

Economic Empowerment of Disabled People: Lessons from northern Uganda about developing the market for enterprise-based skills development services



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Economic Empowerment of Disabled People: lessons from northern Uganda on developing the market for enterprise-based training services¹

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for APT Enterprise Development

1. Introduction

One of the acid tests of human development is whether the benefits of social, technological and economic progress are enjoyed by the politically weakest or most marginalized members of society – children, ethnic minorities, the elderly or sick, chronically poor and people with disabilities. This is not a feat achieved convincingly even in wealthy societies, and it is a profound challenge in very poor nations. Yet, if reducing social exclusion and economic inequity are just as important as growth in per capita GDP², then all development practitioners will have to find ways to show how their own sphere of practice contributes – or risk their work being seen as irrelevant to the main goals of poverty reduction³.

The rock-bottom social and economic status of disabled people in all countries presents a particularly stark example of this. There is ample evidence from the disability movement, that given the right environment and opportunities, many disabled people can make a rich contribution to their communities, in all senses of the word. Their exclusion from full participation in economic life is not merely a failure of welfare provision, it is a missed opportunity for society as a whole.

One of the main features of disabled people's marginalisation is gross under- representation in training environments and workplaces as trainees, employees or self-employed – with obvious negative consequences in terms of unemployment, destitution and dependency. The exclusion of disabled people poses a challenge to those of us working in the fields of small enterprise development, vocational training and skills development generally. It begs the questions:

- What can be done to economically empower disabled people so they have equally rich opportunities to acquire marketable skills and find employment as their non-disabled peers?
- More specifically, what do emerging *market development approaches* to improving business services and making markets work for the poor, have to offer in this particular economic empowerment process?

This paper sets out to respond to these questions using experience from a three-year action-research project which aimed to improve access to enterprise-based training services and credit for disabled people in northern Uganda.

This paper begins by briefly describes the project itself, and the immediate results it achieved.

It then looks at the conclusions which can be drawn from the project's results, in terms of understanding the mechanisms that exclude disabled people from the workplace and skills development opportunities, and undermine markets for training services.

Finally it suggests some lessons for the "disability rights" movement, and for practitioners in the fields of vocational training and small enterprise development respectively.

¹ This project which generated this report was funded by DFID's Enterprise Development Innovation Fund

² A point of view that finds expression and credibility in non-economic measures of national progress, such as UNDP's Human Development Index

³ For example as articulated in the UN's Millennium Development Goals www.un.org/millenniumgoals

2. APT & NUDIPU's BDS project in northern Uganda

"*Improving Business Development Services with Disabled People in Northern Uganda*" was a project of the National Union of Disabled People of Uganda (NUDIPU) and APT Enterprise Development, that set out to tackle the link between disability and poverty. Its purpose was to improve access to appropriate training and support services that can enable disabled people to enter mainstream employment, or to start and grow their own small businesses.

The project ran for three years from November 2001 – October 2004 in Lira, Apac, Soroti and Gulu towns. It was managed from Lira by a three person team of NUDIPU staff, who received guidance and external support from APT Enterprise Development in the UK.

The project focused on two critical components of economic empowerment: the acquisition of relevant, marketable vocational skills, and access to appropriate financial services. The working assumptions were that *enterprise-based training* services would be an effective method of delivering skills and experience of working environments to disabled people; and that local micro-finance institutions could provide appropriate lines of credit for trainees where needed.

The project chose to test a *BDS market development*⁴ approach to the delivery of these economic empowerment services. Such an approach aims above all to create a vibrant, financially and institutionally sustainable market, with a range of independent private providers for the diverse services that disabled people need. In this case, the service providers were, for the most part, independent entrepreneurs running their own small businesses, who offered on-the-job training within their work places – informal apprenticeships – to disabled people over periods of three to six months.

As far as we are aware, the project was highly innovative: a market development approach had not been explicitly tried before in an initiative like this with very marginalised individuals such as disabled people. It was also highly pertinent to the growing debate about how to make business service markets work for the poor in weaker economic situations, such as remoter rural areas⁵. For these reasons the project secured almost all the funding it needed from DFID's Enterprise Development Innovation Fund (EDIF).

The APT / NUDIPU project had objectives at three levels: direct impact, learning and influence.

- At the level of direct impact it sought to demonstrate methods for developing disabled people's vocational skills, and equip at least 150 to participate in Ugandan small-scale manufacturing sector.
- As a learning initiative, it aimed to demonstrate that disabled people can actively participate in mainstream enterprise activities on an equal footing with others; and provide evidence that certain approaches can be adopted to successfully support disabled people in achieving this goal.
- In terms of influence, it aimed to work with micro-finance institutions to develop financial services that better meet disabled people's requirements, and more generally to stimulate enterprise development agencies to develop more inclusive policies, programmes and services.

