Mainstreaming Disability

- a guideline

Draft 01 Apr 2014

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(CBRF)

Promoting Disability Rights

New Delhi

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent days, development organisations have begun to recognise that mainstreaming is an issue of the organisation. The organisation values and its personal commitment are central to mainstreaming. However, in order to broaden and sustain these efforts, it is essential for the whole organisation to engage with the issue, from senior management to frontline and administrative staff.

2. WHAT IS MAINSTREAMING?

"Mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for [person with disabilities] of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels.

Mainstreaming is about building disability into existing agendas, frameworks and processes, not adding on separate disability activities.

Mainstreaming is a method to promote inclusion and to address the barriers that exclude persons with disabilities from full and equal participation in society.

It is a strategy for making concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that [people with disabilities] benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve equality."[1]

Disability Mainstreaming is essentially a matter of rights. It is essential that persons with disability and their organisations play an active role in all mainstreaming activities. It needs a clear structure, with on-going activities and follow-up and appropriate budget and time allocated to it. It cannot be a 'one-off' activity, or left to individuals who do not have a wider support.

Mainstreaming disability is based on the perception that people with disability have the right to equal treatment, participation in all sectors of society and all stages of the development project cycle, no matter if it is directly relevant to them or not. The needs of persons with disabilities should become a standard factor in designing and planning public services. This approach is very different from the original disability-specific approach, in which people with a disability are located by external professionals and put in a programme specially designed for them. Such a programme is often based on what other people think is necessary for them. Examples of disability-specific (development) programmes are rehabilitation centres, special education and medical interventions such as cataract surgeries. It is acknowledged that some disability-specific programmes are necessary, because they provide the basis that enables persons with disabilities to take part in mainstream society. This is why most international organisations and INGOs advocate the twin-track approach.

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[1] *From: UN ECOSOC (1997) cited in: Albert/ Miller (2005), p. 10.*

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3. WHY MAINSTREAM DISABILITY?

The social model of disability shows how disability is multiplied manifold as a result of discrimination by mainstream society, as people with impairments are excluded by structures, policies and practices (at every level) that discriminate against them, sometimes actively, often by ignoring them. Mainstreaming is essential if we want to tackle the exclusion of persons with disabilities.

Any programme trying to tackle disadvantage or seeking to take a rights-based approach needs to consider / understand the ways in which persons with disabilities are currently excluded and denied their rights.

4. MODE OF APPROACHING MAINSTREAMING?

Mainstreaming would include:

1. **Voice:**

   Strengthening the voice of persons with disabilities at every level, particularly through building the capacity of persons with disabilities' organisations (DPOs).

2. **Inclusive services:**

   Supporting basic services to include persons with disabilities.

3. **Policy change**:

   Policy change at the NGO level in view of ensuring that mainstreaming becomes the mode of operation.

4. **Enabling services:**

   Strengthening disability services (such as mobility assistance, early childhood development or sign language teaching) to meet the specific needs of individuals with impairments that prevent them from participating.

5. **Rights**:

   Mainstreaming is essentially a question of **rights.** Everyone, including every person with disability, has the same fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, to information, to freedom of movement, to education, to family life, to decent work and to a voice in decisions that affect them.

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Mainstreaming is an on-going process of including disability into all our work. However, this process can seem so huge that we never start. Mainstreaming starts with us. We can all be role models of more equitable and inclusive relationships. We can all interact with the persons with disabilities we see around us, and challenge discrimination when we encounter it.

However, mainstreaming cannot be left to individuals. Mainstreaming needs wider organisational support and management commitment. Mainstreaming usually involves working on an issue that would not ordinarily be seen as the core focus of the organisation, so it is very vulnerable to pressure from other priorities. This is another reason why management support is so important. It also means that mainstreaming projects need a clear long-term structure, with on-going activities and follow-up, and appropriate budget and time allocated.

It is essential to involve persons with disabilities in the process of mainstreaming from the beginning, and to build relationships with DPOs, who can guide, advise and support us. This ensures that our efforts are informed by the perspectives of persons with disabilities.

