

# **Women with Disabilities: Lessons of Reinforcing the Gender Perspective in International Norms and Standards**

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## **Getting Women with Disabilities on the Development Agenda of the United Nations**

Women with disabilities did not get on United Nations development agenda overnight. The first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in 1975, did not mention women with disabilities at all.<sup>1</sup> The second World Conference on Women, held in Copenhagen in 1980, only asked Governments to "Direct special attention to the needs of elderly women, women living alone and disabled women."<sup>2</sup> There was little detail in the text agreed by the Governments and persons with disabilities were not well represented.

One of the major achievements for the disability community, following the 1981 observance of the International Year of Disabled Persons, was the founding of Disabled People's International (<http://www.dpi.org>). DPI is an international non-governmental cross-disability coalition of organizations of persons with disabilities. Women with disabilities now had an international non-governmental organizational mechanism by which they could seek to influence the development agenda of the United Nations to be more disability responsive and gender sensitive.

During the third World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi in 1985, women activists with disabilities made a special effort to be present. Even though the location of the parallel NGO Forum was not very accessible and many governmental delegates were more concerned with political issues, activists like Ruth Begun from DPI in the United States were able to convince Governments to include two paragraphs on women with disabilities in the section of the "Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women" on "groups requiring special concern". Women with "physical and mental disabilities" were among the 13 special groups of women listed in the "Strategies", and taken together they were considered to be "vulnerable".<sup>3</sup>

DPI women decided to use the opportunity of this text to bring the case of women with disabilities to the United Nations. The main focus of their efforts would be the Commission on the Status of Women, a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The Commission had for almost fifty years been the place where women's concerns could be expressed at the intergovernmental level. However, the Commission had never dealt with the question of women with disabilities.

In 1987, Disabled People's International established its "Women's Committee"; Anneli Jonecken of Sweden was its chairperson. Beginning in 1988 the Women's Committee of DPI began introducing language on women with disabilities both in expert meetings organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat and at annual sessions of the

Commission on the Status of Women. Oral and written statements were introduced during the debate by DPI representatives, all related to women with disabilities.

The issue of vulnerable women, referring to the 13 special groups of women identified in the "Forward-looking strategies" was included in the long-term work program of the Commission for 1991. This meant that the theme would be developed substantively during 1990. The Division for the Advancement of Women, which prepared background papers for the Commission, had decided to deal with each of five groups of "women with special concerns" identified in the "Strategies" individually. One of these groups was "women with disabilities".

## **United Nations Seminar on Women with Disabilities**

During the 1990 session of the Commission, agreement was reached between DPI and the Division for the Advancement of Women to organize jointly a "[Seminar on disabled women](#)" from 20-24 August 1990 at Vienna. This was the first time that the United Nations had organized a technical meeting on women with disabilities. Both DPI and the Division prepared for it carefully. After an open discussion and strong debates, the meeting adopted more than seventy recommendations. DPI worked with the Division to present these in their periodic publication *Women 2000*.<sup>4</sup> A women's point of view on disability now was on the table.

## **Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities**

The rights of persons with disabilities has been the subject of much attention in the United Nations.<sup>5</sup> One outcome of the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 was the adoption of the World Plan of Action concerning Disabled Persons<sup>6</sup> by General Assembly resolution 37/52 of 3 December 1982. The World Programme emphasized the rights of persons with disabilities to equal opportunities as does society as a whole, to improvements in their living conditions on the basis of full and effective participation and to accountability in policies and programmes that affect their well being and livelihoods. The Programme did not however distinguish between women and men with disabilities. Since most of the delegates who reviewed and discussed drafts of Programme were men, the document reflected a male point of view.

In 1987, at the midpoint of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992) a Global Meeting of Expert was organized in Stockholm to review progress and obstacles in implementing the World Programme. The Meeting recommended that the General Assembly should convene a special conference to draft an international convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities to be ratified by States by the end of the Decade.<sup>7</sup> Again, there was no reference in the recommendations submitted to gender-sensitive issues.

