

# Disability, poverty and the new development agenda

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## Glossary

**Impairment:** A physical, sensory, intellectual or behavioural condition.

**Disability:** A complex system of restrictions imposed on people with impairments resulting in a denial of rights and equal opportunities.

**Disabled people or people with disabilities:** The chosen terminology of the disability movement varies between cultures and languages. In this document we have used 'disabled people', as this is favoured in the UK. In some countries the disability movement prefers 'people with disabilities'.

### **Models of disability:**

- **Medical model:** Disabled people are defined by their impairment and medical/technical solutions offered to alleviate their impairment – an individualistic approach that does not look at social barriers.
- **Charity model:** Disabled people are to be pitied and helped. There is no recognition of equal rights or the role that discrimination plays.
- **Social model:** This model sees disability as the social consequence of having an impairment. The inequities faced by disabled people can only be overcome if the structure of society is changed.

## Acronyms

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>ADD</b>	Action on Disability and Development
<b>CBR</b>	Community Based Rehabilitation
<b>DANIDA</b>	Danish International Development Assistance
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (UK Government)
<b>DPO</b>	Disabled Peoples' Organisation
<b>DPI</b>	Disabled Peoples' International
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization (UN)
<b>FDIDC</b>	Finnish Department for International Development Cooperation (formerly FINNIDA)
<b>G8</b>	Group of the eight industrialised countries with the most powerful economies (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, United States of America, Russia)
<b>G7</b>	As G8 but without Russia
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GNP</b>	Gross National Product
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>JICA</b>	Japan International Cooperation Agency
<b>KaR</b>	Knowledge and Research (a DFID-funded disability research programme)
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MPH</b>	Make Poverty History
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>Norad</b>	Norwegian Agency for Development
<b>NUDIPU</b>	National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PEAP</b>	Poverty Eradication Action Plan (Ugandan PRSP)
<b>PRSP</b>	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
<b>SAP</b>	Structural Adjustment Policy
<b>SIDA</b>	Swedish International Development Agency
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>VSO</b>	Voluntary Service Overseas
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization

## Executive summary

Despite numerous policies and statements regarding disability and poverty reduction, it is still estimated that 50,000 people, including 10,000 disabled people, die every day as a result of extreme poverty. This is not an abstract theory, but a disastrous crisis. It would be deceptive to claim that this injustice is anybody's conscious intention. However, it can be argued that it is the inevitable and logical result of existing global relations. Earlier in 2005, many thousands of people took to the streets to protest against this injustice.

Disabled people are among the most disadvantaged people in the world and are over-represented among the poorest of the poor. The relationship between disability and poverty has often been referred to as a vicious circle. This paper argues that this representation may obscure the similarities between the processes of marginalisation experienced by disabled people and poor people.

There appears to be a widespread assumption in the disability sector that inclusion is necessarily good, with little assessment of the wider context. This leads to the bizarre situation where many community organisations are campaigning against, for example, the World Bank's poverty reduction strategies, claiming that the Bank's approach perpetuates poverty, while the disability sector fights for inclusion within the Bank's strategies. If the existing system is the cause of the problem, then inclusion within it cannot be the answer. Wider assessment of the context is urgently required and alliances need to be built between marginalised people, if there is to be any real chance of creating a more humane and just society.

## Introduction

There has been noticeable change in the attention paid to disability in recent years. As the disability movement has grown in strength, so the language of the mainstream establishment has also changed. Many governments have passed new legislation, as well as noting the need to include disabled people in their international development work. Many international development organisations also now have some form of guidelines or policy regarding the need to include disabled people in their work. Among those organisations specifically dedicated to working with disabled people internationally, the majority now refer to the social model of disability and to disabled people's rights as central to their work. However the extent to which changes in legislation and documentation reflect change in practice is more debatable. Many in the disability movement complain that the voices of disabled people are still not being heard to any great degree. Several other KaR publications refer to these issues in detail, (see for example: Albert 2004b; Albert and Miller 2005; Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen 2005; Dube and Charowa 2005; Thomas 2004 and 2005). This paper will briefly describe some of these changes, focusing on their impact on the poverty reduction agenda.

In parallel with developments in the disability sector, there has been some change in official policy on more general development matters, with increasing focus on a 'rights-based' approach, poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals. The G8 summit in Scotland combined with Britain's Presidency of the European Commission led to the formation of an alliance of NGOs, faith organisations and individuals with the stated goal to 'Make Poverty History'. Between this alliance and G8 Alternatives, thousands of people took to the streets in the UK, calling for an end to world poverty. Such widespread public concern for international poverty concerns is unprecedented. The media profile was raised considerably once Bob Geldof, Bono and others began to take on the issue. However, as the media turned its attention to sanctifying the rock stars, many accused the campaign of sidelining Africans themselves. The main musical events were devoid of African musicians, who staged a separate event in Cornwall. African organisations campaigning against poverty adopted the well-known slogan of the disability movement: 'Nothing about us, without us'.

Geldof's intervention certainly helped to raise the profile of poverty, but whether it helped address the causes of poverty is more questionable. It may even have diverted the energy of a growing movement to focus on actions that make participants feel good but do little to address the causes of poverty.

Changes in language and documentation about disability may be the first step to more practical progress, or a smokescreen that pacifies the movement without changing anything in practice. Several disability activists draw a distinction between inclusion and mainstreaming. The latter incorporates the more radical goals of self-

determination and equality. There appears to be a widespread assumption in the disability sector that inclusion, or even mainstreaming, is necessarily good. There is rarely any assessment of the agenda into which inclusion is considered. This leads to the not infrequent occurrence that many community organisations are working to build a new agenda altogether, while the disability sector is campaigning for inclusion within the existing agenda. A debate about the most constructive focus of energy needs to be had. For example, is mainstreaming in the World Bank's agenda a real possibility, is it a goal to be striven for, or should alliances be built with those campaigning against the World Bank's agenda per se? The disability sector seems often to focus its energy upwards towards those perceived as having the power. Perhaps there are times when more meaningful progress could be made by building more horizontal alliances with the wider movement for social change.

The relationship between disability and poverty is often described as a vicious circle. Here, it is argued that in fact, both disability and poverty are often manifestations of the same processes. If the commonalities are recognised then the need to build horizontal alliances becomes more apparent.

This paper will look at the changes that have taken place in recent years around poverty, disability and the relationship between the two. The nature of the changes will be assessed, examining who controls the agenda and what prospects there are for progress. The role that disabled people and poor people have in setting and implementing the current agenda is questioned. Finally the paper looks at some ways forward and makes some suggestions as to how poverty and disability can be more effectively addressed.

## 1. Disability – Recent developments in disability and international development work

There has been increasing reference to disability as an international development issue over recent years. Governments, international development agencies and the international financial institutions have made widespread changes to their rhetoric as well as published many guidelines and policy documents regarding disability. International NGOs working in the disability sector now almost all claim to base their work on the social model of disability.

A recent KaR report examines in detail the ways in which disability is being mainstreamed in development cooperation (Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen 2005). The authors introduce their work by saying, "Since the late 1990s there have been an impressive catalogue of policy initiatives around disability mainstreaming into development cooperation so as to make it seem that disability had finally broken through and was now firmly on the development agenda. It appears however, that ... nowhere has disability been adopted as a cross-cutting development issue and recent reports indicate that the most progressive disability policies of such agencies as USAID, NORAD and FINIDA have not been carried through." This paper will summarise recent developments in terms of disability policies, focusing on the impact on the poverty reduction agenda.

### 1.1 Disability on the official agenda

Official recognition of the rights of disabled people in international development work only really began in the 1980s. In 1983, the UN published its *World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons* (UN 1983), in which it was stated that, "... particular efforts should be made to integrate the disabled in the development process and that effective measures for prevention, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities are therefore essential." This Programme of Action marked the beginning of the UN Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-92), which culminated with the UN adoption of the Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in 1993. The post of special rapporteur on disability issues was created in 1994 to monitor implementation of the Rules. These Rules are not legally enforceable, nor were many resources made available for promotion. They do, however, set an anti-discriminatory and inclusive international standard, which, together with other developments in the disability movement, have influenced many governments and organisations to take disability rights more seriously.

There have been expressions of concern from the financial institutions. In 2000, the Asian Development Bank published a paper proposing technical assistance for identifying disability issues related to poverty reduction. The World Bank appointed Judith Heumann as disability policy adviser in 2002 and its former President James Wolfensohn made a series of pronouncements on disability.

After many years of lobbying by the disability movement, several governments began to adopt some form of disability-focused legislation from the 1990s onwards (e.g. USA 1990; Zimbabwe 1992; India 1995; UK 1995;

Sri Lanka 1996; South Africa 1997; Bangladesh 2001). By the late 1990s, several governments were also beginning to make statements of various kinds regarding the need to include disabled people in their international development work (e.g. USAID, FINNIDA, NORAD, DANIDA, SIDA, DFID, JICA). In 2000 the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID) published an Issues Paper entitled *Disability, Poverty and Development*, which many outside the department took for a commitment to mainstream disability (see Thomas 2004 and 2005 for analysis of the practical impact of this paper on DFID and see Albert 2004b for a wider discussion of official disability policies).

Few NGOs working in international development made any mention of disabled people's rights until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What reference there was before then was generally in the context of charity and medical assistance. Increasing numbers of agencies have recently shown some recognition of the needs of disabled people (e.g. Action Aid, Oxfam, VSO, World Vision). In 1999 Oxfam produced a discussion paper, asserting that, "because disability and poverty are inextricably linked, poverty can never be eradicated until disabled people enjoy equal rights with non-disabled people." (Lee 1999:13)

As regards academic research, the earliest contributions include *Prejudice and Dignity: An Introduction to Community-based Rehabilitation* (Helander 1992) and *Disability, Liberation and Development* (Coleridge 1993) as well as the work by disability rights activists Lewis, C. and Sygall, S *Loud, Proud and Passionate: Including Women with Disabilities in International Development Programs* (Lewis & Sygall 1997). In 1999, the Disability Press at the University of Leeds published a collection of essays on disability and international development issues, *Disability and Development: Learning from Action and Research on Disability in the Majority World* (1999). Susan Erb and Barbara Harriss-White carried out a study into the economic and social context of disability in a number of villages in Tamil Nadu, India (Erb & Harriss-White 2000, 2001, 2002). The authors note that 'disability' suffered from neglect at the levels of analysis, policy, and information – all of which reinforced each other, "This low priority can be explained by the political weakness of disabled people ... high perceived economic costs and low perceived political benefits." (2002: 1-2)

This increase in the profile of disability issues in international development work has occurred in parallel with developments in the disability movement. Analysis of what disability actually means and how it can be tackled are fundamental to considerations of poverty reduction work.

