

iReflect: Synthesis Review of Social Inclusion

Executive Summary

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a synthesis review commissioned by Sightsavers as part of an organisation-wide process to develop a global strategy on the crosscutting theme of social inclusion. This strategy will be aligned to its other thematic strategies in eye health and education and be set within the Global Strategic Framework.

2. PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

The purpose of the review was to collate experience, knowledge and analysis from internal evidence and present learning and recommendations to inform the authors of the new strategy.

3. METHODOLOGY

The below findings are based upon a desk review and content analysis of documentary evidence in the form of evaluations, assessments, project documents, mid-term reviews, public information and advocacy products, research reports and resource documents. The review was restricted to documents published since 2009 as they were considered applicable to the current Global Strategy. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four senior staff based at Sightsavers' offices in the UK, Ghana, India and Bangladesh.

4. FINDINGS - AREAS OF STRENGTH

i) Commitment to a relevant and rights-based approach

Since 2009 Sightsavers' social inclusion work has strongly reflected the objectives described in the current global strategy. The following themes are particularly relevant and feature prominently in country strategies and project proposals: capacity building of Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and Blind People's Organisations (BPOs); advocating on access to mainstream services for people with disabilities; and promoting social, economic and political empowerment of people with disabilities through community-based development.

These social inclusion priorities are the product of Sightsavers' ongoing development from a broad-based health and social inclusion-focused organisation to one that also strives to deliver inclusive disability and development outcomes based on global frameworks such as the WHO Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) guidelines and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). In the current strategic period there has been a strong commitment from leaders within Sightsavers to build on this progression by implementing a crosscutting and rights-based approach to social inclusion.

This commitment is evidenced by the willingness shown in current programming to enable beneficiaries as drivers of their own development through the capacity building of DPOs/BPOs and community-based self-help groups and by advocating for people with disabilities to be represented on local mainstream decision-making bodies.

Furthermore, as well as taking into account national and international frameworks, there has been a concerted effort in certain areas to base social programmes on relevant research in the target country and involve a broad range of stakeholders in their design, planning and implementation. Where consultation with target groups has not taken place as part of a previous evaluation, baseline studies have been planned as an initial project activity.

ii) Effective and collaborative interventions targeting long-term change

There have been notable achievements as a result of Sightsavers' social inclusion programmes in target countries. These include decreasing discrimination at different levels of society and improved capacity of disabled people's groups to advocate for access to mainstream services. There has also been policy and legislation reform as a result of Sightsavers' advocacy as well as enhanced employment opportunities and access to health and education for target groups.

There is a clear recognition that to achieve its social inclusion objectives Sightsavers needs to collaborate with a broad range of partners including DPOs/BPOs; disability and mainstream NGOs; government ministries; and private companies. This recognition is reflected in strategic and programme planning. The most successful interventions have involved a combination of some partners who have expertise and networks unavailable to Sightsavers and others who are seeking support to building their core capacities relating to social inclusion.

Although the majority of the community development programmes are targeted at people with visual impairment, Sightsavers takes a pan-disability approach when it comes to advocacy at all levels and also seeks partnerships with DPOs and NGOs who have the necessary expertise to ensure that interventions can benefit all impairment groups. This approach makes good use of Sightsavers' prevailing area of expertise.

Sustainability has been a challenge due to the projectised nature of Sightsavers' social inclusion work. However, it is apparent that efforts have been made to explore alternative

sustainability approaches that move beyond capacity building of people with disabilities and target mainstream systems. There is also a strong commitment to implementing innovative demonstration projects and conducting advocacy to promote adoption and scaling up.

5. CONCLUSIONS - AREAS OF LEARNING

i) 'Walking the Talk'

On paper there is a good understanding of social inclusion – it is articulated well in a number of strategy and planning documents. However, Sightsavers is an organisation that has changed greatly in its approach over the last two decades and internal capacities will need attention if there is to be a level of understanding on a par with the leadership in the UK and country levels. This also applies to Sightsavers' long-running partners who still see the social inclusion work as distinct projects and have yet to mainstream the principles of a rights-based approach. Sightsavers will need to be able show that it can 'Walk the Talk' and work towards being a fully inclusive organisation in order to build the capacity of others in this area. This means ensuring that social inclusion is crosscutting and not contained within individual projects that can be vulnerable to funding cuts. This also means applying principles of equity and inclusion to all ongoing eye-health programmes and assessing the extent to which disabled people can access them on an equal basis with non-disabled people.

ii) Improving programme coherence

CBR is clearly a key framework of Sightsavers' social inclusion programmes and attempts have been made, across the range of projects, to broadly address all the dimensions included in the WHO CBR matrix (health, education, livelihood, social, empowerment). This is apt given the multi-dimensional nature of social inclusion, however, programme coherence has been inhibited by a lack of robust analysis of how the barriers related to different arenas interact with one another. Consideration should also be given to addressing multiple discrimination specifically with regards women with disabilities. Although there is a general recognition that women and girls with disabilities should be a key target group, most programme and strategic planning lacks a specific approach to included them in empowerment initiatives and how the specific barriers leading to their exclusion will be tackled.