A draft outline of such a "Convention" was prepared by Italy for consideration at the forty-second session of the General Assembly (1987), and Sweden prepared a draft of a "Convention" for consideration at the forty-fourth session of the Assembly (1989). In neither session could consensus be reached on a course of action. The reason was that, in the opinion of many representatives, other existing human rights documents seemed to guarantee persons with disabilities the same rights as all other persons.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council, at its first regular session in 1990, agreed to elaborate "Standard rules on equalization of opportunities of persons with disabilities" as an alternative to drafting of a "Convention". Governmental experts would elaborate the "Standard Rules" in close collaboration with organizations of the United Nations system, intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations, especially organizations of persons with disabilities.

The "Standard Rules" were developed through a series of expert consultations and workshops over the period 1991-1993. At its forty-eight session (1993) the General Assembly adopted the "Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities" by resolution 48/96, annex of 20 December 1993.<sup>8</sup>

Drafting of the "Rules" proceeded independently from what was happening concerning the advancement of women. However, because of the Seminar on women with disabilities, the Commission on the Status of Women in 1991 requested that the issue of women with disabilities be considered in the drafting of the "Standard Rules". While this had no binding effect, it did alert delegations to the importance of the issue.

Again, most of the delegates concerned with drafting the "Rules" were men, who did not see the need to include a gender dimension in the text of the "Standard Rules".<sup>9</sup>

The "Standard Rules" are intended to be a tool for policy-making and action for persons with disabilities and their organizations. The purpose of the "Rules" is to ensure that girls, boys, women and men with disabilities will have the same rights and obligations as others. Since there are still obstacles that prevent persons with disabilities to participate fully in the activities of their societies, the "Rules" call upon States to be responsible for removing these obstacles. Persons with disabilities and their organizations should play an active role in this process, with special attention directed towards groups such as women, children, and older persons, among others.

Chapter II of the "Rules", Target Areas for Equal Participation is the only place in which the "Rules" are especially gender-sensitive. This was because a DPI representative participated in the open-ended working group that agreed on the draft text of the "Rules". She was the only woman with disabilities and probably the only woman in the room. However, colleagues from Disabled People's International came to the final meeting to promote support for keeping the wording in the document when adopted.

## **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

The main human rights document for women is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.<sup>10</sup> It was adopted by the General Assembly in December 1979 and came into force on 3 September 1981. The Convention specifies both women's human rights and policies necessary to enjoy them. States Parties that have ratified, acceded or succeeded to the Convention are legally bound by its provisions. A special treaty body, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, checks whether States Parties are complying with the Convention.

The Convention initially had no mention of women with disabilities. Interpretation of the Convention is done by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Thus, DPI representatives realized that if Committee could be convinced to make a General Recommendation on women with disabilities, it would have the effect of bringing disability concerns into the Convention.

DPI representatives worked during Committee sessions in 1989 and 1991. By talking with Committee Members, especially by showing them recommendations from the Seminar on women with disabilities and by formulating language that the DPI representatives worked out with interested Committee Members, the Committee was convinced to adopt General Recommendation No. 18 (tenth session, 1991) on "Disabled Women".<sup>12</sup> This meant that every State Party to the Convention had to report on the status of women with disabilities in their countries. Some countries have already done so in their periodic reports.

## **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

When the time came to begin work on the final document of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, DPI had two sets of text to show to delegates: the report of the Seminar on women with disabilities and the "Standard Rules". DPI representatives were of the view that some of the "Standard Rules" text could be used at Beijing if the gender dimension were strengthened. However, DPI soon realized that it would have to go far beyond the "Standard Rules" if it were to have the concerns of women with disabilities appropriately reflected in the Beijing "Platform for Action".

If the recommendations of the Seminar on women with disabilities are compared with the text of the "Platform", it is evident that much has been reflected. By constant lobbying in every preparatory committee meeting and encouraging DPI members to attend Beijing or to be part of national delegations, DPI began to see its text on women with disabilities gradually incorporated into the draft Platform.

By the time the Platform for Action was negotiated, it was clear that delegates expected to add text on women with disabilities to certain parts of the document, based on what had been the gender-sensitive analysis of women with disabilities done in 1990.