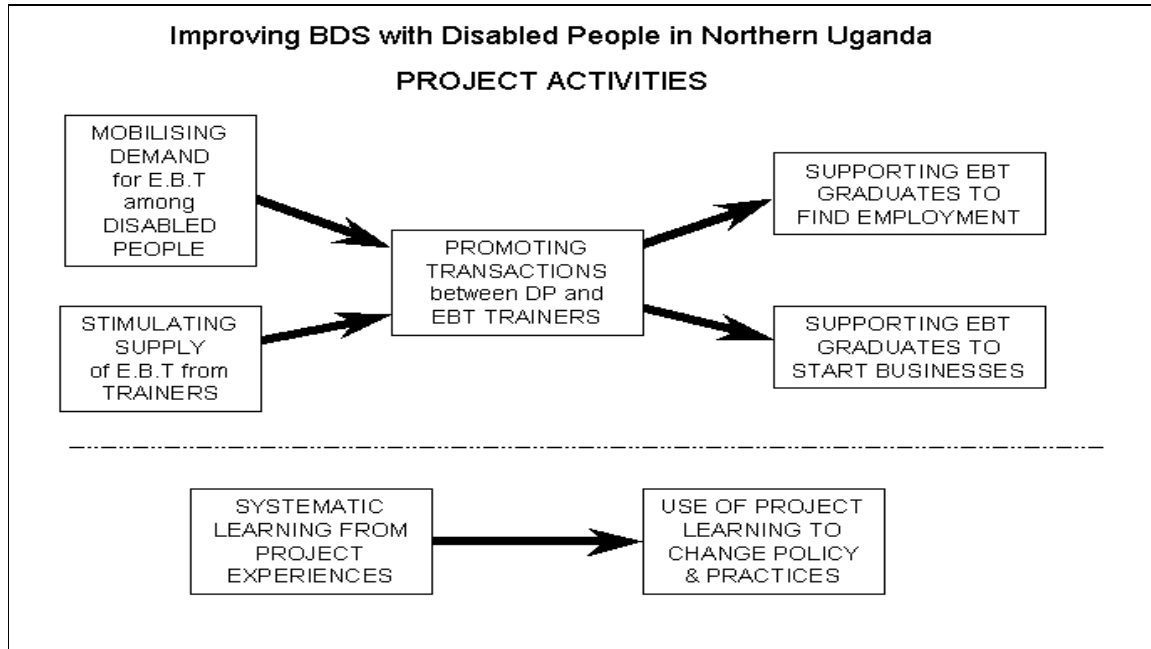
The project therefore had two parallel strands of work: practical activities intended to facilitate economic empowerment of the project's 150 direct beneficiaries by developing the market for enterprise-based training services; and other activities designed to enable learning, the transfer of new knowledge and the influencing of policy, attitudes and practices.

Market development is, in essence, about stimulating, coordinating and matching supply and demand for a service. Supply of enterprise-based training was stimulated through personal meetings between

⁴ For readers not familiar with the market development approach, the BDS Seminar Primer by Miehlbradt & McVay (2003) is probably the best starting point.

⁵ Hitchens, Elliot and Gibson (2004)

NUDIPU project team and suitable businesses in the four towns. Leaders of the districts' Disabled Peoples Unions assisted in identifying suitable training providers, and communicating the project objectives to them.



The list of business types that took part in delivering training was broad, included:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| • Electronics Assembly & Repair | • Bee-keeping | • Tailoring |
| • Handicrafts | • Bakery | • Shoe & Leather work |
| • Carpentry & Joinery | • Welding & Fabrication | • Mushroom cultivation |
| • Bicycle Repair | • Motor Vehicle Mechanics | |

An important element of stimulating supply, was to convince training providers to consider disabled individuals as capable of learning skills and making a valuable contribution to their businesses during the training process. In some cases NUDIPU provided Training of Trainers courses to help sensitise training providers to the needs of disabled people, and guide them in adapting their training facilities and procedures. Some project funds were also invested in helping training providers adapt equipment and premises to suit disabled trainees.

Demand for enterprise-based training was mobilised among disabled people through public meetings and radio programmes. Leaders of each of the four districts' Disabled People's Unions organised meetings and recruited potential candidates. Some orientation activities, with trainer providers, were conducted to help individuals make informed choices in selecting training options.

