



Intersecting Agendas: Gender and Disability-Inclusive Peacebuilding at the UN

Event Description

On September 26, 2025, from 10:30–12:00pm ET, the Engendering Disability-Inclusive Development-Genre, handicap et développement inclusif (EDID-GHDI) partnership hosted a panel on Zoom. Attendees joined host Deborah Stienstra along with five panelists to explore the emerging inclusion of persons with disabilities in United Nations peacebuilding policy and practice. The panelists explored the specific challenges to engaging women with disabilities in peacebuilding practice and discussed the potential and possibilities of a future with meaningful inclusion of diverse women and girls with disabilities.

This event was co-hosted by two SSHRC-funded projects: Finding Their Place: The Contributions of Women with Disabilities to Peacebuilding, and the EDID-GHDI partnership.

Host: Deborah Stienstra

Panelists: A. H. Monjurul Kabir, Kirstin Lange, Janet E. Lord, Bogna Ruminowicz, Kirsten Van Houten

Note taker: Catherine Hall

Round 1 of Questions

Speaker(s): Deborah, Janet, Monjurul, Kirstin, Bogna, Kirsten

Describe how you engage disability and peacebuilding in your work. How have women with disabilities been engaged in these activities specifically?

Janet's response:

- The Land Mines Movement led to development of the Land Mine Treaty
- In the late 1990s, through the monitoring of the implementation of the Land Mine Treaty for the rights of the survivors, some gaps were identified: the treaty focused on rehabilitation, but many people were excluded due to lack of accessibility
- Advocates had to fight for the rights of the land mine survivors
- At the time, it was assumed most survivors were men; later it was evident women were also affected
- Mexico initiated the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities treaty process, which started a much more concentrated effort to think about women with disabilities in peacebuilding, in development, and in human rights advocacy
- Many of the women in the CRPD process were women leaders with disabilities from conflict-affected countries, such as South Africa emerging from apartheid

Monjurul's response:

- There are three layers where you can look at addressing intersectionality and disability: globally, regionally, and by country
- It is challenging for governments to handle and account for intersectionality (i.e., rural women with disabilities); this is further challenging when you are dealing with situations of conflict
- It is a challenge to ensure the participation of women with disabilities in the international peace process and to provide reasonable accommodation or accessibility
- Priority should be finding ways women can connect better with resolution 2475, which is the only resolution on persons with disabilities and conflict
- There are some improvements
 - For example, when the Ukraine war broke out, one of the immediate challenges the UN faced was assisting women with disabilities who crossed the border of Ukraine and neighbouring countries
- In many countries facing conflict (i.e., Afghanistan and Somalia), women with disabilities are the last thought, often due to lack of outreach and resources
- In some countries, there are successes:

- In Colombia: Peace negotiation was happening, women were connecting with peacebuilding funding and making sure gender was balanced as part of the peace response that was being discussed and integrated.
- Ethiopia: Women are trying to connect, which has raised a broader response in Central Africa and a number of other African countries marred by conflict
- Women and girls with disabilities are not necessarily in the spaces where we want them yet, but it is gaining traction and practices are improving

Kirstin's response:

- UNICEF looks at horizontal inequalities – systems of exclusion that produce unequal access to power, resources, and opportunities
- Horizontal inequalities are often the strongest predictors of conflict; addressing these inequalities is one of the strongest levels to address roots causes of fragility and conflict
- UNICEF looks at disability in 4 levels:
 - Create enabling environment for child rights-based and positive peace by changing the social norms and stigma that keep women and girls with disabilities excluded
 - State society relations – connecting state with local communities
 - Community relationships –within and among community groups
 - Develop individual capacities for peace – encourage and enable individual efforts for peacebuilding

Bogna's response:

- In her previous posting in New York, she helped negotiate Resolution 2475 of the Security Council, the first resolution dedicated to persons with disabilities in the conflict and in the humanitarian crisis
- Until June 2019 when the Resolution was adopted, the Security Council had paid little attention to persons with disabilities in general, not to mention women with disabilities
- There is still very little knowledge or sensitivity among peacekeepers and peacebuilders when it comes to the rights and needs of persons with disabilities in this specific context.
- Aims of Resolution 2475:
 - To strengthen data collection and reporting on persons with disabilities in the conflict and the specific challenges of women and girls in this context
 - To shift the attitudes about persons with disabilities in the conflict from only the humanitarian assistance perspective and protection to empowerment and engagement with persons with disabilities
 - To provide equal access to humanitarian assistance and services that tends to be particularly important for women and girls, who are often the very last to receive assistance

- To protect from violence and abuse – women and girls face a higher risk of conflict related sexual violence, trafficking, and exploitation, and addressing their situation requires specific measures

Kirsten’s response:

- The initial research design for “Finding Their Place” sought to examine contributions of women with disabilities in North and South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
 - The project shifted due to ongoing conflict as well as a broader reading of the literature and policy landscape
- Several staff at local peacebuilding organizations who had mental health disabilities or who suffered from chronic illnesses described an absence of structural support for their disabilities within their organizations
 - None of the organizations offered psychosocial support to their staff despite their exposure to both secondary and primary trauma.
- There is a significant need to address mental health and psychosocial support for peacebuilders
- Also encountered women served by the hospital who, upon returning to their communities, set up networks and associations to support other survivors of this prevalent form of violence and help to support a community of care and promote peace in the areas where they live
- Through the EDID partnership, Kirsten has met women and men with disabilities from South Africa, Vietnam, Uganda, Haiti, and Canada who have contributed to peacebuilding through research, legal work, projects, public speaking and other avenues, locally, nationally and internationally

