



**CONCILIATION  
RESOURCES**

# **UNTAPPED PEACEBUILDERS: INCLUDING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN BUILDING PEACE**

**Report**

# UNTAPPED PEACEBUILDERS: INCLUDING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN BUILDING PEACE

MARCH 2021

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## About the Peace Research Partnership

Saferworld, Conciliation Resources and International Alert are collaborating on a four-year research programme, the Peace Research Partnership, which generates evidence and lessons for policymakers and practitioners on how to support peaceful, inclusive change in conflict-affected areas.



Funded by UK aid from the UK government, the research focuses on economic development, peace processes, institutions and gender drivers of conflict. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

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Cover photo: The deaf student community raises one hand and covers their ears with the other, as a symbol of "Deaf Power", during a protest organised by the deaf and hard-of-hearing students community on March 11, 2021 in Medellin, Colombia. (Photo by Fredy Builes/Getty Images)

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# INTRODUCTION

**Inclusive peace, or the idea that all stakeholders in a conflict-affected society should have a meaningful role in shaping peace, is receiving widespread global recognition.<sup>1</sup> There are currently around one billion women and girls, men and boys, and sexual and gender minorities with disabilities, affected by a range of sensory, physical, psychosocial and/or intellectual impairments. This number is rapidly increasing due to global population aging, increased incidence of chronic diseases and injuries caused by environmental factors such as climate change, natural disasters and conflict.<sup>2</sup>**

This number represents around 15% of the global population, making persons with disabilities the largest minority group in the world.<sup>3</sup> There is a clear link between poverty and disability with 800 million persons with disabilities living in developing countries.<sup>4</sup> More than half of all persons with disabilities live in countries affected by conflict and natural disasters.<sup>5</sup>

Despite policy and normative frameworks relating to the rights, participation and protection of persons with disabilities in development, humanitarian and conflict settings, huge physical, communication, institutional and attitudinal barriers remain to their practical implementation. There is a particular absence of focus on the roles and importance of persons with disabilities in peace and security efforts, including peace processes, and a parallel gap in practical implementation.

Evidence demonstrates positive returns when persons with disabilities are included in development and humanitarian decision-making.<sup>6</sup> Yet research, policy and practice has mostly focused on the vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities – as victims of discrimination, marginalisation, violence and abuse – as opposed to their skills and potential as peacebuilders.<sup>7</sup> As a result, very little attention has been paid to the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in peacebuilding processes, the factors and dynamics that contribute to their inclusion or exclusion, the challenges of ensuring effective representation, and the most successful mechanisms for inclusion.

There is limited evidence of persons with disabilities or of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) being involved in or consulted on decision-making related to peacebuilding processes.<sup>8</sup> Peacebuilders have also failed to engage substantially with the challenges

for persons with disabilities who may experience multiple interacting forms of discrimination and exclusion depending on any number of interconnected identity factors. This is particularly the case for women and girls with disabilities in conflict situations because of their low societal status, negative stereotyping and harmful attitudes towards them.<sup>9</sup>

Conciliation Resources advocates for early inclusion – the meaningful participation of diverse identity groups at all levels of peace processes – as fundamental to sustaining peace.<sup>10</sup> Our approach to gender is intersectional, meaning we take into account the multiple ways that systems of power – such as ethnicity, age, class, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, indigeneity and geographic location – interact with gender to shape how different actors engage with conflict and peacebuilding. We work alongside local partners to ensure that the different needs of diverse women, men, and sexual and gender minorities are taken into account for more sustainable peace outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

Our gender-sensitive approach challenges established patterns of power and exclusion and works to ensure people impacted by conflict meaningfully participate in transformative change.<sup>12</sup> But we do not yet incorporate a disability-inclusive approach to our practice. We acknowledge the significant work done by peacebuilders with disabilities who are changing practices in the sector; this report is an important first step in our understanding of how to shift towards more inclusive and accessible peacebuilding.

This paper examines how to strengthen inclusion and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities within peacebuilding practice and identifies some of the key barriers and potential enablers that can overcome these challenges. It is aimed at national and international policymakers, mediation and peace process advisers, and practitioners working in conflict-affected contexts.

## Methodology

This paper builds on a broad review of academic literature, particularly the work of our colleagues at International Alert, and a study of the policy and normative frameworks.<sup>13</sup> It draws on practice-based insights from interviews with three experienced peace practitioners with disabilities in the conflict settings of Abkhazia, South Caucasus; Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in the Philippines; and Mirpur in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.<sup>14</sup> The interviewees are all involved in advocacy for social change and they provided rich information on the links between disability inclusion and peacebuilding. All participants were informed of the purpose of the research and consent was sought and granted regarding their identification and attribution of their views.

