Disability Knowledge and Research Programme

Mainstreaming disability in development:
Lessons from gender mainstreaming

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Executive Summary

Disability in development remains trapped, for the most part, in the 'special needs' ghetto of targeted projects concerned with health, education and welfare. Despite calls for the 'mainstreaming of disability' it has not yet found a home in the development policy and practice mainstream. That disability finds such a home is an essential first step to addressing the social exclusion and extreme poverty that affects the vast majority of the hundred of millions of disabled people in the developing world.

In 2000, the Department for International Development (DFID) published an issues paper *Disability, Poverty and Development*, which recognised this problem. One of the measures it called for was to bring disability into the mainstream. However, research carried out four years later that mapped disability initiatives within DFID found that although there was a substantial number of 'disability-focused' projects, there was little practical evidence that mainstreaming had taken place.

It is clear that for DFID, in common with almost all similar agencies, there remains a great deal of work to do before disability begins to be actively or effectively mainstreamed in development policy let alone practice. While gender mainstreaming has been used explicitly or implicitly as a template for disability mainstreaming, there has been little critical engagement with the actual experience of the former in relation to the latter. This paper uses the experience of gender mainstreaming as a lens through which to view and reflect on some of the proposals for mainstreaming disability in development. It is hoped that this exercise will help inform what is happening or planned on disability by the

principal international development agencies in general and DFID in particular.

The paper begins with an exploration of the meaning of 'mainstreaming', looking specifically at how it emerged as a strategy from the history of feminist advocacy in the development context and drawing out comparisons with the history of the disability movement. Related to this it notes the similarities between the feminist concept of 'gender' and the 'social model of disability' and observes that while the feminist movement has broadly won the argument that the inequality experienced by women has its roots in society, not biology, the disability movement has yet to win that argument with respect to disability. The meaning of disability remains for most people essentially a question of physical or mental deficit rather than one of discrimination and human rights. The experience of gender mainstreaming suggests that the importance of establishing shared understanding of key concepts – not to mention goals – should not be underestimated and that the way in which key concepts are used needs to be tracked, in order to ensure that they advance rather than hinder the goals set out.

The paper goes on to explore recent recommendations that have been made for mainstreaming disability, with specific emphasis on DFID, and compares these with what is currently seen to be 'good practice' in gender mainstreaming. As a heuristic device to structure the analysis, the paper follows a schema of three *interlocking arenas of gender mainstreaming:* (1) at the level of the agency itself with respect to its culture, policies and practices; (2) within its programmes; and (3) the outcomes (following through with the promise of improving equality). Based on the disaggregation of these various realms and strategies or interventions appropriate for each one, the paper then outlines eight lessons from gender mainstreaming that are of particular relevance to disability mainstreaming. These are summarised below.

Lesson One: a clear mandate on disability and development
For many development organisations, statements of commitment to disability equality are rarely backed up by an institutional policy or a clear mandate on disability. Where such policies do exist, they often remain 'trapped on paper'. This paper explores the similar challenges that have been experienced by gender advocates and signals the importance now attached to the development of a gender policy (which makes the connections between gender equality/women's rights and the

organisation's development objectives), backed up by a time-bound implementation strategy with measurable targets and outcomes.

Lesson Two: robust institutional structures to promote a disability equality agenda
Unless there are dedicated structures, staff and resources, the experience from gender mainstreaming suggests that no one 'takes responsibility'. At the same time it is now acknowledged that mainstreaming requires a twin-tracked approach: that is, efforts to integrate gender concerns across all programmes/sectors as well as the need for specific gender-focused initiatives. While some development organisations have recognised the need to take a twin-tracked approach to disability mainstreaming, few have developed institutional structures or appointed dedicated staff to work on disability equality issues, though there are some isolated examples.

Lesson Three: an organisational culture that is supportive of disability equality and staff that have the skills needed to mainstream disability
Over the past decade, there has been considerable emphasis on the inter-relationship between internal organisational values, policies and practices and the effectiveness of external programmatic interventions in support of gender equality. Much effort has gone into identifying strategies that support organisational change (human resources policies and practices, performance management systems, gender sensitisation training) as part of the overall approach to gender mainstreaming. This paper considers whether similar strategies are required from a disability perspective, particularly in relation to understandings of the social model of disability. Specifically, it raises questions about what might be needed in the way of disability equality training, building on lessons from gender training.