5.   THE MAINSTREAMING MODEL

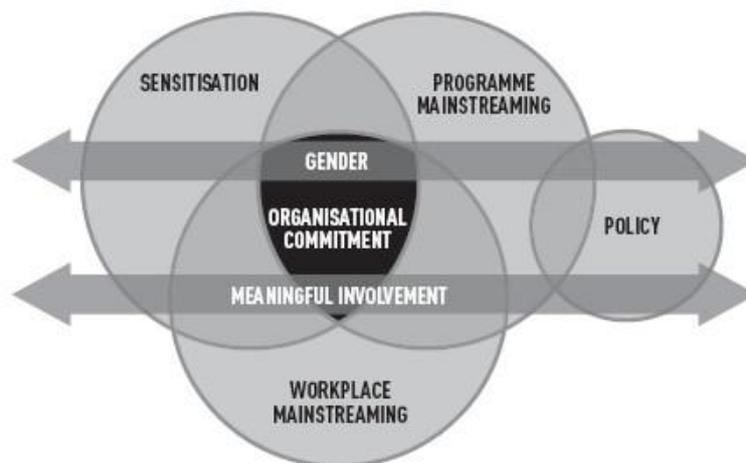The following Model of Mainstreaming offers a good perspective on what Mainstreaming should include:

Figure 1: The VSO mainstreaming model
Adapted from HIV & AIDS Mainstreaming Guide for Programme Offices, 2004

5.1   OBTAINING ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

We will only succeed in mainstreaming disability if we are **committed** to tackling discrimination and the exclusion of persons with disabilities. Individual commitment from every member of the organization is a key factor for effective mainstreaming. To ensure mainstreaming efforts are sustained, the same level of commitment must be developed within the whole organisation. This will allow the organisation to move forward as a whole

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and prevent mainstreaming from fragmenting into individual actions or fading away altogether.

Management support is essential to enable on-going engagement with staff and volunteers, to allow adjustments to organisational policies and processes, and to gain the necessary time and budget for action.

Experience suggests that it is a good idea to **develop an agreed formal statement of the organisation's commitment to mainstreaming disability**. This will help staff and other stakeholders to understand what disability mainstreaming is, why it is important, and what the organisation expects them to do. The statement will help guide decisions about implementation, prioritisation and allocation of resources. It should also help to sustain the organisational commitment when there is a change of management. When working out such a statement:

☞ *Involve persons with disabilities and their organisations in building organisational commitment.*
☞ *Get management commitment and support for mainstreaming.*
☞ *Develop a clear rationale for mainstreaming that is linked to the organisation's existing values and purpose – for example, look at how disability relates to wider development agendas, especially in terms of rights and exclusion.*
☞ *Develop an understanding of the situation of women & girls with disability and men & boys with disability – more so, of those with severe disabilities.*

If we are trying to get management support for mainstreaming disability, we need to develop a clear **rationale,** which shows:

☞ **why** mainstreaming is important for the organisation
☞ **how** mainstreaming disability ties in with the organisation's values and existing commitments
☞ **what** the organisation could achieve, and
☞ **the risks** to the organisation of not mainstreaming.

Throughout the development of the rationale, focus on what can be done to support persons with disabilities in realising their rights, including the right to life, right to information, right to participation in daily life, right to access basic services, right to earn a living etc.

Consider the specific strengths and experience of the organisation. Look at what the organization already does and consider how these objectives and processes could be adapted to stop excluding persons with disabilities. Identify how failing to include persons with disabilities could prevent the organisation from achieving its objectives.

Organisational commitment is very often the result of **personal commitment by the head of institutions.** This cannot be manufactured, but it could be helpful to start by finding out if some decision-makers have personal experience of disability.

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5.2 SENSITISATION OF THE TEAM

Sensitisation refers to the process of building people's personal engagement with, and commitment to, disability. Sensitisation is more than just raising awareness of disability. Sensitisation is about people becoming personally engaged with their organisation's commitment to mainstreaming. It is crucial because mainstreaming starts with each of us – without our individual commitment, there can be no mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming is about achieving equality for persons with disabilities rather than creating awareness of disability. It is about making a real difference. Awareness without clear, practical and resourced follow-up action will not improve the lives of persons with disabilities. It may even make matters worse by raising false expectations.

