



Fourth P4R Virtual Networking Days – November 16, 2021

Questions:

- Over a year and a half into the COVID-19 pandemic, how has the LNOB principle been implemented at the country level for marginalized groups?
- Six years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, how have marginalized groups been included in the sustainable development processes and what gaps remain?

Talking points for Dr. Mohammed Ali Loutfy

Marginalized groups, including the disability movement engaged in the UN's negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda, with community members from all parts of the world presenting their experiences and priorities to governments at the UN during the development of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is these stories and others from people around the world that formed the bedrock of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

For the last five years, governments have tried to translate the SDGs into national policies with limited outcomes. But moving forward, the SDGs need to be re-focused into feasible and inclusive life-saving actions that can be and are carried out for people everywhere.

Now as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the SDGs will remain relevant only if governments reframe the Goals to be part of the fabric of people's lives. The SDGs can survive, and even thrive, if they meaningfully and universally address the critical situation faced by many communities globally, including persons with disabilities, just as the Goals emerged from stories at the grassroots level around the globe.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent policies have affected marginalized groups in grave ways, including persons with disabilities and older persons. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities carried out two phases of qualitative research to gather information on the experiences of persons with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19

pandemic and to complement existing research studies. The first phase of research took place in 2020 with disability movement leaders from around the world and the second phase followed in 2021 exploring three countries in depth: Bangladesh, Bolivia, and Nigeria.

The studies indicated that the most significant barriers for persons with disabilities were: (1) lack of employment and social protection, (2) inaccessible healthcare facilities, (3) lack of access to COVID-19 information and data, and (4) lack of accessibility in terms of infrastructure, transportation, communication, digital, and more.

In the three countries, overlapping themes emerged, including: (1) new barriers due to changing roles in extended family situations, (2) increased competition to find employment with overall high unemployment in society, (3) lack of financial and technical resources to access information via phones and the internet increasing the digital divide, and (4) increased lack of security and safety.

The findings shed light on the key role of organizations of persons with disabilities during the pandemic. OPDs stepped in and addressed the many gaps in government services. Many OPDs shared vital information otherwise inaccessible, raised awareness with their members, and provided accessible materials in different formats. Moreover, in many countries, governments began to provide national sign language interpretation and live captioning for news briefings. Often, the inclusion of these services was a direct result of advocacy efforts led by deaf communities and OPDs.

Older persons with and without disabilities faced intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of their older age. Nursing homes all over the world locked their doors with no plans for visitation in place, cutting off residents from visitors from the outside world. The numbers of older people who died in facilities in some places are only now being analysed as seriously underreported. Older persons who relied on supports in the community under draconian lockdown measures found themselves dangerously isolated. And the digital divide is exceptionally steep for older persons, who have struggled with a rapidly digitizing world leaving them behind.

To address this critical situation for marginalized groups, it is important to keep in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as the SDGs. Furthermore, governments must address the growing digital divide that disproportionately affects the most marginalized groups.

Governments must also collect data on the most marginalized groups to provide essential information on the status of the rights of persons with disabilities and other groups, and identify policy gaps and barriers faced by persons with disabilities and other groups to support policymakers to amend existing policies, regulations, and programs to include all groups fully and equally into society.

Let's keep the momentum going to ensure the truly no one is left behind.

