

## About the possible role of rural advisory services in disability-inclusive development

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### Food for thoughts:

#### ***“More and better rice, just sms”\****

*Extension services via short text messages and the internet are changing the livelihoods of rural rice farmers in the Pampanga community in the Philippines....*

### Does this success story apply to blind rice farmers too?

\* From the GFRAS web-site <http://www.g-fras.org/en/events/gfras-events/annual-meeting-philippines-2012/blog/173-more-and-better-rice-just-sms>

**Persons with disabilities** include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.\*

**Disability affects individuals and their families.**

\* (UN Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2008), Art. 1

Rural Advisory Services (RAS) could considerably contribute to breaking the vicious cycle of disability and poverty - if RAS would take more consciously into account the needs and the potentials of persons who are affected by disability.

The paper describes the challenge and provides some core facts and figures on disability. It also summarizes the framework for change.

Some elements are suggested on how RAS could boost their contributions to the reduction of hunger and poverty applying a disability-inclusive rural development approach.

### Facts and Figures

- 1 billion persons or about 15% of the world's population live with disabilities<sup>1</sup> with some 80% of them in developing countries.<sup>2</sup>
- Exclusion of persons with disabilities is costly. Estimates range from 1- 7% of GDP.<sup>3</sup>
- Physical and attitudinal barriers very often hinder or exclude persons with disabilities from equal participation in community life.
- Prejudices about disability are often mirrored in inappropriate attitude and discriminating behavior of community and even family members towards persons with disabilities.
- Four of every five persons with disabilities live in rural areas in developing countries.<sup>4</sup>
- Persons with disabilities, their families and their caretakers represent around 25% of any population.<sup>5</sup>
- The rural population of low and middle income countries was 3.12 billion people in 2011<sup>6</sup> of which around 780 million persons should be affected by the presence of disability.

<sup>1</sup> (WHO and World Bank; World Report on Disability, 2011, p. 29)

<sup>2</sup> (UN; International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 2012)

<sup>3</sup> (ILO; Barbara Murray; Disability Employment for Social Justice and a Fair Globalization, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> (UN Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons, 2006)

<sup>5</sup> (UN Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons, 2006)

<sup>6</sup> (World Bank; World Bank Data, 2013) Query on World Development Indicators, Rural Population (% of total population) in low & middle income

## Challenge

- “People with disabilities in developing countries are over-represented among the poorest people. They have been largely overlooked in the development agenda so far, but the recent focus on poverty reduction strategies is a unique chance to rethink and rewrite that agenda. Poverty causes disabilities and can furthermore lead to secondary disabilities for those individuals who are already disabled, as a result of the poor living conditions, health endangering employment, malnutrition, poor access to health care and education opportunities etc. Together, poverty and disability create a vicious circle.”<sup>7</sup>
- “One of the Millennium Development Goals is the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, a goal that cannot be achieved without taking into consideration a group of people that is so disproportionately represented among the world's poorest people”.<sup>8</sup>
- “Most persons with disabilities who do work in rural areas in developing countries are engaged in income-generating activities such as subsistence farming or small-scale entrepreneurship in the informal economy”.<sup>9</sup>

With too few exceptions, persons with disabilities continue to be, intentionally or unintentionally, excluded from development agendas. Needs of those affected by disability are not yet sufficiently and appropriately reflected in strategies and programs for rural development.

As a consequence, a large majority of persons with disabilities in developing countries do have and will remain with poorer health, lower educational achievements, less economic opportunities and a higher rate of poverty than people without disabilities<sup>10</sup> ..... unless action is taken.

## Framework for Change

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)<sup>11</sup> entered into force in May 2008. The CRPD is “to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity”.<sup>12</sup>

Equal participation of persons with disabilities in political, social, economic and cultural life, for equal opportunity in education and the opportunity of a self-determined living in a barrier-free society through disability-inclusive development are some of concerns the CRPD is promoting. Hence disability-inclusive development encompasses all sectors of development. Therefore, any vision aiming at the sustainable reduction of hunger and poverty needs to consciously give consideration to the group of persons with disabilities too.

At present (12<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2013), 134 countries have ratified the CRPD<sup>13</sup>. Therewith these countries underline their commitment to proactively strive for change on how persons with disabilities and their needs are taken into account, to reduce exclusion and discrimination as well as to anchor inclusion in all aspects of society and community. Moreover, these countries recognize the importance of international cooperation in the realization of the purpose and objectives of the CRPD.<sup>14</sup> Hence development agendas will increasingly take into account the contents of the CRPD.

