To what extent are disabled people[1] included in international development work? How can the barriers to inclusion be overcome?

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'*Bringing disabled people out of the corners and back alleys of society, and empowering them to thrive in the bustling centre of national life, will do much to improve the lives of many from among the poorest of the poor around the world*.'
(James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, 2002)

"*Because disability and poverty are inextricably linked, poverty can never be eradicated until disabled people enjoy equal rights with non-disabled people*"
(*Lee* H. (1999) p.13. Discussion paper for Oxfam: disability as a development issue and how to integrate a disability perspective into the SCO. Oxford: Oxfam).

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[1] Disabled people are defined here as those denied rights and opportunities on the basis of having physical, sensory, intellectual or behavioural impairments.

Abstract

The Millennium Development Goals call for increased focus on poverty reduction. The World Bank estimates that 20% of the poorest are disabled people. There is also general consensus that disproportionate numbers of disabled people are among those living in chronic poverty.

Despite this context, the hypothesis is that disabled people are largely excluded from mainstream development programmes and that unless changes are made they are likely to remain in chronic poverty even if the international goals are reached. Research was conducted among international development organisations with offices in the UK, to examine the extent to which disabled people are included in their work. More specifically the aims of this research were to look at the barriers to better inclusion and at strategies to overcome such barriers. A questionnaire was sent to approximately 275 organisations (30 replies were received!) and individual interviews conducted with 22. This research is not intended to be statistically significant, rather to cover a range of different organisations and their approach to disability issues.

All the organisations involved in this study work on poverty reduction issues in various ways, yet the results show widespread exclusion of disabled people from their work. This is generally not as a result of deliberate exclusion more due to lack of awareness of the need to actively consider this issue. A few organisations have put considerable work into becoming more inclusive. Examples of their activities are described. After some consideration, almost all interviewees had constructive ideas on how the barriers to disability inclusion could be reduced within their organisation.

The intention is not to name and shame organisations, but to examine the problems and consider solutions. The source of individual comments therefore remains anonymous except where agreed with the organisation concerned.

Introduction

A written questionnaire was sent to 275 members of the British Overseas Network for Development (BOND), 30 replies were received. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with representatives of 22 organisations [2]. Interviews have not as yet been carried out with funders of the UK based development organisations. However, some information about the funding criteria of a few of the larger donors has been collected.

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[2] A total of 49 organisations were involved in this research, three organisations replied to both the written questionnaire and were interviewed.

When selecting organisations to interview, the aim was to get a range of organisations of different sizes, faith and non-faith based, those known to have done a lot of work to be more inclusive, as well as those about whom the researchers had little knowledge. A disproportionate number (20%) of those replying to the written questionnaire came from organisations specifically set up to work with disabled people (compared with 9.5% of total BOND membership). For these reasons this research is not claimed to be statistically significant, rather, to cover a broad range of different approaches towards disability inclusion.

The aims of this research were: to examine the extent to which development organisations currently include disabled people; to explore the perceived barriers to inclusion; and to gather examples of existing good practice and suggestions for change to be shared between organisations. The aim is not to name and shame organisations, therefore the source of individual comments is withheld unless specifically agreed with the organisation concerned.

Based on the written questionnaire and the interviews, this paper sets out the current situation regarding disability issues within development organisations. It goes on to explore perceived barriers to the inclusion of disabled people within the work of these organisations and strategies that have been, or could be, adopted to minimise these barriers.

The results show a startling lack of inclusion of disabled people among many agencies. However, after some questioning, almost without exception all the interviewees had constructive ideas on how disabled people could be better included within their organisation.

Current Situation

a) Proportion of Disabled People among Beneficiaries or Staff of International Development Organisations

The WHO estimates that disabled people make up approximately 10% of any society. The World Bank estimates that disabled people make up approximately 20% of the world's poorest. More accurate figures in individual countries are often hard to come by. Furthermore, many of these statistics are frequently contested[3]. Figures for numbers of disabled people living in chronic poverty are even harder to find. The dearth of statistics on disability both reflects and reinforces the exclusion experienced by disabled people, particularly those living in chronic poverty, all over the world.

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[3] For further discussion of this issue, see CPRC background paper no.4 (August 2001). Ongoing CPRC research is also expected to provide more accurate information.

