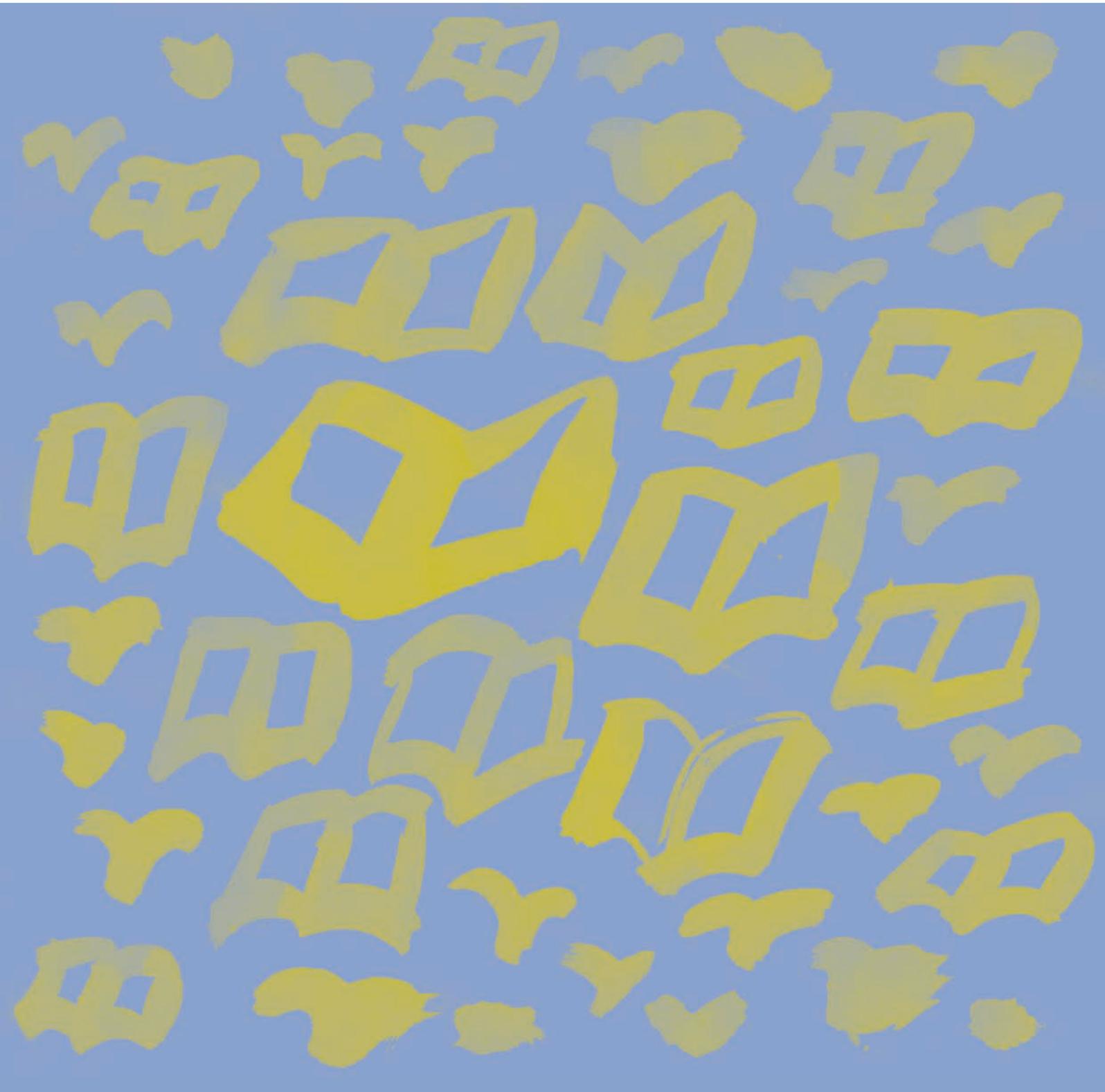


# Behinderung und internationale Entwicklung Disability and International Development

Thema: Digitale Teilhabe

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# Inhalt

Digital Divide Chronicles: Bridging the Gap in Digital Access and Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities <i>Vibhu Sharma</i>	4
Disability Inclusion and Digital Transformations <i>Paul Horsters</i>	11
Opportunities, Needs and Ways Forward for the Digital Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Global South <i>Jalasa Sapkota/Nir Shrestha</i>	17
Deaf Community Perception on Social Media Applications and Platforms <i>Nyarko Stanley Marco/Dzeani Okai Phinehas</i>	23
Digitalising Instruction during Global Emergencies: Deaf Education in Focus <i>Godwin Irokaba</i>	30
Berichte   Reports Afghanistan im Fokus	38
Kurzmeldungen   Announcements	41
Literatur	46

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Liebe Leser\*innen,

in einem Zeitalter, in dem die Digitalisierung alle Aspekte des täglichen Lebens erfasst, ist es von entscheidender Bedeutung, die Bedürfnisse von Menschen mit Behinderungen einzubeziehen und sie in die Lage zu versetzen, digitale Technologien gleichermaßen nutzen und davon profitieren zu können. Andernfalls besteht die Gefahr, dass die digitale Kluft zu einem noch ungleicheren Zugang zu lebenswichtigen Dienstleistungen wie Gesundheitsfürsorge, Bildung oder Bankgeschäften führt, wodurch sich die Lebensbedingungen von Menschen mit Behinderungen weiter verschlechtern. Wenn Menschen mit Behinderungen, insbesondere im Globalen Süden, bei der Digitalisierung zurückbleiben, werden die Bemühungen und Ziele der Agenda 2030 untergraben. Digitale Technologien haben das Potenzial, das Leben von Menschen mit Behinderungen im Globalen Süden deutlich zu verbessern, indem sie Barrieren in den Bereichen Gesundheit, Bildung, Arbeit, politisches Leben, kulturelle Aktivitäten oder unabhängige Lebensführung abbauen. Die digitale Entwicklung ist schnelllebig. Es ist daher höchste Zeit, den digitalen Wandel für Menschen mit Behinderungen zu gestalten und Lösungen für eine inklusive Digitalisierung zu entwickeln.

Diese Ausgabe befasst sich mit der digitalen Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderungen und geht auf die Herausforderungen und Chancen ein, die sich für Menschen mit Behinderungen im Zusammenhang mit digitalen Entwicklungen ergeben. Vibhu Sharma skizziert in seinem Beitrag das Dilemma zwischen dem Potenzial der digitalen Technologien und den gleichzeitigen Zugangsbarrieren für Menschen mit Behinderungen. Paul Horsters von der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) sucht nach Antworten darauf, wie die paradoxen Auswirkungen des digitalen Wandels für die Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderungen angemessen adressiert werden können. Exemplarisch stellt er verschiedene GIZ-Projekte vor, deren Ziel es ist, die digitale Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderungen zu unterstützen. Jalasa Sapkota und Nir Shrestha untersuchen die Realität und Bedeutung digitaler Zugänglichkeit und Inklusion für Menschen mit Behinderungen mit einem Fokus auf Nepal. Nyarko Stanley Marco und Dzeani Okai Phinehas beleuchten die Wahrnehmung von Gemeinschaften gehörloser Menschen in Bezug auf Social-Media-Anwendungen in Ghana und erforschen Erfahrungen, Nutzen und Herausforderungen sowie Möglichkeiten für mehr Barrierefreiheit in den sozialen Medien. Schließlich befasst sich Godwin Irokaba mit der digitalen Inklusion im Bildungswesen. Am Beispiel Nigeria untersucht er die Möglichkeiten des Fernunterrichts für gehörlose und schwerhörige Lernende unter Verwendung von Technologien und Multimedia-Ressourcen.

Wir wünschen Ihnen eine aufschlussreiche Lektüre!

Ihr Redaktionsteam

Dear readers,

in an age where digitalisation is spilling into all aspects of daily life, it is crucial to include the needs of persons with disabilities and to enable them to equally use and benefit from digital technologies. Otherwise, there is a risk that the digital divide results in even more disproportionate access to essential services such as healthcare, education or banking, ultimately worsening living conditions for persons with disabilities. If persons with disabilities, especially in the Global South, are left behind in digitalisation, the efforts and goals of the 2030 Agenda will be undermined. Digital technologies have the potential for making significant improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities in the Global South, diminishing barriers in health, education, work, political life, cultural activities or independent living. Digital developments are fast-moving. They are happening right now. It is therefore high time to analyse digital transformations for persons with disabilities and develop solutions for inclusive digitalisation.

This issue deals with the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities and covers challenges and opportunities for people with disabilities in digital developments whilst also recognising good practices. Vibhu Sharma outlines the dilemma between the potential of digital technologies and the simultaneous barriers to access for persons with disabilities. Paul Horsters from Deutsche *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) searches for answers on how the paradox effects of digital transformations for disability inclusion can be addressed. He presents various GIZ projects aiming to support digital inclusion of persons with disabilities. Jalasa Sapkota and Nir Shrestha explore the reality and importance of digital accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities with a focus on Nepal. Nyarko Stanley Marco and Dzeani Okai Phinehas shed light on the perception of deaf communities regarding social media applications in Ghana, exploring experiences, benefits and challenges as well as ways for more social media accessibility. Lastly, Godwin Irokaba looks at digital inclusion in education and explores remote teaching options for deaf and hard-of-hearing learners using technologies and multimedia resources in Nigeria.

We wish you an informative read!  
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# Digital Divide Chronicles: Bridging the Gap in Digital Access and Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities

Vibhu Sharma

This article examines the digital inclusion challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in the Global South. It emphasises the transformative potential of digital technologies while highlighting the persistent digital divide, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. By exploring the circular, intertwined relationship between digital literacy and digital divide, the article highlights the key barriers for persons with disabilities due to inaccessible digital ecosystems. These include limited access to technology, inaccessible content, economic constraints, and unreliable internet connectivity. These hurdles hinder education, employment, social inclusion, and healthcare access. Ethically, digital exclusion perpetuates social injustices and undermines autonomy. Legally, it violates human rights conventions. By underscoring the urgency of creating equitable digital ecosystems to empower individuals with disabilities to bridge the digital divide, the article calls for collaboration between governments, businesses, and philanthropy to provide accessible technologies, internet connectivity, and digital literacy programmes to empower persons with disabilities and promote digital inclusion.

## Introduction

In the rapidly changing landscape of the modern world, the frequent and the ubiquitous use of technology has transformed the way we learn, work, and live. Coupled with the proactive, expanding digitalisation, we use digital technologies, to operate in a digital age.

While digitalisation offers a multitude of benefits and opportunities in all realms including education, work, social, cultural and political life, health and so on, it also means that digitalisation is a boon for the traditionally excluded, underprivileged, marginalised groups such as the poor, rural, and persons with disabilities, as it helps them access these life facets at par with their rich or middle class, urban, and non-disabled peers. Moreover, there are multiple international policy frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that put the accessibility of digital tools and services at the centre of government services and emphasises the essential role of technology

in enabling persons with disabilities (Roy and Lewthwaite 2016). Furthermore, initiatives such as the accessibility of the World Wide Web have increasingly focused on including persons with disabilities in the Web, while there has also been identification of policy issues on communication rights via technology for persons with disabilities (Tatsuo 2020).

## Digital Literacy and Digital Divide

The current trends in digitalisation have however, severely discounted the aforementioned theories, as many of these traditionally marginalised people continue to be left behind due to a lack of access to computers, internet, and inaccessible devices and content, giving rise to two prominent, interconnected and mutually reinforcing phenomenon; digital literacy, and the lack thereof, which is digital divide.

Digital literacy refers to the skills, knowledge and competencies that are needed to effectively engage with and use digital technologies. It includes the

ability to navigate the digital landscape, find, evaluate, and critically assess information, communicate online, and participate in the digital society. Consequently, the lack of these skills, knowledge, and competencies, to engage with and benefit from the digitalisation, causes digital divide, as the social group that is equipped with digital literacy is able to benefit quickly from the opportunities offered by digitalisation when compared to the group that is unequipped with this literacy. Conversely, digital divide can also be a precursor to the lack of digital literacy. This happens when there is a gap between groups that have access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as computers, the internet, and other digital devices. Limited access to technology and internet poses challenges for certain groups to acquire digital literacy skills. Inevitably, without access to digital devices and internet connectivity, the opportunity to learn and practice digital literacy is nullified, thereby widening the gap between the two. The prevalence of these together have significant implications for socio-economic factors, such as education and employment opportunities. Those who lack access to digital technologies and digital literacy skills find it challenging to access online educational resources, apply for jobs that require digital proficiency, or participate in remote work.

### **Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Digital Access**

The inadvertently erected barriers manifested in the inaccessibility of the digital systems have since long hindered the full inclusion of persons with disabilities. Challenges such as inflexible curricula, inaccessible learning materials, lack of assistive devices, untrained and unprepared teachers to support inclusive learning in classrooms, stigma, discrimination, and prejudice have all contributed to the exclusion of persons with disabilities from education.

The Coronavirus pandemic was then, an antecedent to not only reveal the existing digital divide, but also expand it for the social groups who have traditionally had a severely limited access or have simply been excluded from accessing digital resources. As vital, regular activities such as teaching, learning, working, and health care shifted online, about 463 million children and young people around the world, lost access to education. Millions could not work or access health as they did not have access to internet. The pandemic turned into a catalyst to compound the sociological, economic, and structural inequalities pushing people already marginalised to a greater marginalisation. Closure of businesses and workplaces meant that about 1 in 6

youth had to stop working as they either did not have a reliable access to the internet, technology, or device, or simply lacked the digital skills and acumen that they needed to continue working online (UNICEF/PWC 2020).

This anomaly brought about by the pandemic disproportionately impacted persons with disabilities by exacerbating the exclusion and impacting the access to digital media, as irrespective of the level of the digital literacy they might have previously had, their circumstances were worsened as most digital solutions that were created to continue teaching, learning, and working online were inaccessible with assistive technologies. This then, expanded the gap and magnified the urgency for inclusive digital solutions.

While this enervated equal access to education for learners with disabilities, it also illuminated that the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive, equitable and quality education for all is jeopardised, as persons with disabilities are at the risk of being left behind. This also means that lack of access to technology, means, a denial of opportunities, as well as the inability to control environment (Easton 2014). Consequently, the pandemic also presented a threat to the fulfilment of all other goals, as without education, the prospects that people with disabilities would be able to be employed are naturally dimmed.

Consequently, the systematic inequalities and the non-technological access stemming from the lack of digital literacy, signifies a dearth of technologically skilled workforce, prepared to meet the employment needs. This then, is a hinderance to the building of an equal and equitable society for all.

### **Digital Inclusion and Its Promise**

Technological advances in the digital world have the potentiality to integrate persons with disabilities in the society and have the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers. The use of digital technologies removes the barriers to access information and engage in social interactions which may be difficult without the use of such technologies. Digital access gives persons with disabilities the freedom to decide to disclose their identity as a person with disability. The anonymity provided by the use of digital media therefore has the potentiality to reduce social stigma experienced by persons with disabilities. The expansion of the use of digital media is also anticipated to potentially make significant improvements in access to education, social, political, and economic and cultural connectedness. For instance, digital learning enables all students to be equal and enables students

*“Despite the persuasive agreement that enhancing and expanding digital access can create a level playing field for persons with disabilities, it has been uncorroborated by the harsh reality that they continue to be left behind [...]”*

with disabilities to interact at par with their non-disabled peers. In traditional face-to-face educational settings, however, physical, communication and social barriers prevent this interaction (Chadwick/Wesson 2016).

There is then, ample evidence to support that access to digital technology has the potentiality to enhance the feelings of belonging, enjoyment, competence, autonomy, and self-worth, promoting their agency and individuality, enabling them to assert their ability (Bannon et al. 2015; Chadwick/Fullwood 2018).

Furthermore, the integration of accessibility features such as speech synthesis programs<sup>1</sup>, voice recognition<sup>2</sup>, captioning and others, in mainstream technologies have further increased avenues for the technological inclusion of persons with disabilities. There is hence a clear consensus that mainstream technologies enable a better inclusion as they help a sounder inclusive practice (Kamei-Hannan et al. 2012/Scott et al. 2013). Moreover, the emergence of specialised assistive technologies or devices<sup>3</sup> such as magnifiers<sup>4</sup>, braille note takers<sup>5</sup>, assistive hearing devices<sup>6</sup>, alternative input devices such as eye-tracking systems or adaptive keyboards, among others, can all redefine digital engagement for persons with disabilities.

### **Barriers to Digital Access for Persons with Disabilities in the Global South**

However, many scholars elucidate that the existing research illuminating the emergence and use of digital technologies by persons with disabilities are focused

only on the experiences and assumptions of the Global North (Grech/Soldati 2014; Watermeyer/Goggin 2019). This then means that such data and theory does not reflect dilemmas of persons with disabilities living in the global south in benefiting from the digital revolution.

Access to digital technologies is a complex and a multifaceted issue. What’s needed to fully and aptly enable digital access for persons with disabilities far outweighs what’s available in the realm of digital technologies. Multiple barriers, co-existing in a circular, intertwined relationship convolute access to digital technologies. Persons with disabilities frequently lack the means to access digital technologies due to economic, technological, infrastructural, and social barriers, and if they can, however, access the technology, they may still not be adequately equipped or supported (Chadwick et al. 2013A).

**Economic challenges:** The economic challenges faced by persons with disabilities make the cost of technologies prohibitive, contributing to the lack of appropriate, accessible, assistive technologies or devices. Consequently, they are less likely to have the necessary digital knowledge and/or digital devices compared to people without disabilities. The affordability gap exacerbates the digital divide, hindering access to essential digital tools.

**Technological challenges:** Furthermore, the sheer dearth of accessible digital content, prevents persons with disabilities from accessing and using the content even if they have access to an assistive device. Inaccessibility of the reading material or printed knowledge, for instance, naturally implies a fundamental exclusion from what’s generally known in one’s community (Haripur 2017). Nonetheless, availability of accessible digital content but a lack of accessible technology implies that the content could not be accessed.

**Infrastructural challenges:** Moreover, the use of digital devices or material requires electricity and internet connectivity, which is unreliable or limited, further hindering digital access.

The amalgamation of all these factors then, lead to what was described by one young man with visual impairment from South Africa to Watermeyer (2019) that technology was “cool stuff for other people”. Consequently, digital inclusion, specifically for persons with disabilities, in the Global South, is far from being achieved.

Although, there is a shortage, and even scarcity, of reliable data on the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), recent estimates reveal that over 2.5 billion

people globally need at least one form of assistive technology. In the LMICs, however, nine hundred million people do not have access to assistive technology. While only 10 % people have the assistive technology they require in low-income countries, only about 3 % people can access the life-changing assistive technology they need in LMICS (WHO/UNICEF, 2022). Then, even though, technology offers a pathway in education for millions, it excludes many more as currently only about 85 % of countries have laws or policies to improve school or learner connectivity (UNESCO 2023).

This unavailability of appropriate assistive technology naturally restrains access to education for persons with disabilities. According to one research study conducted and published by Theirworld (A Global Children's Charity), capturing the opinions of students with disabilities and their mainstream schoolteachers in the LMICs, provision of appropriate assistive technologies with digital materials accessible by such technologies facilitated equal and equitable access to quality education. However, on an average, 51 % of all respondents indicated that either a lack of assistive technologies, or simply that of digitally accessible learning platforms, expand the digital divide between students with and without disabilities. Moreover, an insufficient implementation of accessibility guidelines, coupled with a failure to diligently monitor these platforms for accessibility, exacerbates the issue. Similarly, 43 % of the respondents on an average also indicated that there is not only a lack of accessible materials, but also that of training on using assistive devices or digital materials, which then contributes to the hampering of the development of lack of digital literacy among students with disabilities (Theirworld 2022).

In retrospect, access to digital technology enables persons with disabilities to express their identity, create online social relationships and reduce stigma, all of which generate opportunities for self-determination and self-advocacy (Chadwick et al. 2013B). The scarcity of digitally accessible materials then, severely impacts the empowerment of individuals with disabilities by reverberating in key sectors like education and employment, exacerbating existing socio-economic disparities. This has direct ethical and human, and legal ramifications of excluding persons with disabilities from the benefits of digitalisation.

### **Ethical and Human Implications**

At the ethical level, the constraints of persons with disabilities to access digital systems and resources due to their inaccessibility, not only deprives them of the opportunity to participate fully in society, but also

perpetuates social injustice and equity, reinforcing disparities. A deeper implication also means that the needs and contributions of persons with disabilities are far from being valued equally. This then extends to undermining their autonomy, limiting their ability to make informed choices about their lives.

This means that the inaccessibility of the digital ecosystems has serious repercussions on the educational, economic, social and health opportunities for persons with disabilities.

**Education:** As already illuminated, the inaccessibility of the digital systems, combined with a rise in digital learning, can reduce the number of learning opportunities and educational resources available to individuals with disabilities. At a personal level, this creates barriers to participation in learning as well as pushes them at the risk of missing critical information, affecting their educational attainment and creating inequalities.

**Economic and employment opportunities:** Economic disadvantages can increase due to the inaccessibility of the digital tools and ecosystems limiting employment opportunities and perpetuating poverty. This limits the ability of persons with disabilities to search for and apply to job opportunities effectively. While this reduces their chances of securing employment, inaccessibility of the digital systems also mean that their skill development has been restricted, robbing them of the skills required in the job market and reducing their competitiveness. Furthermore, they may also miss out on any telecommuting or online Entrepreneurship opportunities.

**Social Exclusion:** Experiences of social isolation and exclusion can increase as the inaccessibility of the digital social media platform presents communication obstacles, preventing persons with disabilities from participating not only in the community life, but also from interacting with their friends and family like a non-disabled person, potentially negatively impacting their mental health and overall well-being.

**Health:** The inaccessibility of the digital health information systems can result in denying persons with disabilities access to critical healthcare resources, affecting their ability to access timely medical care and reducing their overall life quality.

In a nutshell, the inaccessibility of digital systems, creates barriers for persons with disabilities, generating and maximizing the information gap, reducing their self-sufficiency, preventing them from not only fully engaging in society but also increasing their overall dependence on others for support and assistance, and thus, severely limiting their ability to live

independently and diminishing opportunities for personal and professional growth and development.

