



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# Programs for Vulnerable Populations

## Disability Program

USAID's Programs for Vulnerable Populations comprises five Congressionally directed programs:

- Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
- Leahy War Victims Fund
- Victims of Torture Program
- Wheelchair Program
- Disability Program

Each has its own purpose and strategy, but they share a focus on providing assistance to poor and vulnerable populations. Each emphasizes the value of family and community as the first resort in providing protection, care, and support to vulnerable children, civilian victims of war, torture survivors, and people with disabilities.



Robert Horvath, Manager  
Programs for Vulnerable Populations  
Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights  
and Governance  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Washington, DC 20523  
Tel: (202)712-5239, Fax: (202)216-3231  
rhorvath@usaid.gov

**According to the World Health Organization's 2011 *World Report on Disability*, approximately 15 percent of any population has some form of disability. The incidence of disability is higher in countries that have experienced conflict and/or natural disasters. Of the estimated 1 billion people throughout the world who have a disability, 80 percent or more live in developing countries.**

People with disabilities have been marginalized from traditional development activities due to both deliberate and inadvertent barriers. Those barriers limit the access of people with disabilities to health care, education, employment, and society in general, which in turn often contributes to a cycle of disability and poverty.

Traditionally, programs for people with disabilities have been developed as stand alone programs, rather than being integrated into existing development activities. Although it may be necessary at times to initiate targeted approaches with focused support to meet specific needs, it is also extremely important to ensure that people with disabilities are able to benefit from *all* development efforts.

### USAID and Disability Inclusive Development

In 1997, USAID adopted a disability policy that advanced a clear vision and framework to guide the Agency's efforts toward disability inclusion. The policy states that USAID will not discriminate against people with disabilities and will work to ensure the inclusion and meaningful participation of people with disabilities in USAID-funded programs and activities. The policy also calls on USAID missions to reach out to partners, host-country counterparts, and other donors to lead a collaborative effort to end discrimination against, and promote equal opportunity for, people with disabilities.

USAID further institutionalized its commitment when it passed two policy directives in 2004 and 2005 mandating that all new construction and major renovations be made accessible and that all requests or solicitations for funding clearly state how the programs promote and support the 1997 policy.

In July 2009, the United States signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities strengthening again its commitment to the human rights of people with disabilities around the world. Many of the countries in which USAID operates have also signed or ratified the Convention, signaling a global movement toward the full realization of the rights of people with disabilities and their crucial role in the international development community.

## Strengthening Agency Response

USAID recognizes that to build an inclusive development community its staff and partners must be equipped with the knowledge and tools for how to include people with disabilities in development programs.

Since 2002, USAID's e-learning course on *Disability Inclusive Development* has provided staff with in-depth training on topics such as the misconceptions about disability, removing physical and social barriers, inclusive program design, and monitoring and evaluating strategies. The disability community, as well as key USAID partners, played an integral role in designing the course. A newly revised course will be available to all USAID staff as well as implementing partners and the public in 2013.

In addition to offering the structured online course, USAID also conducts both internal and external disability-related workshops and orientation sessions. The objective of these sessions is to educate staff and organizations on Agency policy and opportunities, and to stimulate innovative thinking on strategies that will reduce barriers to the participation of people with disabilities in areas such as education, economic growth, HIV and AIDS, and democracy and governance.

Stemming from a recommendation contained in the *Fifth Report on the Implementation of USAID Disability Policy*, USAID is providing field missions with technical assistance, tools, and resources to develop and implement disability action plans. The action plans, developed by each mission, are designed to clearly articulate and guide missions on ways in which they will proactively promote the inclusion of people with disabilities.

## USAID's Disability Program Funding

In 2005, Congress appropriated funding specifically aimed at increasing the participation of people with disabilities in USAID programs and strengthening the capacity and services of disabled people's organizations (DPOs). Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) are organizations run by and for people with disabilities and exist in almost all countries where USAID operates. USAID recognizes the unique contributions of DPOs to the development process and values their input in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs. Funding provides an opportunity to invest in DPOs and strengthen their ability to advocate on their own behalf and to access and manage foreign assistance funding.

Since 2005, funding has supported over 100 programs and activities in 65 countries working with a variety of organizations and implementing partners. Programming areas span sectors to include democracy, human rights and governance, economic growth and trade, education, the environment, gender equality and women's empowerment, and others.

Past programs have improved national laws and policies to further the rights of people with disabilities; increased the numbers of children with disabilities attending school and improved the quality of instruction they receive; provided job training to youth with disabilities and opened up opportunities for competitive employment; and trained humanitarian relief workers and first responders to better incorporate the needs of people with disabilities in disaster risk reduction. The common thread throughout all programs supported by this funding is the meaningful participation of people with disabilities and the furthering of human rights.



*In Albania, USAID's Economic Empowerment of People with Disabilities project works to include people with disabilities in the workforce, as well as to increase the capacity of employers to hire people with disabilities.*