

Module 1 Unit 2

This is a **REQUIRED READING**.

Nicoli, M. & Guernsey, K. (2008). Disability and Development: What role for communication? In P. Mefalopulos, Development communication sourcebook: Broadening the boundaries of communication (pp. 195-203). Washington: World Bank.

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DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION SOURCEBOOK

Broadening the Boundaries
of Communication

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THE WORLD BANK

Paolo Mefalopulos

Development Communication Sourcebook

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THE WORLD BANK
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4.4 Disability and Development: What Role for Communication?

Marco Nicoli and Katherine Guernsey†*

Why Disability and Development?

In order to alleviate poverty, economic development programs and policies and communication strategies must embrace an entire population, including groups at risk, such as those with disabilities. Without integrating the disabled population, poverty alleviation efforts are compromised, since disabled people and their entire families face a higher risk of poverty. Similarly, poor people experience a heightened rate of acquiring impairments that, in interaction with societal barriers, results in disability.

Disability is widely recognized as a development issue affecting the lives of more than 600 million people and their families.¹ The World Bank’s overarching goal is poverty alleviation, and a development agenda inclusive of disabled people is necessary to achieve this goal. In this context, the concept of disability is consistent with the “social model,” where the focus is on the interaction of people’s functional limitations with societal barriers, including physical, attitudinal, legislative, informational, and other barriers.

The commitment to disability has come from the highest levels of the Bank, including a number of World Bank presidents. Former World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn indicated the importance of reaching out to, and collaborating with, disabled populations in developing countries: “Addressing disability is a significant part of reducing poverty. Bringing disabled people out of the corners and back alleys of society, and empowering them to thrive in the bustling center of national life, will do much to improve the lives of many from among the poorest of the poor around the world.” “Inclusion—that is what development is all about—to bring into society people that have never been a part of it.”²

The Role of Development Communication

Communication methods and techniques can play a crucial role in addressing needs and challenges for the inclusion of disabled people in the development agenda. Ini-

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tially, proper communication strategies and products are needed to raise awareness of what disability is and who disabled people are. Too often disability is overlooked, perceived as merely a health issue, or approached with pietism and largely misunderstood by people. The mainstream media can help to accustom the general public to the inclusion of people with disabilities in everyday life.

Communication campaigns are another important component as they form the basis for the education of society on disability prevention and on the affirmation of disability as one of the many different qualities of human diversity, such as sex, religion, culture, and so forth. Disability is neither a curse nor a blessing: it is a normal part of life and should be addressed as such. The more disabled people are shown in inclusive settings with their nondisabled peers, the more familiar society becomes with inclusion. In terms of prevention, disabled people and their nondisabled peers should be recognized as distinct audiences and the issue of prevention appropriately broached. While it is appropriate to engage in awareness-raising campaigns aimed at preventing injuries and the spread of communicable diseases, these campaigns must be accessible to people with disabilities and in no case should portray people with disabilities as objects of pity or “cautionary tales.” For example, campaigns to improve driver and pedestrian safety should not use people injured by traffic accidents as “poster children” for what can happen when people do not heed the advice of the campaign.

In addition, communication strategies are instrumental for behavior change to fight stigma and prejudice with the goal of real social inclusion. Many persons with disabilities lead a life of exclusion not because of their own limitations, for everyone has personal limitations, but because of social norms that perceive them as outcasts, bewitched, sinners punished by God. This discrimination is often extended to family members or associates of disabled persons. Communication products can be very effective antidiscrimination tools. For example, communication campaigns have been used in post-conflict areas to reduce the fear and negative perception of various populations being reintegrated.³ This fosters a positive behavioral change for the entire society.

Two-way communication processes are needed to include disabled people in any decisions concerning their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Development communication is not only about communicating and educating, but also about listening, sharing knowledge and opinions, and creating knowledge to address key issues successfully. Disabled people’s contributions, needs, and perceptions should be articulated by them first and foremost, without external filters, in order to achieve more meaningful and sustainable results.

What Is the Role for World Bank Communication Professionals?

