFERENCES

United Nations (2011). Disability and the Millennium Development Goals: A Review of the MDG Process and Strategies for Inclusion of Disability Issues in Millennium Development Goal Efforts. New York: United Nations. Available from: http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/review_of_disability_and_the_mdgs.pdf.

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