## **What the Platform says about Women with Disabilities**

The "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" were adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women on September 16, 1995<sup>12</sup> and endorsed by the General Assembly in December 1995.<sup>13</sup> By agreeing to its adoption, the Governments present at Beijing made a moral commitment to implement the provisions of the Declaration and Platform for Action. This means that they have committed themselves to do what is necessary to make the recommendations about women with disabilities real.

The Platform for Action contains over 300 separate paragraphs covering all aspects of women's advancement. Paragraphs on women with disabilities are found throughout the text. Knowledge of these paragraphs is a basic tool for advocacy.

The Platform for Action has six chapters:

- a mission statement,
- description of the global framework containing an analysis of how world conditions affect women,
- brief description of twelve critical areas of concern in which priority actions are required for advancement of women,
- detailed description of strategic objectives to address these critical areas and of the actions necessary,
- institutional arrangements and
- financial arrangements.

In the chapter on strategic objectives, each critical area is described and then a series of specific strategic objectives is set out. For each strategic objective, suggested actions by Governments, non-governmental organizations and others are described.

The paragraphs on women with disability constitute what could be called the women with disabilities platform. The relevant paragraphs of the Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women<sup>14</sup> are presented below:

## **"BEIJING DECLARATION"**

Paragraph 32. Intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls who face multiple barriers to their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, or disability, or because they are indigenous people;

## **"PLATFORM FOR ACTION" - WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES**

Paragraph 46. The Platform for Action recognizes that women face barriers to full equality and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability, because they are indigenous women or because of other status. Many women encounter specific obstacles related to their family status, particularly as single parents; and to their socio-economic status, including their living conditions in rural, isolated or impoverished areas. Additional barriers also exist for refugee women, other displaced women, including internally displaced women as well as for immigrant women and migrant women, including women migrant workers. Many women are also particularly affected by environmental disasters, serious and infectious diseases and various forms of violence against women.

### **A. Women and poverty**

Strategic objective A.1. Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty

#### **Actions to be taken**

Paragraph 60. By national and international non-governmental organizations and women's groups:

(a) Mobilize all parties involved in the development process, including academic institutions, non-governmental organizations and grass-roots and women's groups, to improve the effectiveness of anti-poverty programmes directed towards the poorest and most disadvantaged groups of women, such as rural and indigenous women, female heads of households, young women and older women, refugees and migrant women and women with disabilities, recognizing that social development is primarily the responsibility of Governments;

### **B. Education and training of women**

Paragraph 71. Discrimination in girls' access to education persists in many areas, owing to customary attitudes, early marriages and pregnancies, inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials, sexual harassment and lack of adequate and physically and otherwise accessible schooling facilities. Girls undertake heavy domestic work at a very early age. Girls and young women are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in poor scholastic performance and early dropout from the educational system. This has long-lasting consequences for all aspects of women's lives.

Strategic objective B.1. Ensure equal access to education.

#### **Actions to be taken**

Paragraph 80. By Governments:

(a) Advance the goal of equal access to education by taking measures to eliminate discrimination in education at all levels on the basis of gender, race, language, religion, national origin, age or disability, or any other form of discrimination and, as appropriate, consider establishing procedures to address grievances;

(g) Promote an educational setting that eliminates all barriers that impeded the schooling of pregnant adolescents and young mothers, including, as appropriate, affordable and physically accessible child-care facilities and parental education to encourage those who are responsible for the care of their children and siblings during their school years, to return to, or continue with and complete schooling;

Strategic objective B.2. Eradicate illiteracy among women.

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 81. By Governments, national, regional and international bodies, bilateral and multilateral donors and non-governmental organizations:

(a) Reduce the female illiteracy rate to at least half its 1990 level, with emphasis on rural women, migrant, refugee and internally displaced women and women with disabilities;

Strategic objective B.3. Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 82. By Governments, in cooperation with employers, workers and trade unions, international and non-governmental organizations, including women's and youth organizations, and educational institutions:

(k) Ensure access to quality education and training at all appropriate levels for adult women with little or no education, for women with disabilities and for documented migrant, refugee and displaced women to improve their work opportunities.