There is a similar lack of statistics regarding numbers of disabled people among the beneficiaries of international development work. Apart from those organisations working exclusively with disabled people, only three of the participating organisations claim to collect sufficient data to give accurate estimates of the numbers of disabled people among their beneficiaries. Various reasons are given for this lack of information. Firstly, and perhaps most crucially, disability issues are frequently seen as an add-on to a busy workload, not as intrinsic to any effective poverty reduction work. Secondly, but related to the first point, monitoring of disability inclusion is rarely demanded by donors and is therefore low priority for the organisation's funds. Thirdly, several organisations claimed that their decentralised structure means that data may be collected in local branches, but not be easily available to UK offices, nor is it necessarily carried out within a standardised framework.

Again, excluding those organisations specifically set up to work with disabled people, approximately 50% of the remaining respondents run some sort of programme targeted solely at disabled people. Yet only 22 percent said they aim to include disabled people in all their work. That leaves 78% who see work with disabled people as somehow separate from overall poverty reduction objectives.

Only three organisations reported regularly informing disabled people of their activities. One respondent said that they inform disabled people of their activities "if appropriate". This would seem to imply that some activities would not be appropriate for disabled people. Such an attitude again seems to reflect the tendency to see work with disabled people as somehow a separate objective from other poverty reduction work.

Disability is also largely absent from academic writing on development. Major development journals around the world were searched for mentions of disability, impairment or handicap in titles, keywords or abstracts, from 1996-2001. Out of 44 journals, 31 had no mention of any of these words over the entire five-year period.

Internal procedures in many organisations participating in this study may discriminate against disabled people at all stages of recruitment. World Vision employs 10% disabled people among its UK based staff. The proportion in most other organisations is startlingly low -- 35% reported employing no disabled people in their UK offices. Even in an organisation set up exclusively to work with disabled people, less than 2% of its staff are disabled people. Some participating organisations have very small offices of less than 10 staff. But one organisation of several hundred employees also claims to have no employees who class themselves as disabled. The offices of this agency are totally inaccessible to wheelchair users and no provision is made for the needs of disabled job applicants. Despite this, the head of personnel, said she could see no barriers within the organisation to the inclusion of disabled people. This person insisted that adaptations would be carried out if necessary, but as yet

changes had not been needed. She did not think that lack of access would deter disabled people from applying or from having a fair interview.

No organisation that took part in the study admitted intentionally excluding disabled people whether among staff or beneficiaries, yet few made any attempt to overcome the discrimination that currently exists. One organisation was particularly emphatic that it did not exclude anyone from its work. Yet, whilst making deliberate efforts to ensure that women are included in all the work, similar efforts are not made regarding disabled people.

When asked if they planned to make any changes to increase the numbers of disabled people among beneficiaries or staff, one respondent wrote: "as we do not feel we **actively** *(emphasis added)* discriminate against disabled people we do not intend to change our strategy". The same respondent reports never having received job applications from disabled people and taking no active steps to reduce the barriers to the inclusion of disabled people.

A small number of NGOs have recently considered the whole area of disability in greater depth, and begun developing a proactive, integrated disability strategy throughout their work. Some of the strategies of these organisations will be described.

b) Donors approach towards disability inclusion

Several organisations said that they would work more inclusively of disabled people if there were more support from funders.

Some donors do now ask about disability inclusion in their application procedure, for example DFID, Comic Relief and the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund.

European Commission

The European Commission is among the world's largest multilateral donors. It is currently in the process of finalising new guidelines regarding the inclusion of disabled people in international development work. Paul Nielsen the Commissioner for International Development has said: "disability must be mainstreamed into all development work in order to integrate people with disabilities in developing countries." "Disability is, as are poverty and gender mainstreaming, an important human rights issue…Within the European Union we agree on an approach based on the notion of right rather than charity and an accommodation for difference rather than a compulsory adjustment to an artificial norm. Therefore the limitations faced by disabled individuals should not be linked to their disabilities as such, but to society's inability to provide equality of opportunity to all citizens." (18 September 2001, letter to the Danish disability

movement, DSI). There are several EC budget lines that now state support to disabled people among the appropriate criteria. However, the inclusion of disabled people is still not an essential element of all poverty reduction work that it funds.