A critical element of mobilising demand (in an economic sense of the word) was to convince both district union leaders and disabled individuals to see enterprise-based training as a personal investment in the future, and to understand that the project was not going to directly subsidise training placements. Discussions were also held with local micro-finance institutions, to explore ways of providing credit to pay for the costs of training.

An important area of activity for NUDIPU project team, and the district union leaders, became negotiating payment terms for the placement of disabled individuals in training. Similarly, activities to support and encourage individuals in overcoming personal and practical obstacles to completing training – such as mobility constraints, family commitments and other financial hardship.

3. Achievements and results

The information and data used to prepare this paper was gathered in three ways:

Firstly, a project evaluation took place in April 2004 during which the project documentation was reviewed; the main project stakeholders in Lira, Soroti and Apac were visited; meetings were held with the APT project manager, NUDIPU HQ staff and the NUDIPU project team based in Lira, and interviews were conducted with a wide range of informants in the region.

Secondly, in late 2004 the NUDIPU project team carried out a retrospective appraisal of the influence played by various "success" factors in determining training outcomes for individuals.

Thirdly, a national seminar was held on 21 October 2004 in Kampala, attended by project participants, stakeholders and experts on disability and enterprise development in which results and conclusions were discussed, and reactions and responses gathered from the audience.

Before outlining the project's achievements, it is important to describe the context, and four factors in particular that influenced the pace and degree of success:

- i. Northern Uganda is an extraordinarily poor region of a poor nation. The economy is highly dependent on agriculture, but has very weak transport, health, education and energy infrastructure. A brutal insurgency since early the 1990s by Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has further stifled business and trade by displacing the rural population to secure camps and throttling agricultural production.
- ii. It was therefore a very difficult time to conduct this project. LRA attacks on camps and roads in the region made journeys between the four towns highly risky at times. Many of the project's intended participants suffered directly in attacks. Meetings and activities frequently had to be cancelled or postponed.
- iii. The region is accustomed to projects that parachute in resources and hand-outs. This project set out instead to promote the emergence of a market, to facilitate and advocate for rights, to learn lessons. Inevitably this approach faced some resistance and misunderstanding from intended beneficiaries.
- iv. Poor people are by necessity risk-averse, but for many disabled people this is aggravated by poor self-esteem and stunted ambition caused by their experiences of social discrimination. This internalised oppression makes the project objective to stimulate effective demand for training among disabled people a particularly challenging task.⁶

Bearing in mind these factors, the project actually did quite well in terms of numbers of participating disabled trainees. In relation to its objective to equip at least 150 disabled people to participate productively in economic life, the project achieved the following by December 2004

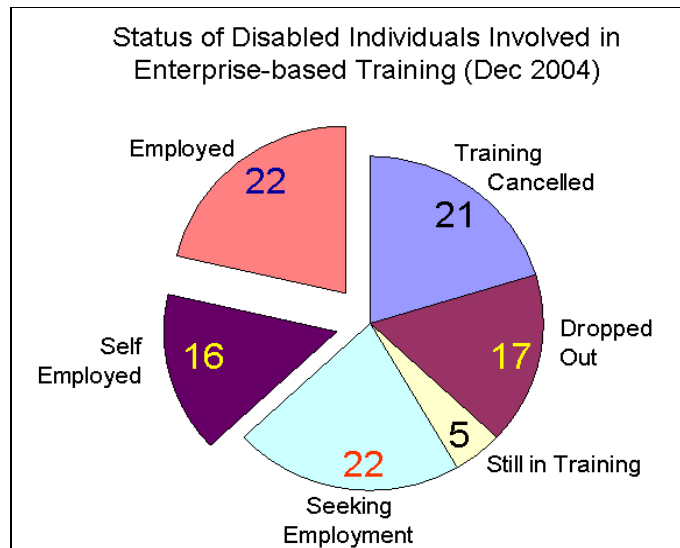
Outcomes of Training Placements		
People who sought training	231	
Training placements established	103	
Placements where trainee dropped out		17
Placements cancelled by trainer		21
Placements still on-going in Sept 2004		5
People who have completed training	60	
People who have found employment		22
People who have started own business		16

⁶ Lwange-Ntale (2004)

Plenty of disabled people came forward (231) to participate in the project, but it proved difficult to place all in training. This was mainly due to the challenge of matching trainers expectations around fees with the amounts that disabled people were willing and able to pay. The “normal” training fee levels which service providers reported (US\$ 20 – 80 per month depending on type of training) were much higher (three or four times higher) than most disabled trainees said they could afford. The gulf partly reflected traditional expectations of project hands-outs. But it was mainly a real reflection of real hardship. Negotiations were occasionally protracted, and some placements broke down over financial issues. Nine of the 17 trainees who later dropped out, did so because they struggled to pay fee instalments.

