

DISABILITY ISSUES WORLDWIDE

Compass

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Young Voices sing loud
How young disabled people
are influencing the UN

Global Partnerships
Do they work?

The whole world in his hands?

Meet the Chair of the
Ad Hoc Committee for the
new UN Convention

Creating opportunities with disabled people

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Leonard Cheshire exists to change attitudes to disability and to serve disabled people around the world. It has been supporting disabled people around the world for almost 60 years and is active in 55 countries.

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WELCOME to COMPASS

As I write this, we draw near to what is hoped to be the final session of the Ad Hoc Committee process of building the new UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People. It is a good moment to reflect on the extraordinary things that can be achieved through cooperation and perseverance, added to a rich mix of leadership from disabled people and a great Chairman.



However, making the new Convention into a living instrument will perhaps be the greatest challenge, and international cooperation will be a critical factor in bringing this about, not as an alternative to each State's responsibility, but as a supporting mechanism to allow us all to learn from the good practice of each other.

Disability organisations around the world recognise that we will only see real impact if we work together in partnerships, networks and alliances, hence the decision by the Leonard Cheshire organisations from 52 countries to build a strong and effective Global Alliance, and the increasing importance of IDDC and the GPDD in the field of international disability and development. I hope this issue of *Compass* can play its own part in generating discussion on this vital issue, and bring NGOs and DPOs together for the benefit of disabled people everywhere. The future is ours for the making.

Tanya Barron,
International Director, Leonard Cheshire

BBC World Service backs disabled playwrights

The BBC World Service is supporting a new campaign to get more young disabled people on to the airwaves. The first product of this, a new radio play called 'Beautiful Only at Night' was broadcast by the World Service in Africa in March, with regular repeats since then.

The play grew from a series of workshops for young disabled people, co-ordinated by Leonard Cheshire Uganda in conjunction with Radio for Development and the National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda. A series of guidelines for new writers has also been published, and is being distributed to teacher training colleges and other Cheshire partners.

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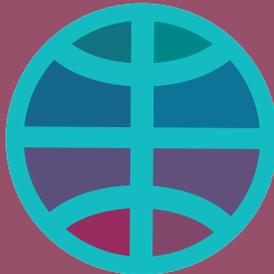
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ActionAid to back disability equality training

Following a successful pilot project in Sri Lanka, development organisation ActionAid is funding disability equality training for almost 100 NGOs in India.

act!onaid

The training, entitled 'Mainstreaming Disability' is being delivered by Leonard Cheshire staff in conjunction with disabled people themselves, and will take place over the next six months. Local partners of ActionAid will be among those receiving the training.

Philippines seminar opened by President

President Gloria Arroyo attended a conference in Manila organised by the National Council of Cheshire Homes in the Philippines (PhilCOCHED) to raise awareness of the challenges facing disabled people in the country. The conference brought together stakeholders including representatives from the UN, Philippine government



ministries, NGOs, disabled people's organisations and Cheshire partners, and focused

on two of Leonard Cheshire's key thematic areas: Inclusive Education and Economic Empowerment.

Over 100 people attended the event and the President's presence ensured extensive press coverage, thus greatly raising the profile of the disability movement in the Philippines and of the issues affecting disabled people.

The whole world

in his hands?

On the eve of the eighth, and many hope final, meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee for the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People, *Compass* speaks to its Chair, New Zealand Ambassador Don MacKay.

Q How have you found the experience of chairing the Ad Hoc Committee?

A For me, this has been one of the most rewarding experiences during my working career. I have spent a lot of time in international meetings over the years, particularly around the United Nations, and I have chaired a lot of meetings, but several things stand out about this Committee.

First, is the commitment on the part of all participants to come to a result. In the early days there were some questions as to whether this Convention was really necessary, given that persons with disabilities are already covered under existing generic human rights conventions. Those

doubts have now been truly dispelled, however, and there is a real commitment to come out with a Convention that is worthwhile and meaningful, and that improves the situation of persons with disabilities on the ground.

A second feature of



these negotiations is that they are not politicised with issues deadlocked across the various UN groupings. We are currently living in a very politicised international environment, and that is a feature of the UN scene generally. It has not been a feature of these meetings however.

