SPECIAL REPORT

Disability-Inclusive Peacebuilding: State of the Field and the Way Forward

By Elizabeth Murray

People wounded during opposition protests attend an August 28, 2020 prayer service in Bamako, Mali, for those who died or were injured during the protests. (Photo by Baba Ahmed/AP)

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Summary

- Legal and policy frameworks developed over the past fifteen years have advanced disability rights worldwide, but the peacebuilding field has not prioritized the inclusion of people with disabilities. As a result, most are routinely excluded from peacebuilding.

- When people with disabilities are included in peacebuilding, the approach is uneven, with some groups prioritized over others.

- Other major gaps in disability-inclusive peacebuilding are the lack of disability-disaggregated data on peacebuilding programs and the failure of peacebuilding organizations and governments to prioritize hiring people with disabilities among their own staff.

- Disability rights has proved to be an issue that can unify groups across conflict lines. The peacebuilding field would benefit from greater attention to the potential of this issue to catalyze peacebuilding and to the unifying role that is often played by organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in conflict situations.

- Peacebuilding organizations and governments should eliminate barriers to participation and improve accessibility, plan and budget for inclusion, partner with OPDs, and make all programs inclusive while also developing dedicated programs to further the inclusion of people with disabilities in peacebuilding.

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report reviews the current state of disability inclusion in peacebuilding, covering the international legal frameworks, gaps requiring immediate attention, and opportunities. It concludes with recommendations for how organizations can further the inclusion of people with disabilities in peacebuilding.

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Using a wheelchair, Lisa Calan, who lost both her legs in an explosion June 5, 2015, during a Peoples' Democratic Party rally for the previous elections, casts her vote on November 1, 2015, in Diyarbakir, Turkey. (Photo by Mahmut Bozarslan/AP)

Introduction

Although they represent an estimated 15 percent of the world's population and are the world's largest minority, people with disabilities are not routinely included in peacebuilding.[1] There has been some modest progress on the inclusion of people with disabilities in humanitarian action over the past decade, but the larger focus has been on the increased risk of harm to people with disabilities during armed conflict and on the potential of armed conflict itself to cause disability.[2] These are well-documented issues, and people with disabilities merit special protections during conflict and humanitarian emergencies.[3] But an emphasis on vulnerability and protection can obscure the equally important matter that people with disabilities can and should be included in every aspect of peacebuilding.

When people with disabilities are included in peacebuilding, it is often as part of a broader group of marginalized populations—such as women, youth, victims of conflict, and ethnic and religious minorities. Although efforts to include marginalized populations can indeed help to counter exclusion, people with disabilities are among the most excluded groups. Dominant cultural narratives in many countries ignore the capacity and autonomy of people with disabilities and are used to justify leaving them out or making decisions on their behalf. They have therefore seen fewer tangible gains than other groups from broad efforts to bring all marginalized groups to the table.

While acknowledging that a holistic approach to inclusion should underpin all peacebuilding, this report asserts that the inclusion of people with disabilities in peacebuilding necessitates

particular and immediate attention. The current deficits are simply too great to be remedied through general approaches. Achieving broad inclusion of people with disabilities in peacebuilding and ensuring their meaningful participation will require tailored strategies and sustained efforts.[4] At the same time, success on this front can bring benefits to other marginalized groups, including older persons.

The peacebuilding arena stands to benefit from the expertise of people with disabilities, whose perspectives have not yet been drawn into conversations on peace and conflict in a systematic way. Whether people have acquired a disability through war—as combatants or civilians—or through another cause, their agency is often overlooked. "People with disabilities participate in protests and participate in conflicts," says Mbah Fon Dieudonne, the national coordinator of Think Big Association, an organization of persons with disabilities in Cameroon.[5] At the same time, a recent report by the international organization Conciliation Resources aptly describes people with disabilities as "untapped peacebuilders."[6]

A recognition of intersectionality—that is, of the way in which systems of identities overlap and interact—must also underpin work toward disability-inclusive peacebuilding.[7] Through their intersecting identities, some people with disabilities experience more discrimination than others. These include women, children, the LGBTQ+ community, ethnic or religious minorities, and displaced persons.[8] Analyzing these intersecting factors (and the power dynamics and social inequalities that drive them) allows practitioners to identify situations in a given society where several factors of exclusion combine and to define actions to promote inclusion. By adopting an intersectional approach, practitioners and policymakers acknowledge that it will take greater efforts to achieve the inclusion of people with disabilities who are doubly or triply excluded because of other identities. An intersectional approach also includes a commitment to redress these disparities and work to ensure seats at the table not just for some people with disabilities, but for all.

The successes of the women, peace, and security agenda and the youth, peace, and security agenda over the past twenty years offer hope that similar successes can be achieved in the arena of disability and peacebuilding. "We are light-years ahead of where we were in 1990 but nowhere compared to where we should be," says John Lancaster, a Vietnam veteran and disability activist.[9] The work of disability activists around the world, international legal frameworks, and existing policy and practice documents together constitute a strong foundation for disability-inclusive peacebuilding. To build upon this foundation, peacebuilding organizations must now take up disability inclusion as a priority.

This report covers the state of the field, identifies gaps and opportunities, and makes recommendations for the inclusion and meaningful participation of people with disabilities in peacebuilding. It is based on desk research and twenty-two consultations with disability experts, policymakers, and leaders of organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). Throughout the report, the word *peacebuilding* is used in a broad sense, to include not just formal peace processes but also efforts to address the long-term drivers of conflict and promote resilience. While acknowledging that preferences in language vary and that it is a best practice to ask people how they wish to be described, this report uses the terms *people with disabilities* and *organizations of persons with disabilities*, which are consistent with UN language. Organizations of persons with disabilities are governed by a majority of persons with disabilities—not simply focused on disability.

