

Learnings on Sustainability and Scale-Up

**An Innovation to Inclusion (i2i)
programme learning paper**



Abbreviations

BBDN	Bangladesh Business and Disability Network
BDN	Business disability network
CBM	Christian Blind Mission
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DEP	Digital employment pathway
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
ILO	International Labour Organization
i2i	Innovation to Inclusion
LC	Leonard Cheshire
OPD	Organisation of persons with disabilities
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
WBG	The World Bank Group
WGQ	Washington Group Question

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Recommendations summary

Findings and recommendations for sustainability and scale-up across national systems

- Training and integration of the Washington Group Questions' Labour Force Survey module can support governments to collect disability data within national labour force surveys, increasing access to data and evidence on disability and access to work.
- Providing core funding to locally owned institutions advancing inclusive employment, like the ILO national business and disability networks, allows them to take risks, invest in innovation, and ultimately increases sustainability of interventions with the private sector.
- Working in partnership with a consortium of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) using a coordinated, data-driven approach is a replicable and sustainable model to effectively change policies and systems.
- Understanding, aligning with, and seizing opportunities for entry points in a government's policymaking cycle is imperative for effective policy dialogue.
- A three-year project is about "planting seeds of inclusion", but is not enough time to capture long-term policy and systems change.

Findings and recommendations for mainstreaming disability inclusion across the private sector

- In both Bangladesh and Kenya, partnering with pre-existing groups of employers, like sector associations or unions, allowed the consortium to reach a large group of employers at once and increase opportunities for scale.
- The consortium model also helped increase reach to the private sector, as different partners brought in different pre-existing relationships with corporations.
- Empathetic HR staff were important entry points into organisations, acting as disability inclusion champions throughout the project.
- Comprehensive sensitisation (not just a one-time training), which works even better if the trainer themselves has a disability, shifts paradigms towards inclusion.
- Talent mismatches in the labour market make it harder for persons with disabilities to get jobs, which in turn affects the private sector's capacity to gain exposure and experience to employing persons with disabilities.

Findings and recommendations for improving access to work for jobseekers with disabilities

- Digital employment pathways (DEP) should be built into existing digital job search engines and ecosystems wherever possible, for local ownership, relevance and sustainability.
- Working in partnership with persons with disabilities to develop inclusive digital skill building modules.
- When considering the creation of an accessible and inclusive digital employment pathway, it is important to consider the cultural context; and more specifically, the culture around accessing work, in the countries of implementation.
- Persons with disabilities faced barriers to entering and using the career portal due to a lack of digital skills and access to hardware/internet connectivity, a lack of exposure to the formal job market and the design of the portal itself.

- Access to Work schemes are well-appreciated by jobseekers with disabilities, but need to be managed by a government or organisation with strong logistics capacity to process and disperse funds at the time that persons with disabilities need the social protection funds.

Findings and recommendations for sustainable future replication of the model

- The consortium needs strong and well-resourced leadership, project management, clearly defined roles and ongoing stakeholder coordination.
- The physical location of consortium management should be closer to project operations.
- The Head of Consortium should not also act as a Project Manager.
- Selecting the right country and policy context is important for replication.
- A diverse set of stakeholders is important to affect change across the three levels targeted by i2i: policies, corporations and for jobseekers.
- Having the right stakeholders at the table during design is important to create a realistic timeline for activity completion.

Findings and recommendations for gender mainstreaming and intersectionality

- Conduct cross-cutting assessments during the inception phase to ensure practical recommendations can be integrated from the start of implementation.
- Analysing gender and disability disaggregated data is important to track project reach to beneficiaries.
- Both a top-down and bottom-up approach are needed for successful gender mainstreaming.

Findings and recommendations for COVID-19 adaptations

- Policy level pivots: when in-person influence and advocacy are not possible, shift to creating evidence that can be used to influence policy.
- Employer level pivots: digital platforms offer an alternative to in-person employer sensitisation and job matching.
- Skill training pivots: when needed, accessible digital platforms can offer an alternative to in-person skills training. However, digital spaces won't work for all, and not all persons with disabilities have the digital skills and hardware to access skills training online.
- Project management: for a multi-stakeholder project like i2i, finding ways to promote cohesion amongst project stakeholders is important for effective project implementation. This may be difficult to achieve through remote meetings.

