



Disabled Peoples' International: Position Paper on the Millennium Development Goals



In Anticipation

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Overview

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have the potential to improve life for billions of people in the world's poorest countries. Yet when they were established by world leaders in 2000 they omitted one in five of the world's poorest people, namely persons with disabilities. Disability is currently not included in indicators and targets set for the MDGs and, for the most part, persons with disabilities are excluded from international and national poverty reduction plans. Until **disability is included** in every aspect of the MDGs, there is little opportunity for achieving success.

Established in 1981, Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) is the largest cross-disability grass roots organization in the world. It comprises 134 national assemblies (member organizations), over half of which are located in developing nations. DPI promotes the human rights of persons with disabilities through full participation, equalization of opportunity and development. As such, DPI is ideally situated not only to lobby the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and its ten thematic Task Forces for the inclusion of disability in MDGs' future policies and practice, but also to increase awareness of the MDGs among persons with disabilities worldwide.ⁱ Only then will persons with disabilities be in a stronger position to contribute in **innovative and meaningful** ways to the MDGs, at local, national and international levels.

What are the Millennium Development Goals?

Adopted by world leaders in the year 2000 and set to be achieved by 2015, the Millennium Development Goals are the most broadly supported, comprehensive and specific development goals the world has ever agreed upon. They represent the basic rights and human needs that **every** individual should be able to enjoy: freedom from extreme poverty and hunger; quality education, productive and decent employment, good health and shelter; the right of women to give birth without risking their lives; and a world where environmental sustainability is a priority, with women and men living in equality.

The MDGs are both **global and local** in that they are tailored by each country to suit **specific** development needs. They incorporate concrete, numerical benchmarks for tackling extreme poverty in its many dimensions.ⁱⁱ The MDGs aim to

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empowerment of women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Disability and the Millennium Development Goals

Poverty is both a cause and consequence of disability. Disability affects **all** eight of the MDGs due to the **intersection** of disability with poverty, education, gender, health and the environment:ⁱⁱⁱ

1. *Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger*

Of the estimated 650 million persons with disabilities worldwide, 70% live in developing countries, and according to United Nations (UN) statistics, 82% live below the poverty line.

2. *Achieve universal primary education*

This is the only absolute goal and, with 98% of children with disabilities in developing countries not in school, it will be impossible to achieve unless they are explicitly brought into the equation.

3. *Promote gender equality and empowerment of women*

Women and girls with disabilities often face double discrimination based on gender and disability. They are often excluded from education, health

Children with disabilities in developing countries are at a higher risk of dying in infancy due to malnutrition, poor sanitation, lack of access to health services and social stigma. In some developing countries, mortality rates for children with disabilities under five years of age is as high as 80%, even in countries where overall under-five mortality is below 20%.

4. *Reduce child mortality*

5. *Improve maternal health*

Up to 20 million women a year are affected by disability acquired as a result of pregnancy and childbirth.

6. *Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases*

Education for persons with disabilities about HIV/AIDS is essential in helping them to make informed choices. Yet, pamphlets and posters about HIV/AIDS are rarely available in accessible formats such as Braille, large print and simple language formats.

7. *Ensure environmental sustainability*

Environmental dangers can lead to the onset of many types of disabilities, and inaccessible environments prevent

8. *Develop a Global Partnership for Development*

Disability and poverty influence a person's ability to access health services, education and employment, especially women. Not addressing these barriers severely undermines the effectiveness of anti-

A partnership implies inclusion, which means everyone. Article 32 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities supports the aims and objectives of MDG 8, as it highlights the role of civil society and disabled people's organisations in the promotion of inclusive development. It demands that persons living with disabilities are **included** in all phases of development cooperation, planning, implementation and evaluation.

poverty programs and reinforces gender disparity and the dependence of persons with disabilities on others for survival.

Progress to Date

Some progress has been made in meeting the MDGs but much more needs to be done. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to monitor progress for disability as recent reports on the MDGs fail to track the inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in poverty reduction processes. The 2010 World Health Organization's (WHO's) report titled "20 Ways that the World Health Organization helps Countries reach the Millennium Development Goals" fails to mention disability.^{iv}

Having said this, however, over the past few years there has been growing recognition internationally of the **importance of disability** in reducing poverty:

- ✚ The Department for International Development (DFID), UK and the European Union (EU) Commission have both produced Guidance Notes on Disability, a practical guide for their country offices and delegations to address disability within development work. Both these notes explicitly recognise that the MDGs cannot be achieved without addressing disability.
- ✚ The African Union and European Union have developed action points on disability under the MDG areas of health and education in their Joint EU Africa Strategy and Action Plan, 2008-2009.
- ✚ The UN has committed to developing a Common Strategy and Action Plan on Disability to be used as the foundation for concerted and coordinated work on disability across all UN agencies.

