



Disability and Development

The impact of disability

More than 45 million people around the world are blind. Their vision is impaired to the extent that they are unable to walk without assistance.

Most of these people live in developing countries where there are very few services to treat and assist people with disabilities.

In low-income countries, people who are or become disabled are at greater risk of living in extreme poverty. They are often excluded from education and training and are less able to work and support themselves. (C)

Blindness and disability intensifies the hardship of poverty - people with disabilities are among the poorest of the poor. (D)

Those living in poverty are generally unable to meet health care, travel or rehabilitation expenses. This compounds their existing health condition and places them at greater risk of experiencing additional health problems.

Family income and wellbeing is also severely affected as the person with a disability is often unable to farm, work or help with household duties.

In countries where there are no welfare or disability services, people who are blind or have other disabilities, rely on family members to care and provide for them. Often the carer is a child who must miss out on school or another family member who is then unable to work.

The United Nations Enable agency estimates that while 650 million people worldwide have a disability, the number directly affected by disability rises to 2 billion if family members are included. (E)

Facts about disability

More than 650 million people worldwide live with a disability. (A)

According to the World Health Organisation, 45 million people worldwide are blind and a further 124 million people have low vision. (B)

Around 80 percent of people with disabilities and 90 percent of people who are blind, live in developing countries. (A,B)

According to the World Bank, the rate of disability is very high among the world's poorest people, around 20 percent. They are the most disadvantaged individuals living in the most disadvantaged situations. (A)

Only 45 countries have anti-discrimination and other disability specific laws. (A)

Ninety percent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school. (A)

Disability is higher among women than men, and these women are much more vulnerable to social exclusion and abuse. (A)

Unemployment among persons with disabilities is as high as 80 percent in some countries. (A)

What is disability?

In the past, *disability* was generally considered to be physical or intellectual impairment that affected a person's ability to function. This simple definition didn't fully capture the many different ways in which a person's health condition and the relationship with their life situation and environmental surroundings, can negatively impact on their life opportunities.

Today the World Health Organisation uses The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). Under the ICF, *disability* is considered as an "umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions". (F)

Disability occurs through the interaction between a person's:

- **health condition** – disease, injury or disorder
- **individual life situation** – including factors such as their gender, age, education, experiences, family situation
- **surrounding environment** - including social attitudes, availability of services, legal system, climate, transport options.

Disability involves:

- **Impairment** - to part/s of the body or the that way it functions (inc. psychological)
- **Activity limitation** – unable to undertake activities for self-care, mobility and personal, family, community and civic life.
- **Participation restriction** – any problems with being involved in life situations including social, education, economic, civic and political situations. (F)

Disability should be considered from a human rights perspective rather than looked upon as an individual medical condition. This perspective recognises our collective responsibility to reduce the barriers and restrictions experienced by

people with health conditions and impairments, so that *all* people are able to equally participate in society.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In December 2006 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Convention ensures that all persons with disabilities enjoy all human rights on an equal basis as others. The Convention outlined eight main Principles that were ratified by member countries around the world:

1. *“Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons*
2. *Non-discrimination*
3. *Full and effective participation and inclusion in society*
4. *Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity*
5. *Equality of opportunity*
6. *Accessibility*
7. *Equality between men and women*
8. *Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.” (G)*

The UK Government signed the Convention in March 2007.

International non-government organisations, such as The Fred Hollows Foundation, have an important role to play in integrating the Principles in development work and ensuring that addressing disability issues is at the forefront of each organisation's agenda.

The Fred Hollows Foundation's approach to disability

The Fred Hollows Foundation works to treat and prevent avoidable blindness by working with partners in over 20 developing countries throughout Asia, Africa and the Pacific.

The Foundation is guided by a human rights based approach to its development work and believes that all people have the right to high quality affordable eye care.

The Foundation believes that addressing disability is strongly linked to the promotion and protection of human rights and to the alleviation of poverty and social exclusion.

The Foundation is committed to both preventing the impact of disability and to ensuring that people with disabilities have equal access to our program activities regardless of their individual life situation or surrounding environment.

In reference to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (see page 2) The Fred Hollows Foundation views disability as *an impairment which can lead to social and economic disadvantages, the denial of rights and limited opportunities to equally participate in the life of the community.*



Photo | Sixty five year old Sim Mon had one of her cataracts restored at Kampong Chhnang Eye Unit and has since been able to make pottery to generate income for her family. (Kampong Chhnang province, Cambodia)
Photo courtesy of www.lannonharley.com.

How The Foundation works to reduce the impact of disability

As a development organisation The Fred Hollows Foundation works to reduce the impact of disability by:

- Preventing and treating *health conditions*, specifically eye health problems such as cataract and trachoma.
- Preventing and reducing *impairment*, particularly to vision.
- Preventing and overcoming *activity limitation* by restoring vision to individuals and thereby restoring their independence for self-care and their ability to participate in work, family and community activities.
- Removing the systemic barriers that *restrict participation* in and access to eye health care services in poor and isolated regions of developing countries such as remoteness, cost and lack of health infrastructure.
- Advocating alongside and on behalf of: people with disabilities, specifically around the issue of avoidable blindness at local, national and international levels.

