



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION  
JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

# **The Ability to Participate**

## **A Study on the Contributions of Persons with Disabilities in the Sustainable Development Goals**

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## Abstract

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The study investigates recent efforts made by the United Nations to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in the designing of a post-2015 development framework that will build on the progress catalysed by the Millennium Development Goals. Anchored in the participatory development theory, the study examines the consultation process held between 2012 and 2013, analysing the correlation between the extensive online consultation and the Open Working Groups' proposal for Sustainable Development Goals. Through a qualitative content analysis the study aims to investigate how well the contributions of the online consultation have been included in the proposal. The study finds that while themes expressed by persons with disabilities can be identified within the proposal, only a few directly articulate the details. Out of the themes expressed by persons with disabilities, several are unable to find in the Sustainable Development Goals and did not have a strong linkage with persons with disabilities. The reflective discussion of the study elaborates the reasons behind the empirical findings and states how the contributions have been included, indicating that "real" participation of persons with disabilities has taken place in the design stage.

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Keywords: participatory development, post-2015 development agenda, persons with disabilities, sustainable development goals

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## **Acronyms & Abbreviations**

CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DPOs	Disabled People's Organization
HLMDD	High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Disability and Development
HLP	High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
PWDs	Persons With Disabilities
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNPRPD	United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
WHO	World Health Organization

# 1 Introduction

Since 2001, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have helped to frame international co-operation policy and greatly contributed to progress in different areas of human well-being. However, the MDGs have received extensive criticism for failing to address the numerous barriers experienced by one billion persons with disabilities (PWDs). History reveals that the goals were unsuccessful in fully realizing their potential to advance the rights of PWDs and as a result, directly excluded PWDs from enjoying developmental processes (United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNPRPD], 2013, p. 12). Among lessons learned from the MDGs, an essential one was to address PWDs to ensure that they are explicitly articulated and formally recognized as an area of intervention. It is of great importance to place PWDs along with other marginalized groups at the centre of future development efforts to ensure that the next framework addresses barriers and include PWDs in development efforts at all levels (UNPRPD, 2013, p. 21).

Between 2012 and 2013, the United Nations (UN) initiated consultations with the purpose of discussing a future development agenda beyond 2015 and its potential content. The new development agenda is to be based on reports on lessons learned from the MDGs, Rio+20 outcome documents and on contributions of civil society collected during consultations. The global conversations have included countless meetings and consultations with civil society, among them more specific consultations with PWDs. Efforts were made to ensure that PWDs were not left out, by using different forums to ensure global inclusiveness of all groups (UNPRPD, 2013, p. 23).

In the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) the importance of the participation of PWDs in political and public life is emphasized. Article 3 contains requirements of “full and effective participation and inclusion in society”. Moreover, a requirement for States Parties to closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations during development of policies and in decision-making processes, which concern them, is enshrined in article 4.3 of the CRPD (United Nations [UN], 2006). While the UN acknowledges that a special effort was made in the consultation process to reach marginalized, poor and people whose voices are usually unheard (United Nations Development Group [UNDG], 2013b, p. III), the Convention further emphasizes the importance of such efforts.

In June 2015 a new post-2015 agenda will be set but a proposal for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has already been formulated. Although the post-2015 process has merely reached

the end of the design stage there is much indicating that the inputs given by PWDs during this stage will impact the formation and implementation of the final post-2015 development agenda. The way in which PWDs are taken into consideration may have consequences on how they will be included later on in the implementation stage. It is therefore important to investigate how well the UN has incorporated the inputs of PWDs into the SDGs, as this will impact the future involvement of PWDs in the process. In order to ensure a fully inclusive process, it is essential to ensure an active participation. For PWDs, this means having their contributions taken into consideration. A participant from the online consultation entitled *Disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 & beyond* explains:

“It is essential to respect each person, to consult, listen, clarify and ensure we have heard what is presented” (The World We Want 2015, 2013).

## 2 Method

### 2.1 Purpose & Research Questions

The aim of the study is to investigate recent efforts made by the United Nations to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in the designing of a post-2015 development framework.

Q.1 Among the contributions from persons with disabilities in the consultation *Disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 & beyond*, which essential themes are expressed with the purpose to be included in the new development agenda?

Q.2 To what extent has the contributions of persons with disabilities been taken into consideration in the Open Working Group’s proposal of the Sustainable Development Goals?

### 2.2 Procedure of Collecting Data

The following data includes the most extensive forum where the target group PWDs has expressed voices and opinions concerning what should be included in the new SDGs. In order to see in what way and to what extent the opinions of PWDs have been included in the sustainable development goals discourse, the extensive consultation will be compared with the latest proposal of the new SDGs.

The English version of the online consultation *Disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 & beyond* was downloaded to a Word document using the Google search engine, on the 21st of April 2015. The consultation is an open online discussion forum/web portal found on the platform “The World We Want” on issues concerning disability where Disabled Persons’ Organizations

(DPOs), Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and representatives for PWDs were invited to discuss five different questions presented by the UN. The following questions were asked in the consultation (The World We Want 2015, 2013);

Q.1. What are the major CHALLENGES to implementing development policies & programmes for persons with disabilities? (n 170/113)

Q.2. What approaches/actions have been SUCCESSFUL in promoting the inclusion of disability in development? (n 74/54)

Q.3. What specific steps, measures or ACTIONS should be taken to promote the goal of a disability inclusive society? (n 102/82)

Q.4. What are the ROLES of the relevant stakeholders? (n 61/38)

Q.5. Any other suggestions or recommendations for the High-level Meeting? (n 87/56)

The consultation was held during a period of one month, between 8<sup>th</sup> march and 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2013. The online consultation is the most extensive consultation for PWDs. The UN stated how over 400 posts were received, with a spread over 60 countries worldwide. The contributions were conducted into a report, serving as a basis of the High-Level Meeting on Disability and Development (The World We Want 2015, 2013).

*Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970)* was downloaded on the 21st of April 2015, using the UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. The A/68/970 proposal is the latest publicized proposal for SDGs pursuant to the recommendations, which were formulated in the Outcome Document of the Rio+20, United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UN, 2014). Though the goals are not decided upon at the time when downloading the proposal, the A/68/970 proposal is first draft that will serve as a base for further discussion towards the new agenda. It is therefore considered to be an important document, as the content will have an impact on the direction of the agenda in later stages.

### **2.3 Content Analysis – Qualitative Data**

The content analysis has been performed in two stages, both through an inductive approach;

The contributions found in the online consultation *Disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 & beyond* can be viewed as raw data. Although the consultation has been performed by the UN, the unprocessed data has been the basis for the comparison with the proposal of the SDGs. The raw data, which was converted into 343 Word pages, has been systematically and iteratively

analysed on three levels: reduction of data (coding), presentation of data (themes) and conclusions and authentication (summery) (Hjelm; Lindgren & Nilsson, 2014, p. 34). The summery will be presented in the first part of “empirical findings” as summarized themes. The consultation was reviewed and analysed manually through open coding to ensure that no essential information was left out. Initially, each author performed the open coding separately. The results of each coding were then further compared through “peer debriefing” between the authors and scrutinized once more (Hjelm; Lindgren & Nilsson, 2014, p. 83). The evolving themes served as a base for further investigation of the SDGs.

The CAQDAS (computer assisted qualitative data analysis) program ATLAS.ti has been used to analyze the content on the sampling unit consisting of *Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals*. The software program allows systematic coding, which then stores the codes and quotes which have been identified in the raw data of the online consultation. ATLAS.ti helps the user to localize data, which has been essential for the purpose of this study. In order to carry out the coding of the SDGs, a coding scheme was prepared in advance based on the themes and key components found in the reduced data from the online consultation. Although the coding scheme shows the frequency of codes, the purpose of using the scheme is not to highlight frequency or quantitative aspects but only qualitative correlations to the SDGs and its context. When a decision was made on which words and concepts should be used from the online consultation, the search for common denominators with the SDGs was applied. In this way the qualitative findings of the online consultation have been the guide and criteria to which codes have been chosen, also marked within themes presented in the section of “empirical findings” for clarification. The coding scheme containing the codes that has been used can be found in Table 2.

The risk of using a software program is related to the understanding of its limitations, which have been carefully addressed (Denscombe, 2009, p. 389). Such limitations could be connected to the risk of using too few codes or too many. Furthermore, too broad formulations of the codes can be limiting in the same way as a prepared coding scheme can have consequences on the result. To meet the potential risks, a balance is consequently required. The codes used have been carefully chosen based on the themes from the online consultation to address these risks. As the codes were further analyzed in relation to the context in which they were found, the codes do not represent the results alone but should be seen as a tool to extract the essential information for further analysis.

## **2.4 Criticism of Sources**

The communication within the online consultation was asynchronous, monitored by a moderator. The role of the moderator was to guide and clarify the answers on the five pre-determined questions of the consultation regarding disability and PWDs in relation to development. Using a moderator may have had an impact on the contributions, as the role of the moderator is to guide the attendants. When reviewing the information on individuals that contributed in the consultation it is possible to see the name, country origin and organization. However, it is unclear if each individual has a disability. Therefore, it is questionable whether contributions from the consultation are from PWDs or from individuals with an interest to contribute to the online consultation. Moreover, some contributions might have been given with the purpose to emphasize the work of a specific organization. If this is correct, it does not necessarily mean that the answers are affected negatively. With this in mind, one could ask if it is fitting to refer to the consultation as representing “the views of PWDs”. Despite these objections, this study views the online consultation as representative of the views of PWDs.

## **2.5 Demarcations**

PWDs have been further consulted in other forms of meetings making the decision to investigate the online consultation on disability issues a demarcation. The online consultation is by far the largest available source of PWDs’ views and perspectives compared to other available information and could be seen as the main consultation with information concerning disability-issues for the UN to consider in the new development agenda. Furthermore, the online consultation provides unprocessed raw data of contributions, which is difficult to find elsewhere. Therefore, it is argued that analysing the online consultation will make it possible to draw conclusions from the findings. The limitation of language resulted in the decision to review the online consultation in English, although it was available in six other languages. This might affect the outcome of themes as themes may shift related to contextual and cultural diversities. Since the purpose of the online consultation is to include the contributions expressed, the demarcation concerning language is not considered to affect the outcome since all contributions are equally important.

## **2.6 Ethical Considerations**

Efforts have been made to receive permission to download and use the information available in the online consultation entitled *Disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 & beyond* despite being aware that this was not ultimately necessary. Each individual contributing to the online consultation was likely aware of expressed inputs would become official and posted opinions be-

cause of this very reason. Since the online forum is open for public, no formal permission is required to use the information that was entered into the discussion forum.

### 3 Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Previous Research

The following section presents research on participation in relation to the post-2015 process. The scientific articles all focus on participation in relation to the process of inclusiveness. The intention is to shed light on participation within the area of development work.

##### *Research field of participation and the new development agenda*

The definition of ‘real participation’ has been the main area of critique within the research field of participation in establishing a new agenda. Stecher (2014, p. 335) emphasize how the issue of depth is more significant for the quality of participation rather than merely width, which might be seen as number of participants. While recognizing how efforts made by the UN to include civil society are well intended, Stecher (2014, p. 337) argues that bottom-up approaches with a depth are yet to be achieved. While presenting examples of NGOs and ‘the poorest’, Stecher (2014, p. 336) contends that genuine participation narrows down to power and politics and less about participation counted in numbers, time and held meetings.

Although the UN has made great efforts to move away from a top-down approach concerning development work, critique concerning its lack of inclusive and participatory bottom-up approaches has been aimed at the organization from many directions. From a critical standpoint, Enns, Bersaglio and Kepe (2015, p. 364) claim that the UNs’ approach to participatory development “represents a pretense rather than an actual shift in power from development experts to the intended beneficiaries of development.” Using the perspectives and priorities of indigenous people as the object of research in the study, Enns *et al.* (2015, p. 364) conclude that what the UN wanted to know about indigenous people determined the structure of inclusiveness and the process of collecting global perspectives on development. What the post-2015 consultation process does do, according to the authors, is to illustrate the recurring ‘tyranny’ of participation while the UN maintains control over the final shape of the global development goals. In this sense, the methodology of the UN has not achieved an actual shift in power as desired (Enns *et al.* 2015, p. 371).