C. Women and health

Paragraph 101. With the increase in life expectancy and the growing number of older women, their health concerns require particular attention. The long-term health prospects of women are influenced by changes at menopause, which, in combination with life-long conditions and other factors, such as poor nutrition and lack of physical activity, may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis. Other diseases of ageing and the interrelationships of ageing and disability among women also need particular attention

Strategic objective C.1. Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 106. By Governments, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and employers' and workers' organizations and with the support of international institutions:

(c) Design and implement, in cooperation with women and community-based organizations, gender-sensitive health programmes, including decentralized health services, that address the needs of women throughout their lives and take into account their multiple roles and responsibilities, the demands on their time, the special needs of rural women and women with disabilities and the diversity of women's needs arising from age and socio-economic and cultural differences, among others; include women, especially local and indigenous women, in the identification and planning of health-care priorities and programmes; and remove all barriers to women's health services and provide a broad range of health-care services;

(o) Ensure that girls and women of all ages with any form of disability receive supportive services;

Strategic objective C.4. Promote research and disseminate information on women's health.

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 109. By Governments, the United Nations system, health professions, research institutions, non-governmental organizations, donors, pharmaceutical industries and the mass media, as appropriate:

(d) Increase financial and other support from all sources for preventive, appropriate biomedical, behavioural, epidemiological and health service research on women's health issues and for research on the social, economic and political causes of women's health problems, and their consequences, including the impact of gender and age inequalities, especially with respect to chronic and non-communicable diseases, particularly cardiovascular diseases and conditions, cancers, reproductive tract infections and injuries, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, domestic violence, occupational health, disabilities, environmentally related health problems, tropical diseases and health aspects of ageing;

D. Violence against women

Paragraph 116. Some groups of women, such as women belonging to minority groups, indigenous women, refugee women, women migrants, including women migrant workers, women in poverty living in rural or remote communities, destitute women, women in institutions or in detention, female children, women with disabilities, elderly women, displaced women, repatriated women, women living in poverty and women in situations of armed conflict, foreign occupation, wars of aggression, civil wars, terrorism, including hostage-taking, are also particularly vulnerable to violence.

Strategic objective D.1. Take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 124. By Governments:

(m) Ensure that women with disabilities have access to information and services in the field of violence against women;

Paragraph 126. By Governments, employers, trade unions, community and youth organizations and non-governmental organizations, as appropriate:

(d) Take special measures to eliminate violence against women, particularly those in vulnerable situations, such as young women, refugee, displaced and internally displaced women, women with

disabilities and women migrant workers, including enforcing any existing legislation and developing, as appropriate, new legislation for women migrant workers in both sending and receiving countries.

## F. Women and the Economy

Strategic objective F.4. Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks.

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 175. By Governments:

(d) Support programmes that enhance the self-reliance of special groups of women, such as young women, women with disabilities, elderly women and women belonging to racial and ethnic minorities;

Strategic objective F.5. Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination.

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 178. By Governments, employers, employees, trade unions and women's organizations:

(f) Implement and monitor positive public and private-sector employment, equity and positive action programmes to address systemic discrimination against women in the labour force, in particular women with disabilities and women belonging to other disadvantaged groups, with respect to hiring, retention and promotion, and vocational training of women in all sectors;

(j) Ensure access to and develop special programmes to enable women with disabilities to obtain and retain employment, and ensure access to education and training at all proper levels, in accordance with the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities;<sup>15</sup> adjust, to the extent possible, working conditions in order to suit the needs of women with disabilities, who should be secured legal protection against unfounded job loss on account of their disabilities;

## G. Women in Power and Decision-making

Strategic objective G.2. Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 195. By Governments, national bodies, the private sector, political parties, trade unions, employers' organizations, sub-regional and regional bodies, non-governmental and international organizations and educational institutions:

(a) Provide leadership and self-esteem training to assist women and girls, particularly those with special needs, women with disabilities and women belonging to racial and ethnic minorities to strengthen their self-esteem and to encourage them to take decision-making positions;

## H. Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

Strategic objective H.3. Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 206. By national, regional and international statistical services and relevant governmental and United Nations agencies, in cooperation with research and documentation organizations, in their respective areas of responsibility:

(k) Improve concepts and methods of data collection on the participation of women and men with disabilities, including their access to resources.

