



Disability Inclusive Development Round Table

REMARKS

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I am profoundly honored by the invitation from the Embassy of Finland to make some remarks this morning at this roundtable. I would also like to thank Madame Ambassador Sirpa Mäenpää, USAID Ethiopia Mission Director Dennis Weller and colleagues Michelle Chen and Demissie Legesse for making my participation possible. And it would be remiss of me not to thank my friend and comrade, Kalle Könkkölä.

Persons with disabilities make up 15 percent of the world's population—80 percent live in developing countries and 80 percent live in poverty.

I believe that the defining challenge of our era is to shift to a new model of development—one that is more inclusive and more attuned to the world we live in, one that is more visionary, depicting the world we want; one in which we are all valued, respected and afforded opportunities to reach our highest potential.

Today, we have new tools and new global frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has to date been ratified by 150 countries, including our host country Ethiopia. We also have new opportunities—namely, the post 2015 Agenda. More on that in a moment.

Today, we have more evidence that persons with disabilities are too often left out of the development equation. Allow me to share some observations.

It is clear that if we are serious about pathways from exclusion to inclusion, we have to work with the key players that are experts on inclusive development. We also have to work with

persons with disabilities themselves. We need to explore more robustly low cost solutions if we want to breathe life into the policies and ensure that tools and good practice models are brought to scale. We need to build strong partnerships and influence those who sign off on development policies.

We need to be bolder about showcasing what works and sharing good policies. We have to be bullish about allocating the appropriate resources for inclusion and adamant about bringing down barriers to inclusion.

We need to embed the paradigm shift that moves away from seeing persons with disabilities as solely beneficiaries of aid, but as change agents that contribute to broader economic and social development. There is intrinsic value in including everybody in economic and social development, but it is also an economic imperative.

Fortunately, globally, we are seeing an emerging cadre of disability researchers, academics, activists and policy makers who are confronting this exclusion and generating new and exciting inclusive policies at both national and global levels. Allow me to highlight some global trends:

- Persons with disabilities make up a significant part of the population and yet they are not automatically at the center or, even for that matter, included in a great many efforts to address inequality; and when they are, it is through a piece-meal approach that really does not address the fundamental barriers of exclusion. For example, education policies that pronounce to include children with disabilities in schools, but do not address the specific needs of those children to attend school, are not inclusive.
- Across all continents, persons with disabilities are challenging their exclusion and insisting on jobs and decent education and healthcare.
- At a global level, the International Disability Movement is constructively engaged in the post 2015 Agenda.

Around the world, we see remarkable evidence of human progress. There have been significant advances toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Many millions

more children go to school, and many millions more people enjoy better health. Women have greater opportunities to realize their potential. We want to see through the unfinished business of the MDGs and include known drivers of development progress, in this case, inclusive societies. The current eight goals do not include disability.

But we are hopeful that the working groups on the proposed agenda for post-2015 sustainable development goals will address disability in the outcomes documents. The current draft of World Bank safeguards includes disability which is important for international cooperation. We at USAID are looking forward to the UN Secretary General's synthesis report.

The U.S. attaches high priority to agreeing to a meaningful and ambitious post-2015 Agenda by next September. We believe that this Agenda has the potential to be a powerful instrument to eradicate extreme poverty within a generation, with a focus on transformative priorities that can have wide-reaching and long-lasting impact, particularly for the most vulnerable—which includes persons with disabilities. We know that development gains cannot flourish when we exclude persons with disabilities.

We note that the common Africa position on the post 2015 Agenda is replete with references to disability—a welcomed position.

The jury is out: education is a phenomenal equalizer. Education provides a world of opportunities, it enables us at an individual level to thrive—but also as a collective, to plan better, live better and better spend and better conserve our planet for those that follow us. Education is a key ingredient for shaping our personal and global development!

For persons with disabilities, education, I would argue, is perhaps the most fundamental equalizer. Quite simply, it molds us, imbues social norms and is the platform from which we engage with others.

USAID developed a disability policy in 1997 and has two directives that bolster that policy—one that requires all USAID infrastructure to be accessible and the second that further prevents discrimination on the basis of disability in all contracts and grants. In addition, USAID has mainstreamed disability into a suite of sectoral policies including on gender

equality and youth, to name but a few. USAID, through its education strategy and disability policy, supports inclusive education programs.

Recently on a visit to Malawi, I experienced how mainstreaming inclusion works. USAID Malawi supports an Early Grade Reading Program, which has a component that supports reading for blind and deaf learners. In Ghana and Pakistan, we support the building of disabled-friendly schools, while in Moldova, USAID supports teacher training in special needs education.

As you know, USAID works in a number of sectors. Because disability is a cross cutting issue, our efforts find place in many sectors. For example, in Paraguay we support, through a private-public partnership, the inclusion of young persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities into the workforce. Through PEPFAR, we support programs in research on disability and HIV and AIDS in three countries: Zambia, Uganda and South Africa. USAID has also supported a large number of inclusive sports activities in Haiti and Brazil.

In addition to mainstreaming disability inclusive development, an impactful feature of operationalizing mainstreaming is having staff with expertise in-house to provide thought leadership and technical assistance. My position, senior Agency Coordinator for Disability Inclusive Development, is set up to fill that role.

We know that the pathway from exclusion to inclusion can be transformational for millions of persons with a disability and more importantly, for society as a whole. When societies are more inclusive, they are often more democratic. Animating inclusive development stands to bolster growth and reduce extreme poverty, but only if we are deliberate about it.

There are three key points to consider in being deliberate in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development programming.

- 1) Good policies that have mechanisms of accountability are essential—they often provide the bedrock for action.
- 2) Participation of persons with disabilities is critical to successful and effective inclusive development programming.

3) Leadership, champions and political will are essential to advancing disability inclusive development.

Partnership is central to these three points. Fostering strong partnerships between and among donors, partner countries, implementing partners, and of course, disabled peoples' organizations.

Another critical aspect of advancing disability inclusive development is having more reliable and desegregated disability data. Data that tells us who is disabled, where they are, and sometimes why, is needed for more effective planning and resource allocation.

Mainstreaming disability into development requires resources—it requires training of staff in government or in aid agencies and it requires human capital to shore up knowledge and ensure implementation. However, I want to leave you with one thought, and that is, the cost of exclusion outweighs the cost of inclusion. Let us all remember that the pathway from exclusion to inclusion is not only the right path to follow, it also makes economic sense—in short, it's a good investment in human capital.

Thank you for your attention.