

## **DRAFT**

Staying Poor: Chronic Poverty and Development Policy  
Conference, 7th-9th April 2003 – Manchester, UK

**POVERTY AND DISABLED PEOPLE IN DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT:  
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### **Introduction**

Poverty and disability are closely linked and have detrimental impact on the level of inclusion in society and its overall development. From social perspective, both poverty, and disability are product of capitalist development. They are both socially constructed and culturally produced in a given society. Hence, this suggests society as the focal point of action to deal with both poverty and disability having created them in the first place. This is mainly through restructuring societal policies and provisions including those of the economy.

Poverty leads to disability resulting in diseases and impairments. Equally true, disability leads to poverty in the sense that those with impairments will engender extra cost of living related to their specific needs. Therefore, it is argued that poverty alleviation is a key solution in preventing disability directly and indirectly, especially in countries with low resources such as in developing world where no welfare system exists to cater for the needs of disadvantaged groups including those with impairments such as in the west. Breaking the chain of economic dependency of the poor requires the eradication of poverty to help overcome the problems of social and economic deprivation. In this sense, poverty eradication can be regarded as a prerequisite to development.

Various measures can be considered as instrumental strategies in fighting widespread poverty amongst disabled people. This primarily includes different kinds of remunerated employment schemes as well as policies, legislation and welfare provisions. Together, these may facilitate the creation of inclusive society, which allows disabled people develop their economic potentials and ultimately strengthen their independent life.

Yet, poverty, social and economic deprivation is the everyday experience of people with impairments in developing countries. Their access to various services is often restricted and their opportunity to secure enough income to meet their basic needs is almost non-existent. This paper highlights the relationship between poverty and disability and how this affects the position of disabled people in developing societies by drawing particularly on the experience of their fellows in Jordan, as well as in Afghanistan.

### **Disability and Development**

Across the world, disabled people are experiencing social and economic deprivation. They are highly represented among the population of unemployed as well as those who are poor (Beresford, 1996). Although there is a growing awareness of the contribution disabled people make to the life of society, too often development plans bypass their interests in terms of education, training and

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employment. Practical assistance for confronting such disadvantageous situation is largely restricted by lack of awareness of the needs, rights and abilities of disabled people.

There are a variety of notions about development that coexist in developing societies. Evidence from the literature and the practice of NGO's supports the move from the existing top down approaches to dealing with disadvantaged groups to a more human rights view of development. This shift can be noted through government's compliance - in principle - with the United Nation's statements regarding the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, including Article 23 on the rights for economic participation to all human beings including the right to employment and income (UN, 1948). Moreover, this shift can be increasingly noted in government's compliance with UN's standards rule for the equalization of opportunities for disabled people including their rights for employment and income.

Poverty has been identified as principal obstacle that prevents the fulfillment of such rights and ultimately hinders development efforts, especially in developing countries. Development in this sense cannot be achieved without addressing the issue of poverty and that alleviation of poverty is often a target of any development plans (Coleridge, 1993; ESCWA, 1994). The world Development Report (World Bank 1990) defined poverty as the "inability to attain a minimal standard of living" measured by household incomes and expenditures. Ownership or access to physical facilities in the environment (or rather lack of them) is often used as a test of urban poverty, particularly when data on income is unavailable. Poverty, however, is a relative concept across cultures (Townsend 1993; Alcock, 1997).

The impact of poverty on people's lives is well documented, especially in third world countries where poor people are suffering from inequality in the social and economic areas of their lives (World Bank, 2002; Feuerstein, 1997). The draft rural development strategy of the World Bank (2002) recognizes poverty as a factor causing ill health and disability especially in rural areas (World Bank, 2002). Whether poverty causes disability or an outcome of it, poverty remains an important factor in the creation of disability. However, it is clear that poverty affects people's health and sometimes is even the cause of impairment and disability. The obvious example is the relationship between poverty and malnutrition (i.e. there are 100 million people globally with impairments caused by malnutrition and 200,000 children acquire blindness every year because of Vitamin A deficiency (DAA/UNESCO, 1995; Werner, 1997; UNICEF, 1998).

