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Bridging the GAP

Bridging the Gap II

The Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities

A Compilation of Implemented Activities and Identified Best Practices 2018-2020

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Table of contents

FOREWORD **4**

ACRONYMS **6**

1. Introduction **7**

2. Overview: BtG-II´s work to include girls and women with disabilities **9**

Building local capacity to work with girls and women with disabilities 9

Including the needs of girls and women in activities 12

Supporting specific activities for girls and women with disabilities 17

Developing knowledge products 19

Creating awareness 22

3. Identified best practices for the inclusion of girls and women with disabilities **26**

At the design phase: Explicitly mentioning and including girls and women with disabilities in documents 26

During implementation: Adapting interventions to the needs and interests of women and girls with disabilities 28

Visibility: Creating diverse opportunities for girls and women with disabilities to be participants and their needs heard 30

Capacity building: Strengthening organizations to build commitment and know-how to work with girls and women with disabilities 32

Synergies: Bringing together diverse stakeholders can enable greater results than working with them separately 35

Challenges: Including women and girls with disabilities does not come without obstacles 37

4. Conclusion **41**

FOREWORD

Over the last decade, the widespread concept of “intersectionality” succeeded in enlightening a crucial issue: the multidimensionality of inequality. Certainly, inequality should not be understood as a static factor, but rather as a cumulative process of different drivers of exclusion (social, territorial, ethnical, gender, disability, etc.) that may worsen the conditions and limit the opportunities of certain groups of people. Women and girls with disabilities are a clear example of the multidimensional nature of inequality.

Women and girls with disabilities worldwide suffer from gender-based violence – including rape, sexual assault, and harassment – exclusion from school or workplaces, and limited access to caregiving and counselling at higher rates than others. The covid-19 pandemic’s outbreak has been further exacerbating their exclusion and marginalization, with several reports pointing to a disturbing increase of these violations of essential human rights. Women and girls with disabilities are more isolated than ever before in recent times.

The marginalization and endangerment of their rights, as well as the exposure to multiple forms of discrimination, is alas is not anymore an opinion, nor an argument to be proved true: it is a distressing reality certified in multiple researches and analysis.

Reverting this alarming and unsettling trend is not only a matter of human rights and a moral compass. It is also a question of collective responsibility when globally, as stressed in the

report, 20% of women live with a disability. The protection and promotion of their rights shall be at the center of the international development agenda. The global framework provided by the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, pay attention to ensuring that gender equality is a cross-cutting principle applicable to any action. So does the Spanish Public Administration's policy framework and most specifically FIIAPP's, which recently approved its first ever Gender Equality Plan. But a step further is needed: including women and girls with disabilities in these processes is unavoidable to ensure that no one is actually left behind. Or even more: that we reach the furthest behind, now more than ever.

This report from project Bridging the Gap II, an initiative funded by the European Union and coordinated by FIIAPP, sheds light on good practices of women and girls with disabilities' inclusion worth replicating and expanding. The goal is to funnel international cooperation's efforts towards the fight against the marginalization of this group, and the report – a product made by women, with women and for women – is a superb tool to spearhead action for the achievement of this goal.

I am grateful to Cristina López Mahyer and the rest of the research team, as well to Bridging the Gap's partnership, for the dedication and commitment to this work. Let's make sure these practices and examples are well embedded in our daily work as international development practitioners, paving together the path to full inclusion.

Peggy Martinello

Head of Unit Public Administration and Social Affairs
FIIAPP

ACRONYMS

ADA: Austrian Development Agency

AECID: Spanish Agency for Development and International Cooperation

BtG-II: Bridging the Gap II

CBM: Christian Blind Mission

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CRPD: Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

DP: Development Practitioners

EDD: European Disability Days

EDF: European Disability Forum

ENAPPD: Ethiopian National Association of Persons with Physical Disabilities

ENDAN: Ethiopian National Disability Action Network

EU: European Union

FEAPD: Federation of Ethiopian Associations of Persons with Disabilities

FIIAPP: International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies

IDA: International Disability Alliance

IDDC: International Disability and Development Consortium

NGI: National Government Institutions

OPD: Organizations of People with Disabilities

PAP: Poverty Alleviation Project

PDCO: Physical Disability Challenges Organization

PNDES: Plan National de Développement Économique et Social

SAA: Social Analysis and Action

SG – CPDs: Secretaries General of State Councils of Persons with Disabilities

SWEEP: Water for Food Security, Women's Empowerment and Environmental Protection

UNAFEHB: National Union of Organizations for the Promotion of Women with Disabilities, Burkina Faso

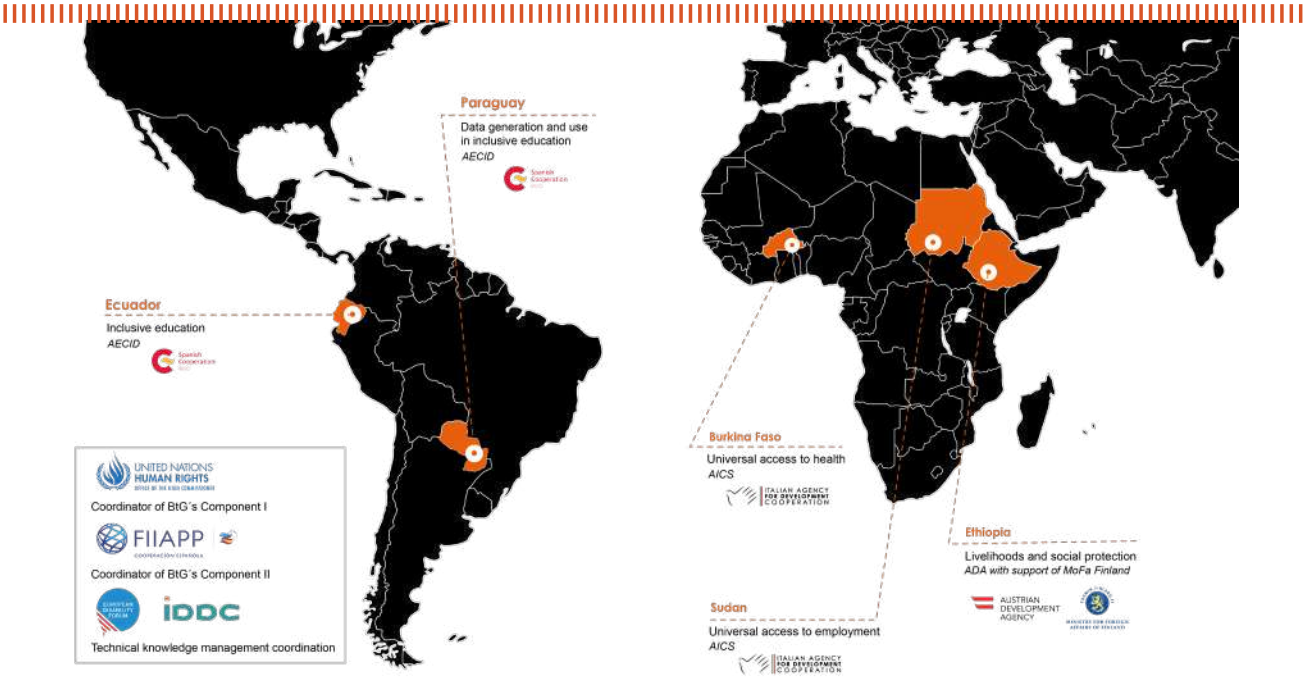
VSLA: Village Saving and Loan Association

1. Introduction

It is well known that women have higher chances than men to live with a disability, and when they do, they face different and numerous obstacles to live to their full potential, and to enjoy all their rights.[1] In fact, 1 in 5 women worldwide live with a disability (19.2%) compared to 11% of men, and are at a higher risk of gender-based violence, sexual abuse and domestic violence. Furthermore, according to diverse studies[2], women with disabilities suffer from:

- Double discrimination
- Low levels of education
- Limited access to employment
- Inadequate and insufficient access and offer of health services
- Invisibility in decision-making processes

Bridging the Gap II works in five different countries (Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Paraguay and Sudan), as well as at the global level, to improve the lives of people with disabilities in all these areas. In each partner country, the focus of the work in a specific thematic area (see map bellow), and gender is considered a cross-cutting issue for all of them.



