

iReflect

A Synthesis Review of Sightsavers' work on economic empowerment and financial inclusion



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Acronyms

ADL	Activities of Daily Life
ATP	Access Technology Project
BPO	Blind People's Organisation
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CBR	Community-Based Rehabilitation
CCB	Citizen Community Boards
DFID	Department of International Development
DPO	Disabled People's Organisation
EE	Economic Empowerment
GBU	Ghana Blind Union
IGA	Income Generating Activities
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IEC	Information, Education, Communication
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MoL	Ministry of Labour and Labour Relations (Sri Lanka)
MTR	Mid Term Review
NUDIPU	National Union of Disabled People in Uganda
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
O&M	Orientation and Mobility
PWD	People with Disabilities
PVI	People with Visual Impairment
RDS	Rural Development Society
SACCO	Saving and Credit Cooperative
SHG	Self Help Group
SLI	Sign Language Interpreter
UNAB	Uganda National Association of the Blind
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability
VCA	Value Chain Analysis
VIP	Visually Impaired Person
VTI	Vocational Training Institute
WHO	World Health Organisation
WO	Women's Organisation
YWD	Youth With Disabilities

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a synthesis report commissioned by Sightsavers to collate knowledge, experience and learning from Sightsavers' projects with an economic empowerment component. The presentation of good practice, gaps and resulting set of recommendations are to support the implementation of Sightsavers *Empowerment and Inclusion Strategic Framework*.

There is a clear evolution in Sightsavers' work in expanding from eye care and medical rehabilitation to a more holistic perspective on disability and inclusion. Economic Empowerment has been recognised as both a means and an end, in that economic empowerment contributes to social inclusion and tackles discrimination, and social inclusion promotes economic empowerment, and therefore improves the lives of people with disabilities directly.

The review has identified two main approaches – CBR which has developed to Social Inclusion with a focus on economic empowerment, and (self-)employment through vocational and ICT training. The approaches under review reflect the understanding that the CBR matrix provides guidance in addressing the situation of people with disabilities holistically, but that specific measures and a focus on employment and business are needed to push people with disabilities' opportunities for economic empowerment and social inclusion.

Increasingly, the need for understanding and using diverse market opportunities and accessing formal employment has become more apparent. This has meant an increase in business training as part of skill development training to ensure people with disabilities are able to understand and react to market demands. Enhancing employment opportunities through access to ICT for visually impaired people, diversifying tactics to include internships and apprenticeships and working specifically with Vocational Training Institutes to become inclusive (and promote inclusion) are part of the identified approaches to economic empowerment.

Sightsavers has increasingly recognised the need to specifically address the situation of women and girls, which is reflected in consistent data disaggregation in gender, training of stakeholders in gender and disability, and attempts to include women and girls. However, there needs to be a clearer understanding of the intersectionality of gender and disability, the difference between women-focused work and gender work, and analysis already at the design stage to determine how interventions might affect men and women differently.

Across Sightsavers' partners and projects it has been clear that advocacy is vital to support social inclusion interventions. Through Sightsavers (and project partners') training and mentoring, Self Help Groups (SHG) and Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), including

DPO youth wings, have become increasingly knowledgeable of and successful in demanding their rights to social protection entitlements and financial inclusion.

Advocacy on employment has not been quite as effective or advanced, which is in part due to the geographical context of the projects. However, more efforts to target employer platforms and reinforce, or add to, existing legislation around employment would be an important part of future advocacy strategies. Similarly, more attention would need to be directed towards the financial sector.

Sightsavers' choice of partners reflects the ambition to engage with a variety of organisations that bring a wealth of experience relevant to the context of the project for example, community development organisations, rights-based advocacy organisations and women's organisations. In addition, more recent projects, in particular, have made every effort to engage with people with disabilities around the choices for training and enterprises or employment to ensure interest and capacities are taken into consideration.

The involvement of stakeholders, especially participatory planning processes with people with diverse disabilities at the design stage, needs to be approached more systematically and with a common understanding across Sightsavers' programmes and partners.

Recommendations

At an organisational level

- Consider the development of an overarching Theory of Change for economic empowerment to draw on the various experiences from Sightsavers and other (I)NGOs work and expertise.
- Provide clearer guidance to programme staff and partners on equity-focused interventions for more effective inclusion of people with diverse impairments, also using the expertise of other international organisations with experience in social inclusion of all people with disabilities.

At a programmatic level

- Systematically conduct relevant studies like situation and market analyses, market trend and scoping studies etc. with findings followed up and documented so that the link between findings and subsequent interventions can be used for good practice case studies and evidence for advocacy and learning.
- Systematically conduct a gender analysis when a project is being developed to explore how the design would affect girls and women in relation to boys and men and what would need to be done to ensure equity. Consistent gender monitoring and the use of gender-responsive evaluation designs would reinforce an equity-focused approach.
- Develop an advocacy strategy that involves a shift from a purely needs-based focus on entitlement to a more rights-based focus, providing SHGs and DPOs with

practical skills in barrier analysis and conducting accessibility audits and awareness campaigns for more targeted advocacy.

- Systematically plan for and implement regular evaluations. Consider using impact studies to explore the success rate and factors following training, linkages and advocacy.

At project level

- Provide business training as a mandatory part of skills development training for business and enterprises to ensure greater viability.
- Include systematic follow up of trained people with disabilities, monitoring how they apply their skills and knowledge to self-employment. The projects should also include more efforts in connecting people with disabilities to employment after vocational and skill training to ensure long-term impact of the intervention.
- Promote more extensive documentation of successful employment and apprenticeship placements, as well as evidence of systematic mainstreaming processes of including people with disabilities into work forces to use as models/show cases for advocacy.
- Ensure more in-depth involvement of people with disabilities and other stakeholders in the design of projects. Vocational training institutions, formal financial institutions and prospective employers should be included not just as targets for advocacy but as collaborators in shaping projects.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Background

In June 2015 Sightsavers launched a new social inclusion strategy – the *Empowerment and Inclusion Strategic Framework* which is set within the Global Strategic Framework and aligned with other thematic strategies around eye health and education.

Based on feedback from Sightsavers' countries of intervention, economic empowerment and financial inclusion are priority areas of development for which project participants seek support.

Economic empowerment is defined by the OECD as

...the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth¹

It gives access to economic opportunities such as financial services, property and other assets needed for productive activities; and includes access to skills development and market information - and jobs.

The empowerment component within the term suggests that there is also a strong element of choice and decision-making on the part of poor and marginalised – in this context: people with disabilities.

In order for poor and marginalised people to have the means (information, skills, power) to make choices, economic empowerment underpins equity and vice versa.

Economic empowerment is a key prerequisite of an equity agenda supporting pro-poor growth. Allowing more people to participate in markets and act entrepreneurially fosters pro-poor growth, while the denial of economic opportunity traps people in poverty and limits growth²

The role of development agencies then is to support the creation of an enabling environment and societal change that supports empowerment.

¹ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/womenseconomicempowerment.htm>

² Tucker, J., Ludi, E. *Empowerment and Equity*, 2012 OECD;
<http://www.oecd.org/dac/povertyreduction/50157953.pdf>

Part of economic empowerment is financial inclusion, which the OECD defines as

“...the process of ensuring access to appropriate financial products and services needed by vulnerable groups such as weaker sections and low-income groups at an affordable cost in a fair and transparent manner by mainstream Institutional players.”³

Sightsavers emphasises that access has to be equitable and relevant and with special attention to the financial needs of the most marginalised, including rural, people with disabilities, women and other overlooked or excluded people. Clients need to be appropriately informed, so that they can make decisions about the management of their money and other assets. Quality services, for Sightsavers, are convenient, affordable, and are provided with the dignity and protection of clients in mind.

Financial inclusion applies, therefore, to the entire financial sector, from the structures that shape national banking policy, to the banking sector itself, to other financial service providers such as microfinance organisations⁴

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of the synthesis review is to collate knowledge, experience and learning from Sightsavers' projects with an economic empowerment component. The presentation of emerging good practice, the gaps and the resulting set of recommendations are to support the implementation of Sightsavers *Empowerment and Inclusion Strategic Framework*.

³ <http://www.oecd.org/finance/financial-education/48303408.pdf>

⁴ Sightsavers Social inclusion strategic framework – Information Sheet Financial Inclusion, 2015

2. Methodology

This synthesis review is based on a number of internal documents such as mid-term reviews, final evaluations and annual reviews of projects, as well as review reports on social inclusion and regional work and other supporting organisational documents, such as the Strategic Framework and Sightsavers' organisational Theory of Change for Social Inclusion.

The documents refer to projects and reviews of Sightsavers' work in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Ghana between 2005 and 2014

Semi-structured interviews/Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted with Sightsavers staff in the UK, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Uganda, and with a sample of people with disabilities in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India.

In addition, the review includes external research reports when they were deemed useful for Sightsavers and relevant to the context.

Text in purple and Annex 1, 5, 6 & 7 were written following the finalisation of the report by the consultant and was written by Sightsavers Evaluations Advisor (Karen Smith). The additions on Sri Lanka are informed by fieldwork in Sri Lanka from 23rd - 25th March 2016. In some areas, implications for Sightsavers have also been added to clarify and enhance the findings of report.

2.1 Projects Reviewed

Project	Country	Dates	Focus
CBR and empowerment project for blind and visually impaired people	Sierra Leone	2005 – 2009	CBR
Access Technology Project	Ghana	2006 - 2011	ICT training for people with visual impairments
Disabled People’s Livelihood Project	Sri Lanka	2005 – 2013	Livelihood-specific project under CBR umbrella
Disabled People’s Livelihood Project	Sri Lanka	2014 - 2016	Livelihood-specific project under CBR umbrella
Raipur District PRERAK	India	2007- 2010	CBR
Dhamtari Christian Hospital	India	2007 – 2010	CBR
MPVSS CED Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh	India	2008 – 2011	CBR
CBR project for visually impaired Barisal	Bangladesh	2008 – 2010	CBR
CBR and IE project AKSSUS	India	2009 – 2012	CBR
GPSVS	India	2009 – 2012	CBR
CBR Initiatives with Grassroots organisations ABC and CBBSH in Narsingdi and Cox’s Bazar	Bangladesh	2009 – 2011	CBR
Inclusive Community Development Through Mainstreaming people with disabilities Project	Pakistan	2008 - 2012	Empowerment of people with disabilities through mainstreaming under CBR umbrella
Raipur District GRIHINI project	India	2009 - 2013	CBR
Nagaur District UKS	India	2010 – 2013	CBR
Dumka District Chetna Vikas	India	2010 – 2012	CBR
Chittorgah District	India	2010 – 2013	CBR
VKKRS CBR/IE	India	No dates, MTR 2010	CBR
Review Report	Bangladesh	1999-2009	CBR
Connect the dots: Investing in youth with disabilities for enhanced access to employment	Uganda	2012 - 2016	(Self-) Employment-specific
Barrier-free social inclusion for people with disabilities project	Bangladesh	2013 - 2016	Social inclusion with strong economic component under CBR umbrella

3. Findings

3.1 Identified Project Approaches to Economic Empowerment

The review has identified two main approaches to economic empowerment interventions: Community-based rehabilitation - which developed to Social Inclusion with a focus on Economic Empowerment and (Self-) Employment approaches through vocational training and ICT.

This section looks at each of these approaches in turn, and how they developed from projects in which economic empowerment was a small part of a wider project on the inclusion of people with disabilities, to projects in which economic empowerment promoted and led to greater inclusion of people with disabilities. The following section provides references to and examples from specific projects, and identifies emerging good practices and challenges in addressing economic empowerment and financial inclusion.

3.1.1 Community-based rehabilitation

Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) has been a key approach of Sightsavers to improve the lives of people with visual impairments and other disabilities. Among the reviewed documentation, the earlier CBR projects started with a clear focus on health, i.e. eye care, medical rehabilitation for people with visual impairment (PVI), and education. Since 2009 Sightsavers' social inclusion work prioritised the establishment and capacity development of DPOs and Blind People's Organisations (BPOs), promoting socio-economic rehabilitation and empowerment through community-based development, and advocating for access to mainstream services. This development reflects Sightsavers commitment to broaden its scope for inclusion of all impairment groups in line with global frameworks such as the UNCRPD and the WHO CBR guidelines and matrix.⁵

Consequently, CBR projects attempted not only to address health and education but also the other CBR matrix components of livelihood, social and empowerment. All of the reviewed projects in India and Sierra Leone, and the majority of projects in Bangladesh (between 2005 and 2012) therefore addressed livelihoods as part of the socio-economic rehabilitation intervention with a focus on:

- Orientation and Mobility training (O&M)
- Daily Life skills training/Activities of Daily Life (ADL)
- Skills development for income generating activities (IGA)
- Formation and support of SHG; disability awareness and training on rights
- Facilitation of access to government social protection and welfare schemes

And some also included:

- Micro-finance activities

⁵ iReflect Social Inclusion Report, 2014

- Saving and credit activities within SHG setting

SHGs and DPOs

All projects have made it a point to establish and support SHGs, and engage with community and government stakeholders to raise awareness of the rights and needs of people with disabilities. As Sightsavers staff in India and Bangladesh (and confirmed by ADD International in Bangladesh) explained, SHG in India and Bangladesh operate entirely at village level and engage mostly in livelihood and grassroots-level advocacy and networking through committees at sub-district level⁶. At Block-level, SHG in India have representatives in DPOs who then have representatives at District-level DPOs, going on to State level and National level DPOs.

DPOs are responsible for advocacy related to the relevant political level, networking, and – as an example at District level in India shows - marketing of products that the SHGs have produced at village level. In Bangladesh, it was not always clear if SHGs were linked to a DPO, and what the precise differences between SHGs and DPOs were⁷, particularly at district and state level.

Process of economic empowerment in SHGs

Typically, SHGs are formed through a process of identification of people with disabilities by the project, followed by awareness raising activities targeting people with disabilities and their family members. These activities include information about their potential and their rights to access services. Getting people with disabilities together and supporting their independence in terms of mobility is a first step.

Individual and then, where possible, group livelihood initiatives with saving strategies are the next steps⁸. Indeed, more and more, the ambition is that SHGs develop group-based IGA and businesses. There seem to be a number of advantages to using the SHGs and group structure for IGA, such as:

- Potentially better access to loans due to higher collaterals
- Peer support (as well as pressure) to repay loans;
- Peer support on a social level⁹
- The opportunity to set up SHG-based revolving funds from group members' savings.

A more detailed account of the various stages that SHGs go through in achieving economic empowerment is provided in Annex 2 by example of India and Bangladesh.

^{6/7} Interview with key Sightsavers staff and ABC, Bangladesh, 10.1.2016, and India 14.1.2016

⁸ Interviews with Sightsavers key staff in India, Bangladesh, 10.1.-16.1.2016

⁹ An example is given in Sri Lanka, where a group IGA protected a woman with multiple disability from potential sexual abuse by a family member Sri Lanka Country Review Report, 2015

Other processes identified in project documentation include individual people with disabilities (mostly PVI) accessing small loans from local banks¹⁰, group micro-finance activities through SHG¹¹ or business groups, formed of disabled and non-disabled community members¹². The mid-term review of the Urmul Khejri Sansthan CBR project (2012) reported that some women with disabilities enrolled in existing micro-finance groups or made an effort to establish saving groups themselves. In this project, people with disabilities self-initiated micro-enterprises with the backing of their families and peers, and without the support of CBR staff¹³.

Such access to micro-credit (through partners, SHGs, or their own initiative) allowed individual and groups of people with disabilities across the majority of projects to open small businesses such as grocery stalls and petty shops, tailoring, and similar micro-businesses (e.g. bread-making and production of household items like ropes).

There is a spectrum along which SHG can be placed in regard to economic empowerment and corresponding developmental stages. At one end of the spectrum, SHG were formed many years ago with the intention to bring people with disabilities together and encourage peer support. Economic empowerment initiatives for these SHG developed much later. At the other end, some SHG were established by DPO members for the exclusive purpose of setting up a group enterprise aiming at establishing a cooperative. Annex 3 provides more detail on the variety of SHGs.

Another approach to group enterprises was taken in Sierra Leone, where the CBR project sub-contracted the micro-loan/IGA activities to a micro-finance agency that stipulated that the business groups must include both PBVI and sighted people. It seems that the reason was purely for convenience of disbursement because the money was intended for individual group members and not the group as a whole¹⁴.

The set up in its conception may have missed an interesting point, namely the idea of mixed SHGs from a community development and mainstreaming perspective. There are examples from West Africa (ADD International), where women's Saving For Change groups were set up with non-disabled and disabled community members to tackle poverty as well as disability-related stigma. Based on ADD's internal reviews and data (stories of change, small surveys) the initiative seemed to have a very positive impact on the change of attitude towards people with disabilities, and on augmented household income.

However, in India, there are government rules around the formation of SHGs. While originally SHGs were only for women, advocacy by the project including partners and DPOs resulted in adaptations to allow people with disabilities to form SHGs. But in order to access

¹⁰ CES-CUTS CBR project, MTR Chittorgarh, India, 2012

¹¹ CBR project Barisal final project evaluation 2010, Evaluation of Community-based Rehabilitation, Bangladesh 2011

¹² CBR project evaluation, , Sierra Leone, 2010

¹³ UKS CBR MTR, India, 2012

¹⁴ CBR project evaluation, Sierra Leone, 2010

special grants for people with disabilities, a SHG must consist entirely of people with disabilities and cannot be mixed¹⁵.

In addition, a SHG in Dhaka, Bangladesh, (further detail in Annex 3) deliberately decided against accepting non-disabled members because individual people have had negative experiences with community saving groups and wanted to take advantage of the peer confidence-and-trust dynamics of an exclusively disabled SHG with a focus on disability-related issues before considering non-disabled members in the future¹⁶.

In summary, the formation of SHG is an important part of mobilising people with disabilities into organisational structures that provide peer support and create self-confidence, higher visibility in communities and a stronger voice in campaigning for entitlements, as well as change in attitudes and practice around economic rights and productivity. SHGs develop and work in contexts that may have different legal and social conditions. There is no precise formula that guarantees success under any circumstances. What seems to be clear is the importance of having a well-defined purpose for any SHG and understanding of the needs, conditions, and potential limitations that come with it.

Entitlement and government social protection schemes

A fairly consistent aspect of the economic rehabilitation approach by Sightsavers' projects has been the facilitation of special government allowances and access to support systems for people with disabilities, especially in India and Bangladesh through SHGs and/or support by partners. The process of formally registering and certifying people with disabilities allows them to receive pensions or disability allowances, travel concession passes, MGNREGA job cards in India (which guarantee them up to 100 days of employed and paid work per year), housing support, food subsidies and other benefits. Initially, not all projects were deemed to have adequate knowledge of various schemes and links with government departments for the provision of assistive devices¹⁷, however later documentation of some of these projects attested to having filled the gap.

The facilitation of access to social protection and welfare schemes is important. It provides some financial relief and is a stepping stone to economic opportunities - for example, free transport passes enable people with disabilities to bring their products to markets farther away; disability allowances, feeding schemes, housing etc. help alleviate extreme financial hardship and may provide some resources for supporting a small business.