Department For International Development (DFID)

DFID's issues paper, *Disability, Poverty and Development (2000)*, proposes a 'twin-track' approach towards disability. Following a similar strategy to that adopted in the case of gender, it is proposed that disabled people should be included in all the work that DFID funds, as well as there being specific initiatives working with disabled people. According to DFID, this approach necessitates change in all areas, they specify: policy; economic, social and human development; infrastructure; conflict and humanitarian assistance; empowerment; media and communications; research methods and progress measurement.

DFID recently added a question on disability to their Civil Society Challenge Fund application form:
"Proposals should show that you have considered the inclusion of disabled adults or children. The design and implementation should demonstrate how their needs and rights of inclusion are met."

However, when asked for the result of this requirement we were told *"we are unable to provide any detailed evidence of the inclusion of **the disabled** (sic, emphasis added) in CSCF proposals. All we can say is that we are confident that none of the CSCF proposals we support has negatively impacted on **the disabled** (ibid)"* (personal correspondence date, 7th March 2002). This reply shows a somewhat weaker approach than the question on the application form would suggest.

Similarly, in a recently published DFID policy document "Making Connections -- Infrastructure for Poverty Reduction", there was no mention of the need to ensure that new infrastructure is accessible to disabled people. This is despite the fact that in the UK, buildings should be accessible to disabled people by 2004. When questioned about this, the reply from DFID was "we blundered in failing to mention disability access" (Dec 2002). There seems to be a long way to go before the twin track approach proposed by DFID becomes a reality.

Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund

All funding applications to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund do need to demonstrate: *"How the proposed work will address gender and disability issues among the participating agencies".* The application form goes on to ask:
How will the project take account of gender and disability issues?
How will women, girls and disabled people be involved in the planning and management of the project?

What impact will the project have on the lives of the women, girls and disabled people?
Give percentage of disabled people among service users.

Barriers to Inclusion

All interviewees agreed with the statement: "The international development community has a responsibility to ensure that all members of society participate fully and equally in the development process". Yet despite the low levels of inclusion of disabled people in their current work, nine out of the thirty respondents to the written questionnaire have no plans to work to increase the participation of disabled people in their work. Indeed, when asked to identify the main barriers to including disabled people, responses include "there are no barriers", "these will only be external to the organisation", "none to seriously consider".

However, after some questioning, the twenty-two organisations interviewed in further detail recognise a broad range of barriers to the full inclusion of disabled people in their work. The barriers can be grouped in to five broad categories: awareness, staffing, access (both physical and in terms of information), resources and organisational working practices.

1. Awareness

The most significant and overriding obstacle to disability inclusion is probably a lack of awareness, knowledge and experience of disability-related issues among the staff of international development organisations. There are many myths and misconceptions regarding disability which permeate our society. Disabled people have been widely excluded from education, employment and leisure facilities. Many of those now working in the international development sector will not have grown up with disabled people around them. The fact that the overwhelmingly, non-disabled staff of international development organisations lack awareness of disability issues is therefore perhaps not surprising. What is more surprising is that in so many organisations whose main aim is to tackle exclusion and inequality in different ways, so little effort is made to tackle this lack of disability awareness and to develop more inclusive working practices.

One interviewee expressed the fear of taking inappropriate action due to lack of experience in this area. Similarly, several organisations said what prevented them from becoming more inclusive of disabled people was lack of knowledge of how to do it. As one person put it "we don't have staff expertise in disablement". This lack of expertise and fear of taking inappropriate action is understandable, however this could be easily overcome by asking disabled people what they want. Out of the 22 organisations interviewed only 3 have regular consultations with disabled people's organisations. Only one organisation reported ensuring

that all staff receive disability equality training from suitably qualified disabled people.

If there are so few disabled people among the staff; if staff have grown up with little contact with disabled people; if even now training is not provided and there is not regular consultation with disabled people, then an ongoing lack of awareness is to be expected. If disabled people were a small privileged elite such lack of awareness might not be too detrimental to the aims of a poverty reduction agency. However, according to the World Bank we are referring to 20% of the poorest.

2. Staffing

Several participants expressed concerns regarding the cost of making a job accessible (these costs often being hugely exaggerated). Many were unaware that there is often government support for such expenses in the UK. Some also claimed that they would find the funds to adapt if a disabled person were employed, but so far this had not happened.