1 Strategy. The Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities. Towards Full and Effective Participation and Gender Equality UN Women. 2018

2 Gender and Disability Mainstreaming Training Manual. GIZ, BMZ. 2013

Bridging the Gap II – Inclusive Policies and Services for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities- (BtG-II, or the Project) is an initiative funded by the European Union aiming to the socio-economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries. It is implemented by a consortium coordinated by FIIAPP – Spanish Cooperation and composed by the Austrian Development Agency, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, the Spanish Agency for Development and Cooperation, the European Disability Forum, the International Disability and Development Consortium and, as observers, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

BtG-II considers gender a “cross-cutting component” throughout its action, both in the participating countries and at global level. Since the beginning of the implementation phase, several activities have been conducted in order to:

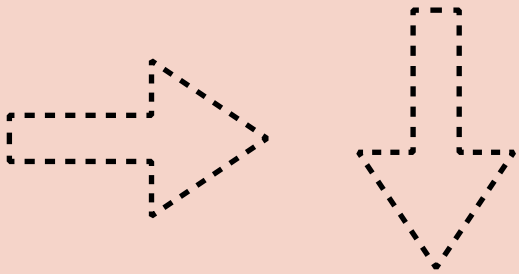
- Increase women with disabilities’ leadership, recognition and participation in decisions that affect their lives;
- Increase economic participation and empowerment by ensuring their access to decent work and opportunities;
- Increase participation in peace and humanitarian response;
- Ensure that women and girls with disabilities have the capacity to make choices;
- Ensure women and girls with disabilities have equal access to both primary education and vocational education and training;
- Challenge social norms that create discrimination and perpetuate prejudices.

In this framework, BtG-II analyses, interacts with and influences international and national policies, programs and experiences aimed at removing barriers to the economic and social empowerment of women and girls with disabilities. The Project supports the promotion of affirmative action measures for the development, advancement and empowerment of women with disabilities, the creation of organizations of women with disabilities and their inclusion in wider networks, as well as the carrying on of specific researches on the situation of women and girls with disabilities.

The objective of the present document is to collect, summarize and share the interventions within BtG-II scope which have taken girls and women with disabilities into account, together with those activities designed explicitly to support them. As a result of this capitalization work, the knowledge and experiences created by BtG-II´s activities are not lost, and the good practices identified can be replicated and perfected by development practitioners.

2. Overview: BtG-II´s work to include girls and women with disabilities

Bridging the Gap II has as its core the inclusion of all people with disabilities, and it understands that to achieve that, it has to explicitly know the reality and needs of girls and women with disabilities. Therefore, working with a gender perspective is considered a natural and efficient way of achieving the Project´s goals. It applies the twin-track approach: (a) mainstreaming a gender perspective and the rights of women/girls with disabilities of all ages, (b) initiatives targeting women/girls with disabilities.



Women and girls with disabilities are considered in all activities

Specific activities are designed for women and girls with disabilities

Building local capacity to work with girls and women with disabilities

Bridging the Gap II has provided capacity building on how to mainstream gender when working on disabilities, to its three main allies: National Government Institutions (NGI), Organizations of People with Disabilities (OPD), and Development Practitioners (DP). These trainings have taken into consideration the nature of the work of the attendees, their baseline understanding on the topic, and the role they can play to include women and girls with disabilities in different aspects. To national government institution and development practitioners, the main topic of the trainings has been the inclusion of disability in their work. The needs of girls and women with disabilities were included as a key element to take into account when mainstreaming disabilities.

OPDs also benefit from capacity building on working with girls and women with disabilities. Many of these organizations are represented mostly by men, have few women in leadership positions, or women members do not have the same opportunities to get training and visibility. In this sense, in **Ethiopia** BtG-II supported the **capacity assessment of different OPDs** through the organization Humentum. The analysis revealed a need for guidance on gender mainstreaming in terms of policies and program intervention. Thus, BtG-II **has provided two OPDs with gender specific grants to develop** their gender mainstreaming manuals and training materials: to the Ethiopian National Association of Persons with Physical Disabilities (ENAPPD), and the Ethiopian National Disability Action Network (ENDAN)[3]. In fact, in Ethiopia all sensitization trainings conducted by BtG-II have included a session on gender and disability, communicating the project focus on gender and on empowering girls and women with disabilities as one of its cross-cutting issues. To this end, most trainings include an exercise which recreates a day in the life of a woman with disabilities, to create awareness on the specific obstacles and needs she would face. Overall, in Ethiopia BtG-II has facilitated more than 200 staff from development partners, plus 145 government staffs in the livelihood and social protection sectors receive training on gender and disabilities. Additionally, FEAPD (Federation of Ethiopian Associations of Persons with Disabilities) organized a one-day training on gender mainstreaming for 29 participants, including internal staff, its member associations and government directors from gender mainstreaming directorates at Addis Ababa.

In the same direction, in **Sudan** BtG-II facilitated capacity building sessions for **Secretaries General of State Councils of Persons with Disabilities (SG - CPDs)**, organized by the National Council for Persons with Disabilities **(NCPD)** in 18 states. The objective was to provide relevant knowledge and skills required to mainstream disability in policy-making, budgeting and programming, in their respective departments and divisions, and the CRPD Standards regarding the right to employment. The sessions also included a focus on mainstreaming gender equality in programming.

In **Burkina Faso**, one of Bridging the Gap's subgrants supports access to basic healthcare services to women with disabilities throughout the country, for which it has trained the staff of 30 hospitals and clinics in Ouagadougou on how to include them in their medical plans. The activity has focused on the importance of including the final beneficiaries in the decision-making process, as a key pillar for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their specific needs. It also strengthened 14 organizations working with women and girls with disabilities, by providing training on project management, funding, writing proposals and such. At least one woman with disabilities was able to submit a project for official funding after this training. Moreover, after said capacity building efforts, these organizations representing women and girls with disabilities are taking part in relevant decision-making activities. For in-

3 Work with other OPDs was on hold at the moment of this report due to COVID-19.

stance, they have become part of the validating group of the National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disability and its upcoming Action Plan, receiving additional training to this end.

At **Global** level, BtG-II organized webinars on the main topics of work of the Project, such as inclusive education, social protection, and access to health, to strengthen capacity of development practitioners (for instance: agencies, EU delegations), national institutions of the partner countries, and national organisations of persons with disabilities. Given that gender is a cross-cutting issue, three of these sessions were specifically on women and girls with disabilities, each in one of the three languages spoken in the five countries covered by the Project: English, French and Spanish. Mary Keogh (English session), CBM International Director at Disability Inclusive Development Initiative, talked about international and national policies and programs aimed at removing barriers to the economic and social empowerment of women and girls with disabilities. Sophie Pecourt (French session), from the project «Making it Work » of Humanity & Inclusion, analyzed the economic Independence of women and girls with disabilities, in the scope of the 2030 Agenda. Finally, Silvia Quan (Spanish session), independent expert on the rights of people with disabilities, talked about the relevance of guaranteeing the participation of girls and women with disabilities in society and in feminist movements, among other. These webinars are available in this link.

Country	Capacity building activities
Global	Three webinars on girls and women with disabilities, with different speakers, in English, French and Spanish.
Burkina Faso	Training to organizations of women with disabilities on project planning and management, including logical framework, monitoring and evaluation, reporting. Training on the Importance of the inclusion of the final beneficiaries in decision-making processes.

Country	Capacity building activities
Ethiopia	Strengthening the capacity of the Federation of Ethiopian National Associations of Persons with Disabilities (FENAPD) (recently renamed as FEAPD) and its member associations in CRPD and SDGs in relation to national legal instruments, **training on Gender Mainstreaming**, training on international and National Laws and Legal Instruments on Disability, as well as training on advocacy and negotiation skills.
	One day training on Gender Mainstreaming for 29 participants from FENAPD, its member associations and government ministries directors from gender mainstreaming directorates at Addis Ababa.
	Capacity assessment of nine BtG-II grant beneficiaries, with a specific emphasis on gender mainstreaming at the organizational level. Two OPDs have already received gender mainstreaming training support.
Sudan	Training to the Secretaries General of the State Councils of People with Disabilities, with focus on mainstreaming gender equality.