# SUMMARY OF LESSONS

## 1. Support for the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities benefits the quality and sustainability of peace.

Persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by conflict and it is important that they are able to equally and meaningfully participate in peacebuilding, including implementation and monitoring processes. This requires recognition of persons with disabilities' diverse capacities.

## 2. An intersectional, gender-sensitive conflict analysis is required for disability-inclusive peacebuilding interventions.

Persons with disabilities experience multiple forms of exclusion, stigma and discrimination, which are exacerbated by conflict. An intersectional analysis can help design inclusive processes and targeted peace interventions.

## 3. Peacebuilders should partner with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to sustain and diversify movement building.<sup>15</sup>

Diversify networks by connecting peacebuilding organisations with OPDs and engage in reciprocal learning and collective capacity strengthening within and across the peacebuilding sector. Disability inclusion requires flexible and sustained core funding to OPDs.

## 4. Identify and address physical, communication, institutional and attitudinal barriers to inclusion.

Disability inclusion in conflict-affected contexts requires peacebuilders to make reasonable accommodation to ensure the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities.<sup>16</sup> In situations of conflict this will require persons with disabilities have unimpeded access to essential health and protection services as well as comprehensive psychosocial support.

## 5. Greater global policy coherence can support disability inclusion at local levels.

Normative frameworks, particularly the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), need to be linked to concrete, targeted and localised outcomes.

### BOX 1: EVOLVING CONCEPTS FOR DISABILITY

There is no one definition or criterion for disability and definitions are context specific, contested and evolving. Article 2 of the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) states that "persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others".<sup>17</sup> Over time, disability has shifted from a **charitable** model (an approach based on pity not rights) and a **medical** one (that characterised disabilities by impairments or deficits in bodily functions and medical needs), to a **social** model (where the vulnerabilities faced by all persons with disabilities are not the fault of the person; rather, they are socially constructed and the result of discrimination, requiring political and societal responses).<sup>18</sup>

The social model has evolved into the **rights-based** model (the normative basis for responding to disabilities is grounded in principles of non-discrimination, equality, human diversity, individual autonomy, meaningful participation and empowerment). The rights-based model recognises the interplay between a person's capabilities (limitations in functioning) and barriers (physical, communication, institutional and attitudinal) that may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The progressive shift in how disabilities are framed was achieved through campaigning by persons with disabilities.<sup>19</sup>

# THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION

Conflict is a leading cause of disability and persons with disabilities are among the most marginalised and at-risk group in any crisis- or conflict-affected community. An estimated 9.7 million persons with disabilities are forcibly displaced due to conflict and persecution and they disproportionately experience human rights violations and conflict-related violence.<sup>20</sup> The varied experiences of persons with disabilities in conflict depend on their impairment but also on other intersecting aspects of identity such as age, gender, religion, ethnicity, indigeneity, geographic location and socio-economic status. Experiencing multiple forms of discrimination impacts directly and indirectly on their meaningful participation in peace processes.<sup>21</sup>

Disability and gender are both social constructs; cultural, religious and moral norms, and superstitions and myths about disabilities perpetuate harmful ideas about the skills, intelligence, maturity, potential, and importance of persons with disabilities. These attitudinal barriers are related to persons with disabilities' perceived 'failure' to live up to conventional gendered roles such as male mobility, virility or economic autonomy, or as supportive and capable wives and mothers.<sup>22</sup> Persons with disabilities are often subjected to violence linked to their perceived failure to live up to conventional norms of masculinity and femininity.

These views perpetuate 'disablism': discriminatory, oppressive or abusive behaviour arising from the belief that persons with disabilities are inferior to others.<sup>23</sup> Disablism occurs when persons with disabilities are not seen as cognitively able to provide useful insights on conflict resolution or that a physical impairment prevents their participation in peacebuilding. Self-exclusion can also occur when persons with disabilities internalise stigmas, due to fear of encountering negative attitudes or experiencing physical violence, including gender-based violence (GBV). Discriminatory attitudes are made and perpetuated in all aspects of society, but importantly in the family, meaning that support to children with disabilities is an important entry point for changing attitudes.