However, the Bangladesh Social Inclusion review, 2014, is critical of the over-emphasis on entitlement and welfare schemes at individual level.

Since many are poorly educated and struggle with income their priorities are necessarily linked to self-improvement. When disabled

¹⁵ Interview with Sightsavers staff, Bhubaneswar, 14.01.2016

¹⁶ FGD with SHG, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 12.01.2016

¹⁷ GBSVS CBR MTR, 2010; PRERAK CBR India 2007-2010; Dhamtari Christian Hospital, final evaluation 2010

people are brought together in self help groups there is a tendency for them to focus on access to entitlements and income generation once they have become aware that these things are possible.

[...]

This tendency to view the problem as a needs based issue (one of deprivation and lack of access to services) rather than a rights based one (which focuses on the interface between disabled people and communities/services) has led to problems with defining exactly what the social inclusion program is focused on and how to appropriately support self help groups. The results of this are that self help groups are more needs based also, with many of them serving to provide access to welfare services and income generating opportunities¹⁸

The evaluator suggests providing SHG with a few skills such as conducting accessibility audits and barrier analyses, and implement awareness raising campaigns and action research. These skills would give SHG members a better understanding and tools to conduct their own advocacy reflecting their context, and with a greater chance of sustainability.

Sightsavers staff in India made clear that their understanding of economic empowerment, based on consultations with people with disabilities, accepts that economic empowerment at this stage is (and must be) needs-based as a precondition for rights-based empowerment approaches in regard to DPO development and enabling environment¹⁹ (Annex 4 provides more detail on examples of advocacy efforts by DPOs at different levels in India).

The perspectives as paraphrased above seem to reflect the tension between different priorities. To a degree, it comes back to the purpose of SHG: if they are formed explicitly for income/profit-making, leaving all issues around rights to DPOs then the separation of tasks and responsibility is clear. The SHG functions and is in fact a cooperative. In cases where SHG are not linked to a DPO or where there is limited interface between DPO and SHG then empowerment approaches through skills development in auditing and barrier analysis would be important to enable the SHG to make choices about their own development.

Economic Empowerment Outcomes for SHG/DPOs

As described in the above section, the majority of SHG and DPOs developed and/or supported through CBR projects focus on individual financial support through access to government schemes and social protection. Capacity development is directed towards the mobilisation of people with disabilities and organisational structures.

¹⁸ Sightsavers Social Inclusion Review, Bangladesh 2014

¹⁹ Interview with Sightsavers key staff, India, 14.1.2016

The MTR of the Barrier-free inclusive society project concludes, and interviews with beneficiaries and SHGs in Bangladesh confirmed, that over the course of the project's implementation and support, Sightsavers and partners have realised the strength of group approaches to livelihoods. SHGs have started to understand the necessity of basic market research and developing business plans²⁰. They also realise the strength of their unity that provides shared knowledge and the necessary confidence to approach a variety of stakeholders and lobby them to promote access and inclusion of SHG members in community businesses and community development plans.

Some SHG members are negotiating access to *khas* land (government owned land) to set up their own office/businesses with the District Commissioner's office's help. The Assistant District Commissioner (Land) has given his verbal commitment to lease or donate *khas* land to a SHG where land is available²¹.

One SHG has proven to be quite resourceful in establishing income and points to the variety of opportunities to attract continuous income.

While discussing with one of the SHGs (named RPKS) in Raipura Sub-district of Narsingdi, the MTR Team was told that they have more than 30,000 BDT of group savings deposited to a bank. The group has their own bank account. They own 4 rickshaw vans, which are rented to non-disabled drivers for money²².

With more successful enterprises, SHG members act as role models for others. They are expected to share their knowledge and expertise and encourage more members to get involved in business ventures²³.

The outcome of economic empowerment for SHGs depends to some degree on the purpose behind the formation to understand starting points. However, there seems to be a cycle of interlinked aspects supporting economic empowerment: as individual members of SHGs confirm, it takes confidence to start a business. This usually starts with individual livelihood initiatives. With growing success of the business, people with disabilities become more confident and willing to invest in bigger enterprises. The unity and trust within the SHG and the access to information and willingness to share knowledge and information bind the SHG members closer together. This creates a willingness to work together and take the risk to invest in group enterprises.

Where there is cohesion and economic success, SHGs become go-to organisations for non-disabled community members who seek advice and information²⁴, which contributes to changing attitudes.

²⁰ Interview with SHG in Narsingdi, Bangladesh, 11.1.2016

²¹ Barrier-free Inclusive Society for PWD, MTR, Bangladesh 2015

²² Barrier-free Inclusive Society for PWD, MTR, Bangladesh 2015

²³ Interview with SHG, Bangladesh, 10./11.1.2016

Findings on SHGs: Implications for Sightsavers

Continue working with and through SHGs, but ensure that the purpose of group formation is clear. The members of the SHG should be selected and trained according to the purpose of the group. For example, a SHG intended as a group enterprise will need a confident, strong leader, literate members and business and financial literacy training to ensure success.

Sightsavers should, however, be careful not to predetermine group direction and to work with SHGs to support them in determining what the aims and purpose of their group will be.

3.1.2 Social Inclusion approaches with a specific focus on Economic Empowerment

The evaluator for the CBR project in Cox's Bazar and Narsingdi mentions that "true CBR" should address all components of the CBR matrix. While there are clear links between and across components (e.g. better health is a precondition for being able to work for income; income affects self-esteem and confidence and achieves a better social standing in the family and community, which positively influences health and well-being etc.), the reality is also that there are limited resources and often not all components can be given equal attention.

The change from more traditional CBR to an approach focusing on social inclusion with specific attention to economic empowerment has reached across Sightsavers' programmes following a global workshop in 2009, and is based on subsequent extensive consultation, analysis and mapping processes across Sightsavers and in collaboration with other organisations, e.g. Action Aid and CBR platforms²⁵.

Sightsavers undertook a review of CBR in 2010 and a study on DPOs and on community development programmes in 2011 in India. Based on the findings, the India Social Inclusion Strategy 2012 commits to comprehensive coverage of all elements under the livelihood component. It also acknowledges the need to work more on DPO development as a means of empowerment and self-advocacy for people with disabilities. Where before, partners selected for the CBR projects were general development organisations without exposure to or knowledge of disability, the attention in India is now on a rights-based agenda that focuses on people with disabilities to take up their cause²⁶. However, the choice of partners in Sightsavers' CBR projects reflects the understanding of bringing in expertise in certain areas, for example rights-based advocacy, mainstream development organisations, women's groups and disability organisations.

Sightsavers India's Social Inclusion Strategy 2014-2018 has narrowed down the focus on three objectives:

1. Economic Empowerment (needs-based)
2. DPO empowerment (rights-based)

²⁴ Interview with SHG in Narsingdi, Bangladesh, 11.1.2016

²⁵ Interview with Sightsavers key staff, India, 14.1.2016

²⁶ India Social Inclusion Strategy 2012

3. Enabling environment (rights-based)

According to key staff of Sightsavers India, livelihood is the common denominator that brings people together²⁷. Economic empowerment understandably is a priority area for people with disabilities, not only for the income and related buying power but also because poverty is a huge factor when it comes to respect and standing in families and communities. It is often a more important factor even than the disability in the sense that a well-off disabled person is likely to be more valued and asked for advice than a non-disabled but poorer person²⁸.

The current focus remains on entitlement and self-employment in the form of individual or – where possible and appropriate – group enterprises as many of Sightsavers' project areas in India are rural with not much industry that could provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities²⁹.

Other recent **social inclusion and empowerment projects in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan** were designed utilising the WHO CBR guidelines and building on existing community-based initiatives and support while putting a deliberate emphasis on livelihood and economic empowerment as part of a social inclusion approach³⁰. These are new approaches to economic empowerment for Sightsavers and will therefore be presented in some detail, highlighting areas of strength and challenges that are specific to these projects, to enhance learning.

Pakistan: mainstreaming as a strategy for social inclusion

In Pakistan, the project focused on **mainstreaming as a strategy for social inclusion** by forming men's and women's community organisations and registering them as Citizen Community Boards (CCB) and Women's Organisations (WO) respectively. People with disabilities were linked to these and upon membership were eligible to participate in decision-making processes that affected the whole community (such as improved infrastructure and sanitation) with particular attention to the needs of people with disabilities³¹.

What has been a fairly new project component is that the project **explicitly included women with disabilities** to ensure they benefited from training, capacity development, decision-making processes (if only within the WO), and livelihood training and activities, e.g. livestock management, tailoring and stitching. They also received small loans from micro-credit schemes of village-based CBOs and contributed to cumulative saving funds within the WO to avail individual women to small loans on a rotating basis³². This is an important step towards gender-responsive programming, as most previously mentioned CBR projects

²⁷ Interview with Sightsavers key staff, India, 14.1.2016

²⁸ Based on FGD with disabled people in Bangladesh, 2012 by this consultant

²⁹ Interview with Sightsavers key staff, India, 14.1.2016

³⁰ Empowerment PWD through inclusive development, project proposal Pakistan 2012; Sri Lanka Country Review Report, 2014; Bangladesh EC Grant Application 2011

³¹ DFID Inclusive development through mainstreaming PWD, final evaluation, Pakistan 2012

³² DFID Inclusive development through mainstreaming PWD, MTR, Pakistan 2010

had women with disabilities as participants. However, the intent to ensure women's access to and benefit from skills and capacity development and decision-making processes was less categorical and deliberate.

CCBs and WOs have contributed 20% of costs to community development projects such as ramps, pavements and accessible latrines, which has increased a sense of ownership and helps provide a focus on “**contribution**” of people with disabilities for the benefit of the **entire community**. This constitutes an important step in overcoming prejudice against people with disabilities. Moreover, it is also a strategic step of mainstreaming in that it draws attention to needs that concern people with and without disability equally and encourages joining forces to overcome challenges.

Like the other CBR projects mentioned previously, the main approach to the livelihood component remains within activities of IGA and micro-financing. While this is certainly an important part of economic empowerment, especially in rural areas, it seems that other opportunities such as **access to employment** are neglected.

For example, people with disabilities in Pakistan need to be formally registered to be able to compete for employment in line with the Government's law stipulating that employers must include a certain percentage of registered people with disabilities in their workforce. However, most employers, especially the larger ones, choose to pay a fee in lieu of meeting the quotas³⁷. According to the MTR report, the Disability Registration Board appears to be quite happy with receiving penalty fees as it provides funds for its work. The MTR clearly recommended challenging this position in order to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Further recommendations refer to increased efforts to link with the project partner DPO STEP who was implementing programmes on *Accessible Employment* and similar initiatives and with the Lahore Business Association for Rehabilitation of the Disabled (LABARD). Unfortunately, in the final evaluation there is no further reference to either advocacy on employment or linking with the mentioned organisations and potential employers.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka: projects focusing on economic empowerment/livelihoods

The *Barrier-free inclusive society for people with disabilities* project in **Bangladesh** and the *Disabled People's Livelihood* project in **Sri Lanka** have expanded activities under the livelihood component to include **access to wage employment** through linking with the private and public sector, and incorporated training on business planning and marketing (see Annex 5 for Sri Lanka Case Study³³). BVIPS, as one of the main partners in the Barrier-free inclusive society project, helped improve accessibility of ICT in education, and have developed accessible software for PVI and an IT access training course. This is a course especially for visually impaired people, which is in the process of achieving

³³ Sightsavers made the organisational level decision to withdraw from Sri Lanka, so a more detailed case study was documented during the visit to ensure lessons from the social inclusion work were fully captured.

nationally recognised certification status³⁴. Bangladesh also initiated apprenticeship programmes in collaboration with the Polytechnic College and internships with different organisations who indicated they would keep on a number of people with disabilities after the end of the internship³⁵.

Both countries developed databases of people with disabilities to promote the products, skills and availability of people with disabilities to employers and provides information of potential markets and employers. Annex 6 describes the characteristics of both of these and the strengths and challenges of these. In Sri Lanka, the database is linked to the Ministry of Labour and appears on their website. In Bangladesh, the website is in its final editing stages and received further feedback and editing suggestions from this consultant and Sightsavers staff during the project visit for this report.

There are a number of initiatives present in either or both projects that reflect a better understanding of what is needed to boost the success of economic interventions such as:

- ✓ The combination of activities and trainings, such as employment-oriented skills training, provision of start-up capital for businesses, vocational training, job fairs and the training on business management and marketing, reflects an understanding of overlapping issues that people with disabilities face in improving their economic circumstances, and the multi-faceted requirements to enhance the chances of economic success.
- ✓ Both projects offered (if on a limited scale) group livelihood projects involving SHGs, managing Savings And Credit Cooperatives (SACCO) in Bangladesh, or community group enterprises (Sri Lanka) that were able to secure contracts with local producers and garment factories respectively. This is a trend that is proving to be more successful (lucrative) and potentially sustainable than individual IGA.
- ✓ Particularly in Bangladesh, it seems the project made every effort to consider initiatives that are not the typical run of the mill (e.g. petty shops, tailoring), but based its business ideas on both interest and market demand - for example, a solar-based electricity supply in rural areas; production and supply of simple packaging services - e.g. boxes and shopping bags to various local producers; establishing a carpentry unit with provision of production and supply of needs-based assistive devices to persons with disabilities – these constitute community-based businesses with a perspective of market demand-driven opportunities.
- ✓ The database (as described above) and – in Bangladesh – a resource centre with a library, a hotline and a job cell have great potential to link people with disabilities with employment opportunities and economic initiatives.
- ✓ Both projects forged links with government, private sector and business institutions for e.g. free business consultations (Sri Lanka) and/or market-based consultancy firms and community-based business (Bangladesh). The choice of collaborators

³⁴ Bangladesh Social Inclusion review, 2014

³⁵ Annual report, Barrier-free inclusive society for PWD project, Bangladesh, 2014

reflects the progress from focusing on small-scale income for individuals only to seeking employment opportunities and more diverse options in self-employment.

Findings on projects specifically focusing on economic empowerment: Implications for Sightsavers

The focus on economic empowerment as a key part of Social Inclusion has been informed by evidence-based decisions across projects and programmes.

Projects focusing on economic empowerment need to consider a diverse range of self-employment activities, which go beyond the traditional small scale IGA. These activities should be backed by comprehensive training, including business training and market analysis. Initiatives should be linked to a variety of stakeholders, including Government, private sector and business institutions.

Consider more focus on (and support for) group enterprises where appropriate, as these appear to be more lucrative. There should be further exploration of the potential and challenges of forming groups with persons with disabilities and non-disabled members to address stigma and discrimination and support the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Particular attention should be paid to the effects of forming separate Women's /Men's groups.

3.1.3 (Self-) Employment approaches through vocational and ICT training

Two projects in Uganda - '*Connecting the dots - Investing in Youths with Disabilities for Enhanced Access to Employment*' and '*The Access Technology Project*' in Ghana – have approached economic empowerment from an angle focusing on vocational and ICT training to increase the employment and self-employment opportunities for young people with disabilities. The Youth Employment project in Uganda was designed for all impairment groups; in Ghana it was directed specifically at visually impaired people already in employment and students at High Schools, colleges and universities.

Connect the Dots: Youth Employment project Uganda

The Youth Employment project is the first social inclusion project for the Uganda programme and has imbedded a number of principles that are important for the success of such interventions, for example:

- ✓ Combining a **thorough market analysis with screening the participating youth** to match the ability and educational level of young men and women with disabilities to demand-driven skills and market-relevant courses³⁶.

³⁶ Connect the dots- youth employment project, MTR, Uganda 2014; Connect the dots – Annual Project Report, Uganda, 2013

- ✓ Working closely with VTI by conducting **accessibility audits**- this has led to improved physical accessibility such as ramps, wider pathways and disability-friendly toilets, and – over time – to better technical adaptations through training for instructors in Braille and Sign Language.
- ✓ Offering **both formal and non-formal systems of training** by the partner VTI to match the various educational levels of youth with disabilities. The non-formal system is modularised and customised to admit and train youth with disabilities who have low or no formal qualifications³⁷.
- ✓ Forming **youth structures within DPOs** and equipping them with advocacy skills to lobby better for their rights both at organisational and local authority level - for example, youth structures are negotiating with VTI and local government to provide bursaries for poorer youths with disabilities who can't afford the training fees³⁸. The youth structures are also reported to have good participation of young women with disabilities³⁹.
- ✓ Forming **parents' networks** to participate in functional assessments, providing peer support to other families with youth with disabilities, and exchanging information. The family context is critical, as youth with disabilities are often either over-protected, or parents are very sceptical about their children's abilities and potential. These Parent Associations and networks have contributed to changing negative attitudes⁴⁰.

³⁷ Connect the dots – Annual Project Report, Uganda, 2013

³⁸ (telephone) Interview with Sightsavers project manager, Uganda, 28.1.2016

³⁹ Connect the dots- youth employment project, MTR, Uganda 2014

⁴⁰ Connect the dots, Uganda Policy Analysis, 2015

The case study presented in Box 1 is based on conversations with key Sightsavers staff in Uganda and describes the process of linking project participants with the market⁴¹.

Box 1: Case study – Youth Employment project, Uganda

After skills training at a VTI, the youths are linked with a business to gain experience on how to run a business (for example, auto-mechanic, carpentry, restaurant, or beauty salon). The placed trainees learn how to apply their skills in real-life business to further hone their skills but also to learn “soft” skills, such as how to talk to customers, plan for the purchase of material, etc.

After the placement, the youth can decide if they want to start their own business, or if they want to seek employment. Some are retained by the businesses of their placement.

For those who want to start self-employment, the project helps to connect them to the market in their original community with the support of the VTI, who send people to follow up on the ex-trainees and assess if they would need further support or experience, e.g. through mentoring at a suitable work place.

There is a clear purpose of involving the VTI in the follow-up of trained youths with disabilities to ensure continued support for the young people, but also to shift some of the responsibility for quality control and sustainability to the training institutes. The VTI have professed to be keen to continue with inclusive training and commit to create awareness and capacity-building in their communities to let families with young people with disabilities know that they are able to provide training⁴².

Despite the very thorough approach, the Youth Employment project in Uganda has faced a few **challenges regarding long-term success of youth and sustainability of the project**- for example:

- The quality of VTI differs, and not all training courses for youth with disabilities are the same. Many young people with disabilities have low educational backgrounds and even though VTI adjust and offer more non-formal trainings to cater to these youth, the downside is that these training course are often shorter and scaled down⁴⁸. Therefore, the chances for developing successful businesses despite lower scale training depend very much on the entrepreneurial spirit and motivation of the individual, as well as supportive environment – which is not always given.
- When the project finishes in spring 2016, there will be no further funding to finance the training of young people with disabilities and the provision of start-up kits. Only

⁴¹ (telephone) interview with key Sightsavers staff, Uganda, 28.1./03.02.2016

⁴² (Telephone) interview with Sightsavers project manager, Uganda, 28.1.2016

families who can afford the training fees can enrol their young people with disabilities in the training and provide start-up capital.