Including the needs of girls and women in activities

Bridging the Gap II works for all people with disabilities, understanding they are not a homogeneous group. Among other segmentations, taking into account gender differences is essential to design and implement efficient and effective activities. Therefore, BtG-II makes an effort to ensure that girls and women´s needs and specific realities are taken into consideration in all the actions it supports. Trainings on gender mainstreaming, as mentioned in the above section, are essential to achieve this.

For instance, BtG-II in **Ecuador** has supported the development of easy reading educative material, Así Aprendo, aimed for children with intellectual disabilities. The visuals include both girls and boys with disabilities, providing a sense of belonging to all children. Moreover, both men and women with disabilities were part of the group of validators of easy reading,

and special attention was given to avoid spreading the message of overprotection of women with disabilities.

> “The gender component was also taken into account because, within the group (of people with disabilities), women often suffer from overprotection. So, there is a need to keep working in all areas to strengthen the understanding that men and women have the same rights.”
>
> High level staff at FEPAPDEM, Ecuador

In **Burkina Faso**, one of the activities BtG-II supports is the harmonization of the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Persons with Disability with the National Socio-Economic Development Plan[4], the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Although the National Strategy encompasses all aspects of inclusion, it is worth mentioning the promotion of Art 25 “Access to Health”, which is one of the most felt needs by persons with disability in the country. In this sense, the National Union of Organizations for the Promotion of Women with Disabilities (UNAFEHB), which is committed to promote the inclusion of girls and women with disabilities in development projects, giving priority to health, social protection and the fight against violence, organized two workshops to train young law students on the CRPD.

In **Paraguay**, BtG-II has strengthened the National Action Plan on the Rights of People with Disabilities. The Plan, which was designed with no monitoring mechanisms, has now an extensive list of indicators, including some specifically on girls and women with disabilities. For instance, to monitor the inclusion of women with disabilities in decision making positions, the Plan will monitor the “number of participatory agencies at national and municipal level, in which women with disabilities participate”; it includes disaggregation by sex, age, type of disability, type of organization, and type of position. The Plan also includes an indicator on the percentage of national budget assigned to, and executed by public institutions working against the abuse and mistreatment of people with disabilities, disaggregated by sex, and it will measure the number of public programs to attend women which have been adapted for women with disabilities.

4 Plan National de Développement Économique et Social (PNDES)

> “Including indicators on women and girls in the National Plan on People with Disabilities is positive and important, as it will allow us to keep improving and building in this direction. Also, as a woman with a disability, it has been important that the issues of violence, ill-treatment and abandonment have been addressed, as the life quality of men and women are quite different.”
>
> Woman with disability, participant in BtG-II Paraguay’s activities

BtG-II also supported the development of a matrix to gather information on OPDs and civil society organizations working on disability in **Paraguay**, which includes two questions about organizations working on women and girls with disabilities. This matrix was officially approved by the national authority on disability, and is meant to be used to identify first, and strengthen later, those organizations working on disability, to enable them to participate and have influence in the elaboration of policies.

Additionally, BtG-II has supported **Paraguay** in developing a monitoring methodology on the public response to the sanitary emergency of COVID-19 and its consideration of people with disabilities. In this work, BtG-II’s support suggests explicitly the need to work with public agencies, human rights organizations, and civil society dedicated to eliminate gender-based violence, to adapt their services to women and girls with disabilities, by including accessible campaigns, and effective mechanisms to identify women and girls with disabilities at risk of, or suffering abuse and violence during the pandemic.

In **Sudan**, BtG-II facilitated the organization of seven capacity-building sessions by the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPD), which involved staff from ministries of Labour, Welfare, Education, OPDs, National Bureau of Statistics, National Register, public offices with data collection duties, and private sector representatives. The general objective was to enhance capacity of the NCPD and institutional counterparts, to strengthen organizations of people with disabilities, and to train institutions on data collection and private sector involvement. Within these sessions, the NCPD organized a workshop for women and girls with disabilities in rural areas on creation and management of Women Cooperatives.

Gender is mainstreamed in all four grants BtG-II has awarded in **Sudan** to strengthen the employment of people with disabilities. The grants consider women and girls with disabilities’ rights during both project design and implementation, and they include gender-sensitive indicators. Indeed, implementing organisations took into account women’s specific

needs, organising transportation to training venues, and tailoring schedules to suit female participants. All the organisations tried to ensure equal participation of men and women with disabilities in trainings, with at least 50% of female participants. Furthermore, one of the four grants was fully designed to answer to the needs of women with disabilities, the “Equal Access to Employment for Women with Disabilities” project, executed by the Physical Disability Challenges Organization (PDCO). It provided trainings for women with disabilities for the development of productive activities related to processing agricultural-dairy products and to micro-craftsmanship. It also trained on management and sustainability of small business projects. This activity was accompanied by awareness campaigns towards the right to work for women with disabilities. PDCO also carries out awareness campaigns to reduce sexual violence and harassment, and provides legal aid to gender-based violence survivors.

In **Ethiopia**, BtG- II has provided technical support to the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), project implementing partner in the country, by reviewing general proposals and existing projects to make them more gender and disability sensitive. BtG-II also supports CARE’s SWEEP project, “Water for Food Security, Women’s Empowerment and Environmental Protection”. Thanks to the Project’s intervention, an average of 15% of the groups‘ members of around 25 women being trained as leaders in the sector are now women with disabilities.

> “Until Bridging the Gap came in, we had no women with disabilities involved in our activities. Thanks to the training received we have now included some of them in the groups and we hope to expand the number soon.”
>
> CARE Ethiopia’s SWEEP project Senior Advisor - WASH Policy and Communications

Country	Activities with gender perspective
Burkina Faso	Three grants for OPDs to gain further operational experience and confidence. Call for proposals consisted of three lots concerning: a) promotion of CRPD and local legislation at local level, b) promotion of access to health for women and with disability (developed in next section) c) evaluation of accessibility to health facilities for persons with disability in Ouagadougou.
Ecuador	Así Aprendo has become the very first educative materials in Easy Reading for children with intellectual disabilities, which was reviewed with a gender lens.
Ethiopia	Supported ADA to strengthen the inclusion of girls and women with disability in its project and activity documents.
	Supported CARE to include women with disabilities in its interventions.
Paraguay	Included a list of indicators, with specific mention of girls and women with disabilities, in the National Plan on People with Disabilities.
	An identification matrix of OPDs at national level includes specific questions on organizations working with girls and women with disabilities.
Sudan	Enhanced capacity of the National Council of Persons with Disabilities and the Ministry of Welfare to collect disaggregated data, including awareness sessions on the rights of women with disabilities.
	Four grants to strengthen employment of people with disabilities, which included gender analysis, sex disaggregated data, and adaptation of trainings to women´s needs and schedules. One of the four grants was directed entirely to support women with disabilities´ employment.

Supporting specific activities for girls and women with disabilities

BtG-II understands that to ensure the inclusion of girls and women with disabilities it is necessary to work with them in their specific needs and interests. Thus, the Project includes activities designed exclusively for them. Aspects such as girls and women's rights, developing productive skills and knowledge, strengthening their confidence and leadership skills, working on safety and gender-based violence, are worked with girls and women with disabilities through OPDs.

In **Ethiopia**, BtG-II supported the Leadership Skills Program for Women with Disabilities: The essence and philosophy of disability and women movements". The purpose of the training is to empower selected women with various impairments to grow into leadership roles either within OPDs, or in any other agency of their engagement. It is a small but targeted intervention with the aim of increasing the number of women with disabilities in leadership positions in a context where the current numbers, both within OPD management and in the society in general, is very small. The capacity building programme is designed to increase knowledge in selected topics, to provide exposure to different experiences, and to increase self-confidence. The topics include, among others, "the Essence and Philosophy of Disability and the Women's Movement", "The UNCRPD principles, articles, monitoring mechanisms and reporting", "Introduction to Reproductive Health Rights", "Leadership and the Role of Women with Disabilities in Decision Making", "Self, Advocacy and Lobbying".

