

## Disability and development SOFMER Saint Etienne 2016.

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People with disabilities are **very diverse** but are united by the common experience of facing **barriers to full participation** in society. A completely satisfactory universal definition of disability is probably impossible to achieve, but the four elements enshrined in the CRPD provide the basis for all analysis and action on disability: *'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.'*

Because of the difficulties of definition, generalised **global statistics in disability are problematic** and are best avoided. Disability programming needs to be based on **researched data**, not rough estimates. Good data collection practices need to be part of any disability programme. The human rights of persons with disabilities do not depend on numbers.

There has been a **paradigm shift** from regarding persons with disabilities as *objects* to seeing them as *subjects*, able to take charge of their own development. The four models of disability (charity, medical, social, and human rights) illustrate the complexity of the issue. Although there has been an evolution from charity to human rights, these models are not mutually exclusive: the human rights model embraces areas that are covered by the other three although with a different perspective. Rehabilitation should be an equal partnership between persons with disabilities and professionals. Self-empowerment, self-determination and equality must be the guiding principles of all work in disability.

The **relationship between disability and poverty is complex** and little researched, but persons with disability are subject to processes of impoverishment, because of the barriers, obstacles and discrimination they face. Rates of poverty around the world are significantly higher in households with a disabled person. However, with improvements in development and standards of living the profile of disability changes, but the numbers of persons with disabilities do not decrease. Increasing affluence and longer lifespans mean different types of disability, not less disability. There is a greater *proportion* of persons with disabilities in industrialised countries than in poor countries. However, poverty cannot be measured only in material terms, especially in relation to disability. There is an urgent need for systematic research on the link between poverty and disability in poor countries.

Unless disability is specifically included in both planning and implementation of the MDGs, the MDGs will not be reached.

**Gender issues.** Disabled women and girls are often subject to multiple discrimination. Education is the key to development and the education of girls with disabilities must be a major part of the strategy to correct gender imbalances.

Persons with disabilities are the best advocates for the cause of disability, working in partnership with others committed to the issue. **Disabled People's Organisations** are vital to the sustainability and implementation of the CRPD, and they need to be supported to achieve better capacity in order to deliver more effective advocacy. The guiding principle of inclusive policies is *'nothing about us without us'*, i.e. persons with disabilities must be included in all policy formulation, through their representative organisations.

In order to make development inclusive, **mainstreaming** is now recognised as a necessity by major donors, in which all development activities are screened against their impact on persons with disabilities. But despite this recognition implementation still lags behind policy. The **twin track approach**, i.e. mainstreaming in general development and specific disability related actions, is a necessity, not an option. Mainstreaming requires identification of barriers to persons with disabilities in the different services and systematic efforts to remove them.

In terms of programming design, **Community Based Rehabilitation** has evolved into a fully comprehensive approach to disability and is much wider than its first conception 30 years ago as a simple, low-cost approach to rehabilitation. It deals with all aspects of disabled people's lives, needs and rights. It involves persons with disabilities and their families, local communities, relevant professionals, regional authorities, and national authorities. It is a strategy for a local development based on respect for human rights, to promote empowerment and poverty reduction, and is a comprehensive approach to implementing the CRPD.