

## NOT ON THE GUEST LIST:

### Disabled people and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

When world leaders established the eight MDGs for reducing poverty they left out one in five of the world's poorest people. This is not as surprising as it sounds. Disabled people have consistently faced discrimination and disadvantage, which is why 82% of disabled people live below the poverty line and comprise one of the largest single groups of excluded and chronically poor people in the world.<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that without including disability in plans for tackling poverty the MDGs stand little chance of success, but it is a point which has eluded those world leaders who rededicate themselves to reducing poverty at each international meeting. Disability is currently not included in indicators and targets set for the MDGs and people with disabilities are often excluded from international and national poverty reduction plans. At the halfway point of the MDGs, it is crucial for governments, donors, international agencies and civil society to address disability through implementation of **inclusive** development strategies. Without this approach disabled people will continue to be excluded, live in poverty and the MDGs will ultimately fail.

This paper sets out the context for addressing disability in the MDGs. It highlights the growing international momentum for including disability in development and makes recommendations on how donors, partner governments and civil society can include people with disabilities in the global drive to achieve the MDGs.

### Disability, Poverty, Exclusion

'I speak to those who suffer the most grinding poverty. Let 2008 be the year of the bottom billion.' (*UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon*)

There is more need than ever to address disability in development. In developing countries, disabled people experience disproportionately high rates of poverty. Individuals and households affected by disability are more likely to live below the poverty line. They face exclusion from mainstream social, economic and political life, with limited access to most areas of development, including health, education, food, shelter, employment and land. Disabled people are often socially isolated due to community attitudes, institutional segregation and physical barriers. Poor people themselves describe disabled people as among the most excluded 'poorest of the poor.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sources in K Gooding, *Poverty and Blindness: A Survey of the Literature* Sightsavers International Feb 2006

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

A key way of including disabled people in development is through engagement with disabled people's organisations (DPOs), which have a critical role to play in engaging with communities and supporting donor and partner governments in the design of strategies inclusive of disabled people. However DPOs themselves are often excluded from government and donor policy making and most have insufficient resources and capacity to advocate for the rights of disabled people within development work, including the MDGs.

## Disability missing from the MDGs

'As the world strives to achieve the MDGs it is important that disability is not treated as a left over.' (*Peter Obeng Asamo, Director, Ghana Association of the Blind*)

Disability affects all eight of the MDGs, making it an issue central to reducing poverty. For example:

- MDG 1 Poverty reduction: lack of income is a key cause of higher rates of poverty, particularly among disabled people. In areas of Bangladesh, the employment rate of disabled people is less than a quarter of those without a disability.<sup>3</sup>
- MDG 2 Education: of the 72 million children of primary school age out of school, over a third are disabled.<sup>4</sup>
- MDG 4 Child Mortality: In some developing countries, mortality rates for disabled children under five can be as high as 80%, even in countries where overall under-five mortality is below 20%.<sup>5</sup>
- MDG 6 HIV: All risk factors associated with HIV are increased for disabled people (e.g. sexual activity, rape, substance abuse), yet they are less likely to be included in outreach or treatment activities.<sup>6</sup>

Until now, disability has been excluded in discourse around the MDGs, largely because international agencies, donors, governments and other development actors have not recognised disability as a cross-cutting issue and have afforded low priority to its role within international development. Recent progress reports on the MDGs, for example, fail to monitor inclusion of disabled adults and children in poverty reduction processes. This is in marked contrast to gender, another cross-cutting issue which has risen up the development agenda over the last few decades and is now widely recognised as a prerequisite for meeting MDG targets.

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<sup>3</sup> Chowdhury J Disability and Chronic Poverty: An Empirical Study on Bangladesh. MPhil Thesis, Oxford University, 2005

<sup>4</sup> EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006. Education for All: Literacy for Life. Paris, UNESCO.

<sup>5</sup> DFID, Disability Poverty and Development, DFID, UK 2000

<sup>6</sup> Groce N Global Survey on HIV/AIDS and Disability. Yale School of Public Health, 2004

## Achieving Inclusive Development

'Inclusion – that is what development is all about – to bring into society people that have never been a part of it.' (Former World Bank President James Wolfensohn)

To address the poverty and exclusion of disabled people, inclusive development strategies need to be adopted. Inclusive development recognises all individuals as equal members of society who should be actively engaged in the development process irrespective of disability, age, gender, ethnicity or any other status. This is achieved by designing policies, products, services and creating environments that can be used by all people, including disabled people.