BtG-II has also supported CARE´s VSLA groups (Village Saving and Loan Association) in Ethiopia to be more disability inclusive. A total of 110 women with disabilities are now members of these groups in the woredas (districts) of West and East Belesa (Amhara region). Among them, three women with disabilities have received material and training support to start tailoring business, and six women (and four men) have opened up a shower service. However, there are limitations in skills, as well as in provision of assistive devices, to enable inclusion of persons with visual and hearing impairments in these VSLA groups.

In **Sudan**, BtG-II has enabled the development of Vocational Training Workshops for Women with Disabilities in Kordofan States. Kordofan locations have been chosen consequentially to the training held for the Secretaries Generals, when the participants agreed on supporting Women OPDs initiatives as a priority due to the dire conditions they face. Beneficiaries were selected by the state councils together with the local OPDs and women's associations, ensuring different ages and different backgrounds (rural-urban, literate-illiterate, family context-no family context).Trainings were tailored on the specific needs and interest raised by consultations with beneficiaries, plus taking into consideration market availability of raw materials and of specialized trainers. Two workshops focused on production of leather goods in North and West Kordofan, and one on production of detergent, conducted in South Kordo-

fan. As a result, **approximately 100 women with disabilities were equipped with basic vocational skills, knowledge, and the right attitude for starting their own business**. An important component of the trainings was raising awareness on disability rights, and on the role of women in community development.

> “The project made me learn and recognise my abilities as a woman with a physical disability. It helped me psychologically and changed many things that I was not able to do but now I can do, using my hands. People now know that a woman with disability can also be productive, work and help the community.”
>
> Participant to an Equal Access to Employment for Women with Disability grant, BtG-II Sudan

Following a similar structure, BtG-II together with the NCPD, identified women with disabilities living in rural areas in Gedaref State as a group that would greatly benefit from training on agricultural skills and micro-business management. Following a successful monitoring visit, the Project supported a second phase aiming to provide sustainability to the achievements obtained during the previous training, building capacity this time on practical applications to form and manage cooperative associations, which can provide economic independence, empowerment and social inclusion to rural women with disabilities. Many women with disabilities who participated in the capacity-building workshops succeeded lately in getting funding from the State Ministry of Social Welfare and other local sources of finance to establish their own businesses.

In **Burkina Faso**, the project supported activities on social protection (rights and health services) to girls and women with disabilities in the city of Ouagadougou and surroundings, facilitating girls and women’s access to health services, HIV and uterine cancer testing, and the fight against violence. This is done together with the Ministry of Health, but also through the grant awarded to the Women Federation UNAFEBH. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 crisis, this activity could not continue. However, UNAFEBH and BtG-II collaborated in the distribution of masks and the dissemination of information on sanitary measures to prevent being infected by the virus. Regarding the distribution of masks, Tigoung Nomna, one of UNAFEHB’s associates lead by a woman with disabilities, was supported to elaborate masks using locally hand woven tissue called Danfani.

Country	Activities for girls and women with disabilities
Burkina Faso	Social Protection (Rights and Health Services) to girls and women with disabilities in the city of Ouagadougou and surroundings./ COVID-19 related activities
Ethiopia	Leadership Skills Program for Women with Disabilities: The essence and philosophy of disability and women movements.
	CARE VSLA groups include now women with disabilities.
Sudan	Vocational Training workshop for Women with Disabilities in Kordofan States.
	Follow up of Training activities in Rural Development and Co-operative Management for the organization of Women with Disabilities in Gedaref State.

Developing knowledge products

A way to create and maintain knowledge on how to include and work with girls and women with disabilities, is by developing manuals and other material, which can be used by local governments, OPDs staff, trainers of trainers, national and international development organizations, and women and girls with disabilities themselves, among others. In this sense, BtG-II has facilitated the development of diverse material, both at local and global levels.

BtG-II has produced both specific material regarding girls and women with disabilities, as well as it has included their needs and realities in other general products. For instance, at global level, 90% of knowledge pieces produced mention girls and women with disabilities, creating awareness and showing that BtG-II has gender mainstreaming as a core value. Additionally, it has developed two specific global documents, "**Contribution to the European Commission's consultation for the next Gender Equality Action Plan**" and the current document. The first one establishes that "The EU Gender Action Plan II (GAPII), though paying attention to multiple discrimination and intersectional barriers, does not systematically address the rights of women/girls with disabilities. Bringing a strong disability perspective in the next GAP will ensure consistency of EU's action between the GAP and EU's commitment to disability inclusion driven from EU's and all EU member states' ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD").

BtG-II RECOMMENDATIONS TO EU GENDER ACTION PLAN

- Ensure accessible involvement of women/girls with disabilities and their representative organizations at all stages (design, implementation and monitoring of the GAP; programming, implementation and monitoring of projects/programmes) and at all levels (regional and country levels). When including women/girls with disabilities, ensure their perspectives are given due weight and included.

- Provide adequate resources and funding to ensure full accessibility of processes and information for women/girls with disabilities, including reasonable accommodation.

- Collect and disaggregate data by gender, age and disability and provide systematic support to partner countries and EU delegations overseas, also by making use of the indicators developed under component I of Bridging the Gap.

- At country level, mainstream an intersectional analysis and support the design and implementation of policies and initiatives that do not adversely impact women/girls with disabilities, including needs and risk assessments.

- Strengthen internal capacities of gender focal points in EU delegations and headquarters, to ensure that all aspects and stages of design, implementation and monitoring of initiatives are disability-inclusive and accessible for women/girls with disabilities.

- Recognize women/girls with disabilities as experts and leaders, support the empowerment of women/girls with disabilities and the capacity development of their organizations for instance by providing dedicated funding.

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At country level, BtG-II has worked closely with CARE in **Ethiopia** to mainstream disability in its working manuals, creating awareness of the specific needs of girls and women with disabilities. Indeed, BtG-II supported the development of CARE questionnaire on gender and vulnerable groups for baseline assessment in SWEEP project in Ethiopia. Building on this collaboration, BtG-II and CARE agreed to undertake the work of disability mainstreaming of the Village Savings and Loan Associations Program Guide (Field Operations Manual), which at the time of this report was under BtG-II's revision. The guidelines are used by CARE staffs globally and this intervention aims at ensuring that persons with disabilities are integrated in savings groups. Increasingly, VSLA is being viewed as a platform or foundation upon which broader programs focused on women and girls' empowerment can be built. As CARE Ethiopia is taking steps to increase disability inclusion in all its programmes, the disability mainstreaming of these guidelines will serve as one supportive measure to make sure women and girls with disabilities equally start benefitting from VSLA. Additionally, BtG-II has worked with CARE in its Social Analysis and Action (SAA): Facilitators Manual, in Amharic. This is one of the methodologies CARE uses in order to influence social change in communities by facilitating dialogues. The training manual outline makes it clear that the discussion will have disability included. For instance, with the objective of breaking negative stereotypes, the manual includes the story of a loving father and his daughter, who has a disability. The father sends her to school and treats her equally to her siblings. It also shows the father refusing to marry his daughter underage, condemning child marriage. Other CARE manuals that are now including people with disabilities in general, and mention girls and women with disabil-

ities in particular, are CARE Rural WASH Management Training Manual, which contains a user's data collection format with disaggregation by sex and disability; Checklist for Disability Inclusion in CARE SWEEP WASH project Cycle, which helps practitioners include disability and to understand the different needs of men and women with and without disabilities.

Furthermore, BtG-II supported the elaboration of the call for action for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Government policies and programs in Ethiopia (FEAPD, 2020). The brief makes an appealing case of studies that prove that women with disabilities are marginalized, starting from their childhood when they are denied access to school, which triggers a cycle of entrapment and poverty, although it overlooks the problematic of violence against girls and women with disability. The Project has also supported the development of FEAPD's Gender Mainstreaming Manual, which was endorsed for use in August 2020. It emphasizes the need to promote the full involvement of women with disabilities in planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of programs. It guides to ensure institutional commitment for making organizational policies, programs and communication materials gender sensitive in order to promote the equality of women and men with disabilities by removing individual, socioeconomic and cultural barriers to full participation. The manual discusses social norms that affect women and girls.

