



World Bank's Safeguard Policies Review and Update
Expert Focus Group on the Emerging Area
Disability
Washington, DC, USA
April 4, 2013

On April 4, 2013, a focus group of international experts was held in Washington, DC, USA, on the subject of Disability. This focus group was part of the World Bank safeguard policies review and update process and the topic of Disability is one of the emerging areas that stakeholders have asked the Bank to consider during the review. Other emerging areas include: labor and occupational safety, climate change, free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples, gender, human rights, land tenure and natural resources. More information about this process is available on the safeguards review [website](#). The terms of reference for participants of focus groups for emerging areas are available [here](#).

Participants in the focus group comprised disability advocates as well as disability experts from a variety of civil society and research organizations, government agencies, and international organizations from around the world (see [list of participants](#)). It was agreed at the outset that the focus group would be conducted in accordance with Chatham House rules, and that participants would speak in their individual capacities rather than as representatives of their respective institutions. In addition to participating experts, ten World Bank staff members were present. The meeting was facilitated by Christiane Frishmuth.

The meeting began with introductions of the participants, followed by a brief description of the meeting agenda and by a presentation by World Bank staff. This presentation helped set the context for the day by giving an overview of World Bank safeguard policies and of the process of the review and update. This was followed by a presentation of three case studies, prepared by the Campaign on World Bank Safeguards and Disability with support from the Bank Information Center (BIC), of World Bank projects in the Philippines, Lebanon, and Uganda to illustrate their impact on persons with disabilities. These case studies were designed to address the issue of why the World Bank should include disability in its safeguard policies.

Following the presentations, World Bank staff discussed findings and recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO)/ World Bank 2011 World Report on Disability. This presentation started with the explanation that the report used the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) as its framework and that it follows the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) approach to disability, where disability is defined as a negative interaction between a person with a health condition and his/ her environment and personal factors. It then focused on disability as an issue of social and economic inclusion, and related findings and recommendations, pertinent to World Bank approach to disability and development. One of the key recommendations of

the report was particularly emphasized: to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to all mainstream public services and benefits. This is a key guiding principle for the way the World Bank addresses disability. The presentation provided an analytical framework and guided the morning conversation, which focused on how disability as a development and inclusion issue could be reflected in the World Bank environmental and social safeguards policies.

The discussion was guided by three questions:

1. How should disability issues be addressed in the environmental and social assessment process?
2. How would the Bank's use of country systems affect issues related to disability?
3. What are areas outside the safeguards that the World Bank should consider and address?

Following is a synthesis of key observations of participants during the day. It should be emphasized that these observations are not reported here as necessarily representing the substantive consensus of the group. They are instead summarized here as key issues put on the table by one or more individual experts that received attention during the consultation and that were proposed for further consideration as the process goes forward.

1. General observations

- Many participants stressed that it is important to ensure that World Bank-financed projects adhere to the principles of universal design (or to the principles of universal accessibility of built environment, transport, and communication and information). Accessibility of environment is one of the core provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and is crucially important for removing environmental barriers and maximizing the functioning and participation of disabled persons, so that they are enabled to realize their human rights. It was pointed out that many of the Bank clients already have national accessibility standards for public buildings, and some also have accessibility standards for transport. Some participants also mentioned that achieving universal accessibility is a process that requires time and resources, stressing out that the CRPD recognizes that and hence specifically talks about progressive realization of the CRPD requirements.
- Several participants argued that the World Bank ought to approach disability as a human rights issue. Others, on the other hand, emphasized that the CRPD approaches disability as a development and a human rights issue and that the World Bank as a development bank should emphasize the development aspects of disability inclusion, thus contributing to the realization of the human rights of persons with disabilities.
- Several participants emphasized that a freestanding safeguard policy on disability is not key to ensure that disability is included in World Bank operations—key would be a more mainstreamed and systematic approach by the World Bank in addressing issues of disability in its operations.
- Some participants felt that disability inclusion should to be addressed throughout the project cycle and in particular from the very beginning. They also thought that disability inclusion should be part of the negotiations with the governments' counterparts. Besides, disabled people organizations should be involved in the project consultations.

- Several participants thought that mechanisms to enhance the demand for disability programs from the borrowing countries should be explored. As the Bank operates according to a business model that emphasizes country leadership and demand, increased demand from the government side will facilitate the Bank’s inclusion of disability issues in projects and operations.
- Some participants stressed that including disability in World Bank projects is not a matter of charity but a valuable investment with high returns. This aspect should be particularly emphasized while explaining the World Bank development interventions in borrowing countries. Additionally, throughout the discussion it was highlighted that investments in disability contribute to extreme poverty eradication and therefore are at the core of the World Bank’s mission.
- Several participants emphasized that to ensure systematic inclusion of disability in relevant World Bank projects inclusion principles should be properly implemented to reduce the gap between stated objectives and actions. For this to happen, the desired outcomes related to persons with disabilities should be clearly stated and appropriate indicators developed. Furthermore, there should be appropriate guidelines to ensure that the inclusion of policy is implemented.

2. How should disability issues be addressed in the environmental and social assessment process?

- Some participants highlighted the need to talk about disability using specific language rather than broader non-discrimination terms. Others felt that disability might be included within a broader human rights framework, provided that specific references to the rights of persons with disabilities are included.
- Some participants suggested avoiding the use of broad terms such as “vulnerable populations” as they avoid defining in clear terms which groups should be included in the category, thus leaving room for misinterpretation.
- Several participants felt that disability related social impact assessment should be carried out in two steps. The first step should be to determine the degree of the relevance of disability for the project in question. Based on the first phase, technical expertise required to carry out the second phase (social workers, child development specialists, teachers, labor market experts, vocational specialists, etc.) should be decided on. The second phase should also include consultations with relevant disabled people organizations.
- Some participants suggested that World Bank technical staff should be trained on disability issues (definition, measurement, diversity of disability, barriers to functioning and participation, policies and programs, mainstreaming) as well as the CRPD principles.
- It was suggested that the social impact assessment specific to disability should be supported by a pool of experts, which might include local NGOs/CSOs working on disability.
- Some participants felt that basic training tools should also be designed for country governments, in order to support them with the implementation of disability inclusive projects. Expertise needs to be built on both sides.

3. How would the Bank's use of country systems affect issues related to disability?

- Some participants felt that country systems can be a valuable solution to build the capacity of countries, provided that the World Bank carefully monitors the enforcement of disability provisions. Provisions could be made for disability organizations and civil society in general to contribute to the monitoring process.
- Some argued that it should be the responsibility of the donor to help countries improve and scale up their laws and regulations on disability. They thought that many developing countries lack awareness of disability or have weak capacity.
- Several participants pointed out that most of the world's countries have signed and ratified the CRPD (155 have signed, 130 have ratified), but need support implementing it.

4. What are areas outside the safeguards that the World Bank should consider and address?

- This session started with the World Bank focal point for disability summarizing the World Bank efforts and activities to mainstream disability. Participants cited examples where World Bank-administered trust had positive impact on the rights of people with disabilities. In particular, the impact of a Japanese trust fund in promoting the creation of projects on disability in several countries around the world was mentioned. Also, participants identified a need for a trust fund that could fund capacity building activities of policy makers and practitioners, but also of disability activists.
- Some suggestions highlighted the importance of identifying disability champions, both within the organization and at the national level. Also, cooperation among different kinds of stakeholders was highlighted as a key issue. In particular, it is important to also include the private sector, which has become a huge player in the labor market integration of persons with disabilities.