DISABILITY **AND GLOBAL** DEVELOPMENT

Objectives

This fact sheet is intended as a plain-language teaching and learning tool for international development students and researchers who are newly considering disability and its implications for theory and practice in the area of global development.

What is 'Disability'?

'Disability' means different things to different people. A wide range of people with diverse bodies and experiences self-identify as persons with disabilities. In this fact sheet, we understand disability to be socially constructed. This means that inequalities for people with disabilities are created by societal attitudes and beliefs about the abilities and needs of individuals labeled with 'disability,' rather than by biological differences alone. These social attitudes and beliefs create exclusion and barriers to things like supports and services for people with disabilities that can prevent equal access to employment opportunities and community participation. This understanding of disability locates inequalities within wider societies, rather than within individual bodies.

> (Re)Building Inclusive Societies: Critical Reflections in Disability and Global Development was a conference held in Halifax, Nova Scotia from June 22-24, 2015 and explored many topics in disability and global development. Three case studies (Haïti, Uganda & South Africa) were a central focus of the conference.

Why Is It Important To Consider Disability in Global Development?

There are approximately one billion persons with disabilities around the world. Over 80 percent of people with disabilities live in the Global South. Much of the research that exists on disability has focused on the Global North. Less is known about the experiences of women and men, and boys and girls with disabilities in the Global South, especially from the perspective of people with disabilities themselves.

Research shows that development policies and programs often do not consider the experiences of persons with disabilities. Development projects that do not properly consider disability may unintentionally intensify existing inequalities. Without critical analysis, development policy in the Global South is easily influenced by the biases and prejudices that surround disability and difference in the Global North. Inclusion is very important in post-disaster and post-conflict situations when large reconstruction plans and projects are underway. Not considering the needs and experiences of persons with disabilities in reconstruction and recovery processes can result in greater inequality and exclusion than existed before the initial conflict or disaster. Global development policies and programs have the potential to greatly improve quality of life for persons with disabilities, therefore the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities should be a priority in development policy and practice.

> The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** was adopted by the General Assembly in 2006, and ratified by Canada in 2010. The UNCRPD affirms the human rights of persons with disabilities and has a very broad definition of disability. Representatives of disabled peoples' organizations were included in its development. Articles of the UNCPRD relevant to global development include: Article 11 (conflict and disaster), Article 14 (liberty), Article 24 (education), Article 25 (health), Article 28 (standards of living), and Article 32 (international cooperation).

www.msvu.ca/dgd

1

DISABILITY AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

Key Concepts in Disability and Global Development

Intersectionality: Intersectionality recognizes that individual circumstances, aspects of identity (race, disability, gender, etc.), systems of power (ableism, sexism, racism, etc.) and institutions (government, economy, legal system, etc.) shape both individual and collective lived experience. An intersectional analysis allows us to explore who might experience inclusion and exclusion in a certain situation, and the power relationships that affect those experiences.

Social model of disability: The social model of disability is a term coined by Michael Oliver in 1990. This approach to understanding experiences of disability focuses on social and environmental factors that negatively affect individuals' options and opportunities to participate in their communities. The social model recognizes that barriers to inclusion for persons with disabilities are created by things like inaccessible buildings, and policies or practices that assume all individuals are able-bodied.

Inclusion and accessibility: Inclusion and accessibility are essential goals to ensure persons with disabilities benefit from development research and programs. Inclusion refers encouraging and supporting diverse individuals to engage with research and programs regardless of ability, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, etc. Planning for inclusion is very important in development policy, research and programs. Accessibility is a related term, often referring to the removal of barriers to participation for persons with disabilities, which helps to promote inclusion.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The SDGs are the newest set of global development goals championed by the United Nations. The aim is to achieve the targets set out in the SDGs by 2030. The 17 SDGs focus on development issues including poverty, food security, gender equality, climate change, peace, health and education. The SDGs are much more inclusive and aware of disability than previous UNchampioned development agendas, likely due to the opportunities created by the UNCRPD.

Fitting and misfitting: Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's materialist based theory of fitting and misfitting is another way of understanding disability. This theory builds on the social model of disability. In this model, disability is a misfit between bodies and environments in particular spaces, times and social contexts. For example, stairs in a building would be a misfit for a person who uses a wheelchair to get around. Creating inclusion in this model is about making a fit happen. In this example, an elevator or ramp would be ways of making a fit happen, and would likely benefit many other people with mobility limitations.