Sensitisation should help people to understand how discrimination works, and the different experiences of persons with disabilities. Raising awareness can often be viewed as an end in itself, instead of preparation for taking action. **Sensitisation is about building personal commitment to mainstreaming.** The commitment and involvement comes primarily from personal experience, not from reading or hearing about disability.

Key elements of sensitization process:

o Ensure that persons with disabilities and their organisations play an active role in sensitisation.
o Have a clear follow-up plan with time and management commitment – sensitisation is an on-going process, not a one-off event.
o Find ways to relate to people's experiences, emotions and values – personal engagement is fundamental.
o Help people understand how disability is relevant to their own situation, values and priorities – look at the things they are already committed to and explore how disability fits in.
o Be prepared to challenge discriminatory behaviour.

5.3 WORKPLACE MAINSTREAMING

Mainstreaming starts with us. The easiest place to make practical, appropriate adjustments is in our own workplace. Workplace mainstreaming is about creating an inclusive, barrier-free workplace where persons with disabilities can participate equally, whether as employees or volunteers. This includes physical access, accessible communications and work-related information, appropriate policies and procedures and ensuring that other employees treat persons with disabilities equitably, with dignity and respect.

5.3.1 Key Points to remember:

o Remember that accessibility is not just about physical access, it is about ensuring that persons with disabilities are not discriminated against in any way, either

passively (e.g., lack of information) or actively (e.g. abuse by other employees or volunteers).

o Address gender: look at whether policies and processes discriminate against women with disabilities.

o Take small steps: make steady progress with simple, cost-effective adjustments and don't expect to change everything at once.

o Adapt the office, not the person.

5.3.2 Practical steps towards mainstreaming the workplace

o Management support is the key for workplace mainstreaming. Without this, it will be extremely difficult to change recruitment processes, revise policies or get a long-term budget commitment for workplace adjustments.

o However, it is usually possible to take small steps to include persons with disabilities more in the workplace, and this can be a powerful way of building management support.

o The best method is always to involve persons with disabilities and DPOs. They are the experts on accessibility. It is very helpful on a number of levels to invite persons with disabilities to visit our workplace: we can see things through their eyes, it personalises the issue for other staff, we can start to interact with them and we can ask them for their perspective on the workplace.

o It is important not to be overwhelmed by all the things you think might be needed.

o Just concentrate on doing what you can, in simple, practical steps. Once you have achieved something, however small, use it to involve persons with disabilities a bit more, and share it with colleagues and senior managers to build their engagement with mainstreaming.

5.3.3 Recruiting persons with disabilities

o The first step is recruiting persons with disabilities into the organisation. If a candidate with disabilities is appointed, it is essential to make appropriate workplace adaptations. Discuss the candidate's accessibility needs with her/ him as soon as possible. Ask for information straight away, instead of guessing or waiting until the person with disability actually starts work.

5.3.4 Office environment

o The most straightforward way to address making our office environment accessible is to have an accessibility audit performed, preferably using a person with disabilities as a consultant. The first thing to think about is how easy it is to gain physical access to the office itself and then to different essential areas:

☑ Are the offices on the ground level or are there steps or lift access?

☑ Are the toilets accessible: is there enough space for a wheelchair to enter the toilet room? Are there handles or grab-bars, an emergency call bell and light/sound fire alarm?

☑ Is the office layout suitable? Are desks at the right height and positioned suitably to allow wheelchair users to move around? How are files and other resources stored?

☑ Are meeting rooms accessible?

☑ Visually impaired people might appreciate signs and directions at all entrances, including lifts, in Braille and large print.

☑ Consider putting posters or stickers on any floor-to-ceiling glass to help people with low vision see them. People with visual impairment would also benefit from bumpy warning tiles placed at entrances and before stairs or single steps.

