INCLUSION and BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Inclusion

Inclusion is the process whereby every person (irrespective of age, disability, gender, religion, sexual preference or nationality) who wishes to, can access and participate fully in all aspects of an activity or service in the same way as any other member of the community.

Inclusion addresses an individual's:

- dignity (basic human rights)
- opportunities (equal employment and attitudes)
- accommodation (accessibility, assistive devices).

Inclusion is about society changing to accommodate difference, and to combat discrimination.

In projects funded by CBM, inclusion of people with disabilities is absolutely fundamental.

Barriers to inclusion

There are three sets of barriers that currently limit the opportunity for people with disabilities to participate in society on equal terms with non-disabled people.

Attitudinal

Prejudice, discrimination and stigma cause the biggest problems for people with disabilities, who are assumed to be one or more of the following:

- incapable/inadequate
- of low intelligence
- in need of a 'cure'
- needing 'special' services or support
- dependent
- inspirational or marvellous or exceptional.

People who make these judgements treat the disabled person as superfluous or superhuman. They either fail to respond to the individual – with all their inherent personality, strengths and weaknesses – or they assume they have 'superhuman' abilities to cope with their impairment.

People who do not have disabilities can respond with fear, pity, repulsion, or a sense of superiority. These assumptions and emotions are reinforced by the media. Negative language reflects and can reinforce prejudices. People with disabilities wish to change the language used by non-disabled people about them – especially language that is offensive and inaccurate.

Environmental

Disabled people encounter barriers in terms of access to the built environment or information, for example in terms of public transport, hospitals and clinics, schools and housing, shops and marketplaces, offices and factories, places of worship, media and communications and public information systems.

Most people think of the physical barriers in this category – e.g. a health clinic is inaccessible for wheelchair users if it has steps and narrow doorways. It is relatively easy to identify these – in consultation with disabled people – once aware.

Lack of accessible communications can also be disabling for those with sensory impairments – e.g. for Deaf people, if there's no sign language; for those with visual impairments if medication isn't appropriately labelled. Poor communication can have devastating results where important school based education campaigns happen (e.g. HIV and AIDS).

Students with hearing, visual or intellectual impairments are unlikely to access vital information unless their access needs have been met. And since 98 per cent of disabled children in developing countries don't attend school, they'll miss out on important education and information.

Institutional

These barriers exclude or segregate disabled people from many areas, such as the legal system, employment laws, electoral system, education policies, health service provisions, social services, belief systems and religion and humanitarian/development agency policies.

Exclusion from institutions has other effects – for example, poorly regulated special education often makes fewer academic demands on pupils, and smaller schools expose them to a limited range of cultural experiences. The virtual exclusion of people with disabilities from teacher training colleges also limits the number of qualified teachers with disabilities as role models for students with disabilities and non-disabled pupils in schools.

Families often make assumptions their child with a disability will not be able to work independently. They therefore rarely ask the government to provide suitable formal education, or encourage the child to pursue a career. Many people with disabilities may then set low expectations for themselves.

Micro-finance institutions often have policies which are highly discriminatory. They may exclude deaf people on the assumption they won't be able to talk directly with staff; or refuse to lend to a visually impaired businessperson on the grounds they're not likely to make a profit as a disabled entrepreneur.