



From Policy to Programming

Final Report
AFGHAN DISABILITY RIGHTS CONFERENCE:
FROM POLICY TO PROGRAMMING
May 23 and 24, 2017
Washington, DC

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Message from Ambassador Mohib | 3 |
| Acknowledgments..... | 4 |
| Executive Summary..... | 5 |
| Day 1 – Full Conference | 6 |
| Panels..... | 8 |
| <i>Inclusive Education</i> | 8 |
| <i>Inclusive Public Health</i> | 9 |
| <i>Lunch Speakers</i> | 10 |
| <i>Employment and Vocational Training Panel</i> | 11 |
| Breakout Sessions | 12 |
| Big Ideas Activity | 14 |
| Day 2 – Knowledge Sharing Workshop..... | 15 |
| APPENDIX..... | 18 |

Message from Ambassador Mohib

Dear Disability Rights Supporter and Friend of Afghanistan,

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was proud to host the Afghan Disability Rights Conference: From Policy to Programming earlier this year. It is our goal that persons with disabilities have every opportunity to succeed and live a full life, and this conference was a necessary step in showing the commitment required from the government and NGOs to make that goal a reality. The Afghan government has made disability rights and protections an issue of national priority, thus we have the opportunity to make real and lasting progress.

As a follow up to the first National Conference for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) held in Kabul at the Presidential Palace last fall, this conference highlighted progress and challenges in the disability sector, and explored practical approaches for making inclusive education, public healthcare, vocational training and employment opportunities realities for Afghans living with disabilities.

Aiming to create a cross-sector dialogue for practical solutions, the goals of the conference were to: 1) raise awareness of disability issues in Afghanistan; 2) consolidate support, and generate ideas and plans for practical implementation of states policy commitments, and 3) provide an opportunity for networking and sharing knowledge.

I would like to acknowledge and thank our key partners in this endeavor, whose partnership made the conference possible: the U.S. Council on Disabilities, the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, Counterpart International and Trivision.

This report aims to document the collective experiences and ideas that all of you contributed at the conference, and will be distributed widely in order to inform pragmatic steps forward.

Sincerely,

Hamdullah Mohib
Ambassador, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Washington, DC

Acknowledgments

With special thanks to our partners who helped make this conference possible.



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
Center for Child and Human Development



Executive Summary

On May 23rd and 24th in Washington, D.C., the Embassy of Afghanistan was proud to host the *Afghan Disability Rights Conference: From Policy to Programming* in partnership with the U.S. International Council on Disabilities (USICD), the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, Georgetown University's Center for Child and Human Development, Counterpart International, and Trivision. The conference was a follow-up to the [National Conference for Persons with Disabilities in Afghanistan](#), held in October 2016 in Kabul.

The conference brought together 150 international and Afghan experts on disability rights and featured several prominent speakers, including a special video message from Her Excellency First Lady of Afghanistan Rula Ghani (click [here](#) to view it); Afghanistan's Deputy Minister for Disability, Jamila Afghani, of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled; and a keynote address from Judy Heumann, the former senior advisor on international disability rights under President Barack Obama and a longtime leader of the disability rights movement in America. U.S. Senator Tom Harkin (ret) delivered the lunchtime address and was introduced by Tim Shriver, the chairman of the Special Olympics.

The conference included panel discussions that focused on three priority issues: making education inclusive, making public health inclusive and vocational training relevant and helpful to all; and opening up employment opportunities. Each panel featured expert and experienced figures in the field, and produced lively, productive discussions that included questions from the audience.

Following the panel discussions, panelists, speakers and participants broke out into three roundtable discussions in which they discussed major the challenges within each focus area; participants came up with original ideas and solutions which were later presented to the entire gathering.

Day 2 of the conference involved smaller, knowledge-sharing workshops that featured experienced American experts having a rich dialogue with Afghan delegation about the unique challenges faced by persons with disabilities, especially in the education, public health, and employment sector.

