



Background

More than one billion people, representing about 15% of the world's population, live with disabilities.

Women and girls with disabilities have the same sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) needs as their peers without disabilities. Yet, too often, stigma and misconceptions about disability – along with a lack of accessible health services, limited personal autonomy, and little to no sexuality education – prevent persons with disabilities (PWDs) from leading healthy sexual lives.

A global study from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reveals that girls and young women with disabilities face up to 10 times more gender-based violence (GBV) than those without disabilities. Girls with intellectual disabilities are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence.

The UNFPA and Rehabilitation International (RI) Initiative from 2019 to 2021 carried a series of advocacy to strengthen SRH information and services for PWDs in both China and developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region in support of the full realization of disability inclusive development.

Key Intervention

The project supported ten consultations with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in the Asia-Pacific region to understand the impact of COVID-19 on SRHR, GBV to PWDs, and also the development of a training package for roll-out of the UNFPA Guidelines addressing GBV and SRH for PWDs.

The project also facilitated partnership building with UNESCAP and governments, and produced a fully accessible video.

At the country level, Chinese OPDs were engaged for advocacy campaigns and the development of video, easy-read versions, and the training package to ensure that knowledge and communication products reflect the needs and interests of PWDs.

Methodology

Many factors prevent PWDs from accessing SRH information and services, and an essential one is widespread stereotypes and misconceptions on sexuality and disability and lack of awareness of SRHR of PWDs among policy makers, service providers, the general public and PWDs. It is critical to increase knowledge base and awareness on SRHR and GBV among stakeholders, service providers and general public through a series of advocacy efforts to break down societal barriers and enable a supportive environment for PWDs to access essential SRHR.

The intervention supported the evidence generation and production of a resources package for civil society, governments, multilateral organizations, and others to ensure gender- and disability-inclusive SRH during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the development of a practical training package to roll-out UNFPA guidance. A social media campaign was also conducted targeting policy makers as well as the general public for awareness raising to increase knowledge and awareness among key stakeholders on SRH needs of PWDs. The intervention also built alliances with women's organizations and OPDs at global, regional and country level.

Key Results

Knowledge base:

Enhanced knowledge base to ensure that policies and practices are inclusive of SRHR for PWDs, especially in the COVID-19 pandemic. Women Enabled International (WEI) and three OPDs conducted ten virtual and in-person consultations in the Asia-Pacific, which contributed to a resource package published by UNFPA in 2021 on COVID-19, SRH, gender and disability.

Training package:

Availability of a training package to support roll out of UNFPA/WEI Guidelines. In 2021, UNFPA, WEI, RI and Shanghai Youren Foundation developed a training package to raise awareness of key stakeholders on rights of PWDs on SRHR and GBV. This training package was developed based on the UNFPA/WEI Guidelines and through rich consultation with OPDs.

Partnership:

Expanded partnership building with ESCAP. At the UNESCAP Regional Forum on Advancing Disability-inclusive Development through the Beijing Action Plan in 2019, UNFPA and RI co-organized a session on empowering women and girls with disabilities and addressing SRH needs with representatives from governments and OPDs. A call for action on women's rights and interests was initiated in 2021 by China Disabled Persons Federation, ESCAP, RI and UN Women with support of UNFPA.

Engagement and awareness:

Strengthened engagement with OPDs and increased awareness through advocacy campaigns. UNFPA APRO launched a video which is fully accessible by PWDs with large-font subtitles, audio description of important visual content, and international sign interpretation. UNFPA China supported the Youren Foundation held "Disability Film Festival" with the theme "Disability & Sexuality" during the Month of Disability Voice (the whole of November every year)-a national campaign initiated by grassroots OPDs.

