

IN FOCUS

***Beyond Charity: Connecting Rights and Development***

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The human rights agenda is increasingly recognizing the interdependency between rights and development. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) deepens this trend with an obligation that States Parties' development supports the rights of people with disabilities. Development aid must be inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities. On the one hand, development agencies are prohibited from discriminating against and excluding persons with disabilities. On the other hand, they are required to put in place policies and programs that promote the participation of people with disabilities and advance their rights.



Uganda: The traditional disability symbol, the wheelchair, and the red ribbon, the symbol for HIV/AIDS.

Given the fact that 80% of persons with disabilities live in the developing world, it is clear that development policies have the potential to make enormous improvements in the lives of people with disabilities. Yet too often, disability is approached as a medical issue and people with disabilities as the recipients of charity. Rather than empowering people with disabilities, development further entrenches cultural stereotypes and discriminating attitudes and policies. At the same time, the human rights agenda generally ignores people with disabilities, often with a dismissal of the issues as health- or “service”- related.

The integration of rights and development in the CRPD provides a helpful perspective into the enormous benefits that development can bring to rights implementation and what the intersection of human rights and development might look like in practice. The specific obligation to align development with the CRPD principles has already spurred change. For example, four UN agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), are forming a new multi-donor trust fund to support the inclusion of the rights of persons with disabilities within the UN system. The Fund will not only provide financial resources, but also technical guidance to strengthen a rights approach to including people with disabilities. Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) are starting to leverage the CRPD in development policy-making through tactics, such as budget analysis, that highlight discriminatory policies and support advocacy positions.

Like many trends, however, we run the risk of doing the same thing, but calling it something different – interchanging the words development and human rights, but not changing our grantmaking practices. Instead, integration demands that each of these fields address the fundamental underpinnings of the other. In the case of human rights funders, this means supporting work to engage with development policy and advance economic, social and cultural rights, acknowledging that most poor people want to secure their basic rights to food, housing, health and education. In the case of development funders, it

means broadening the goal of economic development to include empowerment, participation, and rights advocacy.

### **What can human rights funders do?**

#### *Build capacity of civil society and governments to integrate rights and development*

At a recent meeting of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, I was struck by how many governments requested technical assistance to include people with disabilities in their development policies. More work is needed to show governments how a rights-based approach to development can be implemented, particularly regarding inclusion of marginalized populations. At the same time, human rights organizations need support to strengthen their ability to claim rights and engage with development actors. While global policy advocacy is a useful strategy, national and local groups can also influence local missions and aid agencies, which are closer to the work, and may be easier to engage and influence.

#### *Understand that people don't live in silos so our grantmaking shouldn't either*

While we each focus on our own “program areas” or “identity groups,” the constituencies of our grantmaking do not enjoy this luxury. They are poor women with HIV, children with disabilities, LGBT youth or indigenous people engaged in sex work. As grantmakers, we need to get better at seeing the intersections of our work with diverse issue areas, and collaborating with one another to ensure that we address issues critical to our grantees that may fall “outside” our programs. For example, the Disability Rights Fund has learned that it needs to better address the needs of indigenous people with disabilities, a group marginalized from both the disability and indigenous communities.

#### *Support work to research and document development abuses*

While development offers the enormous potential to be harnessed to deliver rights, it also often perpetuates rights violations. From coal mines that threaten access to water to repressive governments that crack down on communities demanding to be consulted, corporations and governments justify such consequences in the name of development. In the case of disability, development dollars still build institutions that segregate people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities from society – a clear violation of international law. Research and documentation is needed to expose development abuses. Research and documentation can also be used to highlight practices and policies that have already proven successful and should be replicated further.

### **Resources for Funders:**

- “Beyond Charity: A Donors Guide to Inclusive Grantmaking,” Disability Rights Fund (forthcoming).
- [\*Falling Short of Our Goals: Transforming the Millennium Development Goals into Millennium Development Rights\*](#), Ellen Dorsey, Mayra Gomez, Bret Thiele, and Paul Nelson, *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, Vol. 28, No. 4. December 2010.
- [\*Frequently Asked Questions on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Cooperation\*](#), UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva: United Nations, 2006.
- [\*Including the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in United Nations Programming at Country Level - A Guidance Note for United Nations Country Teams and Implementing Partners\*](#). United Nations Development Group/Interagency Support Group for the CRPD Task Team, July 2010.
- [\*The Role of International Cooperation in Support of National Efforts for the Realization of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities\*](#), UN Human Rights Council (A/HRC/16/L), 21 March 2011.

- [Travelling Together: How to include disabled people on the main road of development](#), Sue Coe and Lorraine Wapling. World Vision, 2010.