

# Countering Policy Exclusions: Canada, disability, and international commitments Part 2

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## Transcript from Q&A (participants' names anonymous)

[Deborah] We'd like to take the last little bit of our conversation to bring you, those of you who haven't been speaking for the last hour or so, into the conversation. If you have questions, please use the raise your hand feature of Zoom or post your question in the chat. If it's directed to a specific panelist, please note that to -- Leah's going to write read out the -- any questions in the chat. So maybe we can move from speaker focus. Great, thank you.

### Question 1

[Deborah] And maybe I can invite [Audience Member 1] to begin our conversation with a question. Go ahead, you can unmute.

[Audience Member 1] Hello, can you hear me? Thank you very much for hearing me. Yes, for the possibility to speak. Thank you for your presentation. I would like to know for example, regarding the international level, how your organizations are being interacting with civil society, organizations of disabilities in the Global South, for example, during the Summit like the Global Summit and how are other exchanges and the possible collaborations. Thank you very much.

[Deborah] Wonderful question, thank you. Bonnie, may I start with you? And then if others want, Marijke, we'll get to you next. And then if the others want to connect, that's great. Go ahead.

[Bonnie] Thanks for a great question. So DAWN Canada is part of something called the GFLWD, the Global Forum on the Leadership of Women with Disabilities. That is an international network of women with disabilities leaders. It's not a formerly governed organization at this point, but really makes up a very strong cohort of women with disability leaders from around the world. That's an informal network that's been going on and off for more than a decade. And I think, like I said, I know Marijke is going to talk a bit about the wonderful stuff that HI has done through Making It Work. I would say, you know, there are sort of spotty opportunities and some concrete ones. Many of us gather and come together when there are international meetings like the Disability Summit, like the CRPD meetings, and like the CEDAW meetings. It's not good that that's the only place that many of us are

able to work and collaborate together because we're not resourced properly to do the international work otherwise. And again, I'll just pivot back to the Feminist International Assistance Policy and the hope that, like I said with the new government, that we're going to see some shift in terms of ensuring that the Feminist International Assistance Policy is actually focused on the women who most need it and who are essentially the global minority majority, if you will, for service.

[Deborah] Great. Thank you, Bonnie. Marijke, may I invite you if you'd like to respond?

[Marijke] Yes, absolutely. So usually when in these international spaces, there's different ways that we interact with and try to support organizations of persons with disabilities, including women-led organizations, because we ourselves, we're an international NGO, but we're not a representative organization. So one of the ways is by, for example, if we can, supporting their participation -- that includes financial support for local partners to actually be there on site and be able to be present and join the conversations or by participating in their side events and echoing their calls and their priorities. And so what we also try to do is really to network and engage with local organizations on site to have conversations and to better understand what are their priorities moving forward, because we work a lot with local organizations. So it's important that we know what their priorities are. And I just want to link that as well now to for example, the immense funding cuts that are affecting International Development organizations, but are also having a very, very strong impact on local organizations, local OPDs and women-led organizations. So those are, I think, the main ways that we try to engage and we try to support.

## Question 2

[Deborah] Thank you. I'm going to hold off on the other panelists unless it's urgent because I want to make sure we have enough time. We have two questions that I can see. I don't think I see others. Maybe I can just start with [Audience Member 2] and welcome -- our Global Affairs colleague, [Audience Member 2] -- back and happy to hear you and lovely to see you online. [Audience Member 2], maybe we can start with you and then we'll go to [Audience Member 3] next.

[Audience Member 2] OK, no problem. Hi, Deborah, and thank you so much for the warm welcome. I just wanted to start by saying thank you so, so much for this really informative panel. I was sort of writing notes feverishly throughout. And you know, these are issues that I think, as all of the panelists have noted, have come up time and time again. And I think one thing that is so important is sort of the consistency and the clarity of the message that I think has been coming from civil society and OPDs, because I think as Maureen rightly said, there's no longer really confusion about the issues and, you know, they're importance, but you know, we sort of need to elevate that. So my question, I guess when I was listening

to Neil speak around, you know, different consultations and the different committee bodies, etc. And, you know, the really, I guess the large number of civil society organizations that were consulted in that, I wonder, does Canada have a sort of formal national level, you know, grouping of OPDs, CSOs that kind of meet regularly and, you know, can kind of speak with that united voice. And I give the example of, you know, when I worked in Zimbabwe for about four years, we had an organization called FODPZ. So that was the Federation of Organizations of Disabled People in Zimbabwe. And, you know, they had, I guess their own issues, but one of, I think one of the strengths of that organization is it was really sort of a place, you know, for civil society and especially OPDs to come together and to convene and to then push that forward. So, yeah, I just asked that question, especially coming from the government where, you know, we started to know a lot of different organizations who, you know, we consult with or call in on stuff. But I think it would be really great to kind of, you know, I guess know where to turn to in that sense. Thanks.

[Deborah] Thanks. Neil, can we start with you and then maybe Maureen after that?