Many training providers eventually agreed to charge training fees at much lower levels than normal – even waiving them entirely in exchange for food contributions. In some cases this generosity was genuine, but others clearly expected to get rewarded by the APT / NUDIPU project in some way. In the early days, at least five placements were cancelled by trainers when this misapprehension was cleared up.

Interestingly, only seven placements broke down for reasons specifically related to the disability of the trainee, including problems of mobility. This was a significant factor with visually-impaired trainees – where a lack of appropriate skills and facilities on the part of trainers was clearly a major constraint.



Among the sixty who had completed training placements by December 2004, at least 38 (63%) were already productively employed in some form. Twenty-two have found jobs in established businesses – doing carpentry, electronics, bicycle repair; and sixteen were in some kind of self-employment – including eight individuals in a fledgling bee-keeping co-operative group in Lira.

Among these number were some exceptionally powerful cases of individual success demonstrating that disabled people can, in the right circumstances, use enterprise-based training and support to find employment or establish their own businesses with dramatic impact on their lives.

Box 1: Mother of Two Overcame Poverty to Create a Business

Asio Florence is a young woman who lives in Soroti town with her disabled husband and two children. She can not walk because both her legs are very weak. But unlike many disabled people, she has some valuable mobility, as a result of obtaining a hand-driven tricycle some years ago. In 2003 Asio was introduced to the NUDIPU BDS project by the Soroti Disabled Persons Union (SODIPU). She was living in acute poverty at the time, barely able to feed her children and constantly worried in case they became sick.

Asio chose to seek training in the baking and selling of snack foods like *mandazi*. She considered these would sell well in the local market, and the nature of the business activities would fit well with her child-care responsibilities. Along with three other SODIPU members, she agreed to pay 500 UShs daily fee to a bakery trainer identified by NUDIPU, to teach them the trade.

After a short time, the other three individuals dropped out for various reasons. But Asio was desperate to escape her poverty and pleaded with the trainer to continue the training course for her alone. Her trainer, who runs a small grocery shop for a living, was inspired by Asio's determination. Even though Asio's fee alone was very modest incentive, she continued encouraging her and helped Asio get hold of basic baking equipment.

After a few weeks, Asio started her business making *mandazi*, *kabalaga* and other items. Local shopkeepers who knew her, and wished her well, gave her flour and other ingredients on credit. This enabled her to start work without any start-up capital.

Asio now moves around town selling her products. She uses her hand-powered tricycle as a mobile shop. Proudly she says her daily turnover has risen to 30,000 UShs, and she earns an income of 9,000 UShs a day from this. The impact on her life has been tremendous. Before, she wore rags, struggled to feed her children and worried about medical costs. Now she can afford dresses, clothes for her children, exercise books for their schooling and medicines when they are sick.

An interesting and important finding is that the true cost of services in these successful cases can be greatly outweighed by the private economic benefits secured by these individuals. Individual returns to investment in training for disabled people can potentially be very high. In the cases of Asio Florence (Box 1) and Bony Ocak (Box 2), the costs of their training were recovered within weeks or even days.

Box 2: Internally Displaced Refugee became Successful Entrepreneur

Life was desperately hard for Bony Ocak before 2002, but then it got much worse. Like many in Lira District, Bony and his family had been displaced by the violent LRA insurrection, fleeing to survive. But then just when they had found safety in Apac, Bony and his brothers were devastated by the death of his mother – the family's "backbone" and their only bread-winner.

At the young age of 18, Bony – who has a physical disability in his legs caused by childhood Polio – was left responsible for the welfare of his five brothers. "I tried to survive by repairing shoes in Apac town, but it did not pay well, so I had to look for an alternative income" Ocak says.

In January 2003, Ocak was introduced to the NUDIPU BDS project by the Apac Disabled Peoples Union. Ocak told them he wanted to train in bicycle repair, because he had carefully observed how reliable and lucrative the business seemed to be. A training placement (apprenticeship) was negotiated with an experienced bicycle repairer in Apac town. Even so, Ocak struggled to pay the training fees, and was fortunate that the trainer agreed to pay him a small stipend for his work to support himself during training.

After three months, Ocak had not only acquired the necessary skills, he had also managed to save enough cash to buy a basic set of hand tools. With these he set himself up in business in the shade of a large tree just outside the gates of Apac Hospital, where there is plenty of passing trade.

A year later, Ocak is doing very good business fixing bicycles in his open-air workshop. He has a constant queue of customers – so much so that he has taken on four trainees himself to help serve the business. Two of the trainees have disabilities themselves. His customers have learned that disability is not inability, and get a good reliable service.

