Policy Dialogue
Towards a Disability-Inclusive Post-2015 Development Framework, Pakistan Perspective
and
Launch of First Ever Android Mobile Application DIVE for Persons with Disability

On the occasion of
International Day of Persons with Disability

On
Thursday, December 3, 2015
At Serena Hotel, Islamabad

Organized by:
Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP) and National Forum of Women with Disability (NFWWD) in collaboration with National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), Sightsavers, United States Embassy, National Forum for Women with Disability and Aurat Foundation
Abbreviations

PWD    Persons with Disability
ECP    Election Commission of Pakistan
IFES   International Foundation for Electoral System
UNESCO United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organization
STEP   Special Talent Exchange Program
NFWWD  National Forum of Women with Disability
AF     Aurat Foundation
NCSW   National Commission on the Status of Women
CNIC   Computerized National Identity Cards
EFA    Education for All
ILO    International Labour Organization
PTV    Pakistan Television
PEMRA  Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority
MoHR   Ministry of Human Rights
AKDN   Agha Khan Development Network
EVAW   Elimination of Violence against Women
DG     Director General
BACKGROUND

According to a global estimate of year 2010, about 15 per cent of the world’s population suffers from disability of one form or the other. Despite the fact that there is no country in the world where rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) are not violated, the level of awareness about the lives of such persons and the challenges they face is very low. The qualitative evidence suggests that persons with disabilities are significantly poor in developing countries as compared to their non-disabled counterparts. Many persons with disabilities are denied education, jobs, entertainment, sports and health facilities. The disorder may require chronic healthcare and this in turn drains the scarce household resources. This situation turns this human resource that can become useful citizens of the society into a burden for the families and the country overall.

According to former World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn, “Unless persons with disabilities are brought into the development mainstream, it will be impossible to cut poverty in half by 2015 or to give every girl and boy the chance to achieve a primary education by the same date which were key among the Millennium Development Goals agreed by more than 180 world leaders at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000.”

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which is both a human rights treaty and a development tool, provides an opportunity to strengthen developmental policies related to the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thereby contributing to the realization of a “society for all” in the 21st century.

Pakistan has ratified UNCRPD in July 2011 and implementation is the responsibility of state as well as development organizations including disabled peoples organizations (DPOs). Since there is a need for a state level policy for PWDs so an event titled ‘Policy Dialogue ‘Towards a Disability-Inclusive Post-2015 Development Framework: Pakistan Perspective’ was organized by Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP) and National Forum of Women with Disabilities (NFWWD) in collaboration with Ministry of Human Rights, Embassy of United States, Aurat Foundation and Serena Hotel Islamabad to commemorate International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3, 2015.
The policy dialogue brought together leaders of PWDs, development experts and decision-makers to initiate a process of inclusion of persons with disabilities who are still the uncounted and unheard citizens of the country. Through this dialogue, policy recommendations were formulated for effective and inclusive implementation of international commitments of Pakistan such as UNCRPD and country perspective on inclusive SDGs was shared with a wider network of stakeholders.

The event also included launch of Android application named ‘Disability Inclusive Voter Education (DIVE)’. The application provides complete information on the facilities available for PWDs in the country including the list of education and rehabilitation centers, process of CNIC and voter registration and legislations related to PWDs etc.

**PROCEEDINGS**

**Inaugural Addresses:**

The event that started with the recitation of Holy Quran by Mr. Waqar Puri was moderated by Mr. Ali Shabar and Ms. Maria Qureshi from STEP. The recitation was followed by welcome notes from the organizers and donors. Highlights from the inaugural addresses of each speaker are given in the following paragraphs in the form of recorded verbatim:

**Mr. Muhammad Hassan Mangi - Director General Ministry of Human Rights**

“I welcome participants from different parts of the country on behalf of Ministry of Human Rights particularly differently able guests.

The International Day for Persons with Disability is a day of celebration to mark various commitments made at the United Nations level by all member states that ratified United Nations Convention for Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD).

The International Day is celebrated on December 3 every year and theme for this year is ‘Inclusion Matters.’ This day reminds the governments of their constitutional, especially international commitments, and particularly UNCRPD.
The government has the challenge of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ahead of it. The MDGs did not implicitly refer to concerns of PWDs. Now the post 2015 agenda presents a landmark opportunity thereby showing the inclusiveness of economic growth, social progress, environmental sustainability, and overall in peace and security which is very important for our society. As I have shared that the government of Pakistan has ratified UNCRPD in July 2011, thus we are obliged to implement this convention in letter and spirit.