[Neil] Sure. It's good to see you again. There is a network, it's an informal network, but it's a formal network as well. It's certainly not reflective of all organizations across Canada. So right now, and it's been a few years in the making, right now it's called the National Disability Network, which brings in multiple organizations to look at some key issues. Right now we're looking at the Canada disability benefits, you know, the election with the new government, that type of thing. Even though the concept has been around for a while, it's still developing and, and still could be opened up more and more. It's not reflective of every voice, every disciplinary group in Canada, nor should it be. And so I'd be reluctant for the government to sort of take a look at this and say, well, there's 40 organizations working together. They speak for the disability community in Canada because it will never have that power. I think it was designed with the concept that coming to look -- together to look at common interests and common priorities, that one group might want to work with another. The entire network could agree to things and present that to government from the network, not necessarily from the disability community nationally. But I'll let Maureen pick up on it as well because she's involved as well. Thanks.

[Deborah] Go ahead, Maureen.

[Maureen] Yeah, I just, I think Neil did a great job of talking about -- talking about the network. And I think that the idea behind the network is of communities of practice as opposed to decision making and opposed to making sure that -- or representation, like Neil said, right. And it's a way that we can get together. But the other thing is, and like I -- we have to say this, it's not funded. There's no funding for it. It's just about us realizing that we

have to work together in order to move the move the files forward. And so it's a platform for us as opposed to a platform for the government.

[Deborah] Thank you. And a good reminder that one of those key messages that you've been hearing, [Audience Member 2] and others, is that this needs to be resourced. This sort of support needs to be resourced and and capacity needs to continue to be built if you really want us to engage effectively.

### Question 3

[Audience Member 3], you've been very patient. Thank you.

[Audience Member 3] Hi, Deborah, thank you. So my question goes out to any of the panelists. I did hear aspects of engagement with stakeholders, for instance, both in government when it comes to working with women with disabilities. But I'm back from Uganda, here where I come from, I've also noticed that many of the women with disabilities struggle, especially in line with issues of SRHR. So in the medical sense, we have health practitioners that are, yes, supposed to do work around, you know, helping women with disabilities when it comes to, you know, issues of childbirth, but they end up discriminating them, stigmatizing them. They -- we have many women who go through issues of sexual violence, you know, as women with disabilities. So my question is, in line with sexual health, I mean in line with SRHR, have there been any instances where any of the partners maybe has worked with healthcare professionals and created allies with them in order to support women and their disabilities and how did they go about it. Thank you.

[Deborah] Thanks. Maybe I can just clarify, SRHR stands for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and I think Bonnie probably is the one person who wants to answer to that. Yes, Bonnie?

[Bonnie] I do.

[Deborah] Or is it Marijke?

[Bonnie] Sorry, am I on or off?

[Deborah] Yes, you're on.

[Bonnie] So I think Marijke should definitely speak to that because I know HI have done some work in that area internationally, and I know that's where [Audience Member 3] is coming from. But I guess what I will say is just to -- and then I'll leave it to Marijke from there -- is the biggest issue, I think, has been the larger point that women with disabilities and their sexual reproductive health and rights are not regarded at all. Access to healthcare at a foundational level is a challenge. And the myth of women with disabilities not having need

for access to sexual and reproductive health continues not just in an international context, but indeed in a Canadian context. DAWN Canada's going to be working actually with the Public Health Agency of Canada to update their resources, which they came to us for because they conceded that their content and resources did not reflect the reality or needs of women with disabilities in a Canadian context. So...

[Deborah] Thank you. Marijke, did you want to give a quick response on this one?

[Marijke] Yes, maybe just quickly to complement -- we do work on inclusive health and inclusive SRHR. And just as you mentioned, working with health service providers is really important. And that's why tackling bias and discrimination, tackling ableism in that is really an essential part of that work. And so usually that happens through awareness-raising sessions and capacity building, which really focuses on different stakeholders, so health professionals, but also making sure that we target local authorities so that policies are in place. We work with the disability rights movement as well. But I think absolutely tackling bias and discrimination in the healthcare sector is really important. And I think, again, bringing that back to, you know, measuring and data, being able to also measure the impact of interventions in that regard is really important.

[Deborah] Great, thank you. Leah, I expect you have some questions in the chat.

#### Question 4

[Leah] I do. Thanks, Deborah. There are two questions in the chat and noting the time, I'm wondering if I should read them both maybe and then we can deal with them together. Thank you to all the panelists for the really rich presentations and your responses to the questions so far. So the first question comes from [Audience Member 4] in Haiti. And they write, "Thank you for your presentation. I live in Haiti where the situation is truly chaotic. We have no parliament, and the government is also unstable. In this context, what concrete techniques can we use to effectively continue our advocacy and lobbying for the rights of women and girls with disabilities, techniques that are truly adapted to our reality?"

