IN BRIEF

DISABILITY INCLUSION MARKERS

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Background

In 2021, UN Women embarked on a research and learning process to explore options for introducing disability inclusion markers to UN Women's reporting systems. This process involved reviewing some 20 existing marker systems (disability inclusion markers or gender equality markers) and consulting over 50 internal and external stakeholders. The process culminated in an internal webinar on 30 September 2021, in which highlights from UN Women's research on markers were presented alongside insights from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; the UN Secretariat; the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the International Disability Alliance; Sightsavers; and the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development.[1]

The present brief shares some of the key findings from our learning process, with a particular emphasis on the extra value that markers can add to organisations' wider work to promote rights and equality for persons with disabilities.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, there has been an upsurge in efforts to align international cooperation interventions with the rights of persons with disabilities. These include the first Global Disability Summit in 2018,[2] the creation of the Global Action on Disability Network,[3] the launch of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy[4] and, at UN Women, the adoption of the entity's own Corporate Strategy for Disability Inclusion.[5]

Such efforts are urgently needed since, due to the multiple barriers that they face, persons with disabilities experience "disproportionate levels of poverty; ... [a] lack of access to education, health services and employment; and ... underrepresentation in decision-making and political participation".[6] Persons with disabilities who face multiple intersecting forms of discrimination including on the basis of gender,[7] or persons with underrepresented types of disabilities,[8] experience particularly extreme inequalities. And the inequalities facing persons with disabilities have been magnified still further by the COVID-19 pandemic.[9]

Yet, data on the share of international cooperation interventions that aim to promote rights and equality for persons with disabilities has been scarce. It was this knowledge gap that led to the development of disability inclusion markers.

Disability inclusion markers

Disability inclusion markers are a simple tool that allows international cooperation actors to give each of their interventions a score, based on whether that intervention seeks to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities. For example, in a simple scoring system, an intervention might be given:

- A score of 2 if it is a disability-targeted intervention whose main objective is to promote rights and equality for persons with disabilities;

- A score of 1 if it is a disability-mainstreamed intervention where the enjoyment of rights and equality by persons with disabilities is one objective among many;

- A score of 0 if the intervention does not have objectives relating to the enjoyment of rights and equality by persons with disabilities; and

- A score of -1 if the intervention jeopardises the enjoyment of rights and equality by persons with disabilities.[10]

Disability inclusion markers therefore work on broadly the same principles as gender equality markers – a tool in whose development UN Women played a key role.[11] However, disability inclusion markers generally have some adaptations to reflect the specific issues at stake in upholding the rights of persons with disabilities in international cooperation (for example, see below ref: disability inclusion vs. disability relevance).

Note: disability inclusion vs. disability relevance

International cooperation interventions can be **relevant** to disability in many different ways – but not all disability-relevant interventions contribute to disability **inclusion.** For example, interventions such as landmine clearance, immunisation and eye health care can help to prevent injuries and health conditions associated with disability. As such they are disability-relevant. However, they are not disability-inclusive – not unless they have also taken deliberate steps to ensure that persons with disabilities are fully included throughout their activities (for example, an eye health programme that is fully inclusive and accessible to persons with all types of disabilities). This brief is concerned only with markers to track disability-inclusive interventions. Disability-relevant interventions that are not disability-inclusive are generally outside its scope.

Furthermore, some disability-relevant interventions can actually be harmful for disability inclusion. For example, refurbishing a residential institution for persons with disabilities is disability-relevant, but it perpetuates segregation of persons with disabilities, and thus works **against** inclusion and against the enjoyment of rights by persons with disabilities. In a disability inclusion marker system that allows for negative scoring (such as the four-point scoring system summarised above), such interventions would be marked with negative scores, to signal that they are putting the enjoyment of rights by persons with disabilities in jeopardy.

Disability inclusion markers and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Disability inclusion markers have the potential to enhance compliance with all areas of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), as they allow good practices that contribute to the enjoyment of rights to be quickly identified and replicated, and areas for improvement to be rapidly addressed. The precise set of CRPD articles to which disability inclusion markers contribute depends on the sector in which international cooperation interventions are taking place. But in any international cooperation context, well implemented disability inclusion markers can contribute strongly to upholding the following CRPD articles:

Article 31 requires that States Parties "undertake to collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the present Convention … [and that] The information collected in accordance with this article shall be disaggregated, as appropriate, and used to help assess the implementation of States Parties' obligations under the present Convention and to identify and address the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in exercising their rights".