In order to deal effectively with these issues, communication professionals should include disability in their work. The following elements should provide the main scope of this work:

- Provide visibility—when relevant, the more often disability is linked with development issues, the more awareness is raised and it is normalized.
- Correct misinformation—communication should provide correct information and counter stereotypes.
- Reduce fear, increase familiarity—exposure to disability issues through communication products produces a progressive familiarization with the theme and therefore makes people more comfortable with the issue.
- Reduce stigma and shame—the leading/leadership role played by the World Bank in the development arena can have a domino effect on other organizations at national and local levels, thus reducing the stigma that affects disabled people.
- Give good examples through appropriate and accessible formats—in the design of communication strategies, when relevant, the communication practitioner should use a mix of accessible formats (large print, simplified language, accessible Web sites, Braille printing, and so forth); this will have a tangible effect on implementation. There is evidence that in countries where World Bank Public Information Centers (PICs) have been equipped with assistive technologies, some governments have adopted similar approaches for their own centers.
- Reinforce the notion of disability as a normal difference—rather than a misfortune.
- Include disabled persons organizations (DPOs)—be inclusive in the full range of the Bank’s interaction with civil society, including communication assessments, consultations, trainings, and so forth.

Relevance of Disability and Development Work across Sectors

Disability-related interventions are relevant to most sectoral work. In this respect, communication professionals may encounter disability-related issues in many areas of their work and can rely on the cross-cutting nature of communication to deal effectively with those issues. Often, the Bank’s work includes disabled people implicitly within the broad category of “vulnerable groups.” It is important, however, to explicitly mention disabled people within the vulnerable groups list; otherwise they are often overlooked. Use of photos of disabled people in media products provides “visibility.” The following are samples of good, inclusive media products on various themes, as well as their rationale:⁴

- Early childhood education—disabled children are included in “Education For All” but are still marginally reached.
- HIV/AIDS—disabled people are typically not reached by prevention campaigns and lack access to treatment.
- Gender—disabled women are subject to double discrimination.
- At-risk youth—both the cause of and subject to forms of disabilities because of at-risk behaviors (for example, crime and violence).

- Post-disaster and post-conflict—projects focus on rehabilitation and integration of disabled ex-combatants and civilians.
- Employment—the majority of disabled adults remain unemployed despite possessing employable skills.
- Infrastructure—make accessible transportation, water and sanitation, schools, and hospitals.
- ICT—new information and communication technologies are a great opportunity for inclusion and also a risk factor that can exacerbate the gap between disabled and nondisabled people if those technologies are not accessible.

Key Messages

Facts are very important when communicating key issues about disabled people. Facts, however, need to be “packaged” and transformed into usable information that is interesting and appealing to audiences. The following are some examples of basic information that can be “transformed” into messages and used to great effect when communicating issues related to disabilities:

- Approximately 400 million disabled people live in the developing world.⁵
- Among refugees, it is estimated that acute clinical depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) affect between 40 and 70 percent.⁶
- The global GDP that is lost annually due to exclusion of disabled people from the employment sector is estimated to be between US\$1.37 and US\$1.94 trillion.⁷
- With estimates that 40 million of the 115 million children out of school have disabilities, it is difficult to reach universal primary education targets without including children with disabilities.
- Disabled people are excluded from economic and social life, and thus antipoverty initiatives often do not reach them.
- Exclusion affects not only people with disabilities, but also their families and communities.
- Disability and poverty form a vicious cycle. Poverty often leads to disability, which then traps people in poverty because of the societal barriers and exclusion faced by people with disabilities.⁸
- Disabled people are at increased risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS because of physical abuse, lack of intervention, and lack of appropriate preventive outreach.⁹
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 13, 2006, and with 117 signatory states as of October 10, 2007, sets the benchmark for the inclusion of disabled people in the development agenda.

To increase the awareness and knowledge on this issue, the World Bank has produced a number of communication and media products. They include the following:

- “Don’t Shut Us Out,” a 30-second public service announcement aired on several CNN networks (in English)¹⁰
- Disability and Development Issue Brief, posted on the Bank’s external media site¹¹
- *Development Outreach Magazine* on Disability and Development, July 2005¹²
- “From Exclusion to Inclusion,” a 10-minute corporate video on the Bank’s Disability and Development Work Web site¹³
- Staff and media training modules on communicating with proper terminology, and using the social inclusion paradigm¹⁴
- List of reporters and media networks whose focus is on disability issues¹⁵
- Disability Communication Manual¹⁶

Challenges for World Bank Communication Professionals

Development communication professionals often face a number of challenges when dealing with issues related to disabilities. For the most part, these challenges are similar to those encountered in other development communication approaches that seek to actively engage relevant stakeholder groups, especially those subject to marginalization. The main challenge usually is making sure that their voice is heard and accounted for. Primarily, communication should be a tool for empathy and understanding. While engaged in dialog and communication processes aimed at achieving mutual understanding, communication professionals dealing with disability should also pay attention to specific critical issues.