I think there are several reasons for that. Mainly it is due to the type of participation, with a

“The participation of disabled persons, and disability organisations, has contributed a huge amount to these negotiations”



mix of diplomats from New York, experts from capitals, and representatives of the disability community. The participation of disabled persons, and disability organisations, has contributed a huge amount to these negotiations, and has focused other participants on the real issues and what is at stake, rather than getting caught up in political issues. We have all benefited from that. And the subject matter of the Convention has also helped. Participants know that they are dealing with real problems, with practical implications for real people, and we can't afford the luxury of getting sidetracked on other things.

Q How difficult has it been to bridge the varying philosophies across different types of disability?

A The different disability organisations have worked extremely well in coordinating their positions, particularly as members of the International Disability Caucus which has played a major role in the negotiations. However, not all objectives of particular disability groups can be met, and it is therefore important to look at the overall picture, and not get too caught up on specific aspects.

That said, there have certainly been varying philosophies

across different types of disability, and across different disability organisations. An example is in the area of education, where there has been a strong push from many organisations to have mainstreaming as the general rule. For the visually impaired and those who are hearing impaired, however, there has needed to be some acknowledgment that specific education may be necessary in the early years: for example, for the teaching and learning of Braille and sign language. There has been quite spirited discussion of this – because inclusiveness is one of the overall themes of the draft Convention – and I think that most people now feel that the balance in the text is pretty right.

Q What have been the particular highlights for you?

A Probably for me the stand out part was when we first met in the format of a Working Group to draw up a working draft of the Convention. The Ad Hoc Committee had been faced with hundreds – actually thousands – of different proposals and it was necessary to refine these down into a workable document. We all thought that this would take a long time, probably running over the course of several years.

But the Working Group was

cover story

pretty evenly comprised of country representatives and representatives of disability organisations, and this led to an extraordinary level of commitment on the part of participants, with meetings starting early in the morning, going over the lunch breaks, and into the late evening, so as to

“Persons with disabilities also need to have the same educational training and opportunities as other people”



provide a basis for discussion in the formal meetings during the day. At the end of it we came out with a pretty much completed draft convention as a working document for the Ad Hoc Committee. It wasn't perfect, and left some issues unresolved, but it provided a huge impetus to get work on track in the Ad Hoc Committee itself.

Q What major problems have you encountered, and how have you overcome them?

A Well, the major problem in any negotiation like this, with a huge number of active participants, is refining down all of the proposals into a workable text. That takes a lot of time, particularly for a Convention like this one which is quite complex and has a lot of provisions. This is a long and comprehensive Convention that deals with a huge number of issues from non-discrimination, to health, education, accessibility, liberty, mobility, work, recreation, political participation, and so on. There is always more that can be added, and it is possible to improve language and content ad infinitum. But ultimately one needs to bring the process to an

end, and that is the stage we are now approaching.

Q Do you think there are any big debates still to be had on disability?

A The main points of disagreement are now relatively few. There are one or two what I would describe as 'political' issues, but most of the remaining issues are really of a more technical nature. That is not to say that the remaining issues, including matters dealing with legal capacity and assisted decision making for example, will be very easy to resolve. Some of them may be quite difficult, but they will certainly not be impossible. I'm sure that we will still have some big debates around issues such as these, and the way that the Convention will be monitored internationally will also need further debate.

I think there is a general acceptance that international monitoring, and international cooperation, are important in ensuring that states meet their responsibility to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. It is also an opportunity to draw from the experience of other countries in this way.

Q What are the hurdles to creating an inclusive world?

A Well, the traditional approach to disability issues

“The media have an important role, and so it will be a matter of educating them as well”

in most countries has been a very paternalistic one, with persons with disabilities often being removed from the mainstream of the community and often losing their power to take decisions about matters affecting them. The slogan 'nothing about us without us', which is the catch-cry of the International Disability Caucus, I think captures it all. This Convention is about making a paradigm shift towards inclusiveness in the community, autonomy, and empowerment of persons with disabilities. So attitudes need to change within society, and this Convention will help do that.

States need to address discriminatory stereotypes and prejudices, and this is partly a matter of educating and informing the public. The media have an important role, and so it will be a matter of educating them as well, for example in how they portray persons with disabilities. There are provisions in the draft Convention dealing with this.

Any Government that thinks about it will realise that it simply doesn't make economic sense, or political sense, or social sense – or any other sense – to marginalize a whole group of people in society. Governments need to understand that persons with disabilities can, and do, make a significant contribution to society. But society needs to change, so as to make it easier for persons with disabilities to participate effectively and to contribute.

