

**Disability Constituency 9th APFSD Statement, 2022**

COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and exposed the long standing disparity, persons with disabilities face. Even under normal circumstances, persons with disabilities are less likely to access basic health care, quality education, livelihood, social and empowerment opportunities in order to participate equally in their communities, which leads to social inequality, living in poverty, experiencing higher rates of violence, neglect and abuse, to being among the most marginalized in any humanitarian crisis.

In order to ensure that persons with disabilities are protected, participate equally, contribute meaningfully, respond effectively and are not left behind, it is imperative that necessary steps are in place and taken, to ensure inclusion and genuine commitment in all aspects. We urge Governments, agencies, the private sector as well as respective stakeholders at all levels to work in tandem with organizations of persons with disabilities to ensure persons with disabilities, in particular, women, children and young persons with disabilities are not an afterthought but remain central towards disability inclusion and for full implementation of the 2030 agenda.

Persons with disabilities face many barriers such as lack of accessible critical information to guide them in taking necessary precautions, and proactive decisions, especially in cases of emergencies. Due to lack of access to educational opportunities and accessible infrastructure, most persons with disabilities are unemployed, with lack of education, poor and live-in overpopulated areas with poor living conditions. Therefore, this increases their exposure to the outbreak and health risks, hence raises their vulnerability in the future.

In-depth understanding, political will, genuine commitment, cooperation, disability disaggregated data and realization of the pre-conditions to inclusion of persons with disabilities is key to **Building Back Better from COVID-19, While Advancing the Full Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific** . The precondition to inclusion can be referred to as the prerequisite for disability inclusion. If the pre-conditions are not realized, it will drastically undermine the inclusion of all persons with disabilities across all stages of development, further widening the gap and leaving people with disabilities behind.

There are six different themes which are pre-conditions for inclusion. These are accessibility, assistive device, social protection, support services, community based inclusive development (CBID) and non-discrimination. These measures or actions need to be in place first before inclusion for persons with disabilities can be achieved. Integrating the pre-conditions into the response and building back better mechanism will promote and ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities in such efforts, **Leaving No One Behind**.

Addressing the challenges and barriers faced by persons with disabilities, presents a unique opportunity to strengthen and leverage partnerships right across from global to community level, and collectively design, implement disability-inclusive development in consultation with persons with disabilities towards advancing 2030 Agenda. It calls for putting persons with disabilities at the core and valuing them as fundamental contributors of planning, implementation, response and monitoring, thus prohibiting any form of discrimination, placing particular emphasis on intersectionality.

Below are key recommendations for building back better:

* Ensure preconditions for meaningful consultation with and active participation of all persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all stages of development.
* Ensure mainstreaming disability in development, with targeted actions including prioritization of the collection and use of disability disaggregated data.
* Ensure accessibility of information, facilities, services and programs in building back better. Accessibility is fundamental to the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
* Establish accountability and monitoring mechanisms to ensure disability inclusion.
* Ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities in climate change, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response, economic recovery including access to employment and educational opportunities.

Consequently, this will enable all stakeholders to better serve everyone. The challenges during COVID-19 crisis are lessons learnt and opportunities for us to work collaboratively, to strengthen the means of implementation and partnerships for the goals to build back better.

Inclusion of persons with disabilities is a vital part of achieving the pledge to leave no one behind, and a critical test of accountability to the global commitments of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy along with our very own, Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Incheon Strategy.