

FOKUS Policy on the Inclusion of People with Disabilities

FOKUS – Forum for Women and Development – is a knowledge and resource center for international women’s issues with an emphasis on women-centered development cooperation and information dissemination. FOKUS is committed to protecting the rights and interests of all the world’s women. By extension, FOKUS is committed to the inclusion of people who have physical and intellectual disabilities and those who advocate and offer services on behalf of people with disabilities. This commitment extends from the design and implementation of FOKUS’ programs to advocacy for and outreach to persons with disabilities.

Why a policy on disability?

FOKUS wishes to strengthen its work on human rights for women and girls with disabilities. We are doing this because we believe that every person has equal rights and an equal value, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, skin color, religion, sexual orientation and identity, political or any other opinion, national or social origin, language, or **disability**.

Due to stigma and negative attitudes, adults and children with disabilities are often discriminated against and made invisible in development cooperation and in society at large. This reinforces the cycle of invisibility, exclusion and discrimination.

People often fear what is different and what they do not understand. Fear and ignorance perpetuate the cycle of exclusion for people with disabilities. A person with a disability may appear or behave ‘differently.’ In addition, she can experience real difficulty in various areas of functioning (walking, talking, seeing, hearing) or activities of daily living (ADLs) (eating, dressing, and toileting). Families, communities and staff members of organizations can be caught up immediately into a negative stereotyped response to a person with a disability, and into a cycle of shame, fear, ignorance, prejudice and discrimination. Many people with disabilities are excluded and made invisible at all levels; in the home they are often hidden away in back rooms, so that even household surveys and community mapping exercises do not reveal their existence. In many societies they are ‘hidden’ by being placed in institutions or special schools, transported in special buses, so that non-disabled children and adults do not have any contact with people with disabilities, and the fear and ignorance are perpetuated.

Definition and terms

Disability can be defined and classified in many ways and for different purposes. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities does not include a specific definition of the term “people with disabilities,” but instead lists a broad category of groups. Disability is an evolving concept which results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

FOKUS has chosen to base its approach to disability on the social model of disability. This model differentiates between impairment and disability. Impairment refers to a defect in the physical, mental and intellectual functional ability of an individual. Disability, on the other hand, is a societal product, where physical or mental impairment is transformed into social disadvantage. In other words, disability refers to

the problems/obstacles caused by the surrounding environment in relation to the impairment.¹

Disability can be caused by disease, malnutrition, incorrect treatment or non-treatment, physical or mental violence and war, accidents due to inadequate protection at the workplace and in traffic situations, and, increasingly, age-related diseases.

Historically, various pejorative (negative) terms have been used to refer to people with disabilities. They were often called *handicapped, invalids, cripples, lame, retarded, etc.* These terms have greatly contributed to the stigmatization and are fully unacceptable.

Later, the term *disabled people* came into use. Though seemingly neutral, the term emphasizes the disability and not the person, making the disability an all-encompassing characteristic of the person. Whenever possible, it is preferable to refer to the person first, followed by the mention of the disability she may have. For example, instead of saying “a schizophrenic woman,” a more acceptable term would be “a woman who has schizophrenia.” The umbrella term, then, becomes *people with disabilities*.

Prevalence and consequences

According to the WHO/World Bank “World Report on Disability,” launched in June 2011, 15% of the world’s population, approximately 1 billion people, has a disability. At least 500 million of them are women. Eighty percent of these people live in developing countries, and many live in poverty. In addition, having a family member with a disability has an effect on other family members, including their financial situation.

In both rich and poor countries, studies show that persons with disabilities are poorer than those without disabilities. The World Bank has estimated that of the world’s poorest people, defined as those living on less than USD 1 per day, 20 per cent have some form of disability².

Persons with disabilities suffer from discrimination throughout the world and are often excluded from social, economic and political processes in their societies.

Women with disabilities are twice as likely to suffer discrimination and are excluded on the grounds of both their gender and their disability. Girls and women with disabilities are subject to physical and mental abuse, including sexual violence and abuse, disproportionately often. Exclusion of persons with disabilities takes place in all countries and in all social sectors.