Article 32 requires that "international cooperation, including international development programmes, is inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities." The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights explicitly recommends the use of disability inclusion markers as part of its package of recommended indicators to monitor Article 32.[12]

Furthermore, when disability inclusion markers are applied to international cooperation interventions that

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seek to promote gender equality – as is the case for all of UN Women's interventions – markers can offer valuable insights for aligning interventions with **Article 6** of the CRPD. Article 6 requires that States Parties "take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms … [and] take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention". [13]

Uses of disability inclusion marker data

Disability inclusion marker data showing the share of an organisation's interventions that aim to align with the CRPD can be a valuable asset. The following sections set out some of the different ways in which such data can help an organisation to achieve its wider objectives.

learning

As set out above, one of the most fundamental benefits of disability inclusion markers is the role they can play in driving higher performance on CRPD implementation. Markers can help organisations quickly zero in on areas of strength to learn from as well as areas of weakness to investigate, so that good practice can rapidly spread.

One of the advantages of markers is that, because they are usually integrated in wider management information systems, they do not generate data in isolation, but rather allow data on disability inclusion to be cross-referenced against other variables, such as data on geographic location and thematic focus. This makes it possible to generate quite specific insights on the distribution of good practices across an organisation's portfolio. Disability inclusion marker data can also be triangulated against data from other markers, where these exist; for example, if organisations use both gender equality and disability inclusion markers, analysis can be done on the share of spending that has received a positive score under both markers to derive some tentative insights on the organisation's approach to intersectionality (though, to confirm whether the organisation is taking a genuinely intersectional approach, this would then need to be cross-checked with other qualitative data).

Example:

The non-governmental organisation CBM Switzerland recently examined disability inclusion marker data on Swiss international cooperation spending. It found that in 2019, out of a total of 40.19 million USD with disability inclusion as a "significant" objective, over 25 per cent related to interventions in just one country – Myanmar. This finding indicates there would be an opportunity to explore the reasons for this apparent positive deviance in Myanmar,[14] and whether there are practices from that country team that could be adapted and adopted more widely.

Disability inclusion markers do not just make it possible to learn lessons in hindsight. Because markers focus on an intervention's objectives, not its outcomes, they can readily be applied from an early stage in the programming cycle. This makes it possible to reflect on marker scores in real time and to make immediate adjustments. This in turn can be a useful entry point to build teams' confidence on disability inclusion more broadly, as experience from the adoption of gender equality markers has shown.[15]

Accountability to rights holders

In addition to their value for internal learning processes, marker data can also be of great interest to external stakeholders. In particular, disability inclusion markers offer an opportunity to deepen dialogue with rights holders in the disability movement. Marker data can play an especially valuable external accountability role when made publicly available in a detailed format that allows external stakeholders to conduct their own analysis. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC)'s Creditor Reporting System[16] is an example of one publicly available database that makes such analysis possible.

Example:

The European Disability Forum (a European-wide umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities) recently used disability inclusion marker data from the OECD DAC's Creditor Reporting System database for a research project on disability inclusion in 10 European governments' Official Development Assistance (ODA). This allowed comparisons to be made on the extent to which different governments were using the marker and on their early results.[17]

Influencing

For organisations that grant funds to other partners – for example, civil society organisations – markers can be used

to start a dialogue with these organisations about their work on disability inclusion. For example, markers can be used to assess proposed partnerships at the outset, with partners asked to adapt any plans that do not initially meet the criteria.[18] In this way, markers can enable organisations to leverage stronger attention to the rights of persons with disabilities even beyond their own organisational boundaries.

Example with a gender equality marker:

The UN Peace Building Fund requires all applicants to score themselves against its gender equality marker when they submit proposals, and this plays a fundamental role in decisions on which applicants receive funding. At the same time, the Fund offers applicants support in strengthening the gender focus of their projects.[19] A similar approach could be taken with disability inclusion markers.

