



## **Background paper on the positions expressed in the Draft International Convention regarding rural areas**

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The associations representative of Disability in Argentina that are grouped in ENCIDIS, affiliated to OMPD- DPI and in straightforward support of the circumstances of our fellow people with disabilities living in rural areas, both in Argentina and in the Latin American region, wish to express our positive intake of the results obtained so far at the various meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee.

We wish also to point out that we value the level of participation in the debates by entities representing disability all over the world, as well as the contributions to those representatives actually present, who receive advice from their basis through networks created to that effect, which no doubt have a democratic methodology with a high intellectual level.

The acceptance by the UN General Assembly of a Convention as a juridically binding instrument for the promotion and protection of the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities (PWD) has interested a good part of the community -at the government, representative organizations, families and individual PWD level- and has generated a thematic dialogue that enhances awareness of the world society as a whole.

This whole political framework for the debate and the chance it provides to achieve a universal juridical norm benefiting PWD has prompted us to refer to a situation that is taken into considerations in several paragraphs of the Draft Convention. We would simply wish to strengthen that position with additional arguments that might contribute to have a clearer, better founded concept of the situation of PWD in rural areas.

Our intention is to contribute to the prompt drafting of the final text, without any further delays, and to offer information based on our experience in such areas. Once the norm becomes applicable, such information will help give its true dimension to the situation of PWD living in rural areas, and to take concrete actions in the short term to allow for a progressive solution.

To approach the weighty subject of the situation of PWD in Rural Areas forces us to analyze situations of poverty in the population that resides in rural areas, and to determine the structural or cyclical factor contributing to its perpetuation and affecting in particular the most vulnerable persons in those social groups.

In that regard, it is important to keep in mind that 99% of PWD living in such geographical contexts are poor and have a limited access to services such as health, education and to the possibility of employment.

## **Discrimination due to geographical situation**

A generally marginalized population media, in our subcontinent and in most of the world, are rural areas.

The majority of the population in Latin America live in such areas, and therefore a large proportion of PWD in our continent live in rural areas and are subject to a double or triple discrimination, as a PWD who lives in a rural area and furthermore is in a situation of poverty.

The research carried out by IFAD, International Fund for Agricultural Development unveils important data regarding rural poverty, which has proved a useful basis for the following analysis.

The new century starts with a challenge to establish viable models for rural development, which contribute to national economic growth but, at the same time, may help solve current poverty levels by creating and offering opportunities to poor rural societies.

The success in the development of peasant agriculture as a tool for the reduction of rural poverty depends, in the first place, on the identification of those critical factors causing or perpetuating rural poverty in a region and, in the second place, on the elaboration of strategies and proposals aimed at eliminating or reducing the restrictions caused by those factors.

Rural poverty must be considered as a dynamic process of human relations and interactions, rather than an attribute of certain individuals and groups, thus losing its abstract and numeric classic characterization based solely in quantitative parameters of the social and economic kind.

In the rural areas of Latin America and the Caribbean, poverty and extreme poverty are multidimensional cultural, social and economic phenomena characterized by:

1. Exclusion and discrimination based on ethnic origin, gender and disability,
2. Lack of access or limited access to services aimed at satisfying the basic needs of rural families (health, education, housing and others); and
3. Income levels below the minimum amount necessary to obtain the basic provision of goods and services for the family, including food and medicines. This situation is gravest in the case of PWD.

The definition of rural poverty in the region would have a very limited scope if only the income levels were used to describe or explain its nature, causes and viable solutions. In search for a wider definition and characterization, international organizations introduced the notion of 'unsatisfied basic needs' (UBN) as an indicator of the degree of poverty in rural and urban communities and localities. Yet, due to the nature of its indicators of access to basic services, the exclusive use of UBN to characterize poverty also brings an incomplete description of the phenomenon, since it groups together differentiated population segments, often distorting the results particularly in zones with human groups heterogeneous as to income and access to services. The human development index (HDI) implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which has also been applied in Latin America and the Caribbean, combines several

social and economic variables in order to obtain a measure of the rural poverty in a given political or geographical area. Thus it better resembles the complex nature of the phenomenon of poverty. Additionally, the use of income, UBN or HDI in the characterization of poverty tends to present a statistical picture, since it is based on surveys and studies that are separated by long time intervals due to their high costs. Otherwise, such studies also use secondary information without rigorously checking its sources. Also, such statistics fail to reflect the dynamics of poverty, since the levels of poverty in the region are not static and are modified as a result of physical phenomena, climate disasters and political or economic crisis.

In our view, rural poverty must be considered through the combined use of three indicators: exclusion, discrimination and limited access to basic services and family income. All three are closely related to the causes of poverty and also allow for a more precise approach in the search for viable solutions.