But there are some quite practical issues as well. Cost is something that is often cited, and certainly putting some of the provisions in the Convention into practice will be costly. Obviously all countries will face costs, but it will be hardest for developing countries. International cooperation must play an important part in this, for example in incorporating into aid and development cooperation programmes elements to assist with disability related matters.

But not everything involves a financial cost. Changing discrimination need not be costly, and should be done immediately. There are also a whole range of improvements that can be made in the civil and political area at no or little cost, which will make a huge difference to persons with disabilities.

Q What impact do you hope the Convention will have internationally and also in your own country of New Zealand?

A New Zealand has come a long way in its handling of disability matters over recent years, and so have a lot of countries. But international practice is pretty uneven, and we each need to follow “best practice”. The Convention sets new standards for all to aspire to, and it provides a strong basis for disability organisations to say to their governments, “Look, you

“But not everything involves a financial cost. Changing discrimination need not be costly, and should be done immediately.”

have agreed internationally to meet these standards and to follow this approach, and you need to be doing more.” It should significantly strengthen the hand of persons with disabilities in dealing with governments. And it does provide a strong standard – and it will be an evolving standard – for governments to adhere to. **©**

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The UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People has faced a number of challenges to date. *Stephen Elsdon* explores whether its future will be any smoother.

Conventional thinking

In the next six months, the most groundbreaking piece of international legislation on disability issues will be issued to all member Governments of the United Nations. At least, that's the hope

of supporters of the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People, which sees the eighth meeting of its Ad Hoc Committee, responsible for drafting the Convention, in New York this month (August).

Not least among those hoping for a conclusion to this five year journey will be Don Mackay, current Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee, whose tenure in this post runs out at the end of 2006. But disability commentators and

campaigners are divided on whether the Convention can be ready by then and, if it is, whether it can hope to address all the issues that currently divide the international disability movement.

The Ad Hoc Committee was established in December 2001, and tasked by the General Assembly of the UN to “consider proposals for a comprehensive and integral international convention to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities”. All 191 member states of the UN were entitled to send delegations to the Committee meetings, and in accord with normal UN practice, so too were any NGOs with an interest in the matter.

As a result, the first seven meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee have seen a mix of Government officials, representatives from within the UN, staff of NGOs and members of disabled people’s organisations. Steve Estey, Chair of the International Committee of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, and a member of the World Council for Disabled People’s International, believes this mix is one of the strengths of the drafting process.

“A key factor has been the involvement of disabled people and our representative organisations in the negotiations,



“The fact that many delegations have members who are people with disabilities is a tangible sign that we are central to the process” *Steve Estey*

with the Working Group as a prime example. Such a substantive level of involvement by civil society in this sort of high level negotiations is, in my understanding, unprecedented.

“Moreover, the fact that many delegations have members who are people with disabilities is a tangible sign that we are central to the process,” adds Estey.

However, other contributors to the Ad Hoc Committee observe that disabled people have not always been able to get their points across at the meetings, particularly where their national Government delegation have

had a strong voice themselves. Kicki Nordstrom, Immediate Past President of the World Blind Union, says that, ironically, disabled people from the South are in a stronger position.

“Developing states do include persons with disabilities in their delegations, and they are given the power to contribute. European Union delegations have included disabled people, but they aren’t given the same power to contribute. Developing countries are actually better off than industrial countries in this regard,” she says.

Raymond Lang, of Handicap International, believes that southern-based DPOs and their views are still under represented. “The vast majority of DPOs involved in the Convention are based in western countries, despite the fact that two-thirds of disabled people live in the developing world. One of the major obstacles that prevent their active involvement is the cost of travelling to New York,” Lang believes.

Phitalis Were Masakhwe, International Disability Advisor for the UNDP in Afghanistan, says this imbalance has affected the content of the Convention itself. “There appears to be a wide gap or dichotomy between the wishes, needs and aspirations of disabled people from developing countries and

UN Convention

those of our friends from the so called developed world. Disabled people in places like Africa and Asia would have appreciated a Convention that prominently captures their main challenges – poverty, disability and conflicts, the invisibility of disability in international development and cooperation.”

To help address this, an initiative by Handicap International called Project South was launched at the sixth meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee, to enable more disabled people from developing countries to attend future meetings. Some larger Northern-based NGOs have already agreed to fund more disabled participants from the South for the August meeting and any subsequent gatherings.