Disability and the work of The Fred Hollows Foundation

The Fred Hollows Foundation has treated hundreds of thousands of people with cataract and other forms of avoidable blindness in developing countries throughout Asia, Africa and the Pacific. They are among the poorest and most marginalised people in the world. Many were unaware that their eye condition could be treated or were too poor or incapacitated to travel to a health clinic.

The Foundation is committed to supporting individuals and communities to find their way out of poverty and to improve their life opportunities. We believe that this is only possible by equally including people with disabilities in our programs.

We work to reduce the incidence of blindness and overcome participation barriers such as cost, gender, age, transport, terrain, availability of health services as well as social and political attitudes to blindness prevention and treatment.

Some examples of The Foundation's work include:

- Providing free or heavily subsidized cataract surgery to the poorest of the poor in most of the countries where The Foundation works.

- Working with elderly people in rural China to overcome local misconceptions that blindness is an inevitable consequence of aging and to inform them that many forms of blindness can be treated.
- Providing free eye health care to children in The Rift Valley of Kenya to encourage poor families to seek treatment for their children.
- Training female health care workers in Pakistan to encourage women to visit health services.
- Supporting eye health clinics in remote regions of Nepal to ensure that eye care services are offered to people who are too poor or incapacitated to travel.
- Providing support to the National Blindness Prevention Program in Cambodia to build the capacity of national, regional and local eye health care services to reduce the impact of blindness for the long term.



Photo | Patients wait with their registration forms outside an Outreach Microsurgical Eye Clinic in the remote Far Western Region of Nepal. More than 200 sight restoring operations were conducted at the three-day clinic. The clinic was run by doctors and nurses from the Tilganga Eye Centre in Kathmandu. Tilganga is a long-term partner of The Fred Hollows Foundation. Dipayal (Doti district, Far Western Region, Nepal). Photo courtesy of The Fred Hollows Foundation.

Disability and the Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, all 189 Member States of the United Nations recognised the “collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at a global level”. (H) The resulting *Millennium Declaration* determined that the benefits of globalisation must be shared equally by all of the world’s people.

A set of eight *Millennium Development Goals* (MDG) was adopted by world leaders. The goals are to be met by 2015. They focus on poverty, child and maternal health, education, gender equality, environment, HIV/Aids and global partnership.

People with disabilities are not specifically mentioned in the MDGs as they are written to be inclusive of all people equally. However, there is concern that unless disability is mainstreamed in development programs, then the rights of people with disability will not be fully realised. (D)

The Fred Hollows Foundation recognizes that the MDGs cannot be achieved without addressing and including the needs of people with disabilities.

The Foundation’s work to reduce avoidable blindness directly prevents and addresses disability. In doing so, The Foundation contributes to achieving several of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly:

- *Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger* by helping to break the link between poverty, blindness and disability.
- *Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women*, by ensuring that our programs are equally accessible for women and men.
- *Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development* by working collaboratively with governments, associations and local service providers to strengthen blindness prevention programs and reduce the impact of disability in developing countries.

Further information about the Millennium Development Goals is available at: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

References

- A. United Nations Enable, Fact sheet on persons with disabilities, website accessed 30 June 2008, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=34&pid=18>
- B. VISION2020: The Right to Sight, *Blindness and Vision Impairment: The Global Facts*, website accessed 30 June 2008, <http://www.v2020.org/page.asp?section=0001000100090002>
- C. Despouy L., Human Rights and Disabled Persons, Centre for Human Rights Geneva and UN New York, cited in Inclusion International, *Fact Sheet on Poverty and Disability*, website accessed 1 July 2008, http://www.addc.org.au/webdocs/Disability%20&%20Poverty/Fact%20Sheets/INCLUSION%20INT_FACT%20SHEET_Fact%20Sheet%20on%20Poverty%20and%20Disability.pdf
- D. Thomas, P. *Disability, Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals: Relevance, Challenges and Opportunities for DFID*, DisabilityKar, June 2005. http://www.disabilitykar.net/docs/policy_final.doc
- E. United Nations Enable, Relationship between Development and Human Rights, website accessed 1 July 2008 <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=33>
- F. World Health Organisation, *Towards a Common Language for Functioning, Disability and Health ICF*. WHO/EIP/GPE/CAS01.3, Geneva 2002 <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/site/beginners/bg.pdf>
- G. United Nations Enable, *Guiding Principles of the Convention*, website accessed 20 June 2008, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=14&pid=156>
- H. *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, 55th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 18 September 2000, (Item 55/2) <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>