

Voices of the Marginalised

Innovative and participatory research
for better and inclusive policymaking

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HelpAge
International

age helps



Sightsavers

Leaving no one behind

In September 2015, one hundred and ninety-three Member States of the United Nations formally adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, along with a set of 17 global goals to make the planet a better and safer place. For the first time in history, Member States have clearly committed to improve the lives of people with disabilities and older people who represent 15 per cent¹ and 11 per cent² of the world population respectively.

A collaborative approach

Sightsavers, ADD International, and HelpAge International believe that in order to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we must develop strong and inclusive policies based on evidence, and work in collaboration with people with disabilities and older people. Since 2012, with the support of two research institutes³, our jointly-led Voices of the Marginalised project has brought the perspectives of people with disabilities and older people into consideration, with the aim of sharing their experiences in terms of social, political, economic and cultural inclusion. The study was first conducted in Bangladesh, then in Tanzania.

1. World Report on Disability, World Health Organization and World Bank (2011), p. 28.
2. It represents those over age 60 as described by the UN Population Division in 2011.
3. The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in United Kingdom; the Ifakara Health Institute in Tanzania.

A unique, innovative project

There is a growing recognition of inequalities which arise from marginalisation, where those in excluded situations rarely have the opportunity for their voices to be heard. This invisibility is exacerbated by a lack of relevant data. Voices of the Marginalised aims to:

Build new evidence:

This research study provides a real opportunity to build a body of qualitative data so governments and development actors understand better the barriers confronting people with disabilities and older people. Bridging research and policy, along with tangible recommendations, is essential to improve the quality of life and participation of the most excluded people. This research comes at a time when governments are re-evaluating their national priorities as well as their spending and accountability mechanisms in the light of the 2030 Agenda.

Promote the use of creative and inclusive methodology:

The methodology used for this project was a community-based participatory approach, aiming equitably to involve community members, organisational representatives and external researchers in order to share resources and exchange knowledge. We brought together people with disabilities and older people who actively took part in the project by becoming researchers, being trained to collect and analyse stories from peers in rural and urban areas. Staff from local organisations were also trained as researchers to gather stories from colleagues working with people with disabilities and older people.



Emerging issues: Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the local researchers identified 13 emerging issues that particularly affect people with disabilities and older people based on 70 stories:

- Accidents and disasters
- Livelihoods
- Access to education
- Medical treatment
- Family support
- Exclusion and mistreatment
- Superstition
- Access to services
- Mobility
- Marriage
- Rape and sexual abuse
- The role of grassroots community-based organisations

Emerging issues: Tanzania

In Tanzania, the local researchers identified eight emerging issues that particularly affect people with disabilities and older people based on 106 stories:

- Access to education
- Health services
- NGO issues
- Poverty, income and dependence
- Witchcraft and albinism mistreatment
- Family difficulties and marriage breakup
- Sexual violence and gender issues
- Poor treatment from family and taking advantage of people with disabilities

In both countries, the different issues identified as critical to people with disabilities and older people were closely interrelated. For instance, not being able to earn an income has a direct impact on someone's ability to receive healthcare, while poor access to services often results from reduced local infrastructure. While stories exposed that all participants experience stigma and discrimination, people with disabilities and older people also experienced empowerment, with for example, the pride of living independently or being married. Findings indicate that the daily life for people with disabilities and older people is complex and requires a collaborative approach at a local, national and global level while also addressing individual, interpersonal and societal needs.

Our recommendations

Policymakers must:

- Ratify, implement and monitor the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and support the elaboration of a UN Convention on the Rights of Older People (UNCROP).
- Promote the full and equal participation of people with disabilities and older people in policy making at all levels, with systematic processes for meaningful engagement.
- Improve data collection and analysis mechanisms on both disability and ageing to increase knowledge.
- Raise awareness about the experiences of people with disabilities and older people to reduce stigma and discrimination.
- Ensure SDGs-compliant development to provide public services that are inclusive to people with disabilities and older people.

www.sightsavers.org/voices

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