Coalitions within the Committee are also important to consider. While the 25 member states of the EU can send delegations, and most do, they are required to reach a ‘common EU position’, which doesn’t always meet the best interests of all members, who are at different stages of introducing national legislation to protect the rights of disabled people. For example, the Disability Discrimination Act, recently introduced in the UK, is unequalled in the rest of Europe.

The strength of these coalitions can sometimes affect the

balance of decisions, believes Nordström. “We presently have no definition of disability in the Convention. The EU opposes a definition. Now, I can see that we might not need one in the EU, but the Convention is for the whole world. It’s a very important thing to have. We need to know who the Convention will target.

“We also need an article

“Articles are still weak on legal capacity, the right to dignity, freedom from torture. We can’t accept the Convention as it currently stands”

Kicki Nordström



specifically on disabled women and disabled children. Again, the EU is opposed to this, but if you don’t specify women and children, many countries will only report on disabled people generally, and will exclude women and children from this. Some countries need an obligation to report on this.”

DPOs and NGOs have formed their own coalition – the International Disability Caucus – in part to provide a unified ‘non-Government’ voice at meetings, and more importantly, a strong ‘disability-centric’ position against other delegations which do not have any disabled members. Among other benefits, this approach has helped to move the focus of the Convention from a medical perspective to the social model of disability.

“We have seen challenges as delegates shift their mindset from the medical model to a more social model, and the big challenges we have all faced generally in educating them about disability, so they can elaborate human rights with a disability perspective,” comments Estey. “More specifically, if one examines the current Chairman’s text, it is clear that we are still facing issues relating to legal capacity, education, monitoring and the role of international cooperation.”

Nordström agrees. “Articles are still weak on legal capacity, the right to dignity, freedom from torture. We can’t accept the Convention as it currently stands; we have to put some power in it. We can’t have a Convention where some people over 18 have no right to speak for themselves.”

Even once the Convention text is agreed, ratification by member States and implementation could be a slow process. Disability commentators are united in wanting this part of the process to be truly effective. Last year, the International Disability and Development Consortium presented a paper on inclusive development to the Ad Hoc Committee, arguing why this approach will be fundamental to the Convention’s success.

“Inclusive development, in essence, has two fundamental elements,” explains Handicap International’s Lang. “First, it recognises that disabled people are actively engaged in the development process. Secondly, development institutions must be taken into account and be assessed in accordance with their impact on the lives of persons with disabilities.”

Given that the large majority of disabled people live in developing countries, IDDC’s paper states that without the effective mainstreaming of disability issues, the eradication

of poverty and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals will not be possible. Lang says an Article on international co-operation is still conspicuous by its absence from the draft Convention.

“International cooperation is perceived to be of paramount importance for the effective implementation of the Convention. Furthermore, it must be exercised in a manner that respects the participation and representation of disabled people, and that furthers development goals – particularly at the community level.”

UNDP’s Were Masakhwe feels that a major international campaign will be needed to ensure ratification by all States. “We will need to be very strategic nationally and globally. We will need a great amount of goodwill and support from great leaders, like Kofi Annan, Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton and other global celebrities if this is to succeed.” He adds that a new international body may also be required, along the lines of UNICEF, to co-ordinate and galvanize international attention and focus on disabled people.

So whatever the outcome of August’s meeting, whether a



further Ad Hoc Committee meeting is needed or whether submission to the UN’s General Assembly is the next step, the work to make the Convention a meaningful reality will continue. And Were Masakhwe has a final message for Disabled People’s Organisations who might be looking forward to ‘resting on their laurels’.

“DPOs and disabled people themselves must know that even the best policies, laws and conventions are no panacea to their overall problem. Disabled people don’t eat policies, laws and conventions. They need serious and bolder actions by both national and international institutions and leaders, not mere rhetoric. As disabled people, we must remain agile, vigilant and engaged, for someday, we shall overcome.” 



As the UN Convention is created, the needs and aspirations of young disabled people are struggling to be heard. *Compass* reports on one scheme devised to address this.

Young Voices sing loud

When 14 young disabled people came together in Honduras earlier this year to discuss their experiences of disability, conversation was initially hesitant. Such a meeting was rare, particularly one that sought the views of young people, and disabled young people at that. But once the facilitator raised the topic of rights, there was no stopping the discussion. By the

meeting's end, the right to a home, the right to a family, the right to work and the right to love were all identified as important for the assembled young people.