Considering the importance of human rights, the Prime Minister of Pakistan has decided to set up the independent Ministry of Human Rights. And under the dynamic leadership of honorable Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Law, Justice and Human Rights Ashtar Ausaf, we have succeeded in reporting the obligatory international reports especially on ICCPR and ICESR, one is on civil and political rights and the other is on economic, social and cultural rights and also report on the racial discrimination to the concerned treaty bodies. In order to implement and report progress to the United Nation bodies on UNCRP, the ministry has undertaken consultation with all stakeholders in all provinces. So now taking this opportunity of having together all the stakeholders, let me, on behalf of MOHR, request all stakeholders and representatives of different organizations to facilitate us in implementation of this convention. As we know that after 18th Amendment, the major responsibility of implementation rests with the provinces but it never prevents federal government to interact and coordinate and having a dialogue and even share best practices in order to counter challenges in the best way possible.

Let me also share that under the Prime Minister’s direction, who is also convener of Treaty Implementation Cell, the Cell is taking measures to ensure implementation of international commitments at national, provincial and regional levels. Again, if there are challenges, issues, best practices, we can share them at the platform of Treaty Implementation Cell. Today is a very special day for PWDs and also for the state of Pakistan.”

**Mr. Muhammad Atif Sheikh-Executive Director STEP**

“I welcome all participants on behalf of the organizers. The disability movement started in early 1970’s when PWD decided to have their voice at decision-making level. At the same time, the
disability movement was starting in Pakistan as well. From Pakistan, late Dr. Salma Shahid was part of the international commitments and meetings when the disability movement started in Canada and then spread all over the world.

In Pakistan, the persons with disability were away from these developments because of the biggest hurdle that they face in daily life, that is the lack of communications. With time, they became part of the movement and the disability organizations, the organizations run and led by disabled persons, started spreading and emerging all over the country. As a result, the issue of disability was highlighted before the Government of Pakistan and their voices were heard at the decision-making level.

With the passage of time, we have seen the progress. The government of Pakistan ratified UNCRPD in 2011. We have seen that in 2015, disability was included in all policy decisions taken in the fourth Hugo Framework on disaster reduction. We have seen that in SDGs, disability is mentioned 11 times. We have achieved goals in national and international commitments but now this is the time and this is the debate we are starting today that how we can implement these commitments.

We are very excited that all of you accepted our invitation and we thank you for joining us today. This policy dialogue will turn into recommendation for the inclusion of PWD and we will also launch our unique initiative, the Android mobile application DIVE which is made possible by STEP with the support of International Foundation of Electoral System (IFES).”

**Launch of Application DIVE:**

Post the inaugural addresses, guests were invited on stage for the launch of the application ‘DIVE’. They included Ms. Rabeea Hadi, Ms. Abia Akram and Mr. Atif Sheikh. A brief account of their statements is given as:

**Ms. Rabeea Hadi – Director Advocacy and Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Aurat Foundation (AF)**
“I welcome all the guests on behalf of Aurat Foundation and I am honored to be the part of this dialogue that is organized to raise a strong voice of the rights of persons with disability.

Aurat Foundation started its journey in 1986 and it is our mandate to work for the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized segments of the society especially women. Primarily, we work against all kinds of discrimination and violence against women.

I am glad to see that our mission is made easier by such strong voices and personalities of PWD. I would like to appreciate here that Pakistani PWDs have made Pakistan shine in the global skies. They have actually become the ambassadors of Pakistan and PWDs around the world. Their courage and bravery inspires us all to rise up from our hurdles and problems and contribute to the best of our abilities.

I am proud to mention here that Pakistani PWDs raised their effective voices at all international and national forums and made a huge contribution in including the issues of PWDs in the international agendas and SDGs. I salute all persons with disability for that.

Today we are here to learn from them and extend all possible support to them especially for any future policy dialogue.”

Ms. Abia Akram – Chief Executive Officer of National Forum for Women with Disabilities

“I also welcome all guests on behalf of National Forum for Women with Disabilities (NFWWD). Today the International Day for Persons with Disability is celebrated all around the world. In Pakistan, we are saying that it is very critical and important that how we are going to contribute in the next decade that is going to be for the persons with disability.

We are talking about the SDGs. As it has already been mentioned that there are 11 references for the PWDs in the SDG goals, which is a good success. We have seen national policies and UN conventions on rights of PWD signed and ratified by the government. Now is the time to draw mechanisms for turning these commitments and policies into practice and work twice to make a change in the lives of persons with disability.
I am glad that government and private and international organizations are all present in this policy dialogue and I am hopeful that the day-long deliberations would result in a joint framework for implementation of commitments for PWDs.”

**Mr. Muhammad Atif Sheikh - Executive Director STEP**

“There are three types of organizations working for the issues of persons with disability. There are government organizations working for rules and policies. Secondly, the NGOs and INGOs filling the gaps left by the government and third are the Disabled People’s Organizations (DPOs), the organizations run and led by PWDs particularly for the advocacy side.

In early 80’s, these organization were focused on particular disability like Association of Visually Impaired Persons or Organization of Physically Disabled Persons etc. In late 90’s, the concept of cross disability organizations emerged. Today I am proud to name all those great organizations that are contributing whether they are INGOs, NGOs or DPOs sitting here and joining us in this policy dialogue like Christian Blind Mission from Germany, Sight Savers. This day is very important because our leadership has acknowledged disability issue as a human rights issue.