These days Ocaak can afford to rent a small house for his brothers and pay for their school fees. He is naturally shy about revealing his earnings, but one indication of his success is that he has built up a significant stock of spare parts to sell to his customers, worth at least 100,000 US\$. When asked about his future plans, Bony says “I plan to open up an account with Oribcing MFI in Apac to enable me to start taking loans. I hope this will enable me to open up a proper training workshop for the benefit of other people and to expand my business.”

Job-seeking support services clearly would play an important role in economically empowering disabled people in large numbers. Unfortunately the relatively small numbers who completed training during the APT/NUDIPU project, spread across four locations and a half a dozen types of business, made it difficult for the project to deeply investigate the particular challenges disabled people face in finding mainstream employment in a place like northern Uganda. Little was therefore learned about this aspect. Several of the people who found employment did so with their own trainer – which is not an achievement that could be scaled up to large numbers obviously.

Box 3: From Hospital Bed to Cherished Electrician

Okeny Eric from Kitgum thought his life was over at the young age of 25. A serious road accident broke his spine and left him permanently paralysed in both legs. Abandoning his vocational studies in Electrical Engineering, he was forced to spend two years in physical rehabilitation at Lacor Hospital in Gulu. Like so many people he thought that being disabled condemned him to a life of dependency and begging. He saw no hope for the future.

Fortunately, in 2003 AVSI staff at Lacor Hospital introduced Eric to the NUDIPU BDS project. He told NUDIPU about his former ambition to study electronics. The BDS project team worked to identify a local private enterprise that could offer Eric an apprenticeship or enterprise-based training.

There were many obstacles to be overcome in setting up this training service for Eric. Eric needed mobility. The training venue had to be within reach of Eric's base in Lacor. Fortunately AVSI agreed to provide him with a hand-powered tricycle. AVSI also pledged to pay part of the training fees. In time, an agreement was reached with Joe's Electrical Workshop in Gulu to provide Eric with enterprise-based training. Joe's Electrical Workshop agreed to adapt a workbench and install a ramp to give Eric access. Eric cycled the strenuous 5km journey from Lacor to Gulu Town centre each day to attend.

Initially, both parties to the training agreement had doubts. Eric found it very difficult to let go his earlier ambitions to formally train as a fully qualified electrician – and accept that he would only be able to manage bench-work skills such as electronics repair. He was also not confident that the training would be sufficiently high standard to give him a means of earning a living. The trainer and other employees at Joe's Electrical Workshop were sceptical that a disabled person could pick up the skills they used in the business. NUDIPU needed to invest time in changing attitudes of the trainer and his colleagues, and building Eric's confidence.

Eric overcame his disappointment and persevered with the training. Being intelligent and dedicated he performed well. In time, the trainer found that many of his customers came to trust Eric's work more than his other employees. When Eric completed his training in July 2004, Joe's Electrical Workshop took him on as an employee.

The trainer was so impressed with Eric's performance that he has since agreed to take on a second young man with disabilities as a trainee. Eric meanwhile is saving money from his earnings to buy basic tools for himself, so that he can one day return to Kitgum and start his own workshop to support himself and his family.

4. Success factors in completing training and finding employment

Analysis of APT/NUDIPU's data associated with different training outcomes did reveal some useful findings about the success factors associated with completing training and finding work. In order of importance these included:

- **Support from the Wider Community**

The degree of practical encouragement available from neighbours, church members or others in wider society, had strong influence on whether disabled trainees completed training successfully, AND had some influence on whether trainees got into employment after training. Almost all the training drop-outs lacked this kind of support. This general finding was also reinforced by individual case studies – such as Asio Florence in Soroti (Box 1).

- **Attitude & Skills of Trainer**

The quality of attitude, experience and skills for working with disabled people of the trainer had some influence both on whether the trainees completed training successfully, AND on whether they got into employment after training. This general finding is well illustrated by the example of trainer Ogwang David in Ginamegi Carpentry workshop, Lira

Box 4: Ginamegi Carpentry Workshop, Lira

Ginamegi enterprise is owned by Ogwang David, who trained in carpentry at Apac Technical College and later worked as an instructor at the Ave Maria VTC in the 1990s, where he learnt sign-language. He started Ginamegi in 2000. It now employs up to five people depending on demand. The business is growing despite the LRA insurgency: as Ogwang argued “even displaced people need furniture”.