In the scientific article entitled “15 seconds of fame: why the UN’s post-2015 process doesn’t need more ‘participation’”, Stecher (2014, p. 333) expresses a concern for the process of including civil society in development work and uses marginalized groups as specific examples. Stakeholders need to address structural changes in order to be genuinely inclusive but since power relations keep undermining actual participation, neither inclusiveness nor participation has been achieved in the process of establishing a new agenda so far.

An additional aspect of participation in the post-2015 process is presented in a discursive study by Bersaglio, Enns and Kepe (2015), which puts youth under the magnifying glass. Bersaglio *et al.* (2015, p. 68) emphasize how the UN is actively reconstructing youth as a social category by referring to youth as “asset”, “risks” and “good citizens in the making”. By doing this, the authors claim that the UN seeks to draw youth into global development as subjects of neoliberalism. While youth have emerged as an uncontested priority of the global development agenda, the study recognizes how the discourse of development changed focus from working for youth as recipients of development to working with them as rightful partners and experts (Bersaglio *et al.* 2015, p. 68).

A The issue concerning PWDs and their visibility in the process of post-2015 can be found in previous research by Wolbring, Mackey, Rybchinski and Noga (2013). In a quantitative study with qualitative elements the authors investigate the role and visibility of disabled people in the post-2015 process through a disability lens. Using reports produced by the UN on the post-2015 process and data from the online consultations on issues concerning disability, Wolbring *et al.* (2013, p. 4152) investigate the relationship between the disability community and sustainable development community.

By using quantitative methods of analyzing data and counting visibility, the authors argue how PWDs as a group are underrepresented and barely visible within the sustainable development discourses examined in the study (Wolbring *et al.* 2013, p. 4171). The invisibility, it is argued, could possibly be explained by certain topics not being associated as topics of concern for disabled people. Moreover, the paper asserts how the issue of participation is related to lack of political and societal will to improve the situation for disabled. In line with the UNs’ recommendations to include disabled people in the post-2015 process, Wolbring *et al.* (2013, p. 4172) conclude that PWDs need to be involved in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the post-2015 SDGs. Despite efforts to increase the visibility of PWDs within the development discourses, it has not yet led to action in many instances (Wolbring *et al.* 2013, p. 4178).

Recommendations to improve the visibility of disabled within the development field include the need for capacity building, attitude change in terms of exclusionary language, recognizing a lack of diffusion of issues faced by PWDs into other discourses (as well as PWDs being a cross-cutting theme) and the importance of having a framework capable of capturing the reality of disadvantaged groups, emphasizing evidence-based development (Wolbring *et al.* 2013, p. 4171-4177).

### **3.2 Participatory (Development) Theory**

When viewing the literature on participatory development it becomes evident that no ultimate definition of ‘good’ or ‘true’ participation exists, as approaches to participation are constantly evolving and being debated. Therefore, the following sections will describe a number of different takes on the theory and end of with a clarification on what definition this paper will be concerned with.

In a study about indigenous voices in the post-2015 development agenda, Enns *et al.* (2015, p. 361) describe the primary aim of participatory development as including the beneficiaries of development in all stages of development processes; the design, implementation and evaluation. The driving force of participatory approaches to development is to give voice to the marginalized and empower ‘the poor’ so to make people agents rather than objects of research. As such, beneficiaries of development projects are meant to stand as experts during the development process and consequently influence the direction of change.

According to Nelson and Wright (1995, p. 30), ‘participation’ is primarily used in three different ways. The first one is, as a cosmetic label to make the proposed project appear good. The second is when local labor is mobilized to reduce costs. In this scenario communities give their time and effort to self-help projects with little outside assistance, meaning that ‘the local people’ participate in ‘our’ project. Finally, it is used to create an empowering process, enabling local people to analyze themselves, gain confidence, take command and make their own decisions. In other words, ‘we’ participate in ‘their’ project rather than ‘they’ in ‘ours’ (Nelson & Wright, 1995, p. 30). The latter use of participation is what this paper primarily will be concerned about.

‘Participation’ has been somewhat of a buzzword in the field of development studies for a long time (Katsui & Koistinen, 2008, p. 747) and is commonly used as an “umbrella term”, referring to the involvement of the local community in development activities (Willis, 2005, p. 103). However, there is a number of ways and different stages in which participation can take place when it comes to the preparation of development projects (Willis, 2005, p. 103). While a greater aware-

ness has evolved about the presence of power relations in development research, a range of research methods have developed to better understand what knowledge local people possess in various areas (Willis, 2005, p. 103).

**Table 1. Dimensions of Participation**

Dimension	Meaning
<i>Appraisal</i>	Way of understanding the local community and their understandings of wider processes, e.g. PRA, PUA
<i>Agenda setting</i>	Involvement of local community in decisions about development policies; consulted and listened to from the start, not brought in once policy has been decided upon
<i>Efficiency</i>	Involvement of local community in projects, e.g. building schools
<i>Empowerment</i>	Participation leads to greater self-awareness and confidence; contributions to development of democracy

Source: Willis, 2005, p. 103

One research method or ‘approach’ (see Table 1.) is called participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and is founded on the premise that villagers in development countries have an awareness and knowledge about their environment which should be acknowledged instead of using “outsider” forms of understanding (Chambers, 1994, p. 1253; Willis, 2005, p. 104). Another area, in which participation can be used, concerns the involvement of local people in the agenda setting of development projects. Full participation requires that beneficiaries of the project decide on what priorities the agenda will have, rather than helping to achieve goals which have already been decided on by outside agencies in advance. Far too often though, the two approaches previously mentioned, fail to achieve the intended participation and empowerment, which they try to create (Willis, 2005, p. 104). This is elaborated by Cooke and Kothari (2001) who challenge the degree to which participatory development actually can be implemented effectively, while describing participation as the ‘new tyranny’ in development work.

