

IN FOCUS

Human Rights and People with Disabilities: Moving into the Mainstream

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Disability Rights are Human Rights

Almost 10 percent of the world's population, or 650 million people, have disabilities. 80 percent of people with disabilities live in the developing world. There, they are among the poorest of the poor, as disability is both a cause and effect of poverty. Persons with disabilities comprise the world's largest minority. But, unlike most minority populations, disability can affect *anyone at anytime*, through complications of pregnancy and birth, malnourishment, (physical or psychological) injury, disease, armed conflict, or age.

When thinking about disability, it is not uncommon for funders to conceptualize it as a health, medical, or welfare issue. Such views are consistent with traditional approaches to disability, in that the problems faced by people with disabilities are commonly attributed to their physical, mental or intellectual characteristics, rather than to societal barriers and discrimination. However, over the last 30 years, people with disabilities have pioneered a shift in this thinking, moving disability from the limitations of a charity lens to one of rights.

In 2007, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) ([hyperlink: http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150](http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150)) was adopted. The CRPD marks a significant turning point for the promotion and protection of the rights of people with disabilities. It reframes disability by the barriers created by the social attitudes, public policy and physical environment that block people with physical, sensory, intellectual or psycho-social impairments from enjoying their rights on an equal basis with others. The CRPD is a powerful instrument for activists seeking to address the long-standing marginalization and invisibility of people with disabilities.

Funders can play a crucial role in promoting the CRPD and advancing a rights-based approach to disability by formally recognizing that people with disabilities are already a significant proportion of the populations they serve and by making their programs more accessible. Disability is a cross-cutting issue that is relevant to most, if not all, constituencies that funders care about, including women, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, and the poor.

RESOURCES FOR FUNDERS:

1. Attend IHRFG's January 2010 conference: The plenary sessions will explore the success that disability rights activists have achieved with the paradigm shift at the UN level and the opportunities and challenges facing the movement going forward.
2. Disability Funders Network: <http://www.disabilityfunders.org>
3. Disability Rights Fund <http://www.disabilityrightsfund.org/>
4. International Disability Alliance – network of NGOs: <http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/>
5. United Nations Disability Agenda: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/index.asp>
6. OHCHR web page regarding disability: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/disability/>
7. Disability and the MDGs: <http://www.includeeverybody.org/>