Overview of the i2i programme

Innovation to Inclusion (i2i) was a three-year programme (2019-2022) funded under the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) UK Aid Connect initiative. It aimed to develop, test, validate and share learning on interventions to improve access to private sector waged employment for persons with disabilities. The programme was implemented in Bangladesh and Kenya. It aimed to demonstrate good practices in different regions, adapting to each context. The programme was implemented through a consortium, led by Leonard Cheshire, and comprised of a diverse range of national and international partners.¹

The i2i programme focused on three spheres of change in relation to the employment of women and men with disabilities:

- 1) national systems and policies, or the enabling environment.
- 2) a supportive private sector.
- 3) increasing opportunities for jobseekers to access decent, waged work through skilling and personalised support.

Research questions and methodology

This paper focuses on the themes of sustainability of the i2i project and gives recommendations for replication and scale-up. The two main questions explored in this learning paper are:

- **How can inclusive employment approaches successfully trialled in i2i be integrated into existing systems, organisations and structures to ensure they are sustained?**
- **What recommendations would we make to stakeholders interested in building on the experiences and learning of i2i to scale-up and/or replicate successful solutions we have developed to promote inclusive employment?**

Specifically, it will be looking across the i2i programme to identify solutions that worked, and aspects of the project that didn't work, to promote inclusive employment and provide guidance for sustainability and scale-up. The paper shares recommendations for future policy/programming within the development sector.

Sustainability and scale will be examined across the three project spheres: 1) systems, e.g., national outcomes/policy, 2) employers and the private sector, and 3) jobseekers with disabilities, with a focus on access to skilling and matching skills to jobs. Additional questions include:

- What policies and structures can be created or adapted to foster systems change that creates an enabling environment to promote inclusive employment?

¹ i2i consortium partners included: Action Network for the Disabled Kenya (ANDY), Bangladesh Business Disability Network (BBDN), Christian Blind Mission (CBM), European Disability Forum (EDF), Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDIH), International Labour Organization (ILO), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), Plan International (Plan) and the World Bank Group (WBG). In addition, the consortium worked with several other partners, including 20 organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), 80 private sector employers and technology companies.

- What elements/incentives affect whether a business will engage with inclusive employment, and how can these be leveraged and maximised to increase scale?
- What have been the key elements which have supported men and women with disabilities to access waged employment and how can they be embedded into the national labour market system?

Cross-cutting themes considered throughout will include COVID-19, gender and the set up and management of the project consortium.

The methodology for this learning paper included the review of 53 project documents and six key informant interviews with i2i consortium staff. The documents reviewed included two endline project evaluations – one conducted by an independent evaluator who interviewed 21 participants and conducted a programme workshop and the other conducted by a consortium partner the ILO.

Findings and recommendations for sustainability and scale-up across national systems

Inclusive policies and systems were at the core of the sustainability strategy of the i2i project. Enabling policies can create the environment needed to foster and scale sustainable inclusive employment interventions. The i2i project tested both top-down guidance from and between institutions, as well as bottom-up civil society driven initiatives.²

Activities aimed to:

1. Support governments to implement and/or improve disability-disaggregation of data collection and monitoring mechanisms related to employment and social protection policies and programmes.
2. Support organisations of persons with disabilities to implement evidence-based advocacy and meaningfully engage in national accountability and/or monitoring processes related to employment and social protection policies.
3. Improve understanding of the costs of disability related to employment and the effectiveness of cash transfer schemes to meet relevant costs.

The consortium aimed to test these goals through three complementary activities:

1. Implementation of a new Labour Force Survey (LFS) disability module to address inclusive labour issues, not previously been used in Bangladesh or Kenya.
2. Testing of an online monitoring tool to improve and enhance data monitoring by OPDs.
3. Research into the cost of disability and the availability and adequacy of existing cash transfer schemes and social protection schemes to cover the additional cost of disability needed to access and remain in work; development of a pilot cash transfer scheme to support people with disabilities into work.

While the consortium achieved success and gathered learning in relation to national level policy advocacy, the project was designed before COVID-19 and implemented during the first two years of the pandemic. Therefore, the project's policy and advocacy activities were designed for a different policy environment. The project's endline evaluation, and KIIs conducted for this learning paper, found that the priorities of national governments were redirected to meeting the basic needs of

² Information drawn from the IPEI Updated Programme Summary_12.04.19 (1).

persons living in their country and the pandemic response. This made the advocacy environment difficult in relation to the project's original advocacy plan, outside of topics related to redirected governmental priorities towards meeting basic needs.

Learnings

1. Training and integration of the Washington Group Questions' Labour Force Survey module can support governments to collect disability data within national labour force surveys.