### Legal Implications

At the legal level, the inaccessibility of the digital information and services indicate discrimination towards persons with disabilities as it denies them access to the same information and opportunities solely due to their disability. This also extends to a violation of their basic human rights as they are denied the opportunity to exercise their right to education, employment, and participation in cultural and social life.

The CRPD, through article 9 on accessibility, requires that persons with disabilities have access to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications technologies and systems at par with others. It also means that there needs to be proper mechanisms to monitor and ensure a minimum standard of accessibility of information, facilities and services provided to the public and to ensure that private entities that provide such services implement and ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. Elsewhere, there are national or regional laws that mandate that digital facilities and information through websites, mobile applications and other digital services is accessible to persons with disabilities. While a failure to ensure accessibility signifies a non-compliance with accessibility laws, persons with disabilities, and disability advocacy groups, also have, where applicable, recourse to legal remedies by filing complaints, lawsuits, or petitions, to enforce their rights to digital accessibility and inclusion.

This, consequently, means that the exclusion of persons with disabilities from digital systems due to their inaccessibility, does not only remain limited to the inability to have equal access to digital systems at par with their non-disabled peers, but it can also have negative legal implications for the developers of inaccessible media.

The ripple effects of the shortage in accessible digitalisation underscore that it is imperative to develop accessible digital ecosystems which comprises both an availability of affordable and accessible digital technologies, as well as publication and distribution of accessible content to strengthen equal and equitable access for persons with disabilities.

### Conclusion

Despite the persuasive agreement that enhancing and expanding digital access can create a level playing field for persons with disabilities, it has been uncorroborated by the harsh reality that they continue to be

left behind due to a lack of affordable and accessible digital technologies, accessible content, digital literacy, and poor infrastructure, complimented with a lack of policy enactment and enforcement on digital accessibility. These barriers have together resulted in a restricted access and have, in reality, expanded the gap between persons with and without disabilities.

In order to enhance digital access for persons with disabilities and to close the digital divide, there is a need for a collaboration between states, education, businesses and philanthropy to accelerate efforts with both short and long-term objectives. In the short-term, collaboration and partnership between public and private sectors must be expanded to provide accessible assistive technologies at an affordable cost along with, where needed, internet connectivity. In the long-term, governments in the global south would need to enact and implement policies that mandate development of accessible digital content and require digital systems such as technologies and websites in educational or public institutions to be accessible for persons with disabilities. Through partnerships between the public and private sectors and philanthropic initiatives, it would be necessary to ensure a wider availability of affordable assistive technologies. It would also be necessary for governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and disability advocacy groups to collaborate to design digital literacy and training programmes that empower persons with disabilities by imparting digital skills to use digital services and reap the benefits of digitalisation.

### NOTES

- 1 They convert the text on the computer screen into a computerised speech and read aloud the digital text from the computer screen.
- 2 It enables dictation and produces a written output.
- 3 Hardware or software that enhance the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.
- 4 This can be digital as well as physical and enlarge the information either displayed on the computer screen or printed on paper.
- 5 A specialised computer that can both accept input or commands in Braille and output the results in Speech and Braille.
- 6 Devices that help in hearing or listening by enhancing the frequencies of sounds to make them clearer.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit den Herausforderungen der digitalen Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderungen im globalen Süden. Er betont das transformative Potenzial digitaler Technologien und hebt gleichzeitig die anhaltende digitale Kluft hervor, die durch die

COVID-19-Pandemie noch verschärft wurde. Durch die Untersuchung der miteinander verflochtenen Beziehung zwischen digitaler Kompetenz und digitaler Kluft hebt der Artikel die Haupthindernisse für Menschen mit Behinderungen hervor, die auf unzugängliche digitale Ökosysteme zurückzuführen sind. Dazu gehören der begrenzte Zugang zu Technologien, unzugängliche Inhalte, wirtschaftliche Einschränkungen und unzuverlässige Internetverbindungen. Diese Hürden behindern Bildung, Beschäftigung, soziale Inklusion und den Zugang zur Gesundheitsversorgung. Aus ethischer Sicht führt die digitale Ausgrenzung zu sozialen Ungerechtigkeiten und untergräbt die Autonomie. Rechtlich gesehen verstößt sie gegen die Menschenrechtskonventionen. Der Artikel unterstreicht die Dringlichkeit, gerechte digitale Ökosysteme zu schaffen, um Menschen mit Behinderungen zu befähigen, die digitale Kluft zu überbrücken, und ruft zur Zusammenarbeit zwischen Regierungen, Unternehmen und Philanthropie auf, um zugängliche Technologien, Internetanschlüsse und Programme zur digitalen Kompetenz bereitzustellen, damit Menschen mit Behinderungen befähigt und die digitale Inklusion befördert wird.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine les défis de l'inclusion numérique auxquels sont confrontées les personnes handicapées dans les pays du Sud. Il met l'accent sur le potentiel de transformation des technologies numériques tout en soulignant la persistance de la fracture numérique, exacerbée par la pandémie de COVID-19. En explorant la relation circulaire entre la culture numérique et la fracture numérique, l'article met en évidence les principaux obstacles auxquels se heurtent les personnes handicapées en raison de l'inaccessibilité des écosystèmes numériques. Il s'agit notamment d'un accès limité à la technologie, de contenus inaccessibles, de contraintes économiques et d'une connectivité internet peu fiable. Ces obstacles entravent l'éducation, l'emploi, l'inclusion sociale et l'accès aux soins de santé. D'un point de vue éthique, l'exclusion numérique perpétue les injustices sociales et sape l'autonomie. Sur le plan juridique, elle viole les conventions relatives aux droits de l'homme. En soulignant l'urgence de créer des écosystèmes numériques équitables pour permettre aux personnes handicapées de combler le fossé numérique, l'article appelle à une collaboration entre les gouvernements, les entreprises et les organisations philanthropiques pour fournir des technologies accessibles, une connectivité internet et des programmes d'alphabétisation numérique afin d'autonomiser les personnes handicapées et de promouvoir l'inclusion numérique.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo examina los retos de inclusión digital a los que se enfrentan las personas con discapacidad en el Sur Global. Hace hincapié en el potencial transformador de las tecnologías digitales, al tiempo que destaca la persistente brecha digital, exacerbada por la pandemia de COVID-19. Al explorar la relación circular y entrelazada entre la alfabetización digital y la brecha digital, el artículo pone de relieve las principales barreras a las que se enfrentan las personas

con discapacidad debido a la inaccesibilidad de los ecosistemas digitales. Entre ellos figuran el acceso limitado a la tecnología, los contenidos inaccesibles, las limitaciones económicas y una conectividad a Internet poco fiable. Estos obstáculos dificultan la educación, el empleo, la inclusión social y el acceso a la sanidad. Desde el punto de vista ético, la exclusión digital perpetúa las injusticias sociales y socava la autonomía. Desde el punto de vista jurídico, viola los convenios de derechos humanos. Al subrayar la urgencia de crear ecosistemas digitales equitativos que permitan a las personas con discapacidad superar la brecha digital, el artículo hace un llamamiento a la colaboración entre gobiernos, empresas y organizaciones filantrópicas para proporcionar tecnologías accesibles, conectividad a Internet y programas de alfabetización digital que capaciten a las personas con discapacidad y promuevan la inclusión digital.

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# Disability Inclusion and Digital Transformations

Paul Horsters

This article has tried to provide a broad introduction to disability inclusion in the context of digital transformations. At the core are the paradox effects that digital transformations bring about for people with disabilities: Potentially many existing barriers can be overcome with digital support, however when digital products and services are not accessible and designed inclusively new barriers emerge. The goal of both national and international politics to achieve digital inclusion should be to unleash the potentials of digital technologies for disability inclusion, while diminishing the risks. Policy and implementation are two major levers for putting this into practice. Mainstreaming digital accessibility across the public and private sector through laws, regulations and coordinative work is a vital part of this. In addition, inclusive education can play a key role in enabling digital access.

## Introduction

Digital transformations create paradox effects for people with disabilities around the globe. Increasingly digital technologies help to break down existing barriers. Meanwhile new barriers emerge because of digital transformations. One of the key benefits of digital technologies for bridging accessibility gaps lies in their ability to simplify information conversion. When a blind person wanted to read by him/herself 40 years ago, books, papers or mail a personal translator was necessary or the content needed to be translated and printed in braille. Today, speech output from a laptop, smartphone and/or other devices such as refreshable braille displays make written content accessible in an instant. These are just two examples. The German social entrepreneurs *Sozialhelden e.V.* provide a navigation app for accessible mobility called Wheelmap. This way physical inaccessibility can be circumvented. Smart glasses use artificial intelligence to identify objects, barriers and persons and communicate this verbally to the user. The number of

innovations in this sphere is growing by the day. Yet most of the people with disabilities globally do not benefit from the inclusion potentials of digital assistive technology. This is because connectivity, digital literacy, and skills as well as financial means to afford devices and data are unequally distributed both spatially and within societies. People with disabilities are one of the most underprivileged groups globally and therefore disproportionately often lack access to the internet and digital technologies.

## Digital Accessibility – A Key Challenge

The main new barrier for people with disabilities in the wake of rapid digital transformations is the lack of digital accessibility. The WebAIM reports investigate the top 1 million homepages on a yearly basis. The number of accessible websites (WCAG 2.1 level AA) is growing steadily since a few years. However, they total only around 4% of all homepages investigated (WebAIM Report 2023). That means 96% of the top 1 million

homepages are not fully accessible to people with different disabilities. To understand what that means in terms of disability inclusion we need to switch perspectives.

Let us assume that I am a person with a motor disability. I can access websites only if they are designed in a way that makes it possible to fully navigate them with my keyboard. Unfortunately, the online shop of the cinema I want to go to is not accessible with keyboard, so I cannot buy tickets there by myself. Let us take another example and assume for now that I am a person with a visual impairment and would like to book an appointment at the city's office to renew my passport. It is mandatory to book appointments online, but the booking page is not accessible with screen readers. The list of exclusion scenarios like these could be extended further and further. Everyday people with disabilities around the globe are denied their fundamental rights as consumers, citizens, parents, employers, or applicants due to the inaccessibility of online shops, e-government services, job platforms and online banking portals and other digital services. In many instances there is no analogue option anymore.

There are controversial cases on a theoretical level when considering the appropriate use of technology in the context of social inclusion. One of these cases relates to the inclusion potential of digital speech output – which poses a risk for the conservation of the cultural practice of braille languages. Another one relates to the potentials of remote work or services for people with mobile disabilities in contexts with physical inaccessibility. While in theory and practice this can be an enormous benefit because it is possible to avoid inaccessible streets, sidewalks, buildings, traffic lights etc. it can also lead to greater exclusion, because visibility and face-to-face social interactions decrease.

### **Frameworks, Laws and Current Developments**

People with disabilities have been largely disregarded in the context of academic digital divides discussions which started in the early 2000s. When they have been considered, it has been largely with a focus on people with disabilities in the Global North. In recent years this has changed in the academic but also in the political and private sector. More and more international organisations, bilateral development cooperation agencies but also private companies start or have started acting. They did so not always voluntarily but in some cases as a reaction to new laws. One of the most important laws for the European continent is the European Accessibility Act (EAA) which will enter

into force in 2025. The goal of the EAA is to harmonise the patchwork of accessibility regulations for private companies in the EU-Member states and to take private companies into account regarding the accessibility of the products and services they sell. The EAA will not apply to every single service and product but covers a great range i.e. E-commerce, consumer banking, video streaming and television, certain elements of air, bus, rail and water transport services such as websites, mobile services, electronic tickets as well as e-books. Importantly, they will cover computers, smartphones, and equipment for accessing telecommunication services as well. Meanwhile several countries such as Kenya are developing national digital accessibility standards supported among others by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

On an international level the UN Convention on the Rights of people with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is the overarching directive on what countries, development and international agencies and organisations need to achieve to ensure the inclusion of the at least 1.3 billion people with Disabilities globally. Article 9 of the UNCRPD addresses universal access to information and communication technologies including the removal of barriers to information, communication, and other services. The internationally recognised standard for digital accessibility is the Web Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). The current version 2.2 has been published in 2023. The WCAG are developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) in cooperation with organisations around the world. One of the core aspects of WCAG 2.2 are the so-called POUR Principles. This means that content on websites should be Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust. These principles relate to different forms of impairments and disabilities. It is worthwhile mentioning that barriers differ depending on the type of impairments. From the perspective of the author of this article the greatest barriers to digital content are experienced by people with visual impairments. That is because the great majority of all digital content is accessible through visual interfaces. Social media and e-commerce platforms for an example work primarily with visual pictures. For this content to be accessible by people with visual impairments the websites need to be readable by screen readers, which is currently not the case for the great majority of websites and platforms.<sup>1</sup>

*„The goal of both national and international politics to achieve digital inclusion should be to unleash the potentials of digital technologies for disability inclusion, while diminishing the risks.“*

### **Digital Transformations and Social Inequalities**

Apart from digital accessibility itself there are other factors that prevent most people with disabilities globally to benefit fully from the inclusion potential of digital technologies. Generally, these are related to socio-demographic factors and status of people with disabilities such as age, income, and education. It has been convincingly argued that digital transformations generally reinforce and exacerbate social inequalities. One of the key arguments for this is that connectivity, digital literacy, and skills as well as financial means to afford devices and data are unequally distributed both spatially and within societies. Globally, people with disabilities are one of the most underprivileged groups. In many of the economies of partner countries of German development cooperation (DC) it is estimated that around 80% of the people with disabilities are excluded from the job market. Social security systems are in many cases not in place. This creates a situation in which family members fulfil caretaker roles, which hinders their productivity. This creates what has been called “ripple effects”: Disabilities of one household member impede the life course (education and employment) of other household members. In Ethiopia at least 80% of people with disabilities are estimated to live in rural areas, where they face substantial barriers to their social inclusion, such as stigmatisation, prejudices, and myths (attitudinal barriers) as well as inaccessible educational institutions. These structural disadvantages are mirrored and amplified by digital

transformations.

There is reason to believe that access to basic education for children with disabilities is key to leverage the inclusion benefit of digital technologies. Educational qualifications increase potential income and therefore the affordability of devices and data; digital literacy taught at school improves the usage of digital assistive technology; literacy itself is a prerequisite to fully use the internet. Furthermore, educational institutions are places that enable social interaction and peer learning regarding digital technologies in general as well as about digital assistive technology.

### **Digital Inclusion in German Development Cooperation**

Digital development has become an important topic for German Development Cooperation (DC) and international cooperation. In recent years there has been a steady increase in numbers of those digital and non-digital projects considering disability inclusion. Most of these projects adopt a mainstreaming approach, which means that activities are designed to be inclusive for people with disabilities but are not solely targeted to this group. Other projects apply a targeted approach directing the project or one of its activities specifically towards disability inclusion. It is noteworthy that to address different disability groups is not equally easy. To design development projects inclusive for people with cognitive and/or learning disabilities can be challenging. To advise projects on how to consider disability inclusion in their work is one of the main tasks of the GIZ Global Project Inclusion of People with Disabilities (GIZ GP Inclusion).

In recent years some interesting experiences have been gathered in several projects on the intersection of digital development/transformations and disability inclusion.

The sector with the greatest number of projects at this intersection has been the field of employment promotion/ technical and vocational training (TVET). The reason could be that the contextual factors are favourable: The TVET portfolio in the bilateral German DC is substantial. It seems to be convincing to argue that the socioeconomic disadvantage of people with disabilities needs to be addressed via employment promotion measures. Moreover, companies and public institutions in many countries have quotas they need to fulfil by law. Therefore, they have an incentive to hire people with disabilities. Finally, there is a very appealing argument for supporting trainings on IT skills for people with disabilities: the more diverse IT companies including software developers

and product designers etc. are, the more accessible are their products and services. In the following several interesting GIZ projects in different sectors should be highlighted. All these projects support digital inclusion of persons with disabilities in different ways.

### **Bridge Academy Kenya**

One of the outstanding projects in this field is a cooperation between Sightsavers, GIZ, and Three Talents. Jointly they set up a program in Kenya called IT Bridge Academy. It provides accessible IT training for women and men with disabilities. Almost 500 people with disabilities applied of which 40 were selected to take part in this six-month programme. 97% passed the rigorous globally recognised certification exam on the first attempt and 92% secured IT internships in the private sector upon graduation. The project connects private tech sector interests (qualified personnel), with national interests (bring youth into jobs) and development cooperation interests (local economic development). Because of the success of the program a replication of the approach is currently being started in South Africa.

### **Atos GIZ ICT 4 Inclusion Challenge 2021 & 2022**

Another interesting pilot project was initiated by the GIZ GP Inclusion. The ICT 4 Inclusion Challenge was a cooperation project between GIZ and the European IT company Atos. Further partners were the Zero Project Impact Transfer Program, Impact Hub Global and disabled people's organisations and umbrella organisations in Africa and India.

The main idea was to show both how innovation and start-up promotion in partner countries can be implemented in an accessible way and to create awareness for the way innovations and disability inclusion are interlinked.

In this pilot project, the Atos GIZ ICT 4 Inclusion Challenge 2021, a focus on the English-speaking African countries was adopted with the aim of finding and supporting digital disability innovations in their early stages of development. The response to the call for applications was impressive with over 200 applications from more than 400 people in 37 countries. 46% of participants in the teams were women and the application website of the challenge counted more than 25.000 views and many more on social media. Apart from involving a range of organisations in an expert jury a participatory approach was applied. All supported teams worked directly with the disability community or were already part of this community.

### **Financial Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Ghana and Kenya**

In Ghana and Kenya projects on financial inclusion of people with disabilities have been executed by GIZ Ghana and by Sightsavers. People with disabilities and especially women with disabilities belong to the largest unbanked population globally. The financial sector is among the most digitised, however digital accessibility is, as mentioned earlier, often not taken into consideration, i.e. in online banking. However, there is an economic incentive for banks to include customers with disabilities. The idea the implemented projects was to build on this economic incentive of banks to include customers with disabilities, point out inclusion gaps and sensitise both political representatives and private companies in the financial sector.

### **Improving Data on People with Disabilities**

The topic of data collection on persons with disabilities is a topic of great importance and with strong relations to digital development. Reliable and disaggregated data on disability prevalence on country, district and communal level is key to improve advocacy for disability rights. Here digital tools can be used to support data collection and processing. In Rwanda, GIZ and a number of other international organisations and agencies (i.e. CBM, Clinton Health Initiative, UNICEF) are supporting the national rollout of a Disability Management Information System (DMIS). DMIS is an innovative digital support tool for the identification and registry of all persons with disabilities in Rwanda including a case-management support tool for those most in need.

### **Inclusive E-Governance**

More and more partner governments are taking action to support the inclusiveness of their e-governance services. Among others the BMZ commissioned GIZ projects Innovation in Public Administration (InnoPa) in Egypt and Designing Inclusive Digital Governance (INDIGO) in Palestine support their political counterparts in mainstreaming digital accessibility across digital public services.

### **Emerging Topics**

One of the key emerging topics in the sphere is artificial intelligence (AI). In 2021 the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of People with Disabilities Gerald Quinn published a report on Artificial Intelligence and the Rights of People with Disabilities. Many digital assistive technologies rely on AI to bridge barriers. However, apart from gender and race biases there are

also disability biases. One example for this is facial recognition which often does not recognise faces with different proportions or pigmentation. Initiatives such as the Disability Ethical AI Alliance (DEAI) work to counter discrimination of people with disabilities through AI. Another important topic that is receiving more and more attention is the thematic intersection of gender, disability, and digital access. Especially digital skills for women with disabilities is increasingly explored and put into practice in concrete projects. Since most people with disabilities globally are girls and women facing multiple digital and non-digital forms of discrimination, this is a topic with high relevance for Germany's feminist development policy.

## Conclusion

This article has provided a broad introduction to disability inclusion in the context of digital transformations. At the core are the paradox effects that digital transformations bring about for people with disabilities: Potentially many existing barriers can be overcome with digital support, however when digital products and services are not accessible and designed inclusively new barriers emerge. The remaining question is: How do we address the paradox effects of digital transformations for disability inclusion? The goal of both national and international politics to achieve digital inclusion should be to unleash the potentials of digital technologies for disability inclusion, while diminishing the risks. Policy and implementation are two major levers for putting this into practice. Mainstreaming digital accessibility across the public and private sector through laws, regulations and coordinative work is a vital part of this. To do this effectively we need to support mutual learning of practitioners and identify more best practices. Also, a narrative is needed that highlights the potentials of digital inclusion for societies around the globe. That is, designing inclusively is beneficial for all. Therefore, existing barriers need to be identified, so they can serve as an accelerator for innovation.

Moreover, we need to be aware that progress in disability inclusion generally will support digital inclusion of persons with disabilities. From the perspective presented here, access to inclusive basic and higher education will have the greatest ramifications in this regard. Educational institutions can be great places to acquire the knowledge about digital assistive technology and the skills to use them to bridge real life barriers.