Creating awareness

Bridging the Gap II has worked intensively to create awareness of the specific needs and obstacles girls and women with disabilities face, and the opportunities to include them in development work, enabling them to participate as full rights citizens. It has done these through workshops, events, and communication pieces, among others.

In this sense, at the 2018 European Development Days, BtG-II organized a specific event on the role and visibility of women with disabilities, "**Women on the rise – No one left behind!**", together with Light for the World and the EU Social Protection System Programme. The event presented three different experiences from low-income countries where women with disabilities have become a driving force of sustainable development in their communities and local economies, including in BtG-II's Sudan. The speakers shared their experiences on gender and disability issues based on the different approaches tackled by the three initiatives involved in the session: leadership and entrepreneurship, social protection and access to work and economic empowerment. There was constant interaction between the speakers and the audience to collect inputs and ideas on how everyone can raise awareness among those around them of the contribution that women with disabilities can make to society. BtG-II supported the organization as well as the presence of Akhyar Omar, president of the Organization of Women with Disabilities in Sudan, who gave her testimony and shared it in a blog post for BtG-II and FIIAPP, as well as a radio program on women and

disability broadcasted on Spanish National Radio.

In addition, in the context of the 2018 European Disability and Development Week (EDDW), the European Union, Sightsavers, the European Disability Forum, and Bridging the Gap organized the event "**Women with disabilities: The EU's role in pushing for inclusion in international cooperation**". This event showcased the work the EU conducts on women with disabilities, and how it can push for stronger inclusion in its international work. Participants at the event, which was designed with the support of women with disabilities working in the three organizing institutions, emphasized that ensuring the voices of women in development, peace building and such, is still a challenge, therefore more events like that one are valued. As a result, in the 2019 edition of European Development Days (EDDs), BtG-II enabled the presence in Brussels of Mihret Nigussie Chengerei, acting President of the Federation of Ethiopian National Associations of Persons with Disabilities, as speaker at the session "Making visible the invisible: A disability-inclusive approach for leaving no one behind".

In June 2018, BtG-II organized a Learning Space, '**The European commitment to data collection and use for the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities**', in New York at the COSP11 event (11th Conference of States Parties to the CRPD). Concrete project activities in Paraguay and Ethiopia were presented, serving as a basis for discussion and debate with the audience. Additionally, at BtG-II 2018 Annual Event, one of the round tables organized was on "Mainstreaming gender and disability in inclusive education: the experience of the international cooperation".

Another example of the relevance that BtG-II gives to working with gender perspective is the fact that its Annual Event in 2019 f**ocused on the inclusion of girls and women with disabilities**. The event concentrated on this theme to draw attention on the need to address the situation of women and girls with disabilities worldwide, since laws and policies concerning women have traditionally ignored disability, perpetuating its invisibility and leading to multiple forms of discrimination. The annual event was considered a good time to examine the international policies and experiences aimed at removing obstacles to the economic and social empowerment of women and girls with disabilities, as well as the contribution of the Project to their inclusion. Two global leaders of the movement for the inclusion and empowerment of women with disabilities were invited to give keynote speeches. Ana Peláez, the first woman with disabilities member of the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), talked in a video message about her work, she highlighted good practices developed by Bridging the Gap, and provided recommendations to continue addressing the situation of women and girls with disabilities. Likewise, the President of the International Disability Alliance (IDA), Ana Lucía Arellano, explained how her organization works to include the rights of women with disabilities in broader programmes for gender empowerment, ensuring that the promotion of women with disabilities in leadership development initiatives is taken into account. Additionally, two roundtables explored the topic of the inclusion of women with disabilities in low and middle-income countries, exchanging

experiences to remove barriers to their economic and social inclusion. Guided by the international normative based on the CRPD, panelists from different backgrounds such as development agencies, organizations of persons with disabilities and international organizations, shared knowledge and practices, stimulating debate with the audience and awakening their interest on the topics addressed. Women with disabilities who were invited to the eventwere identified through country teams and national organizations of persons with disabilities, but also based on consultations with global disability organizations (EDF, IDDC and IDA). Feedback on the results of the event was very positive, especially from cooperation practitioners, who admittedly tend to disregard disability when considering gender issues or mainstreaming. OPDs were also satisfied and actually pushed for more on this topic, ultimately leading to this capitalisation work.

In the field, BtG-II has also worked to create awareness and to make women and girls with disabilities visible. **In Sudan,** BtG-II provided awareness sessions at the beginning of every activity, on the rights of women and girls with disabilities specifically, and on the rights-based approach to disability in general. They were designed based on broad consultation with women with disability associations, focusing on the CRPD principles and their application to improve the economic and social condition of women with disabilities in Sudan. The sessions contributed to raise women with disabilities' self-confidence and authority to take decisions.

Additionally, during **International Women's Day,** celebrated on March 8th, Bridging the Gap team participated in the celebrations organized by different organizations. One of the events consisted of a full day celebration at the National Museum of Sudan where project staff and partner OPDs were spreading the message that equality also means inclusion for all. Together with AICS representatives, BtG-II also visited the Shamaa Center and the SOS Children Village, and facilitated that public discussions also referred to the cases of accessibility for persons with disabilities, and early detection and support to mothers of children with disabilities.

In another occasion, during the **validation workshops of the Ten Years Report on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Sudan (2009-2019)**, women with disabilities strongly participated and spoke about the rights guaranteed to them by the CRPD, and the importance of applying all of its clauses to enable women with disabilities to get exercise all their rights.

In **Ethiopia**, during the **International Day of Persons with Disabilities** on December 3rd 2019, BtG-II organized an activity to sensitize all ADA staff on gender and disability, especially in the light of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as barriers to accessing critical services such as reproductive health services. These trainings, which complemented the previously mentioned activities BtG-II carried out reviewing ADA´s documents, strengthened this implementing partner as an ally for the Project in gender mainstreaming. Additionally, **Addis Ababa University Kilinto Campus** asked the BtG-II national coordinator, who has a

physical disability, to motivate active female participation in science departments. It was an opportunity to present a woman with disabilities as a role model for all women. Around 700 students and staff were sensitized during two sessions, creating awareness on the challenges women with disabilities can face to attend university.

In **Burkina Faso**, BtG-II produced a video to raise the voices of Burkinabe women pleading for inclusion of disability, and of their needs, in the agenda of development organizations and local institutions. The video was screened at the Project's 2019 Annual Event as contribution from Burkina Faso. Furthermore, BtG-II supported the production of short stories on the CRPD and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and the economy, currently broadcasted on national radios and available for circulation on WhatsApp. These eight stories included the voices of women and girls with disabilities, making sure their perspective was also shared.

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3. Identified best practices for the inclusion of girls and women with disabilities

BtG-II efforts to include and support girls and women with disabilities have generated practices that are worth replicating in future interventions and summarized in this section.

At the design phase: Explicitly mentioning and including girls and women with disabilities in documents

Acknowledging people with disabilities are not a homogenous group improves intervention results

Girls and women with disabilities must be explicitly mentioned throughout the design process, to ensure that the activities being designed are inclusive, and that partner and implementing organizations take them into account. The efforts to make people with disabilities visible and active agents and beneficiaries of activities, programs and policies, should not be undermined by considering them a homogenous group. Including a gender perspective makes interventions more efficient, as it forces to understand better the target population. As a result, the design will be sharper, guiding to stronger results in implementation.

Indeed, BtG-II activities which explicitly considered women and girls with disabilities showed a stronger engagement with this population, than those mentioning the need to gender mainstream, or to include vulnerable groups in general. In fact, consortium members report against the inclusion of women with disabilities in the project's periodical reports, allowing to follow-up implementation and to execute corrective measures, if any. In this direction, BtG-II country team in Sudan adopted effective measures to ensure gender is mainstreamed at all levels of the project cycle management. The team established the requirement to have equal representation between women and men with disabilities during project activities, especially workshops for capacity-building and trainings. They also coordinated on a daily-basis with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment project funded by AICS. In addition, the team ensures BtG-II representation in gender-related activities, such as the International Women's Day.