Day 1 – Full Conference

On May 23, 2017, the *Afghan Disability Rights Conference: From Policy to Programming* conference began with opening remarks from the spouse of His Excellency Dr. Hamdullah Mohib, Mrs. Lael Mohib, welcoming the conference participants and those participating via Skype in Afghanistan. Mrs. Mohib thanked all the partners of the conference and said, “We are proud to have so many diverse and committed partners in our efforts.”

Following Mrs. Mohib’s remarks, a film titled “Believe in Me!” produced by the Rahyab Organization for Services for the Blind was shared. Click [here](#) to watch the video. All videos played throughout the conference were directed and produced by education panelist, Ms. Benafsha Yacoobi.

Ambassador Hamdullah Mohib provided welcoming remarks and said, “The Afghan government looks forward to engaging our civil society leaders to bring men and women, and boys and girls with disabilities and as contributors to our country’s development”. Ambassador Mohib also made the following points:



His Excellency Dr. Hamdullah Mohib welcomes conference participants

- Recognized President Ashraf Ghani for making the protection and promotion of rights for persons with disabilities a national priority and implementation of the Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Afghanistan
- Stated that the Law on the Rights and Benefits of Persons with Disabilities requires that three percent of jobs in the government are reserved for individuals with disabilities, and prohibits discrimination of persons with disabilities
- Mentioned the development of the new Afghanistan National Disability Action Plan (ANDAP) to implement government policies that support persons with disabilities.
- Thanked the attending delegation of Afghan civil society leaders and government representatives



Her Excellency First Lady of Afghanistan Rula Ghani addressing the conference in a video message.

The Ambassador shared a special video message from Her Excellency Rula Ghani for the conference participants. She was pleased to participate in a conference discussing how to facilitate the integration of people with disabilities into mainstream society. She also stated, “We are all human beings worthy of respect. Regardless of our age, gender, lineage, the color of our skin, or our abilities and disabilities”.

The Embassy was pleased that Deputy Minister Jamila Afghani of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled spoke about the status of the disability rights movement in Afghanistan, not just as the Deputy Minister but also as an Afghan woman who lives with a disability. She said, “For the first time in history, the government has made the protection and promotion of rights of persons with disabilities a national priority”, and contributed the following points:

- According to a report by the [World Health Organization](#), persons with disabilities constitute 15% of the world population and based on a [2005 Handicap International report](#), persons with severe disabilities constitute 2.7% of Afghanistan’s population
- Many Afghans, including men, women and children who are amputees due to war or by landmines and unexploded ordinances. Many more were born with disabilities or acquired disabilities due to inadequate healthcare, poor maternity care and poor birth practices, congenital disabilities, accidents, malnutrition and preventable diseases such as polio.
- The Afghan Constitution and others laws stipulate that persons with disabilities are equal to other people and discrimination is illegal, but in practice, the situation is quite different and many persons with disabilities are deprived of basic rights
- The government of Afghanistan established a central repository within the Ministry for Martyrs and Disabled for persons with disabilities seeking information
- The first ever national conference for persons with disabilities was held in Kabul at the Presidential Palace in October 2016

Judy Heumann, the former United States Department of State Senior Advisor on International Disability rights under President Barack Obama, and longtime leader of the disability rights movement in the U.S., gave a keynote address. She made many valuable points including:

- In all countries, stigma and fear of acquiring a disability has been a major barrier for those living with disabilities



Deputy Minister Jamila Afghani of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled



Keynote Speaker Ms. Judith Heumann

- At the national level, the U.S. is working with congress on disability rights but there is great importance in developing at the grassroots level because it needs to be a bottom-up approach
- It is crucial to ensure that people at the local level are more engaged, not just in discussing the problems that exist, but so they understand how processes in the government work to bring about change
- There are many programs in the U.S. that focus on helping support and develop the voices of parents and voices of individuals with disabilities and to educate them on their rights are and how to use those rights, which could be duplicated in other contexts
- Encouraged participants to discuss ways to help educate parents so the voices of persons with disabilities can be heard.