An intersectional gender-sensitive conflict analysis can reveal that women, children and older persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to violence. An estimated 46% of people aged 60 years and over are persons with disabilities.<sup>24</sup> One in every five women is likely to experience disability in her life, while one in

every ten children has a disability.<sup>25</sup> Women and girls with disabilities experience higher rates of gender-based and other forms of violence, which can contribute to (self-) exclusion, especially in conflict-affected contexts.<sup>26</sup> Numerous other issues disproportionately affect women with disabilities, including health, education, employment, violence, marriage, housing and political participation, all of which are exacerbated by war and observed globally.<sup>27</sup> Children with disabilities are at particular risk of sexual exploitation and GBV.<sup>28</sup> Persons with multiple disabilities, persons who are blind or partially sighted, deaf and hard of hearing persons, persons with deafblindness, and persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, find it particularly difficult to access information in situations of conflict – making it more difficult to access safety and protection and to communicate their needs and interests.

Conflict can force persons with disabilities to be separated from their support persons, and leaving fast or being evacuated without assistive technologies or devices that enable mobility and communication can result in increased vulnerability to violence. Relocation also results in the breakdown of supportive community and family networks and relationships that they and their carers may previously have relied on.<sup>29</sup>

It is notable that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the second leading cause of disability in post-conflict countries, but mental health, particularly psychosocial initiatives, are generally not tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities or adequately resourced in these contexts.<sup>30</sup> In line with the CRPD, persons with disabilities are calling for comprehensive, targeted, non-medical community and peer-led psychosocial support.<sup>31</sup>

The increased incidence of war-related disabilities, especially multiple disabilities, are associated with people who served in the military or were members of armed groups.<sup>32</sup> If disabilities were acquired as a result of participating in combat, public perception and mainstream narratives of war can influence how veterans with disabilities are perceived, ranging from outcast to hero. Male veterans with disabilities commonly experience economic exclusion, stigma, and demasculinisation anxieties.<sup>33</sup> This is psychologically damaging to veterans, making it difficult to reintegrate into mainstream society.

Additionally, COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting persons with disabilities, who often have underlying health conditions, are living in institutions and are more likely to be poor, making them more susceptible to serious illness or death if they contract COVID-19.<sup>34</sup> They are at greater risk of discrimination in accessing healthcare and life-saving procedures during the pandemic and are particularly disadvantaged by the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19.<sup>35</sup>

These risks are further exacerbated in conflict contexts where the health system is less functional or absent. Older persons, women and girls with disabilities in conflict contexts - particularly those with multiple disabilities - are even more at risk during COVID-19, as their social isolation, exclusion and dependency increase the extent of abuse they are subjected to and limit the actions they can take.<sup>36</sup> Without a disability-informed approach to COVID-19 recovery, persons with disabilities are at increased risk of being further left behind and experiencing additional forms of violence.

## BOX 2: PRACTITIONER INSIGHTS



Photo: Muhammad Aftab Qamar

**Professor Muhammad Ilyas Ayoub is the head of the AKAB School for the Blind and founder of the Azad Kashmir Association for the Blind, an NGO which runs the school. He works with and advocates for children and young people who are blind or have low vision in Mirpur, Pakistan-administered Kashmir. He is visually impaired.**

In Pakistan-administered Kashmir inclusive education is embryonic: unless families have the finances to support their children themselves, they cannot attend a mainstream school as the necessary specialist teachers and equipment are not available. Professor Ayoub notes the negative mental impact of exclusion and isolation on persons with disabilities, citing depression and a higher risk of suicide. He explains that family members fear for the welfare of girls in particular, and restrict their school attendance and engagement with the wider community for their protection. The ratio of attendance

at the school for blind and visually impaired children is 40% girls to 60% boys. The double discrimination experienced by girls with disabilities means they do not build relationships in the community, or learn how to build confidence and integrate; likewise, the community does not benefit from their skills and experiences.

In 2014 a committee was set up to develop a quota system for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in government, but as yet there has been little impact. Without political representation, it is unlikely persons with disabilities will be included in any formal peace processes relating to the Kashmiri conflict. Professor Ayoub explains that he cannot even vote without family assistance, as voting ballots are not available in an accessible format and he cannot physically get to the polling station alone. He sees networks and movement building as crucial, establishing organisations for persons with disabilities and strengthening their advocacy to create momentum for the integration of their needs and experiences.

He is also hopeful that, with better use of technology to access information and communicate with others, targeted and sustained funding for OPDs, and removal of negative bias, more persons with disabilities will be included in peacebuilding and decision-making that affects their communities. With support he has participated in events such as peace walks, rallies and seminars. For persons with disabilities, says Professor Ayoub, inclusion is crucial to their wellbeing: "If society accepts us, gives us jobs in the mainstream, then our inclusion can be more emphatic - we'll feel comfortable and confident."

## NORMATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Global frameworks on the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly the CRPD, promote their inclusion as equal and active participants in society and recognise their equal or greater need for protection in times of conflict and natural disaster. The frameworks advocate for targeted measures that meet the specific requirements of people with different impairments. To address internalised oppression and prejudice, they promote the support and empowerment of persons with disabilities, alongside efforts to influence dominant discriminatory attitudes, policies and practices.

Articles 11 and 32 of the CRPD place obligations on peacebuilders to implement the CRPD in conflict-affected contexts by making sure decisions are accessible to and inclusive of persons with disabilities<sup>37</sup>; Articles 6 and 7 refer to the inclusion of women or young persons with disabilities. Article 11 of the CRPD highlights the need for the protection of persons with disabilities during armed conflict, and while Article 29 does not directly refer to situations of conflict, it states their right to “effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others”.<sup>38</sup> The International Disability Alliance (a coalition of global and regional organisations of persons with disabilities) notes also the relevance of CRPD Article 4.3 (related to consultation in decision-making processes), but emphasises that the development of guidelines and standards has focused on humanitarian contexts.<sup>39</sup>

UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2475 (2019) on Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict recognises the critical contributions of persons with disabilities to conflict prevention and calls for their meaningful participation and representation in peacebuilding.<sup>40</sup> The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also makes the link between persons with disabilities, participation, and the promotion of just, peaceful and inclusive societies in Goal 16, which requires monitoring of levels of participation of persons with disabilities in public institutions and their perceptions of the inclusiveness and responsiveness of decision-making.<sup>41</sup>

These frameworks imply the need to integrate disability-inclusive standards and principles in all stages of peacebuilding policy and programming. Yet persons with disabilities continue to be excluded from planning, delivering, accessing and monitoring of development and humanitarian responses.<sup>42</sup> Implementation remains limited due to the lack of accountability mechanisms such as monitoring and investment targets. In working for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in peace processes, a challenge is to avoid repeating this scenario.

Many international legal frameworks need to better integrate the obligations set out in the CRPD. For example, UNSCR 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), which reaffirms the importance of women’s equal and full participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, does not mention women with disabilities.<sup>43</sup> Subsequent WPS resolutions reference women with disabilities only in relation to the impact of armed conflict.<sup>44</sup> UNSCR 2250 (2016) on Youth, Peace and Security calls on states to comply with their CRPD obligations but does not elaborate further.

# WHY INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES MATTERS TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE

Addressing inequalities and exclusion and making institutions more inclusive are key to preventing violent conflict.<sup>45</sup> Despite ongoing resistance, and the fact that inclusion means different things to different people, inclusivity is increasingly used in international peacebuilding interventions as a normative and practice standard. The CRPD is clear that all persons with disabilities – women, men and sexual and gender minorities – have a right to meaningfully participate in all aspects of society.<sup>46</sup>

Conciliation Resources recognises that initial peace efforts set the course for subsequent phases, creating path dependencies for inclusion that can be difficult to change.<sup>47</sup> As a result, we define peace processes broadly, and creatively look for early entry points for inclusion.<sup>48</sup> Strategies for inclusion in peace processes involve direct representation at the negotiating table, observer status, consultations, inclusive commissions, problem-solving workshops, public decision-making and mass action.<sup>49</sup> These modalities often occur simultaneously, signalling that disability inclusion can take place in many different ways and sequences of these. While inclusion can be embedded in formal peace negotiations, it will more commonly occur in parallel consultations to feed in persons with disabilities' specific needs, concerns and interests into the peace process.

Beyond advocating for the meaningful participation of persons with disability, genuinely inclusive peacebuilding has persons with disabilities as a central voice and changemakers in all aspects of peacebuilding similarly to any member of a conflict-affected society. Persons with disabilities, particularly people who have an acquired disability as a result of conflict, provide critical insights to the nature of peace and the changes that are necessary to transform broader exclusion and discrimination which are so often drivers of conflict. But peaceful, inclusive change does not just happen by adding diverse voices to elite peace negotiations; efforts must occur across multiple levels of society.<sup>50</sup> This includes support for inclusion in civil activism, preparatory talks, negotiations of ceasefires and peace agreements, transitional justice, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes and security sector reform.