In contrast to Bangladesh and India, where group enterprises are becoming a favoured approach to livelihood, Uganda's context is slightly different. Because people with disabilities live much more scattered (due to much less densely populated areas) there is less scope for group activities and/or a market to serve them. The DPOs, Uganda National Association of the Blind (UNAB) and the National Union of Disabled People of Uganda (NUDIPU) have branches in the districts and at sub-country level, and the project has made use of the existing structures to reach and support young people with disabilities. Even though the project has encouraged young people with disabilities, especially from more remote areas, to move closer to towns where there are market opportunities, such a move and motivation to work as a group does not come as naturally as it seems to occur in India or Bangladesh⁴³.

The Ghana Access Technology Project (ATP)

The ATP was based on the initiative by the then Ghana Society for the Blind, now Ghana Blind Union (GBU), who set up the first ever Computer Learning Centre for the Blind in 2002. In 2003 the government policy Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD) was launched and soon after the Special Education Division (SPED) for the Ghana Education Service (GES) realised the need to partner with GBU and other stakeholders to make ICT affordable and accessible for people with visual impairments, thereby improving their education and substantially increasing their opportunities for and in employment.

In 2012 Sightsavers and GBU started the 3-year Access Technology project with an emphasis on attaining quality education, greater diversity of employment opportunities and access to leisure for blind and partially sighted people. Previous activities of setting up satellite centres and ICT training were accompanied by the development of specific computer software, career fairs to connect people with disabilities with prospective employers, and creating a pool of ICT-trained blind and partially sighted people to be available as trainers for others.

The project linked successfully with the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communication (GIFEC) for the provision of state-of-the-art equipment, and organised exchange visits to India and a conference in Thailand for GBU staff⁴⁴ to ensure being at the most current level of ICT development. The Standard Chartered Bank organised workshops on CV writing and interviewing skills for university students to prepare them for the job market after their graduation.

This approach of providing access to ICT training and preparing for the job market through CV and interviewing skills development is very practical and delivers on skills that are often

⁴³ (telephone) Interview with Sightsavers programme manager and country director, 3.2.2016

⁴⁴ Annual Report ATP project Ghana, 2013

overlooked in the context of employment: it helps gain confidence and engage with potential employers and colleagues. ICT competency also enables persons with disabilities to complete tasks at the university or in existing jobs with greater independence. This project appears to have a lot of potential, considering the fast pace of technological development and increasing dependence on ICT and related technology.

In addition, job fairs and awareness raising of potential employers have been seen as successful in that people have become more open-minded about people with disabilities employability⁴⁵.

According to the evaluation, the project also undertook advisory interventions with employers in cases where an employed person acquired a visual impairment, to help both employer and employee to adapt to the new situation. Such initiatives could well work with a variety of impairments and use the experience and process of adaptation to advocate more broadly for inclusion of persons with disabilities at the workplace.

However, the review of documents highlighted a number of challenges in the project design and implementation, which seem to have reduced the longer-term effectiveness and potential, for example:

- The **limited engagement of the project with school administration** failed to ensure that schools would set aside resources and space for the infrastructure and maintenance of satellite centres, including adequate equipment, software, internet connectivity and ICT trainers
- It seems there was **no systematic approach to assess the relevance, knowledge and skills addressed** through the training, to monitor and evaluate the outcome of the training in regard to the subsequent performance at their workplace or schools, or their success in securing employment.
- Initial training of trainers was only provided in 2007 and 2008 with one refresher course in 2011. There was no needs assessment of trainers to ensure they had knowledge of current thinking and developments, or to support them in pedagogical matters. In addition, there was **no follow up on trainees who could have been part of a pool of trained ICT personnel to step in as potential ICT trainers**⁴⁶.
- It seemed to be beyond the scope of the project to actually facilitate employment (other than through job fairs) and left this to its partner GBU without further activities to support GBU in that objective⁴⁷. Without linking trained people with disabilities to the hiring market, there is a real risk that the sceptical attitude of employers towards persons with disabilities will not lead to their employment. There is a tendency to provide training and facilitate job offers but true

⁴⁵ Ghana Mission Report, Laurène Leclercq, 2015

⁴⁶ Access Technology Project, Evaluation, Ghana, 2013

⁴⁷ Access Technology Project, Evaluation, Ghana, 2013

effectiveness and impact is only achieved when there is a level of certainty around successful application of skills and knowledge and consistent employment without early drop-out due to persistent barriers.

Overall, the project would have benefitted from better planning particularly in terms of establishing better linkages and collaborations with schools, other ICT training centres, and the government to take full advantage of the created workforce and knowledge base for a larger spread and impact, but also to take the opportunity to lobby for better inclusion of young women with disabilities in higher education.

The project had a focus on a very select group of people, i.e. educated and predominantly male visually impaired persons and therefore has limited reach, but providing ICT access to address the exclusion of this impairment group opens up a variety of significant opportunities for education and employment.

Findings on (self-) employment approaches through Vocational and ICT training: Implications for Sightsavers

Projects looking at Vocational and/or ICT Training need to identify and understand the target groups for these interventions and the implications of this for Sightsavers' strategic direction. Planning should focus on both supply (the availability of employment and training in the project area) and demand (the willingness and ability of persons with disabilities to take up training and employment). By focusing on both these areas and using participatory methods to identify issues in the design stage, projects will have a greater chance of ensuring sustainable (self-) employment for persons with disabilities.

3.2 Project Planning and Implementation

This section explores specific aspects of the planning and implementation process, particularly in regard to market studies, baselines and context analyses, gender, using advocacy and engagement of beneficiaries and stakeholders in the design of economic empowerment projects.

3.2.1 Situational analysis, market and context analysis

There is an evident evolution in Sightsavers' practice of baseline studies, situation/context analyses and market analyses, which is partly linked to donor requirements, but also reflects a clear commitment to understand the environment and set the projects in the socio-economic context.

Baselines have been conducted inconsistently and gaps are evident in some projects where the data collected was only quantitative⁴⁸, limited to certain impairments because the CBR workers did not have the appropriate level of knowledge to confidently identify other disabilities, especially intellectual or mental health related disabilities⁴⁹, or were geographically incomplete⁵⁰. Where there was a complete lack of baseline, it was difficult to adequately assess the achievements in economic interventions⁵¹.

Bangladesh's "*Barrier-free inclusive society for people with disabilities*" project (2013-2016) had planned a baseline. However, in the absence of national disability prevalence figures, the Department of Social Service decided to conduct a door-to-door survey and so the baseline survey was cancelled, presumably so as not to replicate work. This is a fairly common dilemma and though it is important that the government sections produce and disseminate such data, the timing does not always coincide with the project cycle. The absence of a baseline then requires the project to be especially rigorous in its M&E systems and either establish a baseline retrospectively, or keep a close eye on the process and the emerging data.

The GRIHNI CBR project in Raipur started its next project phase for 2013-2015 with a new baseline survey, which showed the gaps in entitlements for people with disabilities. The data was used to advocate for access to government financial support systems and assistive devices. The project also conducted a situational analysis based on document reviews, i.e. secondary data from government reports (e.g. census, Disability Policy Framework, NSSO survey on employment) and learning from previous projects, which included references to people with disabilities and especially women⁵². This reflects the commitment to the India Social Inclusion Strategy 2012 and the increased effort in basing its work on the current context.

⁴⁸ GPSVS CBR MTR 2011, India

⁴⁹ Rajasthan UKS CBR MTR India, 2011;

⁵⁰ CES-CUTS, Rajasthan, MTR 2012, India

⁵¹ Disabled People's Livelihood project evaluation, Sri Lanka, 2012

⁵² Raipur District Social Inclusion Project – funding agreement, India 2014

All CBR projects were criticised in both mid-term reviews and final evaluations for their lack of **market analysis and feasibility studies**, the very limited understanding of the economic environment and the failure to map potential formal and/or institutional partners and collaborators with more expertise.

This overemphasis on IGA and self-employment may miss the other opportunities to explore other paths to make the PVIs economically solvent, like through occupational rehabilitation in community driven projects, employment generation within private and public sectors, and also to explore the opportunity to create access for the VIP [Visually Impaired People] to productive assets like khasland and khas water bodies.

Even the IGA issues for training have been selected discretely and 'intuitively only' alone by the project managers. There is no provision of scanning of which IGA and skill transfer training have more potential to sustain and create augmented income opportunities. Required skills for one community can be different due to many reasons like geographical uniqueness, population profile, disaster proneness, and different economic activity concentration and on others. Skill needs assessment and marketability scanning for issues to be selected for IGA training has not been conducted⁵³.

In contrast, and as explored earlier, Uganda's project *Investing in Youth for improved access to employment* (2012-2016) planned and implemented a comprehensive market analysis/baseline survey and screening of youths to match them with appropriate vocational institutes. The accessibility audits of all VTI not only supported the process of adapting them to the different impairment needs, but also helped establish a good relationship with and excellent attitude to the VTI trainers⁵⁴.

The *Barrier-free inclusive society for people with disabilities* project in Bangladesh undertook **scoping studies** on marketable trades and skills for self-employment as well as identification of skill sets required by potential employers. There was a clear directive to match market demands and job providers with appropriately trained and skilled people with disabilities. However, the studies have only been conducted later in the project and the report was not available at the time of the MTR writing. Similarly, a **Knowledge, Attitude and Practice study** was being conducted at the time of the MTR.

⁵³ Evaluation of Community-based Rehabilitation, Bangladesh 2011

⁵⁴ Connect the dots, Uganda Policy Analysis, 2015

Sri Lanka's "*Disabled People's Livelihood Project*" (2010-2013) lists various surveys in its proposal to the Scottish International Development Fund, including a baseline survey to benchmark for livelihood security, for people with disabilities skills mapping and for marketable skills and businesses. Beneficiaries and stakeholders were to participate in the development and use of tools, data collection and reporting formats. This appears to be a rigorous and participatory approach - however, in the available annual reports and the final evaluation of the project, there is no mention of either baseline survey or market study.

In fact, the baseline study conducted was not of good quality and so was not used in the project. There was also no baseline for the 2014 – 2016 project. However, this project did include a simple market analysis, conducted by WDC staff and volunteers, who met with divisional and district authorities and went to different places to see which products were in high demand. This market analysis was communicated to persons with disabilities during business plan development, thus building their ability to assess markets in future. This is an interesting approach in terms of sustainability and building the capacity of persons with disabilities to grow and develop businesses after project exit.

The Summary Description of Social Inclusion work in Sri Lanka from 2014 reports on **value chain analyses (VCAs)**, which include information on available resources, utilisation of resources, and patterns of economic activities. VCA is described as 'the process of documenting and analysing the operation of value chain [i.e. all activities that are requisite for the bringing a product or service from conception through the phases of production to the delivery to the consumers and final disposal after use], and usually involves mapping the main actors and calculating the added value along with its different links⁵⁵. Based on these value chain analyses, the project supported the development of individual and group income generation, and the identification of job opportunities. Unfortunately, there is no further detail or assessment of its effective application in the project evaluation or country review. However, the concept of VCA is interesting and could be especially useful when it is applied in the context of gender and access to employment and livelihood initiatives.

During interviews WDC highlighted the VCA as an important aspect of the project. Full VCA analyses were not being conducted, but the VCA training was being used as a way of thinking about and identifying different opportunities for persons with disabilities.

What the final evaluation does highlight are a number of difficulties in successfully achieving effective employment and IGA. These difficulties seem to point to the **underestimation of attitudes by people with disabilities themselves and their families** for example that young people were more interested in short-term access to livelihood than in spending time in VTI; families and people with disabilities were reluctant to access loans from banks and preferred grants so as not to have the pressure of paying back and risking debts. There was also evidence of negative attitudes regarding specific impairments based on difficulties with communication and needs that were perceived as more time- and resource-dependent.

⁵⁵ Mutua, E., Njuki, N., Waithanji, E. (2014), *Review of gender and value chain analysis, development and evaluation toolkit*, International Livestock Research Institute

It is questionable that the project conducted a proper situation analysis, which would have brought out the variety of needs in relation to training, health and successful economic empowerment, as well as the barriers - e.g. related to gender and impairment hierarchies.

Overall, the number and variety of studies planned and conducted in different projects reflect a clear commitment to gain a better understanding of current situations, trends and contexts. Unfortunately, such studies are often postponed, or results are not shared or referenced enough. The findings of such studies need to be explicitly linked to subsequent interventions and well-documented to provide a trail of evidence for good practice showcases.

Findings on situational analysis, market analysis and scoping studies: Implications for Sightsavers

Situational analysis, market analysis, scoping studies and baselines are all important and have a strong impact on the success of economic empowerment projects. Studies should be planned early to ensure data is available to inform/adjust project plans. Studies should be feasible and practical and involve persons with disabilities to improve the use of information and persons with disabilities understanding of and adaptability to markets.

3.2.2 Gender responsive/appropriate planning and challenging stereotypes

There is a mixed picture across the country programmes and projects. Certainly, there has been progressive awareness of the importance of addressing women's and girls' situation specifically, or at least paying attention to their participation. The empowerment of, and focus on, women and girls is mentioned in a few project proposals⁵⁶.

Good practice examples are:

- ✓ Specific gender training for stakeholders as part of project activities⁵⁷.
- ✓ The majority of reviewed documents refer to baseline data and monitoring data being gender-disaggregated.
- ✓ Group enterprises to support and protect multiply disabled women who can't leave the house and are at risk of domestic violence or sexual abuse⁵⁸ (though this may refer to only one example and was not originally planned).
- ✓ Attempts to specifically attract female participants and include affirmative action in the selection process to encourage young women to enrol for vocational and skill

⁵⁶ Disabled People's Livelihood Project Grant application, Sri Lanka, 2010; Project Funding Agreement, Raipur Social Inclusion Project, India 2014;

⁵⁷ Barrier-free inclusive society project MTR, Bangladesh 2014; Inclusive Development through Mainstreaming PWD, Evaluation, Pakistan 2012

⁵⁸ Sri Lanka, Country Review Report 2015; Inclusive Development through Mainstreaming PWD, Evaluation, Pakistan 2012

training⁵⁹.

- ✓ Linking women with disabilities to (mainstream) Women's Organisations to ensure their specific needs are addressed and awareness on disability is raised⁶⁰.

Gender stereotypes in skills development and business

The MTR of the Youth Employment project in Uganda highlighted the fact that young men and women expressed interest in employment and businesses typical for their gender - for example, women chose catering, hairdressing and knitting. Men opted for masonry, mechanics, or carpentry. The team suggested challenging the choices in the coming period and encouraging young people to try skills and professions in non-traditional areas. It seems that girls in the Uganda Youth Employment Project were subsequently advocating institutions to take part in different courses, such as welding⁶¹. This is an important observation, which reflects the programme's efforts in overcoming stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes were also identified by the project partner in Sri Lanka as a particular challenge. The partner highlighted that they had attempted to offer non-traditional opportunities for persons with disabilities, while suggesting that the perception of the community and of persons with disabilities made this a real challenge. Persons with disabilities limited themselves, and were limited by, stereotypical IGA. This effect was compounded for women, whose choices are limited by their gender as well as their disability.

Challenging traditional roles might increase economic opportunities for both men and women. It also presents another step towards their empowerment beyond the financial aspect, i.e. gaining a voice and taking more control over their lives through confidence in their own decision making. However, this has to be done carefully and in conjunction with other measures, for example finding role models of either sex who succeeded in a non-traditional business (e.g. a wheelchair workshop run by disabled women in Uganda), or after some feasibility survey.

Intersections of disability and gender

Based on the annual reports and general examination of activities and challenges, it seems clear that the gender dimension is recognised but has to become stronger both in project planning and implementation.

Consideration should also be given to addressing multiple discrimination, specifically with women with disabilities. Although there is a general recognition that women and girls with disabilities should be key target groups, most programme and strategic

⁵⁹ Connect the Dots – Youth Employment Project, MTR 2014

⁶⁰ Sri Lanka, Country Review Report 2015

⁶¹ Connect the Dots - Uganda policy analysis, 2015

planning lack a specific approach to including them in empowerment initiatives and how the specific barriers leading to their exclusion will be tackled⁶²

Challenges in tackling the intersectionality of disability and gender have come up in various situations reflecting the on-going difficulties in adequately including women with disabilities:

➤ **Restrictions in independent mobility**

As highlighted previously, an important feature of the CBR projects has been the consistent training in orientation and mobility (O&M) to enable people with disabilities to move around independently to make social interaction and economic activities (employment, small enterprises) possible. For some projects it has been difficult to appropriately address women's situation in regard to mobility and independence. In parts of India, for example, women are restricted to the home and are not permitted to venture out much. While this is rooted in the cultural norms of these particular societies, it severely limits the women's opportunity to work, to interact, or even meet other disabled women⁶³.

➤ **Inappropriate staffing in patriarchal societies**

The MPVSS CBR project in Ujjain District in Madhya Pradesh, India, employed mainly male CBR workers, which made it difficult for them to work with disabled women due to the patriarchal structures of the society⁶⁴.

➤ **Recognising and addressing compounding discrimination of women with disabilities and the risk of gender-based violence**

The evaluation of a CBR project in Bangladesh noted as a weakness that violence against disabled people and especially against disabled women was not addressed or considered in the project design and implementation. The economic situation is particularly hard for disabled women who face a high risk of domestic violence, for being disabled, a woman and "a burden" in economic terms⁶⁵.

In Sri Lanka, the evaluation highlighted the domineering behaviour of husbands in the handling of money, and the livelihood initiative itself, in such a way that the disabled wife had no say and very limited benefit⁶⁶.

⁶² iReflect Social Inclusion 2014

⁶³ Raipur CBR PRERAK, final evaluation, India 2011

⁶⁴ Ujjain MPVSS CED CBR, MTR, India 2011

⁶⁵ Cox Bazar, Narsingdi, CBR evaluation, Bangladesh, 2011 (also *Triple Jeopardy Report* by Jill Astbury and Faren Walji)

⁶⁶ Disabled People's Livelihood Project Evaluation, Sri Lanka, 2013

➤ **Lack of meaningful participation and inclusion in decision-making processes**

Another interesting point came up in the project in Sri Lanka where male and female project beneficiaries were linked with and included in Rural Development Societies (RDS) and (mixed) SHG respectively. The RDS are government CBOs at the villages and are described as

...the decision makers of the village development and governance. They are representing at the Divisional development committees, where all the decision makers (government officers, political leaders and other stakeholders) gather to discuss the development and other issues of the divisions. Through these channels, the issues of people with disabilities are raised and attempted to mainstream inclusive decision making processes in development and other programmes.

This appears problematic from a gender equality perspective. As women are not invited to join the RDS, it raises the question how strongly disabled women's issues are taken forward and how much opportunity for participation in decision-making processes have.

Similarly, in Pakistan, Citizen Community Boards (CCB) have formal status by local government and at least 70% of them are male only. The mid-term review states that it is very difficult to facilitate community structures that directly include men and women. The project therefore encouraged the formation of Women's Organisations, even though they do not have the same status and level of influence as the CCB⁶⁷. However, it would be important to follow up on the 30% of mixed CCBs to gauge how much women are actively participating and if the process of their involvement could be used as a model.

