No one left behind: a review of disability inclusive development efforts at the World Bank

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In the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) era of financing for development, the international community is placing substantial emphasis on the mantra 'leave no one behind' (Ki-moon 2015). To meet this commitment, an improved ability to assess disability inclusive development efforts of development agencies is required. This study piloted a methodology to monitor the inclusion of people with disabilities in development efforts of the World Bank and aligns findings against progress towards the SDGs by asking two research questions: 1) Are active World Bank projects inclusive of persons with disabilities (PWDs)? and 2) What areas of development and which SDG do disability-inclusive projects focus on? While disability inclusive projects make up only a small percentage of the overall active World Bank portfolio (2.0%), preliminary analysis indicates an investment focus in several areas, such as social protection systems and measures, technical assistance and partnerships, education, health, and affordable housing. The article closes by considering implications for future efforts to track the inclusiveness of development finance as we move forward in implementation of the SDGs.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals; development finance; disability; development projects; World Bank

Introduction

The mantra 'no one left behind' has emerged as the foundation for sustainable, inclusive global development efforts, which are a 'vital source of financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world' (World Bank 2016). Given their ability to determine funding directions, multilateral development agencies, like the World Bank, play an important coordinating role in the current international development cooperation (IDC) structure. With its mission of 'Working for a World Free of Poverty,' the World Bank invests in several areas critical for people with disabilities, including: education, social protection, health and transport.

The World Bank is also working to increase the visibility of disability inclusive development (DID) as well as taking action to include persons with disabilities among the beneficiaries of its investments.

The purpose of the 'No One Left Behind' study was to pilot a coherent methodology to assess the inclusion of people with disabilities by IDC organisations, specifically their inclusion as target beneficiaries in the active project portfolio of a multilateral development agency. With a strong disability inclusive development agenda and a commitment to data transparency, the World Bank was chosen as the first agency for focus. Greater understanding of DID projects of a major IDC organization like the World Bank will provide policymakers with insight into the current state of inclusive development for people with disabilities. This study seeks to encourage evidence-based dialogue about the state of progress in making development more sustainable and inclusive for all.

The paper commences with a brief review of the literature related to DID and positions the World Bank within this field. The methodology describes, in detail, the pilot methodology used to review the World Bank's active project portfolio for evidence of inclusion of persons with disabilities. Next, we present the results of the study, followed by recommendations and next steps for improving DID policies and practices in the post-2015 development agenda.

Actions towards Inclusive Development

According to the World Report on Disability produced jointly by the World Bank and the World Health Organization (2011), approximately 15% of the world population currently lives with a disability and 80% of these people reside in developing countries. The report acknowledges the link between disability and poverty, emphasizing that persons with disabilities (PWDs) are more likely to experience poverty and associated challenges of malnutrition, limited education, and unemployment (World Bank & WHO 2011). These correlations make persons with disabilities in developing countries especially vulnerable and in need of support from international development actors. In view of these disparities, the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) positions disability as a human rights issue, and an important focus of global development initiatives. Article 32 of the convention is the first of its kind to mandate international cooperation to remove barriers to inclusion, specifically stating that development programs must be inclusive of and accessible to people with disabilities (UNCPRD 2007).

Despite major progress made by the IDC community in reducing extreme poverty through the Millennium Development Goal (MDGs), the rising tide of development has not 'lifted all boats'

(World Bank 2013). Across the world, IDC actors are beginning to acknowledge that, 'the continued neglect of the disabled [community]…remains one of the great lacunae of national and international poverty-reduction efforts' (Hulme 2004: 20). Kett *et al.* (2009) identify three major influences on the weakness of DID: (1) discrimination, (2) lack of research on people with disabilities, and (3) limited understanding of disability within international development. For example, IDC actors have historically rationalized the underrepresentation of PWDs in development projects with the misconception that disability is a health issue rather than a cross-sectional human rights issue (Kett 2009: 651).

The UN post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and plan, 'Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development' seeks to rectify this issue by ensuring 'that no person - regardless of ethnicity, gender, geography, disability, race or status - is denied universal human rights and basic economic opportunities' (UN 2015: xv). Much of the SDG era development financing is dedicated to improving outcomes for vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities. Including strands of environmental, economic, and social development, the SDGs explicitly reference PWDs in 5 out of the 17 goals (United Nations 2015). The rights expressed in the SDGs are not new concepts, but represent a more holistic view that is 'better aligned with human rights provisions' than their predecessors, the MDGs (Jensen 2015: 3).