Disability inclusion requires challenging and transforming harmful social and gender norms and strengthening social cohesion and respect for human diversity. Removing the barriers experienced by persons with disabilities needs long-term transformative change processes, made more complex by previous conflict or ongoing violence. Engaging with families and religious institutions is key, as is supporting the visibility of persons with disabilities in media and education curricula.

## THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE PEACEBUILDING

To support disability inclusion, those involved in shaping peace processes need to consider who is participating (and who is excluded), how do different mechanisms support inclusion, and what should be the anticipated outcomes – such as recognition of and respect for human diversity, social cohesion and violence prevention.<sup>51</sup> Inclusion should be elevated, and this can be done by conducting participatory gender-sensitive conflict analysis with persons with disabilities to map the root causes of their exclusion, stigma and systematic discrimination. This should involve a needs assessment to identify barriers and enablers to inclusion, and entry points and pathways for peaceful change. This information can also help OPDs find disability-friendly pro-peace groups to engage with.<sup>52</sup>

Peacebuilders may benefit from training in disability awareness by OPDs to ensure persons with disabilities and OPDs are involved in all stages of programming.

In order to develop and measure targeted interventions it is important to systematically review and analyse access to programmes by persons with disabilities. Monitoring should use disability-inclusive indicators disaggregated by sex, age and disability type, and disability inclusion should be a topic assessed in an evaluation process. All reporting should be shared in accessible formats and learning should be used to adjust programming.

OPDs require consistent support and accompaniment to help persons with disabilities prepare to meaningfully engage with power-holders and conflict parties in dialogue and negotiation. Networking and movement building is also critical in peacebuilding and it is important to elevate women's roles and leadership within OPDs, building on evidence that greater women's participation is more likely to achieve peaceful aims and resist future violence.<sup>53</sup>

Norhanie Taha Mamasabulod in Layog's Community Safety Working Group, talks with a street vendor with disabilities about local security issues. © Paul Adolfo



### BOX 3: PRACTITIONER INSIGHTS:

**Norhanie Mamasabulod Taha is a member of the Community Safety Working Group for Barangay Long in the Philippines and leads the Women's Affairs committee for her chapter of the NGO United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD). She is also Chairperson for the Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office, Municipality of Pagalungan, Maguindanao and lives with restricted mobility following a childhood accident.**

Similar to many contexts, in the Philippines disability discrimination is entrenched and reinforced through superstition and misconceptions. Stigma can keep persons with disabilities at home and out of leadership positions. Fear of negative attitudes initially prevented Norhanie engaging with her community, and she explains that some people saw her as 'cursed': "When we don't understand the value or importance of someone or something, it's easy to dismiss it [or them]". Norhanie became involved in community peacebuilding after attending a UNYPAD meeting. Being invited to the UNYPAD gathering was a catalyst that helped Norhanie address her fears; she realised the importance of including persons with disabilities in conflict management processes, and she also recognised she had a lot to contribute. She now works with a Community Safety Working Group following training from Conciliation Resources, and is the Women's Affairs Committee head of the local UNYPAD chapter, as well as the focal person for persons with disabilities in her municipality.

Her innovative work supporting women peacebuilders and linking excluded indigenous and religious communities to security sector reform across Mindanao has been made possible by her own experiences when faced with inaccessible venues with stairs, a lack of understanding of her needs, and fear of discrimination and other forms of violence. Norhanie's visible participation in peacebuilding and her leadership roles have shifted attitudes in her community – there is more acceptance of her needs and they have increased their efforts to make the physical environment more accessible. She believes that including persons with disabilities in peace processes is a strategy to address harmful norms and discriminatory attitudes.

# MAIN BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO DISABILITY INCLUSION IN PEACE PROCESSES

The four main barriers to disability inclusion are physical, communication, institutional and attitudinal. These are amplified by conflict and compounded by intersecting forms of discrimination based on impairment type, age, gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity and location. This section summarises the main barriers and suggests some corresponding practical enablers for peacebuilders.

One of the most common reasons given for not including persons with disabilities is the anticipated financial cost. Yet peacebuilding and development research shows that exclusion also has high costs, often causing or exacerbating conflict. The costs of exclusion have been identified by the International Labour Organisation as significant, with national economies losing 3-7% of GDP as a result of persons with disabilities not having access to employment.<sup>54</sup> This affects the economic wellbeing of households of persons with disabilities who must bear extra costs of treatment and travel, and lost income of persons with disabilities and their carers, often women and girls, who cannot access paid work.<sup>55</sup>

The benefits of disability inclusion are far more significant. When persons with disabilities can access education, livelihoods and employment, the individual, their family and broader society benefits. These opportunities have positive flow-on effects throughout the economy. Organisations could review their current spending to ensure budgets resource inclusion rather than programmes and processes that exclude, discriminate and create inaccessibility. Disability funding in the peacebuilding sector requires scrutiny, flexibility and adaptation at early planning and design stages of any intervention to ensure comprehensive accessibility.<sup>56</sup> Funding to remove barriers and resource inclusion is also critical for trust building and relationships between OPDs and donors.