International normative framework

Disability was long considered an individual problem that was treated from a medical and charitable viewpoint, but neglected in terms of equal rights for disabled persons. Over the last few decades, a stronger focus on rights has replaced these perspectives.

¹ The medical model viewed disability as a problem that needs “fixing.”

² http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf

In 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted *Standard Rules*³ for establishing equal opportunities for disabled people, which were developed along the lines of the World Program of Action. The *Standard Rules* provide a universal framework for activities to integrate the rights of persons with disabilities into national legislation. However, the *Standard Rules* were not binding beyond their significance as a political guideline.

After years of intense lobbying by people with disabilities and their advocacy organizations, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁴ was adopted in 2006. The Convention illustrates a clear paradigm shift – from a perspective where persons with disabilities are a group that are separate and constitute the object of “care” measures, to one where persons with disabilities are accorded equal rights and where non-discrimination, self-determination and inclusion in development initiatives constitute central starting points.

The Convention came into force on May 3, 2008, and has been signed by almost 140 states, and ratified by around 50 countries, as of February 1, 2012. The Convention aims to remove obstacles that prevent persons with disabilities from enjoying their human rights, and also lists measures to counteract discrimination. The Convention also proposes guiding principles such as equality, participation, accessibility and equal opportunities, and covers a wide range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Several articles of the Convention relate specifically to women with disabilities⁵. The Convention also contains an Optional Protocol on individual right of complaint⁶.

Norway ratified the Convention in 2013.

Women with disabilities

Women with disabilities face discrimination on a daily basis in every country in the world. This includes discrimination in the enforcement of laws, denial of equal opportunity in education and employment, exclusion of women with disabilities in political representation, deprivation of reproductive rights, cultural and social norms that reinforce stereotypes, and physical, sexual and psychological violence to subordinate and ostracize women and children with disabilities.

Women are more at risk than their male counterparts to develop disabilities because they are often last in line to access food, education and health care.⁷ They are also overrepresented as caregivers of family members with disabilities.⁸ Furthermore, while men with disabilities are more commonly cared for by their wives, women with disabilities are more likely to be abused or deserted by their husbands.⁹ Women with disabilities are also more vulnerable to poverty, violence and social exclusion.

³ Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities,

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/dissre00.htm>

⁴ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

⁵ See especially Article 6.

⁶ The individual right of complaint means that individual people or groups of people can complain to a monitoring committee if they believe that their rights have been infringed.

⁷ UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003/04: Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality, http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=23023&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁸ A recent study done in Nicaragua shows that such caregiving can take up to ten hours a day. World Bank. Disability and Development and the World Bank: A Briefing Summary, 2 February 2005,

http://sitesources.worldbank.org/Disability/Resources/overview/DD_and_WB_Briefing_Summary.pdf

⁹ Gender and Women's Mental Health: http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/genderwomen/en/print.html

Implications for FOKUS

General implications

FOKUS shall promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all its activities and programs. The aim of this commitment is to avoid discrimination against women with disabilities and to stimulate an engagement of member and partner organizations, as well as governments, in promoting a climate of non-discrimination against and equal opportunity for people with disabilities.

This shall be done through:

1. Increased accessibility – in a broad sense. Accessibility should be both physical; i.e. accessibility to buildings, transport etc., but also accessibility to information, knowledge and communication.
 - ***FOKUS shall strive to eliminate obstacles and barriers to its indoor facilities, including at FOKUS-sponsored events.***
 - ***FOKUS shall, to the extent possible, make relevant information available in accessible formats (e.g. Braille, audio formats, sign language), including making its website accessible for persons with disabilities.***
 - ***FOKUS shall promote and support increased accessibility for persons with disabilities in member and partner organizations.***
2. Increased awareness and knowledge by and about persons with disabilities.
 - ***FOKUS shall facilitate the integration of a disability perspective into existing systems and tools for program planning, development, monitoring and evaluation.***
 - ***FOKUS shall ensure that its staff, member organizations, and partner organizations receive training on disability.***
 - ***FOKUS shall ensure that women with disabilities are included as a target group in FOKUS-funded programs.***
3. Increased influence. Persons with disabilities should have equal rights to influence issues relating to their own lives. “Nothing about us without us” has been a slogan of the disability movement for many decades. In order to implement inclusion, persons with disabilities need to be involved at every level, and FOKUS needs to lead by example.
 - ***FOKUS shall promote and facilitate the right of persons with disabilities to be heard and considered in all matters concerning them.***
 - ***FOKUS shall have an inclusive and non-discriminatory recruitment and employment policy, and shall work in partnership with Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) to put principles into practice.***