The implementation of the UNCRPD and the adoption of the SDGs provide clarification on the need to include PWDs in development processes (UNCRPD 2007, United Nations 2015), but specific policies and accountability methods for ensuring the inclusion of PWDs in international development programs remains unclear. Vast differences in methodological approaches exist between and amongst different categories of IDC partners, including international donor agencies and governments (DfID 2015, USAID 1997, World Bank 2016). Unfortunately, no internationally recognized accountability method currently exists to ensure that members of IDC community, including major multilateral donor agencies like the World Bank, are meeting the needs of this vulnerable population.

The World Bank is focused on ending extreme poverty and is working towards this goal by providing fiscal and technical assistance to low and middle income countries in the developing world. In 2004, the World Bank established the Global Partnership for Disability and Development, which brings together a variety of sectors to combat socio-economic exclusion of persons with disabilities in developing countries (Lord 2010). The Bank also appointed their first disability advisor in December 2014 (World Bank 2014). The World Bank is in the process of establishing a platform that will enable units across the institution – transport, water and sanitation, health, education, social protection, fragility conflict, and violence – to mainstream disability throughout its operations.

In 2013, the World Bank (WB) released its flagship report, *'Inclusion matters: the foundation for shared prosperity'* after stating that 'confronting the need for social inclusion will prove vital if [the World Bank is] to meet [its] goal of building shared prosperity for all people' (World Bank, 2013: xv). It is evident from the Bank's public declaration that including people with disabilities, is at the 'core' of its work (World Bank 2016). However, the research findings from this study suggest that implementation of this strategy is lacking.

Methodology

The No One Left Behind Study aimed to develop a methodology to assess the inclusion of people with disabilities in the current development efforts of the World Bank to pilot a method of tracking their inclusion in development efforts by international development organisations. To ensure that our analysis was focused on current trends, only active World Bank projects publicly available online were selected for analysis. The study specifically used the Sustainable Development Goals to assess the inclusivity of project proposal documentation. This purposeful element of the methodology was designed to test whether the Bank's efforts to align its work with the 2030 Agenda is effectively translating into inclusive development projects on the ground.

The interdisciplinary research team included individuals with diverse academic and professional backgrounds and expertise in 1) the disability field from the University of Massachusetts Boston's School for Global Inclusion and Social Development and 2) development financing from AidData; a research lab at the College of William and Mary which tracks who is funding what, where, and to what effect in order to inform development policy.

The cross-sectoral nature of disability required that the research team conduct desk research and consult with subject-matter experts and World Bank staff to identify the most appropriate disability-related keywords to use to search the World Bank online project database in order to identify projects that included PWDs (e.g. 'disability', 'disabilities', 'disabled', and specific disabilities i.e.: 'cerebral palsy', as well as 'vulnerable populations' and 'vulnerable groups' in which PWDs are likely to be constituent members). These disability-related keywords were used to conduct a search of the database to identify potential disability inclusive projects. These projects were then saved for the second stage of analysis when all available documentation for the projects (e.g. appraisal documents, implementation status and results reports, integrated safeguards data sheets, and project information documents) was analysed to answer the following questions: 1) are the projects explicitly inclusive of PWDs? (i.e. do they specifically mention PWDs as target beneficiaries?); and 2) What areas of development and which SDGs do disability-inclusive projects focus on?

Table 1. Example of coding activities

SDG Target	DID project examples
1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable	Conditional cash transfers for PWDs, disability pensions; social security; temporary disability-related unemployment benefits; disability inclusive national or regional poverty reduction strategies
2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment	Farming and agricultural supports for people with disabilities; co-ops that help PWDs gain access to arable land
3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all	Inclusion of disability-focused interventions (speech pathology, physical therapy, occupational therapy rehab) in universal health care and health insurance programs; accessibility of mainstream healthcare systems; provision or subsidization of prosthetics, wheelchairs, and other assistive devices
4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes	Funding for disability inclusive primary and secondary educational initiatives; including "special" schools for children with disabilities
5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate	Recognition, supports, stipends for family members involved with care/support of PWDs
6.2 By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations	Provision of more latrines in accessible locations and accessible latrines
8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services	Support policies that help PWDs find gainful and meaningful employment; provision of support to encourage formalization of PWDs owned/operated enterprises; quota for hiring of PWDs