## NOTES

- 1 In addition, screen reader software (i.e. Job Access with Speech

JAWS) can be costly and cover a growing but nonetheless limited number of languages.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Artikel wurde versucht, eine umfassende Einführung in die Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderungen im Kontext des digitalen Wandels zu geben. Im Kern geht es um die paradoxen Auswirkungen, die der digitale Wandel für Menschen mit Behinderungen mit sich bringt: Potenziell können viele bestehende Barrieren mit digitaler Unterstützung überwunden werden, doch wenn digitale Produkte und Dienstleistungen nicht zugänglich und inklusiv gestaltet sind, entstehen neue Barrieren. Ziel der nationalen und internationalen Politik zur Verwirklichung der digitalen Inklusion sollte es sein, die Potenziale digitaler Technologien für die Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderungen freizusetzen und gleichzeitig die Risiken zu mindern. Politik und Umsetzung sind zwei wichtige Hebel, um dies in der Praxis umzusetzen. Die durchgängige Berücksichtigung der digitalen Zugänglichkeit im öffentlichen und privaten Sektor durch Gesetze, Verordnungen und koordinierende Maßnahmen ist ein wesentlicher Bestandteil davon. Darüber hinaus kann die inklusive Bildung eine Schlüsselrolle bei der Ermöglichung des digitalen Zugangs spielen.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article a tenté de fournir une introduction générale à l'inclusion des personnes handicapées dans le contexte des transformations numériques. Les effets paradoxaux que les transformations numériques entraînent pour les personnes handicapées sont au cœur du sujet : Potentiellement, de nombreux obstacles existants peuvent être surmontés grâce à l'assistance numérique, mais lorsque les produits et services numériques ne sont pas accessibles et conçus de manière inclusive, de nouveaux obstacles apparaissent. L'objectif des politiques nationales et internationales visant à réaliser l'inclusion numérique devrait être de libérer le potentiel des technologies numériques pour l'inclusion des personnes handicapées, tout en diminuant les risques. La politique et la mise en œuvre sont deux leviers majeurs pour mettre cet objectif en pratique. L'intégration de l'accessibilité numérique dans les secteurs public et privé par le biais de lois, de réglementations et de travaux de coordination est un élément essentiel. En outre, l'éducation inclusive peut jouer un rôle clé dans l'accès au numérique.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo ha intentado ofrecer una amplia introducción a la inclusión de la discapacidad en el contexto de las transformaciones

digitales. En el centro están los efectos paradójicos que éstas acrean para las personas con discapacidad: Potencialmente, muchas de las barreras existentes pueden superarse con ayuda digital; sin embargo, cuando los productos y estos servicios digitales no son accesibles y no están diseñados de forma inclusiva, surgen nuevas barreras. El objetivo de las políticas nacionales e internacionales para lograr la inclusión digital debe ser liberar el potencial de las tecnologías digitales para la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad, disminuyendo al mismo tiempo los riesgos. La política y la aplicación son dos palancas importantes para poner esto en práctica. La integración de la accesibilidad digital en los sectores público y privado a través de leyes, reglamentos y labores de coordinación es una parte vital de este proceso. Además, la educación inclusiva puede desempeñar un papel clave a la hora de permitir el acceso digital.

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# Opportunities, Needs and Ways Forward for the Digital Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Global South

*Jalasa Sapkota/Nir Shrestha*

This article explores the importance of digital accessibility and inclusion for individuals with disabilities in the Global South, with a focus on Nepal. It emphasises that digital inclusion is essential for building an inclusive society and highlights the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in accessing digital resources. The findings reveal that while there have been positive steps towards recognising digital inclusion, there is still a gap between policy intent and practical implementation. The role of assistive technologies is crucial in enabling independence and participation for individuals with disabilities, but challenges such as inaccessible website designs and a lack of awareness persist. To address these challenges and ensure digital accessibility for all, the article calls for collective efforts from governments, organisations, developers, and society. It emphasises the need for government investment, collaboration, and education at various levels to create a more inclusive digital environment, ultimately recognising digital accessibility and inclusion as fundamental human rights.

## **Introduction**

Digital accessibility is the concept of ensuring that mainstream technologies like computers, mobile phones, software, and digital content holders are usable by a wide range of users, regardless of their abilities or disabilities (Patrizio 2022). This involves designing these technologies in a way that enables efficient and effective use by everyone, including individuals with hearing, visual, motor, cognitive impairments, or mental health problems. The broader practice of implementing digital accessibility for all individuals is known as digital inclusion. Digital inclusion is essential for building an inclusive society and ensuring that development benefits everyone. It seeks to provide equal access and opportunities in the digital realm, irrespective of a person's abilities or diverse backgrounds. People with disabilities often face significant barriers that limit their participation in various aspects of life. Therefore, digital accessibility becomes a critical component of digital inclusion. This paper will

delve into the opportunities, needs, and practical approaches to achieving digital inclusion for individuals with disabilities in the Global South, with a specific focus on Nepal.

## **Background**

In the contemporary digital landscape, the concept of digital inclusion takes centre stage, and its significance cannot be overstated, particularly when considering individuals with disabilities. Globally, an estimated 15% of the population, roughly one billion people, grapple with disabilities, facing unique challenges that obstruct their engagement in various aspects of life, as noted by the World Health Organisation. This issue becomes even more pronounced in regions of the Global South, where disparities in access and opportunities are magnified.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) underscores the critical importance of digital inclusion, especially in a world increasingly reliant on digital services, particularly in

the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital inclusion goes beyond mere access to technology; it encompasses the availability of content that is accessible and interfaces that are user-friendly. However, it also exposes a growing digital divide, disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups, including low-income individuals, rural populations, older adults, and persons with disabilities.

This digital divide has sparked debates about its root causes, including government policies. In some developing countries, there is a lack of clear strategies to promote digital inclusion. The affordability and availability of assistive technology remain significant hurdles, further diminishing the independence of individuals with disabilities.

Global commitments, such as the CRPD, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, all emphasise the principle of leaving no one behind, necessitating collective action to address diverse needs (ITU 2020).

In the Global South, countries like India and Bangladesh have taken proactive steps to harness digital technologies for development and inclusivity. Initiatives such as India's Accessible India Campaign aim to provide equitable opportunities for their disabled populations, including the incorporation of accessible features in websites to move closer to universal accessibility (DEPwD 2015). Bangladesh has also placed significant emphasis on digital technologies as a catalyst for development through the Digital Bangladesh Initiative, a state-sponsored endeavour aimed at eradicating poverty and promoting inclusivity (AZIZ 2020). This initiative, supported by international agencies like UNDP and USAID, seeks to accelerate digitisation as a means of achieving economic growth and social inclusion.

Nonetheless, barriers persist in countries like Nepal, where a complex interplay of societal, institutional, legal, and environmental factors compounds accessibility challenges, perpetuating the cycle of poverty for persons with disabilities. Nepal Census 2021 highlights the prevalence of disability in the country, with 2.2% of the population facing unique challenges. Despite Nepal's commitment to accessibility aligning with international principles and its constitutional provisions and policies, persons with disabilities continue to face obstacles in accessing equitable services (Prayatna Nepal 2022).

This study seeks to examine the state of digital accessibility in Nepal, with a specific focus on evaluating legal provisions, current practices, the availability of multimedia information, and the persistent barriers

hindering progress towards achieving digital inclusion.

## Research Design

This research design outlines the methodology employed for investigating Opportunities, Needs, and Strategies for Advancing Digital Inclusion for Individuals with Disabilities in the Global South. The study's data collection process incorporated interviews with a diverse group of participants, comprising both experts and individuals with varying disabilities. 35 individuals took part in these interviews, consisting of 30 users and five experts. Within this participant pool, disabilities diversity was maintained the participants exhibited a range of disabilities, with three having mobility impairments, seven experiencing hearing impairments and 25 dealing with visual impairments.

The collected data was transcribed into the English language and subsequently subjected to qualitative content analysis to derive meaningful insights. The research also incorporated a comprehensive review of secondary literature, involving the examination of pertinent legislation and policy documents at both the global and local levels.

Data collection methods encompassed the utilisation of questions set and individual interviews conducted with experts and user groups throughout the research endeavour. These interactions were documented, capturing written responses and audio recordings, which were subsequently transcribed and subjected to rigorous analysis.

## Findings and Discussions

### Selected Findings in the Areas of National Policies, Legislative Measures, and Digital Inclusion

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is a global treaty that holds a fundamental mission: to champion and protect the rights and inherent dignity of individuals living with disabilities. At its core, the UNCRPD places a special focus on the pivotal principle of accessibility, which extends its reach into the realm of digital accessibility. Article 9 of the UNCRPD stands as a cornerstone in this treaty, underscoring the paramount importance of accessibility and the creation of all-encompassing information and communication technology (ICT) and systems. This specific article recognises that the availability of information and communication technologies, including the vast expanse of the internet, is nothing short of essential for enabling full participation in society. Moreover, it vehemently stresses the imperative of ensuring that these technologies are designed and maintained in such a way that they are

*„The insights shared by experts and users alike emphasise the pivotal role played by digital inclusion in the lives of individuals with disabilities, empowering them with greater autonomy and fostering participation in various facets of life.“*

Correspondingly, Article 17 of the Act on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2017) echoes this sentiment, affirming that individuals with disabilities possess the right to access multimedia information in an accessible format. It also mandates that information intended for the general public should be readily available to persons with disabilities without additional charges, in a user-friendly and accessible format and technology.

In Nepal, the government introduced the Accessible Physical Structure and Communication Service Directive for People with Disabilities in 2013, but it falls short of comprehensively addressing digital accessibility concerns. Subsequently, in 2019, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology unveiled the Digital Nepal Framework, which outlined the broader digital vision but lacked specific measures to ensure digital accessibility for all, especially individuals with disabilities.

The Communication and Information Technology Policy – 2015 emphasises the need for special measures to promote accessible ICT and enhance the access of persons with disabilities to these technologies, aiming to ensure access to public services and enable independent, dignified, and autonomous living.

Recent guidelines, published by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology in Nepal's gazette in 2021, direct that government websites should

be developed with accessibility in mind for persons with disabilities. This includes adherence to universal design principles and global accessibility guidelines, with the goal of fostering inclusion in the ICT sector.

However, despite the existence of these legal provisions and initiatives, a substantial gap remains in digital accessibility across platforms in Nepal. Most digital platforms fail to meet the minimum criteria established by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standards, which encompass four core principles: perceivability, operability, understandability, and robustness. The Position Paper on Access of Persons with Disabilities to Digital Platforms in Nepal produced by Prayatna Nepal indicates that none of the websites and mobile applications assessed met these minimum criteria. Common accessibility issues include the absence of text alternatives, keyboard traps, keyboard inaccessibility, indistinguishable content, lack of adaptability, absence of captions in audio/video materials, unpredictability, and navigational difficulties.

#### **Selected Findings from Experts/Users Perspective on Status of Digital Inclusion in Nepal**

Upon analysing diverse responses, it is evident that individuals with disabilities predominantly rely on a wide range of assistive technologies, encompassing both hardware and software solutions. These assistive tools cater to various disability needs, with screen reader software like NVDA being a common denominator among many users. Hardware devices like mobile phones, laptops, and computers were frequently mentioned, highlighting their significant role in daily life. The software landscape extends beyond NVDA, encompassing an extensive array of applications and tools, including OCR applications like AB-BYY FineReader and InstaReader, Envision AI, screen readers like JAWS and NVDA, and other assistive apps like Be My Eyes and @Voice Aloud Reader. Additionally, mobile banking, telecommunications, social media, and multimedia-related apps were also noted as essential components of their assistive technology toolkit. Similarly, many experts emphasised the importance of platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and email for communication and inclusion.

The findings show that participants have had a mixed but generally positive response to the benefits of assistive technologies. These technologies have opened various opportunities and conveniences for them. They've been able to seek assistance on projects, propose working groups, find testers for new ideas or products, create teams, and share their expertise in specific fields. Additionally, digital accessibility

has been a significant advantage, allowing them to read and navigate online content, participate in online classes and events, and access information and news.

While some individuals haven't yet experienced these opportunities, others have emphasised how technology has transformed their lives. Examples include using software like Visual Studio Code and Android Studio for work and coding, relying on tools like NVDA and Axe Dev Tool for accessibility, and engaging in online banking and payments. These technologies have not only facilitated education and work but have also enriched personal experiences by enabling tasks like OCR and currency identification. Ride-sharing apps like Pathao and indriver have made mobility easier, and experts have noted that people with disabilities have channelled their creativity through podcasts and digital mediums, contributing to employment opportunities and freedom of expression.

In examining the challenges encountered by users when attempting to access various digital platforms, such as websites, social networks, and documents, several noteworthy issues emerged. Users have highlighted a range of difficulties, stemming from the absence of website designs that cater to individuals with disabilities, to information that is inaccessible on websites, and a general lack of awareness regarding where to find specific information. Furthermore, the unavailability of content in accessible formats like Word and the fact that visually impaired individuals often rely on external assistance for reading images and certain documents underscore the glaring gaps in accessibility.

These challenges encompass a wide array of issues, including inaccessible website designs, layouts that don't respond well to different devices, poor colour contrast, forms that are difficult to use, keyboards that are incompatible, multimedia content that's inaccessible, complex CAPTCHA tests, documents that don't comply with accessibility standards, and a shortage of text-to-speech support. In addition, inconsistent navigation, limited customisation options, slow loading times, and concerns about security and privacy all present substantial barriers to accessibility.

Furthermore, experts have pointed out that digital accessibility has become a matter of cost that many people living in rural areas with limited economic resources cannot afford. While technology has proliferated, digital literacy remains a significant hurdle. How can individuals effectively use laptops and smartphones if they haven't been trained to navigate them? Moreover, there is an attitudinal barrier in the world of software development, as developers often view individuals with disabilities solely as users and not as

contributors. Their concerns are often overlooked during the development process, perpetuating the cycle of inaccessibility.

Moreover, users shared their struggles, including power cuts and slow internet, which further hindered their digital access. Issues like dealing with CAPTCHAs, frequent password changes, inaccessible stock trading systems, and difficulties with banks recognising and accommodating their disabilities added to their digital accessibility woes. A specific challenge highlighted was the difficulty in accessing Nepali documents on the government website, exacerbated by problems with converting documents using assistive technology and navigating Facebook on mobile devices. Furthermore, users encountered issues with using photos on social networks and websites, as well as difficulties with screen readers in software and websites where they were not functioning.

The findings from the experts' views on the importance of upholding digital accessibility and inclusion for individuals with disabilities reveal a clear consensus. They highlighted that digital accessibility is essential for allowing people with disabilities to fully participate in society, ensuring equal opportunities, legal compliance, and expanding market reach. Moreover, experts emphasised the enhanced user experience, innovation, and corporate social responsibility that stem from prioritizing digital inclusion. The importance of digital accessibility was also underscored for its role in education, employment opportunities, and human rights, as it reduces exclusion, isolation, and promotes social integration.

The findings from both experts and users highlight that digital accessibility have far-reaching benefits. It not only aids individuals with disabilities but also benefits the broader community by increasing access to information, enhancing daily productivity, and improving the quality of work. It serves as a tool for promoting equality, ensuring access to modern resources for everyone, upholding the right to information, and driving technological progress. Experts also emphasise that digital inclusion can contribute to the personal development of individuals with disabilities through extensive online classes and networking opportunities, fostering a more global perspective.

Experts have highlighted several crucial steps and initiatives to ensure digital inclusion, particularly for individuals with disabilities. Digital accessibility, as defined, entails providing people with disabilities equal access to information, interaction, and services with the same effectiveness and integration as those without disabilities, ensuring ease of use. The consensus is

that accessibility should be a collective concern, both by authorities and individuals, to guarantee universal access to digital spaces. Organisations and developers are urged to prioritise the needs of people with disabilities when designing websites, including features that make content compatible with screen readers. Governments, from the central to local levels, should emphasise digital accessibility and inclusion. These recommendations underscore the importance of making digital resources accessible to everyone through training programs, creating universally accessible websites, and promoting digital literacy.

Furthermore, there is a call for government investment in digital accessibility, the establishment of laws protecting disability rights, and inclusive banking services. Collaboration between government and non-government bodies is advocated to develop disability-friendly technical materials and technology-friendly classrooms. Standardisation through international accessibility guidelines is emphasised, with the belief that more accessible websites attract a broader user base. It is suggested that disability organisations should work closely with the government to ensure government websites adhere to accessibility standards and undergo regular accessibility testing. Finally, there is a three-tier approach proposed for achieving digital accessibility: micro-level guidance for individuals with disabilities, meso-level collaboration with organisations, and macro-level advocacy for policy changes and a supportive accessibility environment in technology. This multifaceted approach underscores the importance of comprehensive efforts to ensure digital inclusion for all.

Consensus has emerged that digital access and inclusion are not well-understood, even among highly educated individuals. There is a framework for measuring accessibility known as WCAG 2.0 that is relevant to this issue. It is crucial to delve deeper into this topic and educate various organisations about it. To ensure widespread understanding of digital accessibility, both the general population and the government in Nepal need to be well-informed. To achieve this, relevant government departments (OPDs) should actively engage in awareness campaigns. Additionally, incorporating accessibility-related subjects into computer software and computer engineering courses like BCA CSIT from the outset will go a long way in reducing accessibility challenges in the future. Overall, the consensus among respondents is that digital accessibility and inclusion are crucial for building an inclusive, fair, and prosperous society that values the abilities and skills of all citizens, including those with disabilities.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this journal elucidates the compelling case for recognising digital accessibility and inclusion as not merely a policy matter, but as an intrinsic human right that transcends the boundaries of ability. It is incumbent upon governments, organisations, developers, and society at large to jointly shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that digital spaces are welcoming and accommodating to everyone. While Nepal has made commendable strides in acknowledging the importance of digital inclusion, there remains a considerable gap between policy aspirations and their tangible realisation. To meet the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities in the ever-evolving digital landscape, it is imperative to adopt more comprehensive and up-to-date measures.

The insights shared by experts and users alike emphasise the pivotal role played by digital inclusion in the lives of individuals with disabilities, empowering them with greater autonomy and fostering participation in various facets of life. Such inclusion has been the key to unlocking opportunities in education, employment, and social integration, underscoring the transformative potential of digital accessibility. However, a series of challenges, ranging from inaccessible website designs to a lack of awareness and technical issues, pose substantial barriers. To make digital accessibility a palpable reality for all individuals with disabilities, concerted efforts are indispensable. This necessitates government investment, fostering collaboration, and enhancing education at multiple levels, as they collectively constitute the foundation for a more inclusive digital environment.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Bedeutung von digitaler Zugänglichkeit und Inklusion für Menschen mit Behinderungen im Globalen Süden, mit einem Schwerpunkt auf Nepal. Er unterstreicht, dass digitale Inklusion für den Aufbau einer inklusiven Gesellschaft unerlässlich ist, und zeigt die Herausforderungen auf, denen sich Menschen mit Behinderungen beim Zugang zu digitalen Ressourcen gegenübersehen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass es zwar positive Schritte zur Anerkennung der digitalen Inklusion gegeben hat, dass aber immer noch eine Kluft zwischen der politischen Absicht und der praktischen Umsetzung besteht. Unterstützende Technologien spielen eine entscheidende Rolle, wenn es darum geht, Menschen mit Behinderungen Unabhängigkeit und Teilhabe zu ermöglichen, aber es gibt nach wie vor Herausforderungen wie unzugängliche Websites und mangelndes Bewusstsein. Um diese Herausforderungen zu bewältigen und digitale Zugänglichkeit für alle zu gewährleisten, ruft der Artikel zu gemeinsamen Anstrengungen von Regierungen, Organisationen, Entwickler\*innen und der Gesellschaft auf. Er unterstreicht die Notwendigkeit staatlicher Investitionen, der Zusammenarbeit und der Aufklärung auf verschiedenen Ebenen, um ein inklusiveres digitales Umfeld zu schaffen und letztlich digitale Zugänglichkeit und Inklusion als grundlegende Menschenrechte anzuerkennen.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore l'importance de l'accessibilité et de l'inclusion numérique pour les personnes handicapées dans les pays du Sud, en particulier au Népal. Il souligne que l'inclusion numérique est essen-

tielle à la construction d'une société inclusive et met en évidence les difficultés rencontrées par les personnes handicapées pour accéder aux ressources numériques. Les résultats révèlent que si des mesures positives ont été prises pour reconnaître l'inclusion numérique, il existe toujours un fossé entre les intentions politiques et la mise en œuvre pratique. Le rôle des technologies d'assistance est crucial pour permettre l'indépendance et la participation des personnes handicapées, mais des défis tels que la conception de sites web inaccessibles et le manque de sensibilisation persistent. Pour relever ces défis et garantir l'accessibilité numérique pour tous, l'article appelle à des efforts collectifs de la part des gouvernements, des organisations, des développeurs et de la société. Il souligne la nécessité pour les gouvernements d'investir, de collaborer et d'éduquer à différents niveaux afin de créer un environnement numérique plus inclusif, en reconnaissant finalement l'accessibilité et l'inclusion numériques comme des droits de l'homme fondamentaux.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo explora la importancia de la accesibilidad y la inclusión digital para las personas con discapacidad en el Sur Global, centrándose en Nepal. Destaca que la inclusión digital es esencial para construir una sociedad inclusiva y subraya los retos a los que se enfrentan las personas con discapacidad para acceder a los recursos digitales. Las conclusiones revelan que, aunque se han dado pasos positivos hacia el reconocimiento de la inclusión digital, sigue habiendo una brecha entre la intención política y la aplicación práctica. El papel de las tecnologías de apoyo es crucial para permitir la independencia y la participación de las personas con discapacidad, pero persisten problemas como el diseño inaccesible de los sitios web y la falta de concienciación. Para hacer frente a estos retos y garantizar la accesibilidad digital para todos, el artículo hace un llamamiento al esfuerzo colectivo de gobiernos, organizaciones, desarrolladores y sociedad. Subraya la necesidad de inversión pública, colaboración y educación a varios niveles para crear un entorno digital más inclusivo, reconociendo en última instancia la accesibilidad digital y la inclusión como derechos humanos fundamentales.

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# Deaf Community Perception on Social Media Applications and Platforms

*Nyarko Stanley Marco/Dzeani Okai Phinehas*

Social media has become an integral part of modern communication. Its impact on society as well as deaf communities is significant. Social media comprises a group of internet-based applications that allow the creation of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Social media applications allow users to connect with others, share information, and participate in online communities. This leads to concern about the quality of information shared on social media and its impact on public opinion. There is limited research on how deaf communities perceive social media and its accessibility, especially in Ghana. This study aims to evaluate the perception of deaf communities regarding social media applications using a mixed-method approach. The study uses an online survey to collect data from Ghanaian deaf persons, to explore the benefits and challenges of using social media applications, and to identify ways social media can be more inclusive and accessible for deaf communities. The findings of this study will contribute to existing literature on social media accessibility and inform the development of more inclusive social media platforms to benefit deaf communities.

