

POSTCARD

36. Consequences of inequality for persons with disabilities – experience of ADD International

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Development interventions tend to focus on vertical inequalities, the link between economic status, income and assets. But it is often horizontal inequalities, linked to social status and identity, which lock individuals into marginalization and poverty. Without addressing horizontal inequalities, it is impossible to tackle vertical inequalities (Cain, 2012). This is the consistent message of work carried out by ADD International with persons with disabilities over thirty years, many of whom experience further marginalization because of their gender and age.

How the individual experiences disability depends not just on functional limitations relating to their impairment, but also on 'attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (United Nations, 2006). Negative attitudes towards disability mean that people with disabilities routinely experience discrimination which can deny them equitable access to resources, services and opportunities for personal development. This marginalization is exacerbated by environmental barriers such as inaccessible public buildings and services, and the lack of information in accessible formats.

There are close links between disabled people's social marginalization and economic inequalities, and this is consistently reflected in testimony from people with disabilities from all levels of society, including those who have managed to get an education despite their disability:

People without disabilities have alternative options if they can't get a job. They can be self-employed. But people with disabilities don't have as many alternatives. People with disabilities can't influence powerful people. In general, people have negative attitudes about

disability, so they don't employ us. (Salamot Ullah, community peer researcher, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, quoted in Burns and Oswald, 2015, p. 29)

There is also a growing body of empirical data demonstrating the link between disability and poverty, including a World Bank study of fifteen developing countries which found that people with disabilities were significantly worse off, were more likely to experience multiple deprivations, and had lower educational attainment and employment rates than non-disabled people (Mitra et al., 2011).

Through our work with disabled people's organizations (DPOs) in Africa and Asia, we have found that initiatives that promote the voice and empowerment of people with disabilities within their communities are effective at reducing social inequalities. In Cambodia, DPOs are working at village level to build understanding of intellectual disability: 'We didn't believe it was possible for them to change. We didn't know about the situation of people with intellectual disability so didn't know how to treat them,' said the relative of one person with intellectual disability in Svey Tayean Commune (ADD International, 2013, p.15). After efforts to identify and nurture the contributions they can make, people with intellectual disability are now being recognized as active community members: 'In farming work everyone helps one another – previously the people with intellectual disabilities just stood around, but now they help too. They are invited to help' (community member, Sam Ley Commune, quoted in ADD International, 2013, p.17). This recognition has paved the way for people with disabilities to become formally registered with local authorities, giving them access to development support including livestock and water and sanitation investments, and to basic services including free health care.

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