A lack of applications from disabled people was cited by a few organisations as the reason for such low numbers of disabled staff. The World University Service found that over the last two years, less than 1% of applicants have been disabled people. At Help Age International only 2.4% of applicants for the last 17 jobs were disabled people. Several organisations thought that barriers in the areas of education and previous employment led to a shortage of disabled people with appropriate skills for the work. While this may be the case, most organisations make no effort to overcome such barriers.

No organisation admitted any form of disability discrimination in terms of staffing. This does not acknowledge the discrimination against disabled people that already exists, whether intentional or not. If for example a building is not accessible; printed material is not offered in different formats (e.g Braille, large print or audio cassette); proactive attempts are not made to advertise in the disability press and to state that disabled people are welcome; if transferable skills are not considered in recognition of discrimination that may have excluded disabled people from similar work in the past; if disabled peoples access needs are generally not supported in the application procedure, then to say that the organisation does not **actively** discriminate against disabled people in job interviews is meaningless.

One respondent referred to the crucial role of leadership in shaping policy. This same interviewee reported limited commitment to disability at senior levels. It may not be coincidence that this organisation has no disabled staff in senior management or in the board of trustees. Similarly, it may not be coincidence that in International Service (an organisation that has done a lot of work towards becoming more inclusive), 2 out of their 10 trustees are disabled.

3. Access

a) Physical

Inaccessible office space was mentioned by several organisations as one of the biggest barriers to disability inclusion. Yet this awareness does not seem to have led to action. Only 4 of the twenty-two interviewees do have wheelchair accessible offices. Of the other 18, only 4 had taken any steps to make their offices more accessible. Only a third of interviewees considered disabled people's access needs when organising events or meetings. A few thought their meeting spaces overseas would generally be accessible but that this would be more "by luck than design". Few specifically asked participants what their access needs are. Two organisations claimed that their headquarters do not need to be fully accessible as arrangements can be made for appropriate accommodation for disabled people if required. These respondents did not recognise such an approach as discriminatory and likely to discourage disabled people from participating in their work or applying for jobs within the organisation.

Four interviewees stated that whilst they do not take pro-active steps to include disabled people, they do aim not to exclude anyone. Such a statement does not take account of the discriminatory practices that currently widely exclude disabled people from all aspects of society. Furthermore none of these four organisations have offices that are accessible to wheelchair users.

The underlying reasons and obstacles to change are varied: some NGOs point to unsympathetic landlords blocking alterations. Limited resources was mentioned by many, combined with a lack of commitment at senior levels of some NGOs, or a lack of expertise on how to make offices more accessible. Offices overseas vary enormously between countries, but organisations are often limited in their choice of buildings, having to take what is available and affordable. Uncooperative landlords are again mentioned as a problem, along with obstacles relating to the cultural environment, such as buildings being constructed on stilts in areas of Asia. There may also be broader environmental difficulties, such as poor infrastructure or risk of flooding.

b) Information

Only 4% of disabled people in the UK are wheelchair users. Yet when asked about disability access, most people talk exclusively about the needs of wheelchair users. Only five of the twenty-two organisations interviewed produce any material whatsoever in different formats -- for example Braille, audio or large print. One large organisation said that they do not produce any material in these formats because they do not have any supporters who need them. If indeed no supporter does need alternative formats, it could be questioned why the organisation is attracting such a narrow range of supporters. Several

organisations said that they would produce materials in different formats if asked but such a service is not advertised and as yet no one had asked for it. Again, such practice is likely to deter the involvement of disabled people.

4. Resources

Lack of funding was the most commonly mentioned reason given for lack of inclusion of disabled people. This is generally based on assumptions not on actual costings or evidence. In reality many of the strategies suggested to become more disability inclusive, do not cost large amounts of money.

It is true that organisations are limited to a great extent by donor regulations and fashions, so that if disability is not currently a fashionable development issue, NGOs are likely to neglect this aspect in favour of issues preferred by donors. However as has been described many of the larger donors are open to funding the costs of disability inclusion and a few positively require this work. Expense does in any case seem like a strange reason for a poverty reduction agency not to work with the poorest. The cheapest option would after all be to work with rich people instead.