Following previous analysis, it is clear that the gap between the need and the provision for development cannot be bridged by developing, or even expanding, conventional services. The persistence of poverty along with the increasing social and economic inequality for large sections of society, all drew attention to the need for a different approach to fighting poverty and meeting people's needs. The suggested approach to be developed is characterised by a model with fewer experts, less advanced forms of training and simplified methods of intervention.

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The challenge of this approach is to find ways of providing essential assistance to as many people as possible by utilising the available resources and involving local people in the provision of services. It ultimately, aims at enabling community to take responsibility for own development (O'Toole, 1995). The onus of this approach to development is in meeting people's needs from human rights perspective and maximising their participation.

### **Disabled people and economic needs in developing countries**

Disability from the perspective of the social model is seen as a product of a disabled person's relationship to the economy (Finkelstein, 1980; Stone, 1984). Because disabled people are seen as unable to contribute to the economy due to their functional limitation, they are being excluded from work place and suffer great social and economic deprivation (Oliver, 1990; Doyle, 1995). Disabled people are especially disadvantaged in meeting their basic needs including the economic ones such as the need for remunerated employment (Turmusani, 1999).

According to this account which focuses on the needs of people participating in the economic system, economic needs are essential to human existence. Although basic needs are constructed as universal, their satisfaction is very often relative across cultures (Wetherely, 1996), depending on the available welfare resources in a given society as well as on the socially constructed nature of basic needs in different societies. Economic participation via employment may be particularly important where no welfare system exists to support those who have no work, as is the case for many disabled people, or who have no other means of subsistence (ESCR, 1976; ILO, 1995).

While disabled people in many Western societies are often concerned about equality and anti-discrimination legislation, disabled people in developing countries are mainly calling for meeting their survival needs in context of widespread poverty. In particular disabled people in these countries often place their need for a source of income at the top of their list of priorities followed by housing, transport, sex, and rehabilitation (Coleridge, 1993). While reflecting the desperate problem of poverty in these communities, this points to the importance of establishing welfare systems as well as employment opportunities across all societies. The need for a source of income was also listed among the primary needs of disabled people in Jordan<sup>1</sup> (Turmusani, 1999). Disabled people in Jordan identified two categories of needs. The first of which they considered primary economic needs that directly target poverty and included the need for employment (i.e. private, government, sheltered, co-operative and self-employment);

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<sup>1</sup> This empirical study investigated the economic position of disabled people in Jordan in terms of their self-defined needs, priorities and perception of existing provisions. The research included 181 disabled women and men who were involved in economic activities using a participatory approach to research. Findings show the severe disadvantages disabled people experience in their social and economic life (Turmusani, 1999).

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and the need for welfare benefits and financial assistance from the state (i.e. need for benefits, exemptions and concessions and marketing). Concrete examples of people with disabilities who experience employment conditions are included in later analysis. The second category comprised needs which they considered subordinate to their economic inclusion in society. This included needs associated with the built environment such as accessibility, housing, and transport; the need for services such as education, training, provision of sign language and medical care; and needs related to public understanding of disability such as the need for information, attitudes, awareness, legislation, advocacy and NGO's, and the need for establishing one's own family.

Meeting basic needs of disabled people have been recognized as human rights by several international conventions and declarations. Article 159 of the UN declaration on the rights of disabled people (1976) for example outlines particularly the importance for measures designed to enable disabled people to become as self-reliant as possible. The means by which self reliance can be enhanced includes provision of vocational training and rehabilitation, aid, counseling and placement services; economic and social security; a decent standard of living; secure employment; useful, productive and remunerative occupation; and trade unions.

Despite these measures, disabled people continued to experience discrimination in all spheres of life, especially in the economy. Analysis of available data shows that a variety of factors discriminate against disabled people across the world. These include education, benefits, health, leisure and social life, information, personal assistance, aids and equipment, transport, built environment and employment. Disabled people are in fact severely disadvantaged in the labor market in two ways. The level of unemployment is high among disabled people, and their pattern of participation is characterized by poor conditions. Disabled people are more likely to be out of work for a longer period of time than the general population, and when they do find a job, they are usually in low paid, semi-skilled positions, working longer hours, in poor conditions (Hirst and Baldwin 1994). There are two groups of disabled people who have acute problems with regard to employment, those with severe impairment who are expected to remain at home all day and those who are less severely disabled who are expected to obtain open or sheltered employment (Thornton, 1998).