Of significance, in March 2008 the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) came into force. The CRPD is intended as a human rights instrument with an explicit social development dimension. In order to make a sustained difference in alleviating poverty, individuals should work within the **framework of the CRPD** to ensure that the human rights of persons with disabilities underlie development work with the MDGs' Task Forces and

Global Development Partners, international organizations, governments and civil society.

Several CRPD Articles^v are applicable to the MDGs:

Goal 1	Articles 6, 7, 27 and 28
Goal 2	Article 24
Goal 3	Article 6
Goal 4	Article 10
Goal 5	Articles 6, 23 and 25
Goal 6	Articles 5 and 25
Goal 7	Articles 19, 20 and 28
Goal 8	Articles 9, 25 and 32

The CRPD and the MDGs have much in common. They share guiding principles such as participation, empowerment and national ownership; they serve as tools for reporting processes that can hold governments accountable; and, most fundamentally, they share the ultimate objective of promoting human well-being and honouring the inherent dignity of all people.

The CRPD and MDGs are also two interdependent and mutually reinforcing frameworks. The MDGs can help spur efforts toward the achievement of certain human rights, particularly the often-neglected social and economic rights. And for their part, human rights can benefit work in support of the MDGs.^{vi}

Next Steps

As we pass the halfway point of the MDGs, **DPI urges** governments, international agencies, and civil society to address disability through the implementation of **inclusive development** strategies. Inclusive development recognizes all individuals as equal and actively engaged in the development process, irrespective of disability, age, gender, income or ethnicity.

DPI stresses that, in future MDG activities, it is essential to

- ✚ Recognise disability as a cross cutting issue within international development
- ✚ Support the collection of accurate and reliable disability data to identify persons with various disabilities in need of programs and services such as education and health services

- ✦ Support the collection of accurate data to monitor inclusion and progress of persons with disabilities in the MDGs
- ✦ Utilize the CRPD to emphasize the benefits of using a human rights based approach to the MDGs
- ✦ Ensure participation and involvement of Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) and other relevant organisations in development and MDGs-related policy and decision making processes
- ✦ Bring to light a global realization of the impact disability has on societies, as well as how disability intersects the MDGs
- ✦ Ensure equal consideration of people with disabilities alongside children and women in the mainstreaming of the MDGs
- ✦ Increase awareness among all stakeholders about the rights of and issues concerning persons with disabilities
- ✦ Ensure systematic identification of the factors such as stigma that block the inclusion of persons with disabilities in MDG-related programs and policies
- ✦ Adopt a social model of disability to inform key stakeholders of the potential of persons with disabilities to actively participate on MDGs' Task Forces
- ✦ Develop strategic partnerships with the MDGs' Task Forces and Global Development Partners

Conclusion

It is unrealistic to assume that the MDGs can ever be realized without addressing the poverty of hundreds of millions of persons with disabilities, particularly those living in developing countries.

The gap between policy and practice persists. To narrow this gap and realize the final intent of the MDGs, development strategies, policies and programs must be fully accessible to and inclusive of persons with disabilities. Including people with disabilities from the outset is generally the most efficient, cost effective, and least stigmatizing way to address their fundamental needs.

Finally, sharing information about the intersection of disability and MDGs at a grassroots level—with persons with disabilities—will empower persons with disabilities to demand “nothing about us without us.”

Endnotes

ⁱ The ten thematic Task Forces comprise more than 250 experts from around the world including researchers, policymakers, Non-Government Organizations, UN Agencies, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the private sector.

ⁱⁱ To read the UN quantifiable targets and indicators for each of the MDGs, go to <http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.shtml>

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from International Disability and Development Consortium's (IDDC's) Include Everybody.org website.

^{iv} Report can be read at http://www.who.int/topics/millennium_development_goals/who_dgo_2010_3/en/index.html

^v To read CRPD Articles in full, go to <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=259>

^{vi} For a more detailed discussion of this complex relationship, go to UNDP's report titled "Human Rights and MDGs" available at <http://hurilink.org/Primer-HR-MDGs.pdf>