According to Cook and Kothari (2001, p. 32, 182, 140), the planners of participatory research fail to recognize that a) voice is not synonymous with influence b) exclusive focus on the micro-level (people considered marginal and powerless) fail to recognize other wider structures of oppression and disadvantage c) the “local knowledge” produced during participatory planning is many times shaped by pre-existing relationships between the villagers and project organizations. Instead of shaping the project plans according to “indigenous knowledge”, facilitators of projects learn to acquire and manipulate new forms of “planning knowledge”, making the local knowledge compatible with bureaucratic planning. d) questions concerning empowerment should not revolve so much around “how much” are people empowered but rather “for what” are they empowered.

The authors claim that what participatory projects want to empower people to do, is to take part in the ‘modern’ developing society; as participants in the labor market, as consumers in the global economy, as responsible patients in the health system and so forth – ultimately reshaping the personhood of the participants.

When conducting participatory research, Lundberg and Starring (2001, p. 16) conclude that there is no absolute model to be followed. Every unique case and specific conditions must determine the approach. Certain fundamental principles do however exist. For example, research should be conducted in a manner that allows “ordinary” people to participate in the entire process, from formulating the issues to analyzing the results and how these should be used. Research should also have positive and direct effects on the people involved.

In order to clarify what is meant by ‘real participation’ when used in the paper, it is necessary to create a definition. With inspiration from Enns *et al.* (2015) this study defines ‘real participation’ as follows;

- (I) *Including the beneficiaries of development in all stages of development processes; the design, implementation and evaluation.*
- (II) *Giving voice to the marginalized and empower them, making beneficiaries agents rather than objects of research.*
- (III) *Beneficiaries of development projects should stand as experts during the development process and thereby influence the direction of change.*

Additionally, as expressed by Nelson and Wright (1995, p. 30), ‘real participation’ must include ownership.

- (IV) *A mentality of ‘we’ participates in ‘their’ project rather than ‘they’ in ‘ours’. Local people should be able to analyze themselves, gain confidence, take command and make their own decisions.*

## 4 Definitions

### *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*

In September 2000, the UN gathered the largest number of world leaders in history to adopt the UN Millennium Declaration. The meeting entitled the Millennium Summit, encouraged nations to commit to a new global partnership with the goal of reducing extreme poverty and deciding on a total eight time-bound targets which were to be achieved by 2015. These targets have become known as the MDGs (Millennium Project, 2006).

### *Persons With Disabilities (PWDs)*

According to the CRPD, persons with disabilities include “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UN, 2006, p. 4).

### *Disability*

Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Disability is thus not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person’s body and features of the society in which he or she lives. Overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers (WHO, 2015).

### *Universal Design Approach*

The design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. “Universal design” shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed (UN, 2006, p. 4).

### *Human Rights-Based Approach*

Human Rights-based Approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyze inequalities, which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress (United Nations International Children Emergency Fund, 2012).

## **5 Background**

Between 2012 and 2013 the UN facilitated a series of consultations with people all over the world, seeking their views on a new post-2015 development agenda. The global conversation was a response to the increasing call for active participation in shaping what the UN termed “the

world we want” (UNDG, 2013a, p. 3). Before launching the consultations, a series of reports were prepared by the UN department of Economic and Social Affairs accentuating the UNs’ intention to implement the post-MDG process with a participatory approach (Enns *et al.*, 2015). After receiving much criticism for the lack of participation in the MDGs, the UN has been very clear about its intention to make the era of post-2015 participatory (UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, 2012, p. 7).

Consultations were held at three different levels. First, 88 national consultations were organized by the UN country teams in coordination with governments, the private sector and civil society. Second, thematic consultations were held on 11 themes and topics considered to be important issues for the future of sustainable development, also involving civil society, businesses and academics. Third, the [theworldwewant2015.org](http://theworldwewant2015.org) website enabled online discussions on key topics, coupled with MY World survey which enabled people to rank what they think should be the priorities of the post-2015 development agenda (UNDG, 2013b, p. 5). Collectively, the UN estimates the consultations to have involved over one million people from around the globe, although a precise number of participants cannot be established (UNDG, 2013b, p. 3).

Aside from the desire of the agenda to be open and participatory, a key focus of debate has also been about the necessity of accountability (UNDP, 2014, p. I). At the very least, this means that if one party makes a commitment for the benefit of another party, the potential beneficiary of that commitment can demand the commitment-maker to comply with what it intended to do. To ensure the agenda’s accountability, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2014) developed an integrated accountability framework based on four principles where inclusiveness has an important role;

At a minimum, ‘inclusiveness’ requires that all those affected by state actions (or inaction) — and particularly the most marginalized — have the capacity and opportunity to participate in policy formation and implementation, as well as in monitoring, evaluating and requiring responses from state officials (UNDP, 2014, p. 2).

In a UN report guiding the national consultations (UNDG, 2012, p. 12), the previously cited principle is clearly present as the UN stresses the need to launch an inclusive process that will lead to a development agenda owned by all players. In a similar language, the objectives for the country consultations are described to “stimulate an inclusive debate on a new development agenda” and “amplify the voices of the poor and other marginalized in formal negotiation processes”. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon affirms this when stating how “the post-2015

development framework is likely to have the best development impact if it emerges from an inclusive, open and transparent process with multi-stakeholder participation” (UNDG, 2012, p.12). Taking a U-turn from the top-down process of the MDGs, the UN acknowledges the unique opportunity it has to position itself as a promoter of a bottom-up approach. This requires that the organization expands its effort at all levels to create a more open and inclusive dialogue which includes the views of poor and vulnerable people, ensuring global ownership of the post-2015 development agenda (UNDG, 2012, p. 13).

In a report entitled *Towards an Inclusive and Accessible Future for All: Voices of persons with disabilities on the post-2015 development framework*, PWDs are described to have been included in various ways in the process towards formulating a new development agenda. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) opened up for thematic and national consultations in which PWDs had the opportunity to attend. Within the thematic areas PWDs were specifically addressed and referenced in the consultation concerning inequalities and the issue of possible discrimination within the working field (UNPRPD, 2013, p. 23). Regarding the 88 national consultations, the UNPRPD describe how the countries “either made particular efforts to include PWDs in the consultation process, or referenced disability in their outcome report” (UNPRPD, 2013, p. 24).

