



Call for Papers

6th ANNUAL DISABILITY RIGHTS CONFERENCE

*'Are we learning together?
Addressing barriers to inclusive
education in the African region'*

6 – 7 November 2018

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About the Conference

The 6th Annual African Disability Rights Conference will be held from 6 to 7 November 2018 at the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria in South Africa. This year's conference will focus on addressing the barriers to implementation of inclusive education in the African region.

It is anticipated that papers presented at this conference will be reworked by authors and submitted for consideration for publication in the 2019 volume of the *African Disability Rights Yearbook*.

Background

It is more than a decade since the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted, ushering in a transformative paradigm for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of persons with disabilities. The signs are that the Convention is impacting positively on the African region. Out of the fifty-five members of the African Union more than two-thirds have since ratified the CRPD. Another sign of regional significance is that on 29 January 2018, the African Union adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (the Protocol). The adoption of a binding African treaty specifically to ensure the respect, protection and fulfilment of the rights of Africans with disabilities constitutes not just an affirmation of the Convention, it also signals a commitment to ground disability rights on African soil so that they speak to the lived experience of Africans with disabilities.

The increasing number of African countries that have ratified the CRPD is a promising sign though not a sufficient indicator for measuring domestic commitment to honour and implement treaty obligations. Equally, whilst the African Union has taken a giant step in adopting the Protocol, in the end what is crucial is whether the human rights of Africans with disabilities are fulfilled at the domestic level. Rhetorical commitment is not enough. Whether we can find at the domestic level laws, policies and programmes that fulfil treaty obligations and attendant rights is a more dependable test of commitment. Ultimately, treaty obligations must be translated into reality at the grassroots so that persons with disabilities can effectively enjoy the rights they bestow.

One of the areas in which the CRPD and the Protocol call for a transformative paradigm at the domestic level is in provision of education.



Education is recognised as a fundamental right not least because it is critical to the realisation of other human rights. It facilitates individual development, self-actualisation and social mobility. Education is an indispensable gateway for effective participation in society, not least in the economic sector. Whilst systemic discrimination is experienced by persons with disability in all socio-economic spheres, it is in the education sector that such discrimination exacts some of its most devastating and long-lasting effects. Barriers to education easily translate into barriers to the economic sector which often mean for the affected individual lack of economic independence and life-long dependence on the family, the state and charity for sustenance. The over-representation of persons with disabilities among the poor is largely explicable by their under-representation in access to education and vocational skills.

Article 24 of the CRPD seeks to remedy the historical marginalisation and exclusion of persons with disabilities from the education system. It guarantees persons with disabilities a right to education at all levels without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. Even more significantly, article 24 recognises a right to 'inclusive education' as an integral part of the human right to education. The concept of 'inclusive education' is pivotal in understanding the transformative potential of article 24. It marks a departure from a 'one size fits all' education system to a system where the state must provide learners with disabilities with access to education within a learning environment that provides them with the support they need to attain 'effective education' through the 'general education system'. Article 16 of the Protocol emulates article 24 of the CRPD in recognising not just a right to education but equally significant a right to inclusive education.

The notion of a right to inclusive education is not new but is largely a culmination of global advocacy and consensus on the imperative of an education system that accommodates diverse learning needs and capacities. The origins of inclusive education can be found in several global consensus statements and soft laws that preceded the CRPD. These include: *the World Declaration on Education for All* (1990); *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* (1994); *Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (1996); *Dakar Framework for Action. Education for All* (2000); *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*; and in some general comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It is also significant that the inclusive education has also been globally affirmed in consensus statement adopted after the CRPD and notably by Sustainable Development Goal No 4 and by the Thematic Study of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2013).

What is significant about article 24 of the CRPD is that it is more than just a consolidation of global consensus on inclusive education. It constitutes the first time that a right to inclusive education has been expressly recognised and its duties articulated within an international treaty based on a human rights model and whose main purpose is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities. In 2016, in its General Comment No 4, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the CRPD Committee) underscored that inclusive education requires recognition of diversity among learners. It requires a transformation in culture, policy and practice in all formal and informal educational settings with a view to accommodating different learning needs and different identities of learners and the removal of barriers to full and effective participation of all learners. Ultimately inclusive education requires in-depth transformation of the education system in laws, policies and the mechanisms for financing, administering, designing, delivering and monitoring education.

At the same time as clarifying the obligations that flow from the duty to provide inclusive education, the CRPD Committee noted that whilst progress is being achieved worldwide in the attainment of inclusive education, 'profound' challenges persist resulting in millions of persons with disabilities being denied the right to education. The challenges identified by the CRPD Committee include: failure to understand or implement a human rights model of disability; persistent discrimination against persons with disabilities; lack of knowledge about the nature and advantages of inclusive education; lack of disaggregated data and research

to facilitate accountability, development of effective policies and programmes and interventions; lack of political will, technical knowledge and capacity; inappropriate and inadequate funding; and lack of grievance-remedial structures to address violation or rights.

Participants

The conference seeks to bring together scholars, researchers, practitioners, human rights activists, advocates for law reform, persons with disabilities, civil society groups, lawyers, and policymakers and analysts from across Africa and beyond to address the barriers to implementation of inclusive education in the African region.

Possible topics to consider

Barriers to inclusive education open themselves to a wide range of conference topics. These include but are not limited to the following topics (explored individually or in combination):

- interrogating the philosophy and meaning of inclusive education
- inclusive education and democratic theory
- combating persistent discrimination
- designing and applying the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach
- using information and communication technologies (ICT)
- early childhood intervention
- designing and implementing curricula
- designing and implementing pedagogy
- designing and implementing assessment methods
- training and capacitating educators
- designing and implementing the organisation of pre-school, primary school, secondary school, tertiary and vocation learning institutions and environments
- meeting the learning needs of learners with specific disabilities, including autism spectrum, communication impairments and sensory disabilities
- place and future of 'special needs' education
- meeting the needs of blind and partially sighted learners
- meeting the needs of deaf and hard of hearing learners
- meeting the needs of deafblind learners
- advocacy and awareness-raising
- place of the family, community and organisations of persons with disabilities
- design and implementation of policy and laws
- scope and limits of reasonable accommodation
- funding
- monitoring

- enforcement, accountability and grievance-remedial systems
- comparative systems and lessons from other jurisdictions

Priority will be given to abstracts which respond to all of the following three criteria:

1. Current and locally-relevant;
2. Jointly conceptualised by academics, educators, policymakers, members of civil society organisations and persons with disabilities;
3. Propose innovative and practical solutions that contribute to reform of laws, policies, practices and attitudes.

Submission specifications

A committee will review abstracts that are in English, are 300-350 words in length and in MS Word format (not PDF).

Abstracts must be sent by email before **1 July 2018** to dianah.msipa@up.ac.za

Abstracts must be submitted in a single document and include:

1. Title of abstract
2. Author's name
3. Affiliation
4. Qualifications
5. Email address

Funding

Limited funding for travel and accommodation is available to support authors whose abstracts have been accepted and have also submitted written papers. Applicants seeking financial support should indicate in a separate letter, accompanying the abstract, the reason(s) for the application and the nature of support they are seeking.

Applicants will be notified by **4 October 2018** whether their application for funding has been accepted.

Deadline (Abstracts):

1 July 2018

Authors will be notified by **6 July 2018** whether their abstract has been accepted.

Deadline (Papers):

28 September 2018

Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be required to submit their full papers by **28 September 2018**.

Abstracts and queries must be sent to dianah.msipa@up.ac.za



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