



Beijing Platform for Action at 25 Years

Women and Girls with Disabilities

Issue Brief – January 2020

Summary

- ▶ 25 years after the adoption of the most comprehensive global framework on gender equality – the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will review its implementation in March 2020.
- ▶ As the framework only makes cursory reference to women and girls with disabilities, progress on their full empowerment and gender equality has been insufficient.
- ▶ 20% of all women and girls have a disability. They are significantly more likely to experience violence and less likely to be employed than women without disabilities.
- ▶ Governments, international organisations and private actors urgently need to mainstream disability into gender equality action plans, strategies and programmes.

A) Beijing+25 in a Nutshell

2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. To date, this is the most comprehensive global framework on gender equality and the rights of women and girls. Agreed on by the UN Member States, it is directed at themselves and the global community at large. The Platform for Action is structured along a set of 12 themes pivotal to women's rights and empowerment: poverty; education and training; health; violence; armed conflict; economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights; media; environment; the girl-child.¹

At the March 2020 session of the CSW and at the General Assembly in September 2020, UN Member States will assess progress and challenges in its implementation. A synthesis report by UN Women will summarise the global progress on

1 UN Women (2014) [1995]: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf?la=en&vs=800.

women's rights and gender equality.² The discussions at Beijing+25 will situate gender equality in a context of newer global agendas, most importantly the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.³

B) Women and Girls with Disabilities

There are more women and girls with disabilities worldwide than men and boys. Disability prevalence is 19.2% among women compared to 12% among men.⁴ They face intersectional discrimination, which is often not fully recognised and thus inadequately addressed.

Snapshot of the Current Situation

A look at some of the areas of the Beijing Platform for Action shows that there is still a long way to go for equality of women and girls with disabilities with their peers:

- ▶ **Poverty:** Studies consistently show a higher share of persons with disabilities living below the poverty line than of persons without disabilities. Lack of educational and economic opportunities for women with disabilities aggravate this trend.⁵
- ▶ **Education:** Globally, 57% of girls with disabilities complete at least primary school, compared to 86% of girls without disabilities. As a result, in Mozambique for instance, only 17% of women with disabilities are literate.⁶
- ▶ **Economic Participation:** Employment rates for women with disabilities globally are 19.6%, compared to 29.9% for women without disabilities.⁷
- ▶ **Health:** 35% of women with disabilities in the US report fair or poor health, compared to only 6.7% of women without disabilities. 22% of married women with disabilities in seven countries report unmet family planning needs, with qualitative data suggesting a much larger sexual and reproductive health rights gap.⁸
- ▶ **Violence:** Women with disabilities are two to five times more likely to experience violence than women without disabilities. For instance, a survey of primary school children in Uganda found that 24% of girls with disabilities had

2 UN Women (2020): CSW64 / Beijing+25. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw64-2020>.

3 UN General Assembly (2015): Transforming our World – The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A/RES/70/1. <https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>.

4 WHO (2011): World Report on Disability. https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/.

5 UN DESA (2018): Disability and Development Report. pp. 34-36. <https://social.un.org/publications/UN-Flagship-Report-Disability-Final.pdf>.

6 *ibid.* pp. 106-107.

7 WHO (2011): World Report on Disability, p. 237. https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/.

8 Mithra, M. et al. (2016): Disparities in Adverse Preconception Risk Factors between Women with and without Disabilities. *Maternity Child Health Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 507-515; UN DESA (2018): *op. cit.* p. 68.

experienced sexual violence at school compared to 12% of girls without disabilities.⁹

- ▶ **Power and Decision-Making:** The rate of women with disabilities in leadership positions is extremely low. For instance, a 2017 survey found that 14 out of 18 countries in the Asia Pacific Region had no female parliamentarian with disabilities.¹⁰

References in the Policy Framework

When the Beijing Framework was drafted, recognition of the heterogeneity of women and girls was still weak. The Beijing Declaration makes only one explicit reference to disability while its Platform for Action includes some scattered references throughout its thematic chapters. Five years later, this neglect was already recognised:



Girls and women of all ages with any form of disability are generally among the more vulnerable and marginalized of society. There is therefore need to take into account and to address their concerns in all policy-making and programming. Special measures are needed at all levels to integrate them into the mainstream of development.¹¹



The 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) includes a stand-alone article on women with disabilities and related obligations of State Parties. Its expert committee also provides specific guidance on ensuring their rights.¹²

