

HAS NORWAY IMPROVED ITS SUPPORT TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN POOR COUNTRIES SINCE 2010?

Easy to read version

The Evaluation of Norway's inclusion of persons with disabilities in development cooperation (2022)

Written by NIRAS Sweden, commissioned by the Department for Evaluation in Norad

BACKGROUND

In 2011, the Norwegian government wanted to find out if the Norwegian development aid had made life better for persons with disabilities. A team of consultants were hired to help investigate. They asked many people in Norway, Uganda, Palestine, Malawi and Nepal about it. They read reports and statistics. They found that only a tiny part of the total aid budget was used to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. However, some of this small Norwegian support showed good results:

- Organisations of persons with disabilities had become bigger and more influential
- Partner countries had adopted better laws for persons with disabilities
- Individuals had been helped by medical and rehabilitation projects

The consultants made recommendations to the Norwegian government on how they could do better in the future.

In 2021, the Norwegian government wanted to know how things had progressed since the last study. They wanted to know if the recommendations had been implemented. They hired consultants to help. They came from Nepal, Uganda, Sweden, Norway, and South Sudan. The consultants were asked to look especially at the education programmes to see if children with disabilities were included. The consultants read new reports and statistics. They went back to Norway, Uganda, Malawi, and Nepal to ask questions to many people, including children and persons with disabilities. They also went to South Sudan to see if persons with disabilities were included in education programmes supported by Norway.





Braille, photo: Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted

FINDINGS ABOUT THE NORWEGIAN AID ADMINISTRATION

The consultants found out that Norway had made many new promises to persons with disabilities in the 10-year period. Most importantly:

- Norway promised to implement the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2013
- Norway made political declarations promising to give more priority and money to persons with disabilities
- Norway tried hard to cooperate with other countries to achieve more. Norway is active in many international groups that work for disability inclusion.
- Norway wrote guidelines to help partners include persons with disabilities in their programmes.
- Norway adopted a new Disability Inclusion Strategy in 2022. It includes strong promises to include persons with disabilities in aid programmes.

The consultants also found that Norway now gives more money to inclusive education programmes. Out of every 100 dollars given to education programmes, 20

dollars went to disability inclusion. Norway also gives much more money to Norwegian organisations that work together for inclusion. Despite these increases, the money given to improve the lives of persons with disabilities is still a tiny part of the total Norwegian aid budget. In some sectors, persons with disabilities are totally left behind and ignored. This is especially so in support to emergencies and conflict areas.

Why is it so hard to fulfil the promises made?

The consultants found that the obstacles mostly remain the same:

- The Norwegian government does not insist that the promises are fulfilled.
- Decision makers think that other problems are more important. They do not understand that other problems, like poverty or injustices in society, will not be solved unless persons with disabilities are included.
- They think it is difficult and expensive to include persons with disabilities.
- They think that disability is a medical and individual problem that could just be solved by supporting

the person with a disability. They do not see that unless attitudes and practices in society changes, exclusion will continue.

- The agencies responsible for Norwegian aid have not managed to help staff and partner organisations to find ways to translate promises into practice.
- The disability organisations have not managed - or been given the chance - to influence important decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT

- Norway's new Disability Inclusion Strategy must describe in detail how the promises will be realised. This means concrete plans and goals, clear guidelines for staff and partners, sufficient money, and a good system for monitoring.
- Norwegian leaders should say loudly and clearly that disability inclusion is a priority, and not just an option.

- Disability experts should be employed in the aid organisations and persons responsible for keeping disability on the agenda should be appointed in all key departments.
- Norway should demand that all supported programmes have specific goals for persons with disabilities. Norway should demand reports on the results for persons with disabilities.
- Norway should demand that all supported partners and programmes always invite organisations of persons with disabilities to take active part in planning and following up programmes.
- Norway should do more to ensure that disability inclusion becomes part of humanitarian programmes in conflicts and natural disasters.
- Norway should establish a formal group where organisations of persons with disabilities and the people responsible for Norwegian aid can meet and discuss important things on a regular basis.