Previous analysis shows that a source of income whether from paid employment or via welfare benefits was identified by disabled people across the world as essential for meeting their basic needs. Yet as being argued later, the majority of disabled people across the world are having difficulties accessing such income and subsequently experience chronic poverty and inequality.

### **Poverty and disabled people**

Disabled people across the globe are highly represented among the poor. It is estimated that about two thirds of disabled people in the USA, UK and Canada live below the poverty line (OPCS2, 1989). In many developing countries,

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however, the overwhelming majority of the disabled population lives in poverty (Coleridge, 1993). Disabled women and children are highly represented among the poor and they are often subjected to social, cultural and economic disadvantages which limit their access, for example, to health care, education, vocational training and employment (DAA/UNESCO, 1995).

There are two positions concerning poverty and disability. The first revolves around the fact that poverty is considered to be an important cause of impairment and disability especially in the third world, where inequalities in social and economic life are often obvious. The second argument concerns the fact that disabled people are more likely to experience higher levels of financial difficulties due to the way labour force is organized. These two positions are explained below.

### **Poverty as Factor Underlying the Prevalence of Impairment**

Poverty and inequality exist throughout the world and many who are poor even in developed societies suffer greatly. In developing countries, however, the extent of poverty is far greater and its implications can be more severe. Poverty can lead to impairment in a number of ways. Among the most important is the lack of sufficient nutrition, which can directly result in the impairment of mental and physical functioning. In addition, weakened bodies can be prone to disease which can in turn lead to impairment (Coleridge, 1993; Helander, 1993; Harris-White, 1994; Doyle, 1995; Beresford, 1996).

There are 100 million people globally with impairments caused by malnutrition and 200,000 children become blind every year because of Vitamin A deficiency (DAA/UNESCO, 1995). UNICEF (1993) reports that iodine deficiency which causes mental retardation is widespread in rural areas of Jordan. In Afghanistan, recent chronic drought is one striking example on how malnutrition causes impairment and disability. The correlation between poverty, impairment and disability is indicated by the higher incidence of impairments in rural communities of these countries, which are likely to be subject to poverty, lack of basic services and negative socio-economic and environmental conditions.

Disabled people are disempowered by the current economic situation. This essentially means that people suffer from impairments caused by poverty because of the inability of the state to provide a welfare system to its citizens, which includes medical support. Thus, from this point of view, all efforts should be directed and mobilized towards confronting poverty in order to break the chain of economic dependency of disabled people. One important action, which should be addressed, is to enhance economic participation and access to work. This will help to meet the basic needs of disabled people and place them in a better position to realize long term personal development. The priority should be to organize or re-organize the labour force in such a way that it is accessible to disabled people.

Thus, breaking the chain of economic dependency of disabled people helps to alleviate problems of impairment, the extra costs of living with impairment, unemployment, limited access to services and information, and negative attitudes

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towards those with impairments. It is often regarded as the state's responsibility to look after the welfare rights of its citizens. The developed world nonetheless, can take note of how poverty contributes to impairment and to assume some responsibility towards fighting poverty there, given that it has to some extent contributed to the present problems of underdeveloped countries. Progress can be made by making resources available to local people in poor countries and helping them to campaign to change the policies of Western provision for example, by changing overseas aid policy to one, which emphasizes a new participatory role for local people.

### **Poverty as an outcome of disability**

The second argument in the relationship between poverty and disability concerns the fact that disabled people are more likely to experience financial difficulties as well as social and economic deprivation, especially in the developed world, because society is organized around the needs of the non-disabled majority. For example, disability imposes a multitude of extra and hidden costs on those who have impairments, so that they may easily fall into severe financial deprivation and despair (Rock, 1981; Berthoud, 1991; Berthoud et al, 1993). In this sense, poverty, like other consequences of societal discrimination, restricts disabled people's rights and undermines their ability to fulfill their private and social obligations. Poverty thus, is not the cause of disability but the symptom and the outcome of a disabling society (i.e. exclusion and unemployment).

