



issue brief

What Is It?

When a person's physical or mental condition keeps them from being able to function in an expected manner.

A disability can be physical (such as paralysis, loss of limb, deafness), mental (such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder) or intellectual (such as a learning disability). Some people are born disabled; others become disabled as a result of an accident or disease. Disabilities range from moderate to significant and can be temporary or permanent. With the help of a supportive community, good education and vocational opportunities, disabled persons can progress.

Here are some statistics:

- 750 million people in the world are disabled, according to the World Health Organization (WHO)
- 80% of disabled people live in developing countries
- 10% of the population in poor countries is disabled
- 1 in every 10 children around the world copes with a disability
- Only 2–3% of disabled children in poor countries go to school

These numbers are gravely underestimated because disabled people are regularly shunned, isolated and stigmatized by their community so they are often not included in census reports. Families hide disabled children and exclude them from family and community activities.

Why Should I Care?

Disability Leads to Poverty

When persons with a disability are kept from attending school or finding work, they tend to be the poorest among the poor because they don't acquire any skills.

Many people in developing countries think that children with disabilities can't learn or develop skills, so not much is expected from them. In turn, they don't contribute to their communities but are considered to be a burden.

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Why Should I Care? (continued)

But Poverty Contributes to Disability

Poor people are at greater risk of becoming disabled. They also have fewer chances to overcome their disabilities. This increases the odds that they and their families will remain poor.

Children can be born disabled ...

Some children are born disabled because their mothers didn't receive prenatal care or had a hard time giving birth. Other times they are born disabled for unknown reasons.

Or become disabled during lifetime ...

Children can become disabled during childhood if they are malnourished, exposed to preventable childhood diseases, such as polio, or have an accident.

Countries coming out of war have many physically disabled people who got injured during conflict. If these people, especially men, suddenly find themselves unable to work and provide for their families, their welfare will suffer and they may become poorer.

People living in areas prone to conflict or natural hazards (such as hurricanes and droughts) disproportionately suffer from post-traumatic-stress disorder, depression and anxiety.

What Is the International Community Doing?

Demystifying Disability in Developing Countries

Dealing with disability is much more than just a health issue. The idea of who is disabled comes from people's cultures. For example, if a deaf child is taught to read lips and lives with people who speak in sign language, the child is not necessarily disabled and can contribute to society.

Including People with Disability into Society

People with disabilities must be helped to become productive members of society because this will improve the welfare and well being of the entire community. Sometimes solutions can be relatively simple, such as providing reading glasses to children, giving wheelchairs to those in need or constructing wheelchair accessible buildings.

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THINK ABOUT IT

How Disability is Affecting Some Countries

In **Uganda** disabled people are nearly 40% more likely to be poor, and children living in households with disabled family members are less likely to attend school.

In **Serbia**, the poverty rate of disabled people is 70%.

In **Honduras**, 51% of people with disabilities are illiterate compared to 19% for the general population. Only 31.5% of people with disabilities have jobs compared to 50.8% for non-disabled people.

What Is the International Community Doing? (continued)

In addition to helping people who have a disability, international organizations like UNICEF (www.unicef.org), WHO (www.who.org) and the World Bank (www.worldbank.org) work to prevent disability by:

- Improving healthcare in poor countries to help pregnant women and children get proper medical care
- Enabling disabled children to go to school and learn livelihood skills
- Removing landmines from fields to make sure people don't step on them

The World Bank has helped establish the Global Partnership on Disability and Development, an organization aimed at coordinating activities among donor countries, development agencies, NGOs, and client governments.

What Can I Do?

Check out these websites to learn more about disability:

- Save the Children (www.savethechildren.org)
- World Federation of the Deaf (www.hearinglossweb.com/res/hlorg/wfd.htm)
- Landmine Survivors Network (www.landminesurvivors.org)

For specific disability-oriented volunteer opportunities in communities around the world, please check out the volunteer listings on Idealist.org.