State of the Field

The creation over the past fifteen years of legal and policy frameworks on disability was a vital first step to countering the long-standing exclusion of and discrimination against people with disabilities. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)—adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, entered into force in 2008, and ratified by 182 member states—is the centerpiece of the international disability rights movement. It was created with strong involvement from civil society and OPDs. Although it does not create new rights, the CRPD reiterates that people with disabilities have the same universal human rights as everyone else, offers specificity on these rights and the ways in which they should be realized for persons with disabilities, and places the responsibility on signatories to the convention to guarantee these rights. In addition to forming the backbone of international disability law, the CRPD has helped to shift the narrative on disability from a medical or charity model, in which disability is seen as a medical condition needing to be remedied or a condition evoking pity and charity, to a socially oriented, human rights model centered on ensuring fundamental rights of persons with disabilities. Through the rights-based approach, disability is created by an inaccessible environment, and the problem is therefore barriers in a society. This model focuses on the elimination of barriers, which allows people with disabilities equal access to opportunities, services, and social participation. Article 11 of the CRPD on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies is the article most frequently invoked in situations of conflict, but several other articles are relevant to conflict and peacebuilding, including Article 5 on equality and nondiscrimination; Article 13 on access to justice; Article 16 on freedom from exploitation, violence, and abuse; Article 18 on liberty of movement and nationality; and Article 29 on participation in political life.

Subsequent international resolutions, frameworks, and guidelines, some disability-specific and others general, have added further breadth and specificity to disability inclusion as it relates to conflict and crisis. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a shared development agenda with the tagline "No One Left Behind," include disability or accessibility in five of the seventeen goals elaborated in 2015 after months of negotiation at the United Nations.[10] The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights subsequently developed a resource package highlighting the intersections between the CRPD and the SDGs and providing guidance on developing policy around each goal that responds to the needs of people with disabilities.[11] See box 1 (page 6) for a discussion of other international frameworks on disability inclusion in crisis, conflict, and disaster.

UN Security Council Resolution 2475, adopted in June 2019, focuses on the intersections between disability and conflict. It calls for the protection of and assistance to people with disabilities affected by conflict and emergencies, and it calls further for their "meaningful participation . . . in humanitarian action, conflict prevention, resolution, reconciliation, reconstruction and peacebuilding."[12] The resolution is a useful advocacy and awareness tool for disability-inclusive peacebuilding. However, it has not yet led to consistent change within the UN agencies or at the country level, as Human Rights Watch senior researcher Emina Ćerimović points out. For example, recent resolutions renewing mandates for UN peacekeeping missions in the Central African Republic and South Sudan fail to call for the full and active participation of people with disabilities in peacebuilding, even as they call for the inclusion of several groups, such as women and religious leaders.[13]

Box 1.

Other International Frameworks on Disability Inclusion in Crisis

A growing framework addresses disability inclusion in humanitarian action. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction for 2015–2030 contains several specific references to disability, and the concepts of inclusion and accessibility are incorporated throughout the document.[a] The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit led to the Agenda for Humanity, in which 150 agencies and organizations agreed to five responsibilities for humanitarian action and to an accompanying Charter for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. These laid the groundwork for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to develop its Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, published in 2019.[b]

Beyond these documents, the United Nations adopted a Disability Inclusion Strategy in June 2019 that "provides the foundation for sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion through all pillars of the work of the United Nations."[c] Other multilateral organizations appear to be making mixed progress toward the adoption of disability inclusion strategies, with the World Bank's Disability Inclusion and Accountability Framework, published in June 2018, serving as an early example of a comprehensive approach within a major multilateral organization.[d]

In August 2020, the UN issued the International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities, which are applicable in conflict and postconflict situations.[e]

Notes

a. UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, "Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030," www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework
    -disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030. See also Laura M. Stough and Donghyun Kang, "The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and
    Persons with Disabilities," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science* 6 (2015): 140–49.
b. Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Guidelines: Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action," November 2019, https://interagency
    standingcommittee.org/iasc-task-team-inclusion-persons-disabilities-humanitarian-action/documents/iasc-guidelines.
c. United Nations, "United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy," www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/assets/documentation/UN_Disability
    _Inclusion_Strategy_english.pdf. See also the 2020 progress report: "Report of the Secretary General: Disability in the United Nations System,"
    www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_disability_inclusion_strategy_report_final.pdf.
d. World Bank Group, "Disability Inclusion and Accountability Framework," 2018, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/437451528442789278/
    pdf/126977-WP-PUBLIC-DisabilityInclusionAccountabilitydigital.pdf.
e. UN Human Rights Special Procedures, "International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities," August 2020,
    www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/10/Access-to-Justice-EN.pdf.

Progress at the international level, particularly the wide ratification of the CRPD and the SDGs, has prompted changes at the national level in law, policy, and programs. It has also brought about a gradual cultural change, broadening awareness about disability rights and the collective responsibility to ensure that they are realized.