## 1.2 Models of disability

Until the last few years, any discussion of disability had been focused either on medical 'cures' or, where cures were not forthcoming, on pity and charitable donations. Both these approaches frame the individual disabled person as the 'problem'. These approaches are still widespread today, however there is increasing acceptance of the social model, which describes the crux of the problem as emanating from the structure of society itself (see Albert 2004a for more detail). This model has huge implications for poverty reduction work and has relevance for all manner of marginalised groups. If the problem emanates from society itself then what is needed is to change society not the individual. If society were constructed in a more egalitarian, inclusive manner then both poverty and the exclusion of disabled people could be addressed. Notwithstanding the widespread use of the term 'social model' among those working on disability and international development issues, the extent to which it is understood, or forms the basis of action, is debatable.

In the last few years, many international development agencies have begun to adopt a so-called 'rights-based approach'. This approach asserts that each person has equal economic, cultural and social rights; that international development work should be based on working for equal rights rather than on notions of charity. In terms of disability, the Southern African Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD) describes the rights-based approach as being about 'levelling the playing field so that people with disabilities can access jobs, education, health and other services. A rights-based approach is about the removal of physical and social barriers; it is about attitude adjustments for policy makers, employers, teachers, healthcare professionals and even family members. A rights-based approach is about ensuring universal design, accessible technology, and coordinated public programmes and service. The approach requires government to provide the resources necessary to implement these goals and to enforce penalties for those who refuse to cooperate' (cited by Albert and Hurst 2005:6).

There is a range of opinion as to the virtues of the rights-based approach. Some have warned that the approach could actually disadvantage the poorest, who rarely have the capacity to mobilise effectively to assert their rights (Hickey and Bracking, 2005). Some argue that the social model has been superseded by this more general human rights approach. Others argue that the social model and the human rights approach

are not distinct, "Disability describes the barriers faced by people with impairments to achieving equality and justice, and because disabled people are human beings too, it is axiomatic that disability is a human rights issue." (Albert and Hurst, 2005:2)

Not all organisations claim to follow a rights-based approach. USAID have a disability team and a policy calling for inclusion, but this is not on the basis of human rights. Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen report that, "We were told that 'Human rights don't fly at USAID', meaning not that they were opposed to upholding basic human rights, but that ... it is quantifiable, concrete measures of growth and development that push the meaningful buttons. As an extension of this idea it was also pointed out that the agency can only be concerned with *outputs* (the results of particular projects) whereas DPOs are interested in *outcomes* (how the outputs feed into wider social transformation)." (2005:24)

### 1.3 Where is attention focused?

Some in the disability movement claim the 'rights-based' approach does not incorporate the radical societal changes needed to address the barriers to disability equality and that it diverts attention from more structural change:

"Our society is built on a competitive market foundation and it is this social system that disables us. From this point of view disabled people are forced to live in a social prison. While no one can object to campaigning for 'rights' so that the prison in which we live is made more humane it is only a political buffoon who believes that exploring prisoner experiences can lead to emancipation! Nothing less than dismantling the prison and replacing it with a non-competitive form of society can breakdown the doors which bar our emancipation." (Finkelstein 2001b)

A difficulty with Finkelstein's approach is that it is difficult to meet the common NGO criteria for Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Time-bound (SMART) objectives for replacing the prison with a 'non-competitive form of society'. It may be a goal worth striving for, but the means of getting there are much harder to clarify than the means of gaining inclusion within the existing mainstream agenda. Development organisations need to show measurable results, donors demand it and staff morale depends on it. The relative difficulty of formulating practical strategies for building a real alternative to the current system may be a large reason why it does not happen. Furthermore, disabled people are not a sizable political or economic force in the sense that the exploited proletariat were in Marx's day. It may be hard to imagine the disability movement alone ever leading a revolution of any kind. However, the issue remains, if the current agenda is actually causing poverty and disablement, then inclusion within that agenda cannot be the solution.

Much work in the disability sector seems to assess situations almost exclusively on whether or not disabled people are included. The context in which inclusion is offered is rarely considered. The example of the disability sector lobbying for inclusion in the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers while others campaign against the World Bank's approach altogether, will be examined in more detail later. Similarly, KaR-funded research in Sri Lanka after the tsunami, found that disability-focused NGOs were lobbying for physical access in the new hotels being built. Meanwhile fishing communities were campaigning against their displacement if these hotels are built.

The focus of the disability sector appears often to be directed upwards to those perceived as having the most power such as the international financial institutions, government and the bigger NGOs, rather than horizontally towards building a broader-based movement (Kett, Stubbs and Yeo, 2005). This leads to what could be described as 'patron-client' relations, with NGOs as the patron and disabled people as the clients. The power of the poorest disabled people in this system is minimal, having few horizontal linkages with other marginalised people. This leads to a division between disability campaigners and those campaigning against exclusion on grounds other than impairment. This phenomenon is not exclusive to the disability sector. Referring to similar lines of power in wider contexts of poverty, Hickey and Bracking describe how "vertical linkages ... preclude the emergence of more horizontal forms of collective action" (2005:859). Lack of horizontal linkages parallel the manner in which Latin American peasantry related to oppressive landowners in the 1970s, referred to as "a triangle without a base". Such lack of linkages and assessment of the wider context militates against the far-reaching changes needed to address the causes of poverty and disability.

### 1.4 New conventional wisdom

It may not be far-reaching change, but there does appear to be a new conventional wisdom regarding disability and poverty. DFID's Issues Paper, Disability, Poverty and Development (DFID 2000) states that,

“disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty”. It goes further and asserts that, “Eliminating world poverty is unlikely to be achieved unless the rights and needs of people with disabilities are taken into account ... Poor people with disabilities are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and disability, each being both a cause and a consequence of the other.” (DFID 2000:1) This notion of a vicious circle is a common description of the situation that will be examined later. DFID also promotes a ‘twin-track approach’ entailing “the inclusion of ... disability issues in the mainstream of development co-operation work, and looking for opportunities to support more focused activities, including direct support to organisations of disabled people and to initiatives aimed specifically at enhancing the empowerment of people with disabilities” (DFID 2000:11).

The Asian Development Bank’s Technical Assistance proposal (ADB 2000) reproduced the major elements of the new conventional wisdom in its introduction:

“By all definitions of poverty, disabled people in developing countries are over-represented among the poor ... Social exclusion and isolation are a frequent part of their daily experience... Often, the disabled are deprived of the opportunity to participate in productive work and thus become impoverished more easily than the rest of the population. Poverty also causes new disabilities as a result of poor and dangerous living and work conditions; malnutrition; and lack of adequate health care, education and vocational training opportunities. Therefore poverty is both a cause and a consequence of disability. Poverty and disability reinforce each other, contributing to increased vulnerability and exclusion. Eliminating poverty is unlikely to be achieved unless the rights and needs of excluded people and disabled people are taken into account.” (ADB 2000:1)

The basis of this apparently new approach and the extent to which it is reflected in change in practice needs more analysis.

### **1.5 Has the new wisdom and documentation led to practical change?**

It would be useful to know why such large numbers of manuals and guidelines have been produced while so little has changed in practice. Several possible reasons for this are considered:

One of the hurdles appears to be reluctance to hold funders to account. Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen report how members of a DPO were “aggrieved about an agency’s decision over project funding but did not want to go public because they felt it would compromise any future requests” (2005:37). A meeting in Kampala, February, 2005 between USAID, NUDIPU, Kampala Disabled Persons Business Association, and Action on Disability and Development (ADD) found disabled people’s organisations experience difficulties accessing donor funds because “what they identify as programs are not those that the donor community wants to fund” (ibid:20). The language may have changed but the power has not. Unless power is addressed the rights-based approach can in practice only be rights within a limited framework defined by the establishment.

A second hurdle is the lack of real implementation strategy. As Albert and Miller stress, “A distinction should be made between a ‘policy’ and a ‘strategy’. A strategy outlines the approach that will be used to achieve whatever goals or commitments have been made ... A strategy should be: time bound; specify ‘Who, What, When and How?’; use clear and precise language; and be feasible and achievable” (2005:12) What have been produced are statements of good intent, but not strategies for implementation.

A third concern is that many apparent policies have no means of enforcement. Both the World Bank and USAID’s efforts at mainstreaming are based on friendly persuasion. Furthermore, their work is targeted at staff in specific sectors, countries or regions rather than the entire institution. This approach risks confining disability to its traditional realms of social welfare, education or health. This may be the only possibility for “relatively small, under-funded teams working in massive and generally unresponsive organisations.” (Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen 2005:23).

A further major stumbling block seems to be that there is little dissemination of the new approach. Norad, DFID and the EU have all produced statements, which few outside the policy departments are even aware of.

Part of DFID’s approach towards disability has involved a Programme Partnership Agreement with Action on Disability and Development (ADD). This has led to a significantly closer relationship between the two organisations. ADD now receives almost double the amount of funding it did previously from DFID. It also benefits from reduced administration, greater flexibility and closer involvement in DFID’s policy discussions. Whether this agreement has led to greater attention being paid to disabled people’s needs in DFID’s overall

work is more questionable. As Albert points out, "In cases where the disability agenda is farmed out to NGOs, as in the UK, despite the excellent results achieved, this may have simply confirmed the 'special' nature of disability and to that extent made effective mainstreaming within DFID more problematic." (2004b:11)

There does appear to have been some progress. A recent study by DFID's disability officer found the profile of disability had increased within the organisation: more than 10% of new grants from the Civil Society Challenge Fund are now for disability-focused work; a cross-departmental disability working group and an Exclusion, Rights and Justice team have been set up highlighting disability in the context of rights and exclusion (Thomas 2005).

But more generally it may be that those producing the statements are not actually aware what implementation would involve. Inclusion is probably almost universally accepted as a positive goal. What is often not realised is that including disabled people in any meaningful way requires fundamental organisational changes. Unless the statements are turned into real strategies for organisational reform, practical results for disabled people cannot be expected. Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen conclude their analysis of mainstream policies by saying, 'getting fine-sounding policies is not nearly enough. In most cases it is only a first tentative step and without continual lobbying the policies can be left swinging decoratively and uselessly in the wind' (2005:38).