➤ **Limited access to training due to gender/reproductive roles and responsibilities**

The youth employment project in Uganda was diligent in trying to attract young disabled women and to ensure greater enrolment in training, when it became apparent that there was a gender imbalance in applicants. However, a sound gender analysis in the context of baseline and situation analyses may have prepared the project that a higher number of young women drop out because of family obligations like household chores and care for family members, including their own small children, pregnancy or overprotection by parents and the very real risk of sexual abuse during school transport. Such issues could potentially have been addressed in the design, e.g. ensuring childcare opportunities (crèche at the training sites), factoring in modular training or other support in case of pregnancies, ensuring safe transport or considering alternative ways of providing training and apprenticeship opportunities closer to home.

➤ **Limited access to education**

⁶⁷ Pakistan CBR MTR, 2011

The barrier-free inclusive society project in Bangladesh provided an extensive set of trainings (covering, for example, Human Rights, gender, HIV/Aids, business planning and marketing, Braille and Sign language and various income generating activities). Some of the training was provided by the project partner BVIPS, whose membership requirement of having a bachelor degree accounts for the much lower number of female members (159 male vs 43 female BVIPS members) and female beneficiaries of business planning, marketing and accounting training. Women in general, and women with disabilities in particular, still have unequal access to education, the consequences of which have a wide-reaching and long-lasting negative impact on disabled women's opportunities in economic empowerment. BVIPS is aware of this discrepancy and develops women's groups to discuss and advise on how to bring women forward – and they admits that it is a long and slow process⁶⁸.

One of the cross-cutting objectives in the Sightsavers *Empowerment and Inclusion Strategic Framework* (2015) is to **address gender inequalities and women's empowerment**. One priority focus is to embed gender analysis in each programme development plan. While a number of projects have indeed implemented activities that have contributed to disabled women's self-confidence and sense of empowerment, there needs to be a clear understanding of the **difference between women-focused interventions and gender-focused interventions**.

Activities such as peer support, women-only IGA, links to WO are important and should be part of a **twin-track approach** to ensure women's issues, including opportunities for economic empowerment, are brought up and addressed, and to enable women with disabilities to "catch up" and have interventions supporting them specifically. However, such women-focused activities should be considered as a start for challenging women's dependence on male-dominated institutions.

Gender-focused interventions are not about women alone, but about the relationship between women and men, taking into account power (im)balances, decision-making processes and roles and responsibilities within households and communities. There needs to be a more systematic and consistent approach to gender, clarifying the difference and thereby supporting programme staff and partners in understanding how their project interventions relate to these differences. Therefore, a gender analysis would ideally explore if, and how, the intervention and activities might affect men and women differently.

Following the gender analysis at the design stage would be the development of gendered indicators that reflect the findings of the analysis and encourages rigorous monitoring of the benefit to both men and women. Indicators would not only include quantitative data, such as number of men and women participating in trainings/meetings/IGA, but also qualitative

⁶⁸ Interview with BVIPS key staff, Bangladesh, 13.1.2016

information - for example, the level of participation of women in meetings and trainings and the level of decision-making over IG activities and generated income.

3.2.3 Incorporating advocacy in projects

Across Sightsavers' partners and projects it has been clear that advocacy is vital to support social inclusion interventions. The initial emphasis was put on advocacy around eye care, and access to medical services and inclusive education. Increasingly, especially in the context of CBR, DPOs and SHGs were established and provided with advocacy training to build their capacity (appropriate to their relevant political level) in influencing local authorities and government structures in the provision of welfare schemes and social security benefits such as disability certificates, pensions, transport allowances, housing, food subsidies etc⁶⁹. Local authorities across projects have successfully been lobbied to provide accessible infrastructure - e.g. ramps at schools, accessible toilets, street/traffic adaptations for visually and physically impaired people⁷⁰.

Advocacy measures across the majority of projects also included community awareness of disability issues delivered through SHGs - for example, through the observation of International Days and community/courtyard meetings.

The ratification of the UNCRPD and related legislation has provided a favourable political environment to challenge discrimination and through Sightsavers (and project partners') training and support, SHGs/DPOs have become increasingly knowledgeable of and successful in securing government welfare schemes and better access to services for their members⁷¹.

Advocacy for UNCRPD content in policies and plans

Other projects directed their advocacy ambitions at government departments and local authorities to include UNCRPD content in policies and plans - with budget allocations - for the inclusion of people with disabilities in development programmes and in participatory decision-making processes⁷².

Lead on advocacy

Overall, the available documentation of projects has provided limited details on processes and leadership of advocacy interventions around economic empowerment. In Sri Lanka, the majority of advocacy efforts were led by the Women's Development Centre or by Sightsavers - for example, in lobbying governments for the establishment or increase of a quota for employment of people with disabilities in the workforce⁷³, which has led to a draft

⁶⁹ CES-CUTS CBR MTR, India, 2011; Jharkand CBR MTR, India 2011; Social Inclusion Strategy, India, 2012; Bangladesh Social Inclusion Review, 2014;

⁷⁰ Pakistan CBR project evaluation, 2011; Disabled People's Livelihood Project evaluation, Sri Lanka, 2012

⁷¹ Review of Sightsavers' Social Inclusion Programming with DPOs, ADD International, 2014

⁷² Empowering PWD through inclusive development, project Proposal, Pakistan 2012; Barrier-free inclusive society for PWD, MTR, Bangladesh, 2014

⁷³ Sri Lanka Annual Report 2012

national plan of action (see Annex 7) – assisted by Sightsavers - to ensure 3% of employment opportunities in public, private and corporate sectors be reserved for people with disabilities, with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), World Bank and USAID supporting its implementation⁷⁴.

Since this success, the Country Director of Sightsavers has also been leading the development and implementation of the National Plan on Providing Employment for Persons with Disabilities intended to support the implementation of this quota.

There has also been a shift in responsibility for advocacy at the local level in Sri Lanka, with the DPOs taking on the relationship with the District Secretariat and successfully advocating for more inclusive facilities, such as District Secretariat offices, Post Offices and some banks.

In Bangladesh, the Barrier-free inclusive society for people with disabilities project has developed an advocacy strategy as an integral part of the project and developed with SHGs and external stakeholders' input and validation. Concrete targets for advocacy - e.g. private sector, such as garment factories and VTI, were identified during the work⁷⁵. Project staff initially took the lead, but gradually involved DPOs and SHGs through attending meetings, thereby providing contact and accessibility to officials. The strategy also includes national policy dialogue on employment and disability⁷⁶. However, policy level work is done by project staff⁹⁴.

Where SHGs and DPOs campaigned themselves, it appeared to be limited to local areas and with emphasis on subsidies and government support⁷⁷. DPOs at different levels (e.g. Block level, district level, state level) have different targets. Examples of these are illustrated in a case study from India in Appendix 3.

Successful advocacy efforts by DPOs, including youth structures (Youth Employment project Uganda) include:

- ✓ Lobbying for access to government special grants supporting people with disabilities by youth structures within DPOs and district-level youth committees that were specifically formed and trained in leadership, advocacy, lobbying and monitoring skills⁷⁸. Some youths with disabilities are now sitting on district and sub-county councils and on people with disabilities councils, which are the monitoring bodies to following up on the inclusion of people with disabilities in government development plans⁷⁹.
- ✓ Involving the media, i.e. TV and radio, as well as posters and IEC materials for high visibility of the project with emphasis on awareness raising of the professional

⁷⁴ Sri Lanka Annual Report 2012

⁷⁵ Interview with ABC (implementing partner), Bangladesh, 10.1.2016

⁷⁶ Bangladesh Barrier-free inclusive society for PWD, Annual report 2014

⁷⁷ Disabled People's Livelihood Project, Sri Lanka, 2012, Sri Lanka Country Review Report, 2015

⁷⁸ Connect the dots – MTR, Uganda, 2014

⁷⁹ Interview with Sightsavers Uganda Project Manager, via telephone, 28.1.2016

potential and skills of YWD⁸⁰ and around disability issues for all people with disabilities⁸¹.

- ✓ Pursuing the Bangladesh Bank to issue directives for all commercial banks to become inclusive over time, i.e. permitting people with disabilities to open bank accounts¹⁰⁷.

Advocacy targeting VTI and financial institutions

As projects became more focused on economic empowerment, the advocacy efforts were broadened to include vocational training institutes and to some degree (non-)formal financial institutions such as banks and micro-credit institutions.

Programmes in both India and Bangladesh, for example, targeted banks in particular to lobby for people with disabilities' access to opening bank accounts, and subsequently (if further down the line) access to loans. While bank accounts are linked to entitlements (e.g. transfer of disability allowances and pensions), they also provide the necessary conditions for saving and financial management as steps towards economic empowerment.

The Uganda Youth Employment project worked with NUDIPU and UNAB to develop an advocacy strategy for policy makers' greater understanding of the rights of youth with disabilities. Advocacy efforts expanded to "new" targets such as Vocational Training Institutions to provide inclusive and accessible training and Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training Department within the Ministry of Education.

Advocacy targeting employers

While there have been fruitful arrangements with employers to hire people with disabilities, e.g. in garment factories, NGOs, and to some extent private sector companies⁸², these achievements are more likely to be the consequence of skilled negotiations between project implementers and specifically targeted companies, government/public sector employers, and individual small businesses such as carpenters, beauty salons and car/bike repair shops in the Youth Employment project. There is no indication that projects have targeted employers on a wider platform.

A number of mid-term reviews have pointed out that employers are the most difficult targets to convince of people with disabilities' labour market potentials. There is widespread and persistent scepticism that people with disabilities, especially young people with disabilities, might have the skills and knowledge to be efficient employees.

In Sri Lanka the National Plan includes sensitising and registering employers and linking them to people with disabilities with relevant skills. There are plans for follow up with

⁸⁰ Connect the dots, Annual Report, Uganda, 2013

⁸¹ Barrier-free inclusive society for PWD, MTR, Bangladesh, 2014

⁸² Sri Lanka Country Review Report, 2015; Barrier-free inclusive society for PWD Annual report, Bangladesh, 2013

employers and employees to identify barriers and address issues. This could serve as a very interesting source of information on the issues faced in ensuring formal employment.

To change attitudes, original belief systems need to be replaced with something more valid. Therefore there must be greater emphasis on barrier analysis in identifying exactly why employers in the private, public and corporate sector are reluctant to recruit people with disabilities and to tailor advocacy campaigns to those concerns.

Research on employability of people with disabilities in Uganda

A study on employability of people with disabilities in the private sector, commissioned by the Uganda country programme of ADD International found that among the sampled private sector companies who employ people with disabilities the reasons given are:

- Tax deductions if the company can prove that 5% of full time staff are people with disabilities (28%)
- Corporate social responsibility (34%)
- Status of equal opportunity employer (6%)

The report states that many companies are not aware of legalities like the tax deductions, and advantages of corporate social responsibility for (inter)national reputation and trade opportunities, and the official status of being an equal opportunity employer. Those who have people with disabilities in employment confirm their reliability and productivity, an experience, which was endorsed by a garment factory manager in Bangladesh⁸³, whereas those who don't have disabled employees fear the lack of the above. Only 12% of 32 sampled (medium and large size) companies opined that there was no benefit to employ people with disabilities due to perceived high costs associated with accessibility, regular medication and auxiliary services.

Companies requested the following support in order to hire (more) people with disabilities:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • More information about specific needs | 30% |
| • Improved knowledge on relevant legislation | 23% |
| • Creation of job centres to find people with disabilities | 19% |
| • Building of partnerships with private sector | 11% |
| • Information about how to recruit and enable people with disabilities | 8% |
| • Advocacy | 6% |
| • Mentorship | 3% |

The Disability Act requires employers to annually report on the employment status of people with disabilities, which would feed into an overall report to parliament. However, according to the study, since the enactment of the Disability Act in 2006, no single report was submitted by the minister to the parliament⁸⁴. Reinforcing this requirement to highlight

⁸³ Interview with garment factory manager, Narsingdi, Bangladesh, 11.1.2016

⁸⁴ Study on the employability of PWD in the private sector, Uganda, 2012

employment issues would be an important part of an advocacy strategy around employment.

However, it is important to remember that in Uganda, the unemployment rate for all youth is 80% and the public sector is shrinking which provides even less job opportunities, even for the general population. So there is extremely high competition for any job, especially in more rural areas⁸⁵.

Databases as an indirect tool for advocacy

Developing databases (as in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) and linking them to appropriate ministries is an excellent idea. It helps promote people with disabilities' skills, knowledge and experience. Securing the endorsement by government ministries through website links may encourage prospective employers and give them a sense of reassurance about recruiting a disabled person.

Indeed, in Sri Lanka the database is owned and operated by Ministry of Labour and Labour Relations (MoL) staff, funded by Sightsavers, and is an integral part of the National Plan on Employment so giving the system reach and legitimacy. See more information on the databases used in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in Annex 6.

Additional information about accessibility and adaptation needs of diverse impairment groups, accompanied by advice on how to manage those requirements would support the process. According to the study on employability of persons with disabilities in the private sector in Uganda, Handicap International has developed a databank on qualified people with disabilities and it may be worth exchanging experience in regard to content, usage and usefulness.

Another important aspect of tackling employers' scepticism is the documentation and promotion of successful employment and apprenticeship placements as a "best practice"-advocacy tool and to provide concrete guidance on how the process, including recruitment, is done. Potentially, equal opportunity employers with a record of successfully occupying people with disabilities could be actively included in promotion and advocacy campaigns in the role of ambassadors to inclusive practices.

A discussion with Sightsavers staff in Bangladesh revealed that successful employment and apprentice/internships are used as showcases and role models⁸⁶. However, these target people with disabilities to encourage their participation, and increase motivation and confidence. So far, there were no considerations to tap into satisfied employers as advocates to influence other companies and fellow employers regarding the recruitment of people with disabilities, either through employer platform meetings, brochures or other media.

⁸⁵ Telephone Interview with country director, Uganda, 3.2.2016

⁸⁶ Debriefing meeting with Sightsavers staff and partners, Bangladesh, 13.1.2016

Outcome of economic empowerment initiatives in local or national policy

CBR projects have generally been less active in influencing governments at policy level, which was mostly due to the lack of advocacy and networking support by partners and/or DPOs and the limited knowledge around economic empowerment. There are still a few examples of success such as efforts of the Bangladesh CBR CSID project to campaign for the increase of the job quota for people with disabilities from 2%-10%.

In India, the district level DPO in Ganjam District (Odisha) organised a stakeholder meeting inviting the State Commissioner of Disability to discuss the reality of the 3% public sector employment quota and of the 3% college/university quota. As a result, the commissioner issued an official letter to college heads and training institutes (with a copy to the DPO) to support the implementation of the quota and for DPOs to use at meetings⁸⁷.

In Pakistan the DFID funded *Inclusive development through mainstreaming* the project directed its interventions at all societal levels, including district, provincial and national levels.

The multi-faceted outcomes of the project have been widely shared with the key stakeholders and policy makers through provincial and national consultative workshops which have led to development of National Plan of Action (NPA) as a consolidated document on policy recommendations for mainstreaming people with disabilities⁸⁸

The NPA includes the promotion of economic rehabilitation through vocational training, social security and livelihood programmes and legislative support for people with disabilities.

Uganda has seen a number of positive changes, especially in training institutions, which has influenced local government to provide legal backing of inclusive practices⁸⁹. Uganda teamed its DPO and government partners with the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) achieving a top place at DIT's agenda to visit inclusive VTI to develop best practice for sharing and provide technical support for assessment – and importantly – official accreditation of trainees with disability⁹⁰.

As previously mentioned, the advocacy efforts in Sri Lanka led by Sightsavers regarding a quota increase led to a draft national plan of action to ensure 3% of employment opportunities in public, private and corporate sectors be reserved for people with

⁸⁷ Interview with SHG/DPOs in Ganjam District, India, 16.1.2016

⁸⁸ Inclusive Development through Mainstreaming PWD, DFID CSCF, Evaluation 2012

⁸⁹ Youth Employment Project, MTR Uganda, 2015

⁹⁰ Youth Employment Project, Annual report, Uganda, 2013

disabilities⁹¹. As well as the National Plan on Employment, which is currently being implemented to try to ensure this quota is met.

Findings on incorporating advocacy into projects: Implications for Sightsavers

There needs to be a stronger focus on employers in advocacy activities. There should also be a greater focus on building the capacity of DPOs to undertake and participate in higher level advocacy to ensure their perspectives are included in national level consultations and their capacity built.

There should also be a push to increase documentation around successful advocacy processes. Sightsavers and project staff have had a number of strong successes and cross-programme and cross-stakeholder learning around methods would be beneficial to future development.

3.2.4 Engaging people with disabilities and stakeholders in the design of economic empowerment projects/programmes

The documents under review present a mixed picture of the extent to which the projects engaged people with disabilities and stakeholders in the design of economic empowerment projects. The choice of partners, points to Sightsavers' commitment to bring in important experience and knowledge in the area of health, women's inclusion, rights-based advocacy and rights-based movements, community development, as well as disability⁹².

One of the major difficulties in most projects has been the inclusion of disabilities other than visual and physical. Despite the greater focus on the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Strategy Frameworks since 2009, country programmes have struggled to effectively cater to a wider spectrum of impairment groups. Most MTRs and evaluations have pointed this out and recommended to develop specific strategies to ensure that people with learning disabilities, hearing and speech impairments can effectively participate in project activities and SHG/DPO meetings and interactions⁹³. The Bangladesh Social Inclusion Review (2014) identified the lack of partners' experience working with a wide range of impairments and their limited attempts to reach out to other DPOs and the disability movement in general to benefit from their experience.

The Uganda's Youth Employment project commendably included people with severe or multiple disabilities through home visits and home-based skills training but also had difficulty in providing Sign Language Interpretations for hearing impaired youth⁹⁴; and vocational training choices for visually impaired people were limited to knitting and computer technology.

⁹¹ Sri Lanka Annual Report 2012

⁹² iReflect Social Inclusion, 2014

⁹³ Barrier-free inclusive society MTR, Bangladesh, 2014; iReflect Social Inclusion report 2014

⁹⁴ Connecting the dots – Youth Employment MTR, Uganda, 2014, iReflect Social Inclusion, 2014

The MTR of the DFID-funded Social Inclusion project in Pakistan refers to the project's difficulty to directly help people with multiple impairments, severe learning and communication difficulties, but has tried to support their families. The final evaluation showed that there was a mixture of impairment groups among the beneficiaries - however, even though the numbers from each group were recorded, the results of the interventions were not disaggregated by impairment⁹⁵ and so it is difficult to gauge the level of achievement and challenges as per disability. Such documentation would help share experience and lessons learned to ensure more consistent inclusion of all disabilities.

None of the projects mention other disabilities such as people with albinism, dwarfism, mental health issues or other hidden disabilities.

There have been laudable attempts to establish partnerships with DPOs who have an impairment-diverse membership (for example in Pakistan, Sierra Leone and Uganda) and NGOs who have the experience and expertise to provide necessary information and/or support to the process of effectively including all impairment groups. Ideally, this should be a consistent approach, also involving the help of the government and private sector so that interventions benefit all impairment groups of people with disabilities¹¹⁸.

