



BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

The degree to which persons with disabilities are excluded from mainstream services is largely due to the barriers they face from within their own society. This section looks at some of those barriers, their causes and consequences and what should be done to reduce them.

How barriers are created

A rights-based perspective on disability emphasizes that persons with disabilities are frequently prevented from reaching their potential not due to their impairment, but as a result of the environmental, attitudinal and institutional barriers that they face. There are a variety of reasons why persons with disabilities are overlooked in mainstream development. It is not usually through the ill will of individuals or organizations: but more frequently that development stakeholders are not aware of the needs and capabilities of persons with disabilities.

One reason for this is that many persons with disabilities are not visible in society or participating in decisions that affect them. They may, for example, have limited mobility so they do not participate in community activities and meetings. They may also have internal barriers that affect their motivation to participate such as a lack of self-esteem and a feeling that their views and involvement are not important. These are often created as a result of their general marginalization in society.

Consequently, policies are developed and programmes are often designed implemented in ways that overlook their needs and place barriers in their way. The main categories of barriers are attitudinal, environmental, and institutional.

Types of barriers

Attitudinal barriers

Persons with disabilities routinely face prejudice and discrimination. They are often assumed to be incapable and unintelligent. They are frequently treated with pity or fear, or avoided because persons without disabilities are unsure how to relate to them. It is common for persons with disabilities to be looked down on as inferior and to be labeled in negative ways.

Belief systems are another barrier. Disability is often seen as a curse, given as a result of previous wrongdoing by the individual or their parents. When a woman has a child with a disability it can in some contexts be assumed it is a punishment for her sleeping with a man other than her husband, or as a punishment for something she or her husband did in a past life. Disability is surrounded by myths and misconceptions. Many of these negative attitudes are also reflected in the media, or conversely persons with disabilities may be labeled as 'heroes', brave, inspirational, or exceptional if they are able to live independent lives and achieve their goals. This can be patronizing and misleading.



Environmental barriers

There are many physical barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from participation. Public buildings, schools, shops, offices, health centres, markets, and places of worship are frequently inaccessible. Pavements generally lack kerb ramps and public transport is inaccessible. Communication, media and information presents barriers for persons with speech, hearing or visual impairments when the information is not presented in an accessible format, such as Braille and large-letter type or the use of sign language. Natural environmental barriers also exist – such as rough terrain and high winds.

Institutional barriers

Institutional barriers include legislation that discriminates as well as inadequate employment laws and electoral systems including the challenges for persons with disabilities to vote. Policies can also be exclusive of persons with disabilities. For example, a vocational training programme where criteria are included that stipulates that trainees should be able-bodied and fit to work. This can exclude persons with disabilities because they are not considered fit enough to work. Institutional barriers can prevent persons with disabilities from participating in many areas such as politics, religious services and employment.

Causes and consequences of barriers

Barriers mean that persons with disabilities are unable to access their rights as laid out in the UN CRPD to the fullest, and are less able to access and participate in development programmes and society generally as reflected in the components and elements of the CBR Matrix. People may find their way barred by multiple barriers, from one or more of the three categories (Attitudinal, Environmental, Institutional). For example, a lack of assistive device, **plus** negative attitudes from teachers and other pupils **plus** non-inclusive school rules and regulations.