Another key issue remains the lack of rigorous and comparable data, combined with lack of evidence on what works, which can impede understanding and action on disability inclusion. Disaggregation of data on disability status and by age, gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as other factors like ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographic location and religion, will enable targeted peacebuilding interventions. The Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS) is a helpful tool for disaggregated data collection and can be used to recognise basic actions that have been found to restrict participation.<sup>57</sup> It is also necessary to conduct a barrier analysis for each context and consult persons with disabilities on what would make participation accessible. This includes reviewing and revising legislation and policies to ensure non-discrimination on the basis of disability and that persons with disabilities' diverse needs are addressed.

**TABLE 1: PRACTICAL ENABLERS SUPPORTING DISABILITY INCLUSION IN PEACEBUILDING**

MAIN BARRIERS	PRACTICAL ENABLERS
<p><b>Physical:</b> These include tangible barriers to participation such as transportation (inaccessible vehicles) and infrastructure (stairs, bad roads, inaccessible venues).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hire (or build) accessible venues (ramps, good lighting and acoustics) that use universal design principles to ensure accessibility.</li> <li>• Provide support for safe or accompanied travel, to encourage the inclusion of girls, women and older persons with disabilities.</li> <li>• Choose safe locations, away from insecure or conflict-prone places.</li> <li>• Choose appropriate meeting times to better enable girls and women with disabilities to join, especially avoiding night-time travel.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communication:</b> Barriers that occur when written and/or spoken information is not available in accessible formats.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information in Braille, sign language, easy read and/or large print as required, or use literacy aids.</li> <li>• Provide assistive devices such as low vision devices and mobility aids and ensure reliable access to internet and power sources (e.g. electricity, a generator, solar panels) so devices can be used.</li> <li>• Use alternative text for images, photos and illustrations in documents or social media so that images are described for persons with blindness and deafblindness.</li> <li>• Ensure information is shared ahead of time and OPDs to assist with disseminating information so that more people can join peacebuilding processes and activities.</li> <li>• Support community-based information exchanges using radio or regular community or religious gatherings where limited technology, illiteracy and/or poverty prevent the above options.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Institutional:</b> Largely invisible, institutional barriers to disability inclusion include laws, policies, strategies or practices that discriminate against persons with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen political will for the development of inclusive policies and legislation by building awareness of and recognition of rights by elected leaders and decision-makers within a peace process.</li> <li>• Allocate resources within peacebuilding budgets to ensure active and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities.</li> <li>• Resource a focal point (preferably a person with disabilities) to identify and connect with persons with disabilities.</li> <li>• Support participation of OPDs in reviewing and better connecting global frameworks to local peacebuilding action.</li> <li>• And if a peace process progresses: ensure new laws, constitutions and policies are developed and/or amended in consultation with OPDs.</li> <li>• Develop disability inclusion strategies to ensure institutional systems, practices and programs include and benefit persons with disabilities.</li> <li>• Collate and analyse accurate disaggregated data by disability status.</li> <li>• Consult OPDs in identifying solutions for inclusive and accessible financial and banking services.</li> <li>• Ensure new electoral systems have accessible information, ballots and venues to maximise choice, privacy and preference to vote independently.</li> <li>• Provide equal access to social protection, health and education.</li> <li>• Raise awareness and educate persons with disabilities and their families on how to use legal and policy frameworks to protect them against discrimination.</li> </ul>

**Attitudinal:** Invisible barriers such as behaviours, perceptions and assumptions held by individuals and communities that discriminate against persons with disabilities.

Attitudinal changes are long-term and incremental.

- Support families of children with disabilities to remove stigma and stereotypes and increase their visibility.
- Prepare leaders with disabilities, particularly women, to participate in decision-making and to increase their visibility and influence.
- Ensure stakeholders and advisers in peace processes undertake disability awareness and rights training.
- Provide persons with disabilities and their families with training about their rights and how they can engage in the peace process.
- Promote positive participation and images of persons with disabilities in public media and campaigns relating to peacebuilding.
- Represent persons with disabilities as part of the wider community when promoting peacebuilding, including in images and photos.
- Encourage use of inclusive language and discredit negative myths and stereotypes.
- Provide targeted mentoring and support to build confidence and counteract fear of exclusion, especially to youth with disabilities.