A study done in India shows that men with psycho social disabilities are more likely to be cared by their wives while women with similar disabilities are either deserted or abused by their husbands prior to separation.

- ***FOKUS shall encourage its partner organizations to do the same.***

In addition, FOKUS shall promote the rights of women with disabilities within the context of Norway's international aid policy.

Program-specific implications

1. Women and climate change

Research on 'climate change vulnerability' tends to conclude that poor people in developing countries are most vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change. However, very little research attempts to disaggregate 'the poor in developing countries' and look in detail at specific issues and implications for socially excluded groups, such as older people, children, or people with disabilities.

Most resources argue that climate change has differential impacts on men and women. Climate change policy does not fully take account of women's interests and women's voices are often not heard in international climate change negotiations. These challenges are compounded for women with disabilities, who feel the brunt of exclusion on multiple grounds.

FOKUS shall, with its partners and organizations of people with disabilities, strive to let the voices of women with disabilities be heard in addressing the mitigation and adaptation strategies to climate change.

2. Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Women with disabilities are frequently denied access to sexual and reproductive health information and support, being wrongly perceived as asexual or not eligible for sexual relationships. Many are forcibly sterilised to prevent menstruation and pregnancy, which, in addition to violating their fundamental rights, makes them especially vulnerable to rape.

FOKUS shall work with partners to ensure that women and girls with disabilities have (general and equal) access to information about sexual and reproductive health. We shall work with partners, families and communities to protect women with disabilities from sexual abuse, to enhance knowledge of and respect for their sexual and reproductive rights, and to empower them to make informed choices.

3. Violence against women

Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to abuse, violence and exploitation of all kinds. It is estimated that women with disabilities are twice as likely to experience violence in close relationships as are non-disabled women. Girls with disabilities are amongst the world's most vulnerable children, and are frequently the least protected.

FOKUS is committed to working with partners, organizations of persons with disabilities, families and communities to identify situations where violence is occurring and to protect women and girls with disabilities from violence in all situations, as well as to facilitate their access to justice and redress for the wrongs suffered.

4. Women, peace and security

Conflict situations make more women disabled directly because of injuries caused by land mines, bombs, combat, and other factors incident to a conflict situation. All women must have the opportunity to participate in reconstruction, build the rule of law, and strengthen democracy. Sustainable peace requires the inclusion of all groups affected by conflict at all stages, including women with disabilities.

FOKUS shall work with partners to ensure that women with disabilities in conflict and post-conflict areas are provided protection, assistance, rehabilitation, access to justice, and a seat at the table in peace-related decision-making processes.

5. Economic rights and participation

Women and girls with disabilities are often excluded from school, and have fewer education opportunities than their able-bodied counterparts. This often translates to diminished employment and other income-generating opportunities, increasing the risk of a life of poverty and dependence.

FOKUS is committed to working with partners, organizations of persons with disabilities, and communities to include women and girls with disabilities in education, vocational training and to stimulate the development of income-generating initiatives that enable women and girls with disabilities to realize their economic rights.

6. Political rights and participation

Women with disabilities are even more excluded from participating and voicing their opinions than non-disabled women. It is thus important to facilitate the inclusion of women with disabilities in all arenas where decisions of pertinence to their lives are taken.

FOKUS shall work with partners to enable women with disabilities to freely express their views at all levels of decision-making. This shall be done in close cooperation with organizations of persons with disabilities, and by providing training and equipment to facilitate communication. We recognize the importance of local sign languages and Braille, and will promote their development and use.