For more detail on the approach of the different development actors towards disability, the reader is referred to the study by Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen (2005). Here the World Bank's approach will be considered in a little more detail as it is one of the most influential players on the international scene.

### **1.6 What is the World Bank offering?**

The World Bank offers such large amounts of money (albeit largely in the form of loans) and most countries have such large debts to the Bank that it is probably the most influential actor in the international development scene. Few can afford to stray too far from the Bank's favour.

The World Bank has been emphatic within the international development community in highlighting the significance of disability. The influence of this approach on governments and other organisations should not be underestimated. James Wolfensohn, former President of the World Bank made a series of statements explicitly linking disability with poverty reduction, "Bringing disabled people out of the corners and back alleys of society, and empowering them to thrive in the bustling centers of national life, will do much to improve the lives of many from among the poorest of the poor around the world." A World Bank Issue Brief on *Disability* (2005) stated that, "Prevented from working in decent paying jobs and estranged from the political process, disabled people tend to be the poorest of the poor within a global population of 1.3 billion people existing on less than one dollar a day." (World Bank 2005) The appointment of a well-respected disability activist, Judy Heumann, as the Advisor on Disability and Development signalled that disability was to have a higher profile at the Bank. Subsequently, a Disability and Development Team (DDT) was established, promoting research and networking. They have done some important work on crucial issues such as the extent that disabled people are being overlooked in HIV/AIDS awareness work (2004). Without wanting to undervalue what has been done, we should consider the wider World Bank agenda in which inclusion is potentially offered.

The prevailing interests and ideology of those supplying most of its funds inevitably influence the Bank. Votes are divided according to the number of shares a country holds; the richest countries hold most. Thus, the United States is the largest shareholder, with 16.41% of the total votes. This is followed by: Japan (7.87%), Germany (4.49%), the United Kingdom (4.31%), and France (4.31%). The poorer the country, the fewer votes it has and the less influence over the World Bank's agenda.

As long as the biggest economies have the highest number of votes, it is unlikely that the agenda of the World Bank will ever be based on the needs of the poorest. The economy of the largest shareholder (the US) is heavily based on the ideology of neo-liberalism and strongly upholds the interests of multinational corporations. The structure of the World Bank thus militates against curbing the power of big business.

There are several aspects of the World Bank's language that obscure the reality of its actions. One of the most puzzling is the assertion on its website that: "The World Bank is run like a cooperative." The International Co-operative Alliance defines democratic control as fundamental to a cooperative: members "actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions ... elected representatives are accountable to the membership ... members have equal voting rights (one member one vote)" (ICIC 1996). The manner in which votes are divided in the World Bank has no relation to the running of a cooperative.

Despite the high-profile work that has been done, according to Albert et al (2005), disability is not being mainstreamed at the Bank. Disability has not been taken on as an official cross-cutting issue. The Disability and Development Team are supportive of a human rights approach and a more thoroughgoing mainstreaming of disability, but in order to get disability on the agenda at the World Bank they are having to adjust to the structural and cultural reality of this extremely large, decentralised, complex and, at times, change-resistant organisation (Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen 2005). Given this institutional resistance, there was the perception by 2005 that traditional methods of getting issues such as disability on the table had not worked.

It seems that despite the fine array of statements to the contrary, the campaign slogan of Disabled Peoples International 'Nothing about us, without us' is still too often ignored.

## 2. Poverty – Recent developments in poverty reduction work. A 'new' development agenda?

Developments in the mainstream approach towards disability should be assessed in parallel with developments in the manner in which more general poverty reduction work is framed.

### **2.1 Are we on the right track? Is poverty increasing or decreasing?**

Statistics on levels of poverty are used in different ways to show that poverty is increasing or decreasing. A report for the World Bank by Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion (2004) suggests that 390 million fewer people live on less than \$1 a day in 2001 than did in 1981. This figure combines poverty reduction in East Asia (particularly in China) and the Middle East with significant increases in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in South Asia (including India) and Latin America. Indeed if China were to be left out, then the numbers of people living on less than \$1 a day in what they term the 'developing' world would be seen to have increased from 840 to 890 million during this time period. They do also refer to the increasing inequality accompanying this poverty reduction.

Chen and Ravallion predict that if rates continue along similar lines, then by 2015 the poverty rate for developing countries will be 15%, just short of the Millennium Development Goal. In East and South Asia the goal is expected to be exceeded. Their conclusions are that those areas where poverty has decreased are areas with economic growth and that, "substantial further impacts on poverty can be expected from economic growth provided that it does not come with substantial higher inequality" (2004:17).

The World Bank uses figures to indicate that progress is being made in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction to 'prove' that the current strategy is working. It claims that the proportion of people living on less than one-dollar-a-day dropped from 40% in 1981 to 21% in 2001. James Wolfensohn said: "Better policies have contributed to more rapid growth in developing countries' incomes than at any point since the mid-1970s. And faster growth has meant poverty reduction ... Since 1980 the total number of people living in poverty worldwide has fallen by an estimated 200 million." (cited by Pogge and Reddy 2003)

Wolfensohn's claim is highly contentious. Pogge and Reddy (2003b:7) point out that the figure he uses is based on non-comparable data collected using different poverty lines. Indeed Pogge and Reddy question many aspects of the World Bank's poverty statistics. They claim that the Bank uses an "arbitrary international poverty line unrelated to any clear conception of poverty ... employs a misleading measure of purchasing power 'equivalence' [and] ... extrapolates incorrectly from limited data". With regard to the poverty line of \$1 a day, they cite the US Department of Agriculture's estimate of \$3.51 as the lowest cost required to meet minimal nutritional standards in 1999. This is purely food costs, hence the figure of \$1 a day would be a gross underestimation of the numbers living in poverty in the US. They claim the line cannot therefore lead to meaningful international comparisons.

Furthermore, the Bank uses an international poverty line that takes account of a wide range of prices for consumers in each country. In poorer countries, services are usually cheap relative to the cost of food, in comparison with richer countries where labour is more expensive. However, the poorest people make minimal use of services, using all their income to meet basic needs such as food, water and shelter. Therefore including comparison of the cost of services distorts the poverty line. Pogge and Reddy suggest various adaptations to the World Bank's poverty measurements, including the need to base statistics on basic human

capabilities such as nutritional standards and then to compare the costs of achieving them. They claim that what they see as “systematic distortion ... may have led to an understatement of the extent of global income poverty and an incorrect inference that it has declined” (ibid 2003a:1).

Meanwhile, UNDP figures show that the Human Development Index (covering capabilities such as literacy, life expectancy, educational enrolment) actually fell in 21 countries between 1990-2003, something that was very rare until the 1980s (cited by Green and Hulme, 2005). Jean Ziegler, UN rapporteur for food, reports that in 1990, 20% of the world’s population was suffering from extreme undernutrition; by 1999 this had increased by 19% (2000). In a later report (2004) submitted to the commission on human rights, he asserts that progress on reducing hunger had virtually come to a halt and that 840 million people were living in hunger at the time of the report. He cites FAO studies, which show that the world produces more than enough food to feed the entire global population. This would imply that what is most urgently needed is not greater economic growth but more equal distribution of resources.

Richard Wilkinson (2005) provides evidence to suggest that inequality has a stronger effect than absolute poverty on public health. He describes how in Greece, the GDP per capita (\$21,300 – CIA 2005) is half that of the USA (\$40,100 – CIA 2005), while the life expectancy is greater (Greece 79.1 years compared with US 77.7 years – CIA 2005). The USA is the richest, most unequal country with the lowest life expectancy in the developed world (UK 78.4; Germany 78.7; Italy 79.7; Sweden 80.4; Japan 81.2 – CIA, 2005). In 1990 an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that life expectancy in Harlem was shorter than in Bangladesh. Wilkinson reports that lowest-ranking London civil servants are three times more likely to die in a given year than the highest ranks. He claims that “social environment is more toxic than any chemical” (Toynbee 2005). As Polly Toynbee, reviewing Wilkinson’s book writes (2005), “Poverty is not, as the government imagines, a line to pull people over but it is a position on a line. If it tilts too sharply upwards, the pain of those at the bottom can be measured in hard statistics.” If this is the case it makes a nonsense of focusing on the Millennium Development Goal of halving the numbers of people living on less than \$1 a day in isolation from addressing inequality.

Gross National Product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are accounting procedures used to assess the value of goods and services produced in an economy. GNP includes assessment of imports and exports. Neither figure registers products if they are distributed without charge, only if they are sold. Dudley Seers (1979) disregarded GNP many years ago as an indicator of success, welfare or a target in itself. The figures make no assessment of income distribution, nor do they make any distinction between destructive and constructive transactions. Locking disabled people up in private institutions increases these figures, while living in accessible homes does not require monetary exchange and is therefore unmeasured. Contribution to society is ignored unless it is paid, in which case what form the work takes is immaterial. The privatisation of water places a monetary value on water for the first time in many societies. This process therefore raises GNP while making water less accessible to the poorest, including disabled people.

## 2.2 Neo-liberalism

The term ‘neo-liberalism’ is used here to describe a package of political and economic beliefs that have become increasingly influential since the 1970s and 1980s. These beliefs are extremely pervasive in the present day, forming the basis of most national and international development work around the world, particularly that espoused by the World Bank.

A core component of this ideology is that rational economic behaviour can be universally characterised as the pursuit of profit. This provides the basis of a standardised set of policies for all countries, rich or poor. Traditionally, economics has been considered a social science, in which a vast range of possibilities for organising society is considered. Neo-liberalism, on the other hand, focuses on individuals making rational decisions as to how to maximise profits from a range of goods and services. Economic strategy is seen as the result of apparently objective mathematical formulae rather than subjective choice considering different variables.

This belief is often reflected in the principle that the private sector operates more efficiently than the state, as there is a clearer profit incentive. Government expenditure should therefore be cut, allowing for more efficient provision of services in the private sector. These principles have led to privatisation of health services, education, transport and increasingly water and food provision all over the world. As state services are reduced, the World Bank often offers loans to build up the infrastructure prior to privatisation.

State interventions in the form of tariffs on imports and subsidies on local production are considered to distort prices, reduce profit incentives and slow down economic growth. The poverty of sub-Saharan Africa for example is seen to be largely attributable to these factors. It is argued that the free market should determine matters of distribution; this encourages growth, which in turn will reduce poverty. Neo-liberalism does not believe in restricting the operations of corporations. Whoever produces goods most efficiently should prosper. Small-scale local production has no value in itself, unless it is the most efficient in which case under the free market it will flourish unassisted.