5.3.5   Staff Demeanour

o   The behaviour of colleagues is more important for an accessible workplace than physical adjustments. It is essential to make it clear to all employees that persons with disabilities have the same rights to equal participation and fair treatment as everyone else.

o   We can establish clear expectations by developing an explicit standard of non-discrimination that all employees must sign up to as part of their employment contract, with associated performance management and disciplinary procedures if they do discriminate against persons with disabilities. It is important to concentrate on non-discriminatory behaviour (such as involving persons with disabilities, interacting openly with colleagues with disabilities and avoiding derogatory language) in this kind of standard, as it is not feasible or appropriate to police people's attitudes or ways of thinking. It is also important to include non-discrimination on the grounds of gender as well.

o   We can also ensure that new staff members are committed to non-discrimination, by building these values into person specifications and criteria, and assessing them during interviews.

5.3.6   Policies and processes

o   It is also important to assess our existing policies and processes to see where they create or fail to address barriers to persons with disabilities' participation. Again, it is very useful to involve persons with disabilities and DPOs in this process audit. As with an accessibility audit, it is essential to allocate time and budget for following up the recommendations.

o   Particular areas to highlight in the development of a workplace policy on disability would include:

☑ Non-discrimination of staff with disabilities;

☑ Reasonable adjustments for staff with disabilities: for example, access to information; physical access; personal assistance and additional support;

☑ Touring: for example, minimum expectations; reasonable adjustments and assistance available for staff with disabilities;

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- ☑ Staff development: for example, including reasonable adjustments to enable staff with disabilities to participate.
- ☑ Participation of persons with disabilities and DPOs: for example, the roles of disabled women and men in disability mainstreaming; roles of disabled women and men in governance or programme management; standards for accessibility of meetings, workshops and other events.
- ☑ Communications and information: for example, a commitment to provide all information in accessible formats on request; key documents produced in accessible formats; standards on plain language; policy and resources for sign language interpretation.

5.3.7   Review and follow-up

o   It is essential to review our progress and keep following up, both to regularly improve policies and processes based on learning and feedback, and to make sure the adjustments we have already put in place are still appropriate.

o   Ensure we build non discrimination into our appraisal and performance management systems.

o   We can use the findings and recommendations of initial accessibility or process audits to review workplace and policy adjustments so far, and identify next steps. Once we have completed these changes, review implementation and lessons learnt on a regular basis.

o   Involve persons with disabilities in reviewing our progress on workplace adjustments, and ask for their feedback and suggestions on the workplace.

5.4   PROGRAMME MAINSTREAMING:

Programme mainstreaming is the process of ensuring that our programmes and services are inclusive, equitable and non-discriminatory, and do not reinforce the negative effects of disability. An important step in programme mainstreaming is to include persons with disabilities in our programme planning, implementation, management and review processes.

Key features of programme mainstreaming

o   Review how existing and planned programmes exclude persons with disabilities. It is important to involve persons with disabilities in the whole cycle of planning, implementing, managing and reviewing our work.
o   Look at disability in relation to existing agendas, frameworks and models within each sector.
o   Include women and men with disabilities in existing programme management processes –   on-going management and review, not just planning.
o   Define an appropriate role for persons with disabilities and their organisations, with clear roles, responsibilities and expectations agreed on all sides.

- Promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities within mainstream and community settings, not separate or special settings: ensure that any specialist organisations and professionals you work with support mainstream providers to include persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities' rights are the main concern of mainstreaming, so it is particularly important to engage with the Government.
- Programme mainstreaming is a long, slow process – start small and work on easy changes to build confidence and demonstrate success, but after every activity, always ask "what next?".

5.5   POLICY MAINSTREAMING

It is important to address wider policy and institutional barriers that exclude persons with disabilities from equal participation. Mainstreaming is a matter of rights, which means that we need to engage with policy as well as practice. There are major barriers at this level that must be addressed for genuine inclusion. Unless it is taken up to this level and supported by a policy framework, mainstreaming will remain small-scale, local and unsustainable.

Key Features of policy mainstreaming

- Ensure that persons with disabilities and their organisations play an active role as advocates.
- Look at disability in relation to wider development agendas, rights and existing legal frameworks, and promote the inclusion of disability in mainstream policies.
- Identify a clear purpose - the people or organisations you want to influence and the practical actions that you want them to take.
- Identify and work with mainstream allies.

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