



**PUB 11**

## **Together for Justice: Our Collective Action for Disability Rights and Inclusion. Nothing without us!**

### **COVER NOTE**

The ACT structure presenting this statement is the Community of Practice on Disability Inclusive Development (CoP DID). For this statement we have consulted with representatives from ACT organisations who are members of the CoP DID with and without disabilities. The proposed commitments aim at encouraging collective action for disability rights and inclusion.

### **TOPIC**

Persons with disabilities face discrimination and exclusion in all areas of life, everywhere in the world. The ACT Alliance has committed itself towards disability inclusion within its founding documents and public statements. Since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities more than 15 years ago there has been some progress towards disability inclusion in humanitarian and development action through the development of frameworks and practical guidance documents, yet representation and participation of persons with disabilities is still low or non-existent. The members of the Community of Practice on Disability Inclusive Development encourage ACT members towards collective action for disability rights and inclusion reflecting our ACT core values of inclusivity, justice, and most importantly human rights. Concrete points for action include enhancing participation of persons with disabilities at all levels, ensuring accessibility of our work, mainstreaming disability within ACT Alliance quality and accountability framework and jointly learning from good practice examples.

# STATEMENT

## **Our Collective Action for Disability Rights and Inclusion. Nothing without us!**

Persons with disabilities face discrimination and exclusion in all areas of life, everywhere in the world. Despite clear efforts towards disability inclusion in humanitarian and development action, persons with disabilities still do not have equal access or participation in interventions and programmes. Therefore, there is an urgent need for action towards disability inclusion at all levels.

### **“Nothing without us”**

The UN Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was established in 2006. It was needed because the human rights of persons with disabilities were, despite all efforts, not being realised. In other words, persons with disabilities were not seen as fully human, entitled to have the same human rights as everyone else. Human rights are universal, they apply to every individual. This thought is also reflected in the 2030 Agenda with its core message to “Leave No One Behind”. The UN Humanitarian Disability Charter 2016 as well as the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action 2019 reflect the same agenda.

We, as a faith-based alliance, have committed to work for a world where “all God’s creation lives with dignity, justice, peace and full respect for human rights.” Our Founding Document also states that we “believe[s] that all persons are created in the image of God.” In our Public Statement in 2018 we committed ourselves to work towards disability inclusion in projects and programmes. Through this 2024 statement we want to build on this commitment by encouraging collective action for disability rights and inclusion in our programme and advocacy work. This specifically includes active mainstreaming of disability throughout the Alliance’s thematic and programmatic priorities.

The UNCRPD calls for changing societies to make equality, autonomy, and other human rights a reality for persons with disabilities. It emphasizes the importance of meaningful participation and active roles and contributions of persons with disabilities in all areas of society. This is aligned with the ACT General Assembly theme: “Together for Justice.” Persons with disabilities are still too often considered as objects of care and services, not as actors. It is common that the spaces for audience, patients or customers are accessible but areas for staff members are not. The number of leaders and politicians with disabilities globally remains very low. Representative quotas in combination with accessibility and capacity strengthening can help tackle this imbalance.

Our world is increasingly affected by multiple crises such as armed conflicts, the climate emergency, pandemics, and democratic backsliding. This can make it more tempting to go back to medical and charity-based models of disability, i.e., with a focus on providing medical diagnosis and care, institutionalisation, and protection as the main tools of disability politics. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, persons with disabilities living in institutions were more likely to get infected than people living independently. In Ukraine, persons with disabilities

have been left behind in institutions as personnel escaped the war. It is our duty as humanitarian and development actors to ensure that the right to participation and self-determination for persons with disabilities is at the core of our interventions. Focusing on active participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities is key to leaving no one behind and ensuring accessibility of interventions and communication even and especially in times of crisis.

A human-rights based approach means improving accessibility, participation, and equality, ending discrimination, providing necessary services like personal assistance and assistive devices, and making sure persons with disabilities are included even in the most powerful positions.

### **Commitments & Recommendations**

ACT members and the Alliance are committed to upholding core values such as inclusivity and human rights even and especially during times of crisis. We as ACT Alliance commit to and actively encourage members to mainstream disability rights and inclusion across our organisations and work by:

- Increasing, to the extent possible and respecting confidentiality and self-disclosure procedures, the meaningful representation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes and positions.
- Mainstreaming disability rights and inclusion within our advocacy work.
- Enhancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities in programme planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and learning.
- Improving the accessibility of all interventions and communication including reasonable accommodation, assistive technology, or other relevant support to get equal knowledge and enjoyment on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms
- Ensuring the disaggregation of data by disability in projects and programmes.
- Monitoring and reporting of the advances of ACT members towards disability inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of work to the ACT Alliance Secretariat to share learnings and good practices.
- Ensuring the coherent application and mainstreaming of disability inclusion principles in the ACT Alliance quality and accountability framework, also through continuous consultation of self-representative bodies of persons with disabilities.
- Advocating for the design of systems, environments, and products that are accessible to everyone from the start.
- Working to promote awareness of the crucial role of formal and informal caregivers for people with disabilities. Informal caregivers can be family members, community members, neighbours, friends, or hired caregivers- often women. They are often invisible, and their work is deemed as “invisible labour,” which was especially evident during COVID-19.

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- Working to avoid stigmatization and harm when people with disabilities are portrayed in the media by incorporating it into communications policies and practices though, and media we create. Media can highlight the rights and lived experiences of people with disabilities, focusing on their agency, dignity, and achievements.
- Highlighting the issue of multiple discrimination, including discrimination against women and girls with disabilities.

***A majority of the assembly has declared itself in agreement with the opinions expressed in this statement. While many ACT members agree with the public statement, there are members who have expressed differing perspectives on the content or tone. Their decision reflects the diverse viewpoints within our alliance, and we respect their choice to abstain or vote against. As always, we value the collective dialogue and encourage continued discussions on the matter at hand, recognizing the strength of our unity in diversity.***