Public Consultation on Ireland's New International Development Policy

Nature of Views: A specific population who are still significantly marginalised and left behind are persons with disabilities. Due to difficulties in accessing services, persons with disabilities have poorer health outcomes, lower educational achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than those without disabilities. The Sustainable Development Goals aim to "leave no-one" behind through inclusion of all people, including people with intellectual disabilities who are among the most vulnerable to exclusion. By recently ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ireland commits to ensuring inclusion and access to all societal domains for persons with disabilities, including by promoting the availability and use of assistive technologies. Assistive technologies allow people to live healthy, productive, independent, dignified lives, and participate in education, employment and civic life. The prioritisation of assistive products by governments and development partners will advance human rights; generate economic, social and environmental societal benefits; and enable equitable realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Policies and systems that can promote equitable provision of assistive technology are urgently needed. Fair access to assistive technology is therefore a core concern for the human development agenda.

Organisation: ALL Institute: Assisting Living and Learning, Maynooth University.

ALL Institute Web Address: https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/all-institute

Contact ALL Institute:

Ms Hilary Hooks
Administrator
ALL Institute
Maynooth University
Maynooth
Co. Kildare
T: + 353 1 708 3685
E: hilary.hooks@mu.ie

Prof Mac MacLachlan
Director, ALL Institute,
ALL Institute
Maynooth University
Maynooth
Co. Kildare
T: + 353 1 708 3685
E: mac.maclachlan@mu.ie

Date of Posting Response: 16/08/2018.

RESPONSE

Assistive Technology and Social Inclusion

In committing to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Ireland recognised that the dignity of the individual is fundamental and that the Agenda's Goals and targets should be met for all people and for all segments of society. Furthermore, the 2016 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Report encourages countries to first reach those who are furthest behind (United Nations, 2016). However, a specific population who are still significantly left behind are persons with disabilities (PWD).

Low income, unemployment, lack of education, limited access to transport, poorer physical and mental health, and discrimination are key drivers of exclusion for PWD (Appleton-Dyer & Field, 2014). Furthermore, those with disabilities experience more limited access to healthcare, resulting in unmet healthcare needs (WHO, 2018a). Due to difficulties in accessing services, PWD have poorer health outcomes, lower educational achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than those without disabilities (WHO & World Bank, 2011). Disability may result in poverty due to lack of access to education and employment, and due to costs in relation to disability (WHO, 2015). Furthermore, PWD frequently lack access to information regarding laws, policies, and improvements in programmes and services that directly impact on their lives, which sustains their exclusion from social, economic and political spheres (ILO & Irish Aid, 2015).

There are multiple levels of exclusion, such as political exclusion, economic exclusion, social exclusion and cultural exclusion, which renders it a complex concept. It is suggested that these different forms of exclusion also reinforce each other, and negatively impact on outcomes for PWD (Appleton-Dyer & Field, 2014). For example, if the attitudes of employers already exclude PWD from employment, this is reinforced due to a lack of policy or implementation of policies to promote equal opportunities within the workplace.

Lack of understanding of the capacity and skills of PWDs may result in their exclusion from full participation in society. Specific attitudes relating to disability, which are based on social and cultural norms, exist in every society. Those with disabilities are often considered different, less fortunate, unsuccessful or less valuable as a partner, parent, friend or employee. PWD may be labelled and stigmatised if they do not meet the normative expectations of others; and the disability may become central to the person's identity.

Irish researchers and civil society have already gained a significant reputation and leadership role regarding assistive technologies in poorly resourced settings. The Irish government has indicated its significant commitment to this by co-sponsoring the side-event at the

2016 World Health Assembly (WHA) that led to adoption of the priority Assistive Product List (APL). Further WHA resolutions in 2018 and a full session on assistive technology scheduled for WHA 2019 will allow Ireland to further develop its considerable influence in this area. A stronger focus on assistive technology within Irish development policy would allow Ireland to more effectively address the SDGs in an equitable manner, to build on its investment in social protection, and to strengthen its commitment to social inclusion by developing critical intersectionalities around gender; such as women and girls with disability. There are now considerable opportunities to partner with other national aid agencies in this area and to build on newly established research and implementation strengths in this area in Ireland.