Let me brief you a little about the android mobile application that we are about to launch. As we are all aware of the fact that the biggest issue PWDs and their families face is the lack of information. Because of this issue, majority of persons with disability remain confined to their houses. The first thing parents of a disabled child want to know is the location and access to rehabilitation or education centers and also the process to get hearing aid or wheel chair etc. Because of lack of access to this information, 10 per cent of our population is imprisoned in their houses.

To address this issue, we have developed this android application Disability Inclusive Voter Education (DIVE). This application not only provides complete list of all government, private or NGO-run educational institutions in the country, all rehabilitation centers, all accessible places, legislation, process to register for Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) and vote and process to participate in the elections. All these features are included in the first ever mobile
application in Pakistan. One of our partners has conducted a survey in United States, UK and other countries and they have told us that it could possibly be first of its kind disability information application in the world.”

After this the mobile application was launched by Ashtar Ausaf, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on law, justice and human rights

**Mr. Ashtar Ausaf - Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Law, Justice and Human Rights**

“First of all I must admit that today I would learn to overcome my disability of the lack of understanding the issues of PWDs. It’s a great honor for me to be part of this policy dialogue and welcome all the participants.

Today I thought of Stella Young who passed away. I would not say she passed away but she passed on. She said that her disability exists not because she uses a wheelchair, but because the broader environment isn’t accessible. What a profound utterance. I think she said it all. No long speech, no text book, no lecture could have summed up this issue in such a profound way as she does. I think today when we celebrate this day, we need to sit down to look at the past and chalk down the future.

The first thing that needs to be addressed to plan a better future is to cross the barriers of accessibility. The barrier is not only the infrastructure but also the barrier that we have in our minds. The barrier to my mind is of manifolds. I will highlight just a few. The barriers like fear of unknown, sympathy, exclusion etc. The question is whether we would continue to be slaves to these barriers and be confined to these mindsets. I think the time has come when we take the step further. In China they say that a hundred mile journey starts with a small step. And I would say that we need to take many steps to reach our destiny and this dialogue is indeed one of those steps.

Disability is not just physical. It can be that of deficiency to learn, deficiency to communicate, deficiency to exist in an environment. I would say that a person is not a disabled person. It is the disability of the society which does not recognize the special needs of that person. The disability
exists in our minds. It is inculcated in the society where we are unable to communicate. The lack of communication is not from one side. It is always two-sided. It is not from the person sitting in the wheel chair or person who cannot speak or hear. The disability lies with the person on the other side who fails to understand the demands of other person. I am so glad that we are all here. Let us open our hearts and minds and sensitize people to act as a stepping stone.

As Mr. Mangi said, we have signed the international conventions and these conventions and treaties are an obligation for the state. It is on my recommendation that the separate ministry is brought back. I think that it was such an important issue which was passed from one ministry to the other. I think it is not just our obligation as member of a treaty or convention but it is our obligation as Pakistanis to do our best. And by doing so, we are not doing any favor.

This forum is a great opportunity. We need to sit down and discuss and I really look forward to hear from you. I would really like to look at the record or notes of this dialogue so that I can take these issues up in the Parliament and from there we take the next step and add value to what we are doing today.

All of us know issues related to PEDs have been devolved to provinces but the federal government will continue to play its role in the implementation of national and international commitments and conventions. The government has notified Treaty Implementation Cell as full- fledged secretariat. We will be ensuring that all these conventions are implemented to their fullest to the best advantage of the people.

I was told here and I have taken note of the fact that voting for people with special needs is a very difficult task. They don’t even have accessibility to cast vote. The government will ensure that such impediments do not come in the way of this sacred duty as a citizen. They will have their own day and that day is not far. The government is fully committed to carry on its constitutional obligation.”

Panel Discussion: Inclusive Implementation of CRPD and Sustainable Development Goals
The first panel discussion was titled ‘Inclusive Implementation of CRPD and Sustainable Development Goals.’ The panel was chaired by DG Ministry of Human Rights Mr. Muhammad Hassan Mangi and was moderated by Executive Director STEP Mr. Muhammad Atif Sheikh. The panelists included:

- Mr. Syed Sardar Pirzada- Senior Journalist talked about ‘Inclusive Cities and Human Settlement with Reference to Goal 11 of SDGs.’
- Mr. Abdullah Abdul Rehman-Telenor representative discussed ‘Decent Employment with Reference to Goal 4.’
- Mr. Ole Holtved - Country Director International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES) highlighted ‘Political Participation of PWDs with reference to Goal 10 of SDGs.’
- Ms. Ayesha Khan - Deputy Manager Cooperate Strategy, Serena Hotel introduced initiatives of Agha Khan Development Network.
- Ms. Vibeke Jensen - Director UNESCO briefed participants on ‘Inclusive Education with Reference to Goal 4.’