11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons	Accessible and affordable public transportation
16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	Justice system transformation efforts that helps improve rule of law for people with disabilities

To achieve this task, the research team created an analytical tool that provided concrete examples of practical DID initiatives corresponding with SDG goals and targets (see Table 1). This was achieved by first discussing each SDG and its relevance to PWDs in terms of practical DID initiatives. The researchers then populated the tool with relevant SDG goals and targets and concrete examples of DID programs/projects. For example, Goal 4 is designed to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning, particularly highlighting the importance of equitable quality education for PWDs; project examples include building and upgrading schooling facilities to make them accessible for people with disabilities and providing safe, inclusive learning environments.

The team then conducted a two-day training and 'road-test' of the methodology to ensure that researchers utilized the same keywords and approach to analyze projects. After the training, projects identified through the initial search were coded twice, by separate researchers. Projects with coding discrepancies were then re-coded by a third arbitrating researcher.

Results

Disability-inclusive World Bank projects

Question 1: Are active World Bank projects inclusive of PWDs?
The initial sample included all active World Bank projects from 2009-2015 which were publically available on its website, for a total of 2,576 active projects. Using disability related keywords, the team isolated 144 projects (5.6%) that included the keywords in available project documentation. These projects were then analyzed to identify projects that specifically targeted PWDs or included them among other target beneficiaries.
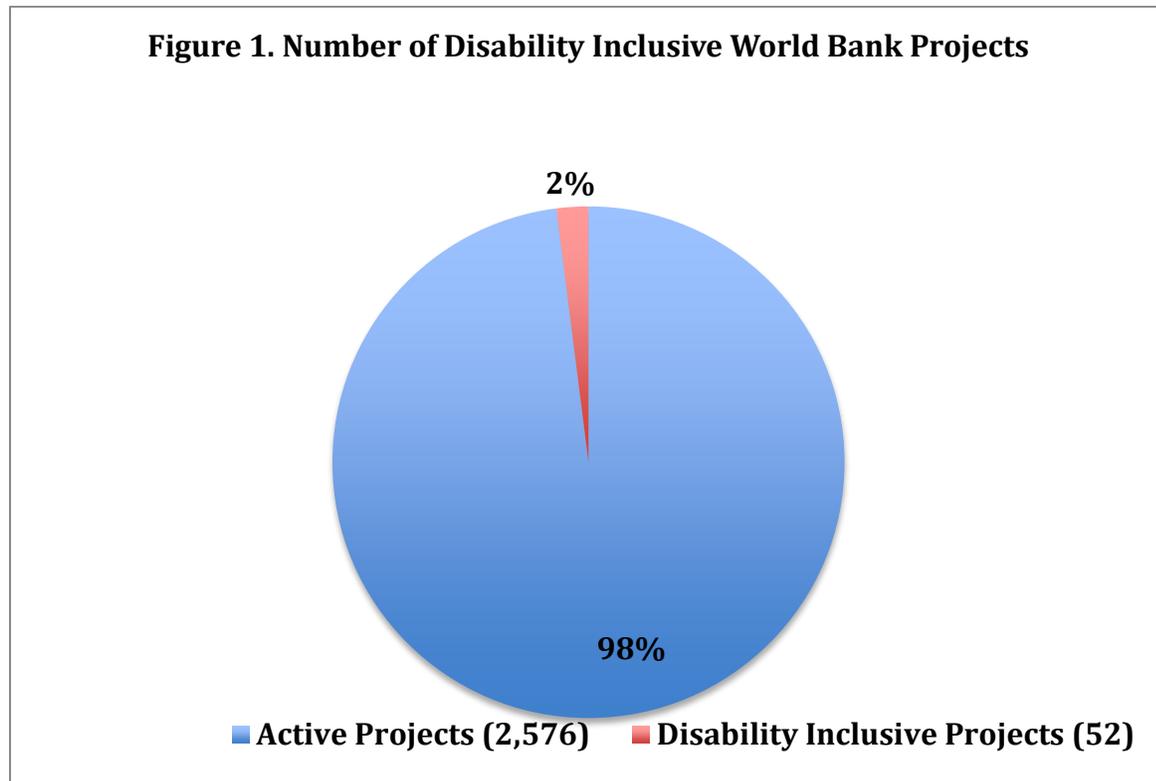
From the 144 projects reviewed in-depth, 52 projects were deemed to be inclusive of PWDs. The other 92 projects that were discovered through the keyword search did not, upon in-depth analysis of project documentation, include PWDs. For example, many projects targeted
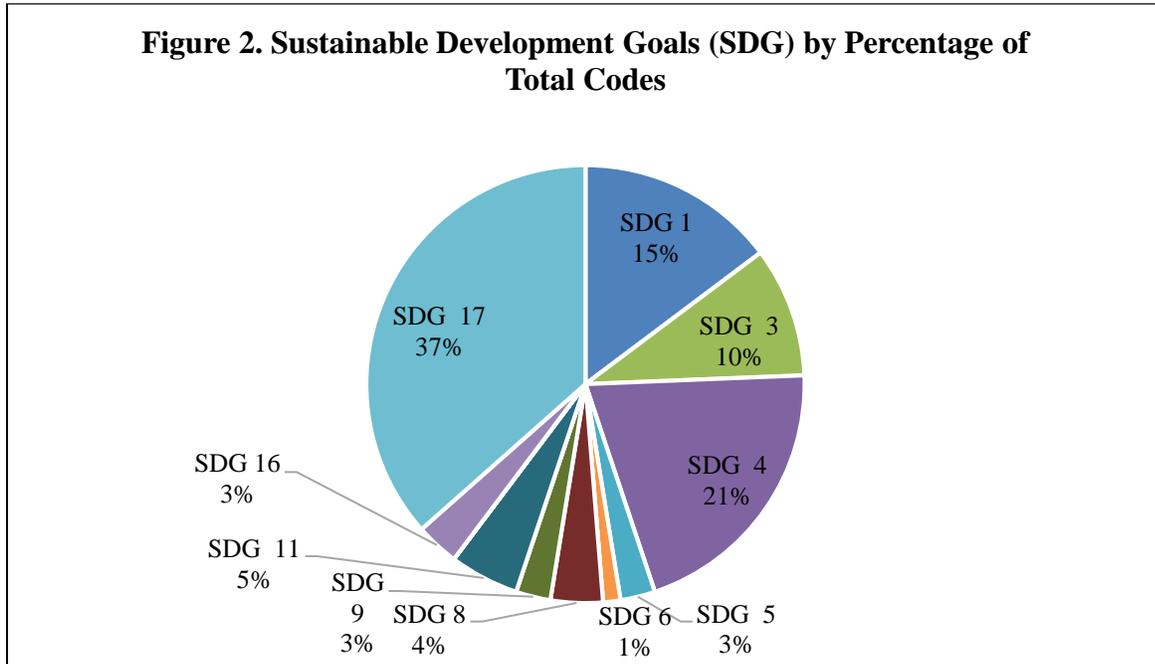
vulnerable populations but did not mention disability. Others mentioned disability only in passing, in the introduction section as background information, but they did not actually include PWDs as target beneficiaries of the project. Ultimately, using the above noted criteria, a review of all active World Bank Projects from 2009-2015 revealed that only 2% of projects were inclusive of people with disabilities (see Figure 1).