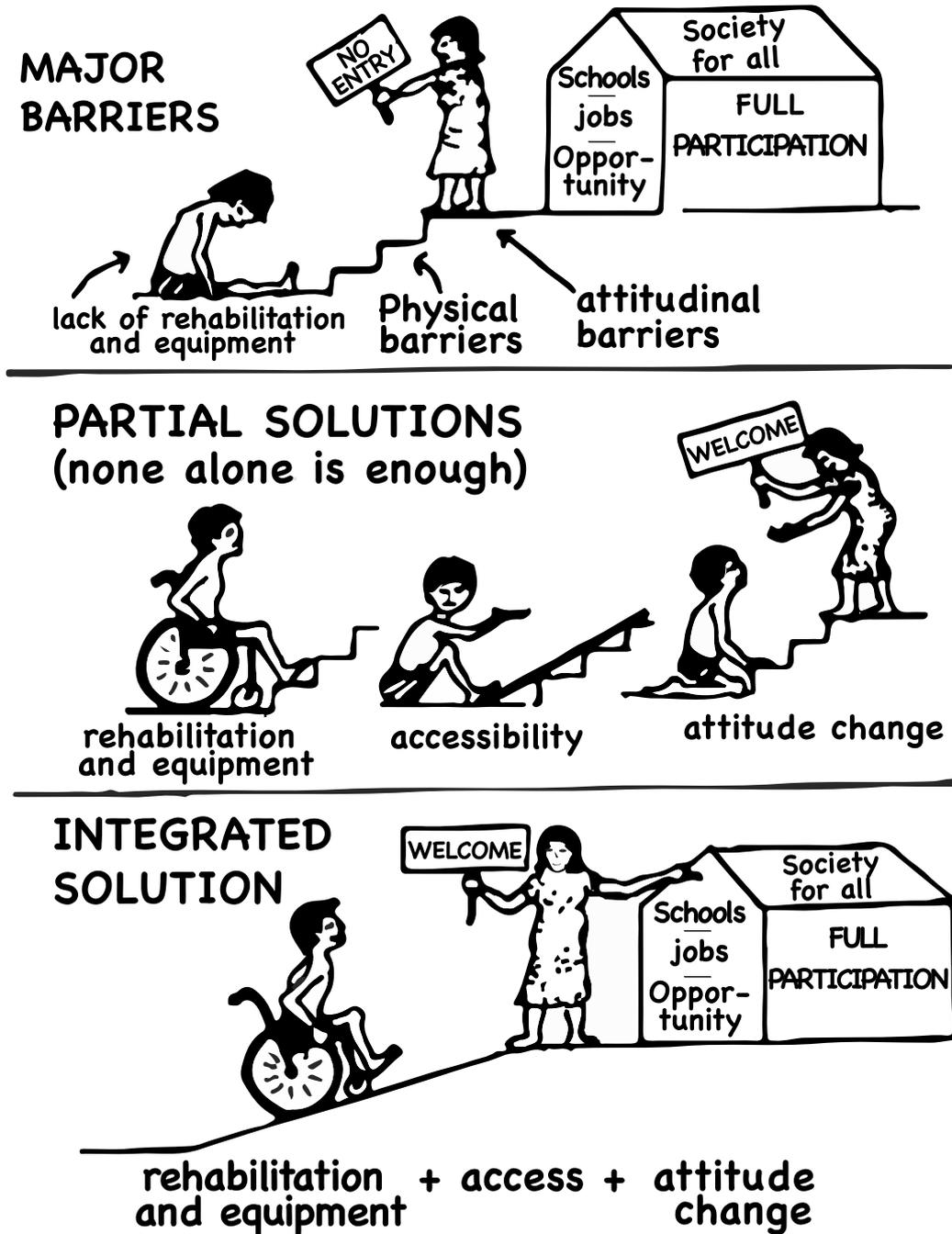
Considering barriers in planning and policy development

Often, persons with disabilities can face all three types of barriers in a situation and when planning programmes and developing policies it is important to consider all of the areas that might be barriers to inclusion. The picture below¹ illustrates how a partial solution will still exclude persons with disabilities.

- An accessible venue isn't useful if someone cannot reach it because they don't have the right assistive device.
- A positive attitude isn't useful if there is still a physical barrier to inclusion.
- And it is not enough to provide access to a building without ensuring that attitudinal barriers are addressed.