iii) Capacity building

Due to the unanticipated level of attention required and a lack of clarity of purpose, there has been some mixed results in building the capacity of people with disabilities. Supporting the organizational development of community-level self-help groups and DPOs requires large amounts of resources and time in order to ensure sustainability. Project evaluations have found that when disabled 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. Advocacy is not an inevitable outcome of

establishing self-help groups, especially if these groups have been heavily supported by projects with a focus on inputs. Supporting DPOs with low capacity levels requires significant expertise in organisational development and may not be the most equitable approach given that DPOs can be unrepresentative of people with disabilities from poorer communities, particularly in rural areas.

iv) Monitoring and evaluating

There is no doubt that Sightsavers' social inclusion programmes have had a positive impact on the lives of a people with disabilities. However, it is difficult to make evidence-based assessments on effectiveness due to the output-focus of much of its monitoring system. This means that Sightsavers and its partners have limited opportunities for learning, an aspect of particular importance given that key informants for this review thought that social inclusion and disability were areas where greater understanding, capacity and direction were required. Although there has been an effort to bring together learning in the form of case studies about successful approaches they rarely reflect on failures. Combined with the fact that there have only been a handful of external evaluations means that there is limited documented critical reflection on social inclusion programmes.

v) Joining up advocacy efforts

Advocating for sustainable changes in attitudes, policies and legislation takes time and requires a structured programmatic approach that allows for consistent messaging and targeting of decision-makers. Currently there is a lack of coherence between global advocacy and social inclusion programming. Sightsavers is taking a leading role within the disability movement on the post-2015 agenda and there are opportunities to link national level outcomes with this and other influencing priorities. Pursuing a pan-disability approach to advocacy is important, however, at a country level Sightsavers still has a strong reputation for working with visually impaired people and some of its partners lack the experience of working with a wide range of impairments. In order to effectively pursue a pan-disability approach, Sightsavers will need to collaborate with agencies with different specialisms to demonstrate broadly applicable approaches; build the evidence base to back up its advocacy; and demonstrate that it can be applied to people with disabilities more widely.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The new social inclusion strategy is an opportunity to build on existing resources and ongoing internal capacity building. Sightsavers should put in place an organisation-wide learning initiative on disability and social inclusion.
2. The new strategy should describe a roadmap for how Sightsavers will 'Walk the Talk' and make inclusion crosscutting through both internal policies and programming. This could include a comprehensive barrier analysis of country offices, programmes and partners'

services to identify whether there are attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that currently exclude disabled people.

3. Pursuing a crosscutting social inclusion approach also means articulating an equity-based approach to programming to ensure that Sightsavers is having an impact on the most vulnerable groups. This is especially important for people who experience multiple levels of discrimination such as women and girls with disabilities.
4. Sightsavers needs to be realistic about what it can achieve in the area of DPO capacity building and should set out a clear rationale explaining why it values DPOs and how supporting them is adding value compared to other interventions, such as building the capacity of mainstream service providers.
5. Similarly, it is necessary to reconsider the approach to building the capacity of people with disabilities at a community level through self-help groups. The new strategy should consider whether it is more efficient to concentrate on training that will enable groups to carry out their own advocacy rather than addressing their specific rehabilitation needs. The more support people are given to advocate at a local level, the greater the likelihood of sustainability.
6. It is important that the social inclusion strategy aligns with those on the health and education thematic strategies. A good starting point would be to redesign the global social inclusion objectives and indicators so that they target systems-level change. Efforts should also be made to make programme and project-level indicators more outcome-focused.
7. This is also an opportunity to articulate an integrated approach to influencing which links global and country-level advocacy priorities to country-level programming. This should be linked to the monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure that impact on social inclusion is comprehensively assessed. It could build on the method developed for the PPA impact indicator and the information gathered therein could be used as a baseline to measure country-level advocacy impact.
8. The new strategy should define specific areas where Sightsavers can add value based on its current areas of expertise (i.e. promoting inclusive provision of health services) and also identify areas where stronger collaboration is required in order to ensure broader applicability and potential for scaling. This is required in order to achieve a balance between a targeted approach and a multi-dimensional approach based on the CBR matrix.
9. If Sightsavers chooses to pursue multi-dimensional interventions the new strategy will need to consider whether it is efficient and practical to pursue a holistic approach in

specific communities and provide guidance on how to identify and address inter-related and overlapping barriers.

10. Similarly if Sightsavers continues to advocate for disability-inclusive development it will need to define how it will generate sufficient evidence and credibility from interventions that principally deliver outcomes for people with visual impairments so that they can be scaled up and applied more broadly. This will require a collaboration approach to research and implementation that draws upon the expertise and networks of other agencies to pilot and market transferable, equitable, and inclusive approaches to promoting social inclusion.

