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Social Protection and Disability: A Call for Action

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Abstract

This article reviews the relationship between social protection and disability in theory and practice. Persons with disabilities and their families may be considered among the most worthy recipients of social protection due to their vulnerability to chronic poverty and social exclusion. A review of cash transfer programmes for persons with disabilities reveals positive economic, social and service access outcomes. However, coverage and benefit levels remain low. This article calls for the state to play a greater role in the provision of social assistance for persons with disabilities in developing countries. Policies and programmes which protect economic security should be combined with those which promote an enabling environment in which people can achieve security of livelihood.

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Notes

¹ As of the 24th of January 2012, the Convention has 153 signatories and 109 ratifications (http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-15&chapter=4&lang=en).

² Public transfers include all forms of public action, both formal and informal, while social insurance may be provided by state and non-state institutions.

³ Gary Becker's time allocation theory ([1965](#)), for example warned of work disincentives created by income shocks such as cash transfers (Abelson, [2000](#); Cecchini, [2009](#)). Health insurance theory pointed to "moral hazard", first identified by Kenneth Arrow in 1963, highlighting the potential over use of services resulting from reductions in the price of health care ([Musgrove, 2004](#)).

⁴ There are many versions of the social model; the unifying characteristic is that disability is perceived primarily as a social phenomenon ([Shakespeare & Watson, 1997](#); [Barnes et al., 2002](#)).

⁵ From multiple country-level surveys as reviewed by the United Nations in 1990.

⁶ It is important to note that the conception of disability as a cross-cutting development problem is not new, dating back to the early 1990s, and that the mainstreaming of disability within development programmes is the result of a long and on-going struggle of advocacy by countless individuals and organisations.

⁷ Human capital encompasses health, education and labour, each of which may be compromised by disability as a result of impairment itself or social discrimination.

⁸ However, relying upon communities to judge the capacity of PWDs to work is also problematic when employment opportunities are rooted in local social structures

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