While this report does not endeavor to provide a country-by-country inventory of progress, experts interviewed agreed that legal and policy frameworks have not led to consistent progress on the ground. This finding is confirmed by Gerard Quinn, the current UN special rapporteur on the

rights of persons with disabilities: "While the war of ideas has been won at least at an abstract level, the ideas have not yet been fully translated into the way in which systems naturally respond."[14]

Gaps

The deficits in disability-inclusive peacebuilding are extensive. The most pressing is the common practice of entirely failing to include people with disabilities in peacebuilding, or including them only superficially. Other important gaps include disparities in the inclusion of different groups of people with disabilities in peacebuilding, the lack of data to inform programming and promote accountability, and the failure of peacebuilding organizations to prioritize inclusion within their own walls.

SYSTEMATIC EXCLUSION OR SUPERFICIAL INCLUSION

A glaring and all-encompassing gap is the frequent lack of inclusion of people with disabilities in peacebuilding, a phenomenon that remains unchallenged in many circles, beginning with the thousands of peacebuilding organizations that do not prioritize this agenda. Ten years and twenty years, respectively, into the youth, peace, and security agenda and the women, peace, and security agenda, it is now standard practice to work for the inclusion and meaningful participation of these constituencies in peacebuilding.[15] This is simply not the case for people with disabilities; many international and national peacebuilding organizations design and carry out a variety of programs—dialogues and roundtables, training, track 2 mediation, institutional capacity building, community-level peacebuilding and social cohesion programs, and others—without any consideration of planning, budgeting, and making reasonable accommodations such that people with disabilities can participate.

This does not mean that people with disabilities are entirely excluded from peacebuilding programs. Some organizations and programs have prioritized disability inclusion, although they are the exception rather than the rule, and people with disabilities tend to be included only as beneficiaries and rarely as partners, technical experts, or trainers.

Furthermore, as multiple people interviewed for this report pointed out, the prevalence of disabilities, including disabilities that are not readily apparent such as psychosocial disabilities, means that some people with disabilities are already being included in peacebuilding programs or peace processes, even if inadvertently. Without an intentional approach to inclusion, however, people with disabilities who are already present in a program, such as those with learning disabilities, may not be enabled to participate to the fullest.

The more damaging consequence of a lack of deliberate inclusion of people with disabilities is that most of them will be excluded. The barriers that exclude them are numerous, including accessibility issues relating to the physical environment (stairs, inaccessible bathrooms, or inaccessible transportation), communication (including failure to provide relevant information in a manner accessible to people with sensory disabilities), and institutional and cultural barriers (laws, policies, and attitudes that discriminate against people with disabilities).[16] Noninclusive programs deny people with disabilities their right to participate and fail to benefit from their expertise, both on conflict-related disability issues and on broader conflict dynamics.

The track record is not much better on formal peace processes: a study of peace agreements from 1990 to 2018 found that only 6.6 percent (118 of 1,789) referenced disability.[17] There

has been no comprehensive study on the participation of people with disabilities during negotiations themselves, but anecdotal evidence suggests that when people with disabilities do participate, it is often those with conflict-acquired disabilities. Harmful attitudes among national or international leaders can keep people with disabilities out of peace processes. "Political figures think this topic too serious for a person with disability to be involved. They think that they should make the peace and we should enjoy it," says Elham Youssefian, who serves as inclusive humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction adviser at the International Disability Alliance.[18]

When people with disabilities participate in negotiations, they may not be fully prepared to advocate for themselves.[19] People with disabilities may also be pigeonholed into speaking only to their disability-related experience or needs and thus denied the opportunity to participate more broadly in peacebuilding. A further risk is that peace negotiations and agreements will perpetuate outdated thinking on disability. By focusing solely on remedying medical issues or the care of people with disabilities, peace agreements can be disempowering even when they have nominally been inclusive.[20]

UNEQUAL EXPERIENCES OF INCLUSION

Some groups of people with disabilities are more excluded than others.[21] Formal peace processes and the broader range of peacebuilding programs have tended to prioritize people with disabilities acquired through conflict, although patterns differ according to conflict dynamics. Some groups, such as women with disabilities and people with intellectual or certain psychosocial disabilities, are uniformly more excluded. These disparate levels of inclusion can undermine unity within the disability community and perpetuate the exclusion of certain groups.

This differential treatment of people who acquired a disability through war, whether as a combatant or a civilian, and people who acquired a disability another way or were born with it, is a common phenomenon across conflict zones. When people with disabilities are included in peacebuilding, those with conflict-acquired disabilities tend to be prioritized. It is important, however, that peacebuilding also include people already living with disabilities and not only those who acquired a disability due to war. Failing to include the former group perpetuates the general exclusion of persons with disabilities and leaves out their perspectives and their lived experiences. Further, the focus on individuals with newly acquired disabilities necessarily obscures the fact that people already living with disabilities are more likely to experience harm during a conflict. This leads in turn to a lack of accountability and justice for crimes specifically targeting people with disabilities.[22]

Likewise, though compensating civilians injured during conflict—through formal reparations programs or medical, housing, or educational benefits—is an important step toward justice and reconciliation, such compensation can lay bare the lack of similar benefits for people who acquired a disability outside of conflict, and hence can cause resentment. People with disabilities acquired through war generally experience less discrimination and have better access to services. In some conflict zones, however, civilians with newly acquired disabilities are suspected by their fellow citizens or the government of being involved in hostilities.[23] This can lead to people with war-acquired disabilities being shunned or choosing to self-isolate.

