



Inclusive Futures
Promoting disability inclusion



Creating meaningful and successful partnerships between INGOs and OPDs: key values and attitudes

In September 2022, Inclusive Futures brought together International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) project officers and Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) project officers from Bangladesh, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria and Tanzania. We discussed one question: What have we learnt about partnerships between INGOs and OPDs?

This document explores the deeper discussions, values and approaches required for a successful and meaningful partnership. This summary is one of two from the discussions. See also: [A guide to building meaningful and successful partnerships between INGOs and OPDs: what we've learned from the Inclusive Futures programme.](#)

Prepare for the partnership to be transformative

Firstly, we heard that mutual respect is fundamental in OPD-INGO partnerships. This respect includes a recognition of both partners as experts in their field, a willingness to learn from each other, and a valuing of the partnership itself. For INGOs, we heard that partnerships need to be developed with the intention of meaningful inclusion of the OPD in the project, including having a role in decision-making about the project goals and its implementation.

Start with understanding

INGOs and OPDs shared how, in their experience, partnerships can experience problems if INGOs do not fully understand what an OPD is and what it does and does not do. OPDs are not the same as disability-focused INGOs. OPDs are often membership-based, work primarily in a voluntary capacity, and OPD members typically have lived experience of disability. They have a range of different structures, and all agreed that capacities and functions vary, depending on whether the OPD is grassroots, local, national or an umbrella group with a wide membership of smaller OPDs.

OPDs also shared that they typically work on linking people with disabilities with services, or delivering services directly, and that their funding often does not include overheads, leading to financial instability. Without understanding how OPDs operate and work together, well-intentioned partnerships formed by INGOs can create challenges for OPDs.

Respect an OPD's relationship with community

We learnt that it can be harmful if OPDs in a partnership are assigned limited roles, such as identifying people with disabilities in a project area, without being given further responsibility for the project itself. This is challenging for many reasons, for example where OPDs feel responsibility to the people with disabilities in the project area yet have no control over whether the project fully respects and meets their needs and interests. We heard how OPDs need to maintain good relations with communities after a project with an INGO finishes. A meaningful partnership needs to discuss and plan how to sustain the positive impact of a project for both the target audience and local partners after a project finishes.

Build a mutually beneficial partnership

Partnerships can be ‘win-win’ when INGOs and OPDs are open about their intentions in partnering. We heard that OPDs are interested in partnering with INGOs to expand their reach, raise their profile, and strengthen their existing work with people with disabilities. Partnering can be attractive if it presents opportunities for OPDs to influence policy and decision-making at county and national level. We heard that OPDs feel they benefit in a partnership from training and capacity strengthening, such as organisational training on financial management and project training on gender inclusion.

We learnt that INGOs are interested in partnering with OPDs to achieve meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities in their projects, and to ensure their projects meet the needs, interests and wants of people with disabilities. A partnership can offer an INGO credibility in a project area, facilitate access to people with disabilities, strengthen the project overall, and move the INGO towards greater inclusivity. OPD partnership can result in issues on disability inclusion being identified earlier in a project which could otherwise threaten the success or reach of the project. As we heard from OPD partners: “Put the project on the ‘operation table’ and dissect it together... we can tell you if your project is going to succeed or fail.”

Use the partnership to challenge disability stigma

We learnt that OPDs and INGOs have an opportunity to work together to challenge the stigma which limits some country-based NGOs from working with OPDs. OPDs and INGOs can partner on sensitisation, advocacy and awareness-raising projects aimed at national NGOs. We heard that OPDs and INGOs can model meaningful engagement in a project and provide training to national NGOs about meaningful engagement with people with disabilities and their representative organisations.

One size does not fit all

Lastly, a partnership between an OPD and an INGO does not mean that the project is guaranteed to represent or meet the needs and interests of all people with disabilities. For effective disability inclusive projects, the diversity of people with disabilities needs to be understood and planned for. This includes engaging with diverse groups of OPDs and other inclusion specialists. We heard that, while each OPD is unique, often their capacity or mandate to represent people with diverse disabilities is limited. When it comes to inclusion, one size does not fit all. Limitations include financial resources, access to support assistants, and time allocated for an OPD to accommodate and meaningfully include the diversity of people with disabilities. While one OPD may have membership representation from people with diverse disabilities, another OPD may offer specialised representation and engagement of people with a specific disability. To strengthen inclusion, during planning and decision-making, a range of OPDs need to be present, particularly to bring out the voice of underrepresented groups.



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