5. Organisational working practices

All organisations have some form of established structure with a range of aims and priorities. The inclusion of disabled people is frequently seen as one among many competing demands and is often a long way down the list of organisational priorities. Disability equality requires a long-term approach, and significant changes that many organisations are not prepared to commit themselves to.

A key structural issue mentioned by several NGOs is the decentralised or partnership nature of their work, where either local offices have a great deal of autonomy and limited accountability in the way they work, or the NGO works with separate partner organisations over whom it has no authority and limited influence. This can be illustrated by the experience of World University Service who approached a group of Community Based Organisations it is supporting in northern Sudan which are running schools and encouraged them to admit disabled children and proactively advertise their willingness to enrol disabled children. This was met with flat refusal and incomprehension by many of the partner managers who claimed that special institutions exist to cater for disabled people.

In addition, there appears to be a lack of commitment to disability issues at senior levels within NGOs: one points out that there is no disability 'champion' within that particular organisation, and many senior figures may have a rather inflexible mindset and do not wish their priorities and goals to be modified in order to allow for disability mainstreaming.

It is widely considered to be good practice in international development work nowadays to base work on the plans of partners overseas. As one organisation put it, our priorities are "up to our partners overseas", or it is up to our country programmes to "mainstream issues they consider most pressing". Another organisation repeatedly stressed that the inclusion of disabled people could not be 'imposed' on partners. The same organisation does however insist much more strongly on the inclusion of women in the work of partners that they fund. This organisation also prides itself on long-term commitment to its partners. This seems like a laudable objective. However this commitment seems to lead to the practice of basing future plans on what existing partners say their needs are. If partners do not currently include disabled people for example, then it is not in their interest for that to become an objective of their donor. Discussion is needed around the issue of when organisations can legitimately question the work and priorities of partners.

In contrast to the idea of long-term commitment as a barrier to disability inclusion, another organisation described the cost of a strong strategic focus as the need to be more flexible, to join or leave partnerships at relatively short notice. This person thought that this may be a barrier to disability work: Disabled People's Organisations often pilot radical approaches that need more than a decade to succeed. DPOs may have extra costs related to providing access or education for disabled people who have lost out on childhood education. This agency, despite being one of the largest, is said to lack sustainable funding strategies that could meet these costs, nor does it have viable exit strategies for partnerships with these organisations.

The nature of the exclusion of disabled people as with any other marginalised groups, means they often do not have the power to insist on inclusion. Furthermore, disabled people are frequently not obviously visible to a visitor to a community. If the staff of an organisation are not made aware of the need to actively find and consult with disabled people the chances of their inclusion are slim.

One respondent wrote that their organisation aims to: "work with governments, NGOs and community-based organisations in a broad way, according to their demands. They have not highlighted the needs of disabled people". This approach does not recognise the extent of disabled people's exclusion. It is quite probable that disability issues did not come up in general consultation with governments, mainstream NGOs and community-based organisations. However this does not validate the exclusion of disability issues, rather it highlights the extent of the problem.

There is often pressure from funders and from within the organisation to make a tangible difference quickly. Project designers and executors may object to changes that they find difficult to implement and which may cause them extra

work. Working with those most excluded, in most chronic poverty, may take longer and produce less visible results. As Jane Carter from International Service said: "it is challenging to go out and find new partnerships with groups that are more marginalised, less likely to know what they want and possibly less articulate. It is a risk of time, effort and money when under pressure from funders for reports, evaluations and meeting targets. It is more time consuming to work with the most marginalised, including disabled people. A culture change is needed to realise that it is a worthwhile use of time. Although some targets are set internally there is also external pressure from funders".

Organisations also prioritise according to how well impact can be measured in order to demonstrate effectiveness: humanitarian assistance may come before long-term social work, and target populations are often not the most marginalised, or those in chronic poverty but those most likely to lift themselves out of poverty relatively quickly. It may be that the Millennium Development Goals encourage this approach. The target of halving the numbers of people living in poverty may encourage a focus on those it is easiest to bring out of poverty.

