

Disability & Development UK Seminar
'Sharing learning for Inclusive Communication for Development'
*As part of the Disability Mainstreaming in Development Co-operation project: supported by DG
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Background Paper

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This background paper has been prepared for the 'Sharing learning for Inclusive Communication for Development' Disability & Development UK Meeting.

As part of an EU sponsored research project 'Disability Mainstreaming in Development Co-operation', Healthlink Worldwide has investigated the views about 'development and disability' of key leaders and experts in the development field and the disability field in the UK. This UK mapping study, together with similar mapping studies in other countries, will help provide the information needed to map and analyse the status of disability in development cooperation policies and legislation in each of the EU member states and by the European Commission. (For more information on the project please see www.make-development-inclusive.org)

Provisional results of the UK study point to a need for NGOs and DPOs to talk more with each other about disability and development, and to share learning and develop common strategies.

'Some of the international organisations could learn a lot from national disability organisations about expertise in the disability area, and likewise national disabled organisations can learn from development practices in the field', said one interviewee.

Within the mapping study an important area of focus was inclusive communications, with a clear need emerging for more strategic approaches to including and amplifying the voice and participation of disabled people within development projects undertaken by UK organisations internationally.

Potential strategies for enhancing UK dialogue about disability and development, and particularly inclusive communication, that were highlighted in the mapping study included:

Share lessons, experiences, identify good practices

Both NGOs/DPOs and PwDs need to have an improved understanding of how to communicate effectively with each other, understand both sides' perspectives, and how they can work together for a common purpose. NGOs/DPOs need to be able to understand the needs of PwD's so that they are better able to assist them, not only in terms of advocating with them but also working with their families and the communities they live in to create suitable, supportive environments.

The mapping raised a set of questions about sharing learning:

- What can disability organisations learn from development organisations?
- What can NGOs learn from disability organisations?
- What learning for UK national/domestic organisations?
- What learning and sharing for stakeholders in the South?

What is inclusive communication? Some ideas:

- 1) Inclusive communication enables voices of the vulnerable (in this case disabled) to be heard.
- 2) Inclusive communication processes enable NGOs and DPOs to constructively engage with disabled people in a participatory manner so that initiatives undertaken by the NGOs/DPOs are based on the real needs of the disabled rather than what the NGOs/DPOs perceive to be the needs of the disabled.
- 3) DPOs/NGOs are key brokers of communication between PwDs and decision makers. It is therefore crucial that DPOs are able to work with PwDs at the grassroots levels to enable their views to be included in advocacy and policy formulation. NGO/DPOs in the north can also work with partners in the south to facilitate north-south and south-south learning, information exchange and networking.
- 4) Inclusive communication is not merely about changing policies or influencing government. It is also about creating environments for change at the community level, within families and among PwD peers.
- 5) The ability to listen is the key to the success of inclusive communication.

Both disability organisations in the UK and development organisations in the UK have a body of knowledge and experience that would be valuable to share with one another. There is a growing awareness within some UK domestically focused DPOs that there are lessons to be learnt from the experience of international disability work, that can contribute to national learning.

Respondents highlighted the need for UK development organisations to meet more regularly and engage more fully with UK and international disability stakeholders.

What can disability organisations learn from development organisations?

UK disability organisations are increasing their international focus. This may include the creation of an international division, or may simply include the increased focus on contextualizing disability issues and the work of the organisation within a broader understanding and network of international development stakeholders.

What can NGOs learn from disability organisations?

Disability within development is being promoted through the development of training courses for mainstream development organisations. One recent example has been collaboration between World Vision and ADD to develop a course for staff that introduces the concepts and issues regarding disability and working with the disabled in projects. A number of interviewees suggested that existing mainstreaming tools and resources – for example on gender and HIV/AIDS – have good potential for being adapted for use in promoting disability mainstreaming.

What learning and sharing for stakeholders in the South?

National UK disability organisations increasingly recognize that they have an institutional body of knowledge and experience that could be of benefit to others internationally. This growing awareness influences the development of services for international partners and audiences who make use of the institutional knowledge and expertise that the organisation has gained over the years in the UK.

International departments: A number of UK disability organisations have created international departments as a response to an increase in questions and inquiries from disability and

development organisations and projects in developing countries. Disability organisations that have or are creating international divisions include Deaf Children's Society, Sue Rider Care, and Sense International. Deaf Children's Society established an international arm three years ago, as a response to *'receiving so many requests for advice.....There is real expertise in deafness coming from the national body'* explained the interviewee from the International Deaf Children's Society, *'and [by establishing the international wing] we are doing something that is quite new, but with an expert backup of established organisation.'*

Information resources: This information provision is increasingly being managed through the development of information services such as websites, which UK disability organisations are creating to share their knowledge and expertise. Access to this knowledge may be through the ability to contact that organisation and to ask questions, request resources and make contacts. For example International Deaf Children's Society information provision has been by way of a website and responding to information requests at a rate of *'...one or two a week at this stage'*. The website of the International Deaf Children Society can be found at www.ldcs.info. As is outlined in the site's introduction *'...the International Deaf Children's Society (IDCS) will build on work done by the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) one of the best resourced and most experienced organizations working with parents of deaf children.'*

What learning and sharing for stakeholders in the North?

Some DPO interviewees spoke about the desire within some UK disability organisations to be more exposed to the international arena, especially when their day to day work is very locally focused. As one interviewee noted from the perspective of a national DPO *'We want to interrelate. Colleagues in UK services are very interested in the international work, especially for those of them working with minorities.'* One area of learning that was highlighted in the study was participatory methodologies; *'Participatory methodology from international is very new for national bodies'*, commented one DPO interviewee.