In the three consultations held between 2012 and 2013 in London, Bali, Indonesia and Monrovia by the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, members of the international disability community attended. The contributions of the perspective of PWDs have been included in the Panel’s final report emphasizing the need for removal of barriers to prevent marginalized groups from accessing opportunities and enjoying rights (UNPRPD, 2013, p. 25). Regional meetings were held during 2013 in preparation for the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Disability and Development, regarding how to make development efforts inclusive for PWDs. To what extent the PWDs have been attending the regional, national and thematic consultation is not further developed.

An additional effort to include PWDs and disability issues was through the online consultation *“Disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond*. By answering ten questions concerning disability and PWDs’ perspectives on development related challenges, the consultation opened up for an inclusive process. Collectively, 88 countries and 395 individual participated in the consultation and according to the report, the stakeholders contributing consisted of non-governmental organizations, academia, Governments, United Nations entities and individuals from differing backgrounds (UNPRPD, 2013, p. 25f).

## 6 Empirical Findings

### 6.1 Contributions from the Online Consultation

Key messages from the comments in the online consultation entitled *Disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 & beyond* can be divided into the following themes (The World We Want 2015, 2013).

**A human rights based approach** is needed in order to change the negative image of PWDs as charity receivers to individuals with rights just like anyone else.

Disability is part of human diversity – Stigma, prejudice and stereotypes must be combated by creating greater **awareness** on PWDs if the society is to be inclusive and sustainable for all. It is essential to take measures to move away from a perception of charity and PWDs as beneficiaries, to recognize abilities rather than disabilities. PWDs should be recognized as agents and experts.

Disability needs to have a **twin-track approach** – i.e. a mix of disability specific programs where some are able to meet more unique needs of PWDs and others are disability-mainstreaming/cross-cutting in all sectors of society.

Improve **accessibility** of the environment, transportation, services and information and communication technologies following the universal design approach. This is a fundamental prerequisite for a development that is disability-inclusive.

Enable full **participation** of PWDs and/or their representative organizations actively engage in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating development responses and the post-2015 development agenda.

Demand of continuously updated disability-**disaggregated data** and reliable information on PWDs as these are vital elements of a disability-inclusive development agenda.

Create **monitoring mechanisms** to ensure that national and international policies, codes and standards concerning PWDs – especially the CRPD – are implemented properly. To supplement this, action plans need to be developed for levying consequences for non-compliance.

Encourage ratification of the **CRPD** in all nations and enforcement of existing **laws and legislation** where it has already been ratified. Furthermore, to eliminate structural barriers laws must be modified in order to avoid structural discrimination.

The willingness of **governments (governance)** and political leadership to realize the rights of PWDs is fundamental to succeed in creating a disability-inclusive society. Commentators propose quotas and affirmative action to put PWDs in executive suites and ensure that they have their voices heard in the tables of decision-making. This should be performed on global, national and regional levels.

Ensure adequate and continuous **funding** for PWDs so to strengthen their social protection and enable them to live an honorable lifestyle. This should result in greater access to income support, technical assistance devices and affordable services.

**PWDs** should be properly included in all the new Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators. Increase visibility of PWDs in high level reports and significant UN documents so that PWDs are not absent from discussions on issues concerning them.

Initiate cooperation with **media** to change their stereotype portrayal of PWDs in commercials, films etc. Potential projects could be social media campaigns in conjunction with PWDs or DPOs to increase understanding, eliminate attitudinal barriers and promote positive perceptions of PWDs to eliminate **discrimination**. A disability-inclusive society starts by changing the hearts and minds of people. This will never happen if they are continuously fed with misleading information about PWDs.

Recognize children with disabilities' right to **education** since greater emphasis on this area is key to poverty alleviation, employment, income generation and improved quality of life. Primary education must be free, accessible, compulsory and of good quality. To achieve this, schools' environmental friendliness for children with disabilities need to be addressed as well as "special needs training" for teachers which is currently lacking from teacher training curriculums.

Promote access to full and productive **employment** of PWDs while recognizing them as a source of talent, social innovation and creativity. Supplement this by developing non-discriminatory procedures in human resources, which consider the needs of disabled in various phases of employment, such as recruitment, hiring, adaption of jobs, reasonable accommodation etc.

Improve accessibility of **health-care** services for PWDs. Both primary health-care and specialized services must be provided for PWDs through increased investment and improved affordability of such services. A more disability-inclusive health-care also requires that medical personnel receive better training and information about disability.

## 6.2 The Inclusion of Contributions in the SDGs Proposal

**Table 2. Codes used for Further Analysis**

		Sustainable Development Goals																
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Codes	Access* (Accessibility)		x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x					x	x
	Awareness												x	x				
	CRDP																	
	Disaggregated data																	x
	Non-discrimination										x						x	x
	Employment								x	x								
	Law/legislation					x					x				x		x	
	Funding																	
	Governance																	
	Health			x														
	Human Rights-based approach																	
	Media																	
	Monitoring mechanisms																	x
	Participation					x											x	
	PWDs				x							x						
	Quality education				x													
Twin-track approach																		
Universal design																		

\* Alternative formulations of the word were used in the coding

Table 2. provides an overview of which SDGs contain the different codes. A description of the context in which the codes can be found is further developed following Table 2.

As seen in Table 2., accessibility is present in ten out of seventeen SDGs. Within the SDGs, accessibility is discussed in relation to ending hunger and achieving food security by promoting sustainable agriculture (UN, 2014, p. 11). In goal three, the need for universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services is emphasized (UN, 2014, p. 12). Several targets regarding education mention the importance of equal access. One particular target demands “equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations” (UN, 2014, p. 13).