That meeting in Honduras was one of a series held around the world to inaugurate Young Voices, an exciting new Leonard Cheshire initiative to engage young disabled people worldwide in the development and application of the forthcoming UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People. The project

aims to prime the disability movement, and in particular those who may be future leaders of the movement, to play an active role in monitoring the implementation of the Convention, ensuring that national governments enshrine its articles in their own policies and legislation.

Jabu Ncube, disability rights campaigner and a co-ordinator of the Young Voices project, outlines the iniquities of the Convention development

Anjum Tag (left) puts her points across.

process to date. Disabled people and their organisations have been invited to attend the Ad Hoc meetings in New York, through which the draft Convention is being negotiated and debated. However, participation has been uneven, with disabled people from the South, and especially young disabled people, unable to access the meetings and the process generally.

“This in itself is unsatisfactory, but it also makes it less likely that these groups will feel motivated to engage with the implementation of the Convention once it is ratified,” says Ncube. “Past experience with Conventions, such as that on the Rights of the Child, shows that it is through the process of monitoring by NGOs and other stakeholders that such instruments come to life.”

Young Voices is one solution to bring young people into the process, and ensure their interest and commitment to the success of the Convention in the future. A total of twelve meetings in Africa, Asia and Latin America have explored the needs of young disabled people, and these have led to the production of written statements on the reality of their own specific country situation, and the rights that each country would like to see reflected in the final

“A total of twelve meetings in Africa, Asia and Latin America have explored the needs of young disabled people”

text of the Convention.

For example, young people in Sierra Leone identified several areas of particular significance in their country. These included protection from inherent negative traditional and superstitious beliefs and practices, such as the belief held by some that disabled babies should be killed at birth or abandoned; protection from sexual exploitation, particularly of disabled women and girls; and inclusion of disability issues and rights in school curricula in order to increase awareness of disability issues.

These statements are currently being collated into a final global document on young people’s views and needs, which will be presented to the UN Ad Hoc Committee at its meeting in August. In addition, a number of the young disabled people who took part in the initial workshops are going to New York to witness proceedings for themselves and, it is hoped, make contributions either at the main session or through side sessions held

during the meeting.

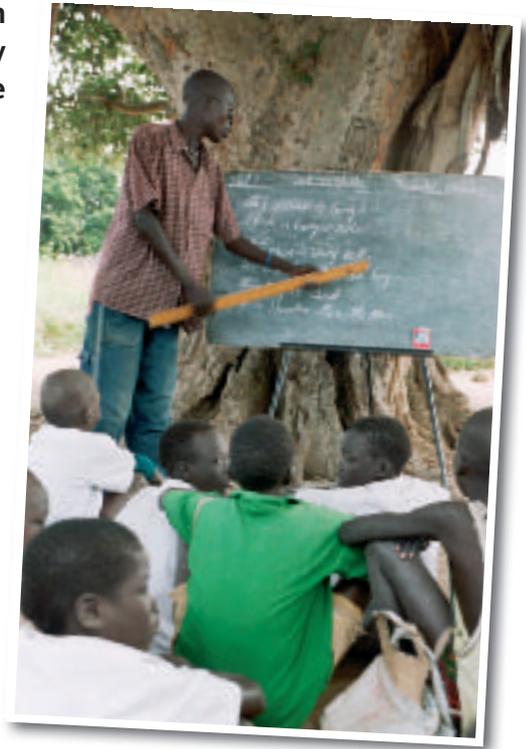
Anjum Tag is one of the young people to participate in India. “I enjoyed discussing with my peers the problems faced by us, how disability laws are ineffectively implemented and condemning the prejudiced attitudes of society in general towards people with disabilities,” she says. “I very strongly hope that the UN will ensure effective implementation of the Convention, after its ratification. The signatories should be made to abide by the Convention by taking stringent measures like cutting grants from the World Bank and others, for non-implementation or ineffective implementation of the provisions laid down in the Convention.”

Anjum is now looking forward to attending the 8th Ad Hoc Committee meeting in New York this month. “I hope to encash my US trip and participation in the UN Convention for the betterment of my life, after I return to India. I hope this participation would open new doors of employment and success for me.”

“We can already see so many positive results from this work,” adds Ncube. “There is an increased knowledge of human rights, and in particular their use to secure the rights of disabled people, by young leaders of the disability movement.” 

Save the Children's education campaign is delivered by its international Alliance

As the partners of Leonard Cheshire International approach the formation of a new Global Alliance, *Compass* examines the benefits and potential pitfalls of a collaborative approach to international development.