Ogwang took on hearing-impaired young men as trainees, having been impressed by the ambition and hard work of disabled people he taught while at Ave Maria VTI. Most of his trainees are people displaced from areas of insurgency. His first batch of four trainees have remained as employees in Ogwang's business. He recruits new trainees through his own employees, who he says are the best assessors of candidates

Unusually, Ogwang says he does not charge his apprentices for training, or the materials they use. But he expects them to produce goods he can sell for a reasonable profit. He said that the main constraints on his capacity to provide training are lack of training materials, hand tools and a secure premises for his business.

Ogwang reported that his own sign-language skills are essential to his ability to work with hearing impaired trainees, and he would always choose to work with those who already knew how to sign. He has not felt the need to make any other adaptations to the way his business operates..

- **Previous Links to Training Provider**

The extent to which established social or family connections to trainer played a part in setting up the training relationship, appeared to have an influence on whether trainees got into employment after training – but this relationship was not statistically proven.

- **Workplace Accessibility**

The effort which was made to ensure the workplace, tools and processes were accessible for the disabled trainees, had a strong influence on whether disabled trainees completed training successfully. It is likely that the NUDIPU project staff's own involvement in processes of helping trainers to make modest improvements to premises or facilities, such as lowering a workbench or installing a ramp, would have encouraged the placements to run more smoothly.

- **Material Support from Family**

The amount of financial or material help available from family members for costs of training, transport, accommodation, meals etc., had some influence on whether disabled trainees completed training successfully. Many trainees reported “paying” the trainer for services in kind, with produce from the family garden for example.

- **Motivation / Drive**

The strength of the trainee’s motivation to succeed - e.g. due to the need to support children, become independent etc., had some influence on whether trainees completed training successfully. Certainly, in some of the most outstanding case studies, the individual drive of the trainees was a major feature, for example with Bony Ocak in Apac (Box 2)

Overall, the analysis of success factors showed that improvements in attitudes to disabled people – in families, among employers and in society more widely would make the biggest difference to training outcomes, assuming it leads to greater moral and material support from families and wider social groups to individuals entering training. This data suggests that this could significantly reduce training drop-out rates and also help trainees to find work after training.

It is also worth noting the lack of evidence for the influence of some factors. The data showed no significant positive association with the level of active encouragement and practical support provided by other disabled people, and only modest influence by the visible success of other disabled persons. We should be cautious about drawing conclusions from this, but it may be that lack of inner motivation and inspiration is less of a problem for disabled people than is sometimes assumed.

5. Constraints on access to financial services

Training is an investment with future rewards and as such, justifies borrowing. NUDIPU aspired to influence local micro-finance institutions so as to make it easier for disabled trainees to get loans. This proved unsuccessful. The most positive achievement was to encourage more disabled people to open savings accounts, and join rotating savings and credit schemes (ROSCAs) – which in the long term may help improve their participation in financial services sector, but does little to solve the immediate problem of financing training costs.

The industry in northern Uganda is still embryonic and financial services take three forms:

- a. ROSCA-type savings and credit schemes, rapid turnover, micro-loans of US\$ 5 - 10
- b. Village banks - more formalised group-based lending, US\$25 – 150 over 3 or 4 months
- c. individual business loans US\$ 150 - 1500 over periods up to 6 months

Clients typically graduate up through these products over time, as they accumulate social-capital, demonstrate economic activity and establish a credit history. Individual loans are only for the most credit-worth clients with an established track-record of borrowing. Joining a ROSCA is easy, but village bank groups are generally open only to individuals who are already economically active.

Disabled people who are economically inactive with no credit history, and seek medium-term loans to invest in skills development or their first business start-up do not fit the village-bank group profile. Not surprisingly therefore, NUDIPU has had no success in opening up lines of credit specifically for disabled trainees.

6. Causes of market failure in training services

It has already been noted that training was a very good investment for some of the disabled people who took part in APT/NUDIPU’s BDS project. The fact is that many disabled people were not able to make such investments in their own economic empowerment, despite potentially good returns.

The project illuminated significant underlying causes of this failure in the training services market for disabled people, which may explain why the success stories are so exceptional. The market failure is linked to four factors associated with the chronic poverty of most disabled people:

Discrimination – this pushes up the transaction costs for disabled people seeking enterprise-based training, by depriving them of mainstream education and vocational training opportunities. Families prioritise schooling for non-disabled children for example, so disabled people seeking services tend to be both older and educationally disadvantaged vis-à-vis their non-disabled peers. The average age of those placed in training was 27 years. They are more likely to have family responsibilities; to lack family support, and find it harder to fit into a model of apprenticeship training geared to youth.