1. What Elements of Ireland's International Development Experience Should the New Policy Reflect?

There is a clear need to improve provision of services within the community, to increase public and professional awareness and understanding of PWD, and to build self-advocacy skills and empowerment of PWD and their families. These needs are more acute in low- and middle-income countries, but are also still very much present in high-income countries such as Ireland. By recently ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations, 2006), Ireland commits to addressing current inequities regarding access to all societal domains for PWD to ensure their full inclusion. The UNCRPD stipulates a rights-based approach to inequities experienced by PWD, and aims to ensure the effective participation of PWD on an equal basis with others in all spheres of life.

A specific population that are most deeply affected by exclusion are those with intellectual disabilities (WHO, 2015). The needs of this population have not been addressed, being a group still hidden out of public sight in homes or institutions, or being isolated within the community (Owuor, Larkan, & MacLachlan, 2017). The SDGs aim to "leave no-one" behind through inclusion of all people, including people with intellectual disabilities who are among the most vulnerable to exclusion (United Nations, 2016).

2. What are the Implications of the Changing Global Context for Ireland's International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action?

While worldwide, more than 1 billion people require one or more assistive products, with this figure predicted to increase to more than 2 billion by 2030, currently only one in ten individuals who require assistive products can access them (WHO, 2018b). In many low- and middle-income countries, AT is not accessible for the vast majority of those who need such

technologies (Marasinghe, Lapitan, & Ross, 2015). However, in high-income countries also, those residing in low-income households endure substantial barriers to accessing AT (Smith, Gowran et al., 2018). Because AT facilitates social inclusion, allocating resources to poorer settings is critical (MacLachlan et al., 2018).

Fair access to AT is imperative so that it may be allocated equitably and for broader social justice and human rights (MacLachlan, 2018a). Assistive technology as a human right is stipulated in the UNCRPD (2006, Article 4(g)), specifying that States Parties "undertake or promote research and development of, and to promote the availability and use of new technologies, including information and communications technologies, mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies, suitable for persons with disabilities, giving priority to technologies at an affordable cost".

3. Do the Proposed Priorities Respond to the Changing Context and Contribute to the Achievement of Our Vision of a More Equal, Peaceful, Sustainable World?

Assistive Technology for Social Inclusion and Equitable Realisation of the SDGs

Technological products, in their broadest sense, allow individuals to participate in and control their environments (Desmond et al., 2018); and this function of technology to facilitate participation and self-determination may be critical for populations such as older people or persons with disabilities. Indeed, assistive technologies (AT), when suitable for the user and the environment of the user, are significant tools to support participation and independence (WHO & World Bank, 2011). AT may be defined as "any device designed, made or adapted to help a person perform a particular task" (WHO & World Bank, 2011, p. 301). Assistive products may be critical for persons with disabilities, with chronic disease, frailty, or mental health problems, and for those with cognitive and physical decline due to ageing (Tebbutt et al., 2016). The benefits of AT are manifold, allowing people to live healthy, productive, independent, dignified lives, and participate in education, employment and civic life; diminishing the need for formal health and support care and the burden on caregivers; and decreasing exclusion, isolation, and poverty, and the effects of disability on an individual and society at large (WHO, 2018b).

Notably, for people with intellectual disabilities, the use of AT has not been adequately addressed in research or practice, although user-appropriate AT could substantially benefit those with intellectual disabilities, advancing population health and human rights (Boot et al., 2017). AT can allow persons with intellectual disabilities to interact with friends and family, strengthen mobility and access to health and social care services; and ultimately act as a mediator for persons

with intellectual disabilities to realise their rights and highest possible quality of life, participation and belonging in society (Owuor et al., 2017).

