



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

## General Information on Disability and Development

### Incidence of Disability

- The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 10% of any given population has a disability, with a higher incidence for post-conflict countries.
- It is estimated that 80% of the world's population who have some form of disability live within developing countries.
- In other words, of the estimated 600 million people worldwide who have a disability, 400 million live in the developing world.
- The United Nations recently stated that the percentage is in reality much higher and estimates that 25% of the world's population has a disability.
- Although many countries may have conducted individual surveys or censuses that try to obtain the number of people with disabilities within their borders, they are often viewed as unreliable and tend to grossly underestimate the number of people with disabilities within the country. Potential reasons for these miscalculations are due to poorly trained enumerators on the topic of disability, social stigmas, and limiting definitions.

### Definition of Disability

- The Americans with Disability Act (ADA), considered to be one of the world's leading pieces of legislation on disability rights, defines a person with a disability as someone who "has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities."<sup>1</sup>
- The newly adopted UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities has a slightly different definition. It states that "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."<sup>2</sup>
- Both the ADA and the UN specifically include people with mental (otherwise known as psychosocial) disabilities in their definitions. Psychosocial disabilities, which include disabilities such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, have historically been excluded from disability programs and services, especially in developing countries.

### Poverty and Disability

- The World Bank estimates that there are approximately 1.3 billion people living below the poverty line worldwide, of which people with disabilities make up around 20% of the poorest of the poor.<sup>3</sup>
- This translates into an estimated 260 million people with disabilities living in absolute poverty.

-----  
**September 2007**

This publication was prepared for the Office of Women in Development, United States Agency for International Development by Anne Hayes, IWID Fellow. Downloaded from [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov) **Keywords:** Women in Development

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Justice, "Americans with Disabilities Act," <http://www.ada.gov>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, "Final report of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities," ENABLE website: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/ahcfinalrepe.htm>

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, "Disability," <http://go.worldbank.org/0GWU0VOY0>

- The World Bank estimates that one in five people living on less than a \$1 a day have a disability.<sup>4</sup>
- There is a clear indication that poor people with disabilities are more likely to be caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and disability, each being both a cause and a consequence of the other.

### **Development and Disability**

- People with disabilities have traditionally been excluded or ignored from both domestic service programs and international development programs.
- Global estimates indicate that 90% of people with disabilities are illiterate and 80% live in isolated rural areas.<sup>5</sup> Almost that many live in areas where the services needed to help them are unavailable.
- Women and girls with disabilities are often at greater risk, both within and outside the home, of violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, discrimination, maltreatment, or exploitation. Furthermore, sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women often lead to psychological problems.
- HIV/AIDS, Malaria, TB, and other diseases are disabling and impoverishing, and they also increase the risk of secondary disabilities, increase child mortality, and worsen maternal health. Moreover, people with disabilities have often been excluded from HIV/AIDS and other health awareness raising activities, thereby further increasing the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other diseases among people with disabilities.
- People with disabilities are substantially more prone to being adversely affected by natural disasters, conflict, or other emergencies, yet they are continually excluded from disaster planning and response efforts.

### **USAID and Disability**<sup>6</sup>

- The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is committed to including people who have physical and mental disabilities and those who advocate and offer services on behalf of people with disabilities.
- This commitment extends from the design and implementation of USAID programming to advocacy for and outreach to people with disabilities.
- USAID's policy on disability (AAPD 04-17 Supporting USAID's Disability Policy in Contracts, Grants, and Cooperative Agreement) is to:
  1. Avoid discrimination against people with disabilities in USAID-funded programs;
  2. Stimulate an engagement of host country counterparts, governments, implementing organizations, and other donors in promoting a climate of nondiscrimination against and equal opportunity for people with disabilities;
  3. Promote the inclusion of people with disabilities both within USAID programs and in host countries where USAID has programs.
- USAID is also committed to inclusive development and the avoidance of building new barriers by ensuring that all new construction or renovation of structures, facilities, or buildings is done in an accessible manner through AAPD 05-07 Supporting USAID's Standards for Accessibility for the Disabled in Contracts, Grants, and Cooperative Agreements.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> USAID, "Disability and Development," [http://www.usaid.gov/about\\_usaid/disability/](http://www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/disability/)