CBR has been a key component of Sightsavers' work and projects in general follow the WHO guidelines and matrix by broadly addressing all components as part of a holistic perspective and given the multi-dimensional nature of social inclusion. However, specific components of health and education appear to have been prioritised. The DFID CSCF 2012 final evaluation report states:

...the project...also achieved additional un-intended outputs which were not included in the original logframe. This was mainly in response to the evolving needs of the people with disabilities which the project had to address in order to mobilize communities for inclusive development. Improved quality of life of people with disabilities through provision of assistive devices by leveraging funds from other sources, income generation through micro-enterprise activities and improved accessibility through inclusive infrastructure projects are the examples of the un-expected outputs⁹⁶.

It seems to have come as a surprise that accessibility and income generation were needed in order to tackle inclusive development. Similarly, the Livelihood Project in Sri Lanka initially selected beneficiaries to receive one intervention only: either the provision of assistive devices or sanitation facilities arranged through the support of the Women's Development Centre, or participation in livelihood activities as implemented by the project's

⁹⁵ iReflect Social Inclusion Report, 2014

⁹⁶ Inclusive Development through Mainstreaming PWD – DFID 2012 Final Evaluation, Pakistan

second partner - the Development with Disability Network⁹⁷. The selection criteria, which were inconsistent, created conflict between partners. Both projects adjusted accordingly but it seems that a greater involvement of people with disabilities at the design stage may have brought up these needs earlier.

Projects tried to match interests and preferences of disabled beneficiaries with available opportunities for skills development and vocational training. Both in India and Bangladesh, programme staff emphasised the attempts to match skills, interest and environmental conditions to ensure the best outcome for specific livelihood activities⁹⁸. However, there is a limit of choices and sometimes, opportunities come up that are offered as they arise without the choice of an immediate alternative (e.g. tailoring training at the Polytech in Narsingdi, internship at a university in Dhaka). Sometimes, SHG or DPO members ask for specific training because of their existing family enterprises or their own interests (e.g. ICT for cyber café, solar panel enterprise in Bangladesh).

Particularly the projects focusing on livelihood and employment have included a number of stakeholders from government, corporate sector and financial institutions. It is not clear from the available documents how much engagement there was at the design stage and how consistent the engagement remained throughout the life of the project.

In response to the micro-finance agency ARD in Sierra Leone's CBR project to disburse loans to individuals within a mixed group of three disabled and three non-disabled people, the final evaluation suggested disbursing loans through existing groups:

In both rural and urban settings, people form groups or associations because certain factors (like kinship, membership of certain social unions or secret societies) bind them together. In other words, people form groups because they belong together. Such groups are cohesive. On the other hand, groups formed by outsiders, because of administrative or other convenience, are often not cohesive⁹⁹.

It is therefore important to explore such options of establishing groups, mixed or not, with stakeholders and beneficiaries to clarify expectations and avoid distrust and resentment when decisions are made for people instead of with them.

The focus of economic empowerment interventions has broadly been on **people of productive age**, i.e. between 20 and 45 years¹⁰⁰. The Youth Employment project explicitly targeted younger persons as a group that needs attention in view of prospects for economic empowerment and poverty alleviation. It is questionable if any projects addressed the **older population** in terms of access to skills training and livelihood. The GRIHINI CBR project

⁹⁷ Disabled People's Livelihood Project Evaluation, 2013, Sri Lanka

⁹⁸ Interview with key Sightsavers staff in Bangladesh and India, 10.1.-15.1.2016

⁹⁹ Sierra Leone CBR Project Evaluation, 2009

¹⁰⁰ UKS, CBR MTR, India, 2011; Evaluation of CBR (Cox's Bazar/Narsingdi), Bangladesh, 2011

evaluation in 2011 recommended to use life cycle approaches, i.e. interventions according to age and gender. The consortium-based action research *We can also make change* explored **livelihood** as part of the research on the perspectives of people with disability living in poverty in Bangladesh. It brought out the marginalisation of older people with disabilities who are often left out of livelihood projects, have no access to loans and so have hardly any alternative to begging. There is a gap in looking at older people with disabilities and trying to find ways to include them in livelihood interventions.

The general practice in the development sector is (or certainly should be) that projects are developed based on priorities expressed by partners and/or as a result of scaling up in a geographical or thematic area. Ideally, programmes and projects are then designed following an extensive consultation with partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries. A Theory of Change is helpful in getting an in-depth understanding of how change happens, who needs to be involved and how an organisation may fit into and add to what is already happening or needs to happen.

As previously mentioned, the choice of partners makes it clear that Sightsavers seeks to engage with a variety of organisations that bring a wealth of experience. Apart from the choice of partners, there needs to be more collaboration with other (I)NGOs working in complementing or similar areas. Although these collaborations do not need to be formalised partnerships, sharing experience and knowledge may be helpful in the robustness of project planning and implementation.

At an organizational level, explore the possibility of taking a consortium approach with other international NGOs (INGOs) having interest to address the issues of disability to promote inclusion to develop and document learning and scale-up of good practice. Explore collaborative linkages and consortium with organisations such as CBM, ADD International, HelpAge and others¹⁰¹

Sightsavers Uganda programme involved ADD International who provided training in the development of an advocacy strategy¹⁰² and there has been informal exchange of experience and opinion between the ADD Uganda Country Director and Sightsavers' Programme Manager¹⁰³. Such informal exchange is very likely to happen more often than it appears in any documentation. However, a more pro-active collaboration and documentation may be helpful in keeping a track record of such instances and, of course, ensure access to organisational knowledge.

Just as important as the involvement of stakeholders and partners in the design stage is their participation and involvement in monitoring and evaluation. Particularly beneficiaries

¹⁰¹ Barrier-free inclusive Society of PWD, MTR, Bangladesh 2015

¹⁰² Uganda Youth Employment Project Annual Report, 2013

¹⁰³ Informal conversation with ADD Uganda Country Director, 9.11.2015 at ADD's office in Frome

should not just be providers of information but also, ideally, participate in the analysis of data to contribute to findings and recommendations.

Economic Empowerment Outcomes for People with Disabilities

Going back to the OECD definition, most projects have contributed in part to economic empowerment in that men and women have participated in and contributed in growth processes. Annex 8 gives more detail on beneficiaries' and project staff's perception of economic empowerment.

The majority of positive effects explicitly stated relate to:

- ✓ **Psychosocial well-being, i.e. sense of achievement; higher self-confidence**¹⁰⁴

Where there was a reference to quotes or feedback from people with disabilities in available documentation, the response was overall positive in regard to their sense of worth and development of confidence. Interviews with beneficiaries in Bangladesh and India particularly emphasised the appreciation of being not dependent on family members anymore, but being able to take care of their own and, in turn, support family members¹⁰⁵, which relates to their definition of economic empowerment.

- ✓ **Better interaction with and respect by family and community members, work colleagues**¹⁰⁶.

In other examples, people with disabilities contributed to the family's income through labour, e.g. in agriculture, made possible by greater independent mobility and other daily life skills.

- ✓ **Better understanding of financial management and savings as a precondition for investment and business success**

A bank account and establishing a routine of putting aside money creates opportunities to access loans. While there is still some practice of leaving savings with family or community members for safekeeping¹⁰⁷, the practice of opening individual bank accounts (where banks allow) is becoming the norm. Alternatively, savings are left with the SHG but with transparent book keeping. It also generates an environment for financial inclusion as described in Sightsavers' definition paper on financial inclusion, i.e. conditions for social protection cash transfer, or use of mobile technology for money transfer, though none of the reviewed documents have referred to such practices.

- ✓ **Tangible financial improvements for better food, education of their children, paying medical bills or investing in expansion of their business or moving to places where**

¹⁰⁴ Access Technology Project – Evaluation, Ghana, 2013

¹⁰⁵ Interviews with beneficiaries in India and Bangladesh, 10.1.-15.1.2016

¹⁰⁶ Access Technology Project – Evaluation, Ghana, 2013

¹⁰⁷ Barrier-free inclusive Society of PWD, MTR, Bangladesh 2015

there are better prospects for their business¹⁰⁸.

Where business training has accompanied skills training, the outcome of the enterprise has generally been more successful and consistent. Especially in recent projects in India, each professional skill training included three to four days business training that covered market links, and soft skills like client identification and approach. Participants clearly stated the importance of this training for their confidence and success¹⁰⁹.

Such accompanying training in business planning and risk management enabled some people with disabilities to use new knowledge to adapt one's business to changing environments. For example, one beneficiary of the Sri Lanka Livelihood project responded to the competition of a new bigger grocery shop nearby by switching to the preparation and sale of ready-made food in the shop¹¹⁰. Another example in India saw a man transfer his acquired business knowledge from mushroom cultivation to a small eatery¹¹¹.

However, for some people with disabilities economic empowerment has been difficult to achieve. Below is the summary of the most common **challenges** people with disabilities have faced

- In some projects, beneficiaries struggled to make enough income to put aside money after paying for basic needs. These cases refer mostly to CBR projects with a small livelihood component but without market studies and market-linked IGA. Loans were sometimes too small to establish sound business activities with an income that barely covered consumption and social needs¹¹². Often small productions such as soap or candle making bring in very small amounts of money that are eaten up paying for immediate needs including transport, health expenditure etc., which doesn't allow for saving. In monetary terms, these IGAs had little impact to change lives¹¹³. Experience from other sources in Nigeria and from ADD International in Mali, Burkina Faso and Cote'd'Ivoire support this¹¹⁴.
- In a similar context, small loans have not consistently been seen as effective. Beneficiary feedback revealed that credit activities from small loans only address productive ventures but do not take into account consumption and social needs. There is not enough income to have an effect¹¹⁵. The Action Research project (a consortium-based project by Sightsavers, ADD International, HelpAge International

¹⁰⁸ Disabled People's Livelihood Project evaluation, Sri Lanka, 2013; UKS CBR MTR, India, 2012; CES CUTS CBR MRT, India 2011; Barrier-free inclusive Society of PWD, MTR, Bangladesh 2015

¹⁰⁹ FGD with beneficiaries in India and Bangladesh between 10.1.16 and 15.1.2016

¹¹⁰ Disabled People's Livelihood Project evaluation, Sri Lanka, 2013

¹¹¹ Interview with beneficiary, Odisha, India, 15.1.2016

¹¹² CBR Sierra Leone Project evaluation, 2010

¹¹³ PRERAK, CBR project evaluation, India, 2011; GPSVS CBR MTR India, 2011; Jharkand CBR MTR, India 2011, CBR project evaluation, Sierra Leone, 2009

¹¹⁴ nsrp *What violence means to us: women with disabilities speak*, Inclusive Friends, Nigeria 2015; M&E documentation at ADD International, 2009-2013

¹¹⁵ CBR project evaluation, Sierra Leone, 2009

and Alzheimer's Disease International) which published its report *We can also make change* in 2015 confirms that there were a number of incidents where people with disabilities actually amassed serious debts when the business set up from small loans was not successful.

- During programme visits in India and Bangladesh, it was apparent that without training the businesses seemed to be less likely to be successful in terms of income and adaptability to external risk and changes. Need to develop business skills of people with disabilities, i.e. planning the business, balancing sheets, promoting the products in the community and around (including considering presentation of products to make them more attractive for potential customers) and risk analysis/mitigation.
- Not all people with disabilities have gained in terms of their own economic empowerment. Especially in CBR projects it was observed that family members were taking over IGA and attended meetings for the person with disability for convenience reasons, and husbands were managing and dominating the enterprises originally set up for or by their wives - which defeated the idea of empowerment¹¹⁶. Even though income has increased for the family, the disabled person's financial independence or decision-making powers have not been affected¹¹⁷. Especially young women with disabilities spoke about the need to work more with families to encourage them to support their daughters and enable them to seek education, training and the space to go out and interact with the external environment¹¹⁸.

Findings on Economic empowerment outcomes: Implications for Sightsavers

Market studies, market linked IGA and business training are emerging as key factors in the success of economic empowerment activities. Sightsavers should ensure these are planned for in economic empowerment projects, while continuing to monitor impact.

Economic empowerment is not guaranteed through income generation and persons with disabilities need careful support to develop the skills needed to sustain and build income and gain financial independence. Monitoring is essential to this and Sightsavers need to develop strong monitoring systems within projects which build the confidence and independence of beneficiaries.

Potential areas for further research

¹¹⁶ Disabled People's Livelihood Project evaluation, Sri Lanka, 2012; Barrier-free inclusive Society for PWD, MTR, Bangladesh, 2015

¹¹⁷ Disabled People's Livelihood Project Evaluation, Sri Lanka, 2013, Interviews with women with disabilities, Narsingdi, Bangladesh, 11.1.2016

¹¹⁸ FGD with women with disabilities, Narsingdi, Bangladesh, 10.1.2016

- As the majority of project documents were mid-term reviews without subsequent final project evaluations, the bulk of information relates to outputs and immediate short-term effects on people with disabilities, often without their direct feedback. There is limited evidence of long-term effects for people with disabilities, i.e. how resilient and sustainable the interventions were in regard to economic empowerment and corresponding transformational changes in people's lives. It would be helpful to consider impact evaluation(s) to specifically explore such changes.
- It might be of interest to consider further research into, or developing learning questions around the outcomes of individual economic empowerment versus group economic empowerment and how effective or influential either is in affecting long-term transformational changes in regard to social inclusion of people with disabilities as a group.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

There is a clear evolution in Sightsavers' work in expanding from eye care and medical rehabilitation to a more holistic perspective on disability and inclusion. Economic Empowerment has been recognised as both a means and an end, in that economic empowerment contributes to social inclusion and tackles discrimination, and social inclusion promotes economic empowerment, and therefore improves the lives of people with disabilities directly.

The approaches under review reflect the understanding that the CBR matrix provides guidance in addressing the situation of people with disabilities holistically but that specific measures and a focus on employment and business are needed to push their opportunities for economic empowerment and social inclusion.

Sightsavers clearly leads in addressing the situation of visually impaired people and made increasing efforts to include people with other disabilities. There is also increased appreciation that relevant studies and analyses need to be undertaken to understand the market and market trends, the current socio-economic situation and, based on the findings, to identify best possible opportunities for effective and long-term income for people with disabilities. The projects have increasingly used a variety of activities to cover the many opportunities to establish a consistent income, either through employment or self-employment. Vocational and other training, linkages with stakeholders and exploration of diverse enterprise opportunities reflect that.

Sightsavers has increasingly recognised the need to specifically address the situation of women and girls, which is reflected in consistent data disaggregation in gender, training of stakeholders in gender and disability, and attempts to include women and girls. However, there needs to be a clearer understanding of the intersectionality of gender and disability and the difference between women-focused work and gender work, and how interventions affect men and women differently. This would ensure women with disabilities have equal access to and equal opportunities in economic empowerment interventions, including meaningful participation and inclusion in decision-making processes.

Across Sightsavers' partners and projects it has been clear that advocacy is a vital element of economic empowerment and social inclusion intervention, and support to SHGs and DPOs to campaign for social protection, inclusive vocational training, and access to financial inclusion has achieved encouraging results. However, more efforts to target employer platforms and reinforce, or add to, existing legislation around employment would be an important part of future advocacy strategies. Similarly, more attention would need to be directed towards the financial sector.

The involvement of stakeholders, especially participatory planning processes with people with diverse disabilities at the design stage, needs to be approached more systematically and with a common understanding across Sightsavers' programmes and partners. In many projects partners lack the experience of working with a wide range or combination of impairments. Whilst people with mild disabilities are easier to connect to training and business, and Sightsavers is leading on working with visually impaired persons, there is a need to collaborate with other organisations/agencies that have experience with a more diverse range of impairment and more broadly applicable approaches.

There is a lot of potential for the programmes to improve their projects by learning from each other. The projects in Asia in particular have many similar challenges and have overcome these in differing ways. This is particularly important, as Sightsavers is exiting Sri Lanka and there is a lot of learning that should be captured and shared. The India project is also in the first stages of implementation and so is at an important phase for adjusting and using learning.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the review of documents and the interviews with selected Sightsavers staff and stakeholders, it is recommended that Sightsavers should

At an organisational level

- Consider the development of an overarching Theory of Change for economic empowerment to draw on the various experiences from Sightsavers and other (I)NGOs work and expertise. The DFID funded project in Pakistan developed a theory of change¹¹⁹ and it might be useful to take this as a basis for further exploration and development.
- Provide clearer guidance to programme staff and partners on equity-focused interventions for more effective inclusion of people with diverse impairments, using the expertise of other international organisations with experience in social inclusion of all people with disabilities at an organisational level, explore the possibility of taking a consortium approach with other international NGOs (INGOs) which have an interest in addressing the issues of disability to promote inclusion

At a programmatic level

- Systematically conduct relevant studies like situation and market analyses, market trend and scoping studies etc. with findings followed up and documented so that the link between findings and subsequent interventions can be used for good practice case studies and evidence for advocacy and learning (e.g. comparing against other such links in other contexts).
- Consider systematically conducting a gender analysis when a project is being developed to explore how the design would affect girls and women in relation to boys and men and what would need to be done to ensure equity. The analysis would include looking at intersectional discrimination and barriers to women's and girls' empowerment in the economic sector, as well as at power balances and decision-making processes in households, SHG/DPOs and community structures. Consistent gender monitoring and the use of gender-responsive evaluation designs would reinforce an equity-focused approach.
- Develop an advocacy strategy that involves a shift from a purely needs-based focus on entitlement to a more rights-based focus, providing SHGs and DPOs with practical skills in barrier analysis and conducting accessibility audits and awareness campaigns for more targeted advocacy.
- Systematically plan for and implement regular evaluations. Ideally, Sightsavers should consider commissioning impact studies to explore the success rate and factors (or lack thereof) following training, linkages and advocacy.
- **Sightsavers should also consider holding a regional level learning workshop to**

¹¹⁹ Inclusive Development through Mainstreaming PWD, DFID CSCF, Evaluation, Pakistan 2012

increase learning and support programme development. This should definitely include Sightsavers Project Officers as well as relevant Country Directors and could potentially involve partner staff and DPO members.

At a project level

- Provide business training as a mandatory part of skills development training for business and enterprises. Plan, budget and fundraise for appropriate length and detail, possibly in sequels, so as to allow for practical application/learning and feedback at next sessions to ensure greater viability.
- Include systematic follow up of trained people with disabilities and how they apply their skills and knowledge to self-employment. The projects should also include more efforts in connecting people with disabilities to employment after vocational and skill training to ensure long-term impact of the intervention.
- Promote more extensive documentation of successful employment and apprenticeship placements, mainstreaming successes (e.g. NVTI in Uganda) to use as models/show cases for advocacy. Equally important is promoting and advertising quality products by people with disabilities and developing innovative, creative designs to attract prospective customers in IGA and enterprises.
- Consider a more in-depth involvement of people with disabilities and other stakeholders in the design of projects. Vocational training institutions, formal financial institutions and prospective employers could be involved at an earlier stage, not just as targets for advocacy but as collaborators in shaping projects.

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10.1.16-16.1.2016

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28.1/ and 3/2/2016

- Telephone interviews with key Sightsavers staff in the UK and Uganda

Text in purple is informed by a trip by Sightsavers Evaluations Advisor to Sri Lanka from 23rd - 25th March 2016.

