

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, November 22

Evidence digest focus issue: SRHR and Disability Inclusion

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Guest blog introduction

Ahead of the **International Conference on Family Planning** (ICFP) being held 14-17th November 2022 in Thailand, we have prepared an additional evidence digest on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and disability inclusion.

Lois Auta-Udonkanta is the CEO of the Network of Women with Disabilities (NWD) – one of the partners working on our inclusive family planning project in northern Nigeria, which is led by Sightsavers and BBC Media Action. Lois founded the Network of Women with Disabilities in 2019 with the mission of including women with disabilities in national policies and agendas.



I see my disability as a bridge and not as a barricade. And I also see my disability as an opportunity to change the world. I was affected by polio when I was two years old. I am 42 now so I have been living with polio for 40 years now.

I always emphasise three barriers stopping women with disabilities, although we have many. Attitudinal, infrastructural and institutional barriers capture all the barriers women with disabilities face in society.

One of the challenges women with disabilities have in accessing family planning resources is perception. Some people think women with disabilities do not have emotions, or sexual feelings, and they don't give birth to children. So attitudinal barriers are a big problem in Nigerian society. I'll never forget an incident that happened a few years back when I entered a taxi. There was a discussion on sexuality on the radio. The taxi driver looked at me and asked, "do women with disabilities have sex?" I said, "What? How can you

ask this question? We are humans, and we have feelings like every other person. And I know some of my friends have given birth to two, three, and up to four children. So, what are you saying?”

What about barriers in infrastructure? Some women with disabilities cannot access hospitals or clinics due to a lack of ramps, a lack of sign language interpretation, and a lack of braille material in the medical centres. It’s very difficult for a person in a wheelchair or crutches to be able to navigate primary healthcare facilities in Nigeria independently.

Another factor is institutional barriers. Our policies, legal framework, and laws do not capture the needs and challenges of women with disabilities. For example, the Nigerian Disability Act includes no representation of women with disabilities, their sexual and reproductive health and rights or their wellbeing.

Programmes should be designed for women with disabilities. Women with visual impairments, for example, use screen readers on their phones and laptops, and most of them have android phones. An accessible app could be used to inform them about their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The major challenge I have here in Nigeria and in many other countries is the implementation of policies, laws and legal frameworks for women – with or without disabilities. The Ministry of Health in Nigeria is doing well. They have a policy on sexual reproductive health and rights with an emphasis on women with disabilities. I was part of drafting the policy. But implementing the recommendations is a big issue here.

I am excited about attending the International Conference for Family Planning in November 2022. I am going to represent women with disabilities, their needs, challenges, and priorities when it comes to health and family planning. I will be there on behalf of women and girls with disabilities accessing healthcare services – emphasising the importance of family planning. We need to sit down together and strategise, and we need to ask each other questions about how we can do it together and share our experiences and expertise. And I’m sure there will be policymakers, development professionals, partners and other key and critical actors and stakeholders who will be there to listen to us.

Read the full blog, and access more evidence, resources and guidance on including people with disabilities in SRHR programmes, on the [dedicated inclusive SRHR page on the Inclusive Futures website](#).

The latest evidence and guidance on disability inclusion and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

Research

A paper on [disability and sexual and reproductive health service utilisation in Uganda](#) was published in BMC Public Health in March 2022. The intersectional analysis of demographic and health surveys in Uganda between 2006 and 2016 found that SRH

outcomes improved over the decade after the Disability Act was approved in Uganda. The paper highlights the importance of taking an intersectional approach and avoid considering people with disabilities as a homogenous group: their findings suggest that more educated women with hearing impairments were more likely to have had optimal antenatal services than women without disabilities who had a lower educational level, while richer women with hearing impairments had less chances of having the same services.

The Disability Evidence Portal produced an evidence brief on how the **sexual health of men and women with physical disabilities can be promoted in low- and middle-income countries** (LMIC) in December 2021. The brief explores what sexual health resources and services people with physical disabilities in LMICs can access. It also identifies five recommendations; (1) addressing negative attitudes towards the sexuality of people with physical disabilities, (2) educating people with physical disabilities on sexuality issues and rights, (3) inclusion in the development of sexual health services and policies, (4) training health workers to provide inclusive sexual health services and information, and (5) ensuring buildings and services are accessible.

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk produced a report on **family planning for women and girls with disabilities** in April 2021. The report provides a rapid review of the evidence on factors affecting access to and uptake of family planning for women and girls with disabilities, as well as highlighting examples of good practice. It found that whilst the evidence base is growing, considerable gaps remain in the evidence base on good practice on increasing full, free and informed contraceptive choice for women and girls with disabilities.