Poverty in general and rural poverty in particular, must be conceived as a process in which human beings present and develop social and behavioral patterns. Such patterns guide their actions and relationships within and without their homes, within and without their communities. Due to these intrinsic characteristics, poverty is more than just a demographics category or a socioeconomic class: poverty is also an attitude towards life. This aspect is connected to the perception poor peasants have of themselves, before the local community, the rural society and the country as a whole, leading to belittlement and low self-esteem, often present in men, women, young people and PWD in poor rural populations. Such perceptions affect the nature of productive and reproductive processes of the family, its survival strategies and its relations to other peasants, poor or not, with the community and the social fabric of the surrounding rural world. Knowing the 'psycho-emotional entourage' of the poor peasant, their perceptions, and personal and family aspirations, directly affects the possible success or failure of programs for the reduction of poverty and for rural development. It matters whether this 'visions' are or not included in the design and implementation of programs for poor rural populations.

Structural poverty (or 'hard poverty') mainly affects vulnerable groups comprising indigenous persons, women and PWD settled in rural areas in the region. Such poverty is characterized by very low or nonexistent education levels; lacking or very limited productive resources; limited productive know-how; few labor abilities; and the lack of access to basic and productive rural services.

Cyclical poverty includes the families of small farmers and landless peasants, of both sexes, who are specially vulnerable to changes due to structural reform processes, to internal and external economic cyclical crisis and to social and political instability in a country. This type of poor person usually owns or has access to small parcels of land, has a certain relation to markets and their income is bordering the poverty threshold. Sudden changes in economic policy or a crisis can affect the income of agricultural and non-agricultural families, causing periodical drops in their income and life conditions. Favorable economic changes bring about an adequate environment allowing them to improve both income levels and life conditions, but the cyclical poor lack enough productive resources and goods to stabilize the family economy during the unfavorable periods.

In most cases, the structural poor and the cyclical poor share the same geographic and ecologic rural spaces, and both groups interrelate using social and economic networks and ties as part of their survival strategy. Their economic activities are guided in the same manner, and they only differ in the degree of access to accumulated goods and productive resources. Both groups are located in very marginal areas (arid or semiarid regions, mountain slopes and high plateaus, and tropical rain forests), in ecologic environments that are fragile and often in the process of environmental deterioration. Economic and productive activities of families in both groups of poor persons combine traditional crops and small-range cattle breeding, for self consume in the case of the structural poor, and for self consume and sale in the case of the cyclical poor. Both groups gain an income outside of their plots of land through seasonal wages in agricultural and non agricultural jobs. In the case of PWD, they have no access to such jobs and, therefore, to such extra income. Other alternative sources of income are constant migration within and without their country of origin and some forms of government subsidies. Also, the family activity of transformation and small-scale industrialization of agricultural and non-agricultural products.

Developments in regional economy, the effects of sub regional economic integration and the growing globalization of markets have brought about changes in the income structure of both the structural and the cyclical rural poor. In the first category, the lack of labor skills limits their steady access to the labor market, maintaining a greater dependency from the agricultural activity for income and subsistence, while in the second case, the level of labor income outside of the farming plot is often far greater than the agricultural income. The rural poor show a diversity of economic activities whose components vary with the opportunities and limitations offered by the rural and urban economic environment, periodically varying the proportion of their income from agriculture, wages, transformation of goods and government subsidies. The diversified economic activity of the rural poor is an important characteristic in the design of policies and strategies to alleviate rural poverty.

In examining the aggregated statistical databases for the Latin American and Caribbean region, we find two completely diverse estimates on the total number of poor persons –both rural and urban- within the region. According to CEPAL (2000a y b), by 1997 there were 204 million poor persons in the region. However, according to the World Bank (2000), in 1998 there were only 78.2 million – a gap of almost 130 million people between both estimates. If we accept the importance of the determination of the total number of the poor population in order to plan for the economic and social development of a country and a region, it is striking to find differences of such magnitude between the basic estimates on total poverty by the international organizations that are particularly relevant to social and economic development policy-making – differences that totally affect the establishing of development programs and policies, as well as the allocation of financial resources towards a solution.

Why such differences? Estimates on poverty levels reflect the diverse intakes and perceptions that the society and its institutions have on poverty, influencing the selection of statistical and econometric instruments and methods for its assessment. That means there are two ways to estimate poverty in the region, which due to their different methodological basis show quite different results, creating an important reflected gap between such estimations.

