

34. The 2018 Global Disability Summit - towards a step-change in disability inclusion

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People with disabilities have often been overlooked by development policies

At the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals is the concept that development occurs only when it includes everyone, leaving no one behind.

Although inclusion as a development principle is uncontroversial, relatively few governments and development agencies have made deliberate, concrete commitments to identify, support and involve people with disabilities in development - even though 15% of the world's population have a disability. This situation reflects a historical absence of political will and the kind of persistent invisibility that advocates of gender equality described decades ago.

A summit to raise awareness and political commitment to disability inclusion

The lack of inclusion of people with disabilities is a complex problem with no single or straightforward solution. However, it was clear that to achieve a global step-change on disability inclusion, greater awareness (Figure 34.1), political will and engagement with people with disabilities would be vital first steps.

The Global Disability Summit¹ was conceived in mid-2017 as a means of moving the international community to act to support people with disabilities in developing countries. The Summit took place in July 2018 at London's Olympic Park, and was a unique moment that generated hundreds of new commitments from governments and organisations around the world.

Figure 34.1. Dickson Juma marches in a deaf awareness march in Kapsabet, Kenya



Note: The deaf awareness march was co-organised with British volunteers who spent three months working with the rural deaf community in Nandi county, Kenya, training them in Kenyan sign language.

Source: Credit - Jeffrey DeKock/VSO ICS.

Broad involvement of different stakeholders, strong commitment and focus on action as a key to success

The Summit's success ultimately depends on the rate at which existing and new commitments translate into action in the coming months and years.

Nevertheless, as a catalytic policy moment, the Summit was a success. It was attended by around 1 200 delegates from around the world, representing 67 countries. This included the President of Ecuador, the Vice-President of Argentina, the CEO of Unilever, five heads of UN agencies, several UK Cabinet Ministers and more than 40 developing country government ministers. Our success factors included:

A “living our values” approach

The Summit was co-hosted by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) with the Government of Kenya and the International Disability Alliance. This reflected our collective ambition that the Summit planning, content and logistics put people with disabilities at the heart of the event; all people chairing sessions and a high proportion of speakers had disabilities. This approach set new benchmarks in terms of the inclusion, atmosphere and accessibility of a high-level event.²

Catalysing political will

Almost every senior leader at the Summit brought tangible commitments to improving disability inclusion. A key feature of this was direct policy engagement with Kenya (as official co-host) and many more developing countries. United Kingdom staff helped build coalitions in each of these countries and several - including Zimbabwe, Kenya, Pakistan and Uganda - organised their own mini-summits.

Focusing on action

Our communications and influencing strategy - supported by Secretary of State speeches, articles and the first-ever sign language speech³ in the United Kingdom Parliament - revolved around the move from rhetoric to action.

Engaging new voices

Our approach to planning was to ensure new voices were at the heart of the Summit - youth advocates, civil society representatives and private sector leaders all had prominent speaking roles. Summit policy content was also developed by thematic working groups whose members were drawn from the full spectrum of civil society (including disabled people's organisations) and academia.

Ultimately, among the key results of our approach were:

- 170 ambitious commitments⁴ from all over the world (including the United Kingdom) to take action on stigma and discrimination;
- More than 300 organisations and governments signed the Charter for Change⁵ an action plan to implement the UN International Convention on Disability; and
- Ten developing countries will use the Washington Group⁶ questions on disability status in upcoming national censuses or surveys - a vital step in making people with disabilities visible.

Overall, success was underpinned by a mutual commitment by all stakeholders to work together in partnership and, above all, a focus on action. There is initial interest in the Summit approach being adopted in other countries.

What next?

- **Tracking commitments:** In the 12 months after the Summit, we will publish all commitments on a website managed by the International Disability Alliance where progress against the commitments will be tracked. During this time, a Partnership Forum has been tasked to design a long-term approach to managing and monitoring commitments.
- **Learning:** A “one year on” report will be produced to see how far we have come, and to document good practice and lessons from across the world.
- **Better programmes:** DFID is scaling up its approach to disability inclusion and announced a set of ambitious commitments at the summit including a new GBP 37 million Disability Inclusive Development evidence and research programme to strengthen access for people with disabilities to education, jobs and healthcare. Many country offices are already undertaking audits of their programmes and developing action plans. By the end of 2018, DFID will publish a new Disability Inclusion Strategy which will set out plans to mainstream disability inclusion across the organisation.

Notes

¹ See gov.uk/globaldisabilitysummit.

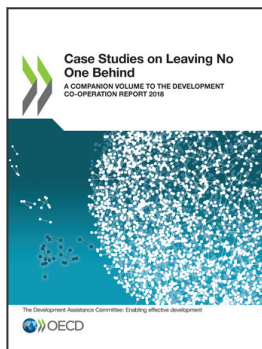
² Read the summit programme (pdf) at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726440/GDS_Printed_Programme.pdf

³ See www.youtube.com/watch?v=eULaVqEGLJM.

⁴ See www.gov.uk/government/collections/global-disability-summit-commitments.

⁵ See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/725336/Global-Disability-Summit-charter-easy-read2.pdf.

⁶ See www.washingtongroup-disability.com/.



From:

Case Studies on Leaving No One Behind

A companion volume to the Development Co-operation Report 2018

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264309333-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2018), "The 2018 Global Disability Summit - towards a step-change in disability inclusion", in *Case Studies on Leaving No One Behind: A companion volume to the Development Co-operation Report 2018*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264309333-36-en>

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