



Intersectional Feminist Development Policy and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

In 2009, Germany ratified the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and made a commitment to promote inclusion in international cooperation.¹ The strategy of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in German development cooperation (2019)² as well as the quality criteria 'Human rights, gender equality and disability inclusion' as part of the reform 'BMZ 2030' are the basis for implementing the UN CRPD in German development cooperation today. In its coalition agreement of 2021, the current government defines gender equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities as essential characteristics for its domestic and foreign political action. Feminist development policy became one of four political priorities of the BMZ, whose intersectional approach recognizes different interacting discriminatory structures and acknowledges the inclusion of persons with disabilities as well as encourages gender equality.³



© GIZ/Felix Lohmaier. Sylvia Abena Peparah (r.) is one of the first women with hearing and visual disabilities to graduate from university in Ghana.

1 United Nations (UN): [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), especially Article 32.

2 German Federal ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ): [Inclusion of persons with disabilities in German development cooperation](#) (2019).

3 [Feminist development policy | BMZ](#)

FACTS AND FIGURES

Persons with disabilities in all their diversity⁴ suffer globally more discrimination and often have severely less access to education, employment, health services, social security, IT- and financial services. The disadvantage increases, when discriminations based on several factors come

together, e.g. disability, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Therefore, women and girls as well as LGBTIQ*⁵ persons with disabilities are more often excluded from rights, resources and representation than men with disabilities or women without disabilities.⁶



© GIZ/IDIWA. On International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Ugandan persons are advocating for greater participation of women and girls with disabilities.

- › **Worldwide 1,2 billion people live with disabilities.** 22.1% of all women in low-income countries have disabilities and 13.8% of all men. This corresponds to almost every 4th woman and thus a gender disability gap of 8.3%.⁷
- › **Women are at a higher risk of becoming disabled during their life cycle than men.** Reasons for this include lack of access to (reproductive) health services, women's higher exposure to violence and also their higher life

expectancy, which is often associated with disabilities in old age.

- › Women and girls with disabilities have less access to **health services** and family planning. For example, women with disabilities have a higher risk of premature birth and underweight babies, as well as a higher risk of stillbirth, than women without disabilities.⁸
- › **LGBTIQ* persons** with disabilities often experience multiple/double discrimination, on the

⁴ "In all their diversity" refers, among other things, to the characteristics of age, gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, living in poverty or other factors that can lead to discrimination.

⁵ LGBTIQ* stands for „Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Intersex, Queer“. This summarizes the classical groups of people discriminated against by a heteronormative social order. The asterisk is a symbolic placeholder for gender identities beyond bisexuality: Guide to gender-sensitive language (tu.berlin).

⁶ In this orientation paper, gender is understood as a multidimensional concept that is not limited to two categories (male, female). However, since most data collections are still based on a binary gender logic, they are reproduced accordingly here.

⁷ WHO + Worldbank: [World Report on Disability](#) (2011), p. 28. interesting: e.g. In Germany, of all persons with disabilities, 51% are men, 49% women; see here: German Federal statistical office

[7.8 million severely disabled people living in Germany – German Federal Statistical Office \(destatis.de\)](#)

⁸ [Missing Billion Report: Access to Health Services for 1 Billion People with Disabilities](#) (2019), p. 18.



one hand because of their sexual orientation, on the other hand because of their disabilities, e.g., in access to health services.⁹

- › Women with disabilities worldwide are up to **10 times more likely to experience violence** than women without disabilities.¹⁰ A study in Malawi, for example, found that over 64% of women with disabilities had experienced violence.¹¹
- › Access to and knowledge about their rights and protections, as well as opportunities to share experiences in the absence of perpetrators, are particularly limited for women and girls with disabilities. Last but not least, the perpetrators often come from the direct (care) environment of those affected.¹²

- › In low-income countries, 45.6% of boys with disabilities and only 32.9% of girls with disabilities **finish primary school**. This corresponds to a gender gap of 21.7%.¹³
- › In low-income countries, women with disabilities are much less likely to have a job (20.1%) than men with disabilities (58.6%). For women without disabilities, the rate is 31.5%.¹⁴
- › Women with disabilities are one of the groups least likely to own a mobile phone or smartphone. They particularly rarely have access to mobile internet. The **Digital Disability Gender Gap** is up to 12%.¹⁵
- › Approximately **every 4th household** worldwide has persons with disabilities.¹⁶ Women do most of the **unpaid housework and caring** for relatives with and without disabilities.¹⁷

CHARACTERISTICS OF A FEMINIST DEVELOPMENT POLICY THAT TAKES PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES INTO ACCOUNT

A feminist development policy that lives the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all its diversity is intersectional and guided by the recognition that social inequalities are not random products, but the result of discriminatory power structures and stigmatising attitudes towards women/persons with disabilities. **A feminist development policy is intersectional and inclusive**, takes into account women with disabilities, and aims to overcome these discriminatory structures. The goal is a gender-equitable and inclusive society with **equal participation of all people in social, political, and economic areas of life**. Central to this are:

- › **Inclusion and diversity** are integral parts of a feminist development policy.
- › **Intersectionality**, meaning the interaction of different dimensions of discrimination (e.g. on the basis of disability, gender, sexual orientation, origin, religion or age), is analysed and addressed.
- › Feminist development policy pursues a **human rights-based, power-critical, gender-transformative, non-binary and inclusive approach** that questions power structures, counteracts discriminatory social norms and behaviors in a context-specific way and strives for a dialogue at eye level.