Under the i2i project, the ILO planned to work in partnership with governments to integrate the WGQs into national Labour Force Surveys, supporting governments and civil society to effectively implement and monitor policies for the promotion of disability rights. While the training was completed, the LFS in both countries were postponed due to the pandemic. Therefore, it is not yet possible to analyse whether or not the WGQ Labour Force Survey modules were integrated into the national LFS or not, and if they were, whether or not the data led to increased data-informed advocacy and decision-making by governments, civil society and other stakeholders.

2. Providing core funding to locally-owned institutions advancing inclusive employment, like the ILO national business and disability networks, allows them to take risks, invest in innovation and ultimately increases sustainability of interventions with the private sector.

Investing in new and existing national level BDNs allows them to be designed with maximising sustainability in mind from the outset. In many countries, BDNs aim to be financially sustained in the long term through membership fees and should operate by offering disability related goods and services that meet the demands of companies in the country.

At the outset of i2i, BDNs were at different stages in different countries. In Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Business and Disability Network was self-created organically, and had existed for many years. In Kenya, there was no BDN, and the network was set up under the project. Given the two different levels of development of each organisation, tailored approaches were taken for investment in each institution.

The i2i project invested in the growth of BBDN and improving the quality of the services offered by the organisation. By providing core funding to the organisation that didn't come from its core operating revenue, the organisation was able to invest in innovation that may have to be risky. This included developing a 3-year strategy under the project which included an expanded vision of the role of BBDN, and working in partnership with project actors to invest resources into strengthening the quality of its interventions, to ensure they better align with the needs of the private sector in Bangladesh. Under the project, an OPD member was also added to the BBDN advisory board, exemplifying how bringing together a unique group of implementing partners can strengthen ties between otherwise siloed organisations.

The Kenya Business and Disability Network (KBDN) was set up by external actors and housed in the Federation of Kenyan Employers (FKE). While KBDN is well connected in the business community, its operational structure may not be correct to sustain the organisation. FKE runs on a project by project basis and does not have core funds to sustain long-term initiatives. Therefore, when considering replication of BDNs in other countries, stakeholders should consider searching for institutions who have core funds that could be allocated to fill resourcing gaps while the financial structure of the BDNs are established and scaled. In addition, the ILO's endline evaluation found there were already

multiple other inclusive employment initiatives in Kenya and that it was important for KBDN to establish either how they worked in partnership with these initiatives or what their unique value proposition was to separate themselves from them.

The business and disability networks were responsible for much of the private sector engagement, training and capacity building under i2i. Working with local actors like the BDNs, saw resources allocated that allowed these organisations to raise their profile in country, increasing the likelihood of their role as long-term market actors, and a resource of choice on disability and employment.

3. Working in partnership with a consortium of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) using a coordinated, data-driven approach is a replicable and sustainable model to effectively change policies and systems.³

The i2i programme created the coordination mechanism needed to bring together OPDs in Bangladesh and Kenya, to work in partnership and leverage data for advocacy and influencing activities of civil society. Specifically, the strong role of OPDs, the model built under the programme to work with OPDs and the different influencing activities they successfully completed in both Bangladesh and Kenya will be highlighted as both replicable and sustainable.

Case study: Successful OPD advocacy in Bangladesh⁴

Under the i2i project, OPDs in Bangladesh conducted successful advocacy that resulted in policy-level advancement for persons with disabilities. For example:

- In Bangladesh, there are no caregiver policies for persons with disabilities in employment. In this context, 10 i2i OPDs advocated to government to allocate caregiver support, effective supply chain management of caregiver/personal assistance allowance and needs-based assistive device support for persons with severe disabilities in the workplace. Following extensive advocacy with the Department of Social Welfare, the State Minister himself recommended OPDs produce a policy development guideline. Md. Ashraf Ali Khan Khshru, State Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare, received the policy guideline through a seminar on March 13, 2022.
- There is a policy in Bangladesh on tax rebates for private companies. The Finance Act 2020, in section 52 (6) states: “Any taxpayer, as a recruiting authority, that recruits at least 10% of the organisation’s total workforce as persons with disabilities, shall receive a 5% tax rebate on the payable tax.” i2i OPDs advocated in collaboration with BGMEA, BKMEA, and Chambers of Commerce to amend the existing policy, with the goal of setting up a 5% tax rebate for companies with 2% of workers with disabilities. A position paper was submitted to the National Board of Revenue (NBR) with a view to amending the existing policy.
- On November 23, 2021, OPDs and their networks arranged a human chain around the demand for half-price tickets for persons with disabilities on all public transport. An office order was circulated to all the concerned ministries and departments from the Ministry of Social Welfare to provide half-price bus fares to persons with disabilities.