There are many ramifications of this set of beliefs. In Chile, a country that has been referred to as the 'social laboratory' of neo-liberal policies such as a free market economy and low state expenditure, there is little state attention paid to disability rights. Instead, for the last 25 years there has been an annual telethon media collaboration, in which disabled children are portrayed in a most tragic, pathetic manner in an appeal for public donations. The organisers claim this is the country's most important work on behalf of disabled children, which has been copied in numerous other countries. Multinational corporations, such as Nestle and McDonalds, sponsor the event by donating small amounts of profits from specific products. This boosts company sales and reputations; increases donations to the telethon and makes consuming these products seem worthy.

Ziegler describes the danger of liberalisation of agricultural markets. When tariffs and subsidies are abolished, the market becomes flooded with cheap imports and local farmers are unable to compete. Consumers rarely benefit from reduced prices. The removal of subsidies combined with the removal of local competition means prices rise. Ziegler cites how Zambia followed IMF structural adjustment and opened up its market to competition by reducing tariffs and ending subsidies of agricultural staple food crops. Many smaller farmers became bankrupt. An IMF evaluation found that as private enterprise took over, prices paid to farmers were reduced, while prices to consumers increased. The result was increased poverty. Maize consumption fell by 20% between 1990 and 1997 (2004:9).

Ziegler reports (2004) that in many areas of the world transnational companies now have near control of food and water supplies yet there is no global system to ensure their accountability. He argues that just as the UN developed a system of human rights to curb abuse by governments, now there is a need for similar controls on the power of corporations. The structure of the World Bank makes it unlikely that such controls could come from there.

### **2.3 Control of water**

The control of such a basic need as water is perhaps the most crass example of the consequences of neo-liberal policy. The Sri Lankan draft Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) states that, "Water is a basic human need, but also has an economic value. Users should ... bear the recurrent costs of drinking water." (2002:99)

Profit may motivate private companies to operate efficiently. However, it brings little motivation to provide services to the poorest and most isolated who will never be profitable consumers. As Ngwane (2003) writes, "Private companies will not take over water systems serving poorer communities living far from city centers and water pipes. They will always choose the most profitable ... leaving the local public authorities to carry the burden of the poor ..." In Sri Lanka, the rejected PRSP stated that in rural areas, "The costs of maintaining and operating these [water] systems will be borne by the community. In towns and urban areas private sector will be encouraged to invest." (Government of Sri Lanka 2002:39)

Private companies can make a profit out of water provision for example, while poor people are increasingly unable to afford such basic services. In South Africa, the Suez water company has made profits of 20-30% while the price of water to consumers has risen by seven per cent. Since many of the poorest people are unable to pay their water bills, the company has been trying to install pre-paid meters, encountering fierce protests from local people (Ngwane 2005). In Johannesburg in 2002 more than 20,000 households per month were being disconnected from water and power after failing to pay their bills. A major outbreak of cholera in 2000 in Kwa Zulu Natal province has been attributed to people being unable to afford clean water and resorting to river water. As Ngwane points out, under apartheid, water had been free (Ngwane 2003). Similar effects of water privatisation are being seen throughout the world. In Bolivia, the people of Cochabamba protested in April 2000 when water prices doubled after privatisation. The government imposed martial law, under which several people were killed, before the government was finally forced to break its contract with the water company, Bechtel.

Hazel Jones and Bob Reed of Loughborough University have done impressive work promoting ways to make water and sanitation systems accessible to disabled people (Jones and Reed 2005). Their book outlines the rationale for physically accessible designs, suggests low-cost technical solutions and strategies for implementation. Of course, all water and sanitation systems should be built in ways that are physically accessible to all. While such work should be applauded it is not without its dangers. Protests have taken place about lack of access to privatised water systems in Bolivia, South Africa, Ghana and numerous other countries. Protesters are not predominantly disabled people and the access issue is predominantly financial, not physical. Even if private water companies were to adopt the accessible designs, water would still not be accessible to poor disabled people unless it is also affordable. The danger is that the adoption of such designs could help private water companies regain some vestiges of credibility without actually making water accessible to the poorest.

KaR research during the tsunami relief work in Sri Lanka found that water and sanitation systems were being constructed with no consideration of disabled people's access needs. The reason for this, researchers were told, is not lack of architectural designs, but policy decisions. Aid workers told researchers all expenditure was allocated to strict budget lines by the agencies' head offices. To make even slight alterations at this stage would result in less construction work happening. They claimed that to achieve accessible reconstruction would require a policy decision by the head offices (Kett, Stubbs and Yeo, 2005).

While neo-liberalism, and the economic growth which it aims for, are the foundations of the World Bank and IMF policy, there has been a concurrent increase in statements of the need to consider the needs of the poorest including disabled people. Quite apart from any moral consideration, the scope for continual economic growth is limited if large numbers of people are not able to participate in the market. Various poverty reduction strategies have been introduced over the last few years with endorsement from some of the strongest proponents of neo-liberalism, including Millennium Development Goals and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

#### **2.4 Millennium Development Goals**

The Millennium Development Goals have become the overriding focus for poverty reduction work by the United Nations (2000), international financial institutions (World Bank 2005 and International Monetary Fund 2005), bilateral aid agencies such as DFID (2004), as well as many NGOs. Commitment to the Goals is not however universal, USAID has never focused on the Goals. Despite universal acceptance at the UN summit in 2000, the recently appointed US ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, is now seeking to remove all mention of the MDGs from the UN's global strategy.

The Goals put the focus of poverty reduction on a wider range of goals than purely economic indicators. However, the IMF's Global Monitoring Review (2004) still stresses the need for economic growth as a priority. Kenny states that, 'while the Millennium Development Goals have placed a welcome focus on reducing the percentage of the population living on below a dollar a day, convergence towards OECD income levels is still the variable of choice for most development economists in this area' (2005:3).

The Global Monitoring Review (2004) found that on current trends it was unlikely that the Goals would be achieved. It called for prioritising reforms to achieve stronger economic growth. In 2005 the Review went further in proposing a five-point agenda for achievement of the Goals: (1) anchor actions to achieve the MDGs in country-led development strategies; (2) improve the environment for stronger, private-led economic growth, as well as policies and governance; (3) scale up human development and relevant key services; (4) dismantle barriers to trade; and (5) substantially increase the level and effectiveness of aid.

While disability is not specifically mentioned in the Millennium Development Goals, many people have mentioned the need to include disabled people if the goals are to be achieved (Thomas 2005:5). James Wolfensohn stated that, "Unless disabled people are brought into the development mainstream, it will be impossible to cut poverty in half by 2015 or to give every girl and boy the chance to achieve a primary education by the same date – goals agreed to by more than 180 world leaders at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000" (cited by Albert and Hurst 2005:5).

Philippa Thomas points out that the goals raise a strategic question for organisations such as DFID. "Will the emphasis be on moving people out of poverty who are just below the poverty line or will DFID be targeting its efforts on the very poorest and the most excluded?" (2005:8) This issue has particular resonance for disabled people who, as Thomas says, are "typically amongst the very poorest" (2005:6). Or as Albert, Dube and Riis-

Hansen report from their analysis of the barriers to mainstreaming disability: "There was a general perception that it would be easier to move people out of poverty who were closer to the line than disabled people, who tend to be the poorest of the poor. This in turn was linked to the political imperative for the organisation of finding 'big hits' and quick results, neither of which it was felt could be achieved by focusing on disability issues." (2005:33)

## **2.5 Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers**

Since 1999, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) have been the main multilateral instruments (mandated by the World Bank and IMF) for providing debt relief and development aid to the poorest countries. Prior to this approach, standard Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were imposed on all countries requiring loans. SAPs were clearly seen to emanate from Washington with no scope for local participation or adaptation. They were a set of economic reforms based on reducing government expenditure through cuts and privatisation, and opening up markets to competition by ending import tariffs and subsidies of national industry. Riots often ensued as subsidies were cut, food prices rose and local producers went out of business.

The IMF and World Bank changed their approach as some level of participation and adaptation to local conditions became seen as crucial in the acceptance of economic reform. Hence the PRSP process differs in that, according to the IMF, it is "country-driven and owned, based on ... participatory processes for formulation, implementation ... and monitoring" (cited by Gariyo 2002). However as Abugre and Alexander (2000) write, "In many ways, participation in PRSPs is engineering consent for structural adjustment policies." In a similar manner to that described earlier whereby DPOs only get funding if their needs match donor priorities, John Page writes, PRSPs are "a compulsory process wherein the people with the money tell the people without the money what to do to get the money" (cited by Abugre and Alexander 2000). In theory, civil society organisations work with governments to form a poverty reduction strategy. However, the reality is that PRSPs are not a forum in which civil society could call for any fundamental change. Unless the IMF/World Bank approves the strategy, there will be little access to aid, credit and debt relief. As Alexander and Abugre write, "Essentially, the PRSP represents a life-line to cash-strapped countries, a life-line that most countries cannot afford to lose." (2000)

Referring to the drafted PRSP in Sri Lanka, Sarath Fernando writes, "There's an attempt to hide the truth in the PRSP. It is clearly not intended to help the poor, but to make the country more attractive for investors," (Christian Aid, 2003). He describes how in theory the paper is written by the Sri Lankan government after wide consultation, but in practice the agenda is set by international financial institutions such as the World Bank. Similarly, Gloria de Silva, who led a PRSP protest group of 200 women said, "I can't accept this as being conducive to the reduction of poverty. This is about opportunities and privileges being offered to multi-national organisations and big business ventures to invest in the country, while the people are burdened with an increasing national debt." (ibid)

In contrast to the participatory façade that is promoted, PRSPs are in fact hugely antidemocratic processes whereby a government's whole agenda is sanctioned by wholly unelected international financial institutions. The approach is actually a big extension of IMF/World Bank power. The PRSP covers a range of economic, social and governance issues over which these institutions had no control in the past. Previously these institutions had power over a country's economic programme, but now IMF approval of the whole strategy is necessary before credit is forthcoming. Therefore, as Gariyo writes, "In most African countries there is resistance by both governments and civil society to the formulation of PRSPs." (2002:11)

## **2.6 PRSPs and disabled people**

According to a 2002 International Labour Organisation report, "An examination of all 29 currently available African Interim PRSPs shows that – apart from some notable exceptions – persons with disabilities have again been either 'forgotten' or treated in a way that does not correspond to their aspirations to socio-economic integration." (ILO 2002) Albert writes that the lack of mention of disability in PRSPs should come as no surprise, "PRSP implementation has been seriously flawed, particularly in terms of human rights, and poverty reduction has been minimal. Furthermore, gender, a much more prominent cross cutting issue than disability, has also not been well served by PRSPs." (Albert 2004b:9)

The National Union of Disabled People of Uganda (NUDIPU) put a detailed submission to the third Ugandan PRSP, known as the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), based on consultations with disabled people around the country. Research commissioned by KaR examined the ways in which the disability movement engaged with the process and how disabled people in other countries could learn from the experience (see Dube 2005 for full details).