Lesson Four: the need for policy-relevant research and information
One of the strategies of feminist advocacy targeting development institutions has been the process of identifying appropriate entry points from international, national, sectoral or organisational policy commitments to gender to generate new research findings or analyses of sex disaggregated data. It is acknowledged that current information and research on disability and development is inadequate and the overall Disability KaR research programme seeks to fill some of these

gaps. While research and statistics are important, this paper argues that they should be seen as one part of an overall mainstreaming strategy.

Lesson Five: practical, relevant guidelines and tools to mainstream disability
One of the main observations is that there are different tools for different jobs. Over the past decade, for example, there has been an explosion of sector-specific gender guidelines, as well as tools for gender and participation, for gender-sensitive programme cycle management, for monitoring and evaluation and for gender audits of an organisation. Current aid modalities have also highlighted the importance of tools such as gender-budget analysis that may also be of relevance to disability mainstreaming. There is also greater recognition that guidelines and tools are more likely to be used if they are not overly complex and are developed in a collabora++tive manner with those who will use them.

Lesson Six: involving disabled people and disabled people's organisations at all levels
The experience of gender mainstreaming suggests that it is important to be clear about the purpose of participation, consultation or inclusion. Counting the numbers of a marginalised group who have been consulted or involved in development interventions is an important starting point but cannot substitute for concrete actions to address the priorities and needs they identify. The paper also considers the importance of not assuming that disabled people are a homogeneous group. Disabled people are a heterogeneous group, not only in terms of having different impairments, but also across the range of identities (gender, age, race, class, income, education, religion, location, etc.). It is crucial that difference voices are heard and that no section of the disability community is marginalised within that community.

Lesson Seven: the need to 'upstream' disability issues in response to new aid modalities
The overall shift in official development aid towards non-project assistance (e.g. SWAPs, DBS, PRSPs) has raised new challenges for mainstreaming. Thus far, gender issues have tended to be sidelined in the new aid paradigm. Current strategies to counter this include emphasis on the need for better institutionalisation of gender (e.g. through policy/strategy, structures, staffing, training, shared learning, etc.) for effective gender mainstreaming into key development policy instruments and processes. Strategies to strengthen civil society groups

in pushing for policy change are also crucial, and support to gender budgeting processes is given as a good practice example in this area.

Lesson Eight: the need for appropriate tools for monitoring progress and outcomes

The paper notes that the most promising approaches to monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment that have emerged in recent years are those that rely heavily on participatory methodologies. In spite of calls for participatory evaluation of disability projects and in mainstream government policies, it is not clear whether this is happening in practice and the paper suggests that disability equality advocates need to be included in wider discussions about monitoring and evaluation and impact assessment.

The paper concludes by observing that those lobbying for mainstreaming disability in development can both take comfort from and be distressed by the history of gender mainstreaming. Outcomes of gender mainstreaming have not lived up to expectations. However, the consolation lies in understanding and accepting just how difficult it is to challenge attitudes, organisational culture and power relationships as well as to tap the financial resources and develop the commitment and skills necessary to institute progressive change. In development cooperation both gender and disability are projects which will take many years, if not decades, to realise. Those looking for 'big hits' or quick victories will invariably be disappointed. This is probably the single most important overarching lesson to derive from the experience of gender mainstreaming. The campaign will be difficult and prolonged.

In this campaign, one important advantage held by the disability movement and its allies within development agencies is the experience of gender mainstreaming: what weapons are needed, where there are pitfalls and dead ends, and the areas where breakthroughs and sustained changes are most likely. The comparative analytical approach adopted in this paper has sought to identify some of the most significant gaps in disability mainstreaming and how these are manifest at different interconnected levels in the mainstreaming process.

The table that follows draws out the lessons from gender mainstreaming of specific relevance in relation to current approaches in DFID.

**Mainstreaming disability within DFID
Some key lessons from gender mainstreaming**

- Devise a clear mandate for disability

- Adopt disability as an official cross-cutting issue

- Develop an implementation strategy with accountable, time-bound goals both in terms of employment and programme work

- Consider how this mandate and strategy can be most effectively communicated throughout DFID

- Establish a sub-group with specific responsibility for disability within the Exclusion, Rights and Justice team in the Policy Division

- Appoint a disability officer

- Address training issues on disability equality

- Working with DPOs, devise appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems

- Collect disability-disaggregated data and develop a disability-based equivalent to gender analysis

- Continue and extend consultation with DPOs in both the North and South

- Develop methods and practices to ensure that disability is taken on board as a cross-cutting human rights issue in multilateral aid instruments

- Demonstrate a practical commitment to mainstreaming disability by earmarking appropriate levels of funding