Going further, women and girls with disabilities are not a homogenous group either. In this sense, girls and women with intellectual disabilities are rarely part of inclusion activities. Nevertheless, BtG-II in Burkina Faso considered it essential for these girls and women to be part of the distribution of kits against COVID-19, together with awareness activities directed to their families, to ensure these girls´ rights and health are taken care of during the pandemic.

> “The main challenge was that women and girls with disabilities are not homogeneous groups with single aims and needs: it is necessary to take into account their multiple identities in terms of disability, age, ethnicity, social status.”
>
> Technical Advisor for awareness raising sessions, BtG-II Sudan

Setting targets triggers collecting sex disaggregated data, and provides valuable information on the reach of the financed activities

Bridging the Gap II’s log frame includes activities for women and girls, and sets targets to be achieved, in terms of number of activities financed for them, number of staff trained on gender mainstreaming, and such. Establishing targets forces to measure, in other words, to collect sex[5] disaggregated data. These data are essential to understand if the activities are reaching both men and women, boys and girls. If it is the first time measuring how many girls and women are participating in the activities, collecting sex disaggregated data enables to establish a base line.

For instance, at global level, BtG-II established as activity the organization of calls for proposals for women cooperatives/mothers of children with disability, young graduates with disability. Its baseline in 2017 was cero, the set target was two, and by 2020 it had achieved three call for proposals (150%). In the field, the Project established a target of 50 staff from development partners trained in gender and disability inclusion in Ethiopia, with a baseline of cero, and by 2020 it had reached over 400% of the target.

5 Sex disaggregated data is a first step in understanding the diversity of the target population. Efforts should then continue to include gender disaggregated data, going beyond binary classification.

Valuing experience in gender mainstreaming, and in working with girls and women with disabilities in particular, in selection criteria of implementing organizations and professionals, strengthens implementation

Specifying that working on gender, girls and women with disabilities, will provide higher scoring in the selection process of consultants, professionals, and implementing organizations, attracts experienced candidates, or at least it creates awareness on the relevance of taking this population into account during the implementation phase. Whenever possible, women with disabilities should be candidates, making sure that they are aware of open positions.

In this sense, at global level, BtG-II's Communication and Visibility Officer (Project Management Unit Madrid – FIIAPP), and the National Coordinator in Ethiopia (ADA) are women with disabilities. In Burkina Faso, BtG-II works with the local association Tigoung Nomna, which is led by an entrepreneurial woman with disability who has set up a catering service. Her business, which employs women with disabilities, is hired to cover BtG-II's catering needs whenever possible. In Paraguay, BtG-II took into account gender considerations in the selection of candidates for the design of indicators for the National Plan on People with Disabilities. Besides the duty to apply a human rights framework, and the fact that Paraguay has adopted policies on equality and prevention and fight against gender violence, the project included a gender expert and guidelines on gender perspective, provided by AECID, the implementing partner.

During implementation: Adapting interventions to the needs and interests of women and girls with disabilities

Providing sufficient resources and funding to ensure full accessibility for women and girls with disabilities is essential for adequate implementation

Implementation usually requires adapting or adding actions to the original design scheme, as there are unexpected events and elements to take into consideration. In order to achieve this, activities must offer space, both in terms of resources and timing, to implement such modifications and really offer valuable interventions for women and girls with disabilities.

In Ethiopia, training to women with disabilities was provided taken into consideration the diversity of the group. Two trainees were hard of hearing and were assigned a sign language interpreter, and facilitators paced themselves to give time for interpretation. The venue was made accessible to those with physical impairment. The trainings didn't have power point

or other written materials accommodating the visually impaired. When videos were played, facilitators narrated what was shown to make it relatable to all participants. A woman from Somali, spoke a different language than those of the facilitators. Thanks to the available resources, organizers brought in a Somali interpreter the second day and have been availing that service to the participant in all other trainings.

Similarly, in Burkina Faso BtG-II ensured that the diversity of women and girls with disabilities could participate in the activities, by providing assistants for those who needed it, and offering translation into sign language. The translation of documents into Braille was in progress at the time of the elaboration of this report.

Setting the interests of women with disabilities at the heart of interventions facilitates their participation. Then, other activities can be added as secondary, although highly relevant for the objectives of the intervention

To attract the attention of women with disabilities and to ask them to invest time and efforts to participate in activities, they must see value. Thus, first it is necessary to understand their interests and needs, and offer activities around those findings. Once women are at the venue and participating, then other actions can be included if considered relevant to strengthen project results. For instance, in Sudan, addressing practical issues like handcraft and micro-business in vocational trainings attracted participants from remote locations with fewer employment opportunities. The turnout was higher than expected, providing at the same time sessions on human rights approach to disabilities, which might have encountered resistance if addressed as a key component of the trainings.

Supporting unplanned activities requested or organized by women with disabilities strengthens their leadership, empowerment and the ramifications of interventions

As women with disabilities, and OPDs working for and with them, are strengthened, it is a good sign and a desirable result that they come up with new ideas for interventions. In Sudan, the Women Producers Cooperative in Kassala city was created as a direct conse-

quence of BtG-II activities, with 35 women with disabilities coming from both urban and rural localities. Moreover, multiple training sessions were organized under the request of the State Councils of persons with Disabilities aiming to provide vocational and skill training to women with disabilities coming from 39 different localities.

In Burkina Faso, the project supported the inclusion of a committee of blind women and girls as part of the UNAFEHB, which until then had only admitted groups formally established as associations.

Visibility: Creating diverse opportunities for girls and women with disabilities to be participants and their needs heard

Recognising women/girls with disabilities as experts and leaders makes society and themselves, value their social and economic inclusion

Women and girls with disabilities are not only beneficiaries of interventions, but active members in their societies. And if this is not the case, then creating awareness to enable such active participation is essential. How women with disabilities are portrait is therefore relevant.

In this sense and as mentioned above, BtG-II collaborated in the organizations of the event "Women on the rise – No one left behind!" as part of the European Development Days, presenting women with disabilities who have become a driving force of sustainable development in their communities and local economies. Events like this one help change the image of women with disabilities in low-income countries as they are often seen as passive subjects in Europe. However, there are more and more examples of women with disabilities leading their communities, and it is necessary to spread the word about the great contribution they are making to the development of their countries.

In Ethiopia, one of the trainees, who is staff at the Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association, mentioned that she was very excited to have met strong and popular women with disabilities she saw on TV facilitating the trainings. She was impressed by the depth of their technical and facilitation skills. Also in Ethiopia, as mentioned in an above section, BtG-II coordinator, who is a woman with a physical disability, participated at an event at Addis Ababa University to motivate women in general to be part of science departments. It was an opportunity to present a woman with disabilities as a role model for all women.

> BtG-II training has increased my knowledge on legal instruments and how to influence duty bearers. I was most influenced by the different facilitators invited for the sessions: the well-known woman with visual impairment, Yetnebersh Niguse. Rigbe Gebrehawaria, a young female lawyer with a physical disability who currently is the disability inclusion advisor at the US Embassy in Ethiopia; a board member of the Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub; and others who are not involved in the disability inclusion movement but more on gender based violence advocacy, such as the Setaweet (feminist women movement) director Dr. Sehin. I was very excited to have met all these strong and popular women I saw on TV, to see them facilitate the trainings. I was impressed by the depth of their technical and facilitation skills.
>
> Young professional trainee, staff at the Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association. Ethiopia

Understanding local context and identifying key stakeholders enables designing adequate awareness campaigns, which might be the first step for a successful intervention

Working to empower girls and women with disabilities is not always straightforward. Previous steps to prepare key stakeholders, including girls and women with disabilities themselves, might be required to avoid, or soften resistances.

The Sudanese Autism Organization understood during the implementation of project activities that social norms against women and girls with disabilities were undermining their participation in trainings and workshops. They decided to articulate specific messages on the importance of women's economic independence and spread them via radio every week for two months. They also targeted other disability centres in the states of intervention and raised awareness in families and communities on the importance to support women and girls with disabilities to access capacity building and income generating opportunities.