The second question comes from someone who is identified as [Audience Member 5], and the question reads, "Liberals promised justice for people with disabilities. Is there news on the pro -- on the process or maybe progress? Also, how are Canada's geographic, provincial, and university of vacuums of disappearing disability systemic leadership and expertise being addressed?" So I think this question is sort of asking about gaps in expertise across in various regions across the country.

[Deborah] And though maybe what -- thanks, Leah -- maybe what we can do is ask each panelist to reply to one of those and have those be our concluding responses. So I'll begin with Maureen and then go to Neil and then Marijke and then Bonnie.

[Maureen] OK, sure. I think that we should talk like just about the area of justice for people with disabilities and the disappearing leadership, right? I think that that's huge, and I know that it keeps people here, right? Like it keep -- because people with, folks with disabilities that I know that should have been retired a while ago, like are still sticking on because, because what is that succession plan? What does it look like? So that mentorship piece is hugely important. I hope that the Network one day will be able to foster that as well. But I do think that it is around this knowledge exchange and making sure that when we are pulling people in, that we are actually doing mentorship and we are making sure that there are emerging leaders among us.

[Deborah] Wonderful. That succession plan, that intergenerational leadership is incredible, hey? Neil, any response to either of those questions?

[Neil] Yeah, I would agree with what Maureen said. And again, back to my comments about the government supporting civil society organizations to be a part of international work focusing on the youth component as well. And then in relation to Haiti, I'm not familiar with what's going on there for sure. And what kind of detriment might happen to civil societies working together to keep pushing forward, you know, the fundamental rights of your constituents with disabilities. So I wish I could answer that more, but without a functioning government, I think your best bet is to rely upon each other as organizations moving forward: support each other, share resources. But again, I don't know the downside to that from a lack of government or whatever power is in place. So sorry about that.

[Deborah] Thank you. And I actually think Haiti has a lot to teach us about how to work in times of crisis. Marijke.

[Marijke] Yes, sorry, I was going to unmute myself, but I'm still unmuted. So maybe just with regard to the Haiti question specifically, I think some of the, you know, strategies for doing advocacy and difficult and, you know, contexts like Haiti, I think one is definitely, as we mentioned before, this cross-sector collaboration and alliances, building strategic alliances across different advocacy movements, but also engaging community leaders to ensure that there is buy-in from, you know, at the very local level as well, not just at the national level. And then I would say in difficult contexts, also leveraging these international or regional human rights mechanisms, you could really help because it helps mitigate the risk, as well, of doing advocacy. If you can, you know, bring in these different frameworks. We talked about the treaty bodies, for example, there's also a special rapporteur on rights of persons with disabilities. There's all these different mechanisms that can help highlight and help amplify or advocacy at national level and help take some of that risk away. And I think I would say the same about collaborating, finding partnership with international

organizations and where possible also the diaspora where they can advocate outside of the country, but for -- to tackle issues within country. I'll stop there.

[Deborah] Thanks, Marijke, and thanks for bringing up those important pieces of not just international human rights, but regional human rights, as well as thinking about the diasporas and how folks, for example, in Canada from Haiti can be supportive. Bonnie, last word to you.

[Bonnie] Thank you. So for our friend from Haiti, in terms of what I had put in the chat or was starting to try to put in the chat was really to encourage you to do what I think all of us in the feminist disability space do, which is to lean into each other first and foremost to solidify the peer support group that you have and identify some key issues. I think a lot of the things Marijke suggested are very good, but I also think, you know, state parties are not something that you can rely on for change. State parties will not make change in Canada. We have all the reason in the world to have seen that change, but it hasn't happened. And so, you know, I will say that your advocacy should focus on where you are and in the community where you live, first and foremost, because affecting change at the international, national, or state party level, it's very hard to do. And we need small wins. And I encourage you to go after small wins in your community where you and your -- the people that you are standing with can see change. And I know it can happen. But like I said, I do want to encourage you to stay local in some of your focus because that's how you can effect some change that you and the people that want to fight together can see. And I think the last thing very quickly is in terms of Canada. Well, Mr. Carney put out a book. He talks a lot about values and investment. And I do think we are dealing with somebody who's not a politician. So I have some hope around the fact that he's a pragmatic man and that that 30%, which is my big gun, is going to make a difference in this case because the numbers matter.

[Deborah] Well, thank you for ending with wisdom and about being strategic in working where we are locally grounded and with the needs of -- where we began this conversation -- those who are most affected. And so I really want to thank all the panelists and all those who participated for thoughtful interventions and comments and questions. I think we've been able to have what I think is a valuable discussion about priority areas for action from Canada's international agreements, but also the leadership of women, girls, and gender-diverse people with disabilities to address those areas. And as [Audience Member 2] said, we've given -- the message is incredibly clear: it's consistent, it's universal, data, involve women and girls with disabilities representatives and other organizations, fund their participation, make sure that you mainstream disability, but you also have targeted

projects related to women and girls with disabilities. So thank you to our panelists for sharing their knowledge and experience.