Reporting under the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy and other frameworks

The UN Disability Inclusion Strategy Entity Accountability Framework explicitly recognises the value of disability inclusion markers. In fact, any entity seeking to obtain the highest score under the indicator on strategic planning is required to implement a "system … to track resource allocation to disability inclusion across the entity" – i.e. a disability inclusion marker. [20]

In addition, data generated through disability inclusion markers can also be valuable evidence for reporting against other parts of the Entity Accountability Framework,[21] as well as the UN Sustainable Development Group Information Management System questionnaire.[22]

Disability inclusion markers can also be valuable for reporting against internal frameworks. For example, UN Women's reporting framework asks offices to describe how their work has reached women with disabilities; disability inclusion marker data would offer useful evidence for such reporting.[23]

Strengthening partnerships

The use of disability inclusion markers is a growing trend. The OECD DAC introduced its disability inclusion marker in 2018,[24] and the latest available data shows that 21 out of the DAC's 30 members are already using the marker for at least some of their reporting.[25] Disability inclusion markers are also well-established at UNICEF and the Ford Foundation, with interest growing in other organisations as well.[26] By adopting disability inclusion markers, organisations can

emphasise their like-mindedness with partners who have already embraced this trend. Depending on the nature of the partnership, organisations may even be able to feed disability inclusion marker data directly into their partner's reporting processes. [27]

Ensuring best practice in transparency

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) includes a disability inclusion marker in its database.[28] If organisations use disability inclusion markers, and these markers are designed in a way that can readily be mapped to the IATI disability inclusion marker scoring system, then they can swiftly enhance the quality of their IATI reporting.

Uses of disability inclusion marker data

While disability inclusion marker data is very valuable, there are some limitations to what it can tell us when used in isolation. Marker data therefore has the utmost value when triangulated against other complementary evidence sources. For example :

- Disability inclusion markers are generally applied to interventions that are underway, not yet completed. As such, they tell us about the intentions of these interventions, not about the **quality of their implementation or about their results.** This makes it essential to triangulate marker scores against both qualitative and quantitative data on interventions' outcomes.

- Disability inclusion markers, by their nature, paint a simplified picture. They tell us about actions' overall objectives, but they do not tell us the **precise share of an intervention's budget that was devoted to realising the rights of persons with disabilities.** For example, if a disability mainstreamed intervention is given a positive marker score, we know that disability inclusion was one of its objectives, but we do not know how much was spent on this objective relative to the others. To determine the precise budget devoted to disability inclusion requires different financial reporting tools. But if these tools are available, and they are triangulated against disability inclusion marker data, this can generate important insights on the costs of achieving CRPD compliance.

Implementing and ensuring quality of a disability inclusion marker system

Experience from organisations that already use disability inclusion markers, and from use of gender equality markers, suggests the following good practices for implementing and ensuring quality of disability inclusion markers.

- Markers should generally be mandatory, to mitigate the risk that they will otherwise not be widely adopted.[29]

- Marker use should be considered right from the start of an intervention. The earlier scoring is considered, the more chance there is to make improvements to the design of the intervention that would enhance its contribution to the rights and equality of persons with disabilities. [30]

- Marker scoring should be led by the staff who know the intervention best – usually programme managers.[31] But it is essential for technical disability inclusion specialists to be on-hand to provide support.[32]

- Marker scores should be supported by a brief justification. [33]

- Marker scores should be revisited annually. This gives a chance to monitor and learn from progress. [34]

- Monitoring and evaluation processes should include consideration of marker scores, and should highlight any apparent anomalies between marker scores and actual results, as a basis for future learning.[35]

These steps can help ensure that markers are systematically used, that they generate quality data – and hence that they live up to their full potential as a tool to help organisations promote the full enjoyment of rights and equality by all persons with disabilities.

Notes]

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2 International Disability Alliance, 'Global Disability Summit 2018 – summary of commitments' (accessed 16 September 2021)

3 'Global Action on Disability Network' (accessed 16 September 2021)

4 UN, 2019, United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy

5 UN Women, 2018, The empowerment of women and girls with disabilities: towards full and effective participation and gender equality

6 UN DESA, 2018, Disability and development report : realising the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities, p.1

7 See for example A/HRC/46/27, Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, January 2021, paragraph 71. The list of forms of intersectional discrimination in this paragraph is of course not exhaustive.

8 See for example A/71/314, Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, August 2016, paragraph 6. The list of types of underrepresented types of disabilities in this paragraph is not exhaustive.

9 See for example UN Women and Women Enabled International, 2020, Meeting basic needs for women and girls with disabilities during COVID-19; Brennan and others, 2020, Disability rights during the pandemic: a global report on findings of the COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor; UNFPA and others, 2021, The impact of COVID-19 on women and girls with disabilities.

10 For example, this is broadly the approach used by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee's (OECD DAC) marker on the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities: see OECD DAC, 2020, The OECD-DAC policy marker on the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities: handbook for data reporters and users, p.13. The addition of the negative score is inspired by the Gender Equality Dimension of the Agence Française de Développement's Sustainable Development Mechanism (source: OECD DAC, 2016, Handbook on the OECD DAC gender equality policy marker, p.20).

