



DISABILITY AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

Summary Report

The conference “(Re)Building Inclusive Societies: Critical Reflections in Disability and Global Development,” a joint initiative of the Alexa McDonough Institute for Women, Gender and Social Justice and the Children and Youth in Challenging Contexts Institute, was held June 22-24, 2015 at Mount Saint Vincent University and Dalhousie University. The daytime sessions on June 22 and 23 were by invitation, and two events were held for the public in the evening of June 23 and during the day on June 24. A final schedule is attached to this summary report. We received two major external grants for the initiative -- \$33,040 from a SSHRC Connections Grants (Jan – December 2015) and \$67,800 from the International Development Research Centre (April 2015 – December 2016) in addition to contributions from the Nancy’s Chair, MSVU and Dalhousie.

Promoting Access and Inclusion

The conference organizing team was committed to ensuring the conference was accessible and inclusive to people of diverse backgrounds and particularly people with disabilities. Efforts in this area included:

- Completing extensive accessibility audits of potential conference venues, noting spatial, technical and logistical requirements with a cross-cultural, cross-disability audience in mind (over 13 hours in total).
- Ensuring the registration process was accessible to computer screen readers with alternative methods available if desired, as well as ensuring all public documents were accessible to screen readers.
- Providing multiple opportunities for conference attendees to identify disability-related accommodation needs and preferences.
- Providing communication access real-time translation (CART) captioning, French translation services, and ASL interpretation at conference sessions.
- Providing a mandatory 1.5 hour training session, and a short refresher at the start of each conference day, for all conference volunteers on best practices to ensure access and inclusion.
- Providing sighted guides, large print materials, accessible transportation, and other requested accommodations to conference attendees.
- Inquiring about dietary needs and ensuring food appropriate for a variety of cultural backgrounds was available.
- Acknowledging that the conference was taking place on Mi’kmaq territory.

- Making a commitment to fostering North-South partnerships through research emerging from the conference.
- Inviting graduate students to play key roles within the conference organizing team and participate and present in the invitation-only portions of the conference.

Conference Audiences

Over the course of the three day conference, over 82 people attended and participated in conference sessions. This number includes 36 people who participated in the invitation-only sessions on June 22 and 23, and researchers from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Uganda, Haiti and South Africa, and representatives of domestic and international disabled peoples' organizations. The members of the public who attended included faculty and students from Atlantic Canadian universities; elected representatives and public servants from municipal, provincial, and federal governments; representatives from a number of community and disability organizations; as well as many concerned citizens. The conference was supported by the excellent work of ten conference volunteers, many of whom were students at Mount Saint Vincent University and Saint Mary's University.

The conference was also widely shared on social media, through the project website, Facebook and Twitter. The project's Facebook page has 70 likes and the project's Twitter account has 38 followers. Conference updates on Twitter were retweeted a total of 78 times over the three days, and the conference Twitter handle (@dgd2015) or hashtag (#dgd2015) were mentioned in 19 tweets by conference participants.

Conference Proceedings Summary

People with disabilities compose approximately one-seventh of the world's population. Fully addressing disability requires us to create societies and political and economic systems that recognize the broad spectrum of human diversity. In 2008, the United Nations ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and that brought increased attention to disability and coordinated action among disability organizations. This conference focused on the intersections between disability and global development, bringing together academics, policy makers, and representatives of disability organizations.

The conference started with an introduction to the history of disability within the UN system leading up to the creation of the CRPD, followed by an overview of conceptual approaches to disability using an international development lens. Invited guests also participated in a short workshop on building inclusive and accessible research practices. One set of sessions for invited participants focused on preliminary findings for three post-conflict and post-disaster case studies: Haiti, Uganda, and South Africa. Project partners had been conducting research in each of these countries and presented their initial findings at the conference, which will be further developed into full papers for a special issue of a journal. While each country context was quite different, there were certainly many connections between them, including a lack of consultation

with and attention to the needs and experiences of people with disabilities in recovery and reconciliation efforts in these countries.

A particular focus of conference sessions was using intersectional perspectives to see how social categories and their related systems of power, particularly gender and childhood, affected the inclusion and exclusion of people with disabilities. For example, women with disabilities are often treated as in some ways unfit to be mothers because of their disability, and may not be included in maternal health initiatives. Despite international development goals in education, children with disabilities in many countries around the world are denied a basic education because inaccessible community infrastructure, inaccessible technologies and a lack of necessary supports do not allow them to attend school.

Many of the public event sessions focused on people with disabilities in the context of Canada's foreign and development policy. One speaker discussed the types of disability-related international development projects that the Canadian government funds. Her research found that the projects that received the most funding had a prevention or a recovery focus. Much less funding was awarded to projects supported by disabled peoples' organizations, which had a focus on inclusion, capacity building, and human rights. Multiple presenters pointed out that links between disability and poverty are often not recognized or addressed in development goals and policy. The public events were very interactive and audience members were able to pose many questions. The final day ended with a closing reception hosted by the President of Mount Saint Vincent University, which gave participants a chance to connect informally and celebrate a successful conference.

Feedback from Conference Participants

The feedback from conference participants received to date was overwhelmingly positive. Many participants expressed that the event had inspired them to learn more about the topic of disability and global development and that the speakers and panelists were engaging and informative. Some expressed appreciation for the opportunities for the audience to become involved in the sessions, particularly the Tuesday night panel, which focused on thinking about disabilities in the new politics of global development. The conference organizing team was very pleased that its efforts toward accessibility and inclusion resulted in a conference that allowed attendees to participate as they chose to. One invited guest told conference organizers that the event was better in terms of access and inclusion than many they had attended at the United Nations. A member of the public who had requested a sighted guide for the Wednesday event said that the volunteer was excellent and that they were "very impressed with her." Another participant wrote that "we all have something to learn from you about running a conference that truly responds to requests for adaptation."

Future Project Events

There has been steadily growing momentum since the conference and several follow-up events are in development:

- Case study research with people with disabilities is continuing in South Africa and Haiti.
- Seven conference presenters are participating in a roundtable at the Atlantic Provinces Political Science Conference in Halifax (September 2015).
- Several members of the organizing team are presenting at an international development conference at the University of Ottawa (November 2015).
- Three members of the organizing team are delivering workshops at a Junior Scholars Conference hosted by the Children and Youth in Challenging Contexts Institute (November 2015).
- A special issue of an academic journal, as well as a series of plain language factsheet emerging from the conference, is being developed.
- The conference organizing team is actively imagining a strategy for making Halifax a hub for work on disability and global development.
- Discussions have begun about partnerships between the AMI, DAWN Canada, the Coady International Institute and Mobility International USA.

Resources For Further Information

Disability and Global Development Project Website: www.msvu.ca/dgd

Project Twitter: twitter.com/dgd2015

Project Facebook: www.facebook.com/DisabilityandGlobalDevelopment

Diversity Through Inclusive Practices Toolkit: <http://bit.ly/1MlvvHs>

Diversity Through Inclusive Practices Toolkit Checklist: <http://bit.ly/1Nw7BAN>