UNFPA and Women Enabled International published a global assessment of the **impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls with disabilities** with a focus on SRHR, gender-based violence and related rights, in 2021. The assessment found that barriers to accessing SRH information, goods, and services and exercising bodily autonomy for women and girls with disabilities have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, in ways that are both similar to and distinct from other women's experiences.

A systematic review was conducted by Gerritsen et al. (2021) on the **maternity care experiences of women with physical impairments**. 10% of women with disabilities are of childbearing age. However, because women with disabilities are often deemed less likely to have children, accessibility to maternity care is limited. They therefore experience problems during pregnancy and childbirth due to physical barriers and barriers to information, communication and the attitude of providers. Findings showed that women with physical impairments experience barriers related to accessibility of facilities, adapted equipment, lack of knowledge and healthcare providers' dismissals of their concerns and unwillingness to assist. In contrast, support has a positive influence on their experiences. The study concluded health providers should be trained to be aware of the need of women with disabilities and to improve clinical practice.

Women Enabled produced a **fact sheet on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls with disabilities**. The fact sheet covers forms and manifestations of SRHR violations against women and girls with disabilities, access to information during

pregnancy, government obligations to ensure SRHR, and realising SRHR for women and girls with disabilities. The fact sheet is available in Easy Read, Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

SRHR Needs Assessments

UNFPA Pacific, Women Enabled International, and the Pacific Disability Forum jointly launched reports identifying barriers that prevent women and young people with disabilities fully realising their sexual and reproductive health and rights, freedom from gender-based violence, and full access to essential services in **Fiji**, **Samoa** and **Vanuatu** in August 2022.

An **SRHR and disability policy analysis in South Africa** was published in March 2021 by Amplify Change, PSH, UNFPA and SAMRC. The report found, through a systematic policy analysis, that overall health-related policies failed to address the needs of people with disabilities. Policies and frameworks that reach a greater degree of disability inclusion underwent an intensive process of consultation and engagement with civil society, including people with disabilities. The report closes with recommendations, including to train policy makers on how to write disability inclusive health policies and avoid working in silos when drafting to make them inclusive.

Guidance, Training and Case Studies

Amplify Change's online learning platform contains a section on **access and disability** under SRHR priorities. It includes short practical guides on a number of topics relating to SRHR and disability inclusion, such as **using creative storytelling and communication to combat stigma**, **making health crisis response mechanisms inclusive**, and **advocating for increased availability and accessibility of disability data**.

ARROW published the manual **Reclaiming SRHR of Women and Girls with Disabilities** in 2021. The manual aims to equip women and girls with disabilities with necessary SRHR information and knowledge to make informed choices free from coercion, violence, discrimination, and abuse. The manual contains modules on gender, sexuality, disability, rights, and their interlinkages in the context of addressing sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls with disabilities. The manual is available in **English** and **Bangla**.

Humanity and Inclusion published the guide **SRHR for all: disability inclusion from theory to practice** in March 2022. Based on technical guidance put into practice during the WISH2ACTION programme, the guide provides practical guidance to enable health providers, local and national authorities and others working in the health sector to ensure high quality and accessible rights based SRH information and services for all. It includes guidance for disability inclusive SRHR for diverse populations, including youth and persons with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities; services, including obstetric services, abortion and post-abortion services; and contexts, including humanitarian contexts. The guide includes an Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) mapping tool and referral tools covering telephone questionnaires, referral checklists, and a directory for service providers.

In July 2021, Humanity and Inclusion published **learning from the WISH2ACTION programme**, which was implemented in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Uganda, Madagascar, Pakistan and South Sudan. The report shares 30 examples of good practice and lessons learnt across nine themes: inclusive culture, quality of services, coordination, data collection and management, referral networks, service integration, social and behavioural change communications (SBCC), partnerships and collaboration and policy and advocacy.

IPAS, Leonard Cheshire and MSI Reproductive Choices produced an **orientation and values clarification toolkit for disability inclusion in reproductive health programs** in 2021. The toolkit is a resource for organisations that want to build a disability inclusion mindset among staff and partners who design and implement abortion and SRHR programming. It is intended to be used as a follow-on workshop for stakeholders who have already been through an abortion values clarification and attitudes transformation (VCAT) but can be used to deliver a stand-alone workshop.

Community engagement for inclusive SRH: a guide for conducting workshops with persons with disabilities was published in December 2020 by Leonard Cheshire and MSI Reproductive Choices. It provides guidance on how to hold community engagement workshops with people with disabilities and OPDs in order to strengthen project adaptations. It includes a mapping conducted by the WISH programme teams in Sierra Leone and Zambia of actions needed to improve disability inclusive services in the following behaviour change domains: individual, interpersonal, community and interpersonal.