**Mr. Syed Sardar Pirzada- Senior Journalist**

“The theme of this year’s International Day of Persons with Disability is ‘Inclusive Society.’ If we look at the theme, it addresses all human rights on the basis of which books and constitutions of this global village were written.

If we look at the history of SDGs, we will see that keeping in mind the increasing population of the world and issues faced by marginalized people, the United Nations set goals for the year 2030 to make the world a better place to live. As a result, 17 goals were drafted which were related to different sectors in which Goal 11 is linked with cities and human settlements.

This goal is backbone of SDGs as mobility of individuals in a society is as important as food or oxygen. All individual abilities are useless without mobility. The talent of common people especially women, children, elderly and disabled can never be explored without proper transportation and settlement facilities. Many of them would not be able to get education.
Unfortunately, the condition of transportation and thus Goal 11 is in a bad shape in Pakistan. All roads are constructed in big cities whereas not much attention has been given to rural areas where majority of the population lives. In fact, G 11 is more important for underdeveloped areas and for women, children and PWDs.

There is a need to keep in mind that PWDs are more vulnerable to accidents. In developed countries, they have installed different mechanisms like alarms and special lights to facilitate disabled persons. They are improving day by day but all such facilities are completely missing in underdeveloped world.

It is a universal truth that an individual is not disabled but the society is not able to facilitate and accommodate them. Martin Luther King said that humans have developed so much that they have learnt to live with animals but they were not able to learn to live with other human beings.

Unfortunately, our media is also not disability-friendly. There was a time when disability was given due importance on Pakistan Television (PTV). Everyone remembers the famous program ‘Boltay Haath’ which taught sign language to a greater audience. There was a time when main news bulletin was also aired with sign language but there is no such sensitivity in media these days. Due to the same reason, persons with disability remain unaware of the political situation.”

**Mr. Abdullah Abdul Rehman - Telenor Representative**

“SDG Goal 4 deals with the issue of inclusive employment. There is a need to tackle this issue in a holistic manner. Unless there is inclusive education, inclusive transportation and inclusive policies, the goal of inclusive economic empowerment or employments cannot be achieved.

From Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the conventions of International Labour Organization (LO), all emphasize on inclusiveness at all levels. Around the same framework to promote inclusiveness, Telenor launched ‘Open Mind Pakistan’ under the guidance of STEP.

It was a three-phased journey that started with the awareness and sensitization internally with the staff and externally with the persons of influence on the need to bring change in the work
environment according to the needs of persons with disability. The issue of accessibility, not only structural but also attitudinal, was addressed through different initiatives as we realized that without accessibility, the talent and education of PWDs is of no use. The qualification cannot help if someone fails to enter the workplace. Once the issue of accessibility is addressed, you can move to the inclusive employment.

Following that, under the volunteer program, we provided training to all employees and engaged extensively with all stakeholders working with the PWDs. In addition, there was a lot of media engagement, radio programs and TV talk shows to spread the message that inclusive employment can be made possible with a little change in the environment.

Besides that, accessibility audit of all Telenor offices, customer outlets and other structures was conducted through government departments to ensure accessibility of PWDs.

Within organization, we came up with role identification. It was identified that PWDs can perform equally well as compared to other employees at call centers. Our aim was result-oriented role identification which can benefit PWDs in future endeavors. Our focus was to provide exposure to PWDs and develop their abilities.

At the end, two PWDs were given permanent jobs for a year in all Telenor divisions. In October, we have launched third batch of the ‘Open Mind Pakistan’ initiative. In all this process, we trained 30 PWDs.

I must say that the level of motivation they brought to the organization was unprecedented and was indeed much more than what was invested in this program.”

Mr. Ole Holtved - Country Director International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES)

“The tenth of SDGs talks about promoting social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic and other status.

In IFES, our focus is on the inclusion of all citizens in the political and democratic processes as voters as well as candidates. Inclusion is not a favor or charity; it is a right, as Goal 10 says
regardless of gender belief or disability. Over the recent years, the awareness of this simple fact is thankfully increasing, not only in Pakistan but globally. This awareness now needs to turn into action for removing barriers, whether these barriers are legal in nature or more practical such as providing government materials accessible for visually impaired or making public buildings – including polling stations- accessible for people with motor impairment.

We are gradually getting there. In 2010, STEP and IFES organized a national consultation workshop on electoral access for persons with disabilities. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) included key recommendations from this forum in their first strategic plan and their second strategic plan for the period 2014 to 2018 further elaborate on this.

In September 2014, IFES in coordination with ECP organized an international conference on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in electoral process. These conferences including what we do today keep reminding all of us to keep these issues high on our agenda and never forget the rights of every group of citizens.

The sub-award which STEP is currently implementing for IFES is developing information resources for PWD, opinion-makers and public at large such as through Android applications, material made available of the Pakvoter website and social media platforms and in direct interaction with decision-makers and disabled persons and organizations.