In Burkina Faso, the UNAFEHB invited 30 public and private health service providers to discuss and create awareness on the rights of people with disabilities in matters of reproductive health. Three media (TV, radio and written press) were present, strengthening the reach of this awareness activity to the general public.

Creating awareness on the role and needs of women and girls with disabilities in other thematic events facilitates their inclusion and triggers relevant conversations

To make women with disabilities visible in different spaces and by diverse actors, it is a good practice to include them and their needs in events other than those focused on them. BtG-II has taken advantage of events on development, disability, and other topics, to share knowledge and experiences of women and girls with disabilities.

One clear example has been 2019 BtG-II Annual Event, which besides working on all activities of the Project during the year, had inclusion of girls and women with disabilities as the main thematic focus. As a result, all Project partners and participants at the event were able to learn about the role of girls and women with disabilities in development interventions. Another example is the event "Women with Disabilities: The EU's Role in Pushing for Inclusion in International Cooperation", when the debate was on how to make women with disabilities heard by the international community, finding the right spaces to speak out, network and learn from each other. There was a general agreement on the need of more spaces like the one created by the event, at all levels.

Similarly, BtG-II supported the participation of Mihret Nigussie Chengerei, acting President of the Federation of Ethiopian National Associations of Persons with Disabilities, at the 2019 European Development Days. She shared her experience on the work being carried out to improve the implementation of inclusive policies and services for persons with disabilities in Ethiopia through Bridging the Gap. Her testimony can also be read in the Project´s blog.

Capacity building: Strengthening organizations to build commitment and know-how to work with girls and women with disabilities

Training on disability and gender mainstreaming come hand in hand, and should be continuous. Changing mindsets takes time

It is essential when working on disability inclusion to provide information and know-how to work for and with girls and women with disabilities, since they face double biases (for being women, and having disabilities), plus their own specific struggles.

Acknowledging and accepting that men and women are affected by social norms and gender roles, and willing to change them to create a more equal society, takes time and explicit

conversations about it, which might come with resistance to change from both men and women (with and without disabilities).

In Ethiopia, requested by the World Food Program, BtG-II delivered a training for the main office staffs and sub offices on disability awareness, which included a session on gender and disability. Before the training, staff understood the challenges and discrimination of people with disabilities to be the same for men and women, specially by men participants. Now there is a deeper understanding on the differences, with special attention to gender-based violence. As a result of this training, refugee camps started collecting disability and sex disaggregated data. There was also a sensitivity to make all food collection points accessible after the training, and refugee camp staff started working with OPD partners for referral services, especially for assistive devices.

Supporting the presence of gender and disability focal points in OPDs, partner organizations, and "in house", reinforces execution

Having at least one person dedicated to the inclusion of girls and women with disabilities in everyday activities, strengthens the probability of actually including them, and of doing so correctly. BtG-II has supported the presence of gender specialists in OPDs.

For instance, in Ethiopia, the Federation of Ethiopian Association of Persons with Disabilities had informal initiatives on including a gender perspective, such as bringing more women to leadership positions. Although it had achieved that its president and vice-president were both women (something unprecedented in the history of OPDs in the country), there were no written gender policies in the organization. With the support of BtG-II, FEAPD restructured its program units, and established a dedicated one on women and disabilities, with a gender officer to improve the representation and to advocate the issues of women and girls with disabilities. This has motivated other OPDs to also start thinking about making changes in how they put their priority on women and girls with disabilities within their organizational set up.

Know-how must not be assumed; creating local capacity is essential

Although OPDs and other implementing partners might have been working on gender mainstreaming previously, it is a good practice to assess their understanding on the issue, their specific knowledge on working with girls and women with disabilities, and their established practices. Then, providing a common base on how to move forward when working with women and girls strengthens adequate practices.

In Ethiopia, an assessment of local OPDs institutional capacity was supported, which included the capacity on gender mainstreaming. The results highlighted the strong need OPD´s had for training and support to include girls and women with disabilities, as their knowledge and awareness was found to be limited. Although many staff felt they had good understanding of social inclusion and gender, BtG-II´s training, which was delivered by a woman with disabilities who had experienced all challenges, was in fact considered an eye opener.

> “(In Ethiopia) BtG-II has shifted OPDs´ work from fixing small problems to engaging with bigger issues, such as working on making gender a strategic element of their work, and allying with national and government stakeholders.
>
> High level representative at FEAPD, Ethiopia”

Revising project and activity documents of local organizations to support an adequate inclusion of girls and women with disabilities is valuable, especially in early stages of gender mainstreaming

One way of supporting organizations to work correctly with women and girls with disabilities, is by reviewing their written material on the subject, such as internal policies, project proposals, training material, etc. It is a way of ensuring that the established practices and knowledge products have a human rights approach, and that biases and misconceptions are not unconsciously perpetuated.

For instance, in Ethiopia it was shared with BtG-II staff that bringing change is difficult for an organization which is piloting and learning on gender mainstreaming. Therefore, the first step is to have an agreement to pursue inclusion of girls and women with disabilities in all projects, and to receive the necessary support to do it right and learn.

In Sudan, BtG-II worked with the Poverty Alleviation Project (PAP) and Tadmeen projects

financed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, co-designing an economic empowerment activity for women with disabilities and women in vulnerable situations in the Red Sea State. The cooperation with the PAP managed to amend the project documents with specific referrals to activities targeting persons with disabilities in the eastern states. As result of this collaboration, the Red-Sea council of persons with disabilities selected 10 groups of women with disabilities to participate in trainings on rural skills and income generating activities, facilitated by an experienced local women's organization, under the supervision of PAP's staff. Women with disabilities would be included in the ongoing economic empowerment activities, increasing production and income opportunities for the entire women's association.

Synergies: Bringing together diverse stakeholders can enable greater results than working with them separately

Sitting together OPDs, government agencies, national organizations, and such, facilitates conversations that otherwise might not occur

Those working (or with the potential to work) with people with disabilities in general, and with women and girls in particular, might not know each other, nor have had the opportunity to collaborate. Creating this opportunity, bringing together these key agents, can have powerful results.

In Sudan, BtG-II facilitated the discussion among the representatives from civil society organizations, OPDs, and public institutions. This raised the importance of addressing the issue of supporting access to forms of self-employment for women and girl with disabilities. Additionally, one of the main achievements of BtG-II in Sudan has been the collaboration between four OPDs under four grants. The requirements under the procedure had been challenging for some of the organizations, but this contributed to a general capacity building, improving OPDs fundraising skills. The National Council for Persons with Disabilities operated as technical support for BtG-II, and provided information and coordination to the selected OPDs. The Project was able to boost the connection within representatives from different OPDs, public institutions, and beneficiaries, ensuring all grants were answering to the project objectives in an effective and efficient way within the available resources. As a result, all four organizations included a gender-mainstreaming approach within their proposals and actions, and one of them was fully targeting women with disabilities.

> “Access to employment for us women with disabilities is still limited in Sudan. Hence, we value very highly the work we are developing together with Bridging the Gap.”
>
> President of the Organization of Women with Disabilities in Sudan

In Paraguay, the advocacy of Saraki, an NGO awarded a BtG-II sub-grant, enabled the connection between the National Plan of People with Disabilities and the Ministry of Women Affairs. As a result, The National Plan for Equality 2018-2024 considers disability for the first time. Additionally, given the existence of women's organizations in the country, and the increasing visibility of gender components, a decision was made to include disability in other projects, such as "My First Employment As A Young Person", a project implemented by Plan International[6], that included gender but not disability. Moreover, in order to strengthen women's leadership and create synergies, a dialogue was held in the 2018 meeting in Encarnación, with the participation of a network of feminist organizations called "Red de Mujeres del Sur" (Southern Women's Network), which had political incidence, but had not included a disability perspective yet.

In Ecuador, the workshop to train validators on easy reading, which included a gender perspective, allowed for a deeper dialogue among the gender-related participants. Due to this dialogue, and that the workshop allowed for a nation-wide in-person meeting of the participants, a Women's Commission was set up in FEPAPDEM for the first time, in October 2019. The Commission is composed of six young women with intellectual disabilities from Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca.