#### I. Human Rights of Women

Paragraph 225. Many women face additional barriers to the enjoyment of their human rights because of such factors as their race, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability or socio-economic class or because they are indigenous people, migrants, including women migrant workers, displaced women or refugees. They may also be disadvantaged and marginalized by a general lack of knowledge and recognition of their human rights as well as by the obstacles they meet in gaining access to information and recourse mechanisms in cases of violation of their rights.

Paragraph 226. The factors that cause the flight of refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women may be different from those affecting men. These women continue to be vulnerable to abuses of their human rights during and after their flight.

Strategic objective I.2. Ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice.

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 232. By Governments:

(p) Strengthen and encourage the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, paying special attention to ensure non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women and girls with disabilities, including their access to information and services in the field of violence against women, as well as their active participation in and economic contribution to all aspects of society;

Strategic objective I.3. Achieve legal literacy

Actions to be taken

Paragraph 233. By Governments and non-governmental organizations, the United Nations and other international organizations, as appropriate:

(a) Translate, whenever possible, into local and indigenous languages and into alternative formats appropriate for persons with disabilities and persons at lower levels of literacy, publicize and disseminate laws and information relating to the equal status and human rights of all women, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Declaration on the Right to Development and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, as well as the outcomes of relevant United Nations conferences and summits and national reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;

(b) Publicize and disseminate such information in easily understandable formats and alternative formats appropriate for persons with disabilities, and persons at low levels of literacy;

#### L. The girl child

Paragraph 259. The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or status" (article 2, para. 1).<sup>16</sup> However, in many countries available indicators show that the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood. In some areas of the world, men outnumber women by 5 in every 100. The reasons for the discrepancy include, among other things, harmful attitudes and practices, such as female genital mutilation, son preference -which results in female infanticide and prenatal sex selection - early marriage, including child marriage, violence against women, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, discrimination against girls in food allocation and other practices related to health and well-being. As a result, fewer girls than boys survive into adulthood.

Paragraph 270. The girl child with disabilities faces additional barriers and needs to be ensured non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.<sup>17</sup>

Paragraph 272. All barriers must therefore be eliminated to enable girls without exception to develop their full potential and skills through equal access to education and training, nutrition, physical and mental health care and related information.

Strategic objective L.4. Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training.

#### Actions to be taken

Paragraph 278. By Governments and international and non-governmental organizations:

(d) Facilitate the equal provision of appropriate services and devices to girls with disabilities and provide their families with related support services, as appropriate.

Paragraph 280. By Governments and international and non-governmental organizations:

(c) Ensure access to appropriate education and skills-training for girl children with disabilities for their full participation in life;

## **The Situation of Women with Disabilities: taking a snapshot**

When the member States of the United Nations adopted the "Platform for Action", they committed themselves to implement it and urged organizations of the United Nations System, all women and men, as well as non-governmental organizations, and all sectors of civil society to commit themselves fully and contribute to its implementation.

The first step in implementation is to see where we are: to take a snapshot of the present situation of women with disabilities. This means asking some tough questions. As part of its follow-up to the Beijing Conference, Disabled People's International has formulated some questions that it has circulated to its members. The questions provide a practical guide for each country and community to ask how the Platform for Action is being implemented.

### **Some tough questions to ask**

#### **About actions by Governments:**

- Has your Government taken action with respect to the eradication of poverty among disabled girls and women?
- Is there a plan of action to ensure access to quality education and training for disabled girls and women?
- What are the activities of your Government to promote and disseminate research and information with reference to the health of women with disabilities?
- What actions are being taken to prevent violence against disabled women and girls?
- What legislative actions are being planned to eradicate inequalities in economic structures and policies affecting disabled girls and women?
- Is there any legislative action to promote employment for women with disabilities?
- What is your Government doing to promote equal access for the full participation of women with disabilities in power structures and decision-making?
- What are the actions to promote respect for the protection of the human rights of disabled girls and women?
- How does your Government ensure access to community resources for disabled girls and women?

#### **About actions by the non-governmental community:**

- Has your organization used the Platform for Action to lobby the Government in any way?
- Has your organization networked with any women's organizations to help promote the inclusion of disabled girls and women in post-Beijing Conference lobbying efforts?
- Has your organization developed any public information programs or training opportunities to promote follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action?