Strength in numbers

Strength through unity. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. United we stand, divided we fall. Language is littered with these and many other phrases singing the virtues of partnerships and alliances.

So it is little wonder that so many NGOs, working with and for disabled people, have sought to forge strategic partnerships internationally to further their global work.

Leonard Cheshire, currently creating a Global Alliance for its Cheshire partners around the world, is but one of many organisations to realise the benefits of this approach. "The

Global Alliance was formed to enable us to have a louder voice and better visibility so that our campaigns and advocacy on disability issues can reach many more people," explains Tanya Barron, International Director of Leonard Cheshire.

"The benefits are also that we waste fewer resources on duplicating action, have more opportunities to learn from each other, and together we have much greater capacity." Barron points to a global campaign to get every disabled child to school, an objective now being supported through inclusive education projects by Cheshire partners in every part of the world.

Education is also a focus for the

International Save the Children Alliance, specifically at the moment education for the 50 million children worldwide denied schooling due to conflict. Alliance members in 30 countries are engaged in collective advocacy, programme development and fundraising activities in support of this campaign.

As well as supporting global campaigns, Ken Caldwell, International Director for Save the Children UK, says the Alliance affords other opportunities. One of these is strengthening the network of International Save the Children members.

"We need to invest in key

members who need support, and identify countries which we feel will be of strategic importance in the years ahead. This could be done through existing NGOs or by setting up our own organisation in those countries,” Caldwell suggests.

Another area being looked at is the streamlining of field operations. “Currently, a number of Alliance members have separate field offices in the same country. We’re looking to introduce a single field office which all members operating in that country will work from.”

“We have much more impact globally, whether dealing with the UN or G8, if we can present ourselves as an alliance rather than individual members,” adds Caldwell.

While not a campaigning network, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies comes together particularly at times of natural disaster to co-ordinate relief efforts. The Federation consists of 185 National Societies, nearly one for every

“Leonard Cheshire, currently creating a Global Alliance for its Cheshire partners around the world”