6. Annexes

Annex 1: Definitions of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) - written by Sightsavers Evaluations Advisor (Karen Smith)

Summary

This document outlines the different definitions of SHGs and DPOs gathered from fieldwork for the iReflect on Economic Empowerment during January and February 2016. It is intended to provide an overview of how Sightsavers staff in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka are using these terms, to inform an organisational definition.

There seem to be common understandings of SHGs as small scale, village level groups primarily concerned with the interests of their own members. The development process from SHG to DPO isn't as clear across the contexts. Though the definition of a DPO is common, as a registered organisation which is focused on rights and working for people with disabilities as a whole within a geographic area dependent on their level of operation.

On page 11 of this report, the consultant made the following observation:

As Sightsavers staff in India and Bangladesh (and confirmed by ADD International in Bangladesh) explained, SHG in India and Bangladesh operate entirely at village level and engage mostly in livelihood and grassroots-level advocacy and networking through committees at sub-district level. At Block-level, SHG in India have representatives in DPOs who then have representatives at District-level DPOs, going on to State level and National level DPOs.

DPOs are responsible for advocacy related to the relevant political level, networking, and – as an example at District level in India shows - marketing of products that the SHG have produced at village level.

Definition in Bangladesh from Rifat Khan (Programme Manager)

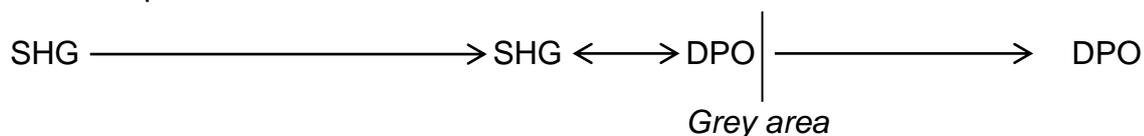
Difference between SHGs and DPOs

- Location
- Scope of work
- Mandate
- Context
- Interest of members
- Registration

SHG

Community and grassroots level, work for themselves and their community. Not necessarily just disability issues e.g. child marriage. SHGs can do a certain level of networking and link to DPOs for higher level advocacy, if they want. SHGs should also work for inclusion.

The change from a SHG to a DPO depends on their drive. The decision has to come from them. The project provides the opportunity for interaction and sharing ideas at different levels. The scope is determined by the SHG through gradual exposure and widening of their scope beyond the community. They will become a DPO at some point. Education level is also important to evolution.



At the lower level the terms SHG and DPO are interchangeable. Once you get to the national level DPOs wouldn't call themselves SHGs.

DPO

After exposure, development and engagement the SHG becomes focused on the national level and works as an umbrella increasing networking. In the project, this needs to be developed, as currently the DPOs are more internally focused. DPOs are/should also be resource groups.

Rifat suggested that, there is an organisational need for a definition and minimum guidelines or standards for working with SHGs. This needs to be a fairly flexible definition to allow for variation in development of SHGS / DPOs, but it would be good to identify common stages and levels of support.

Definition in Sri Lanka from Sunil Fernando (Country Director)

SHG

An informal group of persons with disabilities who meet frequently to discuss their issues, share their lives and strengthen and support each other. The SHG is based on the immediate needs of members.

DPO

Registered with the Divisional Secretariat, DPOs have a constitution and take shared responsibility for the organisation. They conduct rights-based advocacy and speak with authorities for the benefit of members, supporting group members within the defined geographical area. The DPO is rights-based and takes concrete steps for the development of their members.

Definition in India from Abraham George (Director MERL), Sudipta Mohanty (Area Director), Praveen Kumar, (Programme Manager) and Akbar Mehfuz Alam (Programme Officer)

National DPO: National level advocacy linked with many other groups including national level NGOs.

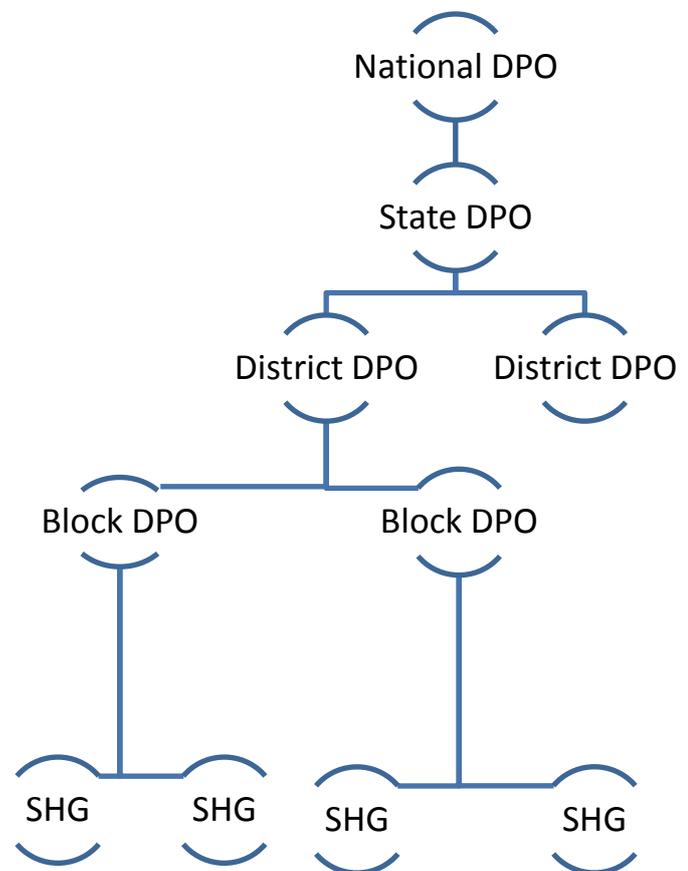
State DPO: A 'network of networks' main role is advocacy using evidence collected from the district level and providing strategic support to district level.

District DPO: Main role is advocacy using evidence collected from the block level and providing strategic support to block level.

Block level DPO: Work on advocacy for individual and collective issues e.g. disability certificates, pension schemes, accessible services, as this is the administration level for schemes and benefits.

SHG: Operate at village level. Main aim is to ensure income and financial inclusion. The thinking is that if income is ensured, then people will be able to speak about their rights.

The SHG level also provides evidence and documentation of schemes etc. which are not being implemented and shares with the block level.



Annex 2: Process of Economic Empowerment in SHG

During a programme visit in Bangladesh and India¹²⁰, project partners and Sightsavers staff respectively identified similar stages that SHG go through to achieve economic empowerment:

Stage 1 – getting people with disabilities together, getting them out of the house and forming a group where they learn about disability-related and rights related issues. This stage often takes the longest because awareness-raising, negotiating with family members, developing confidence of people with disabilities themselves is time consuming and needs a careful and iterative approach. Sightsavers staff estimated the process to take approximately 6-8 months.

People with disabilities, predominantly people with visual impairment, received training in orientation and mobility (O&M) as well as activities of daily life/daily life skills to decrease their dependence on family members and increase their abilities to move around on their own and engage in some form of livelihood activities.¹²¹ This has been seen as vitally important and highly appreciated by people with disabilities and their families¹²². Being independent from family members for moving around and engaging in Activities of Daily Life (ADL) is not only effective in creating higher self-confidence of people with disabilities, facilitating economic independence and challenging perceptions of unproductiveness. It also affects the entire family in reducing unpaid care work and enabling care takers (including child guides) to pursue education and work

Stage 2 – introducing the concept of saving, starting to put aside money (either from own income or through family contributions) with the encouragement to open a bank account (in Bangladesh, having a bank account is necessary to be eligible for voter registration¹²³); basic training in record keeping and management of savings. Members are expected to contribute a certain monthly amount of money to the SHG, which is recorded and accounted for. As soon as banks allow, the SHG opens a bank account. This stage builds on the new confidence levels and the increasing motivation to learn new skills, engage with other people in business, and feel connected to the SHG. Staff estimate this stage to take approximately 4 months.

Stage 3 – start of small individual businesses of members through livelihood mapping in SHG to identify skills and interests; linking members to training courses at training centres or providing training through Sightsavers and partners; investing savings into business venture such as opening petty shops, producing household items, detergents, candles, jute and bamboo based items, livestock raising and box/packaging making. SHG are encouraged to open bank accounts as soon as possible for security reasons and to be able

¹²⁰ Interview with key Sightsavers and ABC staff in India, 14.1.2016 and Bangladesh, 10.1.2016 respectively

¹²¹ Raipur District GRIHINI CBR MTR India, 2011, Rajasthan UKS CBR MTR India, 2011; CBR and Empowerment Project Evaluation, Sierra Leone 2009

¹²² Sightsavers Social Inclusion Review, 2014

¹²³ CBR project Barisal final project evaluation Bangladesh 2010

to negotiate loans at some point¹²⁴. This stage depends very much on the kind of training, the link to local markets and the support of banks.

Stage 4 – establishing group enterprises with clear link to market and external environment; ability to market products (if not done by District DPO as in the example in India) potentially hiring staff when business is flourishing. In India, the government uses a grading system to monitor and assess the success of earlier grants. Depending on how well and successfully people with disability invested, the government gives up to four increasingly larger grants starting at RS 8,000 for the formation of the group, up to a RS 200,000 grant for bigger investments.

¹²⁴ MPVSS CBR project, MTR, India 2010; CBR project evaluation, Sierra Leone, 2010

Annex 3: Comparison of SHG in purpose and economic empowerment levels

SHGs in the projects are at different levels. This is linked to the time frame and purpose for which they were formed: For example, one SHG in Narsingdi, Bangladesh was formed ca 8 years ago, initially to get people with disabilities together and encourage peer support and community awareness around disability, for example access to schools, health services and safety net/social protection schemes. However, the members were also involved with community issues other than disability inclusion, for example issues around child marriage and supporting non-disabled people (women) that were at the time worse off than their SHG members. When the Social Inclusion project started, this SHG learned more about economic empowerment, which since became a higher priority. However, the confidence and peer support is already honed, which supports the process of developing group-based livelihoods and peer support for individual IGA.

A SHG in Dhaka was formed three years ago at the beginning of the Social Inclusion project, with the expressed purpose of supporting livelihood opportunities, it has only recently developed the confidence and unity to plan group enterprises or take steps to negotiate employment for individual members. Dhaka is a particular case because as the capital of Bangladesh, the city is host to a huge number of migrants from all over the country with different backgrounds and experiences. The cohesion that may already exist among people with disabilities from the same village or cluster of villages therefore needs to be developed as a first step. In such circumstances, the development of strong and confident SHG members that work in unity and self-assuredness is critical, but may potentially take longer than elsewhere. The Dhaka group was therefore more inward looking and adamant in accepting only disabled members in their livelihood initiatives and starting advocacy activities at a very low and local level.

Dhaka also presents a special case because its large population means that banks do not want for customers and their bank accounts, and therefore see no advantage in making it easy for people with disabilities to access their banks – despite the national directive on doing so. This means, new SHG with diverse backgrounds and experiences are presented with even more challenging circumstances and may need more project support than their peers outside the larger cities. However, it is worth remembering that, for example, ADD International has worked in Dhaka with SHG and DPOs for a long time and that cross-organisational support, mentoring and linkages might be helpful.

In contrast, a SHG in Odisha, India, was formed by DPO members explicitly and exclusively for the purpose of business, with no intention to pursue advocacy or awareness raising. The following case study is based on a focus group discussion with core and associated members of the Prashanti SHG¹²⁵.

¹²⁵ FGD with Prashanthi SHG, Odisha, India, 15.1.2016

Box 2: Case Study: Prashanthi Self Help Group, Ganjam District, Odisha, India

Following skills and business training arranged by the Social Inclusion Programme in Odisha, some individual participants decided to form a self-help group with the sole intention to set up a business. Seven core members contributed Rs1,000 each (raised through family contributions) to start the enterprise.

Each member now contributes a monthly Rs200. The group has rented a small building where all core members live and work together. The group has 12 associated members who don't contribute a monthly saving fee but help scale productivity and market sales: the core members sell their products at a set price to the associate members who commit to pick up the wares early in the morning, sell it on to local markets, and to return the money in the evening. The associated members keep as profit the difference between sale price set by the SHG and the sell-on price on the market. In this way, the SHG is guaranteed its profit while the associated members take a certain risk of not being able to sell all products.

After six months, the membership will be reviewed, and if associated members have proven to be reliable, and are willing to pay the joining fee of Rs1000 and live at the SHG's house they may become core members.

The case study of the Prashanthi SHG is a particular example as it has a clearly defined purpose separate from the purpose and responsibilities of the district DPO. Issues around rights, accessibility and inclusion are left entirely to the DPO. All core and some associated members were already DPO members before joining the SHG, and went through the processes of confidence building and knowing their rights. Now, the SHG in its business form is an expression of that confidence taking advantage of the skills and knowledge acquired through previous training and peer support (as DPO members and then as project participants in skills and business training), and channeling it all into focus on income. Therefore, all decisions regarding SHG membership, and the kind of businesses to be undertaken are first and foremost focused on and guided by considerations of productivity and marketability. This explains why the SHG is already showing a significant success in productivity and income even though it has only been formed four months prior to this discussion. It also explains why business arrangements (living together for higher productivity) take precedence over the inclusion of women with disabilities.

Annex 4: Example of Advocacy efforts of SHGs and DPOs from Odisha, India

The below examples were collected from members of the block and district level DPO in Ganjam, Odisha, India during fieldwork conducted in January 2016

At Block level:

People with disabilities generally are not informed about government schemes, subsistence subsidies, or social protection. Neither is the government at Block level. So the responsibility of Block DPO is to raise awareness of and provide information to both people with disabilities and the local government. For example:

- Meetings are held with the Panchayat (few villages). The Block DPO is accompanied by Jana Jagarana and District DPO and raises current issues regarding subsidies and social protection schemes; if there is resistance by the government and the meetings do not bring results, then street demonstrations are organised to “force” the subject.
- Sensitisation campaigns target public representatives (at village and block level) informing them why people with disabilities need shelter/housing support and prioritisation in receiving new pensions
- Work with the private sector e.g. with bus association to ensure people with disabilities receive priority seats and are accepted with fare concessions
- During the Tsunami in 2013 one DPO member went to local government offices to request subsidies. He was not only denied a rice subsidy but was also physically abused. The person went to the Block DPO and members rallied at the Revenue Divisional Commissioner’s office to lodge a complaint. The result was that the offending government person was arrested and the DPO member received the subsidy. The internet media reported, and subsequently the print media took interest and reported too.

Regarding Employment

There is little employment at block level and district level, however

- ABAR is a training institute that was previously not inclusive – with support of the implementing partner Jana Jagarana the DPO sensitised ABAR and achieved the inclusion of a training programme for people with disabilities (on mushroom cultivation)
- The 100-day ensured employment scheme did not initially cover people with disabilities. Through advocacy support by Jana Jagarana and the District DPO, the scheme is now covering a large number for people with disabilities

Advocacy activities include:

1. Writing a petition
2. Writing a follow-up letter which includes an ultimatum
3. Agitation in front of the relevant office
4. Rally, demonstration through town, may include hunger strike (e.g. to obtain a disability job card)

At District Level

Before the Economic Empowerment project, many blind and visually impaired people were not allowed to open bank accounts. Advocacy changed that policy. Local banks don't have the power to make such decisions so higher level targets are necessary. With support of Jana Jagarana, the district DPO held meetings with bankers at state level to sensitise them and to adjust the policy.

A stakeholder meeting organised by the district DPO with support of partners invited the State Commissioner of Disability to discuss:

- The public sector quota of 3%, which is not fully implemented - in reality only 0.3% are people with disabilities
- The 3% quota for college/university entry – no mechanism exists to ensure its implementation
- Ensuring priority under Chief Minister Relief Fund to disperse the fund at district level and to include people with disabilities who earlier were not listed to receive such funds at district level

Following the advocacy efforts the Commissioner of Disability issued an official letter to college heads and training institutes and sent copies of the letter to DPOs to use at meetings, and encourage implementation.

As a result:

- The district Polytechnic (for women) increased the entry quota to an even higher percentage than 3%
- The Industrial Training Institute is starting to implement the quota
- One college has made provisions to include BVIP in trainings and provide secure and accessible dormitories.

In addition, the DPO supports and orients schools and colleges in the how-to of inclusion. A series of meetings and follow-up monitoring are to ensure continuation of these implementation processes.

Use of evidence

The DPO keeps itself informed of guidelines and Acts. They follow up requirements in Acts, collect information about and monitor real numbers to show the government discrepancies in the rate of implementation, and remind the government of its responsibility. For example,

- Rules on SHG formation initially did not make allowances to the situation of people with disabilities which has now been widened and adjusted.
- During the Tsunami in 2013, they lobbied for special rate of rehabilitation incentives to people with disabilities affected by the tsunami

- Differential Rate of Interest scheme (DR): the DPO lobbied government officials to enforce loan opportunities under this scheme to people with disabilities

In addition, the project DPOs exchange information with other districts that are not in the project area to mentor emerging DPOs and help with their development and advocacy.

Successful advocacy results are used for further influencing and target appropriate groups such as banks who are not informed of the national directive that allows people with disabilities to open saving accounts.

At State level

One example of state level advocacy was given in regard to a raise in the disability pension, which included hunger strike as an advocacy measure.

Annex 5: Sri Lanka Case Study - written by Sightsavers Evaluations Advisor (Karen Smith)

Summary

Sightsavers Social Inclusion programme in Sri Lanka has used an innovative individualised approach to economic empowerment, which shows promising results after two and a half years of project support. Important elements of the approach include the focus on a small number of beneficiaries with regularly monitored business plans, start-up funding and the provision of relevant training, including business training.

The project has attempted to ensure sustainability through creating a pool of resource persons within the DPOs. Some of the income generation and rights promotion activities are likely to continue after exit, though some beneficiaries are still in early stages of income generation and may struggle to continue without project support.

The project faced several challenges, including: negative community attitudes to persons with disabilities and constricting attitudes and unsafe environments for women with disabilities. There is also some evidence of limited access to some training programmes, particularly for people with Visual Impairment. One weakness of the design is that persons with disabilities were not involved, which might have helped to highlight and address these challenges.

The partner highlighted one of the main benefits of working with Sightsavers was the new approaches they were exposed to and the learning for their staff. Indeed, the project used learning from previous phases to develop the current approach.

This project provides a lot of interesting ideas and learning for other Sightsavers projects in economic empowerment.

Methodology

This case study is informed by a review of project documents and primary data collected during a field visit to the project in Nuwera Eliya district from 23rd – 25th February 2016 by Karen Smith, Sightsavers Evaluations Advisor. The field work involved individual and group interviews with persons with disabilities, non-disabled members of group enterprises, members of Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs), Women's Development Centre (WDC) project staff and Sightsavers staff¹²⁶. The interviews were translated on site by Sightsavers Finance and Support Services Officer, who was not known to the beneficiaries or project staff. Data was analysed using a thematic analysis and the findings are presented, as much as possible, in the words of respondents.

¹²⁶ Three men with disabilities who had received livelihood support; four young women with disabilities, three non-disabled women and one male with disabilities involved in a group enterprise; four WDC project staff and one volunteer; Sightsavers Project Officer and Country director; Six members of Nuwera Eliya DPO and five members of Kotmale DPO.