NUDIPU's submission involved incorporating interventions on behalf of disabled people into the existing four-pillared structure of the PEAP:

- fast and sustainable economic growth and structural transformation
- good governance and security
- increased ability of the poor to raise their incomes
- increased quality of the life of the poor.

A major problem for NUDIPU in this process was the lack of technical expertise as to what was required. This could more easily have been overcome had it not been for the time pressure imposed by the donor community. The KaR research made the following recommendations, "DPOs needed to be properly resourced to develop their technical capacity ... to make a real impact on the PRSP process. Also more time and money were needed to inform and engage disabled people so as to lobby more effectively. Finally in order to ensure the PRSPs weren't simply filled with empty promises, cross-cutting disability indicators and performance benchmarks had to be put in place." (Dube 2005)

The difficulty is that irrespective of how well informed disabled people are and how cohesive their submission, if the demands are not in line with IMF priorities, the government would have to ignore them or lose access to credit and debt relief. Other KaR-funded research into the effects of new aid instruments on disabled people reported that, "Because governments in poor countries are desperate for aid ... PRSPs are in danger of becoming ... little more than the traditional exercise of World Bank/IMF structural adjustment hidden behind a façade of national and civil society ownership." (KaR briefing note *Disability and the New Aid Instruments*, 2005)

In doing this work NUDIPU built alliances with NGOs, government departments and those working with disabled people in various capacities. However, alliances were not built with those opposing the PEAP as a whole. '50 Years Is Enough' is a coalition of hundreds of organisations around the world campaigning against the work of the IMF and World Bank. They criticise the manner in which the PRSP process makes governments more accountable to foreign donors than to its own citizens. Writing for this network, Alexander and Abugre urge people to "rise up and demand that the institutions be stripped of their new powers to veto entire country plans". If people en masse were to refuse to cooperate in this sham of 'participation' or the accompanying economic reforms, then governments and ultimately the World Bank would have to revise their strategies. These institutions are well aware of the power of ordinary people; the resistance to SAPs resulted in changing to PRSPs and making the economic reforms more widely accepted. DPOs are being encouraged to invest more resources in submissions to this process, despite the fact that many people "considered that the government, as well as the World Bank and the IMF, were using DPO involvement as a way of legitimising the PRSP process, rather than out of any genuine interest in the rights or needs of disabled people" (Dube 2005).

Given the hard reality of what participation in the PRSP process actually offers, it seems unlikely that any form of submission could lead to significant improvement in the lives of ordinary disabled people. Perhaps the best that can be hoped for is that, through participation, disabled people become more aware of the global situation and are then better placed to build alliances and plan more effective interventions. The process of forming a submission may be useful in bringing disabled people together with a political and economic focus. This can help build stronger organisations as well as build contact with other organisations fighting poverty. Unmasking the PRSPs for what they are could be part of an important contribution towards building a radical movement, aware of global developments, organised enough to respond and to build something better.

When questioned about the disability sector's relationship with the World Bank, disability activists have responded by saying: that is all we have at the moment. Should we turn down the Bank's efforts because they are not enough? Perhaps before further engagement with the PRSP process it is time to make a rational assessment of the chance of progress. Evidence is needed of where this approach has actually led to poverty reduction. An important question has to be whether the Bank's efforts at inclusion are worthy of dividing the wider movement for progressive change. This can perhaps be answered by assessing the agenda into which inclusion is potentially being offered.

## **2.7 Economic growth**

One of the goals of PRSPs is to increase focus on "the sources of, and obstacles to, growth" (IMF 2005). In Uganda the aim is to develop "a modern economy in which agents in all sectors can participate in economic growth" (Dube 2005:14). Many of the interviewees contacted by Albert et al in their study on mainstreaming

disability “commented on how, in practice, the dominance of a narrow economic focus together with an increasing concentration on instruments such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers tended to marginalise even issues which officially had cross-cutting status, such as gender” (2005:33). They report that, “The increasing importance of PRSPs ... meant that most human rights issues, especially with respect to social and economic rights, were being ignored. This was put down partly to the emphasis on economic indicators.” (2005:34)

So, despite some apparent focus on wider goals, economic growth is still almost unquestioningly referred to as the route out of poverty. PRSPs all have economic growth as a key focus. The IMF asserts that it aims to help “poor countries achieve the sustained high levels of growth that establish the basis for poverty reduction” (IMF 2005). Or as DFID reports, “Creating more wealth by encouraging economic growth is half of the equation ... Governments and multilateral institutions such as the World Health Organisation, OECD, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are working together to encourage economic growth and ensure that the benefits of this growth trickle down to the poor.” (DFID poverty fact sheet 2004) But what does economic growth mean in environmental and in human terms?

Increasingly irrefutable evidence shows that current strategies are causing environmental destruction. The British Government’s chief scientific adviser, Sir David King has been quoted as saying that climate change is a greater danger than terrorism. Even US President George Bush acknowledged that global warming is a “significant, long-term issue that we’ve got to deal with” and admitted that human activity is “to some extent” to blame (Macmahon 2005). Yet it seems that rather than change strategies, economic growth is still being promoted as the route out of poverty around the world.

Nor are the human dimensions of economic growth often considered. The economist Angelica Gimpel-Smith (1998) describes what Chile’s much applauded economic growth means in practice. In recent years many trees have been cut down in Santiago. The private companies contracted to do this work made a profit and contributed to economic growth. In place of the trees more roads and office blocks have been built. Again the contractors made a profit. The new roads enable faster transportation of goods for export and import, an essential prerequisite for the Free Trade Agreement with the USA. Produce is increasingly geared towards export rather than local consumption. The resulting pollution has caused increased rates of bronchial disease in Santiago. This again leads to increased profits for private health companies. All these factors have contributed to Chile’s much-applauded economic growth rates in recent years. The accompanying increase in human suffering is not a concern of the economic growth agenda. Kofi Annan stated, “Growth will not by itself guarantee that most people in a country have the chance to live lives of dignity and fulfilment. A healthy society is one that takes care of *all* its members, and gives them a chance to participate in decisions that affect their lives.” (cited by Albert and Hurst 2005:2)

In their research on the characteristics and causes of chronic poverty, Green and Hulme conclude that, “Frameworks based on the understanding of poverty reduction as linearly increasing household income or consumption through economic growth are unlikely to generate development policies ... that can adequately tackle the underlying causes of poverty.” (Green and Hulme 2005:876) Or as Kenny (2005) reports, the “link between income and other potential measures of the quality of life ... is far from linear and universal. The Indian state of Kerala ... has an income per capita below \$300 (US \$40,100 CIA 2005) yet a life expectancy of 72, an infant mortality rate of 13 per 1,000 and only 9% illiterate – far better than a number of wealthier states and countries.” (see also section 2 for discussion of the impact of inequality)

Disabled people have been largely marginalised from the economic growth agenda for years. More recently many people have been promoting the idea that without greater inclusion disabled people automatically become an economic burden. The USAID policy paper states that part of their aim is to, “... provide a foundation on which these individuals more effectively make a positive contribution to the economic development of their country”. But disabled people will never be among the most economically productive group of citizens. Indeed disabled people are well placed to promote a radically different agenda. As Vic Finkelstein writes:

“Human beings are by nature weak, vulnerable and physically imperfect. But throughout history people with capabilities have striven for perfection and the more they have managed to intervene in our body structure the more people with impairments have been marginalized. It is as if people with capabilities have deposited their own natural vulnerability, and genuine social dependency, into us so that these attributes of being human are unique to being disabled. Our vulnerability is then seen as a condition that

separates us from what is regarded as normal. This transference of vulnerability and consequent dependency into disabled people has not freed people with capabilities from their own dependency upon support systems to ameliorate their essential vulnerability but created a dangerous illusion about the meaning of normality. This is no less than an able-bodied knowledge, learning and educational barrier which is inhibiting the development of comprehensive understanding about being human. In this respect we might regard able-bodied people as disabled; and the status of disabled people is merely a grand reflection of what people with capabilities have been doing to their own lifestyles.” (2001b:5)

Despite the potential for a desperately needed questioning of the status quo, the argument is too often framed simply in terms of whether or not disabled people are included in the existing economic growth agenda. Meanwhile, many other community organisations are developing new agendas, without much involvement of the disability sector.

## **2.8 Civil society organisations**

People all over the world are organising against neo-liberal practices, which cause basic services to be privatised and promote the interests of multinational corporations. Hickey and Bracking (2005) describe how the poorest and most excluded people are those least likely to have allies in civil or political society. Despite this there are many examples of successful protests by poor communities around the world. The example of Bolivian protests against water privatisation cited above is one of the more well-known successes. A local council in Kerala, India shut down a Coca-Cola bottling plant following mass protests at the contamination of the water supply, the toxic waste produced and the excessive use of ground water during drought conditions (*The Hindu*, 2004). The Sri Lankan PRSP cited above was disbanded following public protests and a change of government.

In 2002, the ‘50 Years Is Enough’ network adopted the following statement:

“We call for the immediate suspension of the policies and practices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Group which have caused widespread poverty, inequality, and suffering among the world’s peoples and damage to the world’s environment. Substantial responsibility for the unjust world economic system lies with those institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO). We note that these institutions are anti-democratic, controlled by the G7 governments, and that their policies have benefited international private sector financiers, trans-national corporations, and corrupt officials and politicians.”

The major international institutions, which promote the neo-liberal agenda, are no longer able to meet without provoking mass demonstrations outside the venue. Remote, easily fortified locations are now frequently chosen in an attempt to minimise protests: the recent G8 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland; the World Economics Forum at Davos, Switzerland; and the WTO at Doha, Qatar.