## **Introduction**

Growing concern for access to information has prompted many individuals to use the most available social media platforms as a means of news dissemination, interpersonal online communication (Mack et al. 2020), and sharing of opinions. Social media provides quick access to information in the areas of education, healthcare, livelihood, and politics among others becoming an integral part of our lives such that a closer review of the impact it has on the deaf community is vital. Deafness has a consequence on access to information and interpersonal communication particularly with the hearing community. The lack of available channels for easy communication isolates, excludes, and secludes DHH individuals from society. Advancement in technology has aided DHH individuals to overcome some of these barriers. Instances include that Facebook has become the most patient-driven force in Malaysia for access to healthcare information (Rahim et al. 2021), DHH people in Ghana access

information on COVID-19 through social media, particularly Facebook during the COVID-19 pandemic (Edward et al. 2023), while over 90% of deaf individuals access information through social media in the United States of America (Mack et al. 2022). Notwithstanding the positive impact social media may have had on people, accessing the content poses a challenge to the over 70 million DHH individuals worldwide (Manning et al. 2022), leading to serious communication setbacks for the deaf community.

The content of information shared on social media is often either in voiced or text-based interfaces whereas DHH people particularly use sign language, a full-fledged language with its lexicons and grammar (Zeshan et al. 2005) as their primary mode of communication. As such the content of text- and audio-based information on social media is challenging for the majority of DHH individuals. Maxwell (2014) for instance opines that deafness imposes a serious limitation on both the language and academic achievement

*„DHH [Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing] persons in Ghana [...] seek to be part of the global digital inclusion architecture and therefore are a vibrant part of social media usage [...].“*

of deaf children and by extension deaf adults. Based on these indications, the following questions arise that guide the herein presented study; a) What knowledge do DHH people have about social media applications and use, b) What challenges do DHH persons encounter when using social media applications, and c) What are DHH peoples' perceptions on social media applications and use?

## Literature Review

### Deaf Community Knowledge and Perception of Social Media

Social media platforms have emerged as influential agents of change, altering how people connect, interact, and share information. These virtual spaces transcend geographical boundaries and provide a global platform for dialogue and self-expression. For the deaf community, as a group with unique linguistic and cultural attributes, the advent of social media presents both immense promise and formidable challenges.

The proliferation of social media platforms in recent years has ushered in a new era of communication characterised by instantaneous, multimedia-rich exchanges (Hilbert 2020). Within the deaf community, this transformation has not gone unnoticed. Research suggests a growing awareness of various social media platforms among deaf individuals. These platforms encompass a wide array of options, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube (Huyck/Anbuhl et al. 2021).

A study conducted by Saunders (2016) revealed that social media has become a venue for social awareness and change through forum discussions and the exchange of viewpoints and information. The research focused on online disinhibiting, cyberbullying, audism,

advocacy for and against deafness as a cultural identity, and representation of deaf people in different forms of media, including social media. Ibrahim, Alias et al. (2016) following up on Saunders' work, conducted a study and indicated by their findings that social media such as Facebook serves the deaf community more positively. Many within the deaf community have embraced these platforms as powerful tools for bridging communication gaps, fostering connections, and nurturing a sense of belonging (Rodríguez-Correa/Valencia-Arias et al. 2023).

However, the scope and nature of social media knowledge within the deaf community are by no means uniform. Factors such as age, linguistic preferences be it sign language or written language, and geographic location introduce considerable variations (Saunders 2016). A nuanced understanding of the deaf community's knowledge of social media is essential. Such insight not only facilitates the tailoring of support mechanisms but also ensures the inclusivity of digital communication (Ihlen 2013).

Many deaf persons perceive social media as a platform for advocacy, allowing them to raise awareness about issues that matter to them, from accessibility rights to deaf culture appreciation (Toofaninejad et al. 2017). Through the power of online activism, the deaf communities feel they can effect positive change, challenge stereotypes, and amplify their voices on a global scale.

Furthermore, research shows the preference of many DHH individuals for video content and sign language in their online interactions, aligning seamlessly with their mode of communication (Templeton et al. 2018).

### Challenges Deaf Persons Encounter with Social Media

The promise of social media as a conduit for enhancing communication and community-building among DHH individuals is appealing. Yet, as with any transformative technology, it is not without its challenges. Access barriers have emerged as significant impediments, with the absence of crucial accessibility features such as captioning or sign language interpretation in video content acting as stumbling blocks (Alaimo/Orlando et al. 2019). Furthermore, the inherently visual nature of online interactions can amplify the impact of cyberbullying and online harassment, in such situations affecting deaf individuals (Wang/Cao et al. 2022).

One of the foremost barriers is the absence of crucial accessibility features, such as captioning. This omission, according to Islam, Dash et al., (2021)

effectively excludes DHH persons from engaging with a wide range of content, from educational to entertainment content. Berke, Seita et al. (2020) conducted a study and measured the importance ranking of various YouTube genres of online video to be accurately captioned and video genres of highest captioning importance. The study sampled data from 175 participants and revealed that social media platforms fall short of providing adequate or accurate captioning.

Similarly, the lack of sign language interpretation in video content presents a serious barrier. Sign language interpreters play a vital role in facilitating communication between deaf individuals and content creators who use verbal communication (Young/Oram et al. 2019; Berke/Seita et al. 2020). Without interpreters, DHH users are left unable to access or engage with content that relies on spoken language. As a result, they miss out on opportunities for meaningful interaction, education, and entertainment (Kožuh/Debecv 2018).

**Methodology**

This paper is a mixed-method study of DHH individuals in Ghana. The study took place between July and August 2023. The study area spanned nine out of the 16 political regions in Ghana. The study mainly drew on an online survey used to collect data from forty-six DHH persons who use social media. In all, 20% female and 80% male respondents shared their experiences using social media by responding to a survey questionnaire. The data collected showed that active deaf users of social media range from 22 to 42 years. 60% of respondents indicated that their highest level of education was tertiary. 26.7% had their highest education at the teacher training college level while 13.3%

indicated that their highest educational level was high school. This result confirmed our initial suspicions that deaf persons who had their education terminated at the basic education level or who had no education at all did not possess the necessary technological know-how or literacy abilities to use technological tools even if they could afford or own them.

We had to ensure that data collected was truly to a large extent from respondents, who identified as either deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals. Forty-five respondents indicated whether they identified as hearing, hard-of-hearing (HH), or deaf. Out of the total responses, 28.9% and 68.9% identified as HH and deaf respectively while 2.2% identified as hearing respondents. We included data collected for the only respondent who identified as hearing for analysis based on two assumptions; 1) that the respondent may have just selected the “hearing” option not on purpose since all their other responses showed deaf-related responses and 2) the experiences shared by the respondent concerning their usage of social media even if they were truly a “hearing” individual, would not drastically skew the outcomes of the study.

**Deaf Individuals’ Scope of Knowledge of Social Media Applications and Usage**

Before identifying and analysing the perceptions and challenges DHH persons face while using social media platforms, knowledge of the types of social media applications they had and used is important. Figure 1 shows a chart illustrating the social media applications DHH persons had on their phones or computers and used.

Figure 1 illustrates which social media applications DHH persons had and used most often. 100% of DHH

Which of the following applications do you have on your phone/computer? (tick all that apply)

46 responses

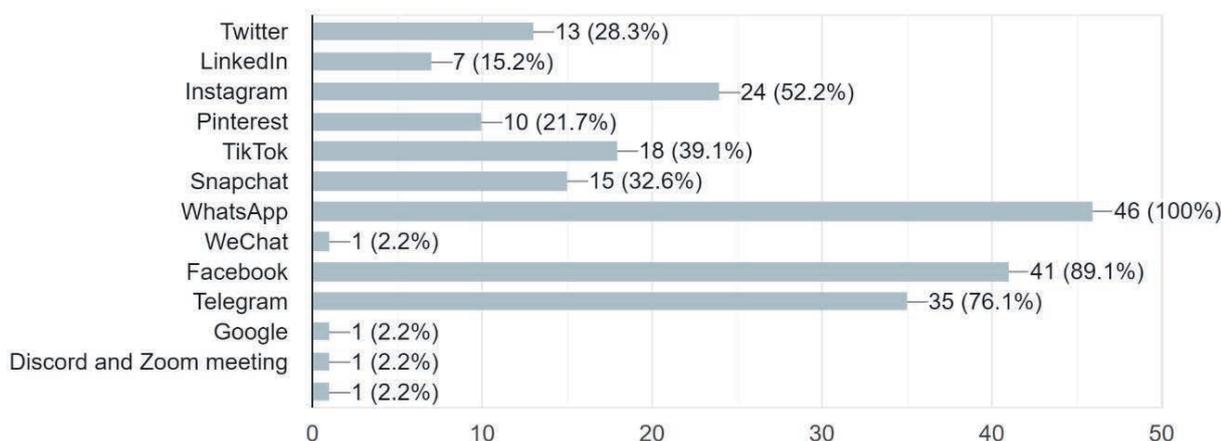


Figure 1: Field Survey: July 2023

people who had digital technologies for communication had installed WhatsApp application on their devices and used it as their primary digital social media tool. The second and third most installed and used social media applications by DHH persons are Facebook/Meta (89.1%) and Telegram (76.1%) respectively.

It is imperative that users of digital media, including deaf persons, possess fundamental knowledge of opportunities and benefits, challenges related to usage, and ethical practices. Key themes that emerged from responses regarding the meaning of social media include socialisation, communication, collaboration, and a reference point to access information. Some of these definitions do not fit neatly into isolated themes because themes as socialisation, communication, and collaboration overlapped in some of the responses provided.

**Socialisation, Communication, and Collaboration**

Some deaf individuals see social media as a “means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks”. As a socialisation tool, other sections of deaf people in the deaf community see social media as “applications used by individuals to enhance socialisation”, or as a “range of web applications based on Web 2.0 technologies [sic] that enable the user to socially interact with one another online”. Understandably, these varied experiences underscore the meaning social media presents to different deaf users. An avid user for example may perceive social media applications and use as depicted in this response:

“Social media has made communication easier by allowing me to connect with others from anywhere in the world, share information and ideas, and stay in touch with friends and family in real-time. It has also made it easier to find and connect with people who share similar interests and hobbies.” (Field interview, 30-07-2023)

While some DHH persons may perceive social media applications and platforms as solely for socialisation purposes, others heavily depend on it for communications

and would use that as a premise to define their understanding of social media. In the responses considered,

Has social media made your communication with other people better?  
46 responses

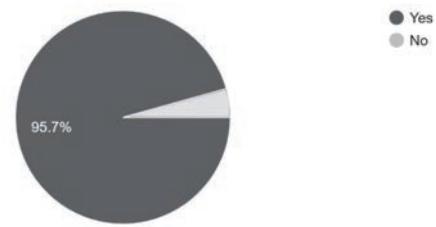


Figure 2: Field Survey: July 2023

communication is the defining factor that seems to underscore the meaning and primary function of social media to many deaf people.

We wanted to find out the impact of using social media on quality of communication. Respondents were to tell with either a “Yes” or “No” whether social media had made their communication with other people better. Their responses are shown in the pie chart in Figure 2.

The 95.7 % response rate for “Yes” shows that DHH individuals have depended on social media technologies to enhance their communication within their community and also with non-deaf individuals.

**A Reference Point for Information**

Another dimension that defines the understanding of social media to DHH persons is its usage as a reference point for information access. Some DHH persons regard social media platforms as the go-to source for whatever information they may need. A deaf individual provides three possible forms of information that they think is available on social media to access by indicating their understanding in the following words:

Specific use of social media applications and platforms

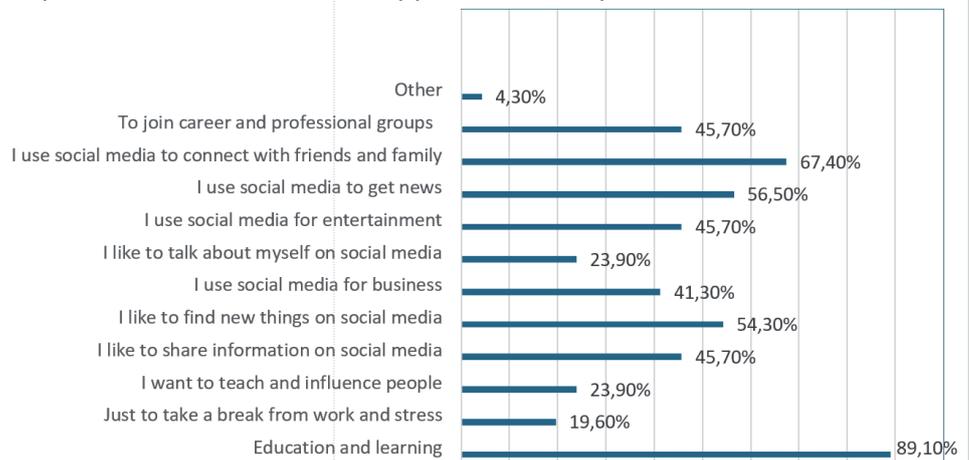


Figure 3: Field Survey: July 2023

“Is an application that enable us to entertain ourselves, get information about what is going on in other parts of the world and for business purposes” It is important to note that this deaf person identifies 1) entertainment, 2) world news and 3) business information as types/forms of information that is accessible on social media platforms. These understandings are aptly supported by other responses defining social media as “Media applications” and “platforms that allow users to create and share content with others, connect with friends and family, and discover new people and things.”

**Broader Perceptions**

More generally expansive views and perceptions are provided by respondents based on how they use the platforms. Aside from the broader themes under which DHH persons perceived social media, we wanted to understand what specific activities they used these platforms for. Figure 3 shows responses relating to this.

From Figure 3, 89.1 % of deaf persons from the data utilise social media platforms for education and learning purposes. 67.4 % use social media to connect with friends and family, while 56.5 % use social media applications and platforms to access news items and information. The distribution confirms our initial suspicion that DHH persons engaged a lot with social media technologies for a variety of reasons.

**Challenges DHH Persons Encounter During Social Media Usage**

Like all users of technology, DHH individuals encounter a variety of challenges when using digital and social media platforms. Figure 4 shows the results of responses regarding some of these challenges.

Results from the data collected indicate that 73.9% of deaf individuals considered activities of online scammers and fraudsters as the most threatening challenge

while using social media platforms. 51.1% of total respondents took either one or a combination of the following actions against scammers and fraudsters: 1) send messages to the social media hosts through feedback to complain, 2) enable two-factor authentication for security, 3) check the information well and compare with other sources to make sure what is seen can be trusted, or 4) block people/users they do not trust on the social media platform. The next troubling challenge for DHH users of social media is the prevalence of fake news on the platforms they use. 63% of respondents cite fake news as a challenge they experience while using social media technologies. 50%, however, mention expensive internet data costs as their challenge. Other challenges identified by respondents include misinformation (37 %), addiction to social media sites (32.6%), taking a lot of users’ time (28.3%), stumbling upon harmful information (28.3%), online bullying, phishing, and insults (26.1%), concern for personal information (13%), too much information (13%) and confusing user design interface (13%).

The data showed that while some took security measures, others focused on portions of information they needed, yet others simply ignored information they felt they did not relate to. Some of their responses to overcoming these challenges include: “I leave the social media site; I delete bad social media accounts form [sic] my phone ; I block people/users I don’t trust on social media”, or “I delete bad social media accounts from my phone; I enable Two-Factor authentication for security; I check information I see from other sites to make sure what I see is true”, and “I respond to information that is not true”, “I join workshops that teach safe use of social media”. The data suggest that deaf individuals are increasingly becoming more aware of challenges relating to the use of online social media sites, are taking steps to overcome these challenges, and are developing skills that enable them to utilise opportunities within the digitalisation space.

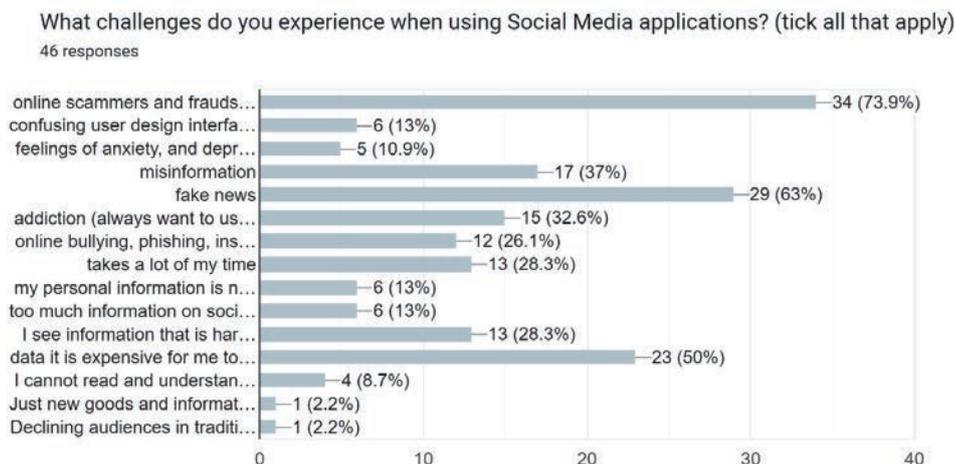


Figure 4: Field Survey: July 2023

**Recommendations**

We summarise this paper with recommendations given by DHH respondents for the study. Firstly, social media app developers must become conscious of online safety for (deaf) users by including security features that help them to be able to identify fake information

and scams and deal with them.

Developers must again ensure that their applications have lots of features that support video chats so that deaf people have more choices. Audio and text formats need to be transcribed into video graphical sign language formats, to reduce miscommunication for deaf persons using these sites. Social media app developers can utilise artificial intelligence technology to translate voice or text into sign language and also to add sign language concepts to emojis and Graphical Interchange Formats (GIFs) for a more user-friendly experience.

Internet and data affordability is a crucial factor for deaf persons when using social media technologies. Since most of their information is consumed understandably in video formats, internet service providers and deaf community advocates should put in place affordable and discounted internet bundle packages for deaf communities arranged through the local national deaf associations.

To overcome challenges, deaf persons must be mindful of how they use social media and take steps to protect their privacy and well-being. This includes being aware of the content they post and share, how to avoid cyberbullying and harassment, and how they can use privacy settings to control who can or cannot see their content. It's also important for (deaf) users to take breaks and seek support if they find themselves struggling with social media addiction or mental health issues.

## Conclusion

In this study, we have shown that DHH persons in Ghana as a disability group seek to be part of the global digital inclusion architecture and therefore are a vibrant part of social media usage though there are major challenges that come with the use of social media as digital tools. DHH individuals persist in the use of these platforms and are consistently finding ways to remain 'safe' while engaging with such platforms. Whereas the study has shown that there is no or minimal presence of sign language interfaces for their use, there still exist many opportunities and benefits for deaf people on these sites where they can leverage applications and platforms for education, training, socialisation, and other positive collaborative engagements.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Soziale Medien sind zu einem festen Bestandteil der modernen Kommunikation geworden. Ihr Einfluss auf die Gesellschaft und die Gemeinschaft von gehörlosen Menschen ist erheblich. Soziale Medien umfassen eine Reihe von internetbasierten Anwendungen, die die Erstellung von nutzergenerierten Inhalten ermöglichen (Kaplan/Haenlein 2010). Social-Media-Anwendungen ermöglichen es den Nutzern, mit anderen in Kontakt zu treten, Informationen auszutauschen und sich an Online-Gemeinschaften zu beteiligen. Dies gibt Anlass zur Sorge über die Qualität der in den sozialen Medien geteilten Informationen und ihre Auswirkungen auf die öffentliche Meinung. Es gibt nur wenige Untersuchungen darüber, wie Gemeinschaften von gehörlosen Menschen die sozialen Medien und ihre Zugänglichkeit wahrnehmen, insbesondere in Ghana. Diese Studie zielt darauf ab, die Wahrnehmung von Gemeinschaften von gehörlosen Menschen in Bezug auf Social-Media-Anwendungen mit Hilfe eines Mixed-Methods-Ansatzes zu untersuchen. Die Studie verwendet eine Online-Umfrage, um Daten von ghanaischen Gehörlosen zu sammeln, die Vorteile und Herausforderungen bei der Nutzung von Social-Media-Anwendungen zu erforschen und Wege aufzuzeigen, wie die sozialen Medien für Gemeinschaften von gehörlosen Menschen inklusiver und zugänglicher gestaltet werden können. Die Ergebnisse dieser Studie werden einen Beitrag zur bestehenden Literatur über die Zugänglichkeit sozialer Medien leisten und die Entwicklung inklusiver sozialer Medienplattformen zum Nutzen der Gemeinschaften von gehörlosen Menschen unterstützen.

## RÉSUMÉ

Les médias sociaux font désormais partie intégrante de la communication moderne. Leur impact sur la société et sur les communautés sourdes est significatif. Les médias sociaux comprennent un groupe d'applications basées sur Internet qui permettent la création de contenu généré par l'utilisateur (Kaplan/Haenlein 2010). Les applications de médias sociaux permettent aux utilisateurs d'entrer en contact avec d'autres personnes, de partager des informations et de participer à des communautés en ligne. Cela conduit à s'inquiéter de la qualité des informations partagées sur les médias sociaux et de leur impact sur l'opinion publique. Il existe peu de recherches sur la façon dont les communautés sourdes perçoivent les médias sociaux et leur accessibilité, en particulier au Ghana. Cette étude vise à évaluer la perception des communautés sourdes à l'égard des applications des médias sociaux en utilisant une approche mixte. L'étude utilise une enquête en ligne pour recueillir des données au-

près de personnes sourdes ghanéennes, pour explorer les avantages et les défis de l'utilisation des applications de médias sociaux, et pour identifier les moyens par lesquels les médias sociaux peuvent être plus inclusifs et accessibles pour les communautés sourdes. Les résultats de cette étude contribueront à la littérature existante sur l'accessibilité des médias sociaux et éclaireront le développement de plateformes de médias sociaux plus inclusives au profit des communautés sourdes.