We intend to continue these efforts and hope that the inclusion of PWDs, both as voters and as political candidates will continue to increase as we move forward to the next general elections in 2018 and beyond.”

Ms. Ayesha Khan - Deputy Manager Cooperate Strategy, Serena Hotel

“Today, we have gathered here to mark International Day of Persons with Disability. I am glad to represent Serena Hotels here. Serena Hotels are part of Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN) and being a part of AKDN, we have a responsibility towards the community and we have to give back to community.
Main focus of AKDN is community development in order to improve the lives of the local people and that is why we are mainly based in the underdeveloped areas. In our initiatives, we engage with disability-driven institutions around Pakistan. We also believe in employment opportunities for the people with disability. Neither we are gender biased nor do we discriminate on the basis of any kind of disability. Our hiring is based on merit and talent and we promote good employees. We strongly believe that together we can make a difference and every one of us has to play our role in it.”

Ms. Vibeke Jensen - Director UNESCO

“I congratulate STEP and NFWWD for organizing this event. As you all know that two months ago, states gathered in New York to approve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I was part of the working group that negotiated for SDGs and I can assure you that the process was very inclusive.

Initially there were around 15 countries in the Opening Working Group but slowly all countries started expressing their desire to become part of the discussions and they made the decision to have two or three or sometimes four member states to be part of the meetings and contribute in the discussion.

Two areas were always on the priority of discussions - one was inclusive agenda and the other was to ensure that no one is left behind. One of the agendas on the top of the list was education. From now on, education will be merging two processes - one is achieving primary education for all and also achieving gender parity as part of Goal 3, but also to have Education for All (EFA) frame work for action which was approved by education ministers just a few months before the SDGs were approved in New York. That is much broader and comprehensive agenda when we talk about access to education, quality of education, literacy for young and adults and when we talk about gender equality.

Unfortunately, we have a lot of unfinished business. I am glad that member states decided to have a goal dedicated to education. At some point in time, it sounded like that it is not going to be the case as education was debated for everything like poverty reduction, improved nutrition,
economic development, peace and security. Finally, we now have Goal 4 which brings along some of the left over from MDG and EFA agenda and we have also added some new items in it i.e. ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all. For all means for all and it is not for 85 or 90 per cent of the population.

There is definitely scope throughout this agenda for advocating for inclusive education and we definitely need it because global figures indicate that only two percent of children with disability in the developing world actually have access to education. I don’t have exact figures from Pakistan. There are many reports around but I don’t think so that there are any authentic figures available on how many children with disability are in school, what kind of schools and what is the level of education. All we know is that there are many out of school disabled children. One of the first things that we can do is to have better take on what the figures say and the number of the children we are talking about to scale and line up the policies.

There are couple of the targets in Goal 4 that address disability. Like 4.5 talks about vulnerable groups and marginalized groups including children and people with disabilities and one of the means of implementation 4.8 specifically refers to disability-friendly infrastructure in place. We have 49 proposed indicators for Goal 4 and there are specific indicators also related to disability.

Now that was the global agenda but the challenge is to translate it into national agenda and in the case of Pakistan, even for provincial agenda as well. We have a lot of work to do in next many months not only with the Ministry of Education at federal level but also with many line ministries to ensure that Goal 4 is properly reflected in the education policy and implementation strategy.

UNICEF and other UN agencies behind Education 2030 agenda, which is same as SDG Goal 4 but sort of taking the EFA agenda forward, are working with the Ministry of Education to start the consultation process that will be held both at federal level and provinces. The consultation will involve all stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental agencies to look into where are the gaps and what needs to be done. All this will be done to make sure that we have an education agenda inclusive of all and not leaving anyone behind.
I would also like to talk about a new addition ‘Education Quality’ in the education agenda, which was not duly highlighted in MDG and EFA. It was there in EFA agenda but there was not much focus on that and more focus was on the access to education. Now the quality is much higher priority. Now it also talks about providing skill to young people, formal or non-formal education, higher education and we have also included an agenda of global citizenship. We are focusing on values like human rights, gender equality and respect for diversity. This is also a very good opportunity to look at the curriculum, and to make sure that respect of diversity of all kind is not also reflected in curriculum but also in the way teachers are transferring that information to the children.

At the end, I would like to say that UNESCO would continue working with the federal and provincial governments on looking at education policy and matching it with SDG goals. This is not a new work and we have been doing that before but this is a new opportunity to putting again the same emphasis. We would also continue to harness ICT for providing access to information focusing on PWDs and we would continue to promote distant learning for children and adults with disability.

Finally, I would like to say that ‘C’ in UNESCO stands for culture and just before joining this dialogue, I inaugurated a workshop on ‘Protection of Heritage Sites’ and I took the opportunity to talk to the managers of historical sites that they should also make sure the access of disabled persons.