#### BOX 4: PRACTITIONER INSIGHTS

**Alkhas Tkhashev is a civil activist in Abkhazia, and an advocate for persons with disabilities. He is chair of the Association for People with Spinal Disabilities, and has been a wheelchair user since being injured in the Georgian-Abkhaz war in the early 1990s.**

Alkhas' organisation educates people about inclusion and the needs of persons with disabilities. Where veterans with disabilities are seen positively, in the public domain and in political life, the respect they command helps improve attitudes towards persons with disabilities more generally. He observes: "The situation is changing: people used to try to hide disability, and hide family members with disabilities. Now that is less often the case and people seek help and advice". He recognises that his visible roles help others overcome their inhibitions and shifts negative stereotypes of persons with disabilities. He notes that the experiences of gender and disability intersect: "It is easier for a young man with cerebral palsy to have a family and job than a [similar] young woman". Compounded discrimination can discourage women and men with disabilities from participating in public life.

Alkhas believes persons with disabilities have unique experiences and therefore must participate in peace processes and rebuilding society. In Abkhazia it is easier for disabled veterans to be included than other persons with disabilities. Following the war, politicians needed disabled (primarily male) veterans on-side because they were highly revered for their part in the fight for independence and held political sway, though this influence has since faded and treatment of disabled veterans now varies.

Although accessibility remains a serious problem in Abkhazia, the authorities now consult Alkhas' organisation when planning new building projects. Alkhas has seen physically inaccessible environments being adapted with ramps, and meeting rooms on ground floors; attitudinal barriers have softened, enabling more regular participation of persons with disability. Alkhas observed how the pandemic has increased public awareness of problems of home schooling, which has helped move forward debates around integrative learning and other ways to decrease the isolation of children and adults with disabilities.



Photo: AIS archive

# LESSONS FOR PEACEBUILDING POLICY AND PRACTICE

## 1. Support for the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities benefits the quality and sustainability of peace.

Visible and meaningful participation by persons with disabilities in all formal and informal peacebuilding and peace processes at all levels of society is key. Inclusion can challenge and provide a concrete counterbalance to negative stereotypes and family and community stigma.

Despite the very substantial risks and their heightened barriers to meaningful participation – or perhaps because of them – persons with disabilities in situations of conflict are excellent problem solvers, often identifying creative and adaptive measures to challenges that also benefit wider society.<sup>58</sup> Incorporating persons with disabilities at all stages of peace processes is valuable to promote the equal engagement of all members of society in sustained peace, and also to ensure their specific needs, interests and experiences are reflected in any peace agreement. It is also important that persons with disabilities design and lead any implementation and monitoring process that specifically affects them.

## 2. An intersectional, gender-sensitive conflict analysis is the starting point for disability-inclusive peacebuilding interventions.

Globally, disability is seen as synonymous with having a physical impairment, which overlooks 70% of persons whose disability is non-visible. The regular use of participatory gender-sensitive conflict analysis with persons with disabilities can shift inaccurate assumptions of persons with disabilities being homogenous. This analysis can examine how conflict specifically impacts persons with disabilities and identify the systems and institutions that perpetuate gendered discrimination, violence and stigma.

An intersectional analysis should examine the links between disability and gender, uncovering how different aspects of a person's identity – such as ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, religion, sexual orientation, indigeneity, geographic location and impairment-type – connect in order to better understand the multiple forms of discrimination and marginalisation they might experience. The information generated can be used to identify entry points for inclusion and transform the complex barriers to disability inclusion that are made more challenging by conflict.

## 3. Peacebuilders should partner with Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to sustain and diversify movement building.

Connecting disability inclusion to the notion of a positive, gender-equal and sustainable peace can help disability activists link with the efforts of other civil society networks in the peacebuilding sector. Diverse networks can better engage in shared learning and collective capacity strengthening. They can also push back against resistance to disability inclusion and support practical, localised change. OPDs need core funding and targeted support to do this work sustainably. Core funding is critical for networking and movement building and can elevate the ability of OPDs to influence change and to monitor implementation of any peace process.

It is particularly important to support gender and disability diversity and to promote women's roles and leadership within OPDs. Within the OPD sector there are some groups who are very excluded, such as people with psychosocial disabilities and people with intellectual disabilities. Where possible, implementers should ensure these groups can also meaningfully participate in peacebuilding.