For example, the Government of Mali, Sightsavers International and Wateraid worked in partnership with the village of Tienfala, Mali – an area ravaged by the blinding effects of trachoma and river blindness. Disabled people, alongside other villagers, identified the building of a new well as a key need – one that could be used by villagers, including those with visual and other physical disabilities. Based on this inclusive development approach, the Malian government, Sightsavers and Wateraid constructed a new well and toilets, which are accessible to all villagers.

The **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** provides the most effective and appropriate mechanism for ensuring inclusion of disability within international development. The CRPD is the very first human rights instrument specific to disabled people and promotes their full participation in economic, social, cultural and political life. Application of the CRPD will help to ensure both donor and partner governments address fundamental elements in inclusive development, such as non discrimination, equality, participation and accountability. In particular, articles 4.1 and 32 call for international cooperation in the design and delivery of development strategies and commit all governments to ensure development plans, strategies and processes are inclusive of disabled people.

## Building on Momentum for Disability

'Poverty reduction cannot be met without considering the needs of disabled people; yet disabled people are still not sufficiently included in international development work funded by the EU.' (European Commission, 2004)

The CRPD provides the framework for international agencies, donors and partner governments to build on their existing commitments in the area of disability and development. Over the past few years, there has been growing recognition internationally of the importance of disability in reducing poverty, for example:

- The Department for International Development (DFID), UK and the EU Commission have both produced Guidance Notes on Disability, providing a practical guide for their country offices and delegations to address disability within development work. Both these notes explicitly recognise that the MDGs cannot be achieved without addressing disability.<sup>7</sup>
- The African Union and European Union have developed action points on disability under the MDG areas of health and education in their Joint EU Africa Strategy and Action Plan, 2008 – 2009.<sup>8</sup>
- The WHO Director-General recently stated that the CRPD will change the way the WHO operates and a Taskforce on Disability has been established to lead WHO efforts in this area.<sup>9</sup>
- The UN have committed to developing a Common Strategy and Action Plan on Disability, which will be used as the basis for concerted and coordinated work on disability across all UN agencies.

Momentum clearly exists but considerable strides still need to be made to ensure disability is effectively integrated within international development processes. In order to make a sustained difference to alleviating poverty, donors should work within the framework of the CRPD and ensure disability is a core component of their development work.

### **Role of Civil Society**

‘Nothing about us without us.’

A key element of achieving inclusive development is ensuring the participation and involvement of DPOs, disability focused NGOs and relevant networks in the design and delivery of development strategies. More open government-civil society relationships, often facilitated by donors, can contribute towards this. For example in Zambia, DFID supported DPOs to work with their Government to develop a chapter on disability within Zambia's overall development plan.

At the same time, DPOs can do more to increase awareness of disability within the development community. So far, there has been minimal interaction with the MDGs campaign but with wider investment and support, DPOs can potentially organise themselves to form strategic alliances with mainstream development organisations, such as HIV/AIDS, gender and education stakeholders, and bring disability further into mainstream development.

<sup>7</sup> DFID How to Note on Disability, October 2007, p2 and EC Guidance Note on Disability and Development, July 2004, p3

<sup>8</sup> The Joint EU Africa Strategy and Action Plans (Signed December 2007- Launch Action Plans 2008)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.eu2007.pt/NR/rdonlyres/D449546C-BF42-4CB3-B566-407591845C43/0/071206jsapenlogos\\_formatado.pdf](http://www.eu2007.pt/NR/rdonlyres/D449546C-BF42-4CB3-B566-407591845C43/0/071206jsapenlogos_formatado.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.who.int/disabilities/media/news/taskforce/en/index.html>

## Key Recommendations

**To address disability within the MDGs, donors and partner governments should:**

- Recognise disability as a cross cutting issue within international development and systematically include and implement disability within all international development processes, including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Country Assistance Plans and DFID/EC Guidance Notes on Disability
- Support the collection of accurate and reliable disability data in partner countries in order to monitor inclusion of disabled people
- Ratify the CRPD and fulfill all commitments towards inclusive development
- Ensure participation and involvement of DPOs and other relevant organisations in development and MDG-related policy and decision making processes

### **This paper is written by Sightsavers International.**

Sightsavers is an international charity combating blindness and working for the rights of disabled people in developing countries. We work with local partner organisations in the least-served communities to help establish and support long-term projects and advocate around the issues of health and education.

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