**Panel Discussion: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women with Disabilities**

The second panel discussion was titled “Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women with Disability.” The panel was chaired by Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Human Rights Barrister Mr. Zafarullah Khan and moderated by Chief Executive Officer of National Forum for Women with Disabilities Ms. Abia Akram. The panelists included:
Ms. Rabeea Hadi - Director Advocacy and EWAV Aurat Foundation talked about ‘Violence against Women with Disabilities.’

Mr. Neal Murata - Cultural Attaché, Embassy of the United States of America expressed the stance of United States government on ‘Empowering Women with Disabilities.’

Ms. Munazza Gilani - Country Director Sightsavers highlighted ‘Role of International Organizations.’

**Mr. Neal Murata - Cultural Attaché Embassy of United States of America**

“I am honored to sit among leaders and pioneers of disability movement in Pakistan. Today is the day of celebration for pioneers of this movement for the success and the role they had played in Pakistani society.

US embassy supports PWDs because we believe that disability rights are human rights. We believe that empowerment begins with education and it starts with the society. Change in mindsets brings change in the society. It is the responsibility of the society to make PWDs realize that being disabled is not a disadvantage. We believe that equality starts from home and from the class room. Society can contribute in making PWDs productive community members. But we also realize that mindset change takes time. The PWDs and government has worked so hard to bring that change.

This year, we are celebrating 25 years of American Disability Act passed in 1990 when PWDs were given right in government, housing, and education. The same spirit translates into the foreign policy of US government. Exchange programs of PWDs are part of this effort. The exchange program with Pakistan is only start of this collaboration. Recently two deaf girls visited United States to learn how US uses sports to inculcate self-esteem in PWDs.

On this occasion, we are proud to share the example of Judith Heumann, who is a pioneer leader of disability rights in US. During recent visit of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to United States, an important initiative was launched in which the two countries agreed to jointly work to ensure that every girl has an opportunity to learn.
Am glad that after this event, each one in this room will take this message that disability is not a disadvantage and disability rights are human rights. I am glad to see that all STEP events are made accessible to PWDs in all respect. These events are true demonstration of accessibility.

At the end, I would like to say that there is a need to encourage society to understand what disability is and we, as member of the community, can play very important role in this regard.”

Ms. Munazza Gillani - Country Director Sightsavers

“I would like to start my talk with a recent experience in a planning workshop on disaster management. Known development experts and policy makers participated in the workshop. During the proceedings, I raised the question about focus on PWDs and the response was that they were planning for all. Unfortunately, it never occurs to us to think about PWDs while planning and we need to emphasize again and again to make sure that PWDs are included in whatever we plan.

Sightsavers recently conducted research studies in Bangladesh and India to collect data and estimate the accessibility PWDs. Research in Bangladesh focuses on ‘Disability Inclusive Disaster Preparedness and Management Focusing Alternative Livelihood.’ There is a need to conduct same kind of research in Pakistan.

In Pakistan we lack information on the statistics of PWDs. The government has announced census in March 2016. I have seen the draft questionnaire and have noticed that questions around disability are not satisfactory. Information cannot be complete unless socio-economic and education status of PWDs also become part of the questionnaire.

I would also like to highlight here the need to understand what stakeholders we are partnering with. According to our observation, many projects related to PWDs are working in isolation. Such projects are never sustainable. It is very important to involve all stakeholders. I think STEP has taken a good step by involving Ministry of Human Rights, National Commission on the Status of Women, NGOs, INGOs and activists in this dialogue. We need to sit together and combine all our resources to support projects related to disability.
This dialogue would be a great benefit to this cause as opinion and recommendations from all stakeholders will be presented here. We are planning to disseminate these recommendations to stakeholders and also plan to conduct the same research in Pakistan.”

Ms. Rabeea Hadi - Director Advocacy and EVAW Aurat Foundation (AF)

After more than two decades of hard work, finally Violence against Women is accepted as an issue that needs to be addressed at policy and implementation level. The world over, every third woman has experienced violence of one form or the other. Recent statistics collected by Aurat Foundation show that 4308 cases of Violence against Women have been registered from January to June 2015.

As per standard definition, violence is not just physical as it has been perceived in our society. Other forms of violence are psychological and economical. And believe me, these two forms of violence are prevalent in every household in our country and it is as damaging as physical violence.

I would like to share my experience of working with blind girls and persons with learning disabilities recently under one of our projects. It was a sad experience but an eye opener for me as well. The level of discrimination these girls face was never known to me until I met them and interacted with them and their teachers.

The level of confidence of those girls was extremely low. Their teachers told us that the worst form of violence they suffer is social isolation and social mindset. These girls are extremely malnourished and such children remain confined to their homes. In fact the families try to hide them from society as it can create trouble in marrying off other daughters and boys. Those with mental instability are sometimes even chained in the name of protection. During census and surveys, people tend to hide their disabled children.