Disability-inclusive projects aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals

Question 2: What areas of development did disability-inclusive projects focus on?
The 52 projects deemed to be inclusive of PWDs extended from Eastern Europe to Latin America, East Asia, South Asia, Sub Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. They were each linked to an average of three SDGs. The most common SDG to which the projects were linked was SDG 17 partnerships for the goals (37%), followed by SDG 4 quality education (21%), SDG 1 no poverty (15%), and SDG 3 good health and wellbeing (10%) (See Figure 2).

Figure 1. Number of Disability Inclusive World Bank Projects

2%

98%

■ **Active Projects (2,576)**　■ **Disability Inclusive Projects (52)**

Figure 2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by Percentage of Total Codes

Analyzing the projects by SDG targets revealed further subclusters of DID project activity. The top ten most commonly coded SDG targets were as follows: national social protection plans (Goal 1; target 1.3) (21%), followed by capacity building support and increasing reliable data (Goal 17; target 17.18) (18%), and knowledge sharing and global partnerships (Goal 17; target 17.16) (16%) (see Figure 3). Targets relating to SDG Goal 17: partnership for the goals were often seen in conjunction with other codes.

The analysis also highlighted several SDG targets that were rarely advanced by the Bank's DID projects, if at all. These include: hunger (Goal 2; targets 2.2, 2.3), good health and wellbeing (Goal 3; targets 3.5, 3.7), quality education (Goal 4; target 4.b), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8; targets 8.8, 8.9, 8.10), sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11: targets 11.3, 11.7), peace, justice, and strong institutions (Goal 16; targets 16.2, 16.3, 16.7, 16.9). None of these targets was pursued by more than one of the 52 projects that were deemed to be disability inclusive.

Textbox 1 provides an example of the SDG targets addressed by one of the 52 projects included in the sample, using the above methodology. In some instances, SDG targets were assigned based on the overall project description, while in others the existence of specific language and terminology influenced the analysis. For example, the project highlighted in Textbox 1 specifically identified persons with disabilities as target beneficiaries within the project

documentation, stating 'community mobilization efforts will focus particularly on vulnerable social groups, including women, youth, disabled persons.'

Discussion

The small number of active World Bank projects identified as disability inclusive by the 'No One Left Behind' pilot study serve as a reminder that the IDC community must be cautious in assuming that people with disabilities are included in poverty reduction efforts. Our results show that despite the Bank's assertion that disability inclusiveness is a core component of its work, this may not be translating into practice. Of the 2,576 active projects in the World Bank's online project database, only 144 (5.6%) included keywords related to *disability* in their documentation, and of those projects, only 52 (2%) were ultimately found to be inclusive of people with disabilities, based on our review of available project documentation.

Figure 3. Top Ten Most Frequently Utilized Subclusters
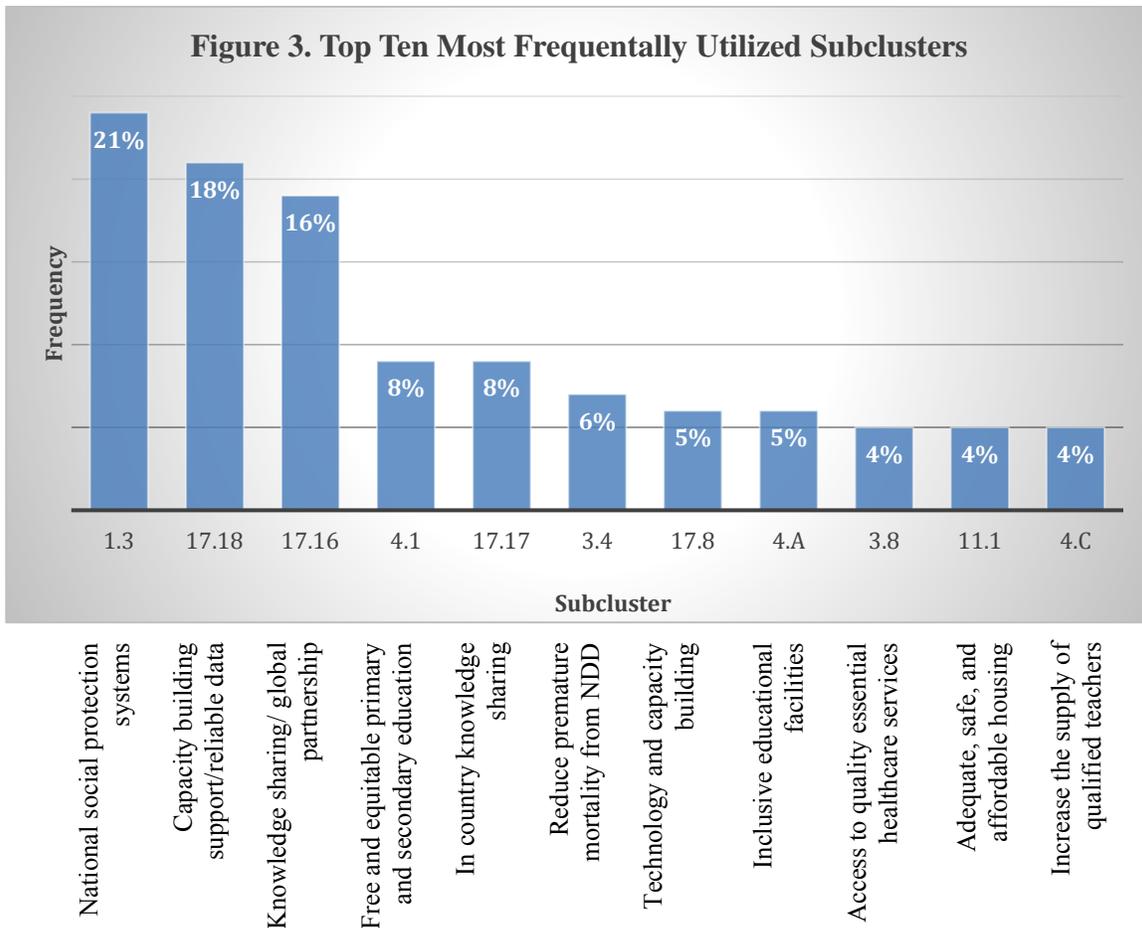
Textbox 1. Example of a disability-inclusive World Bank project:

The Mali Reconstruction and Economic Recovery project (World Bank 2013) though not targeted specifically to individuals with disabilities, clearly identifies people with disabilities as a vulnerable population. Explicit mention increases community and individual participation in both the planning and execution phases. In addition to providing a structure for implementation and communication with stakeholders, the project also engages the support of community partners who have proven capacity and strong understanding of cultural norms and implications of this work for people with disabilities.

The project was found to address the following SDG targets:
- 16.6- Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
- 16.7- Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
- 17.16- Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries
- 17.17- Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships

While our study shows that 98% of currently active World Bank projects **do not** specifically include PWDs as target beneficiaries, this does not mean that they do not benefit from these projects. What our findings do indicate however, is an apparent contradiction between the Bank's public declarations in documents like their flagship report, 'Inclusion Matters' (2015) which acknowledges PWDs as being amongst the most commonly excluded groups based upon their identity and for whom 'remedial efforts [are needed] to provide the same degree of opportunity' (2015: 15) – and the Bank's actual efforts to address this issue in practice. An apparent issue is the Bank's subsuming of PWDs under the broad category of 'vulnerable populations' without specifically identifying them as target beneficiaries for its projects. Most of the 144 projects that were identified through our initial keyword search of available documentation on currently active projects, targeted vulnerable populations, but did not specifically mention PWDs among the target beneficiaries. As Hoogeveen and colleagues note in 'A guide to the analysis of risk, vulnerability and vulnerable groups', it is vital to specifically identify vulnerable groups to ensure their inclusion; while 'certain characteristics may be less easily observed such as being

chronically poor, or remain unrecorded (e.g. being mentally ill or a refugee). Not identifying such vulnerable groups could mistakenly lead to omissions' (Hoogeveen et al 2005: 27).

A potential means for improving the inclusion of PWDs in World Bank projects is therefore the inclusion of disability-specific language within relevant documentation and publications on vulnerability. This is an important distinction because it ensures that in monitoring and evaluation efforts, as well as data collection and reporting, disability-related outcomes of projects targeting vulnerable populations will be tracked. The World Bank shares a number of resources and tools on their website, including a specific section on measuring vulnerability on their poverty reduction and equity website, but there is currently no mention of disability within the existing content. Furthermore, the World Bank should ensure that the policies and procedures they already have in place to protect and include vulnerable populations are inclusive of PWDs. For example, the Bank's current Safeguards Internal Monitoring program – the system used to report grievances related to compliance with World Bank policies and procedures to the Bank's inspection board – lacks disability specific language, this rendering it difficult for PWDs and their representative organisations to use this channel to formally object to their exclusion from Bank-sponsored development efforts.

Revisions to relevant World Bank documentation and publications on vulnerability and its policies and procedures to protect vulnerable populations are a useful first step. However to improve inclusion and ensure transparency and accountability to PWDs, it is vital to disaggregate disability-related data about development project participation more generally, and to measure to what extent such projects are benefitting them. Disability-specific outcome measures were infrequently proposed in the projects reviewed by our study, and progress towards meeting disability-specific targets were even less likely to be tracked.