## RESUMEN

Las redes sociales se han convertido en parte integrante de la comunicación moderna. Su impacto en la sociedad y en las comunidades sordas es significativo. Los medios sociales comprenden un grupo de aplicaciones basadas en Internet que permiten la creación de contenidos generados por los usuarios (Kaplan/ Haenlein 2010). Las aplicaciones de medios sociales permiten a los usuarios conectar con otros, compartir información y participar en comunidades en línea. Esto genera preocupación sobre la calidad de la información compartida en los medios sociales y su impacto en la opinión pública. Existen pocas investigaciones sobre cómo perciben las comunidades sordas los medios sociales y su accesibilidad, especialmente en Ghana. Este estudio pretende evaluar la percepción de las comunidades sordas sobre las aplicaciones de los medios sociales utilizando un enfoque de métodos mixtos. Utiliza una encuesta en línea para recopilar datos de las personas sordas de Ghana, explorar los beneficios y desafíos del uso de aplicaciones de medios sociales, e identificar formas en que los medios sociales pueden ser más inclusivos y accesibles para las comunidades sordas. Los resultados de este estudio contribuirán a la bibliografía existente sobre la accesibilidad de los medios sociales y servirán de base para el desarrollo de plataformas de medios sociales más inclusivas en beneficio de las comunidades mencionadas.

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# Digitalising Instruction during Global Emergencies: Deaf Education in Focus

*Godwin Irokaba*

This study explores remote teaching options for deaf and hard-of-hearing learners using technologies and multimedia resources. The study examines adjustments which have been made globally in response to emergency situations. The study gathered information from 74 schools and programmes for deaf children across the 36 States of Nigeria and the Federal Capital. Two schools from each State were purposively selected for the study. They were proportionately divided into public and private schools to ensure equal representation. Data for the study was collected using an online survey which was administered through phone calls and social media platforms. Participants include teachers, students, parents, proprietors, and government officials. It was found that only 11% of schools, which is approximately eight schools, undertook some form of learning arrangement for their pupils during the emergency lockdown. These schools were all private schools. Among the challenges they encountered while conducting online learning experiments with deaf students were lack of experience in organizing and handling remote learning for deaf children, the exorbitant cost of technological devices and internet. The lack of IT-skills by some teachers and parents, and the absence of encouragement and support from the public and private sectors of society also hindered the use of virtual learning platforms. It was recommended inter alia that digital instructional resources be developed to make learning accessible to deaf children both at home and in schools. A VSO- model of unlocking talent through technology should be introduced to help deaf children learn during emergency lockdowns. Parents and teachers should be IT conversant to be able to ensure the success of the virtual and digital learning arrangements for deaf children.

## **Introduction**

The occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic caused major upheavals around the globe. From ratcheting the healthcare system to causing a steep decline in commerce, and reimaging the education practice, the impacts of the pandemic were far-reaching. The pandemic altered the course of events, changing the way humanity was accustomed to doing things. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in practices which were novel and unconventional before now.

During the early months of the pandemic, lockdowns were imposed and social distancing enforced. These strict measures were taken to curb the spread of the virus and reduce the motility rates from the pandemic. Other precautions were stepped up, such as closure of schools, offices, churches, mosques, and

public places. The long duration the pandemic lasted caused the loss of an entire academic year in many countries. During those times, children were confined at home for as long as the social distancing regime was in place. At a point during the lockdown, government introduced distance learning for school children. The arrangement was to educate children remotely using TV, radio and other digital means. While this arrangement was commendable, it was not inclusive of children with disabilities in Nigeria. Children and youths with disabilities were left out of the media enhanced learning programmes. Explaining reasons behind this neglect of students with disabilities from the digitally transmitted learning arrangement, Deji-Folutile, (2020) noted that Nigeria still dwell in the era of segregated education for students with

disabilities, whereas other nations have long embraced inclusive education. Therefore, the tendency to educate students with disabilities in special schools has created a segregated education mindset. These schools are poorly equipped as educational institutions. Learning arrangements are the same as obtained in public schools. There are no special arrangements to distinguish these schools from public education, notwithstanding that they go by the name *special schools*. Also, special education teachers are untrained in the use of technological devices to organise remote learning.

A lot of people would be quick to think that teaching school subjects on TV with an interpreter on a section of the screen would make an inclusive learning arrangement for deaf learners. But that is not the case. One of the biggest disadvantages of interpreting in educationally inclusive settings for deaf learners is that such interpretations lack depth. While an interpreter will be racing to catch up with the speaker or presenter, vital information could be omitted, and student-teacher symbiosis would be missing. Johnson, Lidell and Erting (1989) provided insight into the conflicting emotions and indecision an interpreter who uses sign supported speech (SSS), also known as simultaneous communication (SimCom), goes through when interpreting word for word. They noted that the interpreter would begin to audit the speech portion of the signal and will allow the sign signal to deteriorate either by omitting signs randomly or deleting signs that do not fit the rhythmic pattern of the spoken English. Contributing, Tevenal and Villanueva, (2009) contends that using simultaneous communication causes alterations in the linguistic integrity of both manual and oral forms of communication, abbreviations of English in the manual code, deletion of grammatical markers in signs, and slowing of speech.

It is pertinent to understand that the use of the total communication system in interpretation in Nigeria causes deaf learners to lose a large portion of information because word for word interpretation is akin to communicating with deaf children in a foreign language which they have little to no knowledge of. Petersen (2017) observes that spoken language work by lining up sound in time, that is, sound after sound after sound. He explains that when we use spoken English, we can add a bit of impact to our words by changing our intonation and adding some nuances. These could pose some problem for a SimCom signer and impart no clear message or understanding to the deaf audience. A study by Nugroho and Lintangari, (2022) found that deaf students have difficulties with English word for word translations because majority of them have not

heard English spoken in its original form. Thus, they cannot understand grammatically accurate English when they have a natural means of communication which expresses the same English sentences and phrases. We must also note that in a physical classroom, attention and mutual support is given to each student, such that no child is left behind. Inclusive practice in the classroom does not prioritise covering curriculum or scheme of work on the timetable within the allotted time space. It is about accommodating individual learning differences and needs and modifying instructions to meet those needs. Ohlin, (2016) explained that the focus of inclusive education is on giving every child the help s/he needs to learn. It also involves giving the child a one-on-one learning opportunity in a small group. These individualised instructional needs of deaf and hard of hearing children cannot be met via a televised interpretation. It therefore raises the question of what are the requirements for a successful virtual learning experience for deaf students and what preparations do teachers of the deaf need to make to be able to execute beneficial virtual instructions? These questions are in the efforts to build back better post COVID-19 pandemic. Lessons learned during the lockdown will lead to the implementation of actions to forestall the negative experiences from the lockdown. This study will explore virtual learning alternatives for deaf students and examine teachers' roles in fostering virtual teaching and learning during emergency school shut down.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Education is a key element in nation building. Keeping children at home for long a time, without an alternative plan to educate them would waste useful years of a child's life. Children and young people with disabilities were the most affected during the pandemic. From neglect to exclusion and the lack of intent to educate them during the pandemic, children with disabilities experienced greater marginalisation and discrimination during the lockdown. Parallel studies by Irokaba (2021); Mahbub & Mahmud (2021); and Nóchez-McNutt (2021), for the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development, investigated the experiences of persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Bolivia, and found that persons with disabilities in those countries had difficulties accessing digital technologies and internet, and also lacked the financial means to obtain those digital resources. It was further found that during the pandemic, when schools were closed to slow the

*„It is an obvious knowledge that deaf people in Nigeria do not have access to information, knowledge and learning materials in their native language.“*

spread of the virus, children with disabilities were neither included in State governments' educational plans for school children. Nor were children with disabilities included in the homegrown rations of the Federal government of which over N523 million was spent to cater to school children staying at home during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not been the only cause of school closures in Nigeria. In recent times, insecurity, which has become a global threat, has forced schools to close in several countries. Nigeria is no exception. Some states in Nigeria have closed their schools indefinitely because of the frequent kidnapping of students for ransom purposes by bandits. Three hotbeds of banditry in Nigeria have seen their schools closed on several occasions. States, where schools are still closed, are Borno, Niger, and Kaduna States (Lere 2021). These closures have adversely affected the education of children and youths with disabilities. Under these circumstances, alternate arrangement to sustain the education of these children is imperative. However, the significant question remains what alternative arrangements should be put in place to ensure that children and youths with disabilities, especially, deaf children, continue their education at home despite closures. What less expensive measures should be put in place to guarantee that children continue their education during lockdowns?

Multimedia instructional materials in the form of digital sign language textbooks, visual story books, sign language charts, and virtual teaching platforms should be introduced in our special education system. Using multimedia resources, lessons can be delivered remotely to schools from a sign language lab or studio, by means of the Zoom app and Google classroom platform. Such innovations will help ease teachers the challenges they face in presenting lessons to deaf

learners. Besides textbooks and educational resource materials, teachers' skills and knowledge of methods in delivering instruction to deaf learners are equally important. Teachers in the education of deaf and hard hearing learners in Nigeria are not exposed to specialised teaching methods in their field. They teach deaf children as they teach hearing children. A digital instructional resource will remove that burden from teachers and enhance learning in deaf children.

In Malawi, a country in Southern Africa, the Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) initiated a project called Unlocking Talent. This project embeds child-focused software that draws its content from the national primary school curriculum for mathematics and literacy into children's hand-held touch screen tablets (Pitchford 2018). This innovative technology is said to enable children of different abilities to learn at their own pace, in their own language. This is a remarkable invention which should be explored for use with deaf and hard-of-hearing children. The Unlocking Talent app does not have a sign language-designed lesson yet. This calls for creativity to ensure the inclusion of sign language apps into the technology so children with hearing loss can learn even when they are staying at home.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent did special and inclusive public and private schools for the deaf participated in the media learning arrangement organised by government (federal and States) during the pandemic lockdown?
2. What arrangements (remote/virtual/online) did special and inclusive public and private schools for the deaf in Nigeria make to ensure the continuation of the education of their students during the COVID-19 lockdown?

What challenges / barriers prevented special and inclusive public and private educational programmes from participating in virtual learning arrangements during the COVID-19 lockdown?

### Methodology

This study investigated alternative remote learning arrangements for deaf children during a COVID-19 pandemic or banditry-induced lockdown. A total of 74 schools were sampled. The schools were purposively selected to include government-owned schools and privately owned schools for the deaf in each of the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Considering that government-owned schools for the deaf are available in every state and the FCT, all these schools were automatically selected in the survey. On the other hand, there are more privately owned schools for the deaf in the States and the FCT. Therefore, the selection of participating schools was based on the convenience sampling method. Schools selected were those that were accessible to the researcher based on the researcher's familiarity with their owners. Other schools were selected from referrals made by members of the Deaf Teachers Association of Nigeria (DTAN). Data for the study was collected using online interviews, focus group discussion and document reviews.

From the set of research questions, the researcher formulated some specific questions for discussion with Head teachers and proprietors of schools for the deaf. The questions asked were:

- Did your schools participate in the national TV and Radio educational programme organised by the federal and State governments? Why not?
- Did your schools make their own arrangements for remote learning for deaf students during the lockdown?
- Was the non-participation of some schools a result of the lack of expertise in virtual learning designs or was it a result of the lack of resources to implement the programme?
- What would you need to implement a virtual learning programme for deaf children during any future lockdown or an elongated school closure due to maybe, insecurity or other factors?
- What advice do you have for government or sponsoring bodies to improve virtual learning for deaf students during emergency school closures?

Interviews were held with deaf teachers at the 6<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Deaf Teachers Association of Nigeria (DTAN) where the researcher was a Key-note Presenter. Focus group discussion was scheduled with head teachers and proprietors of schools and programmes for the deaf virtually. The conversations were open-ended interviews, where one response leads to further questioning and discussions to obtain clear information and an understanding of a particular situation.

## Results

From data collected from head teachers who work in State government-owned schools for the deaf, it was found that none of the schools participated in the distance learning opportunities for school children during the lockdown. Thus, while State governments funded

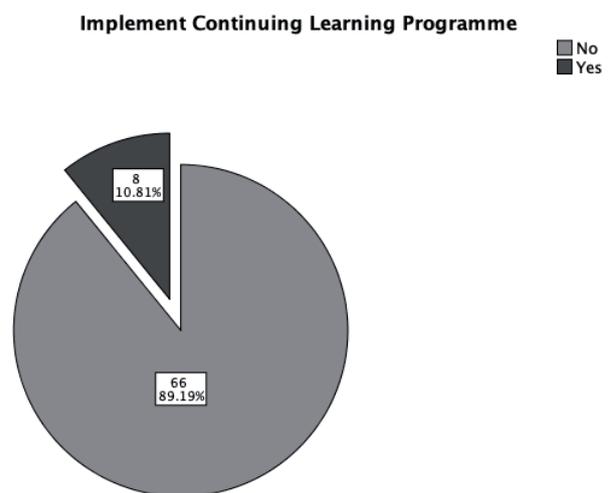


Figure 1: Schools that implemented continuing learning programme

TV stations and Radio channels to transmit educational programmes for school children, none was designed to accommodate children who are deaf and hard of hearing. A study by Azubuike (2021) indicated that 42% of the digital programmes run by State governments for the home education of children during the lockdown were funded by public sector intervention.

Of the 37 private schools for the deaf who participated in this survey, 8 schools, which is approximately 22% of the participants, and 11% of the total population of schools, tried some forms of continuing learning programme for deaf children during the lockdown (see Fig. 2). Their programme, however, was in-person learning plans for a few deaf children in a group of twos and threes.

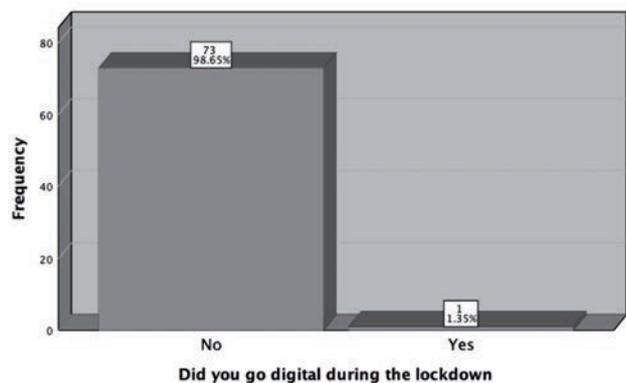


Figure 2: Schools that went digital during the lockdown

Only one private school went digital during the lockdown, but the programme did not record any success because of the lack of internet and the absence of technological devices for use by the deaf students. Patents could not be of much help because several of them could not afford the costs of sliding tablets for their ward's education. Notwithstanding that the school sought collaboration with the Nigeria National

S/N	Item	Type of School		Total
1.	Participation in Distance learning opportunities	Public	Private	Total
	Yes	0 (0%)	0 (100%)	0
	No	37 (50%)	37 (50%)	74 (100%)
	TOTAL	37	37	74
2.	Implementation of Continuous Learning Programme for Deaf Children	Public	Private	Total
	Yes	0 (0%)	8 (10.81%)	8 (10.81%)
	No	37 (50%)	29 (39.12%)	66 (89.19%)
	TOTAL	37	37	74
3.	Going Digital During Lockdown	Public	Private	Total
	Yes	0 (0%)	1 (1.35%)	1 (1.35%)
	No	37 (50%)	36 (48.65%)	73 (98.65%)
	TOTAL	37	37	74

Table 1: Cross Tabulations among School Type and Digitalization Methods

Association of the Deaf (NNAD), and the Deaf Teachers Association of Nigeria (DTAN) to execute the programme, the programme failed to materialise due to a paucity of funds.

### Association between School Type and Digitalisation Methods

The association between type of school and digitalisation methods adopted during the lockdown was accessed statistically. The results are presented in Table 1.

To test for the association between the school type and implementation of continuous learning programmes for deaf children, Fisher's test was computed. Although the sample size was above 50, more than one cell had expected count less than 5. This informed

the adoption of Fisher's Exact test during the cross-tabulations. The results in Table 2 showed that there is a significant association between school type and the implementation of continuous learning programmes for deaf children ( $p < 0.05$ ). From the cross-tabulation, it is clear that private schools are more likely to implement continuous learning programmes for deaf children than private schools.

Regarding the shift to digitalisation during the lockdown, Table 3 shows that there is no significant association between the type of school and going digital during the lockdown ( $p > 0.05$ ). This implies that any school can go digital whether private or public.

### Conclusion

Accessible quality education in line with the sustainable development goal 4 (SDG-4) and article 9 in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires the transcoding of instructional materials into the

vernacular of deaf and hard of hearing learners. Deaf learners need to have linguistic access to the curriculum in their first language (L1). Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE 2014), in Section 7, Paragraph 121(iii), recommended that government agencies, in collaboration with appropriate bodies, shall provide necessary facilities to effectively challenge and develop the intelligence of special needs learners. Paragraph 122 of the Policy elaborated the concept further, stressing that all necessary facilities, equipment, materials and assistive devices that would ensure easy access to quality education for learners with special needs shall be developed and provided. One extremely relevant facility, equipment and material which can guarantee easy access to education for deaf and hard of hearing students in Nigeria is a sign language lab

and sign language multimedia material development centre. Whereas scientists conduct research and carry out experiments to find solution to specific problems in a scientific lab, special educators conduct research and develop new approaches to teaching deaf and other children with disabilities in their special educational lab and resource centres.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	8.970 <sup>a</sup>	1	.003	.005	.003	
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	6.867	1	.009			
Likelihood Ratio	12.062	1	.001	.005	.003	
Fisher's Exact Test				.005	.003	
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.848 <sup>c</sup>	1	.003	.005	.003	.003
N of Valid Cases	74					

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.00.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

c. The standardized statistic is 2.975.

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests showing the association between school type and implementation of continuous learning programme for deaf children

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	1.014 <sup>a</sup>	1	.314	1.000	.500	
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	.000	1	1.000			
Likelihood Ratio	1.400	1	.237	1.000	.500	
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.500	
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.000 <sup>c</sup>	1	.317	1.000	.500	.500
N of Valid Cases	74					

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

c. The standardized statistic is 1.000.

Table 3: Chi-Square Tests showing the Association between School Type and Going Digital during the Lockdown

## Recommendations

It is an obvious knowledge that deaf people in Nigeria do not have access to information, knowledge and learning materials in their native language. Materials available to deaf children are written in English, which is a foreign language to the deaf. A virtual classroom for deaf children should utilise learning materials designed with deaf children in view. In hybrid classrooms, deaf children often struggle with learning materials which are presented in formats which do not provide linguistic access to information, learning and literacy development of deaf readers. It is therefore imperative to make learning materials available in accessible formats to fill the language gap deaf readers' encounter. A multimedia sign language instructional material project should be innovated as a prophylactic to remedy barriers to information acquisition and knowledge development in deaf and hard of hearing persons. The project would equally provide linguistic access to the curriculum and improve learning outcomes for learners who are deaf and hard of hearing.

In this age of technological advancement, virtual resources have helped to correct lapses in human errors. Virtual teaching resources are important tools to support the delivery of home lessons to deaf children during lockdowns. Using virtual applications like Zoom and Google classroom, a skilled teacher in the education of deaf learners can present a lesson where deaf children in various locations can connect virtually to the studio. These classrooms should be made interactive to allow the teacher to provide individualised support to children who need additional help. In Nigeria, teachers use sign supported speech approaches in communications and teaching deaf learners. It is erroneously assumed that by speaking and signing, deaf persons will learn to form English grammar as correctly as possible. This has not been the case as teachers who use this method end up only hearing their own

voices while speaking at deaf students. Teachers who present information to deaf learners in plain English make learning difficult for these students (Johnson/ Liddell/ Ertling 1989). Deaf children have never heard English spoken in its original form. They therefore struggle all their lives to master the grammatical sequences of words in a common sentence.

Using sign supported speech method also compound com-

prehension of compound sentences for deaf learners. For example, sentences with similar words, but which have different meaning cannot be understood by deaf learners when read out in the form in which they are spoken. Some examples are:

1. I hurt my arm when I took up arms against the invaders.
2. A lot of deaf persons complain about their lot in life.
3. He read the minutes of the meeting just a few minutes into the meeting.

Other words have the same spelling, but completely different meanings. Examples are:

1. I am close to your house.
2. There is a trade fair taking place at the cultural center.
3. Let's flag off our campaign for election.

