

The Involvement of The Danish Council of Organizations of Disabled People (DSI) in Development Cooperation.

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Introduction

The Danish Council of Organizations of Disabled People (DSI) is an umbrella organization for the Danish disability movement since 1934. The organization comprises 31 single disability organisations. Totally the organisations have around 350.000 members. All major disability organizations in Denmark are members of DSI.

Since the beginning of the 1990's a new actor has emerged within Denmark's bilateral development cooperation with the increasing involvement of Danish disability organisations. The inspiration for this came primarily from the other Nordic countries and also from an increased focus on equal rights for people with disability recognising their strengths and the need for inclusion within the wider society.

DSI has been the driving force in this process with support from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Uptil now 15 out of DSI's 31 member organisations have been involved in providing financial and technical support for persons with disability in developing countries, amounting to a total of 3 - 4 million Euro annually over the last 5 years.

DSI's involvement with disabled peoples organisations in the South

For most Danish disability organisations, development work is not considered a core activity however, today DSI is represented in 10 countries. Since 2001 DSI has developed 10 country strategies, which outlines what kind of activities the Danish disability organisations can become involved in. The 10 countries are Uganda, Ghana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Malawi, Nicaragua, Nepal, India, Vietnam and the Phillipines.

In particularly Uganda, Nepal and Ghana the Danish disability organisations have established a substantial number of projects with significant variations in size, national coverage, disability groups and development objective, however they all operate under the overall strategy for DSI's involvement in development cooperation.

The overall strategy is:

- To improve the possibility for people with disability in the South to obtain their rights.

To obtain DSI's overall strategy the main activities lay on capacity partner building in the form of organisational development, lobby and development of advocacy skills of disability organisations in the South and mobilization of disabled people.

The main pattern is that Danish disability organisations co-operate with their sister organisations in the South. In Uganda e.g. DSI provides support to its sister structure, The National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU), which is the national disability umbrella organisation or the Danish Epilepsy Association co-operates with its sister organisation in Uganda. The Danish Association of Physically Disabled supports its sister organisation in Ghana etc.

Opportunities:

- Disability organisations have their own knowledge about relevant disability issues, which people with no personal disability experience may not easily be aware of.
- A solidarity and mutual understanding among people with disability, particularly when they have the same type of disability.
- Disability organisations can draw on the experience of their own development such as an evolution towards a more rights-based approach, development of disability policies, networking, lobbying etc.

Challenges:

- Development is not a core activity among the Danish disability organisations and most of them have limited experience from actual work in low-income countries.
- Particularly it can be difficult to work with small and often weak partner organisations in a different cultural context without extensive experience and skills in the field of development cooperation.

DSI's involvement in Danida's Development Policy

Although disability organisations are relatively new players within the field of Danish development cooperation it is evident that there is a good potential for further development in this area. The potentials lie not only in relation to the specific work of the disability organisations, but extend to broader areas of development assistance where the disability aspect can become more visible.

For instance in Denmark's Development Policy from 2000 it is mentioned that people with disability should be involved in development cooperation. DSI has used this opportunity to enhance the efforts for inclusion of people with disability into sector programmes and Danida country strategies. Sector programmes like education, health and recently water and sanitation programmes have been addressed by disabled people's organisations in Denmark.

The disability aspect can also become more visible e.g. in humanitarian assistance in post-conflict areas such as Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. In Kosovo DSI did provide support to the major disability organisation, Handikos during the societal transition. In addition DSI did lobby to ensure that Danida funded reconstruction projects such as schools and clinics were made accessible for children and people with disability in Kosovo.

Furthermore DSI did use the transition phase in Kosovo to develop a Comprehensive Disability Policy Framework for Kosovo framed over the UN Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. It was done in co-operation with Handikos, the major disability organisation and representatives from the different UNMIK departments. The funds for the development of the Comprehensive Disability Policy Framework came from Danida. DSI did also support the disability movement in South Africa during the transition in the 1990's. The disability movement in South Africa did also use the societal transition to develop a White Paper on disability also framed over the UN Standard Rules.

Opportunities:

- Inclusion of people with disability into donor country strategies.
- Inclusion of people with disability into sector programmes such as education, health, water and sanitation etc.
- Inclusion of people with disability into Good Governance programmes, human rights- and democracy programmes, gender and HIV/AIDS programmes.
- Inclusion of people with disability into Humanitarian Assistance.
- To use a societal transition phase to ensure inclusion of people with disability into sector and (reconstruction) programmes following the UN Standard Rules.

Challenges:

- To ensure a continuous dialogue between the disability organisations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ensure initiatives are followed up.
- Disability organisations should be persistent in their approach with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Recognise and promote the UN Standard Rules as guidelines for bilateral- and multilateral development assistance as well as humanitarian assistance and NGO development assistance.
- The constant change of staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Lack of knowledge and practical experience about disability.

DSI's involvement with other Danish development NGO's

As mentioned previously for most disability organisations, development work is not considered a core activity. Therefore the Danish disability organisations try to co-operate with Danish development NGOs whenever possible. Danish development NGOs often has extensive experience of development cooperation. They have often build up a good understanding of the situation in the countries and many have in-country offices, but they have very limited knowledge about the disability movement and very little practical experience when it comes to disability.

Recently DSI has been breaking new ground in co-operation with Danish development organisations e.g. by participating in a Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme Consortium. The Poverty Eradication Programme is linking civil society alliances in five focus countries with in a consortium of 13 Danish organisations. The Programme focuses entirely on advocacy and capacity building so that poor women and men and civil society organisations are strengthened in their active influence on official and alternative initiatives for poverty eradication.

It is a major and significant step towards making disabled people visible in development co-operation together with Danish development NGOs. For the first time a common project proposal has been submitted to Danida from the Danish development NGOs and the three Danish disability organizations.

In addition DSI has established a country office in Ghana together with a Danish development NGO, which has now taken disability on board. This is important, because DSI expects it will lead to a higher degree of integration of disability into the general programme of this particular organisation. Danida's Develop Policy encourages this kind of co-operation.

Opportunities:

- Clear potential for disability organizations and development NGOs to complement the work of each other and develop synergy in a number of areas.
- New models for incorporating equal opportunities for persons with disability in mainstream programmes
- Disability NGOs make their specialist knowledge available, while development NGOs give local insight and professional input on development work.
- Effective inclusion of people with disability will give added value to any programme in terms of poverty and gender focus.

Challenges:

- To convince the development NGOs about the comparative advantages by working together with a disability organisation.
- The development NGO does not have any or only very limited knowledge about disability in development.

DSI's website

DSI launched an English website in late 2001 (www.disability.dk) One of the objectives behind the development of the Website has been to make information on disability and development work accessible and to introduce an Information and Communication Technology into DSI's development work. The idea was to establish an "interactive library" where all the different stakeholders could exchange information and communicate through a portal on the World Wide Web.

Opportunities

- To share information and documents regarding disability.
- Communication between headquarters and local, regional or international disability organisations can be improved by increased use of the computer and IT.

Challenges:

- Upgrading hardware and providing Internet education in order to ensure impact.
- How to reach out to the rural communities.
- Lack of ownership of the website from partners.

DSI's lobby towards the EU

DSI has together with EDF played a role in lobbying for the development of the EU Guidance Note on Disability and Development for EU Delegations and Services.

DSI has distributed the Guidance Note to partner organisations in the South and encouraged the partners to use it in their lobby and advocacy activities. In Malawi e.g. the Guidance Note has been introduced to the EU-delegation and today the national umbrella organisation, Fedoma is being consulted on a EU water supply and sanitation programme.