In April 2016, the Bank published an update to their strategy for advancing disability inclusive development that is in direct alignment with the findings from this pilot and thus bears mentioning. Among other things, the newly defined strategy requires that borrowers (i.e. countries) specifically include disability as part of their social assessment in a newly proposed Environmental and Social Framework. We urge the Bank to include monitoring outcome measures for disability-inclusion as part of these new assessments. Other notable elements of the strategy include:

- inclusion of provisions to ensure that borrowers consider PWDs interests throughout program design and implementation; and

- cultivating partnerships with Disabled Persons' and community-based organizations as well as building upon collaboration with global disability experts that are working to achieve SDGs;
- drafting a new accountability framework and establishing a platform that builds on private sector approaches to institutionalize, mainstream and operationalize disability inclusion across projects; and
- capacity building for WB staff focused on examining opportunities for improved disability inclusion in business processes (World Bank 2016).

Although the Bank has taken clear steps to increase the focus on disability inclusion, the majority of active projects that were deemed to be disability inclusive in our study were focused on social protection programs (n=24/52). We were able to identify a number of SDG goals and targets with limited or no mention among active projects, including: access to justice, political participation (e.g. legal identity, violence prevention, participatory decision-making), economic participation (e.g., access to financial services & banking, labor rights), higher education, participatory settlement planning, and food security. While social protections are an important part of poverty reduction efforts, the neglected areas of project activity are crucial to ensure the full inclusion of PWDs in society. This finding accords with previous research which shows that in instances where disability is explicitly mentioned in development programming, there is a tendency for efforts to be framed from a 'paternalistic, needs-based model rather than the human rights based model' (Bhat 2013: 3).

The UNCRPD recognizes that PWDs should have the right to make their own political choices, vote, and participate in public affairs. In addition, political participation and economic independence are critical if people with disabilities are to have a 'seat at the table' to inform and influence policy-making decisions that directly impact them. Thus, the World Bank and global development counterparts should continue to assess their active project portfolios to ensure that all projects and all sectors are inclusive of people with disabilities, particularly those focused on political and economic participation which are aspects of civic life in which people vulnerable groups are often underrepresented.

The results of our study are not intended to discount or discredit the World Bank's commitment to disability inclusive development, and organization-wide efforts to advance this aim, but instead to provide evidence to support the strengthening of current and proposed initiatives and accountability measures. Our initial results underscore the importance of better systems to track and monitor the inclusion of people with disabilities in development programs, both for financing institutions like the World Bank, as well as for those in the development community that seek to hold them accountable for living up to their promises to ensure that no one is left behind.

Limitations and future research

Due to the pilot nature of this study, the multidisciplinary research team is actively presenting and communicating results to the disability community to garner feedback on how this information can be applied in diverse settings and how the methodology can be tailored to evaluate inclusion of PWDs and other marginalized groups by other development agencies.

The data analyzed in this study was limited to one multilateral agency, the World Bank, and only to active projects publicly available on worldbank.org. Additional active projects may exist, but were not available on the World Bank's online database. The research team wanted to assess budgetary allocations for disability-inclusive activities within projects, but project documentation did not provide budgetary breakdowns at this level. The authors acknowledge that the methodology and results described in this article do not account for actual implementation of DID by the World Bank. An examination of project documentation is only one aspect of reviewing DID practice; field-based approaches are necessary to assess inclusion on the ground from project inception to implementation and final outcomes. We have been limited in our ability to share insights that go beyond the publically available documentation that was the subject of our analysis. A qualitative assessment of what constitutes a 'high quality' disability-inclusive project is needed to identify ostensibly inclusive projects that effectively include PWDs, as well as to note examples where minor changes to semantics or definitions of terms like 'vulnerable' at the Bank influence research results. Future research should focus on improving the depth and breadth of analysis to include: additional development agency portfolios (multi- and bi-lateral), additional vulnerable populations, and related project outcome measures, to inform and advance DID policy and practice.

Conclusions

The ability of the IDC community to advance global development goals requires the active participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of social, economic, and political life. Disability inclusive development is intended to ensure that the full potential of people with disabilities are realized. However, the underrepresentation of disability in the planning and resourcing of development projects by a major multilateral donor like the World Bank, indicates a potential gap between commitment and implementation. The development community has admirably stated that inclusivity of persons with disabilities is a goal. But the leap from rhetoric to reality is unfulfilled so long as equal access to inclusive development initiatives remains elusive.

By tracking the inclusion of PWDs in active projects of the World Bank, it is our hope that this study will contribute to growing evidence base on the extent to which multilateral development agencies target people with disabilities in their projects. This also leaves the door open for further studies to determine how this targeting varies between and across IDC partners.

Acknowledgements

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