

Handout 2

BARRIERS THAT BLOCK PARTICIPATION

HOW TO USE THIS HANDOUT

Use this handout with the following activity:

- **The wall**

INTRODUCTION

There are three big roadblocks preventing disabled people from participating in society on equal terms with non-disabled people. Here they are...

ATTITUDINAL

Prejudice, discrimination and stigma cause the biggest problems for disabled people, who are assumed to be one or more of the following:

- incapable/inadequate
- of low intelligence
- in need of a 'cure'
- needing 'special' services or support
- dependent
- inspirational/marvellous/exceptional

People who make these judgements treat the disabled person as superfluous or superhuman. They either fail to respond to the individual – with all their inherent personality, strengths and weaknesses – or they assume they have 'superhuman' abilities to cope with their impairment.

Non-disabled people can respond with fear, pity, repulsion, or a sense of superiority. These assumptions and emotions are reinforced by the media. Negative language reflects and can reinforce prejudices. Disabled people wish to change the language used by non-disabled people about them – especially language that is offensive and inaccurate.

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ENVIRONMENTAL

Disabled people encounter these barriers in areas such as:

- public transport
- hospitals and clinics
- schools and housing
- shops and marketplaces
- offices and factories
- places of worship
- media and communications
- public information systems

Most people think of the physical barriers in this category – e.g. a health clinic is inaccessible for wheelchair users if it has steps and narrow doorways. It's relatively easy to identify these – in consultation with disabled people – once aware.

But communications can also be disabling for those with sensory impairments – e.g. for Deaf people if there's no sign language; for those with visual impairments if medication isn't appropriately labelled. Poor communication can have devastating results where important school-based education campaigns happen (e.g. HIV and AIDS).

Students with hearing, visual or intellectual impairments are unlikely to access vital information unless their access needs have been met. And since 98 per cent of disabled children in developing countries don't attend school, they'll miss out on important education and information. A Ugandan study found 38 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men with impairments had a sexually transmitted disease at any one time.

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INSTITUTIONAL

These barriers exclude or segregate disabled people from many areas:

- legal system
- employment laws
- electoral system
- education policies
- health service provisions
- social services
- belief systems and religion
- humanitarian/development agency policies

Many of the systems we take for granted have become 'no-go' areas for disabled people. Their marginalisation is similar to the negative treatment of women and ethnic minorities.

Exclusion from institutions has a knock-on effect – poorly regulated special education often makes fewer academic demands on pupils, and smaller schools expose them to a limited range of cultural experiences. The virtual exclusion of disabled people from teacher training colleges also limits the number of qualified disabled teachers as role models for disabled and non-disabled pupils in mainstream schools.

Families make assumptions their disabled child will never work independently. So they don't press the government to provide suitable formal education, or encourage the child to pursue a career. With such low expectations, disabled people can easily become fatalistic about their own prospects.

Micro-finance institutions often have policies which are highly discriminatory. They may exclude deaf people on the assumption they won't be able to talk directly with staff; or refuse to lend to a visually impaired businessperson on the grounds they're not likely to make a profit as a disabled entrepreneur. These are real examples.