

Handout 5

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT INCLUSION

HOW TO USE THIS HANDOUT

Use this handout with the following activity:

- **Excuses excuses**

A whole range of reasons are given when you ask why disabled people are not travelling on the 'main road' of development. Here are some of the most commonly held views – along with informed common sense responses.

'We need to sort out the problems of "normal" people first'

Disability IS normal. Disabled people are in every community. It's an expression of the diversity of the human race. Our perceptions are distorted by social norms which keep disabled people out of the public arena, and by the narrow vision of beauty presented in media images. Good development work challenges conditions which exclude the oppressed – disabled people are among the most oppressed.

'It's not cost effective'

Including disabled people is often seen as an 'extra'. It happens in an ideal world. It's a luxury. Saying 'we only have enough money for the basics, so we can't afford to include them' denies the reality that disabled peoples' needs ARE the basics. It doesn't necessarily cost much more to include them in development, especially if it is planned from the outset. For example, physical accessibility is estimated to account for additional construction costs of between 0.1 and 3.0 per cent.

'There aren't many disabled people here, so it's not an issue'

Disability is treated as a specialist area, often because of the misconception that their number is insignificant. This myth arises because many disabled people are invisible. In reality, they may be hidden away due to stigma, or are excluded from meetings because of a lack of access. If aid workers don't see disabled people in their work, they tend to assume they don't exist in the community. Disability affects the family as well as the individual, and they also face discrimination and increased poverty.

'We don't "do" disability'

Disabled people are often regarded as a distinct target group for separate programming. So some agencies specialise in disability and others do not, thinking their needs are already being dealt with. However, only a small

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number of disabled people participate in programmes of specialised agencies or targeted work. By not including disabled people, mainstream programmes fail to address the needs of a group who account for at least ten per cent – and perhaps up to 20 per cent – of any given population.

'We don't have the skills'

Working with disabled people is not significantly different from working with any other group. Many needs are the same. Sometimes the approach to meeting them is different. Disabled people themselves are the best experts and can often suggest modifications to make things work for them. It's largely about changing attitudes. Sometimes low-tech simple solutions can have a major impact on accessibility for disabled people.

'Let's create a special programme'

It's unrealistic to expect a single specialist intervention programme to address all the needs and rights of all disabled people – who are a diverse group. Many of these needs are shared by other people and are not disability-specific. They are best addressed within the framework of the whole community.

Perhaps you have come across other reasons why inclusion of disabled people isn't happening – what should a common sense response to them be?