<sup>7</sup> (World Bank; Poverty and Disability, 2010)

<sup>8</sup> (World Bank; Poverty and Disability, 2010)

<sup>9</sup> (ILO; Tiina Eskola; Empowering People with Disabilities for Rural Development, 2011)

<sup>10</sup> (WHO; Description of World Report on Disability, 2011)

<sup>11</sup> (UN Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2008)

<sup>12</sup> (UN Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2008) Art. 1

<sup>13</sup> (UN; Treaty Collection, Chapter IV; Status Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2013)

<sup>14</sup> (UN Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2008) Art. 32

## **How RAS could become promoters of disability-inclusive rural development.**

RAS could underline with their **policy and strategy formulation** the relevance of disability-inclusive rural development for a sustainable reduction of hunger and poverty worldwide.

**Vision:** to see rural advisory services effectively contributing to the sustainable reduction of hunger and poverty worldwide.

**Production and productivity increase** of additionally mobilized resources through disability-inclusive rural development may be indicators for success of such strategies.

From the GFRAS Charter Preamble. (downloadable from <http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/gfras-publications/file/68-gfras-charter> )

Spearheading disability-inclusive rural development, RAS could lead by example for other actors in rural development; if policies and strategies would consequently extrapolate in disability-inclusive **principles, techniques and contents**.

In this way, RAS would probably become major promoters in drafting disability-inclusive **rural development agendas** for improving on sustainable livelihoods, well-being and social cohesion in rural communities.

Monitoring and evaluating the engagement and impact of disability-inclusive RAS could provide valuable data to produce **evidence** for optimizing approaches and policies to further boost effectiveness and efficiency of disability-inclusive rural development instruments.

## **Examples on how RAS could demonstrate disability-inclusive action.**

**Rural advisory services** are all the different activities that provide the information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in rural settings to assist them in developing their own technical, organizational, and management skills and practices so as to improve the livelihoods and well-being.

GFRAS, 2011. Rural Advisory Services Worldwide: A Synthesis of Actors and Issues. Synthesis Report. B. Adolph, Triple Line Consulting, 65 p.

Creation of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in all aspects of life is also a question of equal access to information, knowledge, services and infrastructures. Creating and maintaining accessibility for persons with disabilities therefore should be a key aspect in disability-inclusive development.

RAS could promote techniques and instruments to ensure **accessibility of information on input as well as output markets** to persons with disabilities.

RAS could further advise on how to make infrastructures to and on these markets **physically accessible**.

In some financial systems persons with disabilities as such are not eligible for loans and microcredits. RAS could advocate and facilitate **access to financial services** for persons with disabilities.

### **What does it mean, "Accessibility"?**

*"To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. ...."*

(CRPD, Article 9, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>)

Accessibility to production factor land is crucial for producers in agriculture. Reasons ranging from lack of information to discriminating legislation may prevent persons with disabilities from access to land. RAS could provide **legal advice on land issues**.

Most of the presently used formats, methods and contents of extension services do not reach sufficiently persons with disabilities. RAS, using **accessible formats, methods and disability-inclusive contents** could not only lay foundation for a socio-economic empowerment of persons with disabilities but also expand the pool of skilled, technically equipped, informed producers and agribusiness entrepreneurs by the group of persons with disabilities.

*"Universal design" means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. "Universal design" shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed.*

(CRPD Article 2,  
<http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>)

Designing specific technical solutions for persons with disabilities is not always necessary. RAS could promote and trigger **scientific research on universal design** of technical solutions to challenges in agribusiness for persons with disabilities.

Persons affected by disabilities are particularly vulnerable to climate changes, environmental degradation and market volatility. RAS could take this into account in the **preparation of communities for expected climate changes**, environmental degradation and market volatility.

Professional networks, producers' and entrepreneurs' organizations, professional peer-to-peer exchange are catalyzing instruments for sustainable rural development. RAS could encourage and support **professional networks and organizations** to embrace persons with disabilities respectively their organizations (Disabled People's Organizations).

## **Conclusion:**

The presented challenges, facts and figures as well as the desired framework for change are calling for disability-inclusive RAS. Disability-inclusiveness could further boost RAS impact on improving livelihoods, reducing poverty and enhancing food security. The examples given in this paper demonstrate how proven successful practice of RAS could be complemented with disability-inclusive components rather than promoting a radical change of these services.

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