Objectives

Overall Objective:

To strengthen the community approach for social inclusion by empowering people with disabilities, Self Help Groups (SHGs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs), DPOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to actively participate in disability inclusive local development by creating access to influence over policies and decision making, annual development budget and governance policy.

Specific Objective 1

To promote social, economic and political empowerment of persons with disabilities for full participation in the social life, active engagement and negotiation with families, communities and authorities on issues that affect their lives.

Specific Objective 2

To develop capacity of DPOs as resources for Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programmes, agents of advocacy and mediators for rights of persons with disabilities

Specific Objective 3

To promote and build capacity in implementation of disability-sensitive local governance approaches within Local Government Authorities (LGAs)

Specific Objective 4

Institutionalise the learning for replication of project.

What was the programme approach to economic empowerment?

The project took a 'holistic' approach, working on social empowerment, CBR and economic empowerment. There were plans to work on governance, but the project was not able to undertake these activities due to the changes in political structures in the Nuwara Eliya District as well as more broadly in Sri Lanka. The project was originally planned for a three year period, but the project was shortened by the exit of the Country Programme to two and a half years.

The project was planned and implemented with a long-standing partner, WDC. Sightsavers have been working with WDC since 2002. WDC's primary focus is on empowering women and persons with disabilities through ensuring access to knowledge and greater economic independence. They also create networks of Women's Groups for support and community development.

Within economic empowerment the project worked on value chain development, skill development, capacity building, and linkages between these aspects. The project took a rights-based approach, a change from previous needs based approaches. The focus of the

project was on building the capacity of persons with disabilities to sustain and develop income generation activities (IGA) or businesses beyond the project period. The primary focus was on individuals, though a few group enterprises were developed.

Mixed gender SHGs were formed for persons with disabilities, these were generally small, with up to 10 members from one or two villages. Women with disabilities were linked to existing Women's Groups with non-disabled members to raise issues at a higher level. Men with disabilities were linked to Rural Development Societies with non-disabled members. The intention of the project was to ensure these groups were represented at divisional advisory committees. However, due to the dissolving of the urban councils in mid-2014 and the presidential elections held in January 2015, the project team were not able to implement this part of the project.

As the SHGs were formed primarily for social support, they were not the focus of this study. However, there is some anecdotal evidence that these links may address stigma and discrimination. For example, the non-disabled members of the group enterprise in Nuwera Eliya were emphatic in their desire to help persons with disabilities in other districts, "I can help. I am preaching to other disabled women and encouraging and motivating them to do something, not idling at home. I can help teach what we're doing now" (F5)¹²⁷. The female members of the Nuwera Eliya DPO also highlighted the importance of the links to Women's Groups to bring all their problems together, "if we are alone we can't do anything, so [we] bring [our problems] together to deal with all at the same time." (F8)

The project worked on a small scale, with 50 beneficiaries from two Divisions of Nuwera Eliya district (100 beneficiaries in total), 57 of these beneficiaries were involved in economic activities. The other 43 beneficiaries received medical interventions and infrastructure support e.g. assistive devices and accessible toilets, or education support if they were school age children.

There was also opportunistic work on the National Plan for Employment of People with Disabilities with the Ministry of Labour (See annex 7).

What activities were employed?

According to WDC, the project approach to economic empowerment activities involved initial selection of 100 beneficiaries and then conducting a SWOT analysis and assessment of the environment for each beneficiary. Each beneficiary was then given a personal development plan. The SWOT analysis was used to identify 57 beneficiaries (18 women and 39 men) who would benefit from the economic empowerment activities (target 50, actual 57). These were often head of households, who were dependent on other family members.

¹²⁷ All interviewees have been given a number according to the order we spoke with them to retain anonymity. The M, F indicates male or female respondents and WDC indicates a respondent from WDC.

Each of these beneficiaries was supported to develop a personal business plan. The business plans were based on the individual's choice, previous experience, skills and knowledge. WDC assessed the business plans to ensure they were suitable and would provide enough profit for the beneficiary to support themselves, and their family (if they were head of the household). After the business plans were developed the beneficiaries were provided with 50% of the start-up funds needed for the project. From the interviews this varied from in-kind support such as material for sewing, to 30,000 Rs (approx. £150). Beneficiaries were linked to the Department of Social Services (DSS) for the remaining funding through grants, or it was provided by families or through savings.

The beneficiaries received training relevant to their business, level of experience and the ability and skill of the person. For example in a sewing group enterprise some members received 10 days training and others in the group received three months. Another beneficiary received ongoing technical support for his agriculture business and was linked to Ministry of Agriculture for further training sessions. All the beneficiaries were given four days standard business training, but each one was counselled during the training on their specific business. Some family members attended training if persons with disabilities couldn't attend.

Twenty were given additional entrepreneurship training from the Competency Based Economics through the Formation of Enterprises (CEFE) scheme. This is a training of trainers' course which includes economics, business counselling, business planning, business accounts and business development training. As planned, these trainees are now resource persons within the community and are training other groups of persons with disabilities.

The business plans, and businesses, were monitored monthly by WDC project staff and volunteers, who visited the beneficiaries twice a month on average (though this varied depending on the level of support needed).

WDC project staff and volunteers also linked the individuals to persons with disabilities and non-disabled people, to form group businesses. They also provided links for groups and individuals to opportunities with Government and private sector companies, for example a local hotel for making and selling candles and a Strawberry company for growing strawberries and making bags, uniforms and garments for the gift shop.

There was also an element of formal employment for persons with disabilities within the project through job fairs, but this review was unable to meet any of these beneficiaries and so the case study focuses on self-employment and IGA.

Advocacy was conducted by WDC staff and DPOs; this was mainly around improving the accessibility of public and private buildings such as hospitals, District Secretariat Offices, Post Offices and banks. While this may contribute to financial inclusion, advocacy around specific economic empowerment or employment rights was not the focus at this level.

However, there were some examples, such as the DPO in Kotmale getting the Ministry of Social Services to reinstate a 3,000 Rs allowance for persons with disabilities.

At the national level there was a strong and concerted effort from the Country Director to develop and support the piloting of the National Plan on Employment for Persons With Disabilities. This plan includes the development of a database to link persons with disabilities with skills to employment opportunities (www.employmentforpwwds.org) (see Annex 7).

Of approaches so far what seems to have worked well?

For individuals

People with disabilities highlighted the social changes brought about by their earning. As M2 highlighted, “I’m seeing a lot of change before the project I was just around the house after the project I have more friends; I have more interaction and a lot of involvement. I go out more and go to meetings.”

Increased interaction, going out more and being part of the community were highlighted by many of the persons with disabilities and linked to the increase in income, “because they [persons with disabilities] have money, they are coming out” (M8). They also highlighted the change in their daily life from being idle, to being “fully occupied” (M1, M2) as an important change.

In terms of business development the majority of the persons with disabilities interviewed reported being able to secure increased, regular income from the various businesses or income generation activities. A few stated that they were now financially independent and the majority were able to save some of their income and were using this for various needs including medical needs and school fees for children. One was also re-investing in his business.

The income generation activities undertaken varied from sewing, agriculture, building and selling LED bulbs and making paper bags for packaging. This variety is in itself a reflection of the individualised nature of the support offered. The majority of individuals interviewed had previous experience in their income generation/ business and stated that they had been offered a choice of training. This link to previous experience could have influenced the success of the income generation as there was already a certain level of confidence. This could also work against the trend for markets to become saturated with persons with disabilities undertaking the same IGA. Indeed, WDC highlighted that they had attempted to offer non-traditional opportunities for persons with disabilities while suggesting that the perception of the community and of persons with disabilities made this a real challenge, particularly for women:

...for women it’s sewing, cooking. We have done electrical wiring and carpentry but it doesn’t match with the religious and cultural

[expectations]... they don't have exposure and think its dangerous and only a man can do. When it comes to disability it's also worse, they think they can only do small, small things like making bags.

For the mobile repair training people, non-disabled people said 'why are you giving this for these people, rather than normal young guys there. The disabled should be treated like the disabled and kept in their place (WDC 2)

In terms of the project activities, the persons with disabilities identified the training, start-up funding and guidance / monitoring as important to their development. The choice of business/ income generation activity has been mentioned previously and this was also reflected in the way training was implemented. WDC provided some training, but also linked persons with disabilities to various training institutes including vocational centres and Government providers according to their skill level and abilities. The approach was individualised to what the person wanted to do. This also applied to the start-up funding which was provided according to the individual business plans, which were assessed by WDC to ensure they were profitable. This included a simple market analysis, conducted by WDC staff and volunteers who met with divisional and district authorities and went to different places to see which were the most demanded for products. This market analysis was communicated to persons with disabilities during business plan development, building their ability to assess markets in future.

Business development seemed to be fostered by the links provided by WDC to different market opportunities. Importantly for sustainability, this is something the DPOs have also taken on – linking members to business opportunities. For example, Nuwera Eliya DPO asks each new member to fill in an application form with their skills and abilities and uses the meetings to identify and link them to relevant training opportunities. They also bring the District Social Services Officer (DSSO) to the meetings to create awareness about what persons with disabilities can do and link them to opportunities.

The business plans were monitored by WDC project staff and volunteers through regular visits. Indeed these visits were highlighted by many persons with disabilities and their family members as an important source of recognition and motivation, “Because of the constant monitoring of WDC which helps us to develop, they are constantly coming and checking on us, which encourages us. This is how we have more income than we had before.” (M7)

The interviews also highlighted the cyclical nature of empowerment. Persons with disabilities needed confidence and motivation to begin income generation; this confidence was often attributed to the project staffs support. Once they began earning this gave them further encouragement and motivation and a desire to help others, this was a common sentiment expressed by the interviewees when asked what advice they had for other persons with disabilities:

If people are in the house I bring them out and show myself as a practical example so they can improve their lives. My wish is to help them who are hiding at home. To help in any possible way, financial or otherwise, to improve their life skills and they can in turn help others (M10)

For DPOs

The DPOs were at different levels of development. In Kotmale, the group seemed very strong and cohesive. They had a clear leader, but others were speaking up and speaking out. The group seemed to have a strong sense of purpose and was actively seeking out opportunities for income generation and fundraising to ensure continued activities and increased income for members after the end of the project. They also had a strong rights focus. The President was trained by WDC as a resource person for UNCRPD training in the district and the DPO were planning to train others and provide counselling outside their area. They also had several advocacy successes, “Compared to other divisions this is the most accessible in terms of Government buildings including the district Secretariat, the Post Office, the hospital and the police, and some banks” (M3).

Nuwera Eliya DPO in contrast, weren't as strong or cohesive. There was less of a group identity and it was harder to get them to speak about the work of the DPO, as a group. However they do seem to be planning and looking out for their members on an individual level.

In terms of economic empowerment, the role of the DPO in linking their members to opportunities for training and income generation has already been mentioned. In addition both groups gave concrete, well-planned examples of their work to improve the economic situation of their members.

In Kotmale the group, through their advocacy work and with the support of WDC, have created a link with the MoH. The MoH has announced that all orders for the bags used in pharmacies will be given to the DPO. They are currently working on securing these orders, which they will then distribute among the members. The President has a database detailing the livelihood activities of all members. The plan is to distribute the orders among the members who are not currently engaged in any income generation and are confined to their homes. Those who have already been trained in bag making through the project will train others. In addition, some of the members who can travel will get bag training and then retrain others in their homes. The group plan to use the money from DPO membership fees to cover the transport costs for this training.

In Nuwera Eliya, the group have written to the mayor of the District Secretariat to allocate a plot of land for members to sell their products. They have discussed among the group and decided that this will be easier than members travelling house to house, and will reduce competition and costs. They will also be able to take advantage of the high numbers of tourists who visit the area. They plan to keep writing until the Mayor responds. They were confident that the space would be allocated, but were ready to go to a higher authority if needed.

The links enabled by coming together as a DPO were important to the members. As members of Kotmale DPO highlighted, they have some status now and are able to exert some power, because of working with other people. The group identity was important in addressing their issues, “The DPO is important to address the issues. The individual is not recognised. We go in a group then we are recognised. It’s essential for us to be in a group.” (M2)

For the partner

WDC highlighted the Value Chain Analysis (VCA) as an important aspect of the project. A full VCA would involve identifying all the stages of production and assessing the value added at each stage. The analysis would then be used to identify opportunities for persons with disabilities within this chain. This type of VCA wasn’t conducted in the project, but the VCA training was being used as a way of thinking about different opportunities for persons with disabilities. For example, the project volunteers identified the high demand for rugs in the project area, due to the cold weather. They approached a garment factory to provide material for the rugs and the garment factory responded by supplying both waste material to make the rugs and by offering to sell the rugs in their existing markets. This is a mutually beneficial relationship with sustained demand and access to marketing for the persons with disabilities. The main benefit, highlighted by WDC, was the brand and marketing expertise of the garment factory, which would ensure a demand for the rugs and supply of material after project exit.

WDC also highlighted the participatory nature of the project planning, as a key benefit and that the project was “not activity based, but in the most case really rights based” (WDC 3). This is reflected in the small scale, individualised support provided to persons with disabilities, which has resulted, according to Sightsavers staff, in more dramatic change in the lives of beneficiaries, as opposed to previous phases of the project.

Another key factor in the achievements of the project was the focus on the achievements of persons with disabilities, as the Country Director explained:

The first monitoring meeting we did this. We said we are not here to see your achievements; you need to reflect this in terms of what the people with disabilities have done. For example, before WDC would go to the District Secretariat and ask for a meeting room, but later the DPO went and WDC went in support. The partner are now talking from

what the DPO have done, they have slowly transferred the responsibility.

Challenges

For persons with disabilities/ DPOs

The key challenges highlighted by persons with disabilities and project staff were the inaccessibility of the area and low level of awareness of persons with disabilities. Nuwera Eliya is mountainous, which makes physical access to markets difficult and also makes it difficult for persons with disabilities to access information and come together. Also the infrastructure of key buildings in the area was seen as challenging, though project staff and persons with disabilities both highlighted significant progress in this area.

Conversely, one of the key challenges was the attitude of community members to persons with disabilities and this was an area where project staff didn't feel there had been much progress. This manifested in a number of ways including negative attitudes, such as persons with disabilities speaking of fear of coming out, being undermined by disability and the shame of families having a member with disabilities. The Kotmale DPO also mentioned that they were not treated as equals in business matters, but were treated with sympathy and taken advantage of. The issue was highlighted by WDC, "they [the community] don't think they [persons with disabilities] can contribute economically and socially, but that is the thing we are trying to change." (WDC 1). In contrast the Nuwera Eliya DPO was planning to use the sympathy of tourists to bolster sales at their planned joint selling point showing an awareness and redirection of these negative attitudes.

The particular issues for women were also highlighted. Interestingly, one of the non-disabled women in the group enterprise highlighted similar benefits from being involved in the project as group members with disabilities "I am also now happier, after interacting more with the community when involved in the project" (F1). The main challenge highlighted for women was that they were dependent on people accompanying them and couldn't move around alone. Indeed, WDC highlighted the high threat of abuse for women with disabilities in the area. However, this can also be understood as over-protection. For example, when asked if she agreed that women need someone else's help the President of the Nuwera Eliya DPO stated, "No! I am more capable of doing anything and being a success in my life, even with this disability" (F8).

To address this challenge the project had a target for 30% of those involved in economic empowerment activities to be women, which was achieved. All 18 adult women identified by the project were included in the income generation activities. There were fewer women identified (28 out of 100), which project staff attributed to there being more men with disabilities than women in Sri Lanka. This is reflected in data from the 2001 census and is particularly significant in the 15 - 65 age groups (DCS). This could be due in part to the long period of conflict in the country.

The project attempted to encourage women to engage in less traditional income generation activities, though success was limited, as mentioned previously. Importantly, income was seen as an important factor in women finding more freedom at the household level (WDC 1).

For the project

It was notable that the one individual who had not attended business training (though his wife had attended on his behalf) was the least confident in terms of his income generation and had no clear plans for development, expansion or to make his income more regular. This was also reflected in the group enterprise, with those trained in business being more confident in future plans for the enterprise. Though WDC mentioned that all persons with disabilities received business training it seems that some were not accessing this training due to accessibility issues – for two individuals it was highlighted that their Visual Impairment and inability to read braille meant they did not attend all of the trainings. As training has been identified as an important part of the development of independence it is important to ensure that training is inclusive so all persons with disabilities can get the full benefit.

One often mentioned challenge to growing businesses was access to additional funds. While most members were able to provide for immediate needs and have some savings. They were not yet able to save for future business investments to improve their financial security. Access to bank loans was also low, though one person with disabilities in the project had obtained a loan from a bank.

One factor, which could have improved the development of the project, is the involvement of persons with disabilities in project planning. Though the project staff were pleased with the participatory nature of the project and planning also included Government officials, the insight and experiences of persons with disabilities could have further bolstered the planning and potentially identified key focus areas for the project, such as community perception.

Sustainability of results and further scope for development

In terms of sustainability, the main issue highlighted by the project staff, was the short time-frame of the project. It was felt that a two and half year project was not enough to achieve sustainable results. In addition, a three year project (as originally planned) was also not thought to be long enough.

It is difficult to assess the sustainability of the different aspects of the project within the short field work. However, some of the individuals and the members of the group enterprise seemed confident in their plans for the future of their business. A few appeared to have clearly thought out plans for their businesses, but didn't have access to the finance needed to carry out these plans. The Kotmale DPO was very confident in their plans for continuing and expanding their activities and support.

There are others who are still at a very early stage of developing their confidence and income. It is interesting to note the importance the persons with disabilities placed on the “constant monitoring” of WDC staff in their achievements and it is unclear if without this support and guidance the businesses and IGA will continue to develop, particularly for those with less access to/ engagement with the DPO and Women’s Groups for support.

Catering for people with complex disabilities and intellectual impairment may also prove difficult without ongoing support. The young women in the group enterprise were keen to support the other members with intellectual impairments, but they may not have the skills and knowledge needed. Indeed during the interview these young women were not encouraged to take part, but were often spoken for. Also, these young women were not in charge of their savings but savings were being made for them by group and family members. The evaluator, without specific skills in this area, is not in a position to assess the appropriateness of this, but it was an interesting difference.

The project tried to overcome these challenges through creating resource persons among persons with disabilities. For example the 20 CEFE trained individuals can train others in business development and the two individuals trained as resource persons in UNCRPD are conducting training for other groups of persons with disabilities and non-disabled people. The project also trained the DPO members in advocacy and was planning to provide training in project proposal development to help with future fundraising. The project approach also aimed for sustainability, with the focus on small numbers and empowering persons with disabilities to be independent. In terms of links with existing structures, the project staff ensured the persons with disabilities were linked to the DSSO and Women’s Groups so they could take over the support, as their role entails.