Panels

There were three panels followed by Q&A sessions. Each panel was comprised of Afghan and international experts with experience working in Afghanistan, within the government or civil society.



Inclusive Education Panel pictured left to right: Stephanie Ortoleva (moderator), Benafsha Yacoobi, LaTanya Williams, Nasir Ahmad Alokozay

Inclusive Education

Living with a disability should never disqualify a child from attending school. Without an education, a child almost certainly faces an adulthood of dependency and poverty. Afghanistan needs special needs teachers, modifications to existing school buildings so children with mobility issues can access the facilities, essential textbooks in Braille, and much more to ensure that children with disabilities get the education they deserve.

The inclusive education panel, moderated by Stephanie Ortoleva, the President of Women Enabled International, on inclusive education for persons with disabilities began with a video titled “Behind the Wall! Episode 1: Inclusive Education” by Rahyab Organization for Services for the Blind. Click [here](#) to watch the video. Panelists included:

- Nasir Ahmad Alokozay, Director of Inclusive Education at the Ministry of Education
- LaTanya Williams, Disability Specialist from SERVE Afghanistan
- Benafsha Yacoobi, Director of the Rahyab Organization

Some key points from the inclusive education panel were:

- Improving inclusive education requires funding – coordination between government and civil society organizations will create lasting progress, and without funding it's not possible to educate communities in Afghanistan without funding it's not possible to educate communities in Afghanistan
- Awareness and accessibility to information is important because it educates children and youth and young adult students with disabilities on their rights and how to advocate for those rights
- Afghan teachers are being trained fluently in sign language – as there are only 4,000 vocabulary words, those teachers should know at least 3,800 words to qualify as fluent

Inclusive Public Health

All people deserve independence. Persons with severe disabilities often lose their independence due to limited mobility, function, or vision, and with that loss can come an even tougher blow: loss of dignity. Restoring independence and dignity to persons with disabilities is a priority for Afghanistan. The country's public health system has improved significantly in recent years but many more specialized caregivers and clinics that focus on physical rehabilitation, prosthetics and orthotics are needed.



Inclusive Public Health panel pictured from left to right: Jeff Meer (moderator), Abdul Khaliq Zazai, Sadiq Mohibi, Fiona Gall, and Omara Khan Muneeb

The panel on inclusive public health for persons with disabilities began with a film titled, “Behind the Wall! Episode 2: Health and Rehabilitation” by Rahyab Organization for Services for the Blind. Click [here](#) to watch the video.

The panel, moderated by Jeff Meer, the Executive Director for Handicap International included:

- Sadiq Mohibi, Victim Assistance and Disability Advisor for the UN Mine Action Services' Afghan Civilian Assistance Program of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled;
- Fiona Gall, Director for the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development;
- Abdul Khaliq Zazai, Director and Founder of Accessibility Organization for Afghan Disabled
- Omara Khan Muneeb, Director of Development and Ability Organization

Key points from this panel discussion included:

- In the health sector, Afghanistan is still not reaching as many people as it needs to be thus more inclusive policy and implementation of that policy is key.
- Difficulty with human resources and conflict within the Afghan government has made it more difficult to create an inclusive public health system for everyone, especially persons with disabilities.
- Mental health and psychosocial support is an important aspect of inclusive public health that should not be forgotten

Lunch Speakers

During his introduction of retired Senator Tom Harkin, Dr. Tim Shriver, Chairman of [Special Olympics](#), reiterated a 1963 quote by President Kennedy when he said, “We must promote to the best of our ability and by all possible and appropriate means, the mental and physical health of all our citizens – today we are convened to bring that same message to the people of Afghanistan, to the cooperation between the Afghans and Americans, a cooperation rooted in our common destiny as human beings”.