The actual meanings of the underlined words in the sentences above cannot be understood by a deaf child when a teacher uses word for word translation method of sign language. It takes an experienced teacher to present this knowledge using free translation method. Thus, remote learning for deaf children can be a successful enterprise with an experienced teacher as the anchor.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Studie untersucht die Möglichkeiten des Fernunterrichts für gehörlose und schwerhörige Lernende unter Verwendung von Technologien und Multimedia-Ressourcen. Die Studie untersucht die Anpassungen, die weltweit als Reaktion auf Notsituationen vorgenommen wurden. Die Studie sammelte Informationen von 74 Schulen und Programmen für gehörlose Kinder in den 36 Bundesstaaten Nigerias und der Bundeshauptstadt. Sie wurden anteilig in öffentliche und private Schulen aufgeteilt, um eine gleichmäßige Vertretung zu gewährleisten. Die Daten für die Studie wurden mithilfe einer Online-Umfrage erhoben, die über Telefonanrufe und soziale Medienplattformen durchgeführt wurde. Zu den Teilnehmer\*innen gehörten Lehrkräfte, Schüler\*innen, Eltern, Schulträger und Regierungsbeamte. Es wurde festgestellt, dass nur 11 % der Schulen, d. h. etwa acht Schulen, irgendeine Form von Lernarrangement für ihre Schüler\*innen während der Notsituation durchgeführt haben. Bei diesen Schulen handelte es sich ausschließlich um Privatschulen. Zu den Herausforderungen, auf die sie bei der Durchführung von Online-Lernversuchen mit gehörlosen Schüler\*innen stießen, gehörten die

mangelnde Erfahrung bei der Organisation und Handhabung von Fernunterricht für gehörlose Kinder sowie die exorbitanten Kosten für technische Geräte und Internet. Die mangelnden IT-Kenntnisse einiger Lehrkräfte und Eltern sowie das Fehlen von Ermutigung und Unterstützung durch den öffentlichen und privaten Sektor der Gesellschaft behinderten ebenfalls die Nutzung virtueller Lernplattformen. Es wurde unter anderem empfohlen, digitale Unterrichtsressourcen zu entwickeln, um gehörlosen Kindern das Lernen sowohl zu Hause als auch in der Schule zu ermöglichen. Ein VSO-Modell zur Förderung von Talenten durch Technologie sollte eingeführt werden, um gehörlose Kinder beim Lernen während Notsituationen zu unterstützen. Eltern und Lehrkräfte sollten IT-kompetent sein, um den Erfolg der virtuellen und digitalen Lernarrangements für gehörlose Kinder zu gewährleisten.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude explore les options d'enseignement à distance pour les apprenants sourds et malentendants en utilisant les technologies et les ressources multimédias. L'étude examine les ajustements qui ont été faits au niveau mondial en réponse aux situations d'urgence. L'étude a recueilli des informations auprès de 74 écoles et programmes pour enfants sourds dans les 36 États du Nigeria et dans la capitale fédérale. Deux écoles de chaque État ont été sélectionnées à dessein pour l'étude. Elles ont été proportionnellement divisées en écoles publiques et privées pour assurer une représentation égale. Les données de l'étude ont été collectées à l'aide d'une enquête en ligne qui a été administrée par des appels téléphoniques et des plateformes de médias sociaux. Les participants sont des enseignants, des élèves, des parents, des propriétaires et des fonctionnaires. Il s'est avéré que seulement 11 % des écoles, soit environ 8 écoles, ont mis en place une forme ou une autre d'organisation de l'apprentissage pour leurs élèves pendant le confinement d'urgence. Ces écoles étaient toutes privées. Parmi les difficultés rencontrées lors des expériences d'apprentissage en ligne avec des élèves sourds, on peut citer le manque d'expérience dans l'organisation et la gestion de l'apprentissage à distance pour les enfants sourds, le coût exorbitant des appareils technologiques et de l'internet. Le manque de compétences informatiques de certains enseignants et parents, ainsi que l'absence d'encouragement et de soutien de la part des secteurs public et privé de la société ont également entravé l'utilisation des plates-formes d'apprentissage virtuelles. Il a été recommandé, entre autres, de développer des ressources pédagogiques numériques pour rendre l'apprentissage accessible aux enfants sourds à la fois à la maison et à l'école. Un modèle VSO de libération des talents par la technologie devrait être introduit pour aider les enfants sourds à apprendre pendant les fermetures d'urgence. Les parents et les enseignants devraient être familiarisés avec les technologies de l'information afin d'assurer le succès des dispositifs d'apprentissage virtuel et numérique pour les enfants sourds.

## RESUMEN

Este estudio explora las opciones de enseñanza a distancia para alumnos sordos y aquellos con dificultades auditivas mediante el uso de tecnologías y recursos multimedia. El estudio examina los ajustes que se han realizado a nivel mundial en respuesta a situaciones de emergencia. El estudio recopiló información de 74 escuelas y programas para niños sordos de los 36 estados de Nigeria y la capital federal. Se dividieron proporcionalmente en escuelas públicas y privadas para garantizar una representación equitativa. Los datos se recopilaron mediante una encuesta en línea que se realizó a través de llamadas telefónicas y plataformas de medios sociales. Entre los participantes había profesores, alumnos, padres, propietarios y funcionarios públicos. Se constató que sólo el 11% de los centros, es decir, aproximadamente 8 centros, adoptaron algún tipo de medida de aprendizaje para sus alumnos durante el cierre de emergencia. Todas estas escuelas eran privadas. Entre los retos a los que se enfrentaron al realizar experimentos de aprendizaje en línea con alumnos sordos se encontraban la falta de experiencia en la organización y gestión del aprendizaje a distancia para niños sordos, así como el coste desorbitado de los dispositivos tecnológicos e Internet. La falta de conocimientos informáticos de algunos profesores y padres, la ausencia de estímulo y apoyo por parte de los sectores público y privado de la sociedad también obstaculizaron el uso de plataformas virtuales de aprendizaje. Se recomendó, entre otras cosas, desarrollar recursos educativos digitales para que los niños sordos puedan aprender tanto en casa como en la escuela. Debería introducirse un modelo de VSO de desbloqueo del talento a través de la tecnología para ayudar a los niños sordos a aprender durante los cierres de emergencia. Los padres y los profesores deberían tener conocimientos de TI para poder garantizar el éxito de los acuerdos de aprendizaje virtual y digital para los niños sordos.

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### Afghanistan im Fokus

Am 29. Juni 2021 endete der militärische Einsatz der Bundeswehr in Afghanistan. Der Abzug nicht nur der Bundeswehr, sondern des gesamten westlichen Bündnisses inklusive der meisten zivilen Organisationen endete in einem Fiasko. Die Taliban trafen auf keine Gegenwehr mehr und übernahmen wieder die Macht, von der sie 2001 als Reaktion von den USA und deren Verbündeten nach den verheerenden Anschlägen des 11. Septembers 2001 verdrängt worden waren. Die Bilder des überstürzten Abzugs und der Evakuierungen aus Kabul mit verzweifelten Menschen, die sich an abfliegende Flugzeuge hängten, gingen um die Welt und offenbarten das Scheitern westlicher Sicherheits-, Entwicklungs- und Friedenspolitik.

Der Bundestag hat im Sommer 2022 eine Enquete-Kommission eingesetzt, die Lehren aus dem deutschen Engagement in Afghanistan für die künftige Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik ziehen soll. Das Gremium wird den gesamten Zeitraum des deutschen Engagements in Afghanistan von 2001 bis 2021 untersuchen. Auf dieser Basis sollen u.a. Ansätze zur Optimierung des sogenannten *vernetzten Ansatzes* als Grundprinzip deutscher Außenpolitik entwickelt werden. Der vernetzte Ansatz in der Sicherheitspolitik beschreibt die Verzahnung militärischer, polizeilicher, diplomatischer, entwicklungspolitischer und humanitärer Instrumente bei Einsätzen im Rahmen internationaler Friedensmissionen. Ob dieser Ansatz der richtige war und wie das Zusammenspiel von militärischen und zivilen Maßnahmen im internationalen Krisenmanagement aussehen müsste, um erfolgreich zu sein – dazu soll die Enquete-Kommission dem Bundestag Vorschläge für die Zukunft machen. Spätestens bis zum Ende dieser Wahlperiode

sollen dem Parlament Handlungsempfehlungen für das künftige Engagement Deutschlands in internationalen Krisenregionen vorliegen.

Ein vom Deutschen Bundestag am 8. Juli 2022 eingesetzter Untersuchungsausschuss befasst sich darüber hinaus mit den Geschehnissen im Zusammenhang mit dem Abzug der Bundeswehr aus Afghanistan und der Evakuierung des deutschen Personals, der Ortskräfte und anderer betroffener Personen. Betrachtet wird der Zeitraum vom 29. Februar 2020 – dem Abschluss des sogenannten Doha-Abkommens zwischen der US-Regierung unter Ex-Präsident Donald Trump und Vertretern der Taliban – bis zum Ende des Mandats zur militärischen Evakuierung aus Afghanistan am 30. September 2021.

Mittlerweile hat sich auch *Die Gemeinsame Konferenz Kirche und Entwicklung (GKKE)* unter dem Titel *Ehrlichkeit ist das Gebot der Stunde* zu dem Afghanistan-Einsatz und Abzug positioniert. Leider lässt die Stellungnahme vieles vermissen, was

zum Gesamtbild gehört. VENRO als der maßgebliche deutsche Dachverband der entwicklungspolitischen und humanitären Organisationen, der sich immer wieder in die nationalen und internationalen Debatten zu Afghanistan eingemischt hat, wird beispielsweise mit keinem Wort in dem GKKE-Beitrag erwähnt. Es war aber gerade VENRO, der sich sehr früh gegen eine Vermischung von ziviler humanitärer bzw. entwicklungspolitischer Arbeit und militärischem Auftrag ausgesprochen hat und vor den Folgen gewarnt hat. Jürgen Lieser, ehemaliges Vorstandsmitglied von VENRO und langjähriger stellvertretender Leiter von Caritas international äußerte sich beispielsweise am 27.1.2010 in NTV sehr kritisch zu den sogenannten *Regionalen Aufbauteams*, den sogenannten *Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT)*, die unter Federführung der Bundeswehr in Afghanistan humanitäre und entwicklungspolitische Arbeit leisten sollten: „Humanitäre Hilfe muss unabhängig sein, muss neutral sein und darf sich nicht an militärischen Zielen ausrichten.“ Konsequenterweise gab es nahezu keine größere deutsche Nichtregierungsorganisation, die bereit war, in Afghanistan oder anderswo *vernetzte Hilfe* zu leisten. Dies auch basierend auf internationalen Grundsätzen wie dem *Sphere Projekt* mit seiner Humanitären Charta oder dem *Code of Conduct* der Humanitären Hilfe.

Es ist wichtig, Themen wie *vernetzte Sicherheit* oder *humanitäre Militärinterventionen*, wie sie mit Begründung auf beispielsweise den Genozid in Ruanda oder den Verbrechen in Srebrenica, eingeführt worden sind, sorgfältig zu prüfen. Dazu gehört auch, die unbedingte Neutralität der Humanitären Hilfe und Entwicklungszusammenarbeit wie sie sich weltweit täglich bewährt, ernstzunehmen. Denn nur in deren Unabhängigkeit öffnet sich ein Horizont, in dem die Helfer\*innen auch in schwierigsten Krisen-, Konflikt- und Katastrophenregionen im Interesse von bedürftigen und verletzten Menschen wirken können.

Mit Blick auf den Afghanistan-Einsatz ist ein weiteres bedrückendes und bis heute quälendes Erbe kaum im Blick: die gänzlich unzureichende Unterstützung der sogenannten Ortskräfte, deren Familien und vielfältigen Kooperationspartnern beim eigenen Rückzug. Diese Menschen waren für alle deutschen Akteure eine entscheidende Voraussetzung dafür, dass in Afghanistan Hilfe geleistet und Politik auf den Weg gebracht werden konnte. Über Jahre und Jahrzehnte standen sie Tag für Tag an der Seite ihrer deutschen Arbeit- oder Auftraggeber und haben Großartiges geleistet. Es gab im Vorfeld des Rückzugs keinen übergreifenden Plan, wie diese Menschen nach der Rückkehr der Taliban ausreichend geschützt werden können und wie

denen, die aus persönlicher Bedrohung heraus eine vereinfachte Einreise und Aufnahme in Deutschland beantragt haben, diese erteilt werden könnte. Nur wenige wurden entsprechend evakuiert und dies vielfach erst nach ausufernden bürokratischen Prüfungen. Bis heute leben deshalb in Afghanistan mehrere Tausende Menschen, für die Deutschland Verantwortung trägt und die täglich um ihr Leben fürchten müssen. Unabhängig davon, wie in der Enquete-Kommission des Bundestags der Umgang mit den Ortskräften bewertet wird – seitens der Politik, aber auch seitens der GKKE und deren Mitglieder, ist jetzt dringender Handlungsbedarf angezeigt, um ggf. in direkten Verhandlungen mit den Taliban Menschen die Ausreise und Einreise nach Deutschland zu ermöglichen, denen Deutschland sehr viel zu verdanken hat und ohne die auch ein Neuanfang in Afghanistan sehr schwer würde.

#### QUELLEN

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**Autor:** Dr. Thorsten Hinz, bezez-Mitglied, von 2003 bis 2008 Afghanistan-Referent bei Caritas international

### **Statement on the Situation of Persons with Disabilities in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

The International Disability Alliance (IDA) and the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) have published a joint statement on the escalation in the conflict in State of Palestine and Israel. Yannis Vardakastanis, Chair of the International Disability Alliance, mentioned that they are deeply concerned by the tragic and shocking events we are witnessing in Israel and occupied Palestinian territory, and the impact this is having on persons with disabilities, including children. Because when hostilities start, people with disabilities are among the first to lose their lives and to be left behind in accountability processes and documentation of international humanitarian law and human rights law violations. Limited information is available regarding how people with disabilities are impacted by the recent hostilities. However, as documented during past wars and elaborated on by the United Nations Special Rapporteur, persons with disabilities and their families are disproportionately impacted during armed conflicts. In the current situation, they are at greater risk of serious health consequences and even death, due to indiscriminate attacks against populated areas that endanger civilians, unreasonably short evacuation warnings where safe options are very limited and extensively inaccessible, and a denial of access to life-sustaining goods and services such as electricity, water, and food. In addition, we must underline

that taking civilians as hostages, cutting, or restricting access to water, food, fuel, and medicine to an entire population, indiscriminate bombing, and attacks on hospitals and medical personnel might be constitutive of war crimes. IDA and IDDC call on Israel to open access for unrestricted and disability-inclusive humanitarian assistance to address the basic needs of the people of Gaza. They call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and individuals arbitrarily detained, particularly persons with disabilities.

**Information:** <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog/statement-situation-persons-disabilities-israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territory>

### **Gaza: Israeli Attacks, Blockade Devastating for People with Disabilities**

The Israeli government's bombardment, blockade, and major ground offensive in Gaza is having a devastating toll on Palestinian civilians with disabilities, Human Rights Watch said in November. They face greater difficulties fleeing attacks and accessing desperately needed necessities and humanitarian aid. The grave risks all civilians in Gaza face from the Israeli military operations are multiplied for people with disabilities. Israel's October 13, 2023, order to all civilians in the northern Gaza Strip to evacuate to the south did not take into account the needs of people with disabilities, many of whom are unable to leave. The order exposed them to the dangers of war and did not ensure that they would be provided with proper accommodation and satisfactory

conditions. Those able to evacuate described the dread of having to leave their homes, which had been designed to meet their accessibility and adaptability requirements, as well as their assistive devices, such as wheelchairs, walkers, and hearing aids. They also raised concerns about not having access to essential medication and the impact on their mental health. They and hundreds of thousands of others have been forced into overcrowded emergency shelters; mostly health facilities and schools, lacking sufficient access to water, food, and sanitation. The Israeli forces' current bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza began following the October 7 Hamas-led attack in Israel.

**Information:** <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/01/gaza-israeli-attacks-blockade-devastating-people-disabilities>

### **UN-BRK verpflichtet: Flucht und Behinderung als Querschnittsthema verankern**

Die politische Debatte um die Asyl- und Migrationspolitik, aber auch der öffentliche Diskurs über geflüchtete Menschen spitzt sich nach Ansicht des Berliner Zentrum für Selbstbestimmtes Leben behinderter Menschen (BZSL) derzeit dramatisch zu. Unsichtbar und vergessen inmitten dieser alarmierenden Entwicklungen blieben dabei geflüchtete Menschen mit Behinderungen und deren Angehörige. Sie seien einer eklatanten Unterversorgung ausgesetzt, die solche Ausmaße annehmen, dass das BZSL vermehrt von lebensbedrohlichen Situationen erfahre. Das BZSL plädiert daher dafür, das

Thema Flucht und Behinderung entsprechend den kürzlich veröffentlichten Anforderungen der UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention (UN-BRK) als Querschnittsthema zu verankern. So hat der Fachausschuss des Übereinkommens der Vereinten Nationen über die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderungen im Rahmen der zweiten Staatenprüfung Deutschlands zusätzlich auch die verschärfte Situation von geflüchteten Frauen und Kindern mit Behinderungen angemahnt und Empfehlungen aufgelistet, um einen gleichberechtigten Zugang zur Gesundheitsversorgung, zu Teilhabeleistungen, Bildung, Kultur- und Freizeitaktivitäten sowie den Erwerb der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit zu gewährleisten. Ebenso wird Deutschland dazu aufgefordert, endlich seinen Verpflichtungen der EU-Aufnahmerichtlinie (2013/33/EU) gerecht zu werden und ein bundesweit einheitliches Identifizierungsverfahren zu schaffen sowie geflüchtete Menschen mit Behinderungen in der Statistik- und Datensammlung zu berücksichtigen.

**Information:** <https://kobinet-nachrichten.org/2023/10/06/un-brk-verpflichtet-flucht-und-behinderung-als-querschnittsthema-verankern/>

### **Menschenrechtsinstitut fordert mehr Einsatz für Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderungen**

Am 29. und 30. August hat der UN-Ausschuss für die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderungen in Genf zum zweiten Mal geprüft, wie Deutschland die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderungen umsetzt. Zu dieser Staatenprüfung hat das Deutsche Institut für Menschenrechte in einem Parallelbericht ausgewählte Problembereiche bei der Umsetzung der UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention

in Deutschland benannt, etwa die Bereiche Arbeit, Inklusive Bildung, Zwang, Selbstbestimmtes Leben und Barrierefreiheit. Das Institut fordert Bund, Länder und Kommunen auf, sich stärker für die Inklusion und Selbstbestimmung von Menschen mit Behinderungen einzusetzen. „Die Prüfung der Vereinten Nationen hat klar gemacht, dass Deutschland nicht genug tut, um seine menschenrechtlichen Verpflichtungen aus der Behindertenrechtskonvention zu erfüllen,“ sagt Britta Schlegel, Leiterin der Monitoring-Stelle UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention des Instituts. Im Zentrum der Kritik des UN-Ausschusses für die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderungen steht das in Deutschland immer noch hochentwickelte System von Sonderstrukturen – in der schulischen Bildung, bei der Beschäftigung in Werkstätten oder bei der Unterbringung in großen stationären Wohneinrichtungen. „Nötig sind zielgerichtete politische Strategien zur Deinstitutionalisierung, damit Menschen mit Behinderung selbstbestimmt am gesellschaftlichen Leben teilhaben können“, so Schlegel. Außerdem müsse die Selbstbestimmung von Menschen mit Behinderungen in allen Bereichen geachtet und Maßnahmen zu Zwangsvermeidung und Gewaltschutz in psychiatrischen Einrichtungen und Einrichtungen der Eingliederungshilfe dringend verstärkt werden.

**Information:** <https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/aktuelles/detail/menschenrechtsinstitut-fordert-mehr-einsatz-fuer-inklusion-von-menschen-mit-behinderungen>

### **UN Report Shows Very Limited Progress on Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction**

The Global Survey Report on Persons with Disabilities and Disasters was published in October by the UN Agency on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). The survey analyses to which extent persons with disabilities are prepared to cope with disasters. Persons with disabilities are frequently the most affected by natural hazards, climate-induced disasters, and global health emergencies. The Report shows limited progress in disability inclusion over the past 10 years, with no significant differences across the regions. Some of the key findings of the survey include that 84 per cent of persons with disabilities reported not having a personal preparedness plan for disasters and 86 per cent of persons with disabilities reported no participation in community-level DRR decision-making and planning. That is why the European Disability Forum called for the acceleration in the implementation of the Sendai Framework by 2030 and urged that findings and recommendations from the report are integrated by policymakers in their work at local, national, and international levels, to ensure tangible actions for disability-inclusive DRR.

**Information:** <https://www.edf-feph.org/un-report-shows-very-limited-progress-on-disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-reduction/>

### **World Leaders Adopt Sweeping Political Declaration Reaffirming Commitment to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals**

Kicking off the second half of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders at the SDG Summit 2023 in September

adopted a sweeping Political Declaration to reaffirm their shared commitment to end poverty and hunger everywhere, combat inequalities within and among countries and build peaceful societies that leave no one behind. The adoption of the 10-page document, by the Heads of State and Government and high representatives gathering at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, came at a critical juncture as global crises — including armed conflict, adverse climate impacts and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic — threaten the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. “The SDGs need a global rescue plan,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres in his opening remarks to the SDG Summit, known formally as the high-level political forum on sustainable development, under the auspices of the General Assembly. Also addressing the opening segment, Dennis Francis (Trinidad and Tobago), President of the General Assembly, underscored that the most vulnerable communities – including women and girls, young people, persons living with disabilities, older persons, and Indigenous Peoples – are “at the foremost receiving end” of complex and intersecting crises. That is why the world leaders in the Political Declaration commit to ensuring that persons with disabilities actively participate in and equally benefit from sustainable development efforts.

**Information:** <https://press.un.org/en/2023/ga12529.doc.htm>

### **Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 Launched**

The UN released the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) – Times of Crisis, Times of

Change: Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development to help advance implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and to serve as a major input to Member States’ follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the half-way point. The report was authored by an Independent Group of Scientists (IGS) appointed in October 2020. The 2023 edition provides evidence that can support decision makers in their efforts to accelerate action and overcome challenges hindering progress on sustainable development. GSDR 2023 warns that at the half-way point of the 2030 Agenda, “the world is far off track” and that the situation is “much more worrisome” than in 2019. The lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and instability, and inflation and the rising cost of living, it notes, “have wiped out years of progress on some SDGs” and slowed down progress on others. Currently, just 12% of the targets are on track. Yet, the report underscores, transformations are not only possible, but inevitable. It calls for judicious and effective use of time and resources. Otherwise, the big promise of Leave No One Behind will be in danger.

**Information:** <https://sdgs.un.org/gsdrgsd2023>

### **World Psychiatric Association Releases Report Opposing the Death Penalty for People with Mental Illness or Development and Intellectual Disabilities**

In July 2023, the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) released its report and position statement on mental health and the death penalty. The issues addressed in the report include: the imposition of the death penalty on prisoners with

mental illness or developmental and intellectual disabilities, the overrepresentation of death-sentenced prisoners who have been socioeconomically marginalised, and the role of psychiatrists in death penalty cases. Although international law does not explicitly prohibit the death penalty, there is a specific prohibition on the use of the death penalty against juveniles, pregnant women, and people with mental illness or developmental and intellectual disabilities. The WPA report includes several studies that analysed the overrepresentation of death-sentenced prisoners who have been socioeconomically marginalised in India, Bangladesh, the United States, Pakistan, China, Malaysia, and Nigeria. The WPA also addressed the psychological effects of incarceration and the conditions of death row.

**Information:** <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/news/world-psychiatric-association-releases-report-opposing-the-death-penalty-for-people-with-mental-illness-or-development-and-intellectual-disabilities>

### **Press Release by the African Disability Forum on the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa**

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, also known as the African Disability Rights Protocol, was adopted by the African Union Heads of States on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018. The primary objective of the Protocol is to promote, safeguard and ensure the complete and equal exercise of all human and people’s rights for individuals with disabilities in Africa, as well as to ensure respect for their inherent dignity.