11 See, for example, UN Sustainable Development Group, 2019, UNCT Gender Equality Marker Guidance Note

12 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020, Article 32: illustrative indicators on international cooperation, in particular indicators 32.11 and 32.14

13 All references in this section are from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Some of the obligations have been further elaborated in jurisprudence from the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, for example General Comment no. 3 on women and girls with disabilities.

14 Baumgarten / CBM Switzerland, OECD DAC Disability Policy Marker and its application in Switzerland's reporting (forthcoming), and CBM Switzerland, 2021, CRPD implementation in SWITZERLAND, with a focus on disability inclusiveness of development and humanitarian aid, pp.15-16. The finding is based on analysis of allocable ODA commitments in current prices.

15 CARE International, 2017, CARE gender marker: case studies and lessons learned, p.3

16 OECD DAC, Creditor Reporting System (accessed 16 September 2021).

17 European Disability Forum, 2021, Mapping disability inclusiveness of European member states' development and humanitarian aid (accessed 16 September 2021)

18 If the markers were used as a basis for funding decisions, it would be important to build in adequate quality assurance

processes to ensure applicants did not inflate their marker scores. Source: for example, Hyde Townsend C / Ford Foundation, 2021, Progress towards equity: disability inclusion coding.

19 UN Peace Building Fund: PBF guidance note on gender marker scoring, pp.1, 9

20 United Nations, Disability Inclusion Strategy Entity Accountability Framework technical notes, p.15

21 This includes indicators 9 (programmes and projects) and 11 (country programme documents). Source: United Nations, Disability Inclusion Strategy Entity Accountability Framework technical notes, pp.74-78, 86-91.

22 This includes indicator 8 (on joint programmes), indicator 10 (on monitoring and evaluation processes) and indicator 11 (on humanitarian planning and response). Source: UN Development Coordination Office, UNSDG Information Management System Questionnaire 2020, pp. 75-76, 78-83.

23 E.g. UN Women, 2020, 2020 Annual reporting guidance, annex B: annual reporting narrative questions [internal hyperlink for readers within UN Women], pp. 2, 4, 6

24 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, DAC Working Party on Development Finance Statistics, 2018, Proposal to introduce a policy marker in the CRS to track development finance that promotes the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities

25 Source: analysis of the Creditor Reporting System, looking at data on allocative ODA commitments from 2019 (the most recent year for which data is available), triangulated with exchanges with individual DAC members.

26 Sources: Berman-Bieler and Takona/UNICEF, 2021, Connecting expenditure to results for children with disabilities through PIDB codes and the disability tag (accessed 16 September 2021); Hyde Townsend C / Ford Foundation, 2021, Progress towards equity: disability inclusion coding (accessed 16 September 2021); stakeholder interviews. In addition to UNICEF and the Ford Foundation, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee incorporates disability inclusion marking as one element in its wider Gender with Age Marker system (source: Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Gender with Age [and Disability] Marker)

27 For example, if bilateral providers of ODA provide non-core funds to multilateral organisations, and these multilateral organisations use disability inclusion markers that can be mapped to that of the OECD DAC, then the bilateral funders can potentially include this data directly in their own reports on non-core multilateral spending submitted to the OECD DAC.

28 International Aid Transparency Initiative, 'Policy marker' (accessed 16 September 2021)

29 For example, this follows the approach taken by UNICEF and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office [for the most part – there are some administrative differences between different sections of the Office]. (Sources: Berman-Bieler and Takona/UNICEF, 2021, Connecting expenditure to results for children with disabilities through PIDB codes and the disability tag, slide 5; Lloyd/FCDO, 2021, The implementation of the disability policy marker in FCDO, slide 2

30 OECD DAC Working Party on Development Finance Statistics, The OECD DAC policy marker on the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities: handbook for data reporters and users, p.21

31 OECD DAC Working Party on Development Finance Statistics, The OECD DAC policy marker on the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities: handbook for data reporters and users, p.21

32 For example, Hyde Townsend C / Ford Foundation, 2021, Progress towards equity: disability inclusion coding (accessed 16 September 2021), slide 3; Boselli R / Global Affairs Canada, 2021, GLAD learning series : the OECD disability policy DAC marker (accessed 16 September 2021), slide 5.

33 UNCT Gender Equality Marker guidance note, p.10

34 Source: advice from specialist stakeholder

35 UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination / Finance and Budget Network, 2018, Quality assurance of Gender Equality Markers: improving accuracy and consistency – guidance note, p.8