Combatants who acquire a disability during conflict are another group of people with disabilities whose experiences diverge from those of other groups, although again, experiences

Parliamentary candidate Adel Ramadan walks to his campaign headquarters in Qalioubiya, Egypt, on December 28, 2011. Having had difficulty growing up in Egypt with a disability, he wants rights for all disabled Egyptians. (Photo by Eman Mohamed/AP)

vary between conflict zones. The post-conflict reintegration of ex-combatants with disabilities often focuses on medical or rehabilitation needs at the expense of the need for social or economic reintegration. This neglect can cause ex-combatants to become disaffected and increase the risk that they will return to violence, as has occurred in Mozambique, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.[24] At the same time, when ex-combatants with disabilities receive opportunities or other benefits not afforded to other groups of people with disabilities, this can foster resentment, as occurred in Sierra Leone in the early 2000s.[25]

Differential treatment by disability or disability origin is often harmful, but it can bring about positive change when some groups of people with disabilities advocate for inclusive services or reforms that benefit the broader community. Veterans of official armies—as opposed to nonstate armed groups—can pave the way for broader reforms as lawmakers work to acknowledge their sacrifices. Such was the case when Vietnam veterans with disabilities returned to the United States and played a strong role in advocating for progress in disability rights, including through the Americans with Disabilities Act. In Haiti, people who acquired disabilities because of the 2010 earthquake helped to reduce societal taboos about disability and opened the door for other groups of people with disabilities to demand services.[26]

According to experts interviewed for this report, when people with disabilities are included in peacebuilding, certain physical or sensory disabilities tend to be overrepresented. Several experts used the term "hierarchy of disabilities" to describe this phenomenon, which also occurs outside of peacebuilding. This problem has multiple causes, including more insidious social taboos around intellectual disabilities, psychosocial disabilities, and people with multiple disabilities. This imbalance also occurs because certain disabilities are better understood, with more and better-established tools and practices for promoting accessibility. In addition, it can be a result of some OPDs being more visible and better resourced than others. "If you want to hear from people with intellectual disabilities and psychosocial disabilities, it really takes investment because they may need support to become engaged," says Diane Richler, former chair of the International Disability Alliance and past president of Inclusion International. She notes the

> Most organizations have little understanding of the extent to which their programs are inclusive of people with disabilities and even less understanding of how people with disabilities experience and are impacted by these programs.

benefits of successful inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities: "When systems learn how to include people with significant intellectual disabilities, they will learn how to include everyone."[27]

Within the disability movement, a cross-disability approach is growing, with OPDs increasingly collaborating toward shared goals.[28] It nonetheless remains the case that some groups of people with disabilities are better represented in peacebuilding than others, which means that most programs will fail to benefit from the full range of perspectives of people with disabilities.

Women with disabilities are more vulnerable in conflict than men and are more excluded from peacebuilding.[29] Peace processes and peacebuilding programs now include and even prioritize women and girls as a matter of course. Although women and girls with disabilities have made some gains through the broader women, peace, and security agenda, the agenda has not mainstreamed disability, which is mentioned in few of the National Action Plans for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.[30] This omission—and the broader exclusion of women with disabilities from peacebuilding—reflects a "failure to see women with disabilities as leaders and engaged actors for their own rights and for the rights of all women, who therefore can contribute to peace processes."[31]

Uneven representation of people with disabilities in peacebuilding has consequences. Some groups will be able to advance their interests, whether disability-specific or not, and will have the opportunity to counter stereotypes that underestimate their autonomy and capacity. Other groups will see their interests and perspectives left out of the conversation, and stereotypes about them will be perpetuated through their exclusion. From both a peacebuilding perspective and an equity perspective, it is important to advocate for programs and processes that are inclusive of and meet the needs of different groups of people with disabilities and to make extra efforts to include those groups who are most persistently marginalized.

SCARCE DATA AND WEAK ACCOUNTABILITY

Disability inclusion in peacebuilding is impeded by scarce data. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people with disabilities are rarely at the table in peace processes as negotiators, mediators, or signatories, but there are no comprehensive data on this question. To work toward greater inclusion of people with disabilities in formal peace processes, it is important to address this data gap—to map their inclusion in past processes and begin to systematically track their inclusion in current and future peace processes.

The gap in disability-disaggregated data on peacebuilding programs outside of formal peace processes is larger and arguably more consequential. At any given moment, thousands of peacebuilding programs are underway in dozens of countries. Monitoring data for these programs, when collected, are frequently disaggregated by participants' gender and age, and often by characteristics pertaining to conflict (such as religion, political affiliation, or ethnicity). Data are rarely disaggregated by disability. As a result, most organizations have little understanding of the extent

to which their programs are inclusive of people with disabilities and even less understanding of how people with disabilities experience and are impacted by these programs. There is a growing recognition among private, bilateral, and multilateral funders of the importance of disability inclusion. But if donors and implementers are to be accountable for progress on this front, regularizing the collection of disability-disaggregated data will be an important step.

Poor data on disability pose a problem that extends beyond the field of peacebuilding. In response to the scarcity of data and the unevenness in data collection approaches, the Washington Group on Disability Statistics was formed in 2001. Through the Washington Group, a range of entities, including national statistical organizations, bilateral and multilateral agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and OPDs, worked to develop question sets to consistently identify the prevalence of disability across different contexts. The humanitarian and development communities are increasingly using the Washington Group questions as a tool to identify and respond to the needs of people with disabilities.[32] The Washington Group questions can be applied in peacebuilding to identify the extent to which existing programs are reaching people with disabilities; this information provides organizations with a baseline and allows them to set goals for broader inclusion. The questions are also helpful during the planning phase to gather information on what type of support participants need in order to engage meaningfully. Equally important is disaggregating program monitoring and evaluation data to understand how specific peacebuilding outcomes, such as attitudinal change and improved social cohesion, are or are not realized among participants with disabilities. Some countries have also begun to include the Washington Group questions in their censuses, which can lead to more awareness about the prevalence of disability and support efforts to improve inclusion.

