



ASEM Disability Cooperation Event

29-30 October 2015, Beijing, China

“Break Barriers for Inclusive Development”

Concept Paper

I. Why is ASEM Cooperation on Disability Essential?

It is a time when the relationship among ASEM members has never been more important to our collective future. The major challenges of the 21st century, from climate change to economic development, are challenges that touch all of our nations, and challenges that none of our nations could solve by acting alone. Disability issue is one of the challenges, and there is a consensus that the issue needs to be addressed collaboratively by all countries.

The Asia-Europe Meeting provides a very good inter-governmental platform for collaboration in different areas. Disability collaborations within the ASEM framework would be a good example of how inclusion of persons with disabilities could be translated from broad statements at the international level into specific action that makes difference to the lives of persons with disabilities.

Further, ASEM disability cooperation is in line with the UNCRPD, which calls for States Parties to recognize the importance of international cooperation, and to undertake appropriate and effective measures between and among State Parties.

That's why Chinese Premier Li Keqiang called for the incorporation of disability issue into ASEM cooperation framework last October during the ASEM summit meeting in Milan of Italy. CDPF is in firm belief that practical ASEM cooperation on disability is essential and could achieve three major objectives.

Objective 1: Social Development

According to WHO, over one billion people or 15% of the world population have some forms of disabilities. More than half of them live in ASEM countries. Persons with disabilities are a large disadvantaged group. They face numerous difficulties and barriers in daily life and in social participation. They are also important members and productive forces of society. However, this potential and productive force all too often goes unnoticed and untapped.

Protecting their rights of development, and fostering an equal and inclusive social environment for persons with disabilities have a bearing not only on the life and development of persons with disabilities themselves, but also on the harmony, stability and development of society.

It is thus essential for us to make common efforts in helping them to live in an enabling, friendly and favorable environment to achieve inclusive development of our society.

Objective 2: Human Rights

Like other members of ASEM, China is committed to protecting the rights and interests of persons with disabilities. We are among the first countries to sign and ratify the UNCRPD. However, we acknowledge that it is the existing barriers and discrimination, which, to a large extent, create or aggravate disabilities and actually set people with disabilities apart from society. Therefore, it is our duty to increase our recognition in providing protections for the human rights of persons with disabilities.

Most ASEM members have already signed and ratified the UNCRPD, while EU is the first intentional organization to ratify this Convention. And hopefully, we can make the October Event a new starting point, to do something for persons with disabilities in Asia, Europe and beyond, to increase the momentum of social development inside each ASEM member, to ensure the improvement of their human rights conditions.

Objective 3: Economic Development

As WHO pointed out, everyone, including us, has experienced or will experience some kind of limitation or constraint bound by our bodily conditions at some future point. Besides our maybe temporary lapses of bodily function, there are actually more than one billion living with permanent disabilities, in many cases making them a burden to the community.

Both Asian and European countries are active in developing disability-related initiatives, but they are at different stages, face different challenges and have developed a broad spectrum of solutions. As such there are much scope and good prospects for mutual learning and cooperation.

On the other hand, the development of disability related technology is inevitably connected to the development of the Internet of Things. With advanced connectivity of devices, systems and services that go beyond machine-to-machine communications usher in automation in nearly all fields, and this will transform many industries, companies and even governments to witness new economic growth and competitiveness, and will eventually become a new source of economic growth.

Not only the disability-related industry itself has growing potential, with assistive devices and technology, many persons with disabilities who are currently not able to go to work can reintegrate themselves into workforce. This will also provide a substantial uplift for the economies affected by rapidly aging populations.

In summary, the development of work on disability and international collaboration on disability could enhance social development, human rights protection and economic development in each of our countries or regions.

II. How Shall We Proceed with ASEM Disability Cooperation?

To follow up the initiative of Premier Li, CDPF along with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would like to host the ASEM Disability Cooperation Event on 29-30 October in Beijing with the theme of “Break Barriers for Inclusive Development”. The core of the Event is the ASEM High-Level Meeting on Disability, which is supposed to have four agenda items:

1. Opportunities and Challenges—Current Status of Work on Disability in ASEM Countries;
2. Enhancing Pragmatic Cooperation—Best Practice Sharing;
3. Assistive Devices & Technologies—a Starting Point of ASEM Cooperation on Disability;
4. Towards Inclusive Development—Vocational Training and Employment for Persons with Disabilities.

The Meeting will be followed by a proposed **Global Conference on Assistive Devices & Technologies**, composed of **High-level Opening, Dialogue with Entrepreneurs** and **Experts Meeting on Assistive Technology**, and is open to all including ASEM members, which can be called “ASEM plus”.

As for future cooperation, CDPF has proposed three highlighted areas, which are: a) Policy Dialogues; b) Sharing of Methodologies and Experiences; and c) Technical and Industrial Exchange. A roadmap for future steps will be discussed during the meeting. We would appreciate any comments and suggestions you might have.

Through such cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual respect, we hope to achieve the goal of promoting the common development of work on disability and protection of human rights of persons with disabilities in both Asia and Europe.