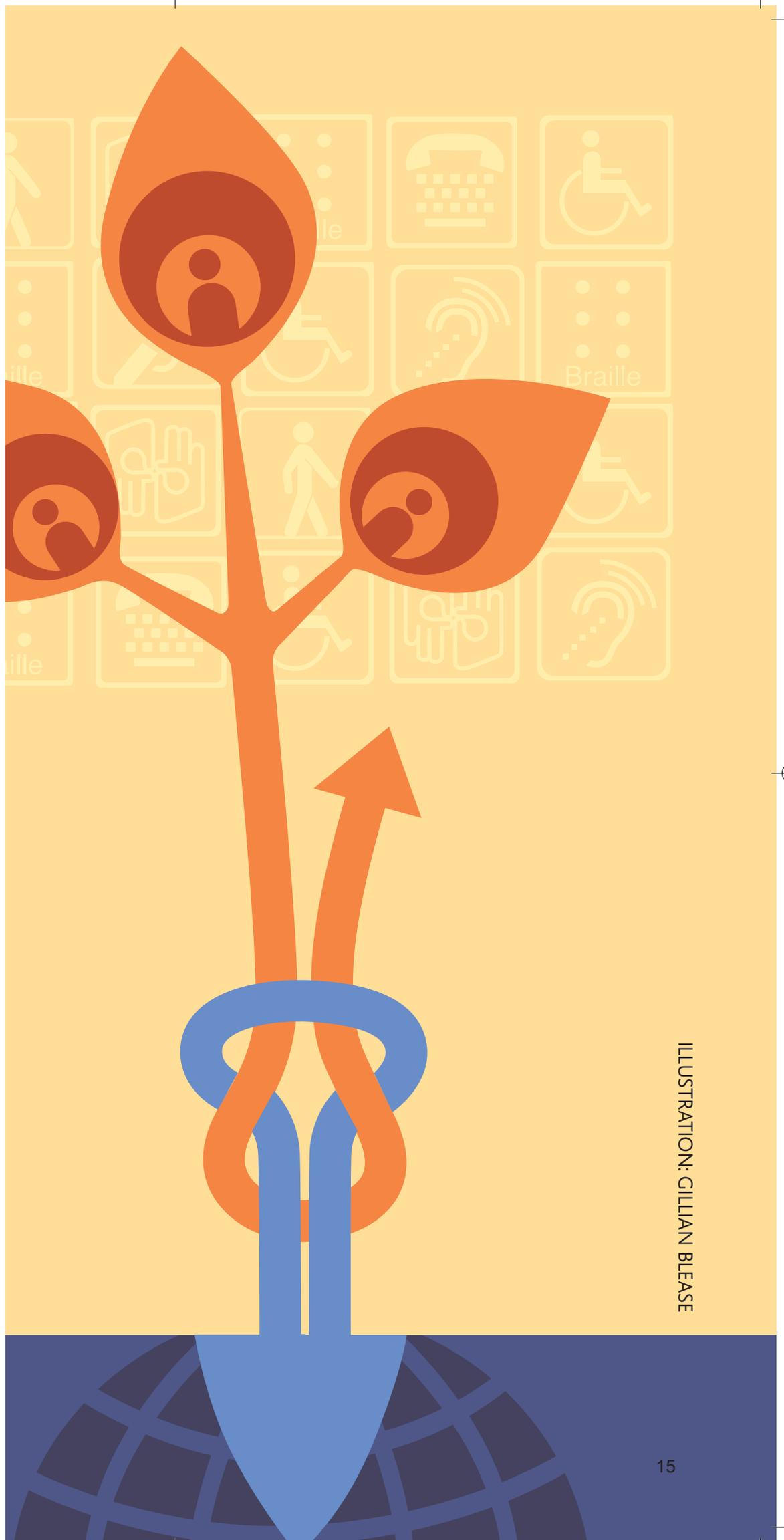


ILLUSTRATION: GILLIAN BLEASE

partnerships



Above: The Red Cross Federation's global reach can be both a benefit and a challenge.



country in the world, and this global reach can be both a benefit and a challenge.

Sir Nicholas Young, Director General of the British Red Cross,

“We have much more impact globally, whether dealing with the UN or G8, if we can present ourselves as an alliance rather than individual members”
Ken Caldwell

a major player in the Federation, says that times of major natural disasters can be particularly testing. “Lots of National Societies are ready and able to respond, and there’s a pressure to respond from the media and from governments, to get on to the job of saving lives.

“Co-ordination is fairly efficient. Immediately after most disasters there’s a big rush, but it sorts itself out pretty quickly. Partners have different roles to play, and we’re all trying to work with the government of the country. It can get pretty complex, and you need to ensure you don’t spend all your time in the field on co-ordination meetings,” reflects Young.

Any international alliance has to consider the local needs and culture of its various partners. The newly formed Global Partnership for Disability and Development is seeking to address this with its members. Hosted by the World Bank, GPDD was established in 2004 to take an international position and action on the issues of disability and economic development. Co-ordinator Lene Astrup says that structural, management and governance issues are just beginning to be addressed, but she acknowledges that any approach cannot be too rigid.

“One option is to have an international alliance and regional/country copies, where the projects, policies and approaches can be targeted to the specific cultural context. We also have to acknowledge the difference in voices between organisations, and the creation of equality between partners operating on very different levels, like the World Bank and a local disabled people’s organisation.”

Equal partnerships within alliances can be a challenge. At least one group has decided to allocate voting rights according to size and income of member NGOs. However, one clear message from a number of alliances is that good ideas can come from the smallest member

or the least developed country. Any potential member fearing arrogance from the developed world will have a pleasant surprise.

“The NGO world is very proud of how it works, but over the last 5-10 years we’ve developed a degree of humility about our work,” confesses Save the Children’s Caldwell. “We’re very open to learning from other Alliance members.”

Sir Nicholas Young echoes this. “The British Red Cross learns a huge amount through its membership of the Federation. We learn as much from a small National Society as we do from, say, the US. In fact, often the former have more to teach us – they often don’t have the same resources as we do, and so have to be more ingenious in the way they work.”

So are more global partnerships and alliances on the horizon? Given the considerations of international co-operation and the view of some that local voices and influence can be lost within wider alliances, formation and membership of such groups is not to be rushed into. “Often partnerships are formed without a proper analysis of what a new partnership can add to existing work and already established networks,” comments Astrup.

But Leonard Cheshire’s Barron



“Partners have different roles to play, but also we’re all trying to work with the government of the country”

Sir Nicholas Young

believes the Global Alliance has come along at the right time, and with the full support of other players in the field. “Leonard Cheshire is a founder member of the International Disability and Development Consortium, and we work very closely with other networks, which really adds to the value of all of our work. In fact, we are all working together and the need to meet Millennium Development Goals will make this more important in the future.” 