Tim Shriver, Chairman of Special Olympics

[Senator Tom Harkin](#) told the conference that this is “a time when the global disability movement is gaining attention and momentum around key goals that have been part of the U.S. approach to disability policy for more than 25 years.” He also said,



“When I had the honor to lead the U.S. Senate effort to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, we established 4 goals for public policy: Equality of Opportunity, Independent Living, Economic Self-Sufficiency, and Full Participation.” Senator Harkin also made the following points in his speech:

Senator Tom Harkin

- Inclusive education, public health, and vocational training and employment are all critical building blocks to achieving the vision of laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- Invest in the growing leadership of Afghanistan’s disability population, recognizing that the progress that has been made in the U.S. happened because Americans with disabilities and their families came together to ask the government to recognize their rights and common experience of discrimination and exclusion
- A big part of investment in the U.S. has been federal support for independent living center and parent training and information center
- Prioritize the importance of creating a societal expectation that all people with disabilities are successful in the labor market
- If competitive and integrated employment becomes the norm for Afghans with disabilities, then education, transportation, health care and long-term services and support systems are all working together to achieve that outcome.

Employment and Vocational Training Panel



Employment and Vocational Training panel from left to right: Deepti Samant Raja (moderator), Jean-Francois Trani, Samiulhaq Sami, Amina Azimi, Ali Yawar Hoshmand.

Afghanistan passed a law requiring that 3 percent of all government jobs be reserved for people with disabilities. An effort to revise the law to include private sector jobs is currently underway. Unfortunately, a lack of education and vocational training opportunities means most people who would qualify don't have the necessary skills. Denying persons with disabilities the opportunity to provide for themselves and their family is a form of discrimination that the Afghan government is determined to eliminate.

The third and final panel on employment opportunities and vocational training for persons with disabilities convened with a film by Rahyab Organization for Services for the Blind titled, "Behind the Wall! Episode 3: Employment and Vocational Opportunities". Click [here](#) to watch the video.

The panel was moderated by Deepti Samant Raja, a Senior Consultant to the Global Disability Advisor at The World Bank. The panelists included:

- Dr. Jean-Francois Trani, associate professor on Global Research on Inclusion and Disability at the Brown School, Washington University, St. Louis;
- Samiulhaq Sami, Inclusion Manager at Handicap International Afghanistan;
- Ali Yawar Hoshmand, CEO of Seema Bag Factory
- Amina Azimi, Advocacy Officer at Afghan Landmine Survivors Organization (ALSO).

The main ideas of the panel on vocational training and employment opportunities were:

- Women with disabilities face dual discrimination when seeking employment opportunities in Afghanistan
- Lack of vocational training and other employment resources, such as assistive technology, severely inhibits the ability of the government and other employers to support employment for persons with disabilities
- Investments in enterprises owned by persons with disabilities, and loan accessibility, is needed

Breakout Sessions

Conference participants then broke off into three breakout sessions focused on inclusive education, inclusive public health, and employment opportunities and vocational training in which they discussed chief obstacles for persons living with disabilities and ideas for solving these problems.

The **education breakout session** discussed the following:

- Universal education for all children
- The stigma that surrounds persons with disabilities

- Increasing examples of girls with disabilities in textbooks and through cultural exchanges

To address the above issues, the education breakout discussed the following solutions:

- To address the issue of stigma, improving awareness of tribal leaders to use inclusive and respectful language in all areas of Afghanistan
- Importance of changing the perception of what having a disability means and showing leaders and others the potential of children with disabilities when they are provided the opportunity to attend school.
- Crucial to involve parents of children with disabilities in the development of inclusive education.
- Teachers play a very important role in inclusive education - they should be trained to accommodate different types of disabilities.
- Consider the accommodation needs of students with disabilities as they pursue post-secondary education

Participants in the breakout session on **inclusive public health** discussed community-based healthcare and education, health outcomes, and health infrastructure as mechanisms to improve public health in Afghanistan.

The following were the big ideas from the public health session:

- Leverage faith and community based organizations to improve public health
- Improve the early identification of infants and toddlers and intervention, such as needed therapies.
- Increasing self-advocacy
- People-centered budgeting and health clinics
- Train workers in community-based rehabilitation
- Prevent the discrimination against people with disabilities throughout the lifespan as they seek to access health care



Dr. Marisa Brown speaking during the inclusive public health breakout session.