### **Making the Platform Happen**

The Platform for Action was named to show that it is a political document. It is a statement of principles and policy objectives that women can use to change the world. However, the Platform will remain just words unless concerned people put pressure on Governments to turn its recommendations into actual deeds. Every woman with a disability has a stake in the Platform and a responsibility to act in her own interest and in the interest of the community in which she lives to convert it into concrete laws, policies and programs.

The experience of the women who worked to put disability into the Platform provides a model for every woman with a disability. Many national organizations of women with disabilities are already developing strategies to make the Platform happen. There are a number of steps common to such efforts, which are discussed in the follow paragraphs

## **Step One: Get the facts concerning the situation of women with disabilities**

The first step towards translating an international instrument, such as the Beijing Platform for Action, into practical action is to obtain information about (1) the situation of women with disabilities, (2) relevant policies that address this issue and which can be used to promote follow-up efforts, and (3) evidence of changes that have occurred since adoption of the Platform - or related international instruments.

Women with disabilities are in the Platform for Action because it was recognized that they experience things differently. The proof that the Platform is being implemented will be found in whether their situation changes for the better. The Platform says that within five years things should change. The Platform was intended to be measurable and the questions asked in the earlier section can be answered with numbers.

Some changes are easier to measure than are others. For instance, it is easy to determine whether access to education by girls with disability is the same as for other girls (and for boys): enrolment statistics can show that.

Other changes can be harder to measure, but information can be found. Surveys showing where women with disabilities live and the existence of independent living programs can indicate, for example, if women with disabilities are able to live independently and in dignity.

Governments are supposed to collect and analyze this information, but the reality is that many do not. Women with disabilities themselves may have to provide Governments with information, simply because the women care more about the issue.

The idea is to be able to say: in 1995 (or whatever year before Beijing for which you have data), women were at "point A". Now a year - or several years later - they are at "point B", compared with a goal of "point C". If they are still at "point A", that is grounds for crying "shame".

Going to the press with the results of this information can be a powerful tool for advocacy. No Government wants to be in a situation in which it can be accused of not making progress in accordance with internationally agreed policies and priorities.

## **Lobby your Government**

Governments have to be reminded of their commitments and encouraged to take action. Trying to influence Governments by contacting them directly is called lobbying.

The art of lobbying involves assembling information, which can include information about what women with disabilities in a given country feel, and making it available to people who make laws, develop policies or design and manage programs. There are a number of places where the information can be effective.

National Governments agreed to the Platform. They have made a commitment and would like to show that they are living up to that commitment, both for themselves and to show to other

countries. There is a competition among countries to show progress; and taking advantage of this is an important technique for effective lobbying of issues.

For this reason, if information shows that a commitment is not being met, most Governments will do things to improve the situation rapidly, by changing laws, changing expenditure policies, by undertaking public information campaigns.

Where can one start a lobbying effort?

Obviously it is important to contact interested members of national or provincial parliaments or similar legislative and deliberative bodies. They make laws and influence their implementation. When members are in the majority they want to show that they are doing well, when they are in the minority they want to show that they could do better.

Another place to lobby is the national machinery or similar coordinating body for the advancement of women as well the national disability committee. Almost every country has established a national body or organizations that is concerned with implementation of the Platform for Action. Sometimes it is a commission; sometimes it is an office in a ministry, sometimes an academic institute, and sometimes just a non-profit office. These entities need to be contacted and information provided related to women with disabilities.

According to the Platform for Action, Governments were supposed to prepare and present implementation plans by the end of 1996.

- If your Government made a plan, you should obtain a copy and make sure that it contains plans to address issues related to women with disabilities.
- If your Government did not make a plan, you should let them know that you are concerned and pressure the concerned officials to draft a plan, even if it is late, and see that the plan addresses disability issues.

## **Use international human rights instruments**

Another way of influencing Governments is to see whether national policies and programs are in compliance with relevant international human rights treaties, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Most Governments are party to (that is, they have ratified, acceded or succeeded to) the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. That means that they have taken a legal (as well as a moral) obligation to implement all of the Convention's provisions. The General Assembly has asked that the monitoring of the Convention take into account the Platform for Action. That means that the Platform can be used to help interpret obligations of States Parties under the Convention.