Lessons Learned

The project is a good example of learning from previous phases and the approach developed has addressed many of the challenges of previous projects and developed a strong approach to economic empowerment. Some of the key areas for learning are:

- **Participatory planning:** to ensure key challenges are identified from the outset and persons with disabilities have ownership of and engagement with the project to ensure sustainability. This would also build skills in project planning.
- **Focus on persons with disabilities achievements, rather than project activities:** This shift in the focus of monitoring ensured the project staff were building the capacity and independence of persons with disabilities to undertake activities. This may have also impacted the appreciation of the persons with disabilities for the monitoring visits.
- **Focus on changing community attitudes:** The project identified this as a key challenge and an area for improvement. Situational analysis to identify community attitudes and appropriate strategies to address these should be included at the outset.

- **Importance of business training:** The business training, as in other projects, seems to be important to the confidence and capability of persons with disabilities to independently develop and sustain IGA and to develop a business.
- **Importance of DPO as resource for sustainability:** Training DPO members as resource persons ensures knowledge and skills are retained in the project area after exit.
- **Individualised focus:** This allowed for flexibility in persons with disabilities activities so responding to their needs, interest, experience and the market. This approach requires intensive working with a small number of beneficiaries.
- **Integration into Government structures for sustainability:** Working with existing Government structures and linking persons with disabilities to relevant Government officials through DPOs raises awareness of persons with disabilities issues, increases knowledge of persons with disabilities and increases the potential for persons with disabilities to access available financial resources after project exit.
- **Time:** A longer project period may have ensured all persons with disabilities were in a stronger position, heightening the chance of continuation after project exit.

Advice for persons with disabilities, from persons with disabilities

“My message to others is to do hard work and get yourself motivated, read a paper to get some knowledge, even a few words.” (M2)

“I’m asking others to come and see how disabled people work and learn from that. Not to think about their disability and come and experience how we work.” (F7)

“If you think you are capable, you can develop that. Think that I can do things and work like other people. You need to develop the feeling within you so don’t think you are disabled, you can do something.” (M7)

“Some people don’t know [they are capable], those who know we can teach them. I learnt after joining - others can learn they are capable.” (F9)

“Even though I have visual impairment, everybody has a capacity within them. I have done my diploma course and am getting a salary. Without thinking about your disability get into something like music – come up and do what you can do” (M10)

“Don’t think about the disability every day that you can’t and you are cornered in the community. With your knowledge and input you can move up in life.” (M9)

Annex 6 - Databases for employment of persons with disabilities - written by
Sightsavers Evaluations Advisor (Karen Smith)

Summary

Both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have developed similar databases, which are hosted on the web and will be accessible for persons with disabilities and employers to register and search for employment. Both databases have potential to support the employment of a number of educated persons with disabilities, with access to ICT. The databases have different strengths, and similar challenges as shown below. The databases are both in implementation stages and monitoring of their use and addressing and learning from challenges will be incredibly important to ensure investments are not wasted. However, follow up and monitoring mechanisms are not currently in place, though they are at different stages of development.

If other Sightsavers programmes want to implement databases, it would be important to contact the development leads to ensure lessons are learned. It would also be important to follow up on the use of the databases to see how effective they are in securing employment, particularly following the initial period of support from the lead organisations. Both leads are entering data for persons with disabilities currently, though the plan is for this to transition to persons with disabilities in future.

	Bangladesh	Sri Lanka
Link to database	Abilities.bd.net	www.employmentforpersons with disabilities.org
Ownership	BVIPs	Ministry of Labour and National Steering Committee on PWD employment
Content	<p>Job seekers: register their details including impairments and any special requirements, job interests and detailed information on experience and training. Can search for jobs and contact employers.</p> <p>Employers: register their company and available positions. Can search for and contact job seekers.</p>	<p>Job seekers: register their details including impairments and any special requirements, job interests and overview information on their experience and training,</p> <p>Employers: register their company and up to three positions they have available. Can search for and contact job seekers with approval of the administration panel.</p>
Development	Sightsavers and BVIPs, as part of the EC Inclusive project	Sightsavers and Ministry of Labour, National Steering Committee on Employment of Persons with disabilities as part of the National Plan development
Use	<p>BVIPs are registering their members on the database. There are plans to sit with different employers and employer's associations to discuss the potential of the database.</p> <p>In the next phase persons with disabilities and employers will be responsible for entering details.</p>	<p>There are 1,148 persons with disabilities already registered on the database. 60 have been introduced to employers and 45 have found employment. These individuals haven't been followed up, as there is no monitoring system at present.</p> <p>In the next phase persons with disabilities and employers will be responsible for entering details.</p>
Strengths	<p>The database is compatible with screen reader software.</p> <p>The information entered by persons with disabilities produces a 'CV' which they can print and take to employers.</p>	<p>The database is available in Sinhala, Tamil and English and is compatible with screen reader software.</p> <p>There is a plan for follow up and monitoring of employers and job seekers, but needs to be developed.</p> <p>Entry of free text is limited with information being mostly drop down menus. This makes the database easier to use.</p>

	Bangladesh	Sri Lanka
Strengths	BVIPs will provide training and support for employers on accessibility and inclusion. They will also provide training and support for job seekers.	Database is linked to and hosted by MoL and so has legitimacy and a wide reach
Challenges	<p>Low levels of education for persons with disabilities, particularly among women, may mean the database is underused and/or difficult to use.</p> <p>There was limited participation of persons with disabilities in database development, which may have identified issues with the system.</p> <p>The database is only available in English</p> <p>There is currently no guidance to help persons with disabilities complete the database</p> <p>Database is hosted by BVIPs, who have limited capacity for entering data and development.</p>	<p>Low levels of education for persons with disabilities, particularly among women, may mean the database is underused.</p> <p>There was limited participation of persons with disabilities in database development, which may have identified issues with the system.</p> <p>Training and support for employers on accessibility and inclusion is not currently available and is not clearly linked to the database.</p>
Recommendations	<p>Additional information about accessibility and adaptation needs of diverse impairment groups, accompanied by advice on how to manage those requirements would support the process.</p> <p>Securing endorsement by government ministries through website links may encourage prospective employers and give them a sense of reassurance about recruiting a disabled person.</p>	<p>The plan surrounding the database is gender aware and has identified challenges on a high level, but a specific gender analysis and gender responsive planning would be beneficial to ensure specific needs are addressed.</p> <p>Foster links with education sector and Vocational Training Institutes to ensure education level of persons with disabilities is built, so future use of the database is ensured.</p>

Annex 7 – Sri Lanka: Developing the National Plan on Providing Employment for Persons with Disabilities - written by Sightsavers Evaluations Advisor (Karen Smith)

There was a strong and concerted effort from the Sri Lanka Country Director to develop and support the implementation of the National Plan on Providing Employment for Persons with disabilities (National Plan). This plan includes the development of a database for persons with disabilities and employers to link people with skills to employment opportunities (www.employmentforpws.org).

Development

The plan was developed through an opportunistic approach; Sunil Fernando (Country Director, Sightsavers) has attended a conference organised by the Sri Lanka Employers Federation and met the former additional secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Labour Relations (MoL), whom he knew a few years back, and was requested to join the National Steering Committee on Employment for Persons with Disabilities. This steering committee was not very active at the time. Sunil led the development of the National Plan, based on evidence from other countries. Members of the working group feeding into the National Plan were from a variety of organisations and included Ministry officials, representatives from ILO and persons with disabilities representing National level NGOs (such as the Development with Disabled Network).

The plan was launched in 2013 and details six strategies for increasing opportunities for persons with disabilities to obtain employment:

1. Compilation of information on persons with disabilities who seek wage employment and assessment of their needs related to wage employment such as interests and goals, skills, talents, motivation and forms of support (e.g. the family) and required training.
2. Facilitation of opportunities for persons with disabilities to increase their chances of securing employment through linking with relevant institutions for required training.
3. Pull together the information on employers, who are willing to provide employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, which may include type of vacancies available, what skills and abilities are required by employers and potential support needs in the workplace.
4. Provision of a service to match persons with disabilities to jobs which correspond with their skills, talents, potential support needs in the workplace and the requirements of the job.
5. Development of job seeking skills of persons with disabilities such as writing of curriculum vitae, look for jobs in the newspapers etc., fill in application forms, develop telephone or letter-writing skills and perform well in a job interview.
6. Facilitation of national level cooperation between all stakeholders to improve the recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities to secure, retain and advance in suitable and freely chosen employment.

The Database

The database has been designed with ease of access for users in mind. It is available in Sinhala, Tamil and English and is compatible with screen reader software.

- **Job seekers:** register their details, job interests, experience, training, impairments and any special requirements.
- **Employers:** register their company and up to three positions they have available.

Employer registration is vetted by an administration panel. Once they are approved they can search registered persons with disabilities by geographic area, experience and interest. Employers can request the contact details of job seekers and the requests are approved by the administration panel. Currently any employer can contact job seekers, but job seekers cannot contact employers. MoL staff can also link employers and job seekers, as they have access to both sides of the information. For now, the MoL is the main source of employment linkages, but the plan is for the linkages to be employer driven with MoL providing support and monitoring.

Currently there are two members of staff (with disabilities) funded by Sightsavers to manage and update the database and approve new persons with disabilities and employers who register on the database. Their funding will be continued to June 2016. The Secretary of the MoL mentioned that they were planning to absorb these staff into the MoL and is discussing within the MoL to try to ensure this is built into budgets.

Results

This is a strong success for advocacy in Sri Lanka. The team have worked very closely with the MoL to develop a National Plan which, when implemented, has the potential to facilitate secure employment of persons with disabilities and mainstream their employment in private and public organisations. The Secretary showed a good understanding of the necessity for ensuring implementation, monitoring and learning. There are plans to roll out the approach across the country. There appears to be a strong sense of ownership, which has been fostered through the process. This is particularly impressive as the current Secretary has only been in post since October 2015 and so was not involved in the majority of the collaborative development of the National Plan.

There are 1,148 persons with disabilities already registered on the database. 60 have been introduced to employers and 45 have found employment, though these persons with disabilities haven't been followed up, as there is no monitoring system at present. In 2014 MoL and Sightsavers also held job fairs to link persons with disabilities and employers, using the database to match skills and opportunities. There aren't plans to continue the job fairs, as the steering group are hoping the database will be more employer driven.

The implementation has begun with the training of District Secretariat officials on the National Plan and database, distribution of application forms in communities for persons with disabilities to fill in and data entry. Currently job seekers either fill in the database themselves, or fill in paper forms which are entered into the database. There will be a meeting in March 2016 to sensitise employers on employing persons with disabilities and to train them in the use of the database. Part of this meeting will involve employers registering themselves on the database. Persons with disabilities will then be linked to job

opportunities by the MoL staff. The MoL plan to pilot the approach in one district where there has been a lot of investment in developing business and generating trade. The Secretary highlighted that they are currently looking to import labour, which suggest vacancies are available for persons with disabilities, particularly in the garment and construction industries.

Challenges

The National Plan is in quite early stages of implementation and there are still several challenges which need to be addressed. One of which is the implementation is occurring in year three of the four year plan and so there will need to be concerted effort to ensure results in the remaining period. However, the Secretary of the MoL was ambitious in his vision stating that he wanted to see 100% employment of able persons with disabilities within three years. He also highlighted that it was a national responsibility to address the employment of persons with disabilities.

Other challenges include

Inclusion of women with disabilities: While the plan does highlight the additional challenges for inclusion of women with disabilities in the labour market there are, as yet, no clear plans to ensure the National Plan is gender responsive. The plan is gender aware and has identified challenges on a high level, but a specific gender analysis and gender responsive planning would be beneficial to ensure specific needs are addressed.

The Secretary of MoL wasn't clear on methods for tackling stereotypical job roles for women and when discussing women's labour primarily highlighted home-based industries as more appropriate for people who "can't go to work places". Conversely, the secretary also highlighted that many women are staying in further education and reaching university level. The data presented in the National Plan, didn't reflect this trend however, highlighting that 32% of people with disabilities had no schooling, that the proportion of females who had no schooling was higher and very few persons with disabilities had a university degree (National Plan on Employment for Persons with Disabilities - DCS, 2001). There will need to be a strong focus on ensuring the inclusion of women in employment and in non-traditional roles.

Low levels of education among persons with disabilities: Linked to the above point the Secretary highlighted, and the National Plan confirms, the importance of improving the level of education of people with disabilities to enable them to access employment. Indeed, the National Plan may only serve an elite section of persons with disabilities. However, the role of the MoL is around formal employment, while the Ministry of Social Services focuses on self-employment and so caters for those with lower educational levels. The MoL were also very aware of this challenge and highlighted this as a key area for further work, though this is beyond their area of control.

Training for employers on accessibility and inclusion: The implementation of the database includes a sensitisation meeting for employers on employing persons with

disabilities. However, training for employers on accessibility and inclusion still needs to be arranged. The MoL will need to lead on this to ensure positive employment outcomes for persons with disabilities and employers. It would also support the process if additional information about accessibility and adaptation needs of diverse impairment groups, accompanied by advice on how to manage those requirements, were easily available to employers.

Sustainability: The National Plan is still in very early stages. Sightsavers Sri Lanka staff, particularly Sunil, have been central to the development of the National Plan and driving forward the implementation. With Sightsavers exit there is a risk that the implementation will lose pace - the mechanism has been established, but the database still needs to be implemented and promoted to show it's really effective. Monitoring and follow up will be essential to this. This is part of the action plan, but will need further elaboration, work and guidance. This will also need the proactive leadership of MoL and the support of other NGOs. The staff currently supported by Sightsavers will also be important to ensuring the database is cleaned and kept active. The progress in this area is impressive, but additional time may have been beneficial to ensure the database is internalised in MoL systems and taken up by employers.

Lessons Learned

- Working with Government requires a high level of interaction and careful, collaborative working. Changing officials means individuals need to be vigilant and ensure relationships are built quickly at the right levels and are based on mutual understanding. This approach is time intensive and requires a long period of support to ensure full integration into structures.
- Working in collaboration needs a strong leader who can push things forward, whilst building consensus and ensuring ownership. Communication is important in this, ensuring the work is not promoting the organisational agenda, but focusing on the joint vision of the project.

Annex 8 - Case study: Malothi and Satata Enterprise

Narsingdi, Bangladesh, based on interview with three members of Satata Enterprise on 11.01.2016

Malothi is General Secretary of her SHG and has taken the lead in establishing a packaging enterprise with two other women with visual impairments, and one hearing impaired man. Her non-disabled husband is helping, as are other SHG members from time to time when big orders come in.

In 2012, Malothi started to think about setting up a clothing business as a livelihood activity. She bought ready-made clothes and sold them on from her home. Because of her blindness she was dependent on others for mobility and therefore spent most of her time at home. Consequently, she had little opportunity to develop a client base. Ready-made clothes have a fixed price and there was not much of a margin to make profit. After a while, Malothi gave up the clothing business - but not the idea of developing a more suitable and successful enterprise.

Through the SHG she asked the (Barrier-free inclusive society) project for training to help establish an income generating activity. In 2014, with two other women with visual impairments, she took part in a 5-day training on making four different kinds of boxes (for packaging shoes, Biryani, sweets, Sari) and shopping bags. Additional business training included basic accounting skills, profit counting, promoting the product and dealing with customers or potential clients, which was practiced, for example, through role play.

In November 2014 Malothi and her colleagues started a small business out of Malothi's house. Initially, it was an experiment but Malothi knew that the project would support 4-5 business plans and decided to apply.

Following her training, she also "practiced" client relationship-building with a relative, a sweetshop owner, who gave her valuable feedback and introduced her to other shop keepers.

Possibly because of the connections of her relative, and certainly because of the SHG's work on awareness-raising, she did not encounter any negative attitudes by other shop owners.

Malothi and her companions began with 2500 THK starting capital to buy raw material for making boxes that they would sell to sweetshops. Luckily, the business application was successful, and the group was able to buy a cutting machine with funds from the SHG (provided through the project). The machine not only improved the quality of the boxes but also significantly increased productivity. The group has moved out of Malothi's house and is now renting a garage-like room where they have more space to work from and store the cutting machine and the material.

The group currently has earned ca 15,000 THK which they use for the facility's rent, utilities and their salaries – currently, 1 THK per box, calculated on the basis of production costs.

After one year in business, they are now starting to pay back the money for the cutting machine. Satata Enterprise has contacted the local bank and will open a bank account soon. They plan to set aside some money as insurance against flooding, fire, or other risks. Because each member receives a disability allowance which is paid directly into their personal accounts, they are known to the bank and don't foresee any difficulties with opening a business account.

The women feel safe in their production facility and in the community. Their clients, the sweetshops, are local and everyone keeps an eye out for them. Because they are business women they are respected.

The SHG also benefits: as the group repays the costs for the cutting machine, the SHG receives cash, which they can use for loans to other SHG members, or investment in group enterprises. If business becomes even better, Satata Enterprise will be happy to employ more people from the SHG. And because they contribute to the SHG, they are involved in decision-making process around what the repayment money will be used for.

The three women who were present during the interview confirmed that the business brought many positive changes in their lives: there is more money for better nutrition and other health issues; there is the interaction with community people and potential customers; the greater respect by family members who now see the potential and the contributions made to the family and the community. And there is also a greater sense of dignity by the women with disabilities and their pride in being called business women.

Malothi emphasises that it is not just the profit margin from raw material against final product but also the group dynamics and the companionship that make the enterprise more successful than her previous business attempt – and also much more enjoyable.

However, without the training, especially the business training and the project support – it is unlikely that any of this would have happened.

Annex 9: Perceptions of economic empowerment (EE) and persistent barriers

Partners' understanding of EE (ABC Narsingdi, Bangladesh)

- Freedom to spend money based on need
- Having the decision making power over earnings
- Earnings
- Having the option to save money

Sightsavers staff understanding of EE

- Being empowered to get a (practical) skill which is transferred to a job or business to raise income and support one's family, e.g. being able to pay for better food, for education (programme manager, Uganda)
- Ability to take charge of one's life means being empowered. If you rely on others in decision-making you are vulnerable. In the economic context, it means being able to make own decisions over income and how it is used (country director, Uganda)

Beneficiaries understanding of economic empowerment: (Narsingdi, Bangladesh)

- Kind of independence (female tailor, 30, with physical impairment)
- Making decisions with available resources; (female livestock raiser, with visual impairment)
- Having access to income (female school teacher, early 20s, with visual impairment)
- State where one can support others (male SHG member, with physical impairment)
- Access to employment (male SHG member, with visual impairment)
- Supporting family (female towel factory worker, 30, with physical impairment)
- Independence from others (female SHG member, with visual impairment)
- "More money" (male SHG member, with physical impairment)
- "Can't see, don't have it – what do you want me to say?" (female SHG member, 40+, with visual impairment)

Men with disabilities in Bangladesh and India clearly identified as continuous barriers to EE

- lack of (access to) information
- lack of education
- lack of opportunities to apply skills due to
 - lack of access to capital
 - lack of apprenticeships in real organisations/companies to practice and apply skills but also to change mind-sets of employers

Women with disabilities in Bangladesh identified as continuous barriers to EE

- social attitudes and consistent lack of confidence in people with disabilities' abilities
 - especially families not being targeted who tend to invest more in non-disabled siblings, especially boys
 - women are vulnerable to their male family members' decision-making who can

- take away livelihoods and even dispossess them entirely
- lack of education
- lack of capital