The last breakout session on **employment opportunities and vocational training** addressed lack of awareness and advocacy, lack of technology, and unemployment among the general population of Afghanistan as major challenges for employment of persons with disabilities.

Some ideas to work towards solving these issues were discussed as follows:

- The [Graduation Model](#), a program to help people graduate out of poverty and better their situation
- Establishing an internship model for middle school age students, high school and university students and identify employers that need services
- Investing in the capacity of people with disabilities as leaders to advocate for employment rights and vocational opportunities
- Raising awareness by finding disability champions who can demonstrate that people with disabilities can be productive and can lead productive lives.
- Build disability NGOs' capacity for cross- disability advocacy through funding and other types of support and assist them with training, developing advocacy campaigns, managing their non-profit, conducting fundraising, and recruiting volunteers
- Utilize local resources and manpower to develop sustainable projects

Big Ideas Activity

After each individual breakout session, the conference reconvened to discuss all big ideas as a larger group. The discussion was facilitated by Phyllis Magrab, the Vice-Chair of the US-Afghan Women's Council, and Director of the Center for Child and Human Development at Georgetown University. The conversation resulted in these main ideas:

- Public awareness around disability rights and inclusion is crucial and necessary
- Need to make disability inclusion a cross-cutting issue; ie, creating disability inclusion units in each Ministry and government organization, like gender units exist
- Role of key partners is important, but must be able to identify who they are to create stronger coalitions for change
- Leadership within the disability community must be nurtured and employed once it is developed
- Technology is a key tool for including people with disabilities
- Establish financing strategies, such as microfinancing, because lack of funding is a common theme in major challenges faced by persons with disabilities

Carol Grabauskas, Deputy Director of the Office of International Visitors at the US Department of State and Isabel Hodge, Executive Director at the US International Council on Disabilities both gave closing remarks. Isabel Hodge shared, "Now, with the three big ideas, and from spending time with U.S. experts today and tomorrow at our Knowledge Sharing Workshop, our new Afghan friends not only have made new connections with experts here in the U.S., they have a way forward—and as His Excellency said, 'if we all work together, we cannot fail.'"

Participants reconvened over dinner to receive remarks from Saeeda Etebari, an internationally-renowned Afghan jewelry designer and entrepreneur at the [Turquoise Mountain Foundation](#). With the use of a sign language interpreter, Ms. Etebari told the conference, “I was born in a refugee camp in Peshawar in Pakistan and because the conditions were not good, I got very sick and was diagnosed with cerebral meningitis. Due to the illness, I couldn’t walk for the first three years of my life and I lost my hearing too.”



Internationally renowned jewelry designer Saeeda Etebari

Ms. Etebari spoke of her love for making jewelry at the Turquoise Mountain Institute because designing a piece that someone buys and wears is special and very rewarding. She said, “I love making a connection with someone through a shared sense of beauty.”



Day 2 – Knowledge Sharing Workshop

May 24, day two of the Afghan Disability Rights Conference was a smaller, knowledge sharing workshop hosted by the US International Council on Disabilities at the National Youth Transitions Center in Washington, D.C.

The workshop commenced with introductions by the Afghan delegation which included:

- Deputy Minister, Jamila Afghani
- Director of Inclusive Education at the Afghan Ministry of Education, Nasir Ahmad Alokozay
- Advocate of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Amina Azimi
- Saeeda Etebari, internationally-renowned Afghan artisan who specializes in jewelry



Pictured left to right: Dr. Marisa Brown and Kelly Buckland discussing public health at the knowledge sharing workshop.