Countries are supposed to report every four years on implementation of the Convention to a monitoring body, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. This Committee is made up of 23 elected experts. Their job is to ask hard questions about what States Parties have done. In their General Recommendation 18, the Committee asked all Governments to report on the status of women with disabilities when they present their periodic reports to the Committee.

If your country is going to report in the next few years (and every State Party should have submitted at least one report between 1995 and 2000), you should contact the office preparing the report and

make your information available. Usually, the national machinery on advancement of women or similar coordinating body does drafting the periodic report.

If your information is ignored, you can make it available directly to members of the Committee. This will help the Committee to raise tough, realistic questions when they review your country's report. The address of members of the Committee can be obtained from Secretary, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations, Two United Nations Plaza, New York NY 10017 (USA).

## **Lobby Governments around the World**

Much of what is in the Platform is the result of lobbying of Governments by international non-governmental organizations. They provided ideas for text, showed that issues were important to many women and, through the Forum '95 at Beijing, dramatized the significance of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Members of the international non-governmental community are now involved in making sure that the Platform is implemented. Representatives of these organizations can be your voice in international forums, if they are given the information. There are a number of international non-governmental organizations concerned with disability. However, Disabled People's International is the one organization that is comprised of persons with disabilities covering all types of disabilities. DPI has a history of working with the United Nations in the areas of advancement of women and people with disabilities.

## **How can your organization lobby successfully?**

Before you attend any meeting, you should obtain copies of the documents (which are now easy to find on the Internet), read them and study them to see where you can most effectively introduce your issues to the debate.

Your organization can prepare a formal statement on the issue and prepare draft text that contains language you would like to see included in the final document of the meeting. You must find out ahead of time if non-governmental organizations are allowed to present oral statements at the meeting. If the answer is yes, you should try to get on the speaker's list two weeks prior to the meeting.

How do you get on the speaker's list? You call the Secretary of the meeting at the United Nations - or the concerned meeting organizing body - and give the name of your organization, your name and the agenda item on which you wish to make a statement. Making an oral statement is the way delegates that will be able to identify you.

Another technique is to have written text to distribute to interested delegations.

## **How do you know which delegations to lobby?**

From the first day of a meeting, it is important to listen to the debate and take note of delegations that mention disability, make a list of the countries at the end of the meeting and start contacting interested delegations. You can approach delegates during the meeting, at tea or lunch or in the hallways and give them a copy of the language that you would like to see added to the final meeting document. Sometimes this works easily; other times you have to keep working on the issue until you see that the issue gains recognition, support and is included in the final document.

When you lobby a resolution, approach the meeting Secretariat and find out what are the resolutions that are going to be tabled during the session you are attending. You can also approach your own country's delegation or the sponsor of a draft resolution being tabled. It is important to get a copy of the first draft of a resolution so you have the opportunity to go through it and have a chance to suggest improved language. You will not succeed all the time in efforts to add disability-sensitive language to a draft resolution. If you do not succeed, it is better to work closely with a delegation that is interested in the issue and look for future opportunities to advance the issue.

### **How do you meet the delegates?**

One approach is to ask if your country's delegates will you support on your issue. Sometimes through them you can meet other delegates. When you are listening to debates, try to locate where each country is sitting and recognize the faces of the delegates (or train your assistant to do this job). Whenever you have the opportunity, say "hello", and lobby your issue. You also can invite delegates for tea or lunch. You usually will not deal with the head of a delegation, but you never know. Sometimes you are lucky: this happens and lobbying becomes easier.

### **How do you meet members of the United Nations Secretariat and other intergovernmental organizations?**

The easiest way is to just make an appointment to meet with the Secretariat staff with whom you wish to discuss issues related to women with disabilities. Part of the job of the international civil service is to meet with representatives of non-governmental organizations and civil society. You can get a brief from them on items in your area of interest. Sometimes you can ask them for copies of meeting documents or publications. You should try to meet with them at their convenience, often before the meeting. During meetings Secretariat staff are very busy.