They are called names like ‘langri’, jhali, Allah log, Pagli, Anni etc. And baichari is the most popular word used for them in front of them. Some are not even given name by their family. In
conflict situation, there are reports that families left their children with disability back in the conflict zone as their priority was normal children.

As far as the physical violence is concerned, there is no data available for women with disabilities. But when a girl without any disability suffers different forms of sexual abuse at home and in society, then we can well imagine the level of abuse suffered by girls or women with disability. The worst part is that they cannot do much to protect themselves. The so called protection which includes lawyers, courts, shelters and police station are not accessible for them. I will share one example that in most of the cases of disabled or down syndrome girls, the families remove their uterus which leads to health complication and sometimes results in their death.

There is no policy for the education of persons with disability. When they attempt competition examination, a matriculation passed person is given to them to attempt the paper.

Unfortunately, women with disability are never considered in women empowerment projects designed by public or private organizations. The blatant demonstration of this fact was seen in local body elections when no seat was reserved for persons with disability.

**Ms. Abia Akram - Chief Executive Officer of National Forum for Women with Disabilities**

“I thank all participants for their support. We have been involved for long in advocacy for women with disability to bring recognition to their voice at all levels. We believe that it is quite important to work on advocacy side. The aim is to build capacities of individuals so that they can join the mainstream. But along with that, employment opportunity for PWDs is equally important in changing their status in the society.

We hope that SDGs will contribute to a great extent in the inclusion of women with disabilities. We believe that all stakeholders need to work in collaboration to achieve these goals.”

**Barrister Mr. Zafarullah Khan - Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Human Rights**
“I am glad to attend this event that is meant to think and work for mainstreaming of PWDs. Unfortunately, we spent more time in thinking about further facilitating people who are already blessed or powerful.

All speakers have talked about the role society can play in making PWDs a productive member of the society. I think society has a major role to play. The real test of an individual is when he or she deals with vulnerable or weak. Anyone can be good to an influential or a powerful person but true personality is reflected through their treatment towards weaker segments of the society.

I we look at our prophets, a common thing about their personalities was their behavior towards weak. Jesus Christ never made friends with the kings. He was always found in the middle of weak, poor, disabled and sick. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was also famous for his kindness towards vulnerable. There was a mentally disabled woman who used to drag Prophet Muhammad PBUH around the market and Prophet Muhammad never rejected her or misbehaved with her. He used to follow her only to please her. Unfortunately, we fail to follow our true leaders in practice.

Besides highlighting negative things about our society, we also need to appreciate good aspects that we see around. For example, we have this golden tradition of taking care of our elders instead of sending them to old homes.

I would like to say here that I personally disagree to the term ‘disability.’ There is an in-built defect in this word which needs to be corrected. I believe that they are able people and it the society and environment that has to change according to them. This term should change. As in 60’s, countries were divided in to first and second world which was then changed to developed and underdeveloped world. When the countries falling in the category of underdeveloped felt disrespected and criticized the term underdeveloped, it was officially changed to developing countries. Similarly, we should try to think of a better term for disability.

I think that there is a good opportunity to work for all vulnerable groups as the government has made Ministry of Human Rights a separate ministry. We are in the process of establishing expert wings within the ministry to accelerate our efforts to bring all deprived sections of the society
into mainstream. We also plan to make a comprehensive national policy on human rights after consultation with all relevant stakeholders. We will soon make a national level committee of all stakeholders for this purpose.

In our society, it is unfortunate that persons with disabilities are treated with sympathy and they fail to find hope and support from their environment. I would advise them not to lose hope in any circumstances and take inspiration from the persons with disability who have made their name in the history despite their short comings.

Whenever you lose hope, think about blind Iranian Scholar Serkis who wrote 30 volumes on Fiqh when he was arrested by the king. Or think about blind English poet John Milton who is well known for his poem Paradise Lost. Or take inspiration from Stephen Hawking who was not even able to move but his services in the field of science are unmatchable.

The only reason to quote these people before you is to encourage you to keep struggling and never to lose hope. I ensure you that the coming time will be much better.”

**Mr. Atif Sheikh - Executive Director STEP**

“I thank all those who have supported today’s event including Ministry of Human Rights Sight Savers, United States Embassy, Serena Hotel and Aurat Foundation and I hoped that recommendations of the policy dialogue would serve as a guideline for policy makers in future.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the backdrop of the legal and factual situation discussed during the proceedings, the following recommendations were proposed:

1. The Federal and Provincial Governments must effectively implement all the relevant provisions of its national and international commitments towards PWDs.
2. The Federal and Provincial Governments must ensure employment of persons with disabilities against the disability quota in all government establishments, commercial establishments and industrial establishments, at the federal and provincial levels.
3. The Federal and Provincial Governments must: (a) implement necessary measures for the purposes of facilitating inclusive education for persons with disabilities at the primary and secondary levels; (b) ensure that persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education; and (c) ensure that persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability, and that persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live.