Internalised oppression – an accumulation of negative self-image and lack of confidence that is inculcated from a lifetime of being denigrated. This undermines the trust, ambition and perseverance that is necessary to take advantage of training or other business services. The effect is to increase disabled people's uncertainty about the value of future benefits from business services and opportunities, so discouraging long-term risk-taking.

Isolation – due to social discrimination and mobility constraints, means that disabled people, especially in rural areas, usually have very restricted knowledge about job opportunities and employment prospects. The result is poorly informed choices – for example about the types of skills that are realistically acquirable or most marketable. Many of drop outs were due to this information factor. The exceptional case of Bony Ocak (Box 2) illustrates by contrast how a well-informed decision is key to a successful outcome.

Asset poverty, finally, lies at heart of the market failure problem for disabled people – especially in northern Uganda where so many have been displaced by conflict. Most disabled people simply have no means of raising sufficient capital to invest in training, or micro-business start-up. This is the case, even when the sums involved are relatively small (e.g less than US\$150) and the potential long-term returns are high.

The last factor is not confined to disabled people. Currently no micro-finance products are available in northern Uganda that would support enterprise-based training or indeed micro-business start-ups for people without any entrepreneurial track record. However, social exclusion and isolation compounds the problem for disabled people, by denying them the opportunity to join in simple group-based savings & loan schemes, as a stepping stone to more substantial borrowing. Further research that aims to overcome social and physical obstacles to participation in ROSCAs and group-based lending would be rewarding in this respect.

These factors are particularly intractable because they reinforce each other. They underpin the visible absence of disabled people in productive employment. The absence of role models for successfully employed disabled people, in turn, contributes to low ambition, social discrimination, lack of family support etc. This vicious circle lies at the heart of disabled people's disempowerment.

7. Outline of a systemic response

In this case, the APT / NUDIPU project has illustrated that there are a portfolio of services that (potentially) are of value to disabled people seeking economic empowerment, including:

- credit for investing in training, skills development and job finding services
- guidance on selecting marketable employment skills
- quality-assurance regarding training providers
- delivery of enterprise-based training / apprenticeships
- job-seeking support and follow-up counselling after-training

8. Conclusions

Lack of visible role models of economically-active disabled people is a key factor

A critical point of intervention for breaking the vicious circle relates to the invisibility of disabled people as role models of economically active, contributing members of society. This invisibility helps determine the low expectations of family members, whose support is usually so critical to younger people's ability to invest in skills development. Even a relatively small number of "role" models of disabled people's economic success could, if promoted and publicised effectively, have a disproportionate impact on the attitudes of disabled people's families, employers and society more widely.

Enterprise-based training has advantages over vocational training institutions, in this respect. It places people with disabilities in the everyday working environment where they are more visible as full participants in society.

One implication of this is that a medium-term intervention to directly boost the number of visibly economically-active disabled people in society – combined with appropriate publicity (such as radio programming) – could be a most effective way of developing sustainable markets for economic empowerment services in the long-term.

The project has demonstrated that such an intervention would, paradoxically, have to be prepared to judiciously subsidise training and support services, at least until a cadre of economically-active disabled people emerges.

The pitfalls of introducing subsidies, even in a time-bound intervention, are well known: including the risk of undermining existing service providers, and reinforcing a "hand-outs" mentality. More work is needed therefore to test the least damaging ways of channelling subsidies into economic empowerment services for disabled people. It is possible that risks could be mitigated by ensuring that disabled participants do still make a significant contribution (e.g. 50%) themselves, and by delivering subsidies through some kind of training voucher scheme, for example.

Developing this sort of market requires strong local institutional capacity over time

A systemic understanding of the market weaknesses observed in northern Uganda shows that the factors subduing disabled people's demand for business, financial and personal support services need to be tackled in a co-ordinated way. The viability of each type of service is dependent on the existence or viability of others. Stand-alone service interventions will not be sufficient.

Crucially, there will be no satisfactory exit from a strategy that uses subsidies to economically empower disabled people, unless results are used powerfully and resolutely to increase visibility of disabled people and change public attitudes.

There is little existing institutional capacity in northern Uganda to play a coordinating role in market development initiatives. An innovative and flexible approach, rooted in good understanding of local economic conditions, links with employers, finance institutions, public media and disabled people's organisations is essential. Coordination mechanisms that don't build on strong links with existing players are unlikely to work well in the politicised environment of the disability movement in Uganda. Engagement at a local level with disabled people's representatives, training providers and employers is essential.

