



IN BRIEF



THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES:

Towards full and effective participation

Photo: UN Women Kyrgyzstan/Meriza Emilbekova

What's the Issue?

It is estimated that about one in five women live with a disability. Women with disabilities experience various types of impairments, including physical, psychosocial, intellectual and sensory conditions, that may or may not come with functional limitations.

In addition to this, the diversity of women with disabilities includes those with multiple and intersecting identities, such as being from different ethnic, religious and racial backgrounds; refugee, migrant, asylum-seeking and internally displaced women; LGBTQI+ persons; widowed women; young and older women; and women living with and affected by HIV, across all contexts. As a result of substantively distinct life experiences based on these factors, some women and girls with disabilities are pushed to the extreme margins and experience profound discriminations.

Systemic and historical marginalization as well as attitudinal and environmental barriers hinder the participation and inclusion in society of women and girls with disabilities on an equal basis with others. These barriers often lead to lower economic and social status, increased risk of violence and abuse, including sexual violence, discrimination as well as harmful gender-based discriminatory practices, barriers in access to education, health care (including sexual and reproductive health), information and services, justice, as well as civic and political participation.

Women and girls with disabilities are often excluded from various aspects of the humanitarian-development continuum. International and national laws and policies have historically neglected to address the intersection of gender and disabilities. Systemic barriers coupled with the

failure to prioritize the collection of data on the situation of women and girls with disabilities has perpetuated the invisibility. Gaps in alliances among women's rights organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities, and organizations of women and girls with disabilities often result in the rights of women and girls with disabilities being overlooked during the development and implementation of relevant policies, programmes and intergovernmental processes. Organizations of women and girls with disabilities are often unable to access funding, as their work may not fit within the standard portfolios of women's rights or disability rights donors, or funding mechanisms are inflexible and do not accommodate them. This gap in access to resources and capacity hinders their full and effective participation.

Our solutions

IUN Women's Strategy on the Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities was developed to ensure a more systematic approach to strengthen the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in UN Women's efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The Strategy builds on UN Women's work in this area and its Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

The overarching objective of the Strategy is to support the full inclusion and meaningful participation of women and girls with disabilities across all of UN Women's priority areas, through the implementation of its mandate as well as by reviewing its accessibility as an organization. To this end, UN Women will invest and engage in three complimentary areas: i) normative frameworks, policies and programmes; ii) strategic partnerships; and iii) inclusive management to enhance accessibility and operational responses.



Our approach

Consistent with the gender mainstreaming approach, UN Women proposes the use of a multi-pronged approach in all areas of its work within UN Women and through its coordination, normative and operational responses – including in collaboration with and support to partners. The approach consists of: i) mainstreaming gender perspectives and the rights of persons with disabilities of all ages, ii) initiatives targeting women and girls with disabilities, and iii) inclusion of women and girls with disabilities. Leveraging this approach, through the implementation of this Strategy, UN Women will provide normative guidance, integrated policy advice, operational support and technical assistance for programme development and capacity development to contribute to ensuring that all initiatives are gender-responsive and disability inclusive.

Why a multi-pronged approach?

“Widespread development practice and learning have established that a multiple-track strategy for gender mainstreaming has greater potential for achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment ... This approach consists of combining gender-targeted or focused interventions for specific social groups, organizations and/or processes with gender efforts integrated across the substantive general work of all priority sectors.”

Source: UN Women (2014). [Guidance note – Gender Mainstreaming in Development Programming](#)

“Nothing about disability should be done without women with disabilities”
—Ana Peláez Narváez, from Spain, the first woman with a disability to be elected to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Areas of Investment

UN Women will strengthen normative frameworks, policies and programmes to become gender-responsive and inclusive of women and girls with disabilities. In this regard, UN Women will contribute to: i) the collection, analysis and dissemination of reliable data and statistics on women and girls with disabilities to inform policies, programmes and other initiatives; ii) the design and implementation of innovative



Photo: UN Women Asia Pacific

and accessible solutions and initiatives to address structural barriers; and iii) address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination experienced by women and girls with disabilities, recognizing their lived realities and experiences of heightened disadvantage caused by structural barriers.

UN Women will also build synergies through collaboration and partnerships, to enhance the capacities, knowledge and networks that each partner brings. The leadership of partners – including Member States, organizations of women and girls with disabilities, their representative organizations, other women’s organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities, of older persons, foundations, international non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and research and academic institutions – can strategically contribute to the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

To more effectively work with and support partners, UN Women will take specific steps to review its approach, services and facilities to make them more accessible and inclusive to persons with disabilities, particularly all women and girls with disabilities, and to promote inclusive attitudes at the workplace. This will be done, among other things, through promoting reasonable accommodation and universal design in all areas of its work and enhancing internal capacities for inclusion and diversity.

“These spaces belong to everyone.”
—Nidhi Goyal, a disabled feminist from India who works on disability rights and gender equality

How we work

FIJI: As part of the Safe Cities Initiative, UN Women supported the local government in the development and design of structural plans for the improvement and/or development of infrastructure and facilities to ensure that these plans guarantee access for people with disabilities, are safe for women and girls including women and girls with disabilities, are environmentally friendly, and address issues such as child care.

SENEGAL: Through the Gender Equitable Local Development programme implemented by UN Women, women with disabilities participated in workshops and trainings on Senegal's social orientation law, and on addressing the unique and specific needs of women with disabilities in menstrual hygiene management.

REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA: With the support of UN Women, as part of the Gender-Responsive Budgeting Project, the Development Tools for Engendering Local Participatory Mechanisms integrated the principle of leaving no one behind. Women, especially the most marginalized, including women with disabilities, were given a space to voice their concerns and influence policymaking and budgeting processes.

MOZAMBIQUE: UN Women, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Action (MGCAS) and the National Institute of Statistics, has identified technical capacity gaps in the production, use and dissemination of gender statistics. UN Women also supported the participation of two government officials from the MGCAS and the National Institute of Statistics in two regional workshops on gender statistics in Rwanda and Côte d'Ivoire. Among other topics, both workshops discussed efforts to collect and analyse disaggregated data on the most vulnerable and marginalized groups – including youth and persons with disabilities – in order to effectively monitor the progress of SDG 5 and other gender targets and indicators throughout the SDGs.

EGYPT: Through the Men and Women for Gender Equality Programme, UN Women has contributed to strengthening the capacity of community-based organizations, including by providing seed funding. In cooperation with CARE Egypt, El-Amany El-Gamila for Community Development was one of six community-based organizations to receive a grant of USD 12,000. The project contributed to strengthening and promoting the engagement of rural girls with disabilities and their mothers to transform harmful beliefs, attitudes and stigma regarding disabilities.

CAMBODIA: UN Women supported 12 women's support groups and youth groups to conduct awareness-raising sessions on violence against women with 800 community members, of whom over 600 were women – including women and girls with disabilities. In addition, 62 women and girls with disabilities received counselling and participated in 'know-your-rights' trainings.

UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA: UN Women designed and led a two-year Women, Leadership and Political Participation project to improve the participation and representation of women, youth and persons with disabilities as leaders in political processes. The project complemented the Democratic Empowerment Project, which was implemented by UNDP along with UN Women and UNESCO as core implementing partners. The project was supported by Finland and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

MALAWI: UN Women supported the development and finalization of a National Action Plan on Persons with Albinism, which succeeds the national response plan. With other partners, including the wider UN Country Team in Malawi, UN Women is leading efforts to create awareness and advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities, and particularly those with Albinism.

GLOBALY: The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, managed by UN Women on behalf of the UN system, has funded nine organizations in 2018 for projects aiming to prevent and end violence against women and girls with disabilities, under a grant-giving special funding window. The grants are worth a total of USD 2.9 million and expected to reach almost 100,000 beneficiaries in five regions of the world by the end of 2021.

“We must be at the table making decisions... empowering indigenous women with disabilities starts with making them count as active participants and decision-makers, not just observers of decisions”
—Pratima Gurung, an activist for the rights of indigenous peoples and women with disabilities in Nepal and Asia and member of the Steering Committee of the Indigenous Persons with Disabilities Global Network.

Ndèye Daro Niang: “I am a valued member of my community”

Ndèye Daro Niang is one of 213 women with disabilities who attended the Gender Equitable Local Development (GELD) programme implemented by UN Women in 58 local councils in Senegal, with financial support from Luxembourg. Through workshops and information sessions, women with disabilities have been sensitized and trained on Senegal’s landmark social orientation law, which was adopted in 2010, and on addressing the unique and specific needs of disabled women in menstrual hygiene management.

“My life turned around when I attended a human rights information session for women with disabilities, organized under UN Women’s GELD programme. I discovered that institutional arrangements were put in place in my country for the integration of people with disabilities. The social orientation law has existed for many years, but those who are illiterate don’t know about it and cannot access it. Not all of my problems are gone. However, my life has changed in ways that I couldn’t have imagined before. With my salary as a community worker, I can now support myself economically. What’s more, I help other women and girls with disabilities, inform[ing] them about their rights. I am a valued member of my community and I want to educate as many people as possible about the importance of integrating people with disabilities into the society and educating the children. My dream is to build a company that offers employment opportunities to all people, including those with disabilities.”

Photo: UNICEF/Asad Zaidi



Jana Mustafa: “Disability should not stop anyone from starting over”

Jana Mustafa is a former employee of a local NGO and a survivor of violence. She lost her job due to an abusive marriage and experienced years of physical and psychological violence. She got a divorce with the legal help of the Hayat Centre in the Gaza Strip. The Centre is supported by the UN Women programme, “A Holistic Approach to Sheltering Services for Women Victims and Survivors.” As she hopes to begin a new life, Mustafa wants to open a small business to support her six-year-old son Jamal and prove that her disability is not an issue.

“I lost my left leg when I was one-and-a-half years old. It was from a faulty vaccination that my cousin and I received ... I was never ashamed of having a disability. I was always confident and dressed well. I also had a job at a local NGO that provided me with vocational training. People often wondered how I got such a job with a disability. I did not care what people thought of me. I met my former husband through a friend about 10 years ago. I became his second wife and lived in a separate house from his first wife. But soon, he started bringing other women into my house and beat me whenever I tried to stop him. My former husband used my disability to make me feel weak. Finally, I decided to get a divorce and consulted an organization supporting disabled women. They referred me to the Hayat Centre, where I got psychosocial support and free legal aid. The lawyers at Hayat were helpful. When I received the paper saying that the divorce is approved, I cried like a baby; I was so relieved. Thanks to the psychosocial help I received from Hayat. I speak out whenever I see injustice.”

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