

Title: Mainstreaming Disability- Challenges and Responses

Authors: Imtiaz Mohammed & Gopal Mitra

Introduction.

The concept of “Mainstreaming Disability” has been increasingly gaining ground with Multilateral, Bilateral and international Non Governmental organisations aiming to adopt principles of mainstreaming in thinking and policies. Broadly, Mainstreaming refers to a strategy through which concerns, needs and experiences of disabled people are made an integral part/ dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that disabled people benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (Albert, 2005). The hitherto residual treatment of disability as only a social welfare issue, it was realized, would not lead to emancipation or equality; it was perceived that mainstreaming issues of disability within the broader development agenda was the only viable/ useful way forward. However, there is an increasing feeling of discontent among development practitioners and people with disabilities that the progress towards mainstreaming has not happened on ground to the extent desired. This paper explores the policies of Mainstreaming adopted by various organisations and the bottlenecks/ challenges that arise in doing so. Subsequently, it attempts to examine some instances where mainstreaming has been tried on ground and demonstrates some practical ways of engagement which emerges from Leonard Cheshire Disability’s work in Asia and in Africa.

Donor Policies on Mainstreaming

It is common knowledge that people with disabilities constitute one of the most marginalized and impoverished groups within the society, a fact that most organisations agree in principle. People with disabilities are more likely to be uneducated, unemployed, lack access to health care, vulnerable to abuse and socially marginalized. They form nearly 10% of the population and despite being over represented among the poor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) failed to recognize the fact and make a clear mention of it. However, there is agreement on the fact that without addressing issues of the 10% of the population (of people with disabilities), who also happen to be the poorest of the poor, the MDGs can be realized neither in letter nor in spirit. The feeling among people with disabilities and organisations is that since disability does not figure in the MDGs it would not be cascaded down to the ground level within the development programmes.

Though the call for mainstreaming (from DPOs) is not a new one the last ten years has witnessed significant efforts by Development Agencies and various Governments adopting principles of mainstreaming atleast within its policies. Subsequent to the adoption of the UN Standard Rules in 1993, USAID

formulated its disability policy in 1997 and the same was further given teeth in 2005. Since 2000 the DFID has also been attempting to mainstream disability into its policies. The EU, in 2003, came out with detailed guidelines encouraging its member states to mainstream disability in their international development agenda. The World Bank too demonstrated its commitment in this regard by setting up Disability and Development team to encourage research and networking (Albert, 2005). The UN through its “Disability Dimension in Development Action: Manual on Inclusive Planning” lays out in detail how issues of disability can be addressed in mainstream development planning and programming.

Despite such an impressive array of policies, which undoubtedly demonstrates the novel intentions and realization on the part of Development Agencies and Governments regarding the approach to be embraced, studies and experiences on ground have brought out a degree of disconnect between policy and practice. The next section endeavors to examine some of them.

Gaps in Policy and Practice

Though it is well appreciated that policies, practices and cultures of organisations cannot be altered as fast as one would like them to, nonetheless it is well worth to examine the bottlenecks and practical challenges that are encountered while operationalising ambitious policies. Moreover, the recent adoption of the UNCRPD and with the hope that it will come into force in the near future such introspection gains enhanced importance. A closer scrutiny of the reasons for the disconnect between intentions, policies and progress made on ground towards mainstreaming disability, reveals that problems exist at multiple levels- with International Development Agencies, National Governments and NGOs including disability sector organisations. Similarly, there are challenges both at the structural as well as at the implementation level. Some of the practical issues that have come to the fore during Leonard Cheshire Disability’s work in various parts of the world have been discussed below:

1. Though international and national development agencies have well laid out policies at the Central level in many cases these policies are not communicated strongly and nor structures created and resources clearly demarcated to implement the same.
2. Disability is often considered as a specialised issue and Development Agency staff are often at a loss as to how to actually create ways and means to include people with disabilities into their programmes. Though most multi and bilateral and INGOs have dedicated disability teams they are often inadequate to train the staff and help in actual design and operationalisation.
3. Though many organisations pursue a rights based approach with groups like gender, minorities etc when it comes to disability it is still largely viewed as a social welfare issue and distinct service delivery approach is adopted instead of mainstreaming issues and concerns of people with disabilities into their main programmes.