Disabled people are often no more included in anti-poverty campaigns than in the mainstream establishment. Most of the non-disabled people in these campaigns will, like most non-disabled people, have grown up in a world segregated from disabled people. However, the disability movement could choose to push for equal participation in these movements in the same way as choosing to push for participation at the World Bank. There is, of course, a danger that the voices of disabled people could get swallowed up by the demands of stronger, more experienced organisers. Some negotiation may be appropriate. For example in the case of the hotel building in Sri Lanka (see section 1.3), maybe it would be constructive for the disability movement to offer support to the fishing communities campaign, if in exchange these communities support the campaign for accessible reconstruction. In such ways, campaigns themselves would be more inclusive and have more chance of success.

## **Make Poverty History**

Make Poverty History is a coalition of NGOs, faith groups and individuals, which formed in response to the G8 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland in July 2005 (see [www.makepovertyhistory.org](http://www.makepovertyhistory.org)), resulting in the largest ever demonstrations regarding international poverty issues. The coalition calls for three basic reforms: debt relief, increased aid and reform of trade rules.

The eclectic nature of the supporters (including members of the British government, anarchists and church leaders) has led some to accuse the coalition of watering down its demands so much as to be no more than a front for the establishment claiming its devotion to poverty reduction, without swerving from its neo-liberal agenda. As George Monbiot writes regarding the Make Poverty History demonstrations:

“I began to realise how much trouble we were in when Hilary Benn, the secretary of state for international development, announced that he would be joining the Make Poverty History march ... Benn is the man in charge of using British aid to persuade African countries to privatise public services; wasn't the march supposed to be a protest against policies like his? But its aims were either expressed or interpreted so loosely that anyone could join. This was its strength and its weakness. The *Daily Mail* ran pictures of Gordon Brown and Bob Geldof on its front page, with the headline 'Let's Roll', showing that nothing either Live 8 or Make Poverty History has done so far represents a threat to power ... There is, as far as some of the MPH organisers are concerned, no contradiction: the new consensus denies that there's a conflict between ending poverty and business as usual.

“Debt, unfair terms of trade and poverty are not causes of Africa's problems but symptoms. The cause is power: the ability of the G8 nations and their corporations to run other people's lives. Where, on the Live 8 stages and in Edinburgh, was the campaign against the G8's control of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the UN? Where was the demand for binding global laws for multinational companies?” (Monbiot 2005)

While these demonstrations were taking place and thousands of people in the UK wore wristbands to symbolise their commitment to making poverty history, aid agencies were struggling to draw attention to the disastrous impending famine in Niger. The most positive aspect of the Make Poverty History coalition so far has been in highlighting that huge numbers of people are eager to do something to end this global injustice. Perhaps part of the reason for the campaign's popularity was however that people were not being requested to do anything other than wear a wristband to salve their consciences.

It is often said that disabled people are over-represented among the poorest. Indeed the issues facing disabled people (rich or poor) and the poorest people (disabled or not) bear many similarities. This was highlighted when a placard held by African organisations on a demonstration against the G8 carried the slogan of Disabled Peoples International: 'Nothing about us, without us'.

### 3. What is disability? What is poverty? What is the relationship between them?

Having considered developments in the disability sector and in poverty reduction it is important to consider how the issues are related.

The social model of disability points to the ways in which people with impairments are excluded by the way that society is organised. It is this exclusion that disables people, not something inherent in an impairment. While impairments are part of the human condition, there is no irresolvable reason why this should lead to exclusion and so to disability. It is this which is socially determined (see section 1 above and Albert 2004a for a more detailed discussion of these issues).

There are great variations in the nature of exclusion between cultures and in the relationship with poverty. A highly trained office executive can acquire a mobility impairment without automatically becoming extremely poor. However, a subsistence farmer with a similar impairment is likely to experience much more extreme poverty.

Studies by Sightsavers International (SSI) show a clear link between visual impairment and poverty. They report that reducing blindness could represent a “net increase in economic productivity ...” (SSI 2005) and refer to the “cost effectiveness” of reducing trachoma for example. In North East Guinea 79% of blind people are economically inactive as compared with 2% of sighted people (ibid). This is a shocking statistic, but is the answer to stop the blindness or to stop the exclusion based on the blindness? Clearly any interventions that reduce human suffering should be encouraged. Where possible, treatment and prevention of impairments may be cheaper and easier than changing social structures. However, this is not always possible; furthermore, it is the isolation that our society imposes on blind people and other disabled people that prevents income generating opportunities and other social interactions, not the impairment itself. Similarly, it is the manner in which refugees or homeless people are marginalised that causes the poverty often associated with these situations. There will always be people with different impairments, racial backgrounds, and times when people experience misfortune. This need only translate into long-term poverty if there is exclusion on these grounds.

High rates of poverty make acquiring an impairment more likely. Poverty is characterised by poor nutrition, poor working conditions and lack of access to health care. Ziegler reports that more than two billion people worldwide suffer from micronutrient deficiencies, which mean, “children and adults are left mentally and physically stunted, deformed or blind, condemning them to a marginal existence” (2004:4). Leaving aside the issue of whether being “stunted, deformed or blind” really does condemn someone to a marginal existence, or whether this is actually socially constructed, an interrelationship between poverty and impairment is plain.

The DFID Issues paper describes a vicious circle between disability and poverty (2000). Notwithstanding the confusion between impairment and disability inherent in this diagram, the causal link between disability and poverty is made clear: living in poverty increases the likelihood of injury and impairment; the exclusion of disability leads to greater rates of poverty. Moore and Yeo (2003) provide diagrams to outline this vicious circle between poverty and disability. They characterise disability by:

- exclusion from formal/informal education and employment
- limited social contacts
- low expectations from community and of self
- exclusion from political/legal processes
- exclusion from even basic health care
- lowest priority for any limited resources e.g. food/clean water/inheritance/land
- lack of support for high costs directly associated with impairment.

Only the last of these characteristics relates exclusively to disabled people. The exclusion disabled people experience is most often on the basis of issues almost universal to poor people. A second diagram is used to describe the exclusion of poverty, including the following characteristics:

- limited access to education and employment
- hazardous working conditions
- limited access to land and shelter
- unhygienic, overcrowded living conditions
- poor sanitation
- exclusion from political/legal processes
- lack of ability to assert rights
- limited access to health care
- insufficient or unhealthy food
- malnutrition, poor health and physical weakness.

The similarities between the characteristics of poverty and those of disability are self-evident. A vicious circle highlights the causal relationship between poverty and disability, but perhaps it also obscures the commonalities. In reality, as Philippa Thomas writes, “disabled people share the general profile of the non-disabled poor” (2005:4). As noted in the KaR report, *Are Disabled Peoples’ Voices being Heard?*:

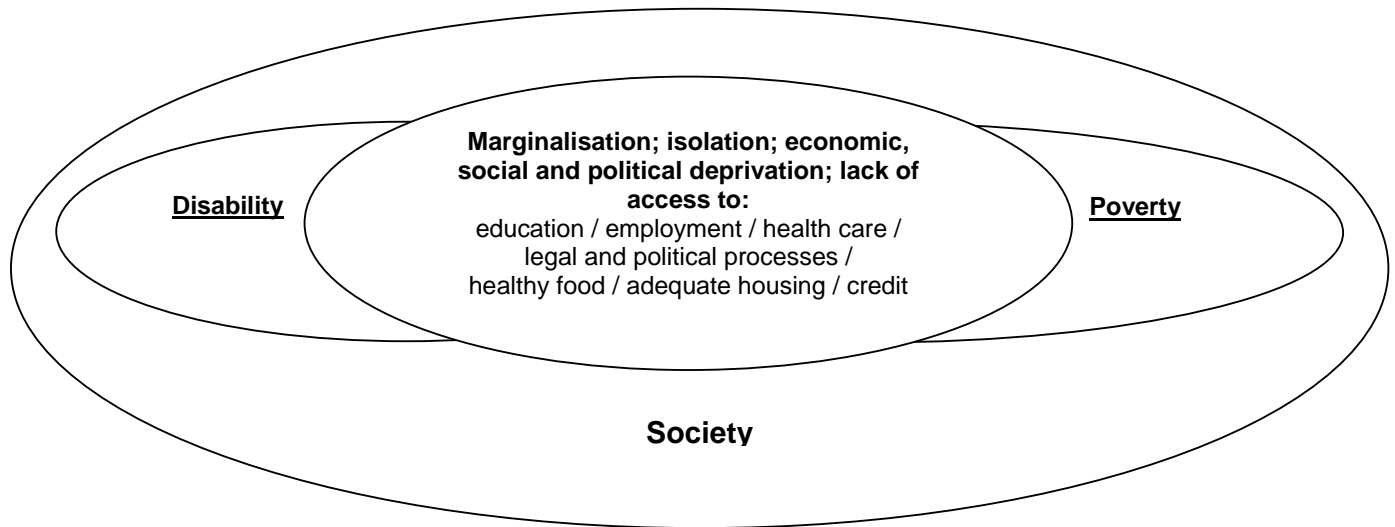
“Poverty is not simply a matter of incomes that are too low to meet basic subsistence needs. It is above all, a symptom of imbedded structural imbalances, which manifest themselves in all domains of human existence. As such, poverty is highly correlated with social exclusion, marginalisation, vulnerability, powerlessness, isolation and other economic, political, social and cultural dimensions of deprivation...It results from limited or no access to basic infrastructure and services, and is further compounded by people’s lack of access to land, credit, technology and institutions and to other productive assets and resources needed to ensure sustainable livelihoods.” (1995 Poverty Assessment Study Report cited by Dube and Charowa 2005:9)

All these attributes also relate to disability.

When disabled people living in poverty are asked what their most pressing needs are, the answers are rarely impairment specific. In a survey of 108 disabled people affected by the tsunami in Sri Lanka, only five asked for impairment-related aids. The others all mentioned issues related to housing, land, livelihoods, education or sanitation (Kett, Stubbs and Yeo 2005). Both disability and poverty are symptoms of the way that society is organised; marginalising and isolating certain people. Clearly not all disabled people are poor, nor are all poor

people disabled, however if there are such similarities between the characteristics of poverty and of disability (not impairment), then perhaps the relationship would be better described as interlocking circles (see diagram 1).

**Diagram 1: Relationship between the characteristics of poverty and disability**



If both disability and poverty are manifestations of similar processes of marginalisation, then the need for disability activists to make alliances with other campaigns against the causes of poverty is clear. If poverty reduction work were to really address the causes of poverty this would also have to challenge the nature of disability.