NONINCLUSIVE PEACEBUILDING ORGANIZATIONS

The lack of disability inclusion within peacebuilding organizations and relevant government agencies hampers efforts to make programs inclusive. In the United States and elsewhere, most organizations or governments engaged in peacebuilding have not prioritized hiring people with disabilities at the leadership level, at the working level, at headquarters, or in field offices. [33]

The absence of people with disabilities among core staff members perpetuates damaging stereotypes that underestimate the capacity and knowledge of people with disabilities. In organizations where people with disabilities are not well represented, the workforce will also naturally lag in their knowledge of accessibility and how to eliminate barriers because they will not have opportunities to consider these matters on a daily basis as part of office culture. As a result programs will suffer. "Unless you have disabled people on the ground, you aren't going to know the situation," says humanitarian practitioner Karen Saba, who also points out that organizations would never attempt gender programs without having a quorum of women on the team.[34]

People with disabilities should not be tapped solely for their knowledge about disability and inclusion, but rather should be included in the peacebuilding field more broadly. Beyond questions of staffing and programming, this requires that peacebuilding organizations' events and knowledge products be accessible. At present, this is not consistently the case, and inaccessible websites, written reports, and public events pose another barrier to people with disabilities becoming involved in peacebuilding.

Opportunities

The gaps in disability-inclusive peacebuilding are so significant that addressing them must be a priority of multilateral organizations, governments, and peacebuilding organizations. There are also some unique opportunities at the intersection of disability and peacebuilding that can be integrated into efforts to redress the major gaps. Two of these are the potential for disability rights to catalyze peacebuilding, and the opportunity to make progress in disability rights during post-conflict or transition phases.

DISABILITY AS A CATALYST FOR PEACEBUILDING

Disability rights can be a politically neutral and feasible way to engage across conflict lines even when heightened tensions preclude other forms of engagement.[35] In Bosnia and Herzegovina in the late 1990s, leaders of opposing groups were able to come together and adopt principles for disability inclusion even when relationships between the groups were otherwise fraught.[36] Or consider the assistance on accessibility and disability rights that the United States offered to Vietnam in the late 1990s. According to John Lancaster, who led the work on the US side, at the government-to-government level these efforts "went a long way to creating trust and understanding."[37]

"People with disabilities have a common enemy in ableism," says Rashad Nimr, a conflict adviser contracted to the US Agency for International Development; this shared experience of disability allows people to forge and maintain relationships across conflict divides.[38] Gerard Quinn adds: "There is now extensive evidence of the positive contribution of disability groups to the process of peacebuilding. Persons with disabilities know all too well the supreme importance of peace, moral repair, and rebuilding broken societies. They have shown time and time again how humanity can rise above sectarian divides and begin the process of healing."[39]

In Northern Ireland, for example, disability organizations on opposing sides remained in contact with one another over the course of the Troubles.[40] According to Gerard Quinn, these organizations "were able to bring people together from all communities, even during the height of political violence, and lay the foundation for a sustainable peace process."[41] The work of Inclusion International in Latin America in the 1990s also demonstrated the unifying potential of the disability rights movement. At a time of intense ideological divides across the region, parents of children with disabilities "saw hope in uniting and were willing to set aside politics in the interests of the common challenges of their sons and daughters."[42] Such was the case when members of the group, which incorporated as the Inter-American sub-group of Inclusion International, selected a former Argentinean colonel and a former Sandinista, nominally on opposite sides of the political divide, as their president and vice president.[43]

POST-CONFLICT WINDOW FOR CHANGE

Although people with disabilities are not routinely afforded representation in peace processes or other peacebuilding efforts, there are instances in which peace agreements or constitution-making processes have yielded progress for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the political, economic, social, and cultural realms. As new legal frameworks emerge during post-conflict and transition phases, opportunities to advocate for gains in disability rights should be seized.

A man with a disability is helped onto a bus as families of Islamic State fighters leave al-Hol camp in Syria to return to their homes on June 3, 2019. (Photo by Baderkhan Ahmad/AP)

In South Sudan, advocacy by disability activists and OPDs led to the 2011 constitution including articles protecting the use of sign language and guaranteeing "to persons with special needs participation in society and the enjoyment of rights and freedoms set out in this Constitution, especially access to public utilities, suitable education and employment."[44] The involvement of the disability community in the constitution-making process and the resulting articles on disability represent progress, although adherence to the articles on disability has been weak, particularly in the area of access to employment.[45] People with disabilities were less included in the 2015 and 2018 peace processes than in the earlier constitution-making process, although the 2018 agreement mentions people with disabilities as one of the groups that should be consulted in a future constitution-making process. Beyond South Sudan, other peace agreements have established institutions for the rights of people with disabilities, ensured their right to vote, and established quotas for political participation.[46]

In South Africa, advocacy by the organization Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) during the 1990–94 transitional phase, including its development of a Disability Rights Charter in 1992, led to major achievements for disability rights. DPSA "was intent on ensuring all political organizations were integrating disability into their political programs," and it succeeded in securing the African National Congress's agreement to include people with disabilities in its electoral lists. South Africa's 1996 Constitution also prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities and provides for measures to redress inequalities they have experienced.[47]

Peace processes, constitution making, and political transitions naturally bring an opportunity to revisit the state-society relationship, including the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities. A cautionary note, however, is that peace agreements tend to be disconnected from a country's existing legal architecture or institutions, which can undermine the prospects of implementation for the provisions on disability.[48]