Round 2 of Questions

Speaker(s): Deborah, Janet, Kirstin, Bogna, Kirsten

In their article "Greater Than Nothing," Kirsten Van Houten and Fabian Garcia have documented that the engagement of women with disabilities in UN peacebuilding efforts has been ad hoc and does not reflect an extension of the international inclusivity norm to this group. What are the challenges to engaging women with disabilities in peacebuilding and humanitarian action and how do you imagine their full and meaningful participation in these processes could be facilitated in the future?

[Monjurul was not in attendance for this question]

Janet's response:

- When they began advocating for the CRPD, the UN wasn't accessible
- They were up against several barriers:
 - UN system of human rights itself – it was not engaging on disability issues
 - Lack of engagement and humanitarian efforts
 - Lack of engagement and no disability-inclusive development
- Argued for age and gender to be included in the Convention
 - Article 11 – ensure safety in natural disasters and armed conflict
- Security Council Resolution 2475, which enabled meaningful participation of people with disabilities, was an important step forward
- 3 reports were developed with Gerard Quinn with a focus on people with disabilities and peacebuilding, and a larger effort to include a gendered lens was made
 - Efforts to look at different contexts and intersectionality
- Crimes Against Humanity Convention is finally getting underway at the UN, reminding folks that people with disabilities were persecuted on the basis of disability

Kirstin's response:

- There are a lot of improvements in humanitarian efforts for people with disabilities, and she highlighted some key lessons:
 - Meaningful participation is not just about making space
 - Basic – needs to be accessible
 - Meaningful participation needs to include meaningful engagement, not just education
 - Joint learning, not one-directional
 - Meaningful participation requires resources
 - Often not paid or reimbursed for participation costs, like travel
 - Meaningful participation requires an attitude shift
 - Women with disabilities as meaningful contributors
- What isn't counted isn't seen
 - Data often isn't collected
 - Need to be very clear about what data is needed and not just blanket data collection
 - Need to build disability data in broader systems, rather than standalone
- Dedicated funding is necessary to move the needle

Bogna's response:

- We need disability and gender disaggregated data to develop effective and inclusive ways of including women with disability
- Women with disabilities tend to be involved in symbolic roles rather than in important discussions

- Silos between humanitarian efforts and “real” political issues that deserve attention
- Seeking inclusiveness of the peace process is still important and needs to be addressed in a more systematic way
- Shifting the attitude so that the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in peacebuilding is no longer seen as something that is additional but a key component
- Build more bridges between different agendas in the UN; still lacking coordination with organizations of women with disabilities that could also shape the decisions

Kirsten’s response:

- Highlighted a number of emerging issues and opportunities:
- Issues
 - Lack of data collection – makes it difficult to design programs
 - Lack of existing funding for women with disabilities in peacebuilding
 - Reporting guidelines and application guidelines that are too onerous
 - Current global and political environment
- Opportunities
 - Creating a dual-track approach to include conclusive policy environment
 - Need for more education and training
 - Designated funds in the UN peacebuilding funds for women with disabilities
 - Need for more inclusive monitoring and evaluation

Question & Answer Period

Speaker(s): Participant #1, Kirstin, Kirsten, Bogna

Participant #1 asked the following question in the chat: **Is there disaggregated data for women with intellectual disabilities in peacemaking?**

Kirstin’s response:

- She’s not aware of data in this area
- Data collection in humanitarian areas is more advanced but even they don’t have this level of disaggregation

Kirsten’s response:

- There is almost no public data on women with disabilities in peacebuilding, never mind specifically intellectual disabilities

Bogna's response:

- Also not aware of any data, but based on other data (i.e., often victims of violence including sexual-related violence) would assume rates of violence would be higher
- Have to be careful that we are using clear language and account for different languages and the ability to read

Speaker(s): Participant #2, Kirstin

Participant #2 asked the following question in the chat: **Can Kirstin speak more about changing social norms? I think we can agree that one big factor driving women's exclusion in these spaces is social norms and the associated shame that the society often ascribes to disability not minding that some of these disabilities were a result of conflict. So, what interventions have worked and where?**

Kirstin's response:

- Inclusion is difficult anyways, but especially in the context of conflict
- Important that youth are actively involved in peacebuilding initiatives and co-building these initiatives

Speaker(s): Participant #3, Kirsten

Participant #3 asked the following question: **In this climate where disability is now seen for many people and has been in the past as something not to be -- not just shame but something not to be visible, that you need to deal with it. How do we deal with that in these contexts?**

Kirsten's response:

- Inclusion broadly in the international system doesn't seem to have happened all at once
- It was really sparked, at least in relation to peacebuilding, with the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and subsequent inclusivity agendas have followed
- Numerous staff people with UN Women think that the disability inclusivity norm in peacebuilding will sort of emerge at the same pace that women with disability did, but it is 20 years behind
- She thinks one of the ways that we can do this in any public space is to continue to acknowledge that there are people with disabilities in the room, encourage self-identification, and make sure that supports are available