It is often assumed that being poor and disabled leads to the most severe isolation possible. Coleridge questions whether this is always the case. He suggests that “in a country as poor as Afghanistan it may be that there is less discrimination towards disabled people than there is in America” (1999:161). He reports commonly seeing disabled children being pushed along in a cart by other children. He states that, “Amputees are such a common sight that they are accepted as part of the normal scene in a bazaar.” “Poverty,” he claims, “is a great leveller.” (ibid)

At the risk of complicating the issue further, Philippa Thomas, KaR’s disability policy officer placed at DFID, points out that not all impairments are poverty related, “Some are even positively correlated with wealth.” (2005:3) She quotes studies showing that wealthy Cambodians are more at risk of road traffic accidents due to higher motorbike ownership. Comparing statistics across countries is highly problematic due to different measurement systems and definitions of disability. However, the statistics that do exist show far higher rates of disability in industrialised countries than in economically poorer countries.

It would over simplify the issue to say that all disabled people are *always* among the poorest in a community or that the poorest are *always* most likely to get any form of impairment. However, a higher proportion of disabled people may experience severe and chronic poverty than the proportion of non-disabled people. The poorest have been described as “those whom it is permissible to reject” (Hossain, cited by Hickey and Bracking 2005:855). Disabled people may often be the leaders in this category. Thomas reports examples of how disabled people in Cambodia are refused access to many development initiatives including micro-credit programmes run by NGOs, village meetings or food-for-work programmes (Thomas 2005b:8). HelpAge International, Womankind and Save the Children also cite examples of how the rights of their client groups are violated. However, ranking levels of suffering is not a constructive approach. Working together to address the causes would be more useful.

Make Poverty History makes wide use of the estimate that 50,000 people die every day from lack of access to basic services. Using the World Bank estimate of 20% of the poorest being disabled, then 10,000 disabled people die every day unnecessarily. Accurate figures for the numbers of people dying from extreme poverty would involve levels of inclusion incompatible with such levels of poverty, but these estimates do highlight the urgency and severity of the issues.

Before considering ways forward it is important to consider what is on offer at the moment and what can be learned from other groups.

#### 4. Whose agenda?

The potential opportunities resulting from mainstreaming are heavily influenced by who sets the agenda and to what extent other agendas are considered.

##### 4.1 The nature of inclusion

References to social exclusion are increasingly popular in both international and domestic policies. In a similar manner to the vicious circle representation, this approach can encourage a perception that poverty is separate from the rest of society, rather than an inevitable consequence of the way society is organised. The logical outcome of a focus on social exclusion is that inclusion is the answer. This presupposes that the agenda in which inclusion is called for is beneficial. What if it is this agenda that causes the problem? The World Bank's World Development Report (2003) states that in order to tackle poverty, poor people need to be included in state institutions. Similarly the World Bank report *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* (1999) uses a diagram of interrelated circles to represent the poor. Poor households are placed in a circle apart from state institutions and civil society organisations. This representation is criticised by Green and Hulme (2005:871) for a number of reasons:

"It separates poverty from the rest of society, so that poverty appears as a problem of the excluded. Recommendations about getting out of poverty thus remain focused on the poor who can either increase incomes in order to access the mainstream or who can be incorporated through inclusion policies ... The problem seems to be not so much involvement in institutions per se, but rather how 'institutions' work or not to produce poverty." (2005:871)

Green and Hulme continue with reference to poor people. However, all their observations are equally applicable to disabled people. If poor people [and disabled people] are seen as "integral to society, even if their position is marginal, it permits the perception of marginality in social terms" ... poverty [and disability] can then be seen as "an outcome of the social relations which tolerate, or promote, such effects". They go further to state that "attempts to explain poverty as a lack of something ... detracts from understanding what processes are present and actively creating and reproducing poverty" (Green and Hulme 2005:873).

Some disability activists make a distinction between inclusion and mainstreaming. As Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen write, "Mainstreaming should not just be about inclusion, it must be about the precise nature of that inclusion. It is absolutely essential that the broader, more radical goals of disability mainstreaming, that is self-empowerment, self-determination and equality are not soft-pedalled. It cannot be stressed strongly enough or often enough that disability is a human rights issue and as such it is always and everywhere a political issue." (2005:9) They go on to say that there is a danger that "de-politicised and technocratic approaches tend to be favoured by those who either feel comfortable seeing disability as a somewhat neutral question of equal access or don't want to rock the boat they have just managed to get invited on board" (2005:40). Both disability and poverty are inherently political issues. Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen stress the need to learn from the experience of gender and ensure that mainstreaming is "seen not as an end in itself but as a strategy for building a human rights approach into development cooperation" (2005:12). Whose voices are heard within the agenda is also a deeply political issue, to which attention must be paid before the merits of inclusion or mainstreaming can be assessed.

##### 4.2 Are disabled people and poor people being heard?

If the marginalisation described in section 3 is what characterises disability and poverty, then the answer to the above question is self-evident. If disabled people and poor people were really being listened to in a meaningful way, poverty would also be reduced. International development work is said to be on behalf of poor people in whatever context. The extent to which the most marginalised actually have any influence over the nature of the agenda is debatable. A KaR research project looks at this issue in more detail, comparing the influence of disabled people in South Africa, Zimbabwe and the UK (Dube and Charowa 2005). This report cites examples of DPOs being asked to contribute to NGO funding proposals, without being offered a full role in the planning and implementation process.

This matter is not as straightforward as it might appear. Unless power is addressed, consultation and participation will always be within the confines of the agenda of the powerful. Donors and development agencies have their own agendas. Disabled people's and poor people's demands must correspond to this agenda or funding is unlikely to materialise. To some extent this is perhaps inevitable. One participant in the KaR research in Sri Lanka stated that their most pressing need after the tsunami was to get growth hormone (Kett, Stubbs and Yeo 2005). If development work were to be based entirely on what people request then growth hormone should be provided. It is also the case that the very isolation that defines disability and poverty means that the most marginalised people often will not have much perspective of the wider world, the ultimate causes of their oppression or possible solutions. Consultation and participation can only be really valid where there is not a great power imbalance, and where the supposed beneficiaries have the opportunity to discuss the wider context, the level of funding and are able to offer potential solutions.

Some of the problems faced by disabled people in taking part in official consultations are similar to those faced by any poor people – the opportunity cost and the out-of-pocket cost of attending meetings with government can be amazingly high. Transport to rural areas can be rare and unreliable, resulting in people having to take weeks away from home to attend a short meeting. In many cases, power issues result in poor people waiting for long periods until the 'important' person consents to see them. Meeting 'powerful' people in an alien environment can be a debilitating experience. On the other hand, the conference environment can be seductive, and all too often valuable grassroots leaders have been lost to their members as they spend more time at 'important' meetings with 'powerful' people. All these difficulties also affect disabled people, but are compounded by the fact that conference organisers rarely take disability access into account; furthermore it may be even harder to persuade 'powerful' people to consent to listen to a disabled lobbyist.

Development agencies generally pay a lot of attention to planning their goals and objectives. This can be done in a participatory manner involving input from a number of beneficiaries. However, the objectives could never correspond with all the wishes of all beneficiaries. Furthermore, development agencies are well aware that for the objectives to be realisable, there needs to be at least some correspondence with their funders' goals. They cannot therefore be fully open to the stated priorities of the poor and disabled people they encounter. Moreover, if beneficiaries are aware of aid agencies' priorities, then they are likely to state matching needs and at least receive something. This may be a conscious pragmatic decision or it may be for lack of consideration or belief in alternatives. Everyone in all areas of life has limited views of the world and perspectives of what is possible. Unless we have access to information or situations that challenge our own experiences and beliefs, it is difficult to imagine how things could be different.

If the power gap is to be addressed, a priority has to be to strengthen the democratic movement of disabled people and of poor people in general. Again this is not as clear-cut as it might appear. The most articulate, active and vociferous people in any group are rarely the most marginalised. For example, an urban-based disabled people's organisation led by middle-class men who became disabled only after receiving an education and building a career, does not automatically provide legitimate representation of, for example, the needs of the poorest disabled women in isolated rural areas. Training and support is needed to enable people to listen, comprehend and accurately represent another's situation.

Finkelstein explains why wheelchair users dominated in the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation:

"They tended to be less isolated and so had greater awareness of significant social changes that were already taking place in the health and welfare services as well as political struggles and the general state of the economy. Many had been able-bodied and were familiar with social movements. On the other hand when we ask why people with cerebral palsy were so absent from self-help organisations of disabled people it may be that because they were born with an impairment they were often 'overprotected' by caring parents and consequently isolated from active contact with radical social movements. They tended to be more passive having been indoctrinated with the understanding that people with abilities will always look after their needs." (2001a:4)

If this argument is taken to its logical conclusion then those who are least marginalised may have a better understanding than do those who are most oppressed. But understanding the context does not equate with understanding the needs and wishes of the poorest themselves. The bigger aid agencies generally work through intermediaries; there is often a long chain of responsibility and funding before any direct attention is paid to the supposed beneficiaries. It may be easier for aid agencies to relate to intermediaries whose lives

are not so far removed from their own. This runs a real risk of distorting the needs of the poorest. It is frequently claimed that disabled people's organisations lack the capacity to manage programmes themselves, therefore intermediaries of international NGOs are required. However, as Thomas (2005) points out, "The perception that DPOs lack capacity is not always well founded and is in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy." (2005:10) This applies equally to any group of poor people.

The danger of misrepresentation by intermediaries is acute in the growing trend among NGOs to prioritise 'advocacy' in their work. As Hickey and Bracking write, "NGO advocacy generates its own problem of legitimacy, particularly in terms of the dangers of misrepresentation, or of ... displacing the voices of more representative forms of political agency." (2005:857) An advocate in the legal sense of the word represents the client. Advocacy groups in the UK usually represent clients dealing with problems with social services for example, but only acting on the explicitly stated requests of the client. In the international development sector things are different. NGOs frequently claim to 'advocate' for poor people, or for disabled people. Such a broad clientele could not possibly have requested such support explicitly. These campaigns may be well intentioned but run the risk of distorting understanding of other people's needs and exacerbating the notion that disabled people or poor people are incapable of speaking for themselves. This is not to say that an advocacy service for disabled people living in poverty might not be useful. It is frequently easier to advocate on behalf of someone else, than to assert one's own demands. However, if this is the case, then it needs to be clear representation of the person's wishes, otherwise it should not be referred to as advocacy.