Increases in international technical and financial assistance during the post-conflict phase also present opportunities for improved inclusion of people with disabilities. "You are never as flush with resources as you are right after a peace process is signed," says retired US Ambassador Donald Steinberg. He urges governments, peacebuilding organizations, and OPDs to partner in the post-conflict phase to improve inclusion of people with disabilities and capacity of OPDs.[49]

Recommendations

Peacebuilding organizations, governments, and OPDs must immediately take action to address the lack of inclusion of people with disabilities in peacebuilding. This effort will require commitment, an investment of financial and human resources, and a rethinking of organizational cultures. The following recommendations will help organizations make strides toward the meaningful and long-term engagement of people with disabilities in peacebuilding:

Prioritize, plan, and budget for inclusion. Including people with disabilities in peacebuilding—and positioning them to participate meaningfully—requires consideration at every stage of an initiative. When organizations wait until the last minute to include people with disabilities, they are unlikely to position them to participate meaningfully. Disability inclusion is also unlikely to be successful when it occurs through a general approach to "including vulnerable groups" that does not consider each group's particular needs, experiences, and perspectives. Instead, disability inclusion should be a consideration from the earliest stages of programming. When planning and budgeting for a program, it is essential to ensure that the necessary program funds are available for the inclusion of people with disabilities and for reasonable accommodations to support their participation. At the same time, there may be low- or no-cost steps toward inclusion, such as sending out information in advance of meetings so that persons with disabilities have adequate time to prepare; scheduling meetings in accessible physical or virtual venues; timing meetings in a manner responsive to travel requirements; planning breaks during programs in a way that facilitates the participation of people with disabilities; and using open-source software to embed captions in videos.

Partner with people with disabilities and OPDs at every stage of programming. Long a motto of the disability rights movement, "nothing about us without us" should also apply to peacebuilding. It is critical that peacebuilding programs counter the pattern of including people with disabilities just as beneficiaries and not as full partners. OPDs and other representatives of the disability community must be involved at the earliest stages of a program and be partners in its design, implementation, and monitoring. (Recall that OPDs are organizations staffed and governed by a majority of people with disabilities, not organizations that serve people with disabilities but are not majority staffed or governed by them.) OPDs will have the best knowledge of how to reach people with disabilities and include them in programs, and they can offer a perspective on how people with disabilities experience a particular conflict. People with disabilities can serve as experts, as trainers, and as advisers to a program, and should not be limited to offering expertise just on disability-related issues. International peacebuilding organizations, governments, and domestic NGOs should all commit to partnering with OPDs in peacebuilding, to providing them with the capacity building that they desire, and to developing longer-term and not just project-based partnerships. To support the growth of OPDs, which often cannot access traditional international grants due to the eligibility requirements, it is important to offer flexible funding mechanisms.

Ensure accessibility and eliminate barriers. To achieve the inclusion of people with disabilities, organizations must prioritize accessibility and eliminate barriers. They must become cognizant of the many barriers to inclusion, including communication barriers, environmental barriers, attitudinal barriers, and institutional barriers, and work to eliminate them.[50] Immediate steps

include choosing accessible program locations (considering transportation), communicating about and during a program in multiple formats, and working to change attitudes about disability within peacebuilding organizations and governments. Peace processes and peacebuilding programs that are inclusive of people with disabilities can also contribute to eliminating more persistent barriers, including the attitudinal and institutional barriers present in many countries. The many existing guides on accessibility can be useful resources for the design of peacebuilding programs.

Adopt a twin-track approach. The twin-track approach promotes both the mainstreaming of disability and a focus on disability. The first track works to include people with disabilities in all programs, at every stage. The second track works to ensure that peacebuilding organizations establish disability-focused programs and research; this is in response to the specific needs and experiences of people with disabilities vis-à-vis conflict and peacebuilding and their long-standing exclusion from this arena.

Ensure inclusion of diverse groups of people with disabilities and bring an intersectional lens to programs. Some people with disabilities, including those who acquired their disabilities through conflict, have historically been more included than others. It is important to include people whose disabilities predate conflict in peacebuilding initiatives and to more broadly guard against uneven treatment of different groups according to their disability or its origin. This effort may require consulting or partnering with more than one OPD during a peacebuilding project or partnering with a consortium of organizations to ensure more diverse representation. It also requires an effort to understand and remove the specific barriers faced by different groups. For example, women with disabilities face more pervasive exclusion than men with disabilities, as do LGBT and indigenous people with disabilities. Staff at peacebuilding organizations should be cognizant of this multiple discrimination and be prepared to go the extra mile to ensure that programs are inclusive of all people with disabilities.

Offer options for participation to accommodate persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. If little has been done for disability inclusion in peacebuilding overall, there has been even less progress on the inclusion of people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities (including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and others). Many options can support the participation of these individuals in peacebuilding, such as sharing training materials ahead of time to allow for advance preparation, offering materials in easy-to-understand formats, establishing systems within trainings or workshops that allow participants to signal when they need clarification, including graphics in program materials, and inviting people with disabilities to be accompanied by a support person if they desire. Many peacebuilding programs include a learning, training, or capacity-building component. The Universal Design for Learning approach, in which the original concepts of Universal Design were adapted for educational settings, offers recommendations that are useful for promoting inclusive peacebuilding.[51] These accommodations can also facilitate greater participation of people with low literacy.