The regional levels of poverty shown by CEPAL have been estimated through pondered and aggregated information in home surveys carried on by the governments in the region, including data from 19 countries comprising 87.2% of the population in the region. In all cases, the poverty and the extreme poverty thresholds have been calculated in accordance with the cost of a ‘basic basket’ of goods and services which takes in account the prevalent price and income structures – therefore, in such estimations, poverty and extreme poverty reflect their level in relation to the concrete economic structure of a given country.

Based on a different methodology, the World Bank estimates poverty using as poverty threshold or universal line an income lower than 1.08 US dollars a day, a value estimated on the basis of country income and consumption data based on studies carried out between 1985 and 1998 (World Bank, 2000). This methodology universalizes poverty into a sole indicator of international use, without regard to the differences between regions and countries within a region. This indicator disregards the fact that the concept of poverty is relative to social and economic development in a country, and that this concept is not limited to the characterization and quantification of poverty as a regional or national condition, but is expressed as a process of relationships between poor persons, families and groups and external social, economic and political forces.

Among the poor rural population, the data in national censuses indicate that there are 26 million rural inhabitants considered to be American Indigenous peoples, on the basis of their maintaining their ancestral language either as the sole language or being bilingual with Spanish. Other 46 million rural areas inhabitants, monolingual in Spanish, are considered as predominantly native American indigenous. Both groups live in conditions of relative poverty or absolute poverty. Urban migration is a fundamental cause of the fall in indigenous populations in rural areas. However, given exclusion and discrimination, those migrant groups are incorporated into the population sectors living in extreme poverty.

An estimated 8 to 10 million homes in rural areas in the region are headed by 2 to 3 million women who perform seasonal paid jobs in agriculture and agro industries. 30 to 40 women with a partner are partially or totally responsible for the agricultural production and the small rural industry. In the past two decades, as a consequence of internal wars, migration and displacement of men, and the effects of natural phenomena and the consequences of structural adjustments place the rural woman as part of the poorer segments of the population.

Social indicators in health and education of countries within the region, expressed also as the level of access to basic services, are presented in Chart 1. Such indicators include: life expectation, access to health care services, child mortality, level of malnutrition in children under 5 years old and illiteracy rates for adults. Estimates for access to basic services in Haiti and the Central American region are among the lowest in the world.

**Chart 1: Basic social indicators for Latin America and the Caribbean**

Sub region	Country	Life	Access to	Child	Malnutrition	Adult illiteracy	
		expectation	health	Mortality	< 5 y.o.	Men	Women
		Years	%	In 1000	%	P%	%
<b>Andes Region</b>	Bolivia	61	44	102	16	10	24
	Colombia	70	63	31	8	9	9
	Ecuador	70	64	40	17	8	12
	Peru	68	44	58	11	6	17
	Venezuela	73	58	28	5	8	10
<b>South Cone</b>	Argentina	73	89	25	2	4	4
	Chile	75	83	13	1	5	5
	Paraguay	71	30	45	4	7	9
	Uruguay	73	82	22	4	3	2
<b>Caribbean</b>	Haiti	52	24	130	28	52	58
	Jamaica	74	74	14	10	19	11
	Dominican Republic	71	78	47	6	18	18
	Trinidad and Tobago	72	56	15	7	1	3
<b>Central America</b>	Costa Rica	77		15	2	5	5
	El Salvador	69	68	40	11	27	30
	Guatemala	66	66	56	33	38	51
	Honduras	67	62	50	18	27	27
	Nicaragua	67	31	57	24	35	33
	Panama	74	87	25	7	9	10
<b>México</b>	México	72	66	36	14	8	13
<b>Brazil</b>	Brazil	67	41	42	7	17	17

**Source: World Bank, Report on world development (1998-99).**

The main causes of marginalization and their incidence in the situation of PWD in rural areas as considered in this paper are economical, historical, politic and cultural. We are aware these are not the only causes, but surely the most important ones.

Based on experience developed in rural areas with 100 families of small farmers in the north of Entre Rios, Argentina, we believe it is pertinent to offer the following recommendations, as a contribution towards the implementability of the negotiated draft Convention:

- Favoring the creation of jobs in the rural environment through the intensification and diversification of production
- Mobilization of financial resources from general rural development plans, including a chapter for PWD
- Uprooting negative attitudes towards PWD in the society, encouraging their active participation in the social processes of their immediate community with a view to the general wellbeing
- Favoring initiatives for the organization of basic units in rural areas, without discriminating disabilities and including family members
- Working with the General Movement of PWD in Latin America and worldwide, as grouped in OMPD and other international civil society organizations, to demand the full respect of basic and all human rights, and to this end to join other entities with converging goals
- Striving for the change in norms that foster pity, replacing them by others that fully respect the dignity of PWD through their own effort and protagonism.