### **How do you get documents for meetings?**

Nowadays, it is can be difficult to get copies of documents during the meeting, because financial cutbacks have resulted in reductions in the number of copies reproduced. The best suggestion is to use the Internet to get documents before a meeting. This will give you a chance to prepare yourself ahead of time.

For documents that are distributed during a conference, representatives of non-governmental organizations often will not be provided copies so you must use your contacts in the Secretariat or among delegations to help you obtain copies and to photocopy the documents that you need.

It also is useful to lobby with non-governmental organizations that attend meetings and briefings on intergovernmental meetings that are organized by other non-governmental organizations. For NGO's that come only for specific meetings, like a national-level non-governmental organization, attendance at NGO briefings is a good way in which to quickly and efficiently gain information and obtain copies of meeting documents.

It is very important to follow a meeting until its final draft report is adopted. You have to be a watchdog for your issue. Sometimes a delegation may decide at the last moment to change or delete paragraphs, so you have to be attentive until the meeting is over.

## What can you do to further implementation of international instruments related to women with disabilities?

You can help make the commitments in the Platform for Action and in the Standard Rules a reality for women with disabilities, in your own communities and countries. Here are some activities to consider:

- Study the Standard Rules and the parts of the Platform for Action that relate to disability and think about how they relate to your own life, your family and your community.
- Try to collect regularly information about the situation of women with disabilities in your community and your country.
- Talk about this with other women with disabilities and other women and men generally.
- Find out about events in your country organized as follow up to the Beijing Conference and to promote interest and support for disability issues in general.
- Contact your national machinery for the advancement of women and your national committee concerning persons with disabilities.
- Keep informed about developments, including through periodic use of the Internet to do research on issues related to advancement of women, at <http://www.un.org/womanwatch> and to persons with disabilities at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/disabled.htm>. A number of non-governmental organizations have comprehensive Internet-based resources, such as the Disabled People's Association of Singapore, at <http://www.dpa.org.sg> as does the private sector WorldEnable site - the Internet Accessibility Initiative, at <http://www.worldenable.net>.
- Prepare and review periodically the list of priority issues that you feel need to be met to promote full participation and equality of persons with disabilities.

## Endnotes

1 Report of the World Conference of the International Women's Year, Mexico City, 19 June-2 July 1975, United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.76.IV.1.

2 Report of the United Nations Conference on the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Copenhagen, 14-30 July 1980, United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.80.IV.3, para.160.

3 Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985, United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10, para 296.

4 Women 2000, no.1, 1991. A summary of Seminar findings and recommendations is presented in a document submitted to the thirty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (Vienna, 27 February - 1 March 1991), "Priority Themes; Equality: Vulnerable Women, including Migrant Women, report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/1991/2)".

5 "The United Nations and Disabled Persons; the first fifty years" [<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/dis50y00.htm>] 28 August 1999.

6 United Nations document A/37/351/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex, sect. VIII, recommendation 1 (iv), available at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/diswpa00.htm>.

7 Report of the Global Meeting of Experts to Review the Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons at the Mid-Point of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (Stockholm, 17-22 August 1987); see also United Nations document A/42/561.

8 General Assembly resolution 48/96 is available on the Internet in English, French and Spanish at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/dissre00.htm>.

9 Economic and Social Council resolution 1991/21 "[took] note of the Seminar on Disabled Women, held in Vienna from 20-24 August 1990 (para 1)" and "[requested] the ad hoc open-ended working group to elaborate standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled persons to pay attention to the particular needs of disabled women (para 5)".

10 The Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development, Mr. Bengt Lindqvist (Sweden) has noted in his monitoring report on the implementation of the Standard Rules, for the period 1994 to 1997, that "... the gender perspective [is] vague in the text of the Rules ... the gender perspective should receive more attention in future implementation efforts" in "Monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities; note by the Secretary-General (A/52/56, para 152)" [<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/dismsre0.htm>].

11 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/content.htm>

12 Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995, United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13, available at <gopher://gopher.un.org/00/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en>.

13 General Assembly resolution 50/42 of 8 December 1995.

14 The full text in English (126 pages), as well as in French and Spanish, is available at <gopher://gopher.un.org/00/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en>.

15 General Assembly resolution 48/96, annex.

16 General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex.

17 General Assembly resolution 48/96, annex.