The risk of falling into deeper poverty as a result of impairment is much greater for the poverty-stricken zones such as in developing countries. The birth of an impaired child, or the occurrence of impairment in the family, often places heavy demands on limited resources and pushes it deeper into poverty. The combined effect of these factors results in a higher proportion of impaired individual among the poorest of society. For this reason, the number of affected families living at the poverty level steadily increases and the negative impact of these trends seriously affects the development process. Impairment can lead to poverty not only for disabled people but also for those who care for them. For example, when services such as education and vocational training are not provided for disabled people, it is more likely that they will fall into the trap of poverty, given their dependency on their families for sustenance and their inability to contribute to the family budget (Jayasooria et al, 1997; Tugnell, 1992).

In Jordan, disabled people expressed main reason for their dissatisfaction due to a lack of income and the insecurity of that income. When asked to describe their own economic situation, only handful of those in this study (N=181) considered themselves 'rich', whereas more than two thirds considered themselves as 'ordinary' in terms of income. A remaining third considered themselves 'poor'. Of this last group, two reported that they were very 'poor'. The poverty line criterion defines poor people as those who have an income no higher than Jordanian Dinar JD 89 per month for those who own their house, and JD 119 for those who do not own their house (MSD, 1987). It should be pointed out here that those interviewed did not regard themselves as 'poor' to the degree or in the proportions might have been expected, given the global and the national

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estimates. This might have been due to their belief that poverty represents weakness in the human being and often makes one more vulnerable to deprivation, especially when already discriminated against on the grounds of functional limitations.

Two thirds of those included in the study depended mainly on families as their main source of income. Just over a third depended on income from jobs within the schemes they were attending (sheltered and self-employment), and a handful relied on government subsidies. More than half of those studied had no additional source of income, while over a third had an additional token source of income from the centre where they were involved. These findings on income dependency account for the feeling shared by many in this study that they lacked control over their own lives.

Although disabled people need higher income to maintain the same standard of living as non-disabled members of the population, they characteristically receive significantly less (Coleridge, 1993; Barnes, 1991; DAA/UNISCO, 1995). Moreover, state benefits and subsidies which constitute a source of income for disabled people in other countries, such as the UK, are entirely absent in Jordan, Afghanistan and many other developing societies. This contributes to the perpetuation of disabled people's dependency on others. Walker and Walker (1991) argue that the only way to break the link between poverty and disability is by having financial schemes which cover disabled people's additional living cost.

Based on previous analysis, in developing countries including Jordan, and Afghanistan, disability can be both a cause of poverty and an outcome of underdeveloped condition. Poverty, however, remains an important cause of impairment in these countries. Whether disability is the cause of poverty or its outcome, what important is the social and economic consequences of poverty on the life of disabled people within underdevelopment context. It can be concluded that poverty prevention and alleviation is thus one of the most important strategies in any attempt to deal with impairment and disability.

### **Economic strategies formulated to fighting poverty among disabled people**

There is little provision made for disabled people in the majority world, which assist them to be economically active. Physical impairment aside, many barriers to open employment continue to exist, including inaccessible transportation and buildings, non-adapted tools, and employers' prejudice and fears (UNESCO/DAA, 1995). Evidence from Jordan and Afghanistan suggests income generating strategies<sup>2</sup> for self-employment as useful means of integrating disabled people into the economy when other options of employment become difficult for them to get and thus fighting poverty.

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<sup>2</sup> Most self employment schemes for disabled people in Jordan takes the form of income generating activities (IGA's). Although many disabled people work longer hours in their self run projects, only limited income being generated from such work due to the small size of enterprise and limited market.

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The goal of the income generation strategy is to enable disabled men and women to become economically self-reliant by supporting them to find self-employment; either in the open labour market or by starting their own businesses and assist them for direct job placement in government as well as in the private sector.