Inclusion after Disaster
Following the 2010 earthquake in Haïti, there was a unique opportunity for the involvement of Haïtians with disabilities in reconstruction efforts. Injuries from the earthquake increased the number of people with disabilities in Haïti, and this was a central focus of post-disaster development assistance. The strong and established capacities of disabled peoples' organizations in Haïti greatly assisted these inclusion efforts.

Figure 1: The damaged National Palace is an iconic image associated with the earthquake.

Intersections of Disability in Development Agendas

Education: Schools are often reconstruction priorities after conflict or disaster. Individuals with disabilities, families and entire communities are negatively affected if schools and training facilities are planned without considering diverse needs and abilities of community members and are inaccessible to people with disabilities. Differences in educational opportunities increase social and economic inequality between those who are supported to learn and those who are not. Educational facilities, classrooms and teaching practices must be designed to accommodate the needs and abilities of all learners to avoid excluding people with disabilities.

> **Thinking About Policy**
> Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) estimates that 14 percent of South Africans live with disabilities. The government of South Africa has an official policy of inclusion for children with disabilities in the school system, which is a positive step. In practice, however, some children with complex needs face accessibility barriers in attending school and receiving educational supports.

Healthcare: Crisis situations often result in injuries and disabilities that can require short and long-term support from healthcare providers. Providing services and supports that are inclusive and accessible to all people, and tailored to meet disability-specific requirements, is important for all community members. Depending on an individual's specific circumstances, appropriate health-related help may include assisting with medication, or giving information in alternative formats (Braille) and languages, such as sign language.

Transportation: Individuals' ability to participate in their community, and access education and healthcare, can be impossible without accessible transportation. This involves the design, construction and maintenance of a system to be used by all people, including those with disabilities. Transportation must be affordable for people with disabilities living on low incomes. An accessible system includes vehicles that can transport individuals with their mobility aids (such as walkers or wheelchairs), large print and Braille signage, and facilities with ramps and lowered ticket counters.

Poverty: Disability and poverty are often related. Sometimes disability leads to poverty, but poverty can lead to disability or worsen an existing disability. For example, being injured due to accepting unsafe work to meet basic needs. People with disabilities often face barriers to employment, and can rely on the state or aid organizations for income assistance to meet their basic needs. Basic needs include food, water, and accessible shelter. Basic needs for people with disabilities may also include medication, mobility or communication aids, or access to a care provider.

Refugee Supports: Organizations responsible for refugee camps need to identify refugees with disabilities and their needs upon entry, and ensure supports are in place to meet those needs. Refugee camps must be physically accessible and safe for people with disabilities. Those designing food and water distribution systems need to think about accessibility barriers. Forms to apply for visas and asylum must be available in accessible mediums, and some refugees with disabilities may need additional support to complete forms.

> Persons with disabilities are experts in their own experience, and are the best source of information on their own needs and best practices for providing assistance. Organizations of persons with disabilities exist in many countries and are also good resources for providing culturally-specific advice and approaches to understanding disability. The UNCRPD also addresses many of these areas.

Disability and Conflict

Many Ugandans have been wounded in the conflict between the Ugandan government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the country's North. Estimates of the number of armed conflict related injuries for the Acholi and Lango sub-regions alone are between 280,000 and 344,000, or about one-tenth of the population. Research has shown that households with a war-wounded family member often face challenges related to food security, poverty, children's educations, and access to healthcare and therapeutic rehabilitation. These challenges are intensified if the injured family member is the head of household and primary income earner for the family. The experience of Northern Ugandans with disabilities shows that disability needs to be considered in post-conflict recovery and peace processes.

Figure 2: Feinstein International Center in Boston has done research on the war-wounded.

Questions to Ask When Considering Disability in Global Development

Asking critical and probing questions is essential to ensuring inclusion and accessibility in global development research, policy and practice. Here are some questions that might be helpful:

- Is the definition of disability used in this research, policy or practice a broad definition that accounts for diverse bodies and experiences?
- Have the unique power relationships shaped by differences in gender, age, ethnicity and ability been considered in this research, policy or practice?
- Would people who are blind, deaf, labelled with learning or intellectual disabilities, who experience mobility impairments, or are struggling with the many complexities that are labelled under the umbrella of mental health issues face barriers in accessing programs or services under this policy or have difficulty participating in this research?
- Have people with disabilities or disabled peoples' organizations been meaningfully included in the development of this research, policy or practice?
- Were people with disabilities given an opportunity to identify any accommodations that would enhance their participation in development research or allow them to access a service or program?

