

Joint Committee on Disability Matters

Topic: International co-operation: UNCRPD and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Issues to be discussed include:

- Article 32 UNCRPD – International co-operation
- Sustainable Development Goal's and UNCRPD Implementation

Opening Statement by Director General of Irish Aid (Development Cooperation and Africa Division, Department of Foreign Affairs).

Cathaoirleach, Members of the Committee, I welcome the opportunity to meet with the Joint Committee on Disability Matters today.

An estimated 15% of the world's population lives with disability. And some 80% of this number live in developing countries, and in areas with high risks of natural disasters, armed conflicts and emergencies. The proportion of people living below the poverty line is higher amongst people with disabilities than people without disabilities and is in fact double in some countries. Poverty and conflict impact people with disabilities to a greater degree than persons without a disability. Disability significantly limits a person's agency to participate in society – and this is particularly the case in low income settings.

Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in March 2018, as a core part of our commitment to promoting and protecting the human rights of persons with disabilities. Promoting and protecting human rights is a key foreign policy priority for Ireland. Therefore, our commitment to CRPD extends beyond our domestic

commitment, to all of our international engagement, including championing the rights of persons with disabilities in international development cooperation.

Articles 11 and 32 of the Convention are specific references to development cooperation and humanitarian action. We recognise however, that *all* Articles of the CRPD are relevant for disability inclusion in development cooperation and humanitarian action.

Disability inclusion is not an optional extra. The Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030, adopted in 2015, are focused on commitments to end poverty, reduce inequality and leave no one behind. The SDGs cannot be achieved in full without including people with disabilities. The Sustainable Development Goals relating to education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and monitoring of the implementation of the Goals, all specifically require attention to disability.

And prioritising people with disabilities is central to delivery on Ireland's pledge to reach the 'furthest behind first', a core principle of *A Better World* - Ireland's policy for international development. *A Better World* specifically notes a "particular focus on improved outcomes for women and girls, minorities and the inclusion of people with disabilities".

This core principle of reaching the 'furthest behind first' is Ireland's response to the promise of the SDGs to leave no one behind, but this focus is not new to us. The ethos of reaching those most marginalised and poorest is embedded in our aid programme, since its foundation just 50 years ago.

Cathaoirleach,

Our policy priorities and our current pledge to reach the furthest behind are informed by evidence and learning that comes from our international engagements and experience. Probably the most important source for us is our direct engagement with the communities and people we support in partnerships through our Embassy network in Sub Saharan Africa and also in Vietnam. We know first-hand, how people with disabilities are excluded from development assistance and have less access to basic services.

I accompanied the Tánaiste on his visit in July to Mozambique, home to one of Ireland's bilateral development programmes. We learned of the slow but steady progress being made to address poverty, in all its dimensions. We also got a better understanding of the challenges of marginalisation and exclusion. Our Embassy teams are continuously exploring and testing initiatives to address this challenge. A good example to illustrate this is in the context of the large UN-led humanitarian assistance operation, to assist over a million displaced persons from the Cabo Delgado conflict in the north of Mozambique.

Through our Embassy in Mozambique, Ireland is funding a project to help UN agencies identify and more accurately prioritise assistance to the most vulnerable amongst the displaced population. This includes a specific focus on persons with disabilities, who are receiving significantly less benefit from the humanitarian response. A catalytic initiative like this, in the margins of a large humanitarian operation, is exactly the type of measure we aim to do more of.

We also know that the participation of people with disabilities is an important and necessary requirement for economic and social life and to prosper. It is very clear to us, that taking a rights based approach to disability inclusion and confronting and overcoming the marginalisation of people with disabilities has a transformative effect on society as a whole. Women with disabilities face higher

personal risk, and are twice as likely to experience gender based violence compared to their peers. Only around 20% of women with disabilities in low income countries are employed; compared with 58% of men with disabilities. Gender equality is, and has been for many years, a core priority for Ireland's international development cooperation. Ensuring that we have a gendered approach to our disability inclusion work is critical.

Recently, the Department of Foreign Affairs undertook a mapping of all programmes and projects that support disability inclusive development. The aim was to understand fully the extent of what we are doing across the development programme on disability and identify gaps and improve our focus. The mapping was based on the Disability Inclusion tracking tool developed by the OECD Development Assistance Committee, that sets standards for the quality of international development cooperation spending, known as ODA.

The mapping demonstrated that disability inclusion work is evident across Ireland's programme, in over 51 countries, channelled mostly through UN agencies and NGOs. It illustrated examples of good practice. For instance, in social protection programmes that we support in Tanzania and Malawi, Ireland advocates for and supports measures to ensure that provision of these services targets people with disabilities.

In Vietnam, our embassy supports a Vietnamese NGO to increase disabled persons' participation in income generating and socio economic projects. In Ethiopia, our embassy, has a partnership with the Ethiopian Centre for Disability and Development, contributing to disability mainstreaming in two states. In Tanzania, Ireland has supported the Centre for Community Based Rehabilitation for many years. Our support enables provision of specialised

surgical and rehabilitation services for people with disabilities and in fact 6% of the centre's staff are themselves, living with disabilities.

More generally, the mapping found that in 2021, 24% of Ireland's ODA was disability-inclusive. We are currently exploring how we increase this percentage. Our starting point is to improve our monitoring systems, to include systematic use of this OECD tracking instrument. We are currently rolling out guidance and training to our teams appraise and improve all programmes for disability inclusion. For this, we will develop guidance on a more standardised use of monitoring tools. More accurately measuring disability inclusion in our programme is critical to allow us to identify gaps and opportunities. In this way we can effectively challenge ourselves and our partners – including UN agencies and NGOs – to redouble our efforts to achieve the commitments we make on disability inclusion.

Ireland's international development policy, A Better World, reaffirms the commitment to improving our disability inclusion work. Adopting a more deliberate and system-wide approach, using the OECD methodology, will allow us to consolidate and strengthen our impact. This is the best, internationally recognised means to enhance disability inclusion in humanitarian action and development cooperation. And it is the means through which we will continue to deliver on our own policy commitments, and through that, on CRPD, and making a meaningful contribution to Agenda 2030.

9 October 2023