The income generation strategy consists of employment or direct job placement, vocational rehabilitation and small business development. The following is descriptive analysis of income generation strategy in Afghanistan and its various components as follow:

### *Employment or direct job placement:*

Direct job placement involves helping disabled people to find a job. This approach is suitable for people who already have vocational skills and experience, educated people or those who have other type of technical and administrative skills. This means connecting an employer who has a job vacancy with a suitable disabled person. To successfully make this link requires availability of information about local employment opportunities and about the skills and experiences of disabled clients. In countries like Afghanistan finding out about local employment opportunities is difficult. There is no organized system for advertising job vacancies except the international organizations. Most jobs go to people who are known to the employer or referred by a reliable person.

### *Vocational rehabilitation:*

Comprehensive Disabled Afghan Programme (CDAP), the largest disability project in Afghanistan has integrated a total of **3120 (1677 Male and 1443 females)** people with disability and vulnerable women in different vocational group training courses, traineeship and referred to other agencies for placement in their vocational skill-training programme. Most of these people are still running their job and having income.

In Afghan society women with disability suffer more than their male counterparts, due to Afghan community structure and male dominant society. Women access to rehabilitation as well as to job opportunity is therefore much less than men. The fact that most vocational training services are located out of the houses does not help women be integrated within these services, especially in the rural areas where women mobility is greatly restricted.

### *Small business development strategy:*

Clients, who express interest in starting a business or improving their current business activities, can be assisted through the project's small business

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development strategy. These will include people who have completed a place in a vocational training course, a traineeship; or already have the technical skills necessary for their business.

All people who are assisted through the small business development strategy should have an idea of the type of business they want to start. If they do not have a business idea but need employment support they will require further employment advice and counseling.

To assist disabled people to start income generation programme, it is necessary for the government and non-governmental organization to introduce revolving loan and micro credit mechanism such as:

~~///~~ Training disabled people in small business development aspect to be able to plan their income generation activities on proper manner.

~~///~~ Establishing bank system for financially supporting disabled people to receive loan for various occupation under certain name such as agriculture purpose, animal husbandry and etc...

~~///~~ Introducing and support different culturally appropriate mechanism to business such as Islamic Muzareba, Musharaka and murabeha.

~~///~~ Financially Support student with disability to continues their education, and after graduation find job for them then remembers the loan amount gradually.

Since 1994, Comprehensive Disabled Afghan programme provided revolving loan to **3773** male and female with different type of disability and vulnerable women. Mainly those disabled people who were graduated from vocational training course organized by CDAP or other organization. Due to a number of reasons such as displacement, drought and earthquakes a total of **230** loan recipients were defaulter in all six regions.

### Concluding remarks

Materialists analysis on disability and social exclusion has been used in this account which contextualizes concerns about poverty and disability in capitalist production. While capital and class play significant role in social relations concerning disabled people, social organization is more complex and includes other issues such as gender, race, sexuality, religion, etc.

The issue of poverty and inequality among disabled people can no longer be ignored within this debate on sustainable development. The building up of institutional capacity in the local community cannot be accomplished without addressing the issue of poverty. Having said that, the improvement of the social condition of the poor including those with impairments requires not only an increase in the spending on the social sector but a greater focus on the

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establishment of policies specifically targeted at the satisfaction of their needs and that such policies should be integrated within the overall development of the community. Measures should ensure the active participation of the target population in the planning and formation of such policies. In other words such policies should take notice of both the end and the means of development.

Limited employment options for disabled people and the low income they receive when in employment makes it difficult for them to meet their basic needs, let alone to achieve the same level of living as other people. Ultimately, this increases the number of disabled people who are poor and strengthens the link between poverty and disability. Such failure to meet economic needs was mainly attributed by disabled men in Jordan for example, to limited sources of income linked with a lack of job opportunities. Disabled women tended to report lack of access to services in the community and difficulties in receiving support from their families. This latter aspect was emphasized by Afghan disabled women too. This account concludes by emphasising the need for tackling poverty as important roots to overcoming problems related to disability. On a larger scale, approaches to dealing with developmental issues such as poverty, disability should also change from traditional to user led perspective in accordance with the social view. Here disabled people are involved in control of the whole business of development to a large extent and their potential is allowed to be developed to an optimum level that secures their struggle for independent life.