4. The Higher Education Commission must: (a) implement necessary measures in order to ensure that institutions of higher education are fully accessible for persons with disabilities; and (b) ensure that persons with disabilities receive all the necessary support required to facilitate their effective education;

5. The Federal and Provincial Governments and various local development authorities and public transport organizations operating under them must ensure that public spaces including buildings and roads and private spaces which are providing services and facilities for the public, particularly educational institutions, banks, hospitals, shopping malls, police stations, airports, railway stations, bus stops, and hotels, and all public transport facilities including mass transit systems, railway systems and airlines, are accessible for persons with disabilities, and to provide maximum facilities on footpaths for persons on wheel chairs and persons with visual impairments.

6. PEMRA must implement measures in order to: (a) ensure that the information being disseminated through electronic media is accessible for persons with disabilities; (b) prevent their humiliation, violation of their dignity, negative stereotyping and discrimination on television channels and radio stations.

7. PTV and Pakistan Radio must implement measures in order to ensure that the information being disseminated through their radio stations and television channels is accessible for persons with disabilities, including introduction of live sign language
interpretation on television channels, and to air specific programs for persons with disabilities in Pakistan.

8. NGOs, INGOs and DPOs should play their role in sensitization of public and private media for the issues related to PWDs and for making media more accessible for PWDs.

9. The Federal Government and the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics must carry out a comprehensive national survey of incidence of disability in the population of Pakistan, after addressing the issues of definitions, reference period and inconsistent categories, which have hampered earlier efforts in this regard, by consulting all relevant stakeholders, researchers and academics, and ensure that such survey is carried out by properly trained staff and involves physical verification of impairments by professionals in order to ensure proper identification of persons with disability, documentation of impairments and categorization of the type, cause, duration and severity of disability.

10. The Election Commission of Pakistan must implement all necessary measures for the purposes of ensuring the full participation of persons with disabilities in the democratic process, including making appropriate arrangements by virtue of which persons with disabilities can cast their votes at polling booths on the election day, including, inter alia, providing accessible polling booths, sign language interpretation and Braille ballot papers.

11. Seats for persons with disability must be reserved in local bodies so that they can raise voice for issues they face at the decision making level.

12. NADRA must implement all necessary measures to facilitate persons with disabilities in obtaining Special National Identity Cards, including simplification of procedures and introduction of one window operations, ensuring accessibility of its offices, providing relevant information and guidelines on its website, and ensuring availability of Braille forms and the Federal and Provincial Governments must implement all necessary measures to ensure that holders of Special National Identity Cards are able to receive the special benefits to which they are entitled, including, inter alia, free medical treatment in government hospitals and travelling concessions.

13. As a compulsory step towards inclusive society, sign language should become part of the curriculum at national and international level.
14. Women with disability should make part of all women empowerment projects at public and private level.

15. Government of Pakistan must ensure accessibility of women with disability to justice by making police stations, courts and shelters more accessible for women with disability and by enhancing online services.
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<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Resource Person</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Prayers/ Recitation of Holy Quran</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Welcome Address</td>
<td>Director General Ministry of Human Rights</td>
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<td>Muhammad Hassan Mangi</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Disability Rights and Policy framework in Pakistan</td>
<td>Mr. Muhammad Atif Sheikh, Executive Director STEP</td>
<td>10:40am</td>
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<td>SDGs and status of Pakistan</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Key note speech</td>
<td>Special Assistant to Prime Minister of Pakistan on Law and Justice Ashtar Ausaf</td>
<td>10:45am</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Launch of Android Mobile App on Disability Rights</td>
<td>Special Assistant to Prime Minister of Pakistan on Law and Justice Ashtar Ausaf</td>
<td>11:00am</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Panel Discussion: Inclusive implementation of CRPD and sustainable</td>
<td>Chair: Mr. Muhammad Hassan Mangi</td>
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<td>Panel Discussion: Achieving Gender Equality and empowering Women with</td>
<td>Chair Special Assistant to Prime Minister On Human Rights Zafarullah Khan</td>
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<td>Ms. Rabeea Hadi, Director Advocacy and EWAV</td>
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<td>Empowering Women with Disabilities</td>
<td>Mr. Neal Murata Cultural Attache Embassy of the United States of America</td>
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<td>Role of International Organization</td>
<td>Ms. Munazza Gilani Country Director Sight Savers</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>Chair Special Assistant to Prime Minister On Human Rights Zafarullah Khan</td>
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<td>Vote of Thanks</td>
<td>Mr. Ali Shabbar Program Manager STEP</td>
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**Pictures of event:**

ABIA AKRAM SPEAKING ON GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES - SUPPORTING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES OF PAKISTAN - POLICY DIALOGUE TOWARDS A DISABILITY INCLUSIVE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK PAKISTAN PERSPECTIVE-INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, DECEMBER 3, 2015