³ Information drawn from the 2022_i2i Final Report_V2.

⁴ Information collected from written KII with LC Programme Manager in Bangladesh.

- OPDs worked together to influence the government to increase disability inclusion across national and local budgeting. A set of recommendations was submitted to the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Social Welfare to make the national budget disability inclusive.
- A letter was sent to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh to revise the insolvent disability allowance policy to make this allowance a universal social protection scheme for all registered persons with disabilities, which is also mentioned in the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), 2015. The government issued a letter on September 30, 2021, to revise the policy and the name of the allowance “person with disability allowance”.
- On February 22, 2022, the OPDs and NBR jointly organised a pre-budget discussion at the NBR office on the national budget 2022-23. The team has submitted a total of 13 recommendations to the Ministry of Planning Commission for consideration (tax rebate and free import of assistive devices, equipment and technology, as well as other facilities for persons with disabilities in employment).

Specific aspects of i2i’s design enabled this success. One important aspect of the project was the resources allocated to the coordination of OPDs towards specific advocacy goals. In some ways, the i2i project simulated an “alliance” or “coalition” advocacy partnership model, creating a mechanism to bring together a group of stakeholders to work toward a series of shared goals. Coalitions often require more resources than advocacy partnerships, as they require higher levels of coordination and leadership. The i2i project management team, and specifically consortium partner EDF, helped fill this role. As a result, the project was able to bring together a large group of OPDs to work together, develop a shared understanding of their advocacy approach (data-driven towards enabling employment and social protection policies) to facilitate a number of strong advocacy initiatives. While the project successfully coordinated OPDs, it did not have a continuity plan in place for advocacy after the project’s end. The project’s endline evaluation specifically stated:

“In regard to engaging with national policymakers, the consortium model was helpful because members worked together to develop advocacy materials (how to make a website accessible) and reach a wide audience in various locations. It is important to note that the project implementation took place during two years of COVID, which made engaging with national governments difficult, as their priorities were elsewhere. National policy advocacy requires long-term efforts and organisations interviewed in the i2i consortium did not express a sense of ownership to continue these efforts beyond the project date. The reasons for this were not stated but may be linked to lack of funding.”

The Inclusion Counts tool also contributed to project sustainability. The web-based tool is a database for OPDs to crowdsource global, national and subnational data on CRPD compliance. This tool aims to create a place for OPDs to leverage data through crowdsourcing of information. The more information OPDs input, the better the tool. The Inclusion Counts tool will be maintained by the National Council of Persons with Disabilities in Kenya, ensuring its sustainability after the project’s end.

4. Understanding, aligning with, and seizing opportunity for entry points in the government’s policymaking cycle is imperative for effective policy dialogue.

The World Bank and ILO activities under the i2i project were designed specifically to influence governments’ policymaking and national Labour Market Surveys. While COVID-19 disrupted the

polymaking cycle and delayed the surveys in both countries, there were still many successful opportunities for policy dialogue and influencing the policy cycle.

The World Bank developed a background report and policy note on inclusive employment of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. The paper was developed in partnership with an OPD representative in Dhaka. This evidence built under the project was already leveraged within the project period to influence other World Bank-run projects to invest in disability inclusion. It was presented to the government and is now widely shared with other World Bank offices and partner governments as an example of what works.

Examples of how the World Bank leveraged the i2i project to identify policy dialogue entry points and ultimately influence other development initiatives include:

- [The Bangladesh Government’s Five-Year Development Plan](#): while the “[Policy Recommendations](#) on Accelerating Inclusive Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh” were not yet published during the development of the five-year plan, the preliminary findings were still presented by World Bank staff. The World Bank shared this information with government policymakers, contributing to the mainstreaming of disability inclusion through the five-year plan.⁵ The words “disability” or “disabled” are mentioned 128 times in the five-year plan, including in relation to social inclusion, inclusive education, employment and within cross-cutting sections including about youth.
- [Accelerating and Strengthening Skills for Economic Transformation](#), Bangladesh: the policy note and findings produced under the i2i project was also used to influence an employment and skills development project called Accelerating and Strengthening Skills for Economic Transformation. The project built in components to ensure persons with disabilities have opportunities to access skill development programmes, including looking specifically at targeted vocational training opportunities.
- [Ethiopia Digital