

DISABILITY

Theme: Changing the Power Equation

The proposition is: *the absence of equal participation and engagement in decision-making throughout society and communities is the fundamental barrier to all people with disabilities, particularly women, taking control of their own lives.*

As we have learned:

The perpetuation of male domination of decision-making, ensures that women do not have access to a fair share in direction and leadership. Their abilities are confined to lower levels of society. Consequently, for women with disabilities, they are discriminated against not only by men—whether disabled or not, but also by non-disabled women themselves, and even in the disability sector itself.

The power equation of inequality needs to be changed. The exclusion of people with disabilities is a development issue. People with disabilities are systematically left out of development planning and their voice is not heard in decision-making circles.

Empowerment means a change in power relationships from which everyone ultimately benefits, women, disabled and the non-disabled. A fundamental shift is required in practice and attitudes to shape each community to become fully inclusive and where people of all ages and abilities are empowered to take control of their lives.

We need to accept a vision that demands that we are able to create and show evidently how people with disabilities are directly engaged and involved in all levels of planning and decision making.

This vision should be underpinned by six values:

Clear Open Inclusive Responsive Sustainable Partnership

Change can be difficult and challenging, but we are at a point where doing more of the same is failing!

An excluding society is failing people with disabilities, careers, families and whole communities.

Making the changes that are now needed, demands **active** and real **engagement** by everyone and a new conversation which is driven by people and by the outcomes they want to secure for themselves.

Lasting and sustainable change is so much more than just re-shaping the current system. It is about engaging people as **active citizens**, ensuring that communities can enable everybody within those communities to support one another and to make a contribution.

Focus points that we would anticipate would arise within the debate:

- *The importance of access: what **physical barriers** prevent women and people with disabilities from full and free participation in society?*
- ***Cultural barriers** - protecting 'our women', protecting 'our handicapped': how a culture of protection equals a culture of control*
- *The **equal rights** to choose our own way: Employment Marriage*
The power of money: how both women and people with disabilities are discouraged or prevented from controlling their own finances (example: blind people denied ATM cards)
- *The **opportunity** gap: the differential access to education in a state that prides itself on being 100% literate*
- ***Violence** against women and people with disabilities: how can policy help?*
- *What can modern **technology** offer women and people with disabilities?*
- *How can the unique **perspectives** and abilities of women and people with disabilities help make a stronger Kerala?*
- *The rights of people with a disability to a **sex** life: should this facilitated if necessary?*
- *Additional barriers to people with disabilities who are **LGBT**?*