Sustainable Development: The Promise of Technology



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Disability is one aspect of the diversity within the human family. Everyone will experience some degree of disability within their lifetime. Over recent decades a paradigm shift has occurred in our understanding of disability and how we address it, with a move from a medical model to a human rights-based social model.

This paradigm shift has contributed to an acceleration of the pace of international developments, culminating in the global adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which came into force in May 2008. For the first time, the Convention explicitly recognized and outlined the human rights of persons with disabilities, whether civil, cultural, political, social or economic.

Three years later came the joint World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank 2011 World report on disability

, which estimated that 15% of the world's population, more than a billion people, experience some form of disability. And these figures are expected to rise in the future due to aging of the population and the increase in chronic health conditions and road traffic crashes, as well as natural disasters and conflicts.

It is impossible to imagine any successful sustainable development endeavours without the active and full inclusion of people with disabilities. Without their empowering and mainstreaming within all development agendas, it is doubtful that current or future global development goals will be achieved. Assistive technology is one of the means of making this happen. Rapidly developing technology has changed the way people with disability can access entertainment, work, communication and basic information seeking.

The theme of this year's International Day of Persons with Disabilities, marked on 3 December, is "Sustainable Development: The Promise of Technology". The theme focuses on the role of technology as a way to break down barriers for people with disability and how devices are becoming faster, cheaper and more accessible.

In recognition of its importance, WHO is launching the Global Cooperation on Assistive Health Technology (GATE) programme in partnership with United Nations (UN) agencies, international organizations, professional organizations, academia and organizations for people with disabilities.

This initiative is in line with the second objective of the WHO global disability action plan 2014–2021: Better health for all people with disability

, which is "to strengthen and extend rehabilitation, habilitation, assistive technology, assistance and support services, and community-based rehabilitation".

On this year's International Day of Persons with Disabilities, WHO is renewing its commitment to continue to work constructively with governments for inclusion and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities at all levels.

For more information:

International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2014

Global Cooperation on Assistive Health Technology (GATE)

WHO global disability action plan 2014–2021: Better health for all people with disability

World report on disability

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