Mapping who is, and who could be, working with women and girl with disabilities, together with an understanding of local context and needs, can reveal potential collaborations even with non- traditional partners

BtG-II in Sudan ensured a gender mainstreaming approach throughout all its activities,

6 http://sapea.org/

thanks to internal and external collaborations. With AICS Khartoum, BtG-II closely collaborates with Tadmeen project, an initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Tadmeen project is also supporting the newly established coordination platform for persons with disabilities, promoting a gender perspective during the group meetings. Externally, Project partners, especially the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, managed to establish fruitful partnerships with the private sector, such as with Zain Telecommunication Company, Dal Food Industries, and Sarya for Leather Product Co Ltd. Within these partnerships, employers were trained on disability rights, and they were supported by the OPDs to understand how to best accommodate persons with disabilities' needs and match individuals' abilities and interests to jobs. OPDs maintained a constant contact with employers and negotiated with them wages, contracts and safety measures on the workplace for women with disabilities. As an example, Zain Telecommunication Company has adopted many accessibility measures for the employment of persons with disabilities, especially women, such as including them as call centre workers, and tailoring some products and services to answer to the needs of persons with hearing disabilities.

Challenges: Including women and girls with disabilities does not come without obstacles

Providing support to avoid perpetuating negative biases and roles for women and girls with disabilities is essential, even to development practitioners

Social norms and gender biases are present in everybody, consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, it is relevant to work to deconstruct these biases in everyone involved in the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, including themselves.

In Ethiopia, although an established and recognized organization had developed an in-depth gender assessment with some disability sensitive dimension, it turned out only six men and one boy with disabilities had participated in activities. The study mentioned the general perception people hold on disability, exclusion and stigma, and how women and girls with disabilities faced obstacles to marriage or lacked companionship. BtG-II has supported this organization in designing adequate terms of references and activities for the given project, to strengthen the inclusion of women with disabilities, presenting them as active members of society.

In Sudan, one of the localities in North Kordofan did not let any representative of women with disabilities participate in the trainings because the community belonged to an ethnic minority which does not allow women to participate in public activities. To minimize the impact of social and gender biases, BtG-II has organized trainings and consultative workshops in

Sudan for government officials, OPDs and other stakeholder on inclusion of disability rights and a gender perspective in legal and policy frameworks, together with awareness raising sessions to change the negative attitudes and social norms towards women and girls with disabilities.

> “I did not face any restrictions from my family, but the restrictions happened to find a job. Firstly, as a woman, it is hard to get a job, and being a woman with disability makes it more difficult. I graduated in 2008 from the university but I could not find a job until now. After the project I am productive and that has changed the way I look at myself.”
>
> Participant to Equal access to employment for Women with Disability grant, BtG-II Sudan

In Burkina Faso, thanks to a training about menstruation and the preparation of suitable sanitary napkins, women with disabilities felt free to talk about the management of their periods, and were then able to make their own reusable sanitary napkins, a subject which was previously seen as taboo.

> “The society of Burkina Faso tends to think that we, the disabled, do not have the right to be part of this society. We (the disabled) are not trusted because they think we do not have skills.”
>
> President of UNAFEHB, Burkina Faso

Addressing women and girls´ families' concerns, can be key to their participation in project activities, and to avoid adverse reactions when they get empowered

Working with women, and especially when working with girls, with disabilities, usually cannot be done without working with their families as well. The common overprotection of women and girls, plus other biases or fears, have to be addressed to facilitate an enabling environment.

> The project has changed my daughter a lot, now she can speak and act freely unlike before. She now sees herself like any other person in the family. Now she feels she can achieve something.
>
> Mother of participant in Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual and Psychosocial Disability grant, BtG-II Sudan

In Sudan, women and girls with disabilities often face barriers to their meaningful participation and inclusion in decision making at national, state and local levels, which is a reflection of society's perception of people with disabilities. For instance, immediately after the start of a vocational training workshop in Kordofan State, four women with disabilities were denied by their families to travel to the capital to participate in the training, due to mistrust and negative attitudes towards women with disabilities. The State Council of Persons with Disabilities, in collaboration with the local women with disability association, started the process of creation of a local branch of the association, and mobilized women with disabilities at local level to conduct home visits to convince the families to support the four women to attend the training. In general, BtG-II in Sudan has facilitated the participation of women and girls with disabilities from rural areas by providing individualised support such as personal assistants, and organised trainings in remote localities to reach women with disabilities who are not allowed to move due to social constraints.

> There was resistance from some of the beneficiaries' families to attend the trainings. We overcame this barrier with dialogue sessions and we made an exhibition of the women's products from previous projects.
>
> Woman and Child Secretariat official, BtG-II Sudan

Resistance to accept the relevance of including girls and women with disabilities will show up: constant guidance, and taking one step at a time proves to be effective

When there has been no previous awareness, or even negative experiences, in gender mainstreaming, there might be resistance to accept that men and women (with disabilities

and without disabilities) need differentiated treatment. Their experiences are not the same, therefore, their needs are also diverse.

In Ethiopia, BtG-II has helped shift a local project team's believe that "there are no women with disabilities. We can't find them", into an opportunity to dig deeper and create awareness and understanding on how to identify and work with women with disabilities.

But expected results might take time. In Sudan, although the adoption of equal representation of all types of disabilities and gender balance is a main selection criteria, the achievement of equal representation is however challenging, due to the underrepresentation of women and girls with disabilities in both leadership and membership of organizations of persons with disabilities (in addition to the underrepresentation of some disability constituencies like persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities).

Making activities inclusive of girls and women with disabilities after their initial design can require additional resources, which might not have been budgeted for

When supporting organizations and partners to include women and girls with disabilities in on going activities and projects, it must be taken into consideration that the original budget might not cover the required adaptations for accessibility. In these cases, BtG-II has supported both financially, or searching for strategies and allies to come up with adequate solutions.

For instance, in Sudan local partners expressed that the cost of including women with disabilities was very high in terms of mobility, to guarantee safety, and accessible/separate services such as toilets. This issue was partially resolved by merging some activities together, like organising training workshop and awareness raising session in the same day and venue, to properly manage transportation, and working with allies such as other AICS projects.

> "The participation of women with disabilities in other women organizations is not easy, because we need more time to adapt, but we really hope we can get there."
>
> President of the Association of the Albino Women in Burkina Faso

4. Conclusion

BtG-II works to strengthen the inclusion of people with disabilities in different areas of life, with differentiated thematic focus in each of the five partner countries. In doing so, it understands women and girls with disabilities have specific needs and interests, considering gender a cross-cutting issue to all its interventions. Willing to learn how gender mainstreaming has been implemented, BtG-II has stopped to collect relevant information on its work with girls and women with disabilities, searching also for best practices to be replicated in future activities.

This exercise of recollection and analyses of activities carried out with a gender lens is a good practice in itself. It has triggered conversations among field experts, OPDs, partners and other key participants in BtG-II activities on the work being done, on how to improve gender mainstreaming, and even on what categorizes as a good practice or gender inclusion activity. All these conversations are enriching and essential to continue working for and with girls and women with disabilities.

Being much what BtG-II has achieved so far in including women and girls' needs and interests in its interventions, the Project also recognizes that there is still much to do to reach both inclusion and equality of all people with disabilities in general, and of girls and women in particular. To this end, BtG-II can continue strengthening internal knowledge on the subject, and increase human resources dedicated to gender mainstreaming in field offices, implementing partners and other allies. In this sense, making additional efforts to hire women with disabilities as experts would increase such internal knowledge, as well as serve as example of the value of hiring women with disabilities. Furthermore, given that changing mindsets and reducing biases takes time, projects should take into account these resistances, providing extended implementing periods of time, and sufficient resources for awareness creation activities. Finally, monitoring who is being reached by the Project, disaggregating not only by sex or gender, but by disabilities and age, among others, would provide valuable information to continue deepening the inclusion of all girls and women with disabilities. Replicating the good practices identified in this document is a first step of moving forward.

Bridging the GAP

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