- design at the Turquoise Mountain Institute,
- Fiona Gall, Director of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR);
 - Ali Yawar Hoshmand, Founder and CEO of bag company
 - Fazal Elahi Ibrahimy, Director General of Social Protection at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD)
 - Inayatullah Miakhil, representative of the Afghan Amputee Bicyclists for Rehabilitation and Recreation (AABRAR),;
 - Sadiq Mohibi, Disability Adviser for UN Mine Action Service at the Afghan MoLSAMD,
 - Saiwash Payab, Chief Executive of the Family Welfare Focus Organization,
 - Musbahu Rahman, Disaster Risk Reduction Program Manager at ActionAid Afghanistan,
 - Sami Ul-Haq Sami, Inclusion Manager at Handicap International Afghanistan (HI),
 - Abdul Rahman Sharifi, Director for the National Assembly of Disabled Institutions (NADI),
 - Wasima Shinwari, Research Assistant at Will Cornell Medicine
 - Jean Francois Trani, Associate professor on Global Research on Inclusion and Disability at the Brown School, Washington University, St. Louis
 - Bashir Ahmad Wali ; Founder and Director of Afghan Disabled Rehabilitation Association (ADRA),
 - LaTanya Williams, Disability Director for SERVE Afghanistan;
 - Benafsha Yacoobi Founder and director of the Organization of Rahyab for Rehabilitation Services for the Blind in Afghanistan (ORRSB)
 - Abdul Khaliq Zazai, Director and Founder of the Accessibility Organization for Afghan Disabled (AOAD)
 - Omara Khan Muneeb, Director of Development and Ability Organization



Pictured left to right: Angela Spinella, Leila Peterson, and Katy Beh Neas discussing inclusive education during the knowledge sharing workshop.

The first panel on inclusive education included the following experts:

- Leila Peterson, Executive Director of SchoolTalk;
- Katy Beh Neas, Executive Vice President of Government Relations at Easter Seals;
- Angela Spinella, a special educator in the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Technical Training, and Assistance.

The second panel on inclusive public health included:

- Dr. Marisa Brown, a research instructor at the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCDD)
- Kelly Buckland from the National Council on Independent Living.

The last panel on vocational training and employment consisted of

- Laura Owens, President of TransCen Inc.;
- Susan Prokop, a Senior Associate Advocacy Director at Paralyzed Veterans of America
- Lauren Appelbaum, the Director of Communications at RespectAbility

The Knowledge Sharing Workshop concluded with a dialogue between Isabel Hodge from the U.S. International Council on Disabilities and workshop participants about their take-aways from the conference overall.



Knowledge Sharing Workshop Participants

In summary, participants appreciated different perspectives and hearing directly from U.S. disability rights activists and advocates on how to advocate, and saw the importance of disability NGOs speaking with a unified voice.

They learned about the diversity of the disability rights movement, the significance of individuals' roles and all agreed that they need stronger disability advocacy in Afghanistan. They were concerned that due to war and other reasons that two generations have passed without receiving an education.

The Afghan participants appreciated learning about veterans' benefits and disability in media, e.g. television shows and political campaigns. They also enjoyed learning about financial support programs, such as the [U.S. Social Security Administration's](#) Social Security Disability Insurance and the Supplemental Security Program for people with disabilities.

Participants would have liked to have heard from experts on social protection of children at risk especially in the area of human trafficking.

They appreciated the rich discussion about obstacles, challenges and achievements. They would like to know how to receive technical assistance and financial support for their programs and emphasized the need for future collaboration.

The discussion concluded with words of thanks and appreciation to the Embassy of Afghanistan and a group photo.

APPENDIX

Further Information

Link to photo album from Day 1 & Day 2 of the Afghan Disability Rights Conference:
<https://www.flickr.com/gp/155475880@N03/fwgGtQ>

Link to clip conference coverage from VOA: <https://youtu.be/QkKZtz2pJbs>

Click [here](#) for the agenda from Day 1.

Click [here](#) for the agenda from Day 2.

Click [here](#) to see the conference booklet.

Click [here](#) for the Afghan Embassy's coverage.

Knowledge Sharing Workshop Participating Organization's Websites

- [SchoolTalk](#)
- [Easterseals](#)
- [Office of the State Superintendent of Education](#)
- [Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development](#)
- [National Council on Independent Living](#)
- [Transcen](#)
- [Paralyzed Veterans of America](#)
- [RespectAbility](#)