Access to assistive products must be a central component of universal health coverage for the successful realisation of the SDGs (WHO, 2016). As a vital constituent of inclusive sustainable development, the prioritisation of assistive products by governments and development partners will advance human rights; generate economic, social and environmental societal benefits; and enable equitable realisation of the SDGs (Tebbutt et al., 2016). Fair access to AT is therefore a core concern for the human development agenda (MacLachlan, 2018a).

Policies and Systems to Promote Equitable Provision of Assistive Technology

National AT policies or programmes are evident in only few countries, resulting in a critical need for universal access to assistive products (WHO, 2016). There is a global challenge to develop policies, procedures and provision systems to enable the availability and accessibility of high quality and affordable AT for people who require it (de Witte et al., 2018). In response to this challenge, the WHO Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology (GATE)[1] is a worldwide initiative established to realise the UNCRPD in relation to increasing AT access (Smith, Scherer, et al., 2018). Policies and systems that can promote equitable provision of AT are urgently needed. Policy development often excludes its intended beneficiaries; and there is a need to assess, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the degree to which AT policies, strategies and action plans integrate human rights principles and facilitate equitable access (MacLachlan et al., 2018).

As AT provision has been hindered by disjointed initiatives and activities, a stronger *systems thinking* perspective within the AT field would enable more equitable, resilient and sustainable AT provision, with the user experience as the core component of systems thinking for AT (MacLachlan & Scherer, 2018). A systems approach implies "understanding the interplay of different factors that influence the relationship between persons and their contexts, between persons, and between technology and the person using that technology" (ALL Institute, n.d.). User-centred systems thinking is fundamentally required; without this critical change in approach, AT may become increasingly siloed, inequitable, and unjust (MacLachlan et al., 2018).

In addition to the need for a stronger systems thinking perspective, a much stronger *market shaping* perspective is required to ensure fair access to AT (MacLachlan, 2018a).
Market shaping is needed when market economics do not provide for social gain in a way that is equitable and fair; for example, for economic reasons, producers may supply a relatively small amount of products to richer individuals at a more expensive price, instead of more products to

[1] WHO Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology (GATE): http://www.who.int/disabilities/technology/gate/en/

more people at a cheaper price (Smith, Scherer, et al., 2018). Market shaping denotes understanding the broader social context of the market, cooperatively collaborating with other stakeholders, and examining different sorts of systems that are appropriate for different contexts (MacLachlan, 2018b).

ALL Institute: Assisting Living and Learning

The newly established ALL (Assisting Living and Learning) Institute[2] at Maynooth University aims "to enable people across their life course – especially those who have been marginalised – to achieve well-being in their preferred ways; through the development and application of appropriate technologies, person-centred systems and evidence-based policies and laws, that empower users and those supporting them". The institute provides an unparalleled interdisciplinary environment, working across disciplines, sectors, and the supply chain; with policy-makers, industry, government, civil society, United Nations agencies, and particularly users. As a user-centred, systems-focused institute, which aims to support the development and application of technologies, person-centred systems, and evidence-based policies and laws, the ALL Institute is uniquely positioned to facilitate the development of systems and policies that can promote equitable provision of assistive technology.

4. How Can We Improve Delivery of Ireland's International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action?

As Ireland was one of the countries that sponsored the adoption of the Assistive Product List at the World Health Assembly 2016; we now call on Ireland to follow through on this commitment by promoting the use of assistive technology in poorly resourced countries by: (1) supporting the development of national assistive technology policies and systems; (2) supporting research to develop and implement assistive technology policies and systems; (3) supporting collaboration between Irish-based and international partners (North and South) involved in developing assistive technology policies and systems; and (4) supporting postgraduate study for international students in this area.