Collect and utilize disability-disaggregated data for improved inclusion and accountability. Peacebuilding organizations should collect disability-disaggregated data to enable the inclusion of people with disabilities and to understand their experiences in peacebuilding. This is a useful step in all phases of programming. In a scoping phase, data on the prevalence of disabilities in a community can allow organizations to set a target for proportional representation of people with

disabilities in a program. During a planning and start-up phase, data collection will provide information on what resources or accommodations participants might need to be successful in a program. During monitoring and evaluation, disability-disaggregated data will shed light on whether people with disabilities were able to fully contribute to and benefit from a given program, allowing for tweaks to be made midstream or in future programs. Donors should also require disability-disaggregated data as part of monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. The Washington Group question sets have proven to be useful in humanitarian and development settings, and they can likewise be used in peacebuilding. The Global Action on Disability Network, a coordination mechanism for donors, has endorsed the use of the Washington Group question sets.[52]

Pursue a research agenda and policy conversations on the inclusion of people with disabilities in peacebuilding. A research agenda on disability-inclusive peacebuilding, which could be coordinated among different organizations, can lead to programs that more effectively include people with disabilities. Research is needed on disability inclusion in peacebuilding programs and formal negotiations, as well as on the catalytic role that organizations of persons with disabilities can play in peacebuilding. Peacebuilding organizations and policymakers can then use this research, as well as anecdotal experiences, as the basis to develop policies that provide for the meaningful participation of people with disabilities in peacebuilding and prevent their exclusion.

Promote a culture of inclusion within peacebuilding organizations. Peacebuilding organizations must ensure not only that they include people with disabilities in their programs, but also that they are fully accessible and inclusive within their own walls. They should hire people with disabilities, including in leadership roles, and ensure that all events and publications are accessible and inclusive.

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Peacebuilding programs and formal peace processes frequently fail to include people with disabilities, an exclusion so widespread and enduring that it persists unquestioned in many circles. In the peacebuilding field, where exclusion is understood to be an injustice and a contributing factor to conflict, remedying this is an urgent obligation. It is also an opportunity to elevate and strengthen the unifying role of people with disabilities in situations of conflict. Realizing the vision of disability-inclusive peacebuilding will require commitment, creativity, and hard work. But it is achievable, and successes in the inclusion of women and youth in peacebuilding can offer lessons and opportunities for partnership. The status quo—the widespread exclusion of people with disabilities from peacebuilding—is so unacceptable as to demand immediate collective action.

Notes

1. A disability is here understood as a condition—sensory, mental, emotional, physical, intellectual/learning, or of another type—that interferes with a person's ability to engage in certain activities or tasks. The estimate of 15 percent is from World Health Organization and World Bank, *World Report on Disability* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2011), 29, www.who.int/teams /noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability.

2. See UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Thematic Study on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, on Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies," A/HRC/31/30 (November 30, 2015), https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/647817.

3. The fact that people with disabilities experience disproportionate harm during conflict has been documented in conflict-specific case studies and in general literature. For a general discussion, see Human Rights Watch, "UN: War's Impact on People with Disabilities: Security Council Meeting to Focus on Risks, Needs," December 3, 2018, www.hrw.org/news/2018/12/03/un-wars -impact-people-disabilities. Also see William Pons, "The Hidden Harm: Acquired Disability During Conflict," Center for Civilians in Conflict, August 4, 2017, www.civiliansinconflict.org/blog/hidden-harm-acquired-disability-conflict; and Janet E. Lord, "Persons with Disabilities in International Humanitarian Law: Paternalism, Protectionism or Rights?" in *Disability, Human Rights and the Limits of Humanitarianism*, ed. Michael Gill and Cathy Schlund-Vials (Routledge, 2014), 155–78.

4. This report uses the term "disability inclusion" to mean the act of ensuring that people with disabilities are included in the political, economic, social, and cultural realms, including programs, initiatives, and policies, and that these in turn are informed by a disability perspective. Achieving inclusion through a deliberate approach to removing barriers and improving accessibility in turn facilitates the full and active participation of people with disabilities.

5. Mbah Fon Dieudonne, national coordinator of Think Big Association, author interview (virtual), April 21, 2021.

6. Conciliation Resources, "Untapped Peacebuilders: Including Persons with Disabilities in Building Peace," March 2021, https://rc-services -assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Untapped_peacebuilders_including_persons_with_disabilities_in_building_peace.pdf.

7. The concept of intersectionality was coined in 1989 by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw. It is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage."

8. For a discussion of displaced persons with disabilities, including women and children, see Women's Refugee Commission, "Disabilities among Refugees and Conflict-Affected Populations," June 2008, www.womensrefugeecommission.org/research -resources/disabilities-among-refugees-and-conflict-affected-populations.

9. John Lancaster, member of United States Institute of Peace Board of Directors, author interview (virtual), April 27, 2021.

10. For a brief summary of disability in the Sustainable Development Goals, see United Nations, "Disability-Inclusive Sustainable Development Goals," www.un.org/disabilities/documents/sdgs/disability_inclusive_sdgs.pdf.

11. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, "SDG-CDPD Resource Package," www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disability/Pages/SDG -CRPD-Resource.aspx.

12. UN Security Council, Resolution 2475 (2019), S/RES/2475 (2019), 2 (June 20, 2019), https://undocs.org/s/res/2475(2019).

13. United States Institute of Peace (USIP) conference "Disability-Inclusive Peacebuilding: Gaps, Opportunities, and Recommendations," June 16, 2021, www.usip.org/events/disability-inclusive-peacebuilding.

14. UN Human Rights Council, "Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," A/HRC/46/27 (January 19, 2021), https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/46/27.