Women are to be given access to ownership and control over their land and property, natural resources, inheritance and financial services (UN, 2014, p. 14). Additional SDGs connected to accessibility concern the issue of safe and affordable drinking water for all, coupled with access to adequate sanitation and hygiene (UN, 2014, p. 14). The next appearance of accessibility is found in goal seven, which calls for access to “affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” (UN, 2014, p. 15). Three targets in goal nine include the word access. One speaks of equitable access for all regarding the development of “quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure” (UN, 2014, p. 16). Another target demands increased access of small-scale enterprises to financial services, especially in developing countries (UN, 2014, p.16). Finally, one addresses the need to significantly increase the access to information and communications technology (UN, 2014, p. 17).

Goal eleven declares how access to safe and affordable housing must be achieved for all. It also speaks of access to sustainable transport systems and green and public spaces with particular reference to PWDs (UN, 2014, p. 18). The following SDG calls for “public access to information in accordance with national legislation and international agreements” (UN, 2014, p. 22). It also speaks of ensuring that all people have equal access to justice (Lastly, accessibility is addressed in goal seventeen, which addresses the subject of trade. It is stated that countries must “realize timely implementation of duty-free and quota-free market access on a lasting basis for all least developed countries” (UN, 2014, p. 23).

Awareness is found in two goals of the SDGs related to climate change and sustainable consumption and production. The goal on climate change emphasizes the importance of education through raising awareness on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning in one of the targets. The goal concerning sustainable consumption and production highlights awareness and relevant information about sustainable development and how to have a sustainable lifestyle (UN, 2014, p. 19).

In a category entitled “data, monitoring and accountability” which belong to goal seventeen, disaggregated data is addressed. It is stated that data should be reliable and timely through its availability. Moreover it should be disaggregated by “income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics related in national contexts” (UN, 2014, p. 24).

Non-discrimination is addressed in three goals. In goal ten which aims to reduce inequalities, the need to ensure equal opportunities through eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices is put forward (UN, 2014, p.17). Non-discrimination appears again in goal sixteen where the UN

calls for countries to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws which will generate sustainable development (UN, 2014, p. 22). Furthermore, goal seventeen calls for a non-discriminatory multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization (UN, 2014, p. 23).

In goal eight, the UN declares that full employment and decent work for all, with special emphasis on young people and PWDs, should be achieved by 2030. Equal pay is furthermore acknowledged as important. Reducing unemployment of youth is emphasized, where a global strategy of Global Jobs Pact is claimed to be of importance. Goal nine further addresses employment concerning the promotion of equal and sustainable industrialization, where least developed countries are to be taken into consideration (UN, 2014, p. 16).

Several targets address law and legislation in various contexts. Goal ten describes how it is essential to eliminate discriminatory laws to ensure equal opportunities (UN, 2014, p. 17), while goal sixteen emphasizes the importance of promoting national and international rule of law to ensure justice for all (UN, 2014, p. 22). In goal 14, which covers the issue of sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, the need to fully implement international and regional laws is presented. The conservation of coastal and marine areas is specifically addressed in relation to legislation (UN, 2014, p. 21). Enforcement of laws is further addressed in relation to gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, where equal rights to economic resources through national law is addressed (UN, 2014, p. 14). Goal sixteen addresses law in relation to the protection of freedom, while also emphasizing non-discriminatory laws in relation to sustainable development (UN, 2014, p. 22).

The area of health is addressed in goal three where the UN states that universal health coverage must be achieved. This includes vaccines for all, financial risk protection, affordable essential medicines and access to the most essential health-care services. An additional target describes the need for “universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education” (UN, 2014, p. 12). In another target under the same goal, the UN aims to significantly increase financing of health and the training, development and recruitment of the health work force (UN, 2014, p. 13).

When participation is mentioned it is done in relation to making cities and human settlements safe, inclusive and sustainable (UN, 2014, p. 18). It is also mentioned in goal sixteen which wants to ensure “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels”. The importance of helping developing countries to participate in global governance institutions is articulated (UN, 2014, p. 22), as is the need for women’s full participation at all levels of decision-making (UN, 2014, p. 14).

Goal seventeen contains a subtitle called “data, monitoring and accountability” but the term monitoring mechanisms is not articulated in the associated targets (UN, 2014, p. 24).

The issues in which PWDs are addressed can be found in goal four and eleven. PWDs are articulated in a target belonging to goal four, demanding equal access to every level of education and vocational training. Addressed in a slightly different way, PWDs are considered in a target demanding the building and upgrading of education facilities that are disability-inclusive (UN, 2014, p. 13). Furthermore, the needs of PWDs are supposed to be given special attention in a target addressing public transport, road safety and transport systems. Finally, PWDs are given particular attention regarding the provision of universal access to green and public spaces in goal eleven (UN, 2014, p. 18).

Quality education is discussed two times in goal four. It is present in the first target, which strives to ensure all girls and boys free primary and secondary education. The second time, it appears in a target declaring the need for “quality technical, vocational and tertiary education including university” (UN, 2014, p. 13).

## **7 Analysis**

As seen in Table 2, key words extracted from the contributions can be identified in the SDGs. The figure presents in what goal the code is mentioned. The codes used in the study are piled up vertically to the left, while the numbers representing the seventeen SDGs are horizontal. The marking scheme uses “x” if a code (term) is used in a specific goal. However, the scheme does not indicate how many times a code is mentioned or what issues the code is related to. The marking scheme merely provides an idea of the spread, and nothing about the content. Therefore, the findings of areas related to codes within the SDGs have been further developed, following the presentation of the scheme.

The marking scheme of Table 2. reveals how codes representing themes from the contributions are addressed some of the SDGs. Accessibility is shown to be addressed in several SDGs, while the rest of the codes are address in few or none. Seven out of nineteen codes from the contributions are not addressed anywhere in the SDGs. Nevertheless, there is more to it than frequency, e.g. a code included in the SDGs does not necessary indicate that it is associated with the opinion expressed in the contributions from the consultations.

In the contribution PWDs address accessibility in relation to improving access to environment, transportation, services and information and computer technologies, essential for disability-

inclusive development. As can be seen in the result, all areas related to environment, transportation, services and information and communication technologies are included in the SDGs. For example, in goal eleven concerning access to sustainable transport systems and green and public spaces, PWDs are specifically referred to. However, a universal design approach is not mentioned.