Carrie Akers (back left) was a recent intern in Sri Lanka

How a new international programme will send interns around the world in support of local disability organisations.



Education through experience

The concept of internships within NGOs is an old and honourable one, allowing young people, often students, to learn more about a profession, industry or country in which they may later wish to work. In return, the host organisation benefits from the energy and insights which the intern provides.

The UN defines the objectives of internship as:

- To provide a framework by

which graduates from diverse backgrounds can enhance their educational experience through practical work assignments

- To expose them to the host organisation
- To provide the organisation with assistance of highly qualified students

Last year, Leonard Cheshire International established its first formal intern programme with York St John University in the UK, with the aim of sending

undergraduate occupational therapy students to international Cheshire partners. The first seven students recently returned from placements in Sri Lanka, India and Southern Africa.

Following the success of this initial foray into internships, the Cheshire International Internship Programmes (ChIIPs) have been established to foster international understanding of disability and development among young people through the provision of internship placements across the world in Cheshire services.

“There’s a real gap in the market at the moment for a professionally managed internship system,” comments Annette Laidler, LCI ChIIPs manager. “The benefits for both interns and host organisations are huge. Students will find their participation to be career enhancing, and their presence

will help to build capacity among international Cheshire partners.”

The scheme will initially cover India, South Africa, Ireland and the UK. As well as continuing to place occupational therapy students, ChIIPs also aims to attract management and business students, who can support local projects in capacity building areas such as fundraising, finance and new project development.

An internship fee is required for each ChIIP placement, but accommodation and basic living allowance is subsidised by the host organisations

KR Rajendra, Leonard Cheshire’s Regional Representative for South Asia, is clear about the benefits the scheme will bring. “The ChIIPs project is a great opportunity for Indian students to get an exposure to western culture and good practices.

“I am sure they would broaden their horizon of knowledge with such an opportunity. Indian students could bring back a great learning from UK and could adapt them to the local situation for the benefit of our disabled people and communities in various projects. I hope at least some of them could afford to raise the internship costs locally and through international support systems.”

The hope is that ChIIPs can

Carrie Akers spent three months as an occupational therapy intern in Galle in southern Sri Lanka

My role, over twelve weeks (February to May 2006), was to assist with screening assessments of a range of clients from the caseloads of the development officers in order to identify people who would benefit from occupational therapy intervention and then to work with them. It made for a rather difficult although interesting task.

I selected eight clients with whom to work. At one end of the spectrum was a man who had been paralysed from the age of seven. While receiving some support from his family, the man did not have any opportunities to express his needs or to receive much pleasure in his daily life.

I provided him with a radio-cassette player with lights and asked his family to play this to him for a short time each day. When I next visited him, his family reported that he had liked the player, especially the lights, so it is my hope that they will continue to use it and he will experience at least one pleasurable occupation in his life.

At the other end of the spectrum, I worked with a woman who had experienced a stroke which had left her with reduced movements on her right side. After some difficulties ascertaining her exact needs due to translation problems, I managed to prioritise a few areas to work on, primarily in the areas of dressing and writing. After several support sessions, she informed me that she was now completely independent in dressing and had also made good progress in writing with her other hand.

So my experience was indeed a challenge, but also an immense privilege, recognising that these services are provided by many dedicated and professional healthcare staff.

develop to incorporate even more countries and to widen the range of skills and experience provided by, and offered to, the participating interns. 

Anyone interested in learning more about the ChIIPs programme should contact Annette Laidler at annette.laidler@lc-uk.org

International events calendar

14-25 AUG

8th Session of the Ad Hoc
Committee on the UN
Convention
New York, USA
Organised by the
United Nations
<http://conf.un.org>

27-01 AUG –
SEPT

International Disaster
Reduction Conference
Davos, Switzerland
Organised by the
World Trade Organisation
www.wto.org

25-27 OCT

World Congress on
Communication for
Development (WCCD)
Rome, Italy
Organised by World Bank,
the United Nations and The
Communication Initiative
www.devcomm-congress.org

7-10 NOV

16th World Congress of
Inclusion International
Acapulco, Mexico
Organised by Inclusion
Interamericana
www.inclusion-ia.org/XIVWCong.htm

24-26 NOV

Implementing Sphere
London, UK
Organised by RedR-IHE
www.redr.org/london

11 DEC

The Private Sector, Poverty
Reduction, and International
Development
Reading, UK
Organised by the Development
Studies Association
www.devstud.org.uk