9 EU Commission: [Health4LGBTI. Reducing health inequalities experienced by LGBTI people](#) (2017); International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health/MDPI: [Experiences of LGBTIQ+ People with Disability in Healthcare and Community Services](#) (2020).

10 World Bank: [Brief on Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities](#) (2019), p.3.

11 Woman Enabled International (WEI)+Disabled Woman in Africa (DIWA): [Joint Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review: Malawi](#), p.10.

12 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): [Young Persons with Disabilities: Global Study on Ending Gender-Based Violence, and Realising Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights](#) (2018), S.14.

13 WHO + Worldbank: [World Report on Disability \(2011\)](#), S.207.

14 WHO + Worldbank: [World Report on Disability \(2011\)](#), S.238.

15 GSM Association: [The Digital Exclusion of Women with Disabilities: A Study of Seven Low- and Middle-Income Countries](#) (2020).

16 UN Women: [Making the SDGs Count for Woman with Disabilities](#) (2021), S.1.

17 Oxfam: [Not all gaps are created equal: the true value of care work](#) (2022), accessed October 13th 2022..



› **Access to resources, rights, and representation** to be achieved through intersectional feminist development policies, must also benefit women and girls with disabilities.

› With regard to the feminist inclusion of persons with disabilities and their rights and representation, close cooperation with feminist **civil society** and the **self-advocacy organizations** of women with disabilities is necessary.

BMZs ENGAGEMENT

The reorientation of the BMZ in the sense of an intersectional feminist development policy means that it is focusing its development cooperation more consistently and more strongly than before on reducing gender inequalities and explicitly including persons with disabilities in all their diversity.

To date, GIZ's projects are rarely and not systematically addressing the target group of women and girls with disabilities.

Nevertheless, the BMZ can build on a number of effective measures and approaches:

The **involvement of experts with disabilities** is an important anchor for implementing the inclusion of women with disabilities. For example, in a governance project in Uganda, a self-advocacy organization of women with disabilities was supported through media training and the development of a communication strategy to address the issue of violence against women with disabilities.

The **regional project FABRIC in Asia** supports garment workers, especially women with disabilities in Cambodia and Vietnam, who have been socially and economically excluded during the Covid-19 pandemic. Measures include training for factory management and textile workers on topics such as gender-based violence, inclusion in the workplace and social protection in the event of illness. In addition, peer educators with and without disabilities are deployed via a social media network for mutual support.

The **regional project “Partnerships for Prevention of Gender-Based Violence in Southern Africa”** promotes cooperation between state, non-governmental and private sector actors to prevent gender-based violence in South Africa, Zambia and Lesotho. In Zimbabwe, the regional project actively involves self-representation organisations of persons with disabilities in multi-stakeholder partnerships. Safety and accessibility audits for drinking water points were carried out and 130 committee members were subsequently trained to make services more accessible and safer for women with and without disabilities.

As part of the **action days “16 days of activism against violence against women”**, a series of events on violence against women with disabilities (Silent Tears) was held in December 2020 together with the Christoffel Blinden Mission (CBM).

The **global project “Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities”** is already working intersectionally and promotes, among other things, the disaggregated data collection by gender and disability of the statistical offices in the partner countries Togo, Namibia and Rwanda.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BMZs FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

- › Inclusion and diversity are integral parts of a feminist development policy. This must also be **reflected in all German development cooperation programmes**.
- › Development policy measures, especially for women and girls with disabilities in all their diversity, are particularly useful in the **areas of employment, education and vocational training, digitalisation, health and family planning and prevention of sexualised and gender-based violence**, as there is a particularly increased disadvantage of women with disabilities.
- › With the Chancellery's commitment to host the **Global Disability Summit 2025** in Berlin, Germany can send an important signal for the implementation of feminist and intersectional development cooperation and an increased global commitment to the target group of people in all their diversity, especially women with disabilities.
- › There is a need for further **knowledge development and exchange** on solutions and practical examples, as well as the development of expertise for an inclusive feminist development policy that addresses people with disabilities and leaves no one behind.
- › To this end, the exchange with **feminist civil society and self-representation organisations** of persons, especially women with disabilities, is crucial.
- › **Disaggregated data** by gender and disability should be collected for sustainable development planning in all activities where relevant.
- › The reduction of discrimination should be addressed **intersectionally and synergistically**. Individual forms of discrimination must not be played off against each other.
- › An intersectional and inclusive feminist development policy must be implemented in practice. This can only be achieved through **clear political objectives** and orientation frameworks for the implementing organisations.

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