Strategies to Minimise Barriers

A striking observation from carrying out the interviews was that many organisations began by citing several external reasons for not including disabled people. There were many exaggerated notions of how difficult it is. After some questioning however, almost without exception, interviewees themselves suggested numerous ways in which they could easily adapt their work to be more inclusive. The vast majority of their ideas do not involve large amounts of money or time.

Some of those organisations interviewed have already made efforts to devise and implement strategies to minimise the barriers to disability inclusion.

1. Awareness

Lack of knowledge and experience of disability inclusion among the staff of international development organisations is one of the principal barriers to inclusion. The obvious way to tackle lack of knowledge of how to include disabled people more effectively, would seem to be to ask disabled people themselves. The USAID policy on disability refers to the need for regular consultation with Disabled People's Organisations. The

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Case Study – World Vision
"World Vision (WV) has made significant steps towards ensuring that disabled people are included in all its work. A disability working group of 100 disabled and non-disabled staff has been formed. The group carries out numerous activities, for example: runs awareness-raising sessions; organises staff training; lobbies for changes in policy and practice; provides advice; has formed 'communities of practice' on Human Resources, Inclusive Education and Programmes; produces a quarterly newsletter; has sought additional resources so that including disabled people is no longer seen as an optional

guidelines on disability currently being finalised by the European Commission also specify this need.

Organisations also suggest that it would be useful to share lessons and good practice between themselves, in order to learn from each others' experiences. BOND already has a disability and development working group. But may be able to provide more support on disability inclusion (see section on Assistance and Support).

Training is another important method of raising awareness, and most organisations acknowledge the need for disability equality training from suitably qualified disabled trainers. Time and resources must be devoted to the training and to following up proposed changes.

2. Staffing

A more proactive approach to the recruitment of disabled people would help to decrease the under-representation of disabled staff within development organisations. As well as tackling physical access issues, other suggestions include: providing recruitment packs in accessible formats; placing advertisements in the disability press; specifying that disabled people are welcome on job adverts; recognising the previous discrimination experienced by disabled people (which may have excluded them from similar work in the past) therefore being open to transferable skills; asking about access needs and providing any necessary support.

3. Access

a) physical

Accessible office space is an essential element of any real commitment to including disabled people. Most organisations acknowledge this barrier, yet few have really committed to improving it. Some agencies have installed, or are making efforts to install, ramps and wheelchair accessible toilets. By 2004 all buildings in the UK should be disability accessible. At present, only three organisations state that disability access is an important factor in the design specification of new offices.

b) information

A few organisations have made some efforts to make their publicity materials more accessible to people with particular impairments, using one or more of the following formats: Braille, video, subtitling, signing, audio cassettes and large-print documents. Many organisations are interested in learning more about how to do this. VSO in particular has recently made a big effort to produce material in accessible formats, including the use of: large-print, Braille, minicoms and subtitling all their films. The simple, more proactive, approach of stating that documents are available in different formats would be at least somewhat more encouraging to disabled people, than the current approach of waiting for disabled people to insist on it.

4. Resources

Costs related to the inclusion of disabled people should be inserted in all funding proposals. Partner organisations should also be encouraged to include any costs relating to disability access in their budgets. It will generally be the case that when this is done the actual costs are far lower than was feared.

5. Organisational structure and working practices

Several organisations acknowledge the need to ensure that disability issues are taken into account while drafting and considering proposals, and reviewing existing work with the aim of making it more inclusive. A few organisations state that disabled people participate in the project cycle of disability-specific programmes, but not usually in that of mainstream programmes. Consultation with DPOs should be a regular part of the project cycle.

Some positive examples of working with DPOs were reported by World Vision. In Cambodia the Disability Action Council is co-ordinating work with local NGOs and local DPOs to create a collective disability strategy.

Some NGOs recognise the need to include disability issues in all areas of their work, for example supporting DPOs in advocacy and lobbying of governments; disability equality in education, including units on gender and disability in classroom materials; organising media campaigns, conferences and other events with disabled people. One organisation

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Case Study - VSO

One of our key development goals is to "support disabled people in exercising their rights, and to promote their full inclusion and active participation as equal members of their families, communities and societies". We had to start by examining our own practices and recognised the need to identify and remove barriers in order to include more disabled people as equal participants in our work as partners, volunteers and staff. We have made progress and are working with disabled colleagues and volunteers to address barriers and help make VSO an inviting and inclusive organisation.