In the online consultation PWDs request increased awareness concerning stigmatization, prejudices and stereotypes. Efforts to address these issues in relation to PWDs are not included in any of the SDGs. The need for disability-disaggregated data is emphasized in the consultation and should be continuously updated. This request is included in the SDGs, along with disaggregated data on other variables such as gender and age.

Non-discrimination is mentioned in relation to laws in the SDGs. This area is expressed by PWDs in the theme on the need to ratify the CRPD. However, the area where PWDs actually address non-discrimination is in relation to the usage of media to change stereotypical portrayal of PWDs and increase understanding. This means that the SDGs did not include non-discriminatory efforts through media channels but addressed it concerning enforcement of law.

Another area emphasized by PWDs is the need for full and productive employment of PWDs. The procedures in human resources need to be non-discriminatory while considering the needs of disabled in various phases. This request is partly addressed in goal eight, where the UN declares the need for full employment and decent work for all, with special emphasis on PWDs. Additional issues expressed in the theme such as recognizing PWDs as a source of talent and social innovation are not mentioned in the SDGs.

Regarding PWDs desire to encourage ratification of the CRPD and enforce existing laws, the results show that the request regarding the CRPD is missing in the SDGs while the enforcement of existing laws can be found in goal sixteen. In addition, PWDs call for the elimination of laws which reinforce structural barriers, in order to avoid structural discrimination. This is included in goal ten.

The SDGs have included the issues expressed by PWDs regarding health, emphasizing universal health coverage. For example, increased financing and training are in line with the request of PWDs. However, PWDs specifically express the need for a disability-inclusive health care, which is not articulated in any of the SDGs.

An additional area emphasized by PWDs is the full participation of PWDs and/or their representative organizations at all levels. This is supported by goal sixteen which strives to ensure par-

ticipatory and representative decision making at all levels. It is worth noting that the SDGs also emphasize the full participation of women in decision-making, since PWDs are also included in the formulation “women”.

One of the requirements of PWDs is to be properly included in all SDGs, which means that one must look for where they are articulated as “persons with disabilities”. The results show that the group is articulated four times in goal four and eleven. This occurs in relation to equal access to education, the building and upgrading of education facilities that are disability-inclusive, addressing public transport, road safety and transport systems and the provision of universal access to green and public spaces.

The final area of intervention expressed by PWDs regards the need for greater recognition of children with disabilities’ right to quality education. PWDs stress how education must be accessible and how good quality is related to providing “special needs training” specifically addressing PWDs. In the SDGs, quality education is mentioned in two targets in goal four, the first emphasizing how all girls and boys must be ensured primary and secondary education. The need for quality education is included in a second target, focusing on quality education through school systems. PWDs are not specifically addressed in the SDG concerning quality education.

Codes which were not found anywhere in the SDGs are the following; CRPD, Funding, Governance, Human Rights-based approach, Media, Twin-track approach, Universal Design.

## **8 Reflective Discussion**

The contributions by PWDs will be continuously referred to as “codes” or “themes” in the following discussion.

As seen in the contributions by PWDs, the issues expressed are both diverse and concrete. The need for a stronger disability-inclusive approach on all areas mentioned within the consultation appears to be fundamental. However, applying a disability-inclusive approach to the agenda may be a challenging task for the UN as the agenda is universal in its nature. Being universal means that the UN is requested to not only include contributions from the consultation with PWDs but it must articulate issues and areas which are important to other groups in the society as well. Despite this dilemma, the results show that the UN managed to include some specific articulations from PWDs in the SDGs, indicating that the SDGs are somewhat disability-inclusive yet universal. According to the first definition of “real” participation in the theoretical framework, it is essential to include beneficiaries in all stages of development processes. Based on what has recently

been discussed, it is evident that PWDs have been included in the initial design stage of the agenda, while it is impossible to say anything about PWDs' inclusion in future stages of the process. The UN has made clear efforts to include PWDs in the design stage. The online consultation has been a platform in which PWDs could express inputs, opinions and suggestions.

There is reason to assume that the design and formation of the new agenda will have an impact on later stages of a development process. If the UN intends to include views that will impact upcoming stages, it is essential that the SDGs reflect the views of the beneficiaries. A similar requirement can be found in the second definition of the theoretical framework, which defines “real” participation as giving voice to the marginalized to ensure that the expressed views are heard. It also addresses the need for making beneficiaries agents rather than objects of research. What can be said about this is that PWDs have been provided a forum in which they have been given a voice. Nevertheless, providing a forum is not an indicator on whether the voices are heard and considered. Furthermore, as have been acknowledged in the “criticism of sources” of this paper, one cannot say with certainty if all voices in the online consultation are actually originating from PWDs. If, however, one assumes that this is the case, having a “real voice” requires that PWDs' contributions are embedded and identifiable in the proposal of the SDGs as these will form the base for the final agenda. The UN has partly succeeded in doing this seeing that most contributions of PWDs can be identified in the SDGs.

What is lacking in many of the targets is direct articulation of PWDs although they can be claimed to have been addressed in formulations such as “for all”. While it is important for PWDs to be articulated in the SDGs, not being articulated does not mean that PWDs are directly excluded. What is furthermore lacking is the correlation between the general themes of the SDGs and the disability-specific issues expressed by PWDs. For example, when PWDs expressed a need for disability-inclusive health-care where medical personnel receives better training and information about disability-related care, the SDGs choose to address the need to ensure financing of health and training, and development and recruitment of health work force. In other words, most of the themes are not disability-inclusive as requested.

There are themes expressed by PWDs among the contributions which are not mentioned anywhere in the SDGs. The reason behind this can be explained by some of the themes being very specific or aimed at explaining how certain SDGs should be implemented. Since the SDGs are aimed towards establishing what needs to be done, rather than how it should be done, it is no surprise that themes such as “Twin-track approach” and “Human Rights-based approach” are absent from the agenda. These two approaches are not included in the SDGs since they are ex-

pressed in relation to how the agenda should be formed and the requests have likely been taken into consideration when designing the proposal for the SDGs.