Despite these developments, Sustainable Development Goal 5, on women's empowerment, does not mention disability. This creates the threat that women and girls with disabilities, one out of five worldwide, remain excluded from progress again.¹³

C) Our Work

Light for the World mainstreams gender equality and women's empowerment of women and girls with disabilities into its key organisational areas. Some key aspects of our work in this area, which we aim to expand in the future, include:

- ▶ **Gender Policy:** We developed a binding policy for all organisational units. It sets out a common approach and ambitious goals for our organisational development and our programmatic work.
- ▶ **Programme Planning:** We apply the OECD DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker to track for each programme whether it targets gender equality as a policy objective.

9 UNESCO (2015): Gender and Education for All. Achievements and Challenges, p. 30. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002348/234809E.pdf>.

10 UN DESA (2018): op. cit. p. 110.

11 UN Women (2014) [2000]: op. cit. p. 265.

12 Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016): General Comment No. 3 on Women and Girls with Disabilities. CRPD/C/GC/3. <https://undocs.org/en/CRPD/C/GC/3>.

13 UN Women (2017): Making the SDGs Count for Women with Disabilities. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/6/issue-brief-making-the-sdgs-count-for-women-and-girls-with-disabilities>.

- ▶ **Data Monitoring:** Our Annual Partner Output Monitoring instrument generates data disaggregated by gender to finetune our programme work for remaining gaps.
- ▶ **Organisations:** We provide support to the umbrella organisation of women with disabilities in Burkina Faso, particularly for institutional advocacy activities.
- ▶ **Her Abilities:** With the annual Her Abilities Award, we honour the achievements of three women with disabilities and facilitate access to policymakers for them.

D) Recommended Action

A Declaration by Women with Disabilities in Political and Public Leadership notes that measures put in place have been insufficient to realise gender equality for all women and girls.¹⁴ Consequently, governments, international organisations, the private sector and the media as well as humanitarian and development actors urgently need to ensure full inclusion of women and girls with disabilities. This disability mainstreaming in their action plans, strategies and programmes includes:

- ▶ Applying an intersectional approach in the implementation and follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action, to ensure that all women and girls are fully included.
- ▶ Applying the CRPD's principles in all processes geared towards realising the Beijing Declaration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- ▶ Involving women and girls with disabilities from diverse social groups in planning, decision-making and review processes related to Beijing+25 and the 2030 Agenda.
- ▶ Repealing discriminatory laws, policies and practices, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health rights and parenting rights.
- ▶ Fully committing to disability-sensitive gender parity and full accessibility, including in representative political office and other decision-making bodies.
- ▶ Recognising women with disabilities as experts, portray them in dignity and provide them with platforms to speak and opportunities to lead.
- ▶ Investing in high-quality data collection and statistics to ensure data disaggregation on disability, sex, age and other relevant variables.

The 25th anniversary of the Beijing framework is a good moment to commit to these changes. In light of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, UN Women should lead efforts to monitor outcomes both at the global and field level and ensure that implementation of the Beijing framework and the 2030 Agenda is inclusive of women and girls with disabilities.

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 14 UN Women (2019): Declaration of Women with Disabilities in Political and Public Leadership Towards Beijing+25. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/2019-06-12-Declaration-towards-Beijing.pdf>.

Further Reading

- ▶ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016): General Comment No. 3. CRPD/C/GC/3. <https://undocs.org/en/CRPD/C/GC/3>.
- ▶ UN DESA (2018): Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities. <https://social.un.org/publications/UN-Flagship-Report-Disability-Final.pdf>.
- ▶ UN General Assembly (2017): Report by the Secretary-General on the Situation of Women and Girls with Disabilities. A/72/227. <https://undocs.org/A/72/227>.
- ▶ UN Women (2017): Making the SDGs Count for Women with Disabilities. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/6/issue-brief-making-the-sdgs-count-for-women-and-girls-with-disabilities>.
- ▶ UN Women (2019): Declaration of Women with Disabilities in Political and Public Leadership Towards Beijing+25. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/2019-06-12-Declaration-towards-Beijing.pdf>.

About Light for the World

Light for the World is a global disability and development organisation, breaking down barriers to enrich society and unlock the potential in all of us. Our vision is an inclusive society for all where no one is left behind. We enable eye health services and empower people with disabilities in some of the poorest regions of the world.

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