Resources

Diversity Through Inclusive Practice Toolkit (link)
Article: Neo-colonial Discourse and Disability: The Case of Canadian International Development NGOs (link)
Report: Violence Against Disabled Children (link)
Article: Disabled People & the Post-2015 Development Goal Agenda Through a Disability Studies Lens (link)
UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (link)
UN Enable Webpage (link)
DAWN-RAFH Canada Webpage (link)
Council of Canadians with Disabilities (link)

Image Notes: Figure 1: "Haitian National Palace Earthquake" by UNDP is licensed under CC BY 2.0. Figure 2: "Bostonstraight" by Riptor3000 is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

References

Council of Canadians with Disabilities. (2013). Personally speaking: Poverty and disability in Canada. *Council of Canadians with Disabilities*. Retrieved from http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/ povertycitizenship/demographic-profile/personally-speaking

Garland-Thomson, R. (2011). Misfits: A feminist materialist disability concept. *Hypatia*, 26(3), 591-609.

Goodley, D. (2013). Dis/entangling critical disability studies. *Disability & Society*, 28(5), 631-644. doi: 10.1080/09687599.2012.717884

Grech, S. (2009). Disability, poverty and development: Critical reflections on the majority world debate. *Disability & Society*, 24(6), 771-784. doi: 10.1080/09687590903160266

Grech, S. (2011). Recolonising debates or perpetuated coloniality? Decentring the spaces of disability, development and community in the global South. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(1), 87-100. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2010.496198

Groce, N., Kett, M., Lang, R., & Trani, J.-F. (2011). Disability and Poverty: The need for a more nuanced understanding of implications for development policy and practice. *Third World Quarterly*, 32(8), 1493-1513. doi: 10.1080/01436597.2011.604520

Hankivsky, O., Grace, D., Hunting, G., Ferlatte, O., Clark, N., Fridkin, A.,...Laviolette, T. (2012). Intersectionality-based policy analysis. In O. Hankvisky (Ed.), *An intersectionality-based policy analysis framework* (pp. 33-45). Vancouver: Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy, Simon Fraser University.

Louis, I., & Baranyi, S. (2015). (Dis)ability and development in Haïti: Beyond a one-dimensional view. Manuscript in preparation.

MacQuarrie, A. (2013). The UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities: Making the convention real and meaningful for people with intellectual disabilities and their families. *Council of Canadians with Disabilities*. Retrieved from http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/poverty-citizenship/ legalprotections/the-un-CRPD-making-the-convention-real

de Matos Ala, J. & Black, D. (2015). Building a more inclusive South Africa: Progress and pitfalls in disability rights and inclusion. Manuscript in preparation.

Mazurana, D., Marshak, A., Opio, J.H., Atim, T., Gordon, R., & McEvoy, B. (2015). Disability and recovery from war in Northern Uganda. Manuscript in preparation.

Meekosha, H. (2011). Decolonising disability: Thinking and acting globally. Disability & Society, 26(6), 667-682.

Oliver, M. (1990). The politics of disablement: A sociological approach. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pearce, E. (2014). Disability inclusion: Translating policy into practice in humanitarian action. New York: Women's Refugee Commission. https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/disabilities/disability-inclusion

Simpson, J. (2009). *Everyone belongs: A toolkit for applying intersectionality.*
Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.

UN Enable. (n.d.). Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. UN Enable. Retrieved from
http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150

UN Enable. (n.d.). The sustainable development goals (SDGs) and disability. UN Enable. Retrieved from
http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1618

UNHCR. (2010). Conclusion on refugees with disabilities and other persons with disabilities protected and
assisted by UNHCR. UNHCR. Retrieved from http://www.unhcr.org/4cbeb1a99.html

UNHCR. (n.d.). People with disabilities. UNHCR. Retrieved from
http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a0c310c6.html

World Bank. (2010). Poverty and disability. World Bank. Retrieved from
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALPROTECTION/EXTDISABILITY/0,,cont
entMDK:20193783~menuPK:419389~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:282699,00.html