

VSO AND DISABILITY

2008-2013



Sharing skills
Changing lives

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INTRODUCTION

“WE BELIEVE THAT EVERYONE MUST BE ABLE TO EXERCISE THEIR FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS.”¹

VSO recognises that poverty is the denial of rights. With this, fighting disadvantage means promoting inclusive development, thus ensuring that all groups of society who are at risk of marginalisation and exclusion have access to their rights.

People with disabilities are still excluded and denied their rights everywhere in the world. Because of our commitment towards inclusion and the recognition of the exclusion that women, men and children with disabilities still face, VSO works towards promoting the rights of people with disabilities across 20 countries.

Working in partnership with organisations of people with disabilities has shaped our understanding and approach to disability across the world. VSO defines disability in development as a human rights issue that is the result of society failing to consider the rights of all its members. We aim to remove the barriers within society that prevent disabled people from fully enjoying their human rights.

VSO and Disability: 2008–2013 outlines the principles and vision for our work. It has been developed by VSO programmes in a series of consultations with our partners and organisations of people with disabilities.

This document is divided into two sections. The first defines our values, beliefs and approach to inclusive development. The second section offers more detailed examples of what changes we have realised through this work, and what we want to bring about with our partner organisations and within VSO itself.

1 Focus For Change, 2002: VSO's Strategic Plan

AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY FOR ALL: VSO'S CONTRIBUTION

"States Parties² undertake to ensure and promote the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability." **(UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, article 4)**

In line with the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, VSO promotes inclusive development across all of our six developmental goals³. *Focus For Change* states: "VSO aims to support people with disabilities in exercising their rights and to promote their full inclusion and active participation as equal members of their families, communities and societies."

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT: VSO'S CONTRIBUTION

VSO contributes to creating an inclusive society where the rights of people with disabilities are realised. We work in partnerships to strengthen the voice of people with disabilities and to build the capacity of governments and civil societies to be responsive and accountable to people with disabilities.

THE VOICE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

VSO works in partnership with organisations of people with disabilities so that the voices of men, women, boys and girls with disabilities are heard in their families and communities. This approach helps to ensure that women, men, girls and boys with disabilities are represented at a national level by strong disability movements that are experienced in fighting for policy change.

VSO helps to realise change by:

- recognising and supporting the specific political nature of social movements such as organisations of people with disabilities
- developing partnerships with organisations of people with disabilities at district and national levels to support their work

2 A 'State Party' to a treaty is a country that has ratified or acceded to that particular treaty and is therefore legally bound.

3 Education, Secure Livelihoods, Health and Social Well-being, Participation and Governance, HIV and AIDS, Disability.



- developing partnerships with umbrella federations to improve links with their member organisations, their inclusiveness and their ability to represent their members' interests effectively
- committing to long-term capacity development support for organisations of people with disabilities
- promoting and building links between service providers and organisations of people with disabilities
- recognising that people with disabilities are not an homogeneous group and that they face extra barriers because of their gender, age, class or language background.

GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSIVENESS

VSO works in partnership with governments and civil society service providers so that enabling services⁴ are accessible at community level and can offer a wider range of appropriate quality services to ensure people with disabilities independent living.

We also support enabling services in equalising opportunities for people with disabilities rather than 'curing' individual impairments. And with this, VSO works with enabling services providers so that they involve people with disabilities in measuring the quality, accessibility and relevance of their services.

We support all partner services in health, income generation, HIV and AIDS and education to promote accessibility, inclusive practices and attitudes towards people with disabilities (especially women and girls).

VSO also works to promote inclusive attitudes towards people with disabilities throughout governments. With this, all national policies we work on aim at designing and planning services and buildings that are accessible to everyone in the community.

4 We define enabling services as all services aimed at addressing individual impairments and at equalising opportunities for people with individual impairments (such as the provision of assistive devices or paramedical services, but also Braille printing and sign language interpretation).



Women, men, boys and girls with disabilities, through this work, will have increased access to appropriate enabling services within their communities (or to information on referral channels) and young people with disabilities will have increased access to a quality education.

VSO helps to realise change by:

- supporting the development of the capacity of enabling services providers to improve the quality and the range of the services they offer
- supporting the capacity of enabling services providers to extend their services to rural areas outside institutions
- supporting the capacity of enabling services providers to ensure their services are accessible to women and girls with disabilities
- facilitating networking between different ministries and civil society organisations to improve holistic responsiveness
- supporting partners across all VSO goals to develop inclusive programme and working practices.

2 VSO'S APPROACH

VSO's approach to disability is based on the following principles:

- Disability is a human rights and a development issue.
- Disability in development is primarily about promoting inclusive development.

Our distinctive way of working in partnerships and through international and national volunteering contributes to building an inclusive society by:

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ORGANISATIONS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

VSO has long-term partnerships with organisations of people with disabilities in all disability programmes. Recognising the international motto of the disability movement: 'Nothing about us without us', VSO needs strong partnerships with organisations of people with disabilities to ensure our work has legitimacy.