The protocol complements the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) by addressing the rights of persons with disabilities from an African perspective, considering the lived realities of individuals with disabilities on the continent while maintaining the core values and principles as set forth in the UNCRPD. To come into effect, this protocol requires ratification by a minimum of 15 African Union Member States. By September 2023, a total of 10 African countries (Angola, Burundi, Cameroun, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, and South Africa) have ratified the protocol. That is why the African Disability Forum in a press release acknowledged those countries who have ratified the protocol, but also to call on other countries to take action and ratify this significant instrument. ADF is committed to continue advocating and collaborating with others for the ratification and enforcement of the protocol across Africa.

**Information:** <https://africandisabilityforum.net/press-release-protocol-to-the-african-charter-on-human-and-peoples-rights-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-africa/>

### Launching the Addis Declaration

Persons with psychosocial disabilities and organisations from five countries in the East Africa region met in Addis Ababa in July 2022 at the East Africa Subregional Convening, organised by Transforming Communities for Inclusion (TCI), and developed the Addis Declaration. The deliberations included participants coming together, discussing the key priority areas to be addressed by the governments in East Africa, call for action, and worked together for the drafting of the Addis Declaration. There were

intensive discussions among the participants on the barriers they faced with respect to their identity, incapacitating laws, lack of social protection mechanisms, community supports for independent living, housing, barriers to work and employment, political participation etc. These deliberations were led by TCI members from East Africa and hence highlighted their situation and demands from the various stakeholders. A mutually derived and approved list of barriers and recommendations was then officially adopted by the present plenary members and embedded in the Declaration.

The Declaration strongly resonated with persons with psychosocial disabilities from Tanzania and was adopted by them in September 2023.

**Information:** <https://tci-global.org/addis-declaration/>

### New Report Highlights Neglected Health Needs of Children with Developmental Disabilities

A new report published in September by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF highlights the global prevalence of developmental disabilities among children and young people, shedding light on the urgent action needed to address disparities in their access to healthcare, health outcomes, and exposure to social determinants such as poverty. The report estimates that – in 2019 – 317 million children and young people were affected by health conditions contributing to a developmental disability. Many of them experience stigmatisation, prejudice, and social exclusion. They also encounter barriers in accessing health care and experience poorer quality of care when compared with their peers. Children

and young people with developmental disabilities have underlying health conditions which affect the developing nervous system and cause impairments in motor, cognitive, language, behaviour and/or sensory functioning and associated disabilities. In interaction with various barriers and contextual factors, these impairments may hinder a child's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The report sets out a concrete framework for action needed to accelerate changes in policies and systems to improve health, development, wellbeing, and participation for children with developmental disabilities. The report can be accessed under the following link:

**Information:** <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240080232>

### The Missing Billion Initiative Announces Global Commitment to Action on Disability Inclusion

The Missing Billion Initiative and its partners in September announced a Commitment to Action centred on accelerating disability inclusion in health systems globally during the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) 2023 Meeting in New York City. The committing partners include the Missing Billion Initiative, the McKinsey Health Institute (MHI), the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), the International Disability Alliance, and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. The two-year commitment aims to reduce the staggering 10- to 20-year life expectancy gap people with disabilities face compared to people without disabilities. This involves changing entire national health systems to ensure that people with disabilities can access the health services they need – from prenatal checkups to eye exams

to urgent care, and beyond. To do this, partners will work with global, national, and community stakeholders to design inclusive health systems that serve as case studies for scale in at least six countries. These case studies will help build a global coalition of health stakeholders, mobilise donors to pledge financial support and cultivate the evidence base to inform action on disability inclusion. The Commitment to Action comes on the heels of a new report published by the Missing Billion Initiative and MHI exploring major gaps in data about people living with disabilities, who represent 16 percent of the world's population.

**Information:** <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog/missing-billion-initiative-announces-global-commitment-action-disability-inclusion>

### **Launching Transforming Communities for Inclusion: Examples of Practice (A PhotoStory)**

Transforming Communities for Inclusion (TCI) has launched a photo story as part of the #WhatWENeed 2023 campaign. A Grass-root Conclave was organised by one of TCI's founding members, Bapu Trust for Research on Mind & Discourse in April 2023 in Pune, India. It was a gathering of the grassroots cadres of their partner organisations who had been trained to program for inclusion and had been practicing inclusion in their communities. The traditional songs and dances adapted to the theme of Inclusion, were powerful immersive experiences for all participants, from different cultures, celebrating land, forest, identity, connection, community, and resilience; and sharing the deeply felt impact of violence, destruction, and appropriation as indigenous areas change to modern

slums and cities, especially on children, elderly, women, and poor households. This photo story tries to capture and present an inventory of inclusion practices from various regions of India. It aims to present a community of practice around inclusion and demonstrate how and in what ways can communities be transformed for inclusion. Through this photo story, the viewers are only focusing on community support systems and not on community support services.

**Information:** <https://tci-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Photo-Story.pdf>

### **Sign-up for a Disability Lens on World News**

Disability Debrief provides an engaging guide to world news through a disability lens for the disability community and the disability curious. A weekly newsletter combines lived experience, analysis, art, and original reporting. An online library curates resources from 151 countries and regions. Browsing the library you will find disabled people's stories, analysis, entertainment, and the latest research. You can explore disability around the world, and the ways it intersects with all areas of social life. You can also explore the library by subjects, or by countries. There's also a dedicated guide to climate change. If you wish to stay up to date on disability in world news, we highly recommend you to sign up to the Disability Debrief.

**Information:** <https://www.disabilitydebrief.org/signup/?ref=disability-debrief-newsletter>

*Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

## **The Transformative Role of Persons with Disabilities in Peacebuilding Processes**

In this report, the Special Rapporteur highlights the agency of persons with disabilities in rebuilding broken societies in post-conflict contexts. Using concepts such as moral repair and transitional justice, he points to the need to include the voices of persons with disabilities in peacebuilding processes. Peacebuilding is a unique moment in time when historic injustice can be confronted, and new beginnings can be established. This requires truth about the past, protection against the recurrence of violence and building new institutions to sustain progress alongside development programmes to redress historic inequalities. These moments blend together peace and security, development, and human rights. Regrettably, these unique opportunities for systemic change are regularly missed as they apply to persons with disabilities. How might this be changed? The recommendations included in this report provide suggestions for States and the United Nations system, as well as organisations of persons with disabilities, donors, and researchers to play their part in laying the foundation for more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable peace processes.

**Bezug:** <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a78174-peacebuilding-and-inclusion-persons-disabilities-report-special>

*Stephen Thompson/Katie Moore/Obindra Chand*

## **Key Considerations: Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Action and Emergency Response in South and Southeast Asia and Beyond**

In many settings, people with disabilities face multiple and complex layers of environmental, societal, and structural barriers. These barriers can lead to them being disproportionately harmed, neglected, and excluded during humanitarian and other emergency responses. This is especially evident in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), including Nepal and other South and Southeast Asian nations. Limited awareness of the needs of people with disabilities, entrenched social stigma, and inaccessible infrastructure can exacerbate the challenges they face in emergency situations. In addition, there has been little preparation and planning to make disaster and emergency planning disability inclusive. This brief explores disability in the context of humanitarian and public health emergencies in South and Southeast Asia. Its focus is on Nepal, but the principles are universally relevant and can be adapted for any context. It is intended for stakeholders in government, civil society, and the humanitarian sector. It aims to support stakeholders to better understand how structural inequities, alongside social and cultural norms, and practices, exacerbate the marginalisation and exclusion of people with disabilities in emergencies. This brief presents examples of good practice for disability-responsive humanitarian and emergency planning and intervention. It also provides key considerations for actors

aiming to support greater inclusion of people with disabilities in response. This brief draws on evidence from academic and grey literature, and from open-source datasets.

**Bezug:** <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/18045>

*United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction - Regional Office for Asia and Pacific*

## **Gender-Responsive and Disability-Inclusive Early Warning and Early Action in the Pacific Region**

The report explores the barriers, challenges, and opportunities to strengthening gender-responsive and disability-inclusive early warning early action in the Pacific, focusing on existing policies, practices, and knowledge. It seeks to capture evidence on risk perception, warning practices and response mechanisms that could be leveraged to make EWS inclusive and people-centred. The findings show that Pacific Small Island Developing

States (SIDS) have well-established institutional and legislative frameworks for disaster risk management, including action on climate change. There are many initiatives and efforts to achieve a shared vision and commitment across SIDS to mainstream gender and disability inclusion into disaster risk reduction and early warning systems. While gender and disability are integrated into and referenced in the national policies and strategies, insufficient information and understanding of the root causes of vulnerability and limited capacity to address them in local disaster management plans and response mechanisms remain challenging. In reality, many tasks remain

to effectively implement and apply mainstreaming commitments.

**Bezug:** <https://www.undrr.org/publication/gender-responsive-and-disability-inclusive-early-warning-and-early-action-pacific>

*DAHW German Leprosy and Tuberculosis Relief Association/  
CBM Christoffel-Blindenmission  
Christian Blind Mission e.V.*

### **Gap Analysis on Disability Inclusive Humanitarian Action in Eastern Africa**

The Gap Analysis on Disability Inclusive Humanitarian Action (DIHA) in Eastern Africa, with a focus on protection, food security, WASH, and anticipatory action was conducted between February and April 2023. The study, carried out by CBM and DAHW, aimed to assess disability inclusion in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan, with a strong emphasis on consulting organisations of persons with disabilities. The Eastern Africa region is confronted with ongoing humanitarian challenges, including armed conflicts, displacement, and natural disasters, which disproportionately impact persons with disabilities. This study aimed to identify gaps and provide recommendations for enhancing disability inclusion in humanitarian responses.

**Bezug:** [https://www.cbm.org/fileadmin/resourcespace/DIHA\\_DAHW\\_CBM\\_FINAL\\_REPORT\\_accessible.pdf](https://www.cbm.org/fileadmin/resourcespace/DIHA_DAHW_CBM_FINAL_REPORT_accessible.pdf)

### **UNHCR Ethiopia Report on the State of Disability Inclusion in Ethiopian Refugee and IDP Settings**

The Disability Inclusion Self-Assessment Tool (DISAT) has been designed to get a snapshot, from UNHCR partners and staff, in various locations (urban settings, camps), on the extent to which the rights of persons with disabilities are recognised as well as their inclusion in UNHCR and partner responses. The objective is to map out to which extent disability inclusion is

mainstreamed and the proportion of targeted action towards disability inclusion in all sectors for which UNHCR and its partners are responsible for.

**Bezug:** <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/102360>

### **World Food Programme Mapping of Disability Services in Afghanistan - Disability Inclusion Working Group**

Protecting the rights and equality of vulnerable and marginalised groups must be central to humanitarian and development assistance. The Asia Foundation Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan, 2019 indicates a 13.9% of people in Afghanistan have severe disabilities. Despite an increased awareness within the aid unity about the issues facing persons with disability, there is growing evidence indicating that inclusion measures are still inconsistently integrated within response and organisational make-up and increased work is needed to improve outcomes. To collect the data on disability services in the country, the disability inclusion working group developed an online data collection form and shared the final version with DIWG members and clusters to populate the form. As a result, 38 partners (INGOs and NNGOs) from 32 provinces filled out the online form and provided details of their services in the mentioned provinces which are summarised within this report. The disability service mapping report can help humanitarian actors, service providers, OPDs, and other stakeholders to refer persons with disabilities to the right services in a specific province. Furthermore, this document can also help in preventing duplication of services in different provinces of Afghanistan.

**Bezug:** <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/mapping-disability-services-afghanistan-disability-inclusion-working-group-september-2023>

### *Protection Cluster*

### **South Sudan Protection Analysis Update**

This South Sudan Protection Analysis Update places a thematic focus on protection risks facing persons with disabilities and older persons. The most recent census reported that 5% of the population in South Sudan, or approximately 424,000 people, were living with a disability. However, the current number is likely to be much higher, possibly reaching 1.2 million people, or 16% of the population, according to the global estimate. Data in South Sudan also suggests a rapid increase in the number of older persons each year, mounting to 5.1% of total population with this percentage expected to continue to steadily increase. People with disabilities and older people in South Sudan are often excluded and face multiple challenges in accessing essential services and protection. Decades of civil war have increased the number of older people and persons with disabilities who are being left behind as they are unable to flee due to chronic health conditions and mobility impairments. People who have managed to flee the violence are often faced with barriers accessing protection and health services. Therefore, older people with and without disabilities in South Sudan face higher risks and greater challenges in getting the necessary humanitarian assistance.

**Bezug:** <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/index.php/publications/1610/reports/protection-analysis-update/south-sudan-protection-analysis-update>

*Olesya Dovgalyuk/Okoro  
Onyekachi Emmanuel/Anastasia  
Kolobrodova et al.*

### **Narrative Change Around Disability & Climate Change**

In 2022-2023, the New Media Advocacy Project (NMAP) conducted an exploratory study on disability and climate change activism in the Niger

Delta region of Nigeria. The goal was to explore the narrative landscape pertaining to disability rights and climate justice in the Niger Delta and to identify opportunities to advance solidarity between the two movements. This project was designed as a community-engaged study, which strongly prioritised listening to the lived experiences of 80+ persons with disabilities (PWDs) and representatives of disability and climate justice civil society organisations (CSOs). This report is offered for use by funders, CSOs, and the government to gain insights into the issues preventing cross-cause solidarity scene in the Niger Delta and consider the recommendations for narrative change work and hands-on accessibility and inclusivity agenda, which can help improve the quality of life for PWDs and nurture more trust-based collaborations between the different civil society groups in the region.

**Bezug:** <https://www.nmap.co/publication/narrativedisabilityandclimatechange/>

*Humanity & Inclusion*  
**Persons with Disabilities and Climate Change in Nepal: Humanitarian Impacts and Pathways for Inclusive Climate Action**

The report looks at how persons with disabilities in Nepal understand and perceive climate change, what is their experience of dealing with climate extremes, what is the impact on their health, livelihoods and support system, and their actual level of inclusion in climate adaptation planning. To capture those perspectives, Humanity & Inclusion (HI) surveyed persons with disabilities across Nepal's seven provinces, consulted key informants from the disability movement, government institutions, and the aid sector, and conducted targeted focus group discussions to hear from women, youth, and persons representing diverse disability types.

**Bezug:** [https://www.hi.org/sn\\_uploads/](https://www.hi.org/sn_uploads/)

document/Persons-with-disabilities-and-climate-change-in-Nepal.pdf

*The World Bank*  
**Climate Change and Disability Inclusion in Uzbekistan**

The impacts of climate change will be unevenly felt within and across countries partly due to social and economic inequalities. Persons with disabilities represent 16 percent of the global population and face widespread forms of social and economic marginalisation yet have received little attention in prior studies of climate change and social inequality. The mortality rate of persons with disabilities in natural disasters is "up to four times higher than people without disabilities" (Stein and Stein 2021). How do the fast-moving shocks, flooding, drought, heatwaves and slower-moving social and economic effects of climate change impact persons with disabilities. How can climate change adaptation efforts be disability inclusive This study examines these questions through original fieldwork and qualitative interviews conducted in Uzbekistan. In November 2022, the authors interviewed persons with disabilities in three regions of the country. The resulting qualitative data afford key insights into how climate change and disability status interact to generate distinct vulnerabilities. Within the nascent field of climate change and disability studies, this report represents one of the first fieldwork-based accounts of how climate change presents heightened risks to persons with disabilities in a developing country context.

**Bezug:** <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/ef55d710-ba10-4530-a6e0-244ee2607596>

*Humanity & Inclusion*  
**Prevention against Emerging Infectious Diseases: An Opportunity for Inclusive Health**

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Somalia counted 27,334 confirmed COVID-19 cases between January 2020 and April 2023 and 1,361 deaths. The country has managed to fully vaccinate 30% of its population against SARS-CoV2. After reacting to the COVID-19 health emergency, Humanity & Inclusion (HI) planned to carry out a Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) programme to ensure the right to health information and prevention for the most vulnerable groups, like persons with disabilities living in Internally Displaced (IDP) camps. In close collaboration with WHO, HI adapted and piloted WHO's behavioural and social drivers (BeSD) of vaccination tools<sup>1</sup> to understand and analyse the perception of COVID-19 vaccines as well as the barriers and drivers of immunisation among persons with disabilities in a humanitarian setting. The overall goal of this study was to capture the unique drivers of health prevention for persons with disabilities in Somalia/Somaliland to support evidence-based disability-inclusive prevention (like RCCE programmes) and strengthen advocacy for inclusive health information and services.

**Bezug:** [https://mcusercontent.com/8639c883e11e53f9e158cb9d5/files/65a9207b-233b-3e80-16d4-86f8657a37a8/Behavioural\\_Social\\_Drivers\\_COVID19\\_vaccination\\_PWDs\\_Somalia\\_Somaliland\\_IDC\\_RS\\_FP\\_44.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/8639c883e11e53f9e158cb9d5/files/65a9207b-233b-3e80-16d4-86f8657a37a8/Behavioural_Social_Drivers_COVID19_vaccination_PWDs_Somalia_Somaliland_IDC_RS_FP_44.pdf)

*UN Women*

### **No Woman Left Behind: Closing the Gender and Inclusion Gap in Eye Health: Why Improving Women's Eye Health Is Essential to Achieving the SDGs**

Vision impairment is both a contributor to gender inequalities and an outcome of gender inequality. Preventing and treating avoidable vision impairment has a crucial role to play in reducing gender inequalities and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This policy brief provides evidence of gender disparities in eye health and highlights gender-related barriers to eye care access and utilisation for women. Bringing women's views and solutions to the forefront of discussions, the brief provides an opportunity to hear directly about the specific risks and challenges these women face, who is most at risk of being left behind, and how national partners and the international community can most effectively tailor policies and programmes to meet their needs and fulfil their rights. The brief maps out a number of forward-looking recommendations to countries, including actions to amplify the voices and ensure the meaningful participation of women who are blind or have vision impairment at all levels of decision-making, increase resources to policies and programmes in all relevant sectors that impact women's eye health, uphold women's and girls' rights, tackle multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and eliminate gendered barriers preventing women's access to eye care.

**Information:** <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/09/policy-brief-closing-the-gender-and-inclusion-gap-in-eye-health>

*CBM Christoffel-Blindenmission  
Christian Blind Mission e.V.*

### **Community Mental Health Good Practice Guide: Inclusive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in Humanitarian Emergencies**

This document provides guidance on inclusive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programming in humanitarian emergencies. It is designed to highlight essential frameworks and principles, and the need for robust and sustainable MHPSS programming, rather than to provide detailed MHPSS technical guidance. It is fully aligned to, and uses the structure of the IASC Guidelines, to share examples of good practices at all levels of the MHPSS intervention pyramid, from provision of basic needs to inclusive mental health services.

**Bezug:** <https://cbm-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CBM-Global-Good-Practice-Guide-MHPSS-in-Humanitarian-Emergencies.pdf>

*Bonita K. Gordon/Nontembeko  
J. Bila*

### **Peace of Mind: Integrating Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Reconciliation and Violence Prevention Programmes in Rwanda and Tajikistan**

New research by global peacebuilding organisation International Alert shows substantial new evidence of the impact of mental health interventions in preventing conflict within communities and supporting efforts to promote peace and reconciliation. The report outlines the findings of in-depth assessments of two of International Alert's peacebuilding projects, in Rwanda and Tajikistan. It found that mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), when combined with improved economic security and access to justice, can break damaging cycles of violence. The report contains new guidance to

support anyone working in conflict and post-conflict situations, from organisations to service providers and local and national authorities, to incorporate MHPSS into interventions to support peace and build safer, more cohesive societies. The guidance comprises seven elements of an integrated mental health and peacebuilding approach, based on the evidence collected for the report. In their report they also thematise the mental health of people with disabilities.

**Bezug:** <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/peace-of-mind-integrating-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-in-reconciliation-and-violence-prevention-programmes-in-rwanda-and-tajikistan/>

*Thulile Duma Mangosuthu/  
Lydia Lindiwe Chamane*

### **Epistemic Access for Students Using Assistive Technology in the Introduction of Online Teaching**

The epistemic access and success for students with disabilities remain a topical issue in higher education, more so during the transition to online teaching and learning that was ignited by COVID-19. This study aims to examine how the epistemic access of students using assistive technology was imperilled during COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The qualitative study is based at the University of Technology in KwaZulu Natal Province in South Africa. A total of 25 students with disabilities who use different assistive technologies were identified. Students reported extraordinary difficulties in accessing and utilising assistive devices, due to lack of appropriate assistive technology, technical skills, poor network, and support. This perpetuated discrimination, social exclusion, and injustices in higher education for students with disabilities. Some had to double their efforts to access their lessons and assessments. Online or blended teaching and learning appear

to be the future trend in higher education, thus, effective plans and systems alignment are required to avoid exclusion of students with disabilities in the learning digital space. To continue to promote social inclusion and inclusive education in higher education institutions, the provision and procurement of assistive technologies must be prioritised. Students with disabilities should be amongst other key stakeholders in the planning of future teaching and learning.

**Bezug:** <https://dcidj.uog.edu.et/index.php/up-j-dcbrid/article/view/670>

*The World Bank*  
**Approaches to Deliver Inclusive Education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia**

This report presents a review of different approaches in service delivery being implemented in the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and South Asia (SA) to ensure the inclusion of children with disabilities in education. The review examines in what ways (and the extent to which) different approaches have been operationalised and contextualised to enable the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education systems, focusing specifically on primary schooling.

**Bezug:** <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/8c4730c0-3554-4eb5-aeae-e16d48eef7db>

*Handicap International*  
**Disability-Inclusive Education in the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

This briefing paper provides information and up-to-date data on the situation of children with disabilities in the occupied Palestinian Territory (oPT), namely West Bank including East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip. It highlights the education of children with disabilities and the main barriers that limit their access to education. Building on the 5-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education

of the Ministry of Education in oPT, HI's Inclusive Education Strategy and Advocacy Strategy, and the current Humanitarian Response Plan, HI calls on financial and technical partners to prioritise disability-inclusive education in development and humanitarian settings at all different levels of intervention.