¹ Werner, D, 1999. *Disabled Village Children*. Hesperian Foundation

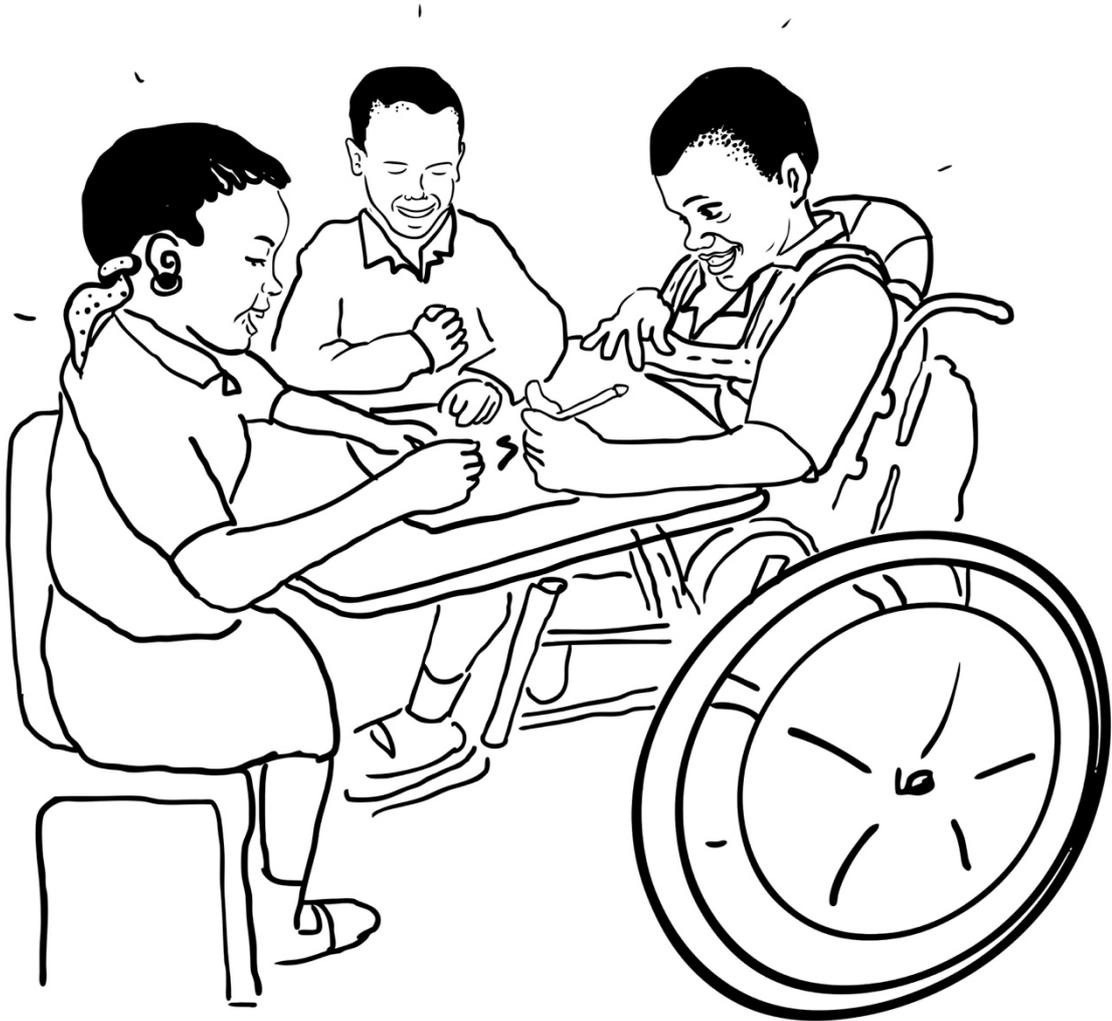
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES requires an INTEGRATED APPROACH



Original illustration: Werner, D. (1999). Disabled Village Children. Hesperian Foundation

The picture below represents inclusion. The child with a disability is included equally in the school class with his peers. It represents him having the full opportunity for:

- Presence
- Participation
- Performance



Actions to break down barriers

- Review and revise policies and pieces of legislation and plans from the perspective of the barriers they may create for the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Develop new policies with a disability lens to take into account potential barriers.
- Include persons with disabilities in policy discussions to ensure their needs are addressed in all policy development and review processes.
- Plan all programmes and financing arrangements taking into account barriers that might affect inclusion of all persons with disabilities.
- Include persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in discussions and decision making at all stages of the programme cycle.
- Identify policies and bye-laws that create barriers and advocate for their revision.
- Identify and raise awareness of barriers that exist and promote and work for their removal.
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- Work with others to advocate and arrange for their removal.
- Promote positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities.
- Support persons with disabilities to advocate for their rights.
- Identify persons with disabilities in the community and ensure they are included.

Sources

World Health Organization, 2010, *CBR Guidelines*, Geneva

Light for the World, Paulien Bruijn, Barbara Regeer, Huib Cornielje, Roelie Wolting, Saskia van Veen and Niala Maharaj, *Count Me In - DCDD Enablement LftW.pdf*

Werner, D. 1999, *Disabled Village Children*. Hesperian Foundation