"My name is Richard O'Brien. I am a thalidomide survivor.

suggests introducing work placements for disabled people in mainstream NGOs that may not have ever considered disability issues, in order to increase awareness and inclusion. Plan International explained that families are interviewed in their homes whenever possible, in order to gain a better idea of their situation and to minimise the 'invisibility' of disabled children.

Any effective change in behaviour by NGOs must be underpinned by clear organisational strategy and policies, leading if possible to an action plan with resources to implement it.

In order to achieve this, organisations suggest focusing on disability as a mainstream issue by creating a cross-divisional working group. Some organisations, for example World Vision, have employed someone with a specific role to look at the organisation's inclusion of disabled people.

This approach may work well in some areas, but may also encourage the idea that disability is a specialist responsibility not something for all to routinely consider. ActionAid has made a shift away from doing separate disability work towards mainstreaming disability in all parts of its Bangladesh branch and closing down its specialist disability unit.

Assistance and Support Required

In order to implement the strategies mentioned above, organisations must review their current practices and the barriers to disability inclusion; establish clear disability policies and targets which they are committed to, and generally take a more proactive approach to the inclusion of disabled people in all areas of their work. Many respondents said that they would like support with funding and information on policy and practice from: donors, disabled people's organisations, and other international development organisations including umbrella organisations such as BOND.

The inclusion of disabled people could be facilitated by regular consultation with disabled people's organisations. DPOs may be a useful source of advice, contacts and training. However, this should not be seen as a free resource, but a source of expertise that should be valued and reimbursed like any other.

In terms of resources, it would help significantly if donors stipulate that inclusion of disabled people is a condition of funding. Several organisations complained that if they devote time and resources to including disabled people, this is in addition to meeting donor requirements on other issues.

A number of suggestions were made as to how BOND could support its members in increasing the inclusion of disabled people:

Providing disability equality training in groups for organisations that are too small for training to be effective with their staff alone.

Initiating a regular page in the BOND newsletter 'Networker' for disability equality issues.

Providing a forum where it is 'safe' to exchange views without fear of getting it 'wrong'

Producing simple guidelines and examples of good practice for other organisations to learn from.

Providing information on useful contacts, sources of funding, training, workshops and conferences and acting as a forum through which NGOs and DPOs could network and discuss issues.

It is also suggested that BOND take a more proactive stance, producing its own disability policy, (as has InterAction, the US equivalent of BOND); actively encouraging members to become more disability-inclusive; and lobbying funding agencies to insist on the inclusion of disabled people as part of their funding criteria.

Conclusion

The results of this research show a startling lack of effort to include disabled people either among staff or beneficiaries of international development organisations. The majority of these organisations have barely considered disability related issues.   One response to the written questionnaire summarises a sentiment implied by several organisations "working with the poorest is challenging enough without ensuring the involvement of disabled people". There is a striking lack of awareness that disabled people **are** the poorest communities and that if real headway is to be made in reducing poverty then the needs of disabled people cannot be ignored.

Disabled people are rarely excluded out of malice it is generally a result of a lack of awareness and experience. Inclusion of disabled people is currently seen as an addition to existing work competing for time and resources with many other issues. Few organisations see it as an intrinsic and essential element of any

effective poverty reduction work. There are exceptions to this, as Jane Carter from International Service says "it is not okay to say we are doing some nice disability projects and some nice water projects for example. It is time to see the inclusion of disabled people as intrinsic to the whole organisation".

Other CPRC research has shown that for instance older people, children, people with long term health problems are also widely excluded from international development work. There is a risk that these groups are perceived as competing for attention and resources. If the nature of poverty reduction work stays the same only disabled people are included there is a danger that it is at the expense of others. To make real progress in reduction of chronic poverty the whole approach needs to be changed to include **all** those experiencing poverty and to look at the roots of inequality that cause poverty. As Michael Oliver writes, "If the game is possessive individualism in a competitive and inegalitarian society, impaired people will inevitably be disadvantaged, no matter how the rules are changed" (Oliver, cited in Russell and Malhotra, 2002).

This work, together with the results of other CPRC research, does beg the question: who is poverty reduction work generally aimed to help? Are any of those living in chronic poverty adequately included?