



Disability: Including the Poorest of the Poor

An estimated 600 million people worldwide live with a disability. 400 million of these live in developing countries and over 80% live below the poverty line. People with disabilities in developing countries make up the biggest definable disadvantaged group in the world. Globally, the number of disabled people is increasing, yet many of the causes of disabilities are preventable and directly linked to poverty.

Disabilities are caused by poor nutrition, dangerous working and living conditions, limited access to health care, maternity care and vaccination programmes, conflict and natural disasters, poor hygiene, bad sanitation or inadequate information about the causes of impairments.

Disability not only affects the individual but also their families and communities.



Unless disabled people are included at all levels of society, poverty will never be beaten.

People with disabilities are often **excluded from participating in society**, for example in education and work. The vast majority of children with disabilities in developing countries do not complete primary education. **Women** with disabilities are often **doubly disadvantaged**, through their status as women and as a person with a disability, and therefore represent one of the most marginalised groups in the world.

If the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to be achieved by 2015, it is critical to consider the rights and needs of people with disabilities, together with prevention of the causes of disability.

What are Irish NGOs doing about it?

The approach of Irish NGOs is both to work towards tackling the underlying causes of disability as well as to ensure inclusion of people with disabilities into all strategic areas of work. Their focus is on the person's potential and respect for their human rights.

- ★ **Preventing** disability - for example, through projects directly targeted at reducing trachoma or polio;
- ★ **Ensuring the inclusion** of people with disabilities in all aspects of development and humanitarian programmes;
- ★ Providing funding and advice to organisations **providing services to people with disabilities**, such as training, medical care, rehabilitation services or income generation;
- ★ **Strengthening of local civil society organisations** through the creation of associations, such as national Disabled Persons' Organisations. This enables the sharing of information, ideas and knowledge of best practices among members;
- ★ **Educating** at grass roots level on the rights of the disabled;
- ★ **Working with partners** and training institutes on issues such as human resources, **organisational development** and services for people with disabilities at rehabilitation centres;
- ★ **Raising awareness** of disability issues at local, national and international levels. One result of this work is the adoption of the 2007 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- ★ **Providing a voice for the voiceless**, to influence policy makers; and
- ★ **Lobbying** for the enactment and implementation of disability legislation in developing countries.

Awareness of the need to tackle disability in developing countries has grown substantially in recent years. A number of developing countries, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa, have published and enacted disability legislation. Internationally, UN member states have agreed a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, reinvigorating the drive to enhance the lives of disabled people the world over.