**Bezug:** [https://www.hi.org/sn\\_uploads/document/Factsheet\\_Inclusive-Education\\_oPt\\_HI\\_March2022.pdf](https://www.hi.org/sn_uploads/document/Factsheet_Inclusive-Education_oPt_HI_March2022.pdf)

*Sujata Bhan/Apoorva Panshikar*  
**School Readiness for Inclusive Education in Tripura, India**

The changing educational scenario in India is seeing a huge emphasis on inclusive education. Efforts are seen in the direction of bringing the children from varied marginalised sections into the fold of inclusive classrooms. Inclusion of children with disability is of crucial importance too. The present study attempted to understand whether the schools in the state of Tripura are ready for inclusive education in its true sense. Data collected from the headmasters/headmistresses of the schools, the schoolteachers, and the observation of the physical infrastructure were analysed. Results suggest that the schools are far from being ready for inclusion but are attempting to inch forward gradually.

**Bezug:** <https://dcidj.uog.edu.et/index.php/up-j-dcbrid/article/view/684>

*Navjit Gaurav/Vaishali Kolhe/Atul Jaiswal*  
**Universal Design: An Embedded Case Study on the Approach Towards the Inclusion of Students with Physical Disabilities in Higher Education in India**

Research on students with physical disabilities (SWPDs) in higher educational institutions (HEIs) often focuses on students' abilities rather than environmental barriers. Architectural barriers are notably the major

roadblock for SWPDs in higher education. Although Indian HEIs are doing architectural modifications (e.g., accessible ramps, washrooms) creating a conducive built environment that supports SWPDs' meaningful participation seems a distant dream. This study aimed to explore the architectural barriers faced by the SWPDs and the environmental requirements for social participation and inclusion. Findings showed that two-thirds of the participants experienced barriers to participation in the built and the social environment. Most barriers originated from the institute's-built environment design and activities conducted on the premises. Failure to provide adequate built environmental modifications results in SWPDs' restricted participation or exclusion from the participation opportunities in and out of the classroom. Implications: Our study findings can have implications across future research, practices of architectural design, HEIs, and the policies to promote inclusion, optimal participation, and social interaction of SWPDs within HEIs.

**Bezug:** <https://dcidj.uog.edu.et/index.php/up-j-dcbrid/article/view/577>

*Anna Hata/Han Wang/Joko Yuwono/Shinsaku Nomura*  
**Assistive Technologies for Children with Disabilities in Inclusive and Special Schools in Indonesia**

This study addresses this knowledge gap, focusing on the Indonesian context. The empirical study of the Indonesian context aims to rigorously examine availability and usage of AT for children with disabilities. It reviews key challenges and support needed in both inclusive and special schools, focusing on teachers in primary and secondary education in Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECRT). Key questions included the availability and use of AT for students with disabilities in schools in

Indonesia, and how teachers, schools, and local and national stakeholders can work together to promote equitable and quality learning through AT for children with disabilities. To answer these questions, this study employed a mixed method to enhance the validity and quality of evidence based analysis of AT for children with disabilities in Indonesia, including a national level teacher survey with over 2000 teachers who participated voluntarily, focus group discussions with teachers, school principals and policy makers as well as an international review of practices on AT for children with disabilities to address the lack of previous studies in Indonesia.

**Bezug:** <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c572889e-81e2-46c7-9c7c-3c00f03d42ee/content>

*World Bank*

### **Inclusive Early Childhood Education for Children with Disabilities in Indonesia**

Children with disabilities are often left out of the education system globally. In many countries children with disabilities are more likely to remain out of school than other children across all education levels. Indonesia is no exception, and despite the government's efforts in recent decades, in particular, inclusive early childhood education (ECE) for children with disabilities is still significantly overlooked in policy, practice, and empirical research. Rather, inclusive education policy and programmes often highlight primary and secondary education, meanwhile inclusion is not a key focus in ECE in Indonesia. This study addresses the dearth of research on inclusive ECE in Indonesia. Given the critical importance of access to education from the early years onwards, and the potential positive impact of ECE on children's lives, this study has a specific focus on children aged four to six. It examines current practices and key issues from multiple perspectives to tackle

several interrelated issues with an aim to inform future policy formation and practice. Multilevel analysis of this rich data revealed hidden and complex issues related to inclusive ECE in Indonesia. Gaps are identified between policy interventions, school dilemmas and struggles in classrooms, and between the supply and demand side, especially considering the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities, who tend to be overlooked despite their key role in their children's education.

**Bezug:** <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099554306052314974/pdf/IDU08a4068a10bf820443d0a3f3062d35276e9bd.pdf>

*Daniel Mont*

### **Estimating the Extra Disability Expenditures for the Design of Inclusive Social Protection Policies**

For social protection policies to be inclusive they must address the extra costs that people with disabilities incur. Studies show that these costs are highly significant and if not taken into account the economic wellbeing of people with disabilities is underestimated. Additionally, disability costs vary significantly by the type and degree of disability. To align the structure of social protection programs with how costs are incurred to promote equal participation requires estimating those costs. The Goods and Services Required approach, it is argued, is better than the often used Standard of Living Approach and has implications for policy design.

**Bezug:** <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fresc.2023.1179213/full>

*United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*

### **Fostering Disability Inclusion and Business Integrity in ASEAN**

Disability inclusion is instrumental to the Sustainable Development Goals and its central pledge to leave no one

behind. *Fostering Disability Inclusion & Business Integrity in ASEAN* examines case studies in six ASEAN countries – Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam – to illustrate promising practices in disability-inclusive business integrity through innovative policies and practices that give precedence to high ethical standards, trust, transparency, and accountability, thereby supporting stronger and inclusive economic growth and societies.

**Bezug:** <https://www.undp.org/publications/fostering-disability-inclusion-and-business-integrity-asean>

*Samantha Zulu/Joseph*

*Lupenga/Brian Chanda Chiluba/*

*Martha Banda-Chalwe*

### **Exploring Employer's Practices for Persons Living with Disabilities and Employers' Implementation of the Persons with Disability Act in Zambia: A Qualitative Study**

The study aimed to explore the employers' practices for persons living with disabilities and employer's implementation post-enactment of the Persons with Disability Act No. 6 of 2012 in the public sector. A qualitative phenomenological study design was used, and data was gathered through in-depth interviews with human resource directors, managers, and commissioners. Only few persons living with disabilities were employed at the headquarters of the three government organisations. The study found that employers mainly use the Employment Act and do not take the Persons with Disability Act no. 6 of 2012 into account when recruiting. Furthermore, the majority demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the provisions enabling disability inclusion in workplaces as well as awareness of the Persons with Disability Act no. 6 of 2012. The study emphasises the gap between developing and implementing Disability Act

policies. Raising awareness of the Persons with Disability Act No.6 of 2012 and its provisions supporting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce, as well as strengthening employers' knowledge of these policies is essential for its successful implementation.

**Bezug:** <https://dcidj.uog.edu.et/index.php/up-j-dcbrid/article/view/640>

*Rebecca Tawiah/Wisdom  
Kwadwo Mprah/Isaac Owusu  
et al.*

### **Searching for Jobs: The Experiences of Persons with Disabilities in the Komenda, Edina, Eguafo, Abirem Municipality of Ghana**

The study investigated the job search experiences of persons with disabilities in the Komenda, Edina, Eguafo, Abirem Municipality in the central region of Ghana. It examined how the attitude of employers influence the kinds of jobs persons with disabilities do and how these attitudes influence their future job search. It also examined major barriers to successful job search and placement and recommended measures to improve employability of persons with disabilities. The participants included visually impaired, hearing impaired and people with physical disabilities. Findings from the study revealed that attitudes of employers towards persons with disabilities who search for jobs were pitiful rather than considering them based on their professional qualification. Inaccessible workplaces and access to information were also major barriers reported by participants. The authors recommend that stakeholders promote and intensify public education on disability and the need to respect all persons regardless of background. The working environment should also be made accessible to all people regardless of their disabilities to ensure an improved economic status and inclusive society.

**Bezug:** <https://dcidj.uog.edu.et/index.php/up-j-dcbrid/article/view/574>

### *Margo Greenwood/Stevens Bechange/Paul Emong et al.* **Using a Community-Based Participatory Research Approach to Explore Economic Empowerment for Youth with Disabilities in Rural Uganda**

This paper presents findings from a community-based participatory study exploring the lived experiences and key livelihood changes post-intervention of a vocational skills training for young people with disabilities in rural Uganda. Twenty-four youth with disabilities who had previously taken the vocational training were trained to become peer researchers and conducted 72 in-depth interviews with a more recent cohort of youth with disabilities. Findings showed that training in a skill is an important part of the economic empowerment journey for youth with disabilities in rural Uganda. Beyond this, transition from training to work, marketing, proving competence, managing chronic pain while working and probable risk are also areas that need guidance and support. Renewed hope for better livelihood prospects was mixed with a degree of uncertainty. Some were unprepared for the complexities around community respect and had also not considered that their financial situation may get worse before it gets better, as part of the risk of self-employment.

**Bezug:** <https://research.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Sightsavers-community-based-participatory-research-economic-empowerment-uganda-2023.pdf>

### *Adetokunbo Johnson* **Protecting Women with Disabilities from Sexual Harassment in Africa**

Research has shown how compared to women without disabilities, women with disabilities are increasingly

susceptible to sexual violence and are also more likely to be in situations of unequal power relationships that trigger unwelcome sexual acts. Consequently, this chapter asks whether women with disabilities are adequately protected from acts of sexual harassment in Africa. This question is essential for two reasons. First, this question draws attention to unacknowledged acts of sexual harassment against women with disabilities in Africa. Second, this question underscores the interactions and intersections between identity categories of gender and disability and how these interactions reinforce the sexual harassment of women with disabilities in African countries. The conclusion from this analysis stresses the importance of developing an intersectional lens in legal systems if there is any serious attempt to end acts of sexual harassment of women with disabilities in Africa.

**Bezug:** [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372404939\\_Protecting\\_Women\\_with\\_Disabilities\\_from\\_Sexual\\_Harassment\\_in\\_Africa](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372404939_Protecting_Women_with_Disabilities_from_Sexual_Harassment_in_Africa)

*United Nations Population  
Fund (UNFPA) Asia/ the Pacific  
Regional Office (APRO)*

### **Disability Inclusion in Gender-Based Violence Programming: Promising Practices and Innovative Approaches from UNFPA and the Pacific Country Offices**

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and the Pacific Regional Office is committed to making sure that all efforts to address gender-based violence (GBV) are inclusive of and accessible to women and girls with disabilities, ensuring that transformative goals are met and that no one is left behind. To meet this critical need, UNFPA APRO developed tools for UNFPA Country Offices and partners to strengthen GBV and Disability inclusion programming, which include a Tip-sheet on Disability Inclusion in GBV Programming and a

GBV and Disability Inclusion Assessment Tool. The lessons learnt from the implementation of the UNFPA APRO tools informed this documentation on promising practices and innovative approaches to disability inclusion in GBV programming. The promising practices and approaches highlight the power of partnerships between UNFPA, GBV service providers and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities not only in addressing the needs of survivors with disabilities, but for knowledge exchange, mentoring and joint advocacy. However, there is still a critical gap in the evidence on effective approaches and interventions to ensure sustainable changes in the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of service providers. Gathering more information about this is critical to identifying what disability-inclusive approaches and strategies work, where they work and why. Hence, the briefing paper ends with recommendations for the policy level, family and community level, service-provision level, and international cooperation level.

**Bezug:** [https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/unfpa\\_gbv\\_and\\_disability\\_inclusion\\_final\\_august\\_11.pdf](https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/unfpa_gbv_and_disability_inclusion_final_august_11.pdf)

*Bonita K. Gordon/Nontembeko J. Bila*

### **Developing a Psychoeducational Programme for Caregivers of People with Intellectual Disability**

In the Western Cape, South Africa, a significant number of individuals with intellectual disabilities are cared for by caregivers who receive little or no compensation, education, or support. Despite the unique challenges faced by these caregivers, no psychoeducational programmes have been implemented for this particular population. The study aimed to examine the factors contributing to caregiver distress and develop a solution in the form of a psychoeducational programme for

caregivers. The statistical findings demonstrated a significant increase in knowledge, with 99% of respondents indicating a positive impact in reducing caregiver distress and 85% feeling better equipped to care for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Hence, the psychoeducational programme developed in this study had a positive effect on reducing caregiver distress.

**Bezug:** <https://ajod.org/index.php/ajod/article/view/1195>

### *Jyotishmita Sarma* **Gendered Nature of Caregiving across the Lifespan: A Study on ‘Disabled Households’ in Assam, India**

Family support plays a significant role in the lives of persons with disabilities, particularly where education and employment opportunities are limited and social security benefits are inadequate. This paper elaborates on caregiving through a gendered lens in the context of an urban district in Assam, a state located in the north-eastern region of India. The study was conducted with 18 women with different locomotor impairments, ranging from mild to severe, in the age group of 18-57 years. Using intersectionality as the analytical framework, the paper highlights the dependence of the study participants on their family members across two phases of their lives: childhood and adulthood. The paper explores the gendered nature of caregiving in the family and shows how, even though the caregiver changes with the passage of time, from parents to siblings, the gendered division of caregiving responsibilities remains intact. The paper further delineates the heterogeneous experience of disablement by exploring different axes such as the nature of impairment, social class, and the location (rural/urban).

**Bezug:** [https://disabilityglobalsouth.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/dgs\\_10\\_02\\_01.pdf](https://disabilityglobalsouth.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/dgs_10_02_01.pdf)

### *Namrata Pradhan/Gørill Haugan/Jennifer Infanti* **Challenges and Forms of Coping and Support in the Daily Lives of Nepali Mothers of Children with Intellectual Disabilities: A Qualitative Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of Nepali mothers who care for their children with intellectual disabilities. These children require lifelong care that places significant emotional, social, and financial burdens on their caregivers, who are predominantly mothers in low-income countries such as Nepal. In these contexts, cultural and social factors, such as gender inequalities, discrimination, exclusion, and poverty, can exacerbate the caregiving challenges faced by these mothers. Therefore, the study aims to explore the specific challenges, the coping strategies and supports that these mothers use to manage them. Fourteen mothers were recruited through local disability organisations and interviewed individually. The findings highlight the critical roles of mothers of children with intellectual disabilities in Nepal and the need for advocacy, research, and interventions to promote the health and well-being of these caregivers and their families.

**Bezug:** [https://disabilityglobalsouth.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/dgs\\_10\\_02\\_02.pdf](https://disabilityglobalsouth.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/dgs_10_02_02.pdf)

### *UNICEF* **Children with Disabilities in Eastern and Southern Africa: A Statistical Overview of their Well-being**

Nearly 29 million children with disabilities live in Eastern and Southern Africa. Each of them – like every child in the world – has the right to be nurtured and supported through responsive care and education, to receive adequate nutrition and social protection, and to enjoy play and leisure time. Too often, however, such rights are denied.

Monitoring the inclusion of children with disabilities in development efforts has long been held back by the lack of reliable and comprehensive data. As part of UNICEF's continued efforts, this report provides regional estimates of children with disabilities in Eastern and Southern Africa. It also includes internationally comparable data from four countries in the region (Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, and Zimbabwe). The data cover more than 10 indicators of child well-being across all sectors – from nutrition, health, and education to protection from violence and discrimination. The findings expose a stark reality: Children with disabilities are still being left behind despite the aspirations laid out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The report aims to promote the use of these data to make children with disabilities in the region more visible, bringing about a fuller understanding of their life experiences. It offers evidence crucial to decision-making to fulfil obligations, both moral and legal, to give every child an equal chance in life.

**Bezug:** <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-in-eastern-and-southern-africa-a-statistical-overview-of-their-well-being/>

*Fleur Smith/Sureni Perera/  
Manjula Marella*

### **The Journey to Early Identification and Intervention for Children with Disabilities in Fiji**

Early identification of developmental delay or disability and access to early intervention improves outcomes for children with disabilities and their families. However, in many low- and middle-income countries, services, and systems to enable timely, co-ordinated care and support are lacking. The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of families of children with developmental disabilities in Fiji in accessing services for intervention and

support across sectors. This qualitative study involved conducting interviews with caregivers of children with disabilities, and relevant key stakeholders from health, education, disability, and social support sectors. The authors used journey maps to identify key stages of the families' journeys, identify key barriers and enablers at each stage, and provide multi-sectoral recommendations for each stage.

**Bezug:** <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/20/18/6732>

### *Save the Children* **Well-being of Yazidi Children in the Aftermath of the 2014 Genocide**

The Yazidis are a minority group of Kurdistan that have long been persecuted for their religious practices. On 3 August 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) brutally attacked the Yazidi community living in Sinjar. Within a few days, 9,900 Yazidis had been killed or abducted. Half of those killed were children. In 2021, Save the Children Iraq Country Office initiated a multi-phase study to understand how the 2014 events continue to shape the current living circumstances, hopes, and aspirations of Yazidi children. Phase I of the study included a review of the existing research, which later informed focus group discussions with Yazidi caregivers as well as interviews, group discussions and mapping activities with Yazidi children. Children with disabilities could not be included in Phase I, so Phase II focused specifically on their experiences through journalling, mapping exercises and interviews with 20 children with disabilities. Phase II also included focus group discussions with 57 caregivers of Yazidi children with disabilities. The report reveals that Yazidi children living with disabilities in Iraq face exclusion, bullying, and suicidal thoughts nine years after the Islamic State (IS) genocide. Many reported challenges in being able to access basic services like

schools and medical care.

**Bezug:** <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/well-being-of-yazidi-children-in-the-aftermath-of-the-2014-genocide/>

*Muhammad Haziq Lim  
Abdullah/Boon Thao Tong/  
Mohd Hafiz Zakaria/Nor Farah  
Naquiah Mohamad Daud*

### **Fostering Social Communication for Children with Autism through Augmented Reality Toy**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder disease, which hinders communication and socialisation. This paper examines an augmented reality toy application, AR Toys, which supports social communication of children with ASD, and reports on how the application was used in school classrooms. AR Toys was evaluated by seven children in an Autism Centre in Melaka, Malaysia. The analysis focused entirely on observation of the interactions between children and teachers at the school. It was found that AR Toys were able to motivate children with ASD on adaptive language, model expressive language to identify a child's emotion and promote pretend play on learning emotion in classroom activities. This gives children with ASD more opportunities to communicate among peers and interact with teachers at school. Human Computer Interaction (HCI) research using AR technologies shows positive feedback in supporting children with ASD in recognising emotions that facilitate their social communication development, leading to better understanding, communication and engagement between teachers and children.

**Information:** <https://dcidj.uog.edu.et/index.php/up-j-dcbrid/article/view/507>

# Veranstaltungen/Events

13.03.2024

**Klimawandel und Behinderung – Wie können globale Klimabemühungen inklusiv werden? Berlin**

Information: <https://www.bezev.de/de/anmeldung-zur-internationalen-tagung-klimawandel-und-menschen-mit-behinderung/>

Kontakt: [langensiepen@bezev.de](mailto:langensiepen@bezev.de)

09.05. - 10.05.2024

**2024 UN Civil Society Conference, Nairobi, Kenya**

Information: <https://www.un.org/en/civil-society/2024-un-civil-society-conference>

Kontakt: Not yet available

14.05. - 16.05.2024

**Inclusive Africa Conference 2024, Nairobi, Kenya**

Information: <https://inclusiveafrica.org/>

Kontakt: [esther@inABLE.org](mailto:esther@inABLE.org)

09.07. - 12.07.2024

**World Down Syndrome Congress, Brisbane, Australia**

Information: <https://wdsc2024.org.au/about-wdsc.html>

Kontakt: [info@wdsc2024.org.au](mailto:info@wdsc2024.org.au)

19.08. - 21.08.2024

**3rd International Disability Conference on Decent Work and Economic Growth: Promoting Inclusive Employment Opportunities and Economic Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities, Lusaka, Zambia**

Information: <https://www.aadisao.org/advocacy-group-conferences>

Kontakt: [info@aadisao.org](mailto:info@aadisao.org)

03.09. - 05.09.2024

**Disability Studies Conference, University of Leeds Campus, UK**

Information: <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/events/conference/>

Kontakt: [cgsconference@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:cdsconference@leeds.ac.uk)

02.04. - 03.04.2025

**Global Disability Summit, Berlin**

Information: <https://www.bmz.de/de/aktuelles/global-disability-summit>

Kontakt: Not yet available

## Schwerpunktthemen kommender Ausgaben der Zeitschrift Focal Topics of Upcoming Issues

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1/2024:

Indigene Menschen mit Behinderungen

[Indigenous Persons with Disabilities](#)

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2/2024

Wohnen und Inklusion

[Living and Inclusion](#)

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3/2024

Inklusive Mobilität

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Redaktionsschluss für zukünftige Ausgaben

[Deadlines for the upcoming issues](#)

	1/2024	2/2024	3/2024
Hauptbeiträge/ <a href="#">Focal articles</a>	01.12.2023	01.03.2024	01.07.2024
Kurzbeiträge/ <a href="#">Other contributions</a>	01.02.2024	01.05.2024	01.09.2024

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## Behinderung und internationale Entwicklung

Die Zeitschrift Behinderung und internationale Entwicklung erscheint seit 1990 dreimal jährlich mit Beiträgen sowohl in deutscher als auch englischer Sprache. Ihr Anspruch ist es, ein Medium für einen grenzüberschreitenden Informationsaustausch zur Thematik zu bieten sowie die fachliche Diskussion zu pädagogischen, sozial- und entwicklungspolitischen sowie interkulturellen Fragen im Zusammenhang mit Behinderung im Globalen Süden weiterzuentwickeln. Jede Ausgabe ist einem Schwerpunktthema gewidmet, das durch Einzelbeiträge und einen aktuellen Informationsteil ergänzt wird.

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