4. The DPOs and the disability movement in many places is at a nascent stage and needs to be further strengthened to enable them to represent concerns and rights of people with disabilities in a more effective manner. Though in many instances there is evidence of strong local and provincial level, DPOs at the national level are still fragmented and weak.
5. Though organisations working exclusively on disability have in principle adopted the rights based approach and believe in mainstreaming, at least in principle, they have still continued to design and implement distinct micro level programmes with people with disabilities as their only constituents rather than invest their resources and expertise to mainstream disability within the regular development programmes and engaging with development agencies and government for the same.
6. National Governments in many countries have adopted mainstreaming issues of disability within their policies however, at the same time they have set up parallel structures to implement separate disability programmes instead of institutionalizing the same across all sectors. This has often led to confusion regarding mainstreaming, with various ministries not taking the onus of including people with disabilities within their programmes.

Despite the above, one cannot deny that no progress has been made on this front. For instance to ensure that disability is mainstreamed in practice DFID has included disability indicators into log frame agreements with the governments especially in the areas of Education and reproductive and child health (Thomas, 2005). The next section discusses some of the experiences of Leonard Cheshire Disability in its endeavor to work with various stake holders for mainstreaming issues of disability into development programmes.

Experiences in Mainstreaming

One of the key focus areas of LCD is to actively engage with governments and development agencies and support them to include people with disabilities in their programmes. In situations where no policies or practice regarding mainstreaming of people with disabilities exist it initiates model pilot programmes demonstrating ways and means through which mainstreaming can be carried out, thereafter convincing governments and other agencies to take it up and replicate the same.

In Sri Lanka LCD collaborated with Action Aid International to develop the capacity of staff of 23 of its partner organisations on issues of disability and how to include people with disability in their poverty alleviation programmes. The two stage training which included both indoor and field based training focused on identification, carrying out need assessments, production of low cost assistive devices, basic therapy and exercises to change the attitude of staff towards disability. Inputs were also given on Inclusive Education and Livelihood options. The most significant outcome of such engagement has been that development

staff were able to identify many more disabled people in their areas who were not identified earlier and who were previously considered as unproductive were chosen for many economic empowerment schemes.

In China an access to livelihood programme was launched jointly by the International Labour Organisation and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. As a part of the programme LCD supported a scheme called Start and Improve your Business (SYIB) to facilitate access of people with disabilities to employment. As a pilot more than 100 people have been given training and support to open their business. Now the China Disabled People's Federation has decided to replicate the same in other provinces too.

In Kenya the Oriang project initiated by LCD as a pilot demonstrated successfully how to facilitate Inclusive Education. The project which was initially started in five schools will now be replicated not only by the Kenyan government but by other governments in the region. In India too LCD Projects are actively supporting the government's flagship education programme (SSA) to include children with disabilities in regular schools. It has established model schools which the government can replicate and provides teacher training and accessibility support to the local government machinery. In many places the government has appointed LCD projects as District Level Resource Organisation (DLRO).

Another instance of engagement with the Government of India to facilitate mainstreaming has been with regard to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme which is currently operational in 350 poorest districts of India. The scheme guarantees 100 days of unskilled employment to one member of each household on demand. Though initially there was no specific provision to include people with disabilities sustained campaigning, of which LCD was a part, have resulted in inclusion of thousands of people with disabilities and in many instances State Governments have issued specific orders to this effect.

The above instances demonstrate that concerted efforts and sustained engagement does facilitate mainstreaming and conscious decisions and strategies have to be formulated to bring about significant forward movement in this regard. However, even for LCD it is a modest start and in the coming years it intends to further intensify its efforts to engage with all stake holders to facilitate mainstreaming.

Conclusion

Given the sheer number of people with disabilities and the degree of marginalization, real difference in their quality of lives can only happen when mainstream development programmes takes cognizance of this fact and makes it mandatory to include people with disabilities at every stage of their programme planning and implementation. Wherever policies are in place, strategies need to be formulated to actualize the intentions by creating viable structures,

demarcating resources (both human and material) and putting in place monitoring mechanisms to assess progress. The DPOs and disability sector organisations need to consolidate their energies and invest them more in engaging with governments and development agencies to facilitate mainstreaming.

Authors: 1. Mr. Imtiaz Mohammed, Senior Program Manager Asia, Leonard Cheshire Disability,
30 Millbank, London SW1P4QD UK. E-mail:
imtiaz.mohammed@lenoardcheshiredisability.org
2. Mr. Gopal Mitra, Inclusive Education Manager, Leonard Cheshire Disability South Asia Regional Office, #542, 9th Cross, J.P.Nagar, Bangalore -560078, Karnataka, India. E-mail:
gopal.mitra@lcdsouthasia.org

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