Disabled people's organisations' role in this coordination is vital

Initially the NUDIPU project team sought to keep the four district Disability Unions at arms length – an understandable precaution in view of the potential for conflict over project objectives and use of resources. However, the unions' contacts and operational role in mobilising candidates for training, in identifying and negotiating with training providers, and in motivating individual disabled people, turned

out to be essential to successful outcomes. NUDIPU later co-opted the chairmen and development workers of the four unions on to the project planning committee, and won them over to the project's purpose. This is good news since it is hard to envisage any effective future co-ordination of services which does not involve the unions very centrally. In conclusion, concerns about the district Disability Unions' motives or expectations may, with hindsight, have been better tackled head-on than avoided.

Systemic approaches to market development are often necessary in very weak markets

Ever since the efficacy of a market development approach to business service delivery began to be recognised in the mid-1990s, there has been (sometimes heated) debate about the impact this has on BDS services for the most marginalized service users. Sometimes it seemed that BDS market-development approaches, by eschewing subsidies for services, have at best ignored those who can not afford to pay market-rates.

Recently however, many BDS practitioners have been forced to put the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable people back at the heart of their work, as BDS has become mainstreamed within broad-based poverty-focused development programmes. Attention is returning to the challenge of developing even very weak markets in order to serve the needs of the poorest service users⁷.

Very weak markets for services are often the result of multiple inter-locking constraints and unmet service needs. In this context there is little incentive for service providers to address individual constraints, because demand for services relies on the effective operation of an entire business system. These scenarios can sometimes be tackled effectively with systemic approaches – such as the sub-sector analysis based approach used by Lusby⁸ - that work by analysing the whole value-chain. The arguments for such systemic approaches are not new⁹, but they are becoming much more accepted in mainstream BDS practice now – as illustrated by the thematic focus of the ILO's BDS Update in 2004¹⁰.

This APT / NUDIPU project attempted to test a sustainable, market-based approach to developing enterprise-based training and support services for disabled people who are among the poorest and most vulnerable population in northern Uganda. The project revealed how difficult it was to develop a market for these services without also considering the wider system which reinforces disabled people's poverty and suppresses demand for training services.

The “system” does not only involves economic relationships and institutions

Conventional systemic approaches, such as subsector analysis, tend to focus primarily on market trends and the financial and material relationships between economic actors operating and trading in the same product sector. The institutional environment is also subject to analysis – in order to reveal how laws, regulations and institutional practices create, or do not create, an enabling environment for business to operate in.

Too infrequently, systemic analyses also consider social institutions and practices. When they do, it is usually with regard to gender issues: considering, for example, how traditional gender roles may constrain the activities of women entrepreneurs.

The APT / NUDIPU project has helped illustrate that particularly for marginalized people, the factors that that undermine development of business service markets are not only multiple and interlocking, but extend well beyond the realm of purely economic activities. In this particular case, the most important factor is psycho-social: negative attitudes towards disabled people, and the resultant invisibility of disabled people as economically active, contributing members of society. As we have

⁷ Hitchens, Elliot & Gibson (2004)

⁸ Lusby & Panlibuton (2004)

⁹ See the conclusions in Kapila & Mead (2002)

¹⁰ Mehlbradt & McVay (2004)

seen this invisibility weakens the market for training services by undermining disabled people's own confidence, ambition and willingness to take risks, and by determining the low expectations of family members, whose support is usually so critical to younger people's ability to invest in skills development.

It seems likely that any effective programme of economic empowerment and market development for disabled people (or other marginalized groups) will encounter these sort of non-economic issues. The implication is that such programmes must equip themselves with the tools to analyse and understand non-economic factors and respond with appropriate skills and competencies. NUDIPU, for example, has realised that it must develop much stronger relationships with journalists and the television media.

Economic empowerment of disabled people is also a rights issue

The disability movement in Uganda has long sought to ensure disabled people have guaranteed access to the essential services they need to participate in mainstream society (including education, training and mobility). Arguably economic empowerment is also a question of human rights. When, as in Uganda, a government and its international donors place poverty eradication at the heart of public policy¹¹, then addressing the economic marginalisation of disabled people (who make up one in four of the poor) should have as high a policy priority as primary education or health services.

This APT / NUDIPU project provides evidence that although returns to investment in services that build disabled people's economic self-reliance are potentially high, the market for such services only works in exceptional cases at the moment. The underlying financial, social and personal factors that inhibit the market are intractable, and may take a generation to redress. The economic empowerment of disabled people therefore requires a long-term market development strategy recognising that significant intervention may be needed for ten years, or more. The major costs of this strategy will lie in building the local institutional capacity to develop and manage such an innovative endeavour. The necessary interventions must include ones that give at least a visible cadre of disabled people access to skills training and job-finding support during this transition.

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¹¹ Government of Uganda (2003)