



Defining disability

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Acknowledgement

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Purpose, audience and objectives

Purpose	This short guide is intended to introduce how we define disability. It is not intended to be an exhaustive guide on the topic. Where possible we have linked to further resources for readers who want, or need, to explore the topic further.
Audience	It is one of a series of short guides developed by Sightsavers, within Futuremakers by Standard Chartered , and specifically written with Youth Business International programme partners in mind. While advice included in the document is more targeted towards YBI's youth entrepreneurship programme, we have tried to make these relevant to all Futuremakers projects.
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To build greater disability confidence of the reader and how partners can better include youth with disabilities in their Futuremakers projects.2. To give specific examples, advice and simple steps on how to adapt projects to be more inclusive of youth with disabilities.

Defining disability

Disability is part of being human. Almost everyone will experience a temporary or permanent loss of function or ability at some point in their life. The older we get, the more likely that we will experience increasing difficulties in functioning.¹ The first ever world report on disability, published in 2011, reported that about 15% of the world's population, more than a billion people, live with some form of disability, of whom 2-4% experience significant difficulties in functioning.

Often disability is viewed as a condition that is simply about the individual's lack of ability or medical needs, for example, a physical condition that requires the person to use a wheelchair or to take medication. However, the modern concept of disability perceives disability as an interaction between an individual's personal condition (such as being in a wheelchair or having a visual impairment) and environmental factors (such as negative attitudes or inaccessible buildings), which together lead to disability and affect an individual's participation in society.² For example, if someone is deaf, it is their hearing impairment alongside inaccessible or unavailable alternative forms of communication and other non-inclusive environmental factors which means they are disabled from participating equally in

¹ World Report on Disability 2011

² CRPD Training Guide, The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner

day-to-day life. In other words, impairment is the injury/illness/condition that causes a loss or difference of function to an individual, whereas disability refers to the limitation or loss of opportunities to participate equally in society because of social and environmental barriers.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is a landmark international treaty, a comprehensive human rights convention and international development tool, that is at the heart of the disability rights movement.³ The UNCRPD and its Optional Protocol was adopted on 13 December 2006 and entered into force on 3 May 2008. Its purpose is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. The UNCRPD recognises that disability is the interaction between a person's impairment and attitudinal and environmental barriers that impact one's ability to participation in society on an equal basis with others.⁴

Impairment interacting with barriers: results in a disability

A person with an impairment (physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory) in an urban centre with an accessible environment is more likely to participate in their community on a similar basis to someone else that does not have an impairment – there is little or no disability.

A person with an impairment (physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory) in a community that views persons with disabilities negatively is less likely to participate on a similar basis than someone who does not have an impairment – there is a disability.

It is important to consider different factors and how they combine to determine the extent to which an individual can participate in society and, as a result, the extent to which disability arises. These include personal factors such as someone's age, gender, sexual orientation, educational level, impairment type among others as well as environmental or community level factors such as being in a rural or urban set up, existence of legal and policy frameworks etc.

Different approaches to disability

There are different approaches by which disability is viewed. An approach may directly or indirectly affect how persons with disabilities are included or excluded in the community; the extent to which they can participate and so on. The four main approaches include the charity model, medical model, social model, and rights-based model.

The charity model: Persons with disabilities are viewed as passive objects of kind acts or of welfare payments. They are seen as unable to provide for themselves because of their impairment. Disability is seen as an individual problem and environmental barriers are not considered. Through the charity model, persons with disabilities hardly participate within their

³ <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/CRPD>

⁴ 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 (CRPD)

communities and are considered a burden on society. The risk with this approach is that with little opportunities for their participation, persons with disabilities will remain at the margins of society.

The medical model: The focus stays on a person's impairment, which is represented as the source of inequality. The assumption is that persons with disabilities can be "fixed" through medicine or rehabilitation to get back to society. Emphasis is on 'curing' the impairment or reducing the impairment as much as possible. Environmental conditions are not considered under this approach and disability is seen as an individual problem. Persons with disabilities have little to no participation whereas others are left to determine their best interests. They remain disempowered.

The social model: It asserts that disability is a product of disabling environments rather than being an individual problem. Disability is viewed as an element of the diversity there is within society.

In this model, disability ceases to be an individual problem. Consequently, it demands that society should restructure policies, practices, attitudes, environmental accessibility, legal provisions, and political organisations and therefore dismantle the social and economic barriers that prevent full participation of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities must be at the centre in the design of policies and laws. They are empowered, in control of their lives and enjoy full participation on an equal basis with others. The burden of disability is not on them but on society.

The human rights model: This model builds on the social model approach. It acknowledges persons with disabilities as subjects of rights, and the State (governments) and others as having responsibilities to respect these persons. It treats the barriers in society as discriminatory and provides avenues for persons with disabilities to raise a complaint when they are faced with such barriers. A rights-based approach seeks ways to respect, support and celebrate human diversity by creating the conditions that allow meaningful participation by a wide range of persons, including persons with disabilities.

Now that I know, what do I need to do?

- Begin to understand the important shift that the UNCRPD has brought about that emphasises the need to dismantle existing barriers that hinder the participation of young people with disabilities
- Recognise that employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people with disabilities will require a need to dismantle different barriers – like making the physical environment more accessible, providing information in a variety of formats, and challenging attitudes and mistaken assumptions about young people with disabilities
- Begin to understand different models of disability and how these can guide programme designs that as far as possible have young people with disabilities as a part of the whole programme cycle
- Budget for activities that challenge attitudes, stigma, stereotypes, and discrimination faced by young people with disabilities
- Build awareness on how certain groups of young people, including those with disabilities face intersectional or multiple discrimination that acts as a barrier to their participation in youth programmes

Further Reading

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) training package on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/disabilities/ohchr-training-package-convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

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