The lack of universal terms and definitions is often a major challenge. Because of cultural and language differences, little consistency exists on what is deemed to be the best usage of disability-related terminology between and even within countries. The word “handicapped,” for example, is considered derogatory in the United States; however, it is the proper term in many Francophone countries. World Bank country office staff should speak directly with their local DPOs to determine what the appropriate cultural norms and related perceptions are in that country.¹⁷

The degree of disability diversity can be another issue to navigate. Disability involves not only different forms but also different degrees of impairments. Not all people with disabilities would self-identify with the term “impairment”; some would prefer “different ability” or other similar phrasing. The typical categories of impairment types include physical, cognitive or intellectual, sensory (vision and hearing), psychosocial, and learning. The different degrees range from mild to medium to severe, though again not all people with disabilities would necessarily identify with these descriptors. Two-way communication can effectively account for such differences in perceptions and types of disabilities.

The final major challenge can be referred to as the “knowledge gap.” Communication professionals do not need to be disability specialists to properly cover and write about disability-related topics. As for any sector of intervention, however, it helps to have a basic understanding of the issues and sensitivity to them in order to

devise effective strategies with a sound foundation. The best way to become familiar with disability issues is to start by consulting some of the basic material on the subject available on the Internet, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.¹⁸

Attending communication training on disability can be helpful, although these sessions are perhaps not as helpful as speaking directly with disability advocates and disabled individuals themselves, who are the best source of answers to the questions of communication practitioners. It is also important for the communication practitioner to familiarize herself or himself with the various tools and media that facilitate communication with disabled people. These include telephone TDY/TTY,¹⁹ cell phone text messaging, instant messaging, closed and open captioning and sign language interpretation for hearing impaired persons; accessible formats of electronic files (for example, MS Word files and accessible Web sites), large print, high contrast and Braille printing for visually impaired people; and “plain language” for the benefit of all people, especially people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities.

Communication in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities²⁰

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is one of the few international conventions that make specific references to communication. The rationale for the active involvement of communication professionals is based on the reasonable expectation that development organizations, including the World Bank, will be called to provide technical assistance to client countries on how to implement the principles of the convention. Article 8 on “Awareness-raising,” together with Article 9 on “Accessibility” and Article 32 on “International Cooperation” should be key references for communication professionals.

Article 8 on awareness raising was included in the Convention in part to try to address the underlying causes of discrimination on the basis of disability—namely, the prevailing attitudes toward persons with disabilities in many societies. Even in countries where disability-related legislation exists (such as nondiscrimination legislation), the efficacy of such legislation is often hindered by public assumptions and stereotypes of persons with disabilities.

In order to enhance the implementation of domestic legislation and the CRPD, Article 8 sets forth the objectives for awareness-raising measures (for example, to foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities),²¹ as well as examples of such measures (for example, “encouraging all organs of the media to portray persons with disabilities in a manner consistent with the purpose of the present Convention”).²² Client countries that are States Parties to the CRPD may need Bank assistance in order to help implement their obligations under Article 8.

In addition, where other projects seek to be inclusive of persons with disabilities, engaging in some of the activities addressed in Article 8 may assist in enhancing the overall efficacy of such projects. For example, where an education project seeks to be inclusive of persons with disabilities, the addition of a public awareness-raising component to the project could be beneficial in helping to dispel stereotypes or inaccurate assumptions held by teachers and/or parents, regarding persons with disabilities in educational environments. Thus, compliance with Article 8 could be viewed as a tool for enhancing the achievement of wider development objectives.²³

Article 9 on “Accessibility” addresses an overarching concern for the effective implementation of obligations for persons with disabilities—accessibility. In this regard it takes a broad approach to the issue, addressing not only physical accessibility but also accessibility of information. In addition, Article 9 captures both public and private actors, as it is applicable to either actor making their products or services “open or available to the public.”

Although some delegations expressed concern about their capacity to uphold their obligations under Article 9, by the end of the negotiations there was general agreement that omitting the article would likely lead to accessibility issues being forgotten about in many planning activities, resulting in the inadvertent creation of further societal barriers for persons with disabilities. Given that it is almost always more cost-effective for such barriers to be avoided in the first place rather than removed at a later juncture, Article 9 came to be seen as a useful reminder to public and private actors of the need to address accessibility issues in an inclusive manner and early in planning processes.

