

Title: The Painter's Canvas and his Colours

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Abstract:

Background:

Rehabilitation in the context of persons with disability has been fraught with impediments. Communities in general have never identified rehabilitation as a major priority, while most of the work with communities has been undertaken by civil society organizations whose thrusts have been in development, water and sanitation, security, gender, participation, rights, and a range of other social issues. Disability has never been considered as an accepted part of mainstream or social development. The challenge for Sightsavers was how to foment change in thinking and acceptance for disability as a development prerogative through innovative strategies.

Objectives:

The main objectives of Sightsavers were to build capacities of DPOs for advocacy, support leadership and entrepreneurship, influence change in policy, incorporate disability in development through a community programme, and identify employment opportunities.

Methodology:

This paper explores the innovations and their outcomes at policy, recreational, leadership, and development levels.

Conclusions:

Disability and development are complementary and not competing forces. The aim should be to enhance collaboration between the two sectors, harness the collective synergy and institute practical application of strategies.

A great pilot can sail even when his canvas is rent – Seneca

Introduction

In populous developing countries like Pakistan with 160 million people, there are a plethora of development priorities, social protection issues, emphasis on economic and sustainable livelihoods, improvement in water and sanitation, increased enrolment in primary education, and health promotion and disease prevention to name a few.

In such situations, disability tends to be relegated lower down the scale of priorities and resource allocations, both by national and state governments and civil society.

The situation is further compounded because:

- development organizations have little knowledge and expertise on disability issues,
- disability organizations tend to work in compartments and try to propagate their cause but with little understanding of development

Oftentimes, there is also an unawareness of the possible strategic entry points that would enhance networking and collaboration between the two sectors.

Rationale

According to the population census of 1998, the prevalence of Disability in Pakistan is estimated at 2.54%, with blindness accounting for 8.3% in urban areas and 7.9% in rural areas of all disabilities (1). Physical disability was the commonest in both locations at 15.8% and 20.5% in urban and rural areas respectively. In a recent population based survey in 2004, the prevalence of blindness was found to be 0.9% implying that at least 1.4 million people are blind in both eyes (2). The prevalence of functional low vision is estimated at 0.8%.

As part of its mission to alleviate avoidable blindness and promote inclusion of people with disability, Sightsavers International works with government, consumer groups and

civil society actors to advocate for change in policies and systems to support a lasting impact. In this regard, it has worked closely with the Ministry of Health and in 2005, the Federal Ministry of Health launched a national programme for prevention and control of blindness 2005 – 2010.

It has also been working with the Ministry of Special Education and Ministry of Education to promote the concept of inclusive education. Recently, it has developed partnerships with a leading mainstream development organization and two organizations of people with disability (DPOs) to determine the programmatic needs and implications of collaboration between disability and development sectors.

This paper explores some of the strategic initiatives that seek to place disability alongside other social and development prerogatives.

Objectives

The main goal of Sightsavers work is mainstreaming of disability in development through the following strategic objectives:

- Advocacy with the government to bring about policy change
- Organizational strengthening and institutional development
- Public awareness on disability issues

Methodology

Sightsavers recognizes that advocacy is a powerful instrument for change and that it is more effective when the consumer groups undertake such initiatives. This approach was implemented using the following strategies:

- **Influencing change in policy** – pilot/demonstration projects were undertaken with the Directorate General of Special Education, a Provincial Directorate of Special Education and the Federal Directorate of Education to promote rehabilitation services for disabled and inclusive education. Membership was obtained for participation on the Technical Advisory Group that worked on developing a new policy on disability

- **Organizational strengthening and institutional development –**
 - Two leading organizations, STEP and Milestone were identified through a series of informal discussions, meetings and sharing of ideas. The three main areas for partnership include leadership development, enhancing soft skills for independent living, and accessibility. Collaboration with the Young Leaders Conference (YLC) was done to encourage participation of young people with disability, especially blindness and promote a cultural change in concept of leadership development.
 - A study visit was made to Bangladesh to learn about the Community Approach to Handicap in Development (CAHD) used by the Centre for Disability and Development (CDD). This idea was then incorporated in a community development programme with a mainstream development organization
- **Public awareness** - Collaboration was developed with the Islamabad Blind Cricket Association for holding blind cricket tournaments and with STEP and Milestone for holding sports festivals for people with all disabilities. Corporate social responsibility was used to leverage creation of employment opportunities for persons with disability

Results

- **Public policy change** - Directorate General of Special Education and provincial Directorate of Education establish low vision centres in their schools for the blind and visually impaired to promote mainstreaming of children with low vision; Federal Directorate commences pilot programme on inclusive education in 16 mainstream schools (8 supported by Sightsavers); Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education launched a new policy on Disability in 2002 with inclusion as its overarching theme
- **Organizational strengthening and institutional development –** some examples are given below:
 - a national consultation was held on accessibility that developed the Islamabad Declaration on Accessibility. A public private partnership with

STEP and Directorate General for Special Education resulted in development of a national Disability Framework which was launched by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education. A training centre for information technology has been established by Milestone and regular courses for leadership development are being held

- Civil Society Human and Institutional Development Programme (CHIP), a mainstream development partner agreed to test the CAHD approach with 12 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in 50 villages; CBOs incorporated persons with disability as members for the first time; development initiatives run by these CBOs now include disability on their agenda
- Six young leaders participated in three annual YLC courses; one young leader set a new record in paragliding and another set up a civil society organization to conduct soft skills training
- Orientation and mobility training for people with blindness was conducted in collaboration with district based eye care government programmes
- **Public awareness** – some examples of ground breaking initiatives:
 - Blind cricket national tournaments held consecutively for last seven years; technical assistance was provided to the Blind Cricket Council to mobilize resources for and hold the Blind Cricket World Cup in Pakistan in 2006; sports and recreational festivals held for public awareness
 - Advocacy with Standard Chartered Bank in Pakistan led to training of 12 young people with blindness for telemarketing and recruitment in their banks

Discussion

There is a strong current of opportunity flowing at present for developing countries like Pakistan. The World Health Assembly has passed a resolution for integrating disability in health programmes; a new UN resolution on disability has been ratified by most countries; development agendas e.g. universal primary education have recognized that this millennium development goal would not be possible without addressing disability;

the new policy on disability and inclusion has many possibilities for supporting work on disability; increasing public sector spending on special needs education; and conversion of a leading mainstream development actor (CHIP) towards disability in development philosophy thus paving the way for further dissemination through a multiplier effect.

The challenge that faces disability movements is three-fold – what needs to be done to promote awareness about disability issues among mainstream development actors; how can DPOs look beyond their compartmentalization and comfort zones to familiarize themselves with development issues and identify opportunities for integration; what sort of policy dialogue needs to be supported to foster cooperation between the state and these two actors?

Disability and development are complementary and not competing forces. The aim should be to enhance collaboration between the two sectors and the state, harness the collective synergy and institute practical application of strategies.

‘There are painters who turn the sun into a yellow spot; there are others who turn a yellow spot into the sun’ - Picasso

References

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