The See You Foundation published **reflections, inclusive practices and tools from a disability inclusive SRH programme in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Rwanda** in February 2022. The report outlines critical success factors such as understanding barriers, staff training, involving community health workers, and inclusive and accessible health materials. It includes assessment tools, checklists and training packages used in the programme, such as a disability inclusion score card for health centres, SRH sign language manuals, and a monitoring tool.

Webinars

Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) hosted the side event **Equity and Inclusion for Adolescent Girls Everywhere: Policy and advocacy approaches to promote disability inclusion** at CSW66 in March 2022. Speakers discussed government efforts improving inclusion in SRHR in humanitarian contexts, and experiences working on disability inclusive SRHR programming as mainstream and disability focused organisations. Sign language and closed captions are available.

Pathfinder International, **FP2030 and Humanity & Inclusion hosted the webinar Beyond One Size Fits All: Advancing Inclusive SRH Services for Young People with Disabilities** in February 2022. The discussion focused on the experiences of young persons with disabilities seeking health services, the role of health service providers, and the importance of partnerships in overcoming barriers related to all young persons' access to SRH services and information. International Sign Language interpretation and closed captions are available.

FP2030 and Knowledge SUCCESS co-hosted a webinar on [ensuring inclusive access to SRH services for young people with disabilities](#). The session focused on how the stigmatisation of young people with disabilities impacts access to SRH services, and what innovative program approaches and considerations are necessary to promote inclusion in SRH information and services. The event recording is available in [English](#) and [French](#).

Programme learning on SRHR and disability inclusion

In January 2022, Inclusive Futures launched the Inclusive Family Planning (IFPLAN) project in Northern Nigeria, which focused on improving access to family planning for people with disabilities. The project is led by Sightsavers and BBC Media Action, in partnership with the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities and Network of Women with Disabilities, working with the Nigerian Primary Healthcare Development Agency. Consortium partners carried out formative research to investigate in more depth the specific barriers faced by different groups of people with disabilities – and to identify suitable approaches and stakeholders who could contribute to promoting equitable access to family planning services and contraceptives for women and men with disabilities. The co-creation process took a human-centred design approach to strengthen the profiles of target audiences from the formative research into behavioural archetypes. This was necessary for ensuring activities could leverage behavioural insights and design thinking in changing the hearts and minds of communities, people with disabilities, and service providers – with a view to ensuring family planning services and information are accessible, equitable and inclusive for all. Working with women leaders in OPDs and women-led OPDs is an important approach to ensure the leadership of women with expert knowledge and challenge institutional barriers. For more information, visit the [Inclusive Futures website](#).

In Nepal, Inclusive Futures tested ways of improving access to and uptake of good-quality sexual and reproductive health services and information for young people with disabilities, with the aim of improving their wellbeing and inclusion. The project was led by Humanity & Inclusion, in partnership with BRAC International, Sense International, Light for the World, local DPOs and National Federation of the Deaf Nepal. Drawing on insights from the baseline study, the project targeted young people with disabilities, service providers and governing authorities. The project runs awareness raising sessions, addressed stigma, and provided training on inclusive SRH in after school clubs to create safe spaces for young people with disabilities to increase their knowledge and discuss SRHR. Health workers and school nurses were also trained on inclusive adolescent SRHR, including sharing guidance on communicating with young people with hearing and visual impairments, and exercises to address prejudiced ideas. For more information, visit the [Inclusive Futures website](#).

Disability inclusive SRHR events at ICFP

Events focusing on disability inclusive SRHR at the **International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP) 2022** include:

- Panel: [Promoting equitable access for people with disabilities to family planning services to achieve universal health coverage.](#)
- Panel: **Special topics and emerging areas of SRHR**
- Presentation: **Lessons learned from building capacities of teachers to deliver comprehensive sexuality education to learners with intellectual disabilities in Indonesia.**
- Presentation: **Supporting Disability inclusion for Marie Stopes Madagascar's (MSM) tele-operators.**
- Presentation: **Ensuring access to quality SRH/FP and basic psychosocial support services and referrals to people with disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic in Tajikistan.**
- Presentation: **Towards disability-inclusive informed consent guidelines in family planning and gender-based violence services in low-middle income countries.**
- Presentation: **Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health of Women and Young People with Disabilities.**

About the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk:

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk provides research and technical assistance on disability inclusion to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office as part of the Disability Inclusive Development Programme. All our published reports are available on [our website](#). Contact us via: enquiries@disabilityinclusion.org.uk