Referring back to the part of the theoretical framework, which demands that beneficiaries should be agents of research rather than objects of research, the one thing that can be said with certainty is that it is difficult to answer which of these roles PWDs have played in the online consultation. On the one hand, the online consultation was facilitated by the UN and was indeed a “consultation”, indicating that PWDs were objects of research. On the other hand, the results show that there is reason to believe that the views expressed in this consultation have been taken into consideration by the UN, indicating that PWDs are more than just objects of research since their voices have influenced the content of the SDGs.

The third aspect of “real” participation declares how beneficiaries should stand as experts during the development process and thereby influence the direction of change. The study reveals that PWDs have been provided the opportunity to move from being beneficiaries to playing the role of experts in the consultation, providing the UN with knowledge and perspectives from the group. Moreover, the results show that there is reason to believe that PWDs have influenced the direction of change through their contributions. This indicates that the UN has complied with the requirements in one part of the theoretical framework. Worth noting in relation to this is that the theoretical framework is limited in the sense that it does not elaborate to what extent the beneficiaries should influence the direction of change. It is therefore relatively easy for the UN to meet the requirement of the theoretical framework since one single evidence of PWDs influencing the agenda would be enough.

The fourth and last part of the definition of “real” participation is related to a mentality of “we” participate in “their” project and how local people should be able to lead the project themselves, analyze themselves and make own decisions. What the theory means is that “we” – being the UN, are meant to participate in “their” – PWDs’ project. What can be understood from reviewing the online consultation is that PWDs have been given the opportunity to participate in a project facilitated by the UN and not the other way around. While PWDs had little space to influence the formation of the consultation, they had the opportunity to influence later stages of the implementation and monitoring by participating in the consultation.

The UN appears to have made some positive achievements in listening to inputs given by PWDs regarding a new development agenda but the fact that some themes appear to be missing, does not necessarily mean that the UN did not listen to PWDs regarding those issues. This is because the concept of the agenda is to mainstream all groups in the targets by using formulations such as

“for all”, “at all levels”, “all people” and “all women and girls”. The purpose of using such language is most likely to safeguard the UN from missing anyone, which can be seen as a positive thing. However, this concept is not unproblematic. For those who will implement the future goals, it might not be clear what “all” means. Although the UN sees “all” in a literal sense, the word might not mean the same thing to someone else. While acknowledging that PWDs have been articulated in the agenda proposal, there is still a risk that PWDs fall by the wayside if the targets remain general, as PWDs are already a marginalized group.

An additional consequence of mainstreaming is that important details expressed by PWDs are lost which might be essential for them to fully enjoy the developmental process. For example, the agenda succeeded in including PWDs’ request for better access to information and computer technologies. What the agenda failed to do were to specify how these technologies need to be disability-adjusted for many PWDs to be able to use it. This means that even if the global community succeed in achieving the goal formulated in the present proposal, PWDs might not be able to benefit from it. Balancing a mainstreamed and global agenda, while at the same time making efforts to be as specific as possible has probably been one of the more difficult challenges for the UN.

Challenges exist in relation to the chosen method of this paper. The consequences of using pre-determined words from the consultation to search for correlations in the SDGs could be that one overlook issues that could potentially be of relevance for the study. This dilemma occurred in one part of the study and is elaborated in the analysis. While the study claims that PWDs are not specifically addressed in the SDG concerning quality education, it simultaneously says that PWDs are articulated in relation to equal access to education and the building and upgrading of education facilities that are disability-inclusive. These claims might seem contradictory to the reader but it does not mean that the results are wrong. It means that PWDs are not addressed in contexts discussing quality education but are addressed in contexts about education in general. This shows how important it is to pay attention to the context in which the codes are found and also how important it is to have a broad variety of codes to cover areas that are missed by other search words.

Referring back at the previous research by Wolbring *et al.* (2013), the investigation of PWDs’ visibility in the post-2015 development discourses indicate that PWDs were underrepresented and barely visible within the discourses examined in the study. The research further notes that despite efforts to increase the visibility of PWDs within the development discourses, it has not yet led to action in many instances. Although visibility of PWDs has been one aspect of this study, visibility

is not an independent indicator on how “real” participation has taken place or not, which is what this study aims to investigate. Regardless, what can be established from the findings of this study is that PWDs are visible in several places in the agenda proposal. This can be seen as a step in the right direction seeing that Wolbring *et al.* (2013) found that nothing appeared to be done to increase the visibility of PWDs during the execution of the study.

The empirical findings show that the UN has not only made notable improvements in making PWDs more visible since the formation of the MDGs but also when it comes to involving the group and providing opportunities to express voices and opinions. These improvements however are only true for the design stage of the process, which means that only time will tell if the UN will continue on the path of participation in future stages of the development process.

## 9 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

PWDs expressed a desire for a disability-inclusive agenda. The themes expressed by PWDs that were absent from the SDGs have shown to be related to the implementation and formation of the agenda, which might explain the reasons behind their absence. The majority of themes expressed by PWDs are present in at least one of the SDGs, indicating that there is reasons to assume that participation have taken place. Seen through the lenses of the theoretical definition of “real” participation, the empirical findings reveal that there is reason to believe that the Open Working Group have made efforts to include PWDs in the SDGs. With this stated, the design stage of the process have shown signs of an inclusive participation of PWDs, indicating a future inclusive and participatory agenda.

With reference to the empirical findings, the study makes the following recommendations for the next stages of the post-2015 process, to ensure a continuous participatory and inclusive agenda.

*The risk of mainstreaming* needs to be address and considered in the future agenda. The study shows how mainstreaming does not need to be a risk, but may be in relation to a universal approach as important details concerning development issues may fall into oblivion if not articulated.

*A greater focus on implementation* is a requirement by the participants of the online consultation. While it may be difficult to address expressed views concerning implementation within the agenda, the main concerns for PWDs are related to the implementation and should be considered in every possible way in future stages.

*A continuous dialogue* is essential in order for a continuous participatory process. PWDs and the contributions expressed, must be taken into consideration in the following stages of the post-2015 process if participation, according to the theoretical definition, is to be continuously ensured.

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