FINDINGS ABOUT DISABILITY INCLUSION IN EDUCATION IN NORWEGIAN PARTNER COUNTRIES

In the countries visited, consultants found that governments, UN agencies, donors and local organisations were more interested in including persons with disabilities than 10 years ago. They had started to mention persons with disabilities and their rights in a lot of documents. They had started to make promises to persons with disabilities. They had started to give money to some projects to improve the lives of persons with disabilities – especially to inclusive education. Norwegian support had helped this to happen, together with other supporters.

Persons with disabilities and their organisations said that this was a good start. They were happy that sometimes the government and donors asked them about their opinion. But they said that they were not really given a chance to influence plans or to check results. They said that little had changed in the lives of most persons with disabilities despite all the aid programmes.

The consultants confirmed that there were indeed only small improvements at the local level despite the government promises and the aid money. Attitudes in society are still favourable to giving needed attention to these issues. There are big problems in accessing services. Still, very few children with disabilities are included in the education system. In Nepal it is estimated that only 15 of 100 children with disabilities are enrolled. In Malawi only 4 of 100 children with disabilities are enrolled. Most children with disabilities remain at home. Some children with disabilities, for example those who are blind, deaf, or deafblind are often sent to special schools.

FINDINGS ABOUT THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SUPPORT IN NEPAL AND MALAWI

The consultants investigated more closely the results of the supported inclusive education programmes in Malawi and Nepal. Most of these had been carried out by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children. Both had received a lot of money from Norway for many years.

The consultants found that the governments in both countries had developed more disability inclusive education plans. National Education Ministries had



Photo: Dietmar Temps /Alamy Stock Photo

become more positive to welcoming children with disabilities in regular schools. In some districts the governments had opened resource units/centres that could help teachers and students with disabilities. Ramps and accessible toilets were constructed in many schools. More teachers were being trained to adapt their work to the needs of children with disabilities. Some parents were now more positive to educate their children. In areas supported by the Norwegian partners more children with disabilities attended regular schools compared to before.

However, there were many problems.

- Children with disabilities were hard to enrol. Some families were still hiding them or wanted to protect their children from being bullied in school. Some families did not believe that their children could learn. Many children did not have the identification papers needed to enrol.
- Many of the enrolled children with disabilities did not learn in their local school. They dropped out. This was because of the poor situation in the schools. Schools often lacked schoolbooks, furniture, and toilets. The classes were sometimes overcrowded with well over 100 students. It was impossible for teachers to help

all the children in the class – especially children who needed extra support.

- Teachers did not know how to teach children with all types of disabilities. They wanted to send some of the children to schools where specialists could help. The parents also wanted this.

- Local education authorities did not have enough money. Schools relied on money from UNICEF and Save the Children to support children with disabilities.
- School authorities did not want to make changes to help children with disabilities. They insisted that all students learn the same things at the same pace.



Photo: Bjørnulf Remme / Norad

- People who built schools and toilets did not involve persons with disabilities to understand what was useful for them. Therefore, they made big mistakes.

Because of these problems, teachers, parents, and children with disabilities wanted to find better ways to organise education. Sometimes children with the same disability studied in one school (special school) or in a special unit. Sometimes a separate classroom was arranged for children with disabilities who needed extra support (resource class). In both Nepal and Malawi, education for children with disabilities was organised to use a combination of methods. Inclusion in local schools and regular classes was combined with support to resource classes, units and special schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SUPPORT

The consultants recommend that:

- Decisions about education for children with disabilities should consider what is best for the individual child where they live.
- Inclusion of children with disabilities in local schools and classrooms is the best long-term goal. For this



Photo: The Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted

to work, much more money and capacity is needed in the regular school system.

- Small units, resource classes or special schools can be better for children with disabilities when the local school does not yet have the necessary conditions.
- It is important to maintain pressure on governments

for more inclusion in local schools and at the same time, find solutions for specialised support to children who need that here and now.

- The flexible systems that are emerging in Nepal, Malawi should receive continued support.

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