Our work with organisations of people with disabilities is based on:

- recognising organisations of people with disabilities as social movements
- building on organisations of people with disabilities' strengths and opportunity for growth
- supporting organisations of people with disabilities to identify their drivers for change through long-term support to self-assessment and planning for change
- supporting the capacity development of national volunteering initiatives.

PROMOTING COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS

VSO works in partnership with organisations active in the fields of education, health and social well-being, secure livelihoods, HIV and AIDS and participation and governance. This allows us to facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration and co-operation.

Facilitating increased co-operation among service providers in different sectors is part of building the responsiveness of government and civil society towards the rights of people with disabilities.

Our distinctive approach in promoting the responsiveness of governments and civil societies towards people with disabilities is framed by a holistic model of inclusive development.



MAINSTREAMING⁵ DISABILITY ACROSS ALL OUR WORK

VSO is committed to including more men and women with disabilities as active and equal participants of our work, as partners, volunteers and staff. To achieve this, VSO is committed to removing barriers that lie within its programme strategies, working practices and policies.

For VSO staff and volunteers this means:

- challenging stigma and discrimination within VSO and amongst our partners in education, health and social well-being, secure livelihoods as well as HIV and AIDS
- proactively promoting inclusive practices within VSO and partner organisations
- actively and meaningfully engaging with people with disabilities and organisations of people with disabilities.

5 VSO understands mainstreaming as the process of engaging in a structured way with issues as an organisation, at workplace, programme and policy levels, to address, and avoid increasing, the negative effects of that issue.

A Handbook on Mainstreaming Disability, VSO 2006

www.vso.org.uk/Images/Disability_DREAM-IT_Mainstreaming_Handbook_tcm8-8411.pdf

WHERE WE SEE CHANGE

1 IN INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

VSO supports community-based strategies with the placement of international volunteers, national volunteering initiatives, study tours, and grants.

Through this approach women, men, boys and girls with disabilities gain access to quality enabling services within their communities or to appropriate referral services. We promote disabled men and women's voices to be heard

and their human rights realised in their communities. International and national volunteers also work towards reducing stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities in the community.

Within the same strategy VSO works to ensure parents of disabled children have access to places to meet and access support, as well as being able to advocate for the rights to access education.

Examples in practice:

- In Kenya, VSO works in partnership with 28 Education Assessment Resource Centres (EARCs), belonging to the Ministry of Education, in 28 districts. The EARCs support schools in becoming inclusive. As part of the inclusive education strategy, EARCs facilitate the creation of parents' groups. With VSO's support, parents' groups now include parents of disabled children. Most groups are now registered at the EARCs as Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) groups. Groups meet regularly in school premises and are actively involved in improving schools' accessibility and inclusiveness as well as referring children out of education in the community to schools.





- In Sri Lanka, VSO supports local NGOs' physiotherapy services in becoming available to communities in a conflict-affected area where those services previously didn't exist.



- In Namibia, the Ministry of Health and Social Services, with VSO's support, facilitates the constitution of community based rehabilitation committees in each district and each region. The committees are formed entirely by people with disabilities or



parents of children with disabilities and they are actively engaged in the steering of the CBR programme. The Ministry's rehabilitation staff meet the committees regularly.

- In Uganda, VSO supports community development departments, which are responsible for the co-ordination of all disability initiatives amongst governments, NGOs and organisations of people with disabilities at district level. The establishment of the community development departments was part of the decentralisation process and of the national poverty eradication process. VSO volunteers work within these departments supporting the planning process and the co-ordination of disability work.
- In Guyana, VSO supports partners in training more national volunteers working in CBR in basic rehabilitation skills as well as advocacy skills to support people with disabilities to live independently in their communities.



2 IN PARTNER SERVICES

VSO supports partner organisations working in health, HIV and AIDS, education and secure livelihoods to become inclusive of people with disabilities. We also work with organisations providing enabling services for people with disabilities in improving the quality of the services achieving the following changes:

IN HEALTH SYSTEMS, CLINICS AND HOSPITALS

- Health professionals do not display discriminatory practices towards people with disabilities.
- Health professionals recognise the rights of people with disabilities to access medical facilities like any other citizen.
- Rehabilitation staff recognise the rights of people with disabilities in deciding on their treatment.
- Rehabilitation staff have improved skills to offer appropriate services and support.

- Clinics and hospital managers support budget decisions, which prioritise accessibility.
- Clinics and hospital managers prioritise community-based strategies and support the training of community rehabilitation workers.
- Clinics and hospital managers actively engage with representatives of organisations of people with disabilities to design rehabilitation services.



Examples in practice:

- In Kazakhstan, a team of 70 social workers from two districts was trained in the Bobath approach⁶ by VSO volunteers and can now offer specific services for children with cerebral palsy. In the same district, families expressed increased satisfaction with services offered by social workers after VSO's support. Parents now see social services as instrumental in demanding rights for their children.
- In Papua New Guinea, physiotherapy graduates are completing two-year residency positions in provincial hospitals, after being taught by VSO volunteers at the Divine Word University, Madang, and coached by VSO volunteers in six provincial hospitals.

IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS

- Teachers, school principals and inspectors do not display discriminatory attitudes and practices towards disabled children.
- School principals and inspectors proactively encourage teachers in developing inclusive attitudes and teaching practices.

6 The Bobath approach involves physiotherapy techniques specifically designed for children with cerebral palsy.



- School principals and education managers allocate funds to promote schools accessibility.
- Schools' staff promote involvement of disabled children's parents and raise awareness in the community on their rights to education.

Examples in practice:

- In Kazakhstan, rehabilitation centres started working on inclusive education after VSO's support and children with disabilities have been admitted in mainstream schools.
- In Cambodia, a draft national policy entitled, 'Inclusive Education for Children with Disability' was completed in December 2006. In all districts, model child friendly schools have been developed and there is evidence of more primary schools starting to include disabled learners in classrooms after VSO's support.
- In The Gambia, the College of Education included in its curriculum inclusive education with support from VSO. The training modules are aimed at enhancing primary teachers skills to include learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.



IN BUSINESSES, EMPLOYERS AND MICROFINANCE INSTITUTIONS

- Microfinance institutions accept people with disabilities as clients and members.

Examples in practice:

- In Kenya, K-REP, an important national microfinance provider, is currently supported by VSO in extending its revolving saving and credit schemes to people with disabilities.
- VSO Indonesia is working with national microfinance providers and business development services to increase the accessibility of their services to people with disabilities.
- VSO Vietnam is developing partnerships with provincial associations of enterprises of people with disabilities to improve the quality of their products and services and their access to markets.

IN HIV AND AIDS SERVICE PROVIDERS

- HIV and AIDS service providers, operating at all different stages of the continuum of care, promote the accessibility of their services for people with disabilities.
- HIV and AIDS service providers involve people with disabilities and organisations of people with disabilities in designing and evaluating their services.

Examples in practice:

- VSO Namibia supports organisations of people with disabilities in liaising with HIV and AIDS services providers to ensure the accessibility of all information material, prevention services, testing and counselling and access to treatment.
- VSO Mozambique supports HIV and AIDS providers in ensuring accessibility of their services to blind people and people with low vision.
- VSO India supported the publication of HIV and AIDS information material in Braille.

3 IN NATIONAL POLICIES

National disability policies are developed and framed around the ratification of the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. In addition, Poverty Reduction Strategies processes (PRSP)⁷ should involve organisations of people with disabilities and include disability issues.

Examples in practice:

- In Guyana, the National Commission on Disability, with VSO's support, drafted disability legislation and conducted a nationwide consultation. The Bill is to be presented in Guyana's Parliament by the Guyanese Minister of Health in 2007.
- In VSO Kenya, a VSO volunteer will work to help children with disabilities to have a voice in policy formulation and to increase access to services through the EARCs.
- In Rwanda, VSO supported all national organisations of people with disabilities in actively participating in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper process (PRSP).



7 The PRSP was introduced by the World Bank and the IMF in 1999. Its purpose is to ensure that governments and civil society groups take the lead in defining policies that the Bank and Fund should support.

4 IN VSO AS AN ORGANISATION

VSO programmes, strategic directions and working procedures are framed by active consultation with people with disabilities and organisations of people with disabilities. The organisation, from volunteers to programme staff to Members of the Federation, is committed to inclusive recruitment procedures. All Members of the Federation and programmes are committed to inclusive workplace policies and practice.

Examples in practice:

- VSO International is a Two Ticks employer. The Two Ticks symbol is a nationally validated Disability Symbol, which is awarded to employers who demonstrate their commitment to employing and retaining people with disabilities. VSO agree to five commitments, which involve interviewing, retaining and supporting disabled staff, plus training all employees. The Symbol is internally and also externally evaluated each year.
- VSO International is conducting a policy review, to be more inclusive of people with disabilities, organising a programme of events and awareness raising activities.
- VSO UK provides sign language interpreters for Meet VSO Events and conducted an accessibility audit of its website, to inform actions needed to make the website accessible to people with disabilities.
- VSO India developed a 'Disability Protocol' to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities as staff and volunteers within VSO India and partner organisations. The protocol defines the workplace policy on disability for VSO India. It ensures non-discrimination towards people with disabilities during recruitment as well as an accessible and inclusive work environment.
- VSO Mongolia has established a 'Disability Advisory Board' with representation of all national organisations of people with disabilities to guide and advise on programme direction, programme review and working procedure.

VSO has disability programmes in 13 countries (The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Namibia, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Guyana).

The rights of people with disabilities to inclusion and equal access and participation are also promoted across our work in education, health and social well-being, secure livelihoods, HIV and AIDS and participation and governance.

VSO agencies in Canada, India, Kenya, the Netherlands, the Philippines and the United Kingdom recruit volunteers from many countries. We use a range of delivery activities to strengthen the contribution of long-term international volunteering:

- other international volunteer placements (special assignments, youth and exchange visits)
- community, national and diaspora volunteering initiatives
- workshops and training
- policy research and advocacy
- global education
- exchanges and study visits
- small grants
- school linking.

For a fuller description of our work in these areas, see VSO's strategy document, *Focus For Change* and additional material at www.vso.org.uk

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