I want to describe an imaginary country...

This country has a population of more than one billion people. That would make it the 3rd most populated country in the world.

There is a lot wrong in our imaginary country...

The under-five mortality is reported to be as high as 80%\(^1\).

UNESCO says that only 10% of children attend school\(^2\). UNDP reports that the literacy rate for adults is lower still\(^3\).

The ILO measures unemployment at 80% in some areas\(^4\).

The women in this country are at high risk of being beaten, raped and forcibly sterilised\(^5,6\) and are unlikely to marry\(^6\).

The population has poor access to health care\(^6\), and often are unable to see a doctor or to pay for even most basic of health care. Children often go unimmunized\(^7\), women are frequently left alone to give birth\(^8\).

Many of the population are unable to vote and often political participation is actively discouraged\(^9\).

The population is disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change, living in areas at risk of temperature change and rising sea levels\(^10\).
The imaginary country certainly sounds as though it would be the international development community’s top priority.

This may be an imaginary country but these are not imaginary statistics. They tell the real but under-recognised story of people with disabilities in developing countries. The statistics quoted are not the product of an overheated imagination. They are official figures from the United Nations and its agencies.

As soon as the stark reality is illustrated, the case for a special priority in development programmes for people with disabilities becomes obvious. No other group with such statistical evidence to show their absolute and relative disadvantage would suffer this lack of attention.

But it isn’t!

Proper recognition of the priority owed to those who are the world’s most disadvantaged should be established.

All development agencies should develop a strategy to guide their approach to the issues of persons with disabilities, not just about the delivery of services but also the rights of people with disabilities.

These rights are set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) to which all the major donor countries are signatories. Article 32 of the CRPD specifically commits developed countries to ensure that their development programs reflect the rights set out in the Convention.

But we shouldn’t need a Convention to tell us that the most disadvantaged should be a focus of our attention.

All governments, donor agencies, non-governmental organisations and communities must take action to include persons with disabilities in their policies, activities and programmes.

Otherwise this imaginary country will continue to receive too little attention, its citizens’ rights will not be recognised and their opportunities will remain unfairly limited. And because the population of this imaginary country makes up 15% of the world’s population, none of the global development goals will be reached unless people with disabilities are included in global development efforts.

So, what is to be done?

Further reading

Author
Bob McMullan is the Australian Executive Director at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. He is a former Minister of the Australian Government, having held several portfolios over a twenty year career in the Australian Parliament. Until early 2010 he was the Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance. He previously served as the Minister for Trade, Arts and Administrative Services. During 2010-11 Mr McMullan was the Special Envoy of the Australian Government to a number of African countries, and he is an Adjunct Professor in the Crawford School of Economics and Government at the Australian National University. He was also a member of the High-level Advisory Group of the UN Secretary-General on Climate Change Financing.

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Leonard Cheshire Disability: International
With a deeply rooted network of over 200 Leonard Cheshire Global Alliance members in 54 countries, Leonard Cheshire Disability is one of the world’s largest networks wholly dedicated to supporting people with disabilities. Our international department works in Africa and Asia to support disabled children to get an education, disabled adults to find employment, and all people with disabilities to access the healthcare and rehabilitation support that they need. We campaign to put disability at the heart of development and support young people with disabilities to campaign for their rights.

http://www.lcint.org/

Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre
The Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre is an academic research centre uniquely dedicated to generating research about disability and poverty, based at University College London. The research helps to improve the lives of people with disabilities, their families and communities around the world.

The research centre provides an evidence base for Leonard Cheshire Disability’s international work. It also provides expertise for UN agencies, national and international organisations, policy makers and NGOs. Centre staff participate in academic networks, and share their research through presentations, publications and teaching.

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