15. It is common practice for peacebuilding organizations both to ensure representation of women and youth in their programs and to design targeted programs for these groups. Examples include training women or youth to serve as community mediators, preparing them to advocate nationally or internationally for conflict-sensitive policies, and holding dialogues with them to understand their perspectives on drivers of conflict and ensure that these are integrated into broader peacebuilding efforts.

16. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's "Guidelines" (pp. 11–16) and Conciliation Resources' "Untapped Peacebuilders" (pp. 12–13) offer useful guides on reducing barriers and putting in place enablers for the inclusion and participation of people with disabilities.

17. Sean Molloy, "Peace Agreements and Persons with Disabilities," Political Settlements Research Program, 2019, 27, www.political-settlements.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Peace-Agreements-Disability-Report-DIGITAL-1.pdf.

18. Elham Youssefian, inclusive humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction adviser at the International Disability Alliance, author interview (virtual), May 12, 2021.

19. World Institute on Disability, "The Involvement of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Efforts: Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) as Part of the Solution in the Post-Conflict Arena," February 2015, www.usip.org/sites /default/files/WID-Disability-Inclusive-Peacebuilding-Process.pdf.

20. Molloy, "Peace Agreements and Persons with Disabilities," 28–29.

21. For a discussion of the exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, see Katrina Scior et al., "Intellectual Disability Stigma and Initiatives to Challenge It and Promote Inclusion around the Globe," *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities* 17, no. 2 (2020): 165–75.

22. See William Pons, "An Argument for the Prosecution of Crimes against Persons with Disabilities," *Intercross* (blog), International Committee of the Red Cross, May 11, 2017, https://intercrossblog.icrc.org/blog/an-argument-for-the-prosecution-of-crimes-against-persons-with-disabilities.

23. Dieudonne, author interview; and Caroline Atim, founder and executive director of South Sudan Women with Disabilities Network, author interview (virtual), May 6, 2021.

24. Dieudonne, author interview; and Atim, author interview.

25. Pearl Praise Gottschalk, "How Are We in This World Now? Examining the Experiences of Persons Disabled by War in the Peace Process in Sierra Leone" (master's thesis, University of Victoria, 2007), 49–50.

26. Valerie Karr, CEO of Inclusive Development Partners, author interview (virtual), April 13, 2021.

27. Diane Richler, former chair of International Disability Alliance and past president of Inclusion International, author interview (virtual), July 16, 2021.

28. Susan Sygall, CEO of Mobility International USA, author interview (virtual), April 28, 2021.

29. For a discussion of the increased risks faced by women and girls, see Brigitte Rohwerder, "Women and Girls with Disabilities in Conflict and Crises," Institute of Development Studies, 2017, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/032-Women%20and%20girls%20with%20disabilities%20in%20crisis%20and%20conflict.pdf.

30. Stephanie Ortoleva, "Who's Missing? Women with Disabilities in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 National Action Plans," *ILSA Journal of International and Comparative Law* 18, no. 2 (2012): 396–412.

31. Ortoleva, "Who's Missing?," 400.

32. Washington Group on Disability Statistics, "Learning from the Use of the Washington Group Questions in Development and Humanitarian Programs," *WG* (blog), August 22, 2019, www.washingtongroup-disability.com/wg-blog/learning-from-the-use-of-the-washington-group-questions-in-development-and-humanitarian-programmes-117.

33. Karen Saba, humanitarian practitioner, author interview (virtual), April 30, 2021.

34. Saba, author interview.

35. World Institute on Disability, "Involvement of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Efforts."

36. Sygall, author interview.

37. Lancaster, author interview.

38. Rashad Nimr, conflict adviser, US Agency for International Development, author interview (virtual), May 6, 2021.

39. Quinn made this point at the USIP conference "Disability-Inclusive Peacebuilding: Gaps, Opportunities, and Recommendations."

40. Katherine Guernsey, agency disability rights coordinator, US Agency for International Development, author interview (virtual), May 19, 2021.

41. Quinn, USIP conference "Disability-Inclusive Peacebuilding: Gaps, Opportunities, and Recommendations."

42. Diane Richler, "Emerging from Conflict, Contributing to Building Peace: Lessons from Inclusion International," Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2021 (unpublished).

43. Richler, "Emerging from Conflict, Contributing to Building Peace."

44. See Article 6 and Article 30 of the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan, 2011, www.refworld.org/pdfid/5d3034b97.pdf.

45. Atim, author interview.

46. Molloy, "Peace Agreements and Persons with Disabilities."

47. Colleen Howell, Schuaib Chalklen, and Thomas Alberts, "A History of the Disability Rights Movement in South Africa," in *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, ed. Brian Watermeyer et al. (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2006), 62.

48. Janet Lord, adviser to UN special rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, author interview (virtual), April 21, 2021.

49. Donald Steinberg, US ambassador (ret.), author interview (virtual), April 16, 2021.

50. For a discussion of barriers and enablers in peacebuilding programs, see Conciliation Resources, "Untapped Peacebuilders," 12–13.

51. Universal Design is a set of principles on the "design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability." Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, "What is Universal Design," http://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/. For resources on Universal Design for Learning, see UDL Guidelines, "The UDL Guidelines," https://udlguidelines.cast.org.

52. Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network, "GLAD Network Joint Statement on Data Disaggregated by Disability" (statement issued at World Data Forum, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, October 22–24, 2018), https://gladnetwork.net/search/resources/glad-network-joint-statement-data-disaggregated-disability-world-data-forum-dubai.

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