## 4. Identify and address physical, communication, institutional and attitudinal barriers to inclusion.

Persons with disabilities best understand how to identify these barriers and the corresponding enablers and should be involved early to develop tailored and contextualised interventions. Appropriate support is crucial to build individuals' confidence and maintain their involvement.

Peacebuilding programmes can be adapted in multiple ways to facilitate short-term and longer-term barriers to inclusion. Early interventions can include additional time to respond to questions or prepare technical documents, access to technical support tools and resources, and preparation of physical environments to ensure accessibility. Where the infrastructure is available, digital technologies are increasingly being used creatively for enhancing inclusion in peacebuilding processes.<sup>59</sup> These immediate adaptations can ensure full and effective participation by individuals with disabilities at any given time and are referred to in the CRPD as 'reasonable accommodations'.

Persons whose disabilities were acquired as a result of conflict, including veterans, require tailored psychosocial support, as psychological disabilities increase as a result of exposure to protracted conflict and violence. This is particularly challenging in conflict-affected situations when reoccurring violence has been found to significantly increase incidences of PTSD and where poverty, community tensions and perceptions of injustice contribute to mental disorders.<sup>60</sup> In particular there is a need for unimpeded access to a full range of essential health and protection services as well as comprehensive, targeted, non-medical community and peer-led psycho-social support.

Persons with disabilities may require further creativity and adaptivity of peacebuilding programmes and peace processes to ensure their inclusion. Attitudinal change involves both longer-term systemic support, such as an inclusive education system that provides persons with disabilities the ability to gain formal qualifications, and the removal of legal and policy barriers preventing gainful employment or attaining political office; and shorter-term interventions such as training and mentoring of leaders with disabilities, and engagement with the media sector to highlight the positive contributions made by persons with disabilities.

## **5. Greater global policy coherence can support disability inclusion at local levels.**

In the absence of specific policy frameworks focused on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in peacebuilding, guidance and lessons can be extrapolated from development and humanitarian responses. It is clear that more coherent frameworks are needed across the board, as well as a shift away from a focus on victimhood and protection toward agency and meaningful participation for a range of under-represented groups. Persons with disabilities can learn from women peacebuilders about the challenges in operationalising UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions; likewise, women peacebuilders can learn about CRPD and disability inclusion.

In order to strengthen policy coherence, it is also important to create links between OPDs and policymakers with a view to reviewing and aligning existing policy frameworks in related areas. For example, integrating CRPD commitments into National Action Plans on WPS would involve deliberate measures for the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in decision-making, GBV prevention and response, and broader humanitarian action and peacebuilding responses. Explicit provisions on inclusion in peace agreements, legislation, and constitutional and political arrangements can provide protection and enforcement measures, and OPDs can use such inclusion 'hooks' to make demands of state authorities and other conflict actors. Given the diversity of gender dynamics it is important to collect data that at a minimum is disaggregated by sex, age and disability status, to ensure interventions can be effectively monitored.

## CONCLUSION

There is a reciprocal relationship between disability, gender inequality and violence. Disability inclusion is key to a sustained and transformative peace process that addresses societal inequalities and gendered discrimination. Peacebuilding that is disability-inclusive and gender-transformative currently faces significant systemic challenges, including gaps in policy and legislative development, stigma and stereotypes about disability and gender roles, poor visibility of persons with disabilities, and a lack of sustained funding for local OPDs and networks. Creative strategies and approaches to promote inclusive and adaptive peacebuilding and overcome implementation barriers must be developed, budgeted for and adequately financed.

There is a lack of evidence to show the gendered experience of persons with disability and to support disability inclusion – this needs to be strengthened. Recognising that persons with disabilities are not a homogenous group, we advocate for the use of an intersectional gender-sensitive conflict analysis to help understand the diverse experiences, capacities, needs and interests of persons with disabilities and what this means in terms of supporting early, targeted interventions. We see significant untapped potential in connecting peacebuilders with OPDs and activists with disabilities who can meaningfully contribute to the quality and sustainability of peacebuilding processes.

The changes that disability inclusion need are long-term, intergenerational and incremental. These processes are made more complex by previous conflict or ongoing violence. This transformation requires deep engagement with the institutions and structures at many levels of society that perpetuate disability and gendered discrimination. This requires work within families, within community governance and religious institutions, and within national level political, education and legal institutions. Disability inclusion in peacebuilding will need strategic and sustained action from civil society, governments and all levels of society in conflict contexts, and from the donors and external actors who want to support them.

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