[2] ALL (Assisting Living and Learning) Institute, Maynooth University: www.maynoothuniversity.ie/all-institute

References

Appleton-Dyer, S., & Field, A. (2014). *Understanding the factors that contribute to social exclusion of disabled people*. Retrieved from https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/understanding-the-factors-that-lead-to-social-exclusion-of-disabled-people/

ALL (Assisting Living and Learning) Institute. (n.d.). *How we define what we do*. Retrieved from

Boot, F. H., Dinsmore, J., Khasnabis, C., & MacLachlan, M. (2017). Intellectual disability and assistive technology: Opening the GATE wider. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *5*(10), 1-4. DOI: 10.3389/fpubh.2017.00010

Desmond, D., Layton, N., Bentley, J., Boot, F. H., Borg, J., Dhungana, B. M., . . . Scherer, M. J. (2018). Assistive technology and people: A position paper from the first global research, innovation and education on assistive technology (GREAT) summit. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, *13*(5), 437-444. DOI: 10.1080/17483107.2018.1471169

de Witte, L., Steel, E., Gupta, S., Ramos, V. D., & Roentgen, U. (2018). Assistive technology provision: Towards an international framework for assuring availability and accessibility of affordable high-quality assistive technology. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, *13*(5), 467-472. DOI: 10.1080/17483107.2018.1470264

International Labour Organization (ILO) & Irish Aid. (2015). *Reporting on disability: Guidelines for the media.* Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_127002.pdf

MacLachlan, M. (2018a). Access to assistive technology, systems thinking, and market shaping: A response to Durocher et al. *Ethics & Behavior*, 1-5. DOI: 10.1080/10508422.2018.1447382

MacLachlan, M. (2018b). China, assistive technology and market shaping re Rise of a new superpower: health and China's global trade ambitions. *BMJ*, *360*. DOI: 10.1136/bmj.k595

MacLachlan, M., Banes, D., Bell, D., Borg, J., Donnelly, B., Fembek, M., . . . Hooks, H. (2018). Assistive technology policy: A position paper from the first global research, innovation, and education on assistive technology (GREAT) summit. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, *13*(5), 454-466. DOI: 10.1080/17483107.2018.1468496

MacLachlan, M., & Scherer, M. J. (2018). Systems thinking for assistive technology: A commentary on the GREAT summit. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, *13*(5), 492-496. DOI: 10.1080/17483107.2018.1472306

Marasinghe, K., Lapitan, J., & Ross, A. (2015). Assistive technologies for ageing populations in six low-income and middle-income countries: A systematic review. *BMJ Innovations*, *1*(4), 182-195. DOI: 10.1136/bmjinnov-2015-000065

Owuor, J., Larkan, F., & MacLachlan, M. (2017). Leaving no-one behind: Using assistive technology to enhance community living for people with intellectual disability. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, *12*(5), 426-428. DOI: 10.1080/17483107.2017.1312572

Smith, E. M., Gowran, R. J., Mannan, H., Donnelly, B., Alvarez, L., Bell, D., . . . Wu, S. (2018). Enabling appropriate personnel skill-mix for progressive realization of equitable access to assistive technology. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, *13*(5), 445-453. DOI: 10.1080/17483107.2018.1470683

Smith, R. O., Scherer, M. J., Cooper, R., Bell, D., Hobbs, D. A., Pettersson, C., . . . Bauer, S. (2018). Assistive technology products: A position paper from the first global research, innovation, and education on assistive technology (GREAT) summit. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, *13*(5), 473-485. DOI: 10.1080/17483107.2018.1473895

Tebbutt, E., Brodmann, R., Borg, J., MacLachlan, M., Khasnabis, C., & Horvath, R. (2016). Assistive products and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). *Globalization and Health*, *12*(79), 1-6. DOI: 10.1186/s12992-016-0220-6

United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol.* Retrieved from http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf

United Nations. (2016). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016.* Retrieved from https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/#sdg-goals

World Health Organization (WHO). (2015). *WHO global disability action plan 2014–2021: Better health for all people with disability*. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/disabilities/actionplan/en/

World Health Organization (WHO). (2016). *Priority assistive products list: Improving access to assistive technology for everyone, everywhere.* Retrieved from http://www.who.int/phi/implementation/assistive_technology/low_res_english.pdf

World Health Organization (WHO). (2018a). *Disability and health.* Retrieved from http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health

World Health Organization (WHO). (2018b). *Assistive technology.* Retrieved from http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/assistive-technology

World Health Organization (WHO), & World Bank. (2011). *World Report on Disability.* Retrieved from http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/