#### **4.3 Competition with other marginalised groups**

The similarities between the situations of disabled people and other poor people have been discussed. But there is a danger that the manner in which 'participation' is framed leads to an accentuation of difference and obscures the similarities. Separate groups may state their particular needs in a way that highlights the difference rather than shows the causal similarities: women, older people, disabled people, refugees and children may all represent themselves slightly differently, despite the obvious overlaps. This leads to the frequently heard complaint in the NGO sector that there are too many issues to consider. Gaining recognition can become a competitive business.

In a survey looking at the inclusion of disabled people in UK-based international development organisations, it was found that one of the reasons commonly given for failing to include disabled people was that this was "seen as one among many competing demands" (Yeo 2003:10). Similarly, DFID's Disability Policy Officer, Philippa Thomas reports how DFID recognises disability "as one of several factors, such as gender, age and caste", and states that there are "many competing priorities" (Thomas 2005:1). Or as Albert, Dube and Riis-Hansen report, "There are so many demands on agency staff that unless something is seen as an immediate priority ... it is likely to be ignored as yet another of many minority concerns such as age, children, ethnic groups, etc." (2005:38) Albert et al also cite how a member of Norad's staff said, "We are supposed to ask questions on HIV/AIDS, gender and environment ... We are not supposed to ask questions on disability." (2005:30)

Hickey and Bracking write: "The contemporary politics of representation ... tends to recognise and empower political identities on the basis of 'difference' and 'diversity' rather than material want or need." (2005:853) There is an urgent need to build alliances with the 'competing priorities' to highlight the similarities of all processes of marginalisation, to end the idea of competition and to have any chance of building something more progressive.

#### **4.4 Lessons from campaigns on gender**

There are many parallels to be drawn with work on gender mainstreaming. Despite the adoption of policies, strategies and programmes, the "immense political weight applied to make gender a cross-cutting issue and the apparent acceptance of this by almost every development agency, the outcomes have not lived up to expectations. What chance then for disability, which has not been awarded cross-cutting status and where there is no agreement even on how to define it?" (Albert and Miller 2005:30). They go on to say that an advantage for the disability movement is that lessons can be learnt from the experiences of gender mainstreaming. Maybe the most important lesson from this is that pushing one issue of marginalisation in isolation cannot work.

According to the Poverty Alleviation Action Plan (PAAP) Implementation Strategies (Zimbabwe) (1994; 6), "Empowerment is to put people first as the primary agents in charge of their own development, to nurture and strengthen the poor communities' innate ability to sustain themselves by creating opportunities. The challenge

is to harness communities' awareness of their status of deprivation and strengthen their efforts for the best standards of living. The disability movement should therefore facilitate the transition from deprivation to productivity and create an environment for sustainable production." (Dube and Charowa, 2005). But what does productivity mean?

Should disabled people be unquestioningly striving to participate in the agenda of increased productivity with the goal of economic growth? The World Bank has made many public moves towards showing its eagerness to include disabled people. The exclusion of disabled people from participation in the market is of course a drain on the global capitalist economy. There is much to be learnt here from the Women in Development approach as described by Albert and Miller (2005). This was based on the idea that women would not be marginalised if policymakers realized the potential economic gains from including women. Donor agencies did begin to take gender more seriously. There was research into women's contributions to development; specific workshops on women's issues at conferences and development agencies began to ensure there was mention of women in their work. However, this approach did not address how power relations cause women to be marginalised. In fact it encouraged the idea that "the problem – and hence the solution – concerned only women" Albert and Miller (2005:7). It did not address "the fact that women were *already integrated* in the economic system – but in ways that perpetuated their position of subordination" (ibid).

By the early 1990s the Gender and Development (GAD) approach focused more strongly on power relations and the manner in which barriers to gender equality are socially constructed. This approach highlights the ways in which women are subordinated *within* the staffing and structure of purportedly gender-neutral development work. Hence the concern is not about inclusion in itself, but about building more equal power relations within the existing inclusion.

## 5. Changing the agenda

The inclusion of disabled people in a truly equal manner would necessitate questioning fundamental aspects of society. As Finkelstein puts it: "We cannot understand or deal with disability without dealing with the essential nature of society itself." (2001b:5)

Commercial enterprises are more likely to accept the inclusion of disabled staff if there is some added incentive such as acceptance of low wages, menial work or useful kudos for the organisation. Russell and Malhotra state that, "Within a capitalist world economy, the inclusion of disabled people in the employment market is resisted, as disabled people are perceived as slower, needing more support and therefore leading to increased production costs." (2002) They cite how in 2000, 10 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act, "despite a ... national official unemployment rate of 4.2%, the unemployment rate for working-age disabled population has barely budged from its chronic level of 65-71%" (ibid). Where disabled people are employed, it is often in menial jobs on low wages with few promotion prospects. The increasingly widespread focus on social exclusion may obscure examples of inclusion on the basis of exploitation, inequality and adverse incorporation. Michael Oliver writes, "If the game is possessive individualism in a competitive and inegalitarian society, impaired people will inevitably be disadvantaged, no matter how the rules are changed." (ibid)

When the disability sector put time and resources into pushing for participation in the World Bank agenda of poverty reduction, nobody should delude themselves that this would be on the basis of equality. DPOs may decide that there is enough to be gained by fighting within the existing agenda to make it worthwhile. But the context needs to be assessed and the real danger of endorsing the current system and splitting the wider movement should be taken into consideration.

George Monbiot points out regarding the Make Poverty History agenda, the "G8 leaders and the business interests their summit promotes can absorb our demands for aid, debt, even slightly fairer terms of trade, and lose nothing. They can wear our colours, speak our language, claim to support our aims, and discover in our agitation not new constraints but new opportunities for manufacturing consent. Justice, this consensus says, can be achieved without confronting power." (Monbiot 2005)

Hickey and Bracking refer to the "manner in which social movements may be co-opted within regimes ... as a means of securing their legitimacy rather than the objectives of the movement" (2005:859). In a separate article Hickey also describes how the much applauded inclusion of disabled people in Uganda's political institution has, he claims, "yet to have any significant influence on the policy process" (2005:999). The only gain he cites is that Parliament has become wheelchair accessible, but even this has not been extended to

other public buildings. He goes on to question whether Uganda's policy of including some marginal groups within the political system is more about "incorporation rather than empowerment" (ibid). Of course, disabled people in Uganda may disagree with his analysis, but the risks of incorporation are real.

In the same way that George Monbiot writes of the danger that those working to 'Make Poverty History' are actually giving legitimacy to the system that causes poverty, perhaps the disability movement needs to reassess where the focus of energy should be directed. "At the Make Poverty History march, the speakers insisted that we are dragging the G8 leaders kicking and screaming towards our demands. It seems to me that the G8 leaders are dragging us dancing and cheering towards theirs." (Monbiot 2005)

## 6. Ways forward

Many policies, statements and manuals have been produced both regarding disability and poverty reduction. The rhetoric has changed somewhat but disabled people are still among the most marginalised and tens of thousands of people still die each day from extreme poverty. Many development agencies have done much beneficial work relieving human suffering among some of the most disadvantaged people around the world. This can only be a good thing, unless the result is to focus resources on a particular wound, diverting attention from the fact that the body is being continually lacerated away from the spotlight.

Projects with easily measurable outputs are important in motivating people. But sometimes the cause of the problem is less easily targeted. If babies are being thrown into a river they can be rescued, resuscitated and many lives saved. This is easily measurable and can make those involved feel good about their role in saving lives. But, what if the cause of the babies drowning is a long chain of responsibility in which we are all to some degree implicated? Tackling that is not such a clear task. It does however have greater long-term value.

It would be unfair to claim that extreme poverty is anyone's explicit intent, but it may be the inevitable consequence of the current system. The ideology of neo-liberalism is so prevalent as to appear the only game in town. This may well be intentional. Increasing recognition that the current system is causing poverty and destroying the planet has led to a growing movement for change around the world. However, what little mainstream publicity is given to anyone developing new agendas, almost universally portrays them as naïve, mad or dangerous. This is currently happening regarding the Chavez government in Venezuela, the Zapatistas in Mexico or anti-globalisation protesters throughout the world. None of these movements have the power to be a serious threat to the neo-liberal establishment in themselves. The only threat they bring is in showing that other possibilities exist. The rallying call of the Zapatistas is not that they have the answer but that there is 'one no, and many yeses'.

It is this that the disability sector should consider. There are an infinite number of ways to structure an economic system. It should not be assumed that lobbying the most economically powerful is necessarily the most productive use of resources. It does seem counterproductive for the disability sector to be lobbying for recognition within an agenda that other marginalised people are campaigning against altogether. However, total disengagement is not necessarily the solution either; it may be pragmatic to have some level of engagement with what currently exists. The many recent policies and statements on disability certainly leave considerable scope for holding agencies to account. It may be useful to devote some resources to alleviating the symptoms of the current system as well as working to create something better. While alleviating the symptoms may be more measurable and fulfilling work than addressing the causes, the potential for creating long-term progress should not be over-estimated. Only the DPOs concerned can determine their priorities for action, but the process of prioritisation should include assessment of the wider context and the different options for change.

The processes that affect disabled people are similar to those that marginalise many others. By definition none of these groups alone has the power to make a big difference. If progress is to be made, alliances are needed between these groups and with their allies. Other social movements may not operate any more inclusively of disabled people than do establishment organisations. Lobbying may be required in order to get recognition within these groups. But disabled people can choose to push for alliances with the wider movement for change or get tempted by half-hearted invitations for inclusion in the very agenda that causes poverty and disables people.

The need to build alliances should not obscure the importance and distinction of the disability movement in itself. It is a testament to the impact of the movement that there has been such a notable shift in rhetoric and

that so many guidelines and statements have been produced. The progress should be celebrated but a modification of language, publication of a manual or gaining of a place at the table does not indicate equal rights or justice of any kind. Pushing for inclusion without assessment of the consequences could result in endorsing the system, dividing the wider movement and delaying the societal change that the social model called for many years ago.

The existing situation is not just, sustainable or inevitable. To quote from the World Social Forum, "Another world is possible". It is up to us all to determine the form we would like that world to take.

"What we all have in common is our difference. Many of our strengths are the fruit of our weakness. Even the experience of being marginalised ... gives us an unusual perspective on the human saga ... Be it with a limp, a cane, a wheelchair, or simply an off-beat drum, we march to a different drummer. And surely today's world sorely needs a breaking of the ranks and questioning of the status quo." (Werner 1995)

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