Article 32 on “International Cooperation” was included because disability “is a major cross-cutting development issue for all development partners,”²⁴ and because international cooperation that is not inclusive of disability issues has the potential to lead to the inadvertent creation of long-term barriers for persons with disabilities. In terms of the obligations for States Parties under Article 32, it calls for “international cooperation, including international development programmes” to be “inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.”²⁵

In this context the term “international cooperation” is interpreted broadly, including not only aid programmes but also the “exchange and sharing of information, experiences, training programmes and best practices.”²⁶ Indeed, during the Ad Hoc Committee’s²⁷ discussions it was noted on numerous occasions that developing countries have as much to learn from each other as from developed countries. Thus, not only can the Bank be of assistance to client countries in the inclusive implementation of projects, but there is also scope for the Bank to utilize its convening power and its communication capacities to help foster the sharing of information, expertise, and best practices between actors in this field.

Notes

1. For a list of other organizations that have adopted guidelines for inclusion of disabled people visit <http://go.worldbank.org/IHINYN1EX0> (World Bank Intranet users only).
2. Disability Knowledge Toolkit: see <http://go.worldbank.org/0GWEU0VOY0>. See note 14.
3. Loretta Hieber, *Lifeline Media: Reaching Populations in Crisis* (Geneva: Media Action International, 2001).
4. Derived from the World Bank training, “Demystifying Disability through Communications” (World Bank, Washington, DC, 2004).
5. World Health Organization.
6. F. Baingana and I. Bannon *Integrating Mental Health and Psychosocial Interventions into World Bank Lending for Conflict-Affected Populations: A Toolkit* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004).
7. R. Metts, “Disability Issues, Trends and Recommendations for the World Bank” (Consultant report, Feb. 2000).
8. See DFID, “Disability, Poverty and Development” (UK Department for International Development, London, Feb. 2000).
9. *HIV/AIDS & Disability: Capturing Hidden Voices* (Washington, DC: World Bank/Yale University, 2004).
10. See the Global Partnership for Disability and Development site at <http://www.worldbank.org/disability>.
11. See News and Broadcast at www.worldbank.org.
12. See <http://www1.worldbank.org/devoutreach/july05/index.asp>.
13. See the Global Partnership for Disability and Development site at <http://www.worldbank.org/disability>.
14. A stand-alone training on the issue was developed and delivered in 2005: “Demystifying Disability Through Communication.” Most of the content is available through the Disability and Development Team (HDNSP).
15. Contact the World Bank’s Disability and Development Team, HDNSP, at <http://go.worldbank.org/0GWEU0VOY0>.
16. Claudia Werneck, *Manual on Disabilities and Inclusive Development for the Media and Social Communications Professionals* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2005); <http://site.resources.worldbank.org/DISABILITY/Resources>.
17. See *World Bank Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about Disabilities*.
18. The World Bank Intranet contains a “disability toolkit,” which also provides samples of good communication products.
19. These are electronic devices for text communication via a telephone line. They are used when one or more of the parties have hearing or speech difficulties.
20. Excerpted from by K. Guernsey, M. Nicoli and A. Ninio, “Convention on the Rights of

Persons with Disabilities: Its Implementation and the Relevance for the World Bank,” Social Protection Discussion Paper No. 0712, (World Bank, Washington, DC, June 2007).

21. CRPD Article 8(1)(a).
22. CRPD Article 8(2)(c).
23. In this regard the Bank sector that could be of assistance is the Communication Network (CommNet). CommNet is the World Bank’s professional association of communications staff working worldwide. CommNet has more than 300 members across the Bank Group (40 percent of whom are working outside Bank headquarters in 73 Bank country offices), who are engaged in a broad spectrum of communications and outreach activities.
24. Statement by José Antonio Ocampo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, UN General Assembly Ad Hoc Committee, 8th session, New York, December 5, 2006.
25. CRPD Article 32(1)(a).
26. CRPD Article 1(b).
27. The Ad Hoc Committee was a sub-body of the UN General Assembly, mandated to consider proposals for a new international convention on the human rights of persons with disabilities. It met at UN Headquarters in New York from 2002 to 2006, and included delegations from UN Member States, UN agencies, and intergovernmental organizations, as well as extensive participation by the international disability community.