

Thank you very much for giving me the space during the 36<sup>th</sup> Joint Parliamentary Assembly to raise the importance of including youth and young persons with disabilities as key component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

My name is Alba Gonzalez and I am the EU representative of CBM, an international development organisation committed to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities. With over than 100 years of experience the work of CBM is based on two fundamental frameworks: the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, commonly referred to it as CRPD, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

The CRPD is the translation of the UN Human Rights Convention and it is a framework defined by and for persons with disabilities. Currently there are 177 countries that ratified the Convention, 82 of them during its opening day which demonstrate the political commitment for a disability inclusive society. However, commitment must be accompanied with implementation and we, persons with disabilities, still face discrimination at different levels.

The Sustainable Development Goals included, for the first time, the need to fight against this discrimination. This is due to the realisation that poverty eradication cannot be achieved if we do not work together with persons with disabilities. There is a cycle between poverty and disability, since poverty may cause disability and persons with disabilities are more in risk of poverty. The motto "leave no one behind" is a commitment that we all need to practice if we really want to deliver the SDGs. If there is something innovative on the SDGs, is the need to work in a holistic approach. One SDG will not be achieved if there are no efforts towards the realisation of the other SDGs.

The cooperation between the EU and ACP countries is a key example of how an international framework as the 2030 Agenda must be translated into regional implementation. The EU is the first and only regional body that ratified the CRPD as well as a majority of ACP countries.

Why is it important to include young persons with disabilities? Because our younger generation will be the main force for change, they will heritage a planet that is facing some challenges due to climate change and they need to be ready for building a diverse and inclusive society. Young persons with disabilities are willing to be included in the society, to be considered as citizens in equal base with others, to be educated and be included in the labour market.

The CBM report "Inclusion Counts" demonstrated that when persons with disabilities are employed, they contribute to the general income of the country, but also to the future of their family and communities. In addition, employers who hired persons with disabilities find that the employment environment is more diverse and productive. However, there are still too many barriers for being included in the labour market.

First of all, attitudinal barriers by which persons with disabilities are considered as weak, sick or useless. History has always considered disability as a burden and we have always been invisible. The most common response has been the institutionalisation, which not only is against any Human Rights Convention but also costly and not productive.

Second of all, access to education has traditionally been denied for children with disabilities since families considered that the effort was not worth. There are few inclusive schools and those that exist are mainly placed in capital cities. Data from Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe shows that between 9-18% of children of five years old or older without disability had not attended to school while this rate increases to 24-39% for children with disabilities. Without quality education, persons with disabilities will never have the opportunity to exercise their right to employment.

Another barrier is the lack of accessibility in transportation. If there is an accessible and inclusive school but there are no accessible means of transportation, children with disabilities and their families will still have no option. This is especially relevant for those living in rural areas, who are even more isolated. Accessibility is not only useful for persons with disabilities but for the entire society. Elderly people, pregnant women or simply someone travelling with suitcases can benefit from elevators, ramps or accessible information.

Only by mainstreaming disability in all policies and programmes we can achieve a truly sustainable society. The most common practice from governments is to focus disability in one Ministry, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs. However, there is a need to include a disability-inclusive perspective in the different ministries, to mainstream inclusion in Education or Employment.

Every commitment must be accompanied by budget allocation. By ensuring a small percentage, such as 7 to 10%, to accessibility and inclusion requirement, we can make sure that the whole society is benefiting and at the same time, contributing.

Therefore, I would like to suggest you some proposals for the achievement of an inclusive ACP-EU region:

- To have a twin-track approach: to establish specific policies and programmes for the inclusion of young persons with disabilities and, at the same time, to ensure a disability inclusive approach of policies and programmes for the general public.
- To ensure accessibility in new infrastructures and communication systems. This will allow access not only to persons with disabilities but also to those communities who can also face discrimination.
- To gather reliable data by which we can compare the progress towards the motto “leave no one behind”. The Washington Group Questions on Disability are a tool available for governments and local authorities to measure the needs of our citizens and to better adapt the responses.
- To ensure that budget is allocated accordingly with the commitments adopted. In this regard, we are advocating for a new Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU which is compliance with the CRPD. The current proposal has not included any reference to disability.
- To count on the expertise and experience of representative organisations of persons with disabilities. There are already some structures in place of Civil Society Organisations that are formed by persons with disabilities such as the African Disability Forum or the Pacific Disability Forum.
- To fight against stereotypes and prejudices towards persons with disabilities and change the paradigm from a charity perspective to a human rights one. Disability is not a burden but discrimination is.
- To consider multiple discrimination that women and girls with disabilities face. They are more at risk to not be included in education or employment, exposed to forced sterilisation and sexual abuse.