
Commission on the Status of Women

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement submitted by Disabled Peoples’ International, non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1

Statement

Disabled Peoples' International (D.P.I.) has found that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have led to very little improvement in the lives of women with disabilities around the world and particularly in developing countries. While Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (C.R.P.D.) is an important step forward, there is much that remains to be done to ensure that women and girls with disabilities fully exercise and enjoy human rights. The following Statement is divided into two parts: (a) information about the situation of women with disabilities and (b) key recommendations for change.

(a) Situation of Women with Disabilities:

The following information has been gathered by Disability Rights Promotion International (D.R.P.I.) and its partner organizations of persons with disabilities in India and Kenya. D.R.P.I. is an international collaborative project working to develop tools and build capacity to monitor the rights of persons with disabilities. The information is based on both legal and policy research along with face-to-face interviews conducted with women and men with disabilities in the countries concerned. While the information presented here is not exhaustive, it does outline trends D.R.P.I. is finding. D.P.I. supports the aims of the D.R.P.I. project and has agreed to assist D.R.P.I. and its partners by submitting this monitoring data to the Beijing +15 review process. In addition, D.P.I. finds that the trends identified in India and Kenya are very similar to the experiences of women with disabilities in other countries in which D.P.I. works.

India

In India, D.R.P.I. worked with Swadhikaar Center for Disabilities Information, Research & Resource Development, Asmita Resource Centre for Women, NALSAR School of Law and National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped.

The 2001 Indian Census estimates that there are over 9 million women with disabilities in India constituting 3.5% of the population. Some researchers estimate that there are over 35 million

women with disabilities (Bacquer and Sharma 1997). Others put the figure at 20 million, of whom 98% are illiterate; less than 1% have access to healthcare and rehabilitation services (Action Aid 2003 15). The majority of women with disabilities in India suffer the *triple discrimination of being female, disabled and poor*. Not only are they socially invisible but their plight is worse than both men with disabilities and women without disabilities. Being powerless, isolated and anonymous, women with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to abuse and violence.

While no specific disability law in India mentions women as a category that requires special attention, the XI Plan observes that "Women with disabilities . . . are considered a financial burden and social liability by their families; they are denied opportunities, movement outside the home and access to education; they are viewed as asexual, helpless and dependant . . . they [are] isolated and neglected with no hope of a normal life." It goes on to state that "the specific concerns of women with disabilities have found a place neither in the government policies and programmes nor the voluntary sector." For the first time, the XI Plan considers the situation of women with disabilities in all its complexity, focusing on the need for an intersectional understanding of discrimination for policy to be effective and addressing the vulnerability of poor women to triple discrimination - poverty, gender and disability in significant ways. The XI Plan explores ways in which the gender-based division of labour places women with disabilities at an added disadvantage both at the family and community level. The national policy for persons with disabilities addresses these concerns as well, though not as comprehensively as the planning document. The XI Plan provides a framework for future government and non-government action to strengthen the position of women with disabilities.

In addition, the *Report of the Working Group on Empowerment of Women for the XI Plan, Ministry of Women and Child Development Government of India* recommends that women with disabilities be included not only as beneficiaries of gender equity but also as fieldworkers and project facilitators, survey designers and field investigators in projects with disability components to enhance their visibility in positive roles. It challenges negative attitudes that reduce women with disabilities to objects of pity and helplessness. The report proposes that there be a separate wing for women with

disabilities in the Disability Commissioner's office and that women with disabilities be represented on the Central and state co-ordination and executive Committees.

D.R.P.I.'s Indian partners conducted 113 interviews with persons with various types of impairments (47 women, 66 men) in three monitoring sites in Andhra Pradesh State: Hyderabad, Kurnool and villages of three Mandals of Vishakapatnam District. The interviews revealed a gender pattern in experiences of discrimination among people with disabilities in India. Women interviewed faced the double discrimination of being women as well as being women with disabilities. Women with disabilities reported facing more discrimination from their family members and in society than men, perhaps because they are discriminated twice over, due to patriarchy and dependence. Men with disabilities reported facing the most discrimination from the government and society. Both women and men with disabilities reported exclusion in communication and access to the physical environment.

Kenya

In Kenya, D.R.P.I. worked with the African Union of the Blind, Kenya Union of the Blind, Centre for Disability Rights Education and Advocacy and the University of Nairobi.

The 1997 *Report of the Task Force Reviewing the Laws relating to Persons with Disabilities* explicitly recognizes the need to recognize the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women and girls in Kenya. The report recommends that special legal, policy and institutional mechanisms for addressing the specific forms of discrimination faced by women and girls be adopted in the new legal and policy regime for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. However, neither the *Persons with Disabilities Act, 2003* nor the *Draft National Policy* recognize the multiple disabilities women with disabilities face.

D.R.P.I.'s partners in Kenya conducted 94 interviews with persons with various types of impairments (49 women, 45 men) in three monitoring sites: Nairobi, Nyanza and Rift Valley. The majority of both women and men interviewed thought gender was not significant in terms of the

discrimination faced by people with disabilities in Kenya. Yet, more women (32%) than men (18 %) reported that being both female and having a disability represented a double disadvantage because of discrimination faced as women and as a person with a disability. The findings may reflect the possibility that the status of disability is an even greater barrier to people than gender, although, on a day by day basis, dual discrimination does have an impact.

In the work place, people with disabilities in Kenya reported that they were exposed to numerous situations in which their rights were violated. More than 25% of respondents reported specific incidences of abuse and violence in the work place. The mistreatment of people with disabilities was reported in nearly all work placements, including domestic work. Many women reported working as maids for months without being paid. Also, some women reported sexual abuse and rape in the work place.

Data gathered through the interviews showed that traditional views portraying women in the family as dependent and submissive to men increase the vulnerability of women with disabilities to discrimination. Incidences of abuse and violence were more common for women with disabilities than for women without disabilities. These incidences were also reported to occur most often in the domestic sphere, by parents, partners and siblings. Men with disabilities, in contrast, were more likely to experience discriminatory attitudes and access barriers in the public sphere – in their workplaces, communities and while interacting with their peers without disabilities in multiple social settings. This could result from men with disabilities being more likely to be outside the home and women inside the home.

(b) Recommendations for Change:

1. All countries should ratify and the C.R.P.D. and its Optional Protocol, without reservation, and immediately fulfil their obligations thereunder, including those set out in Article 6.
2. All countries, N.G.O.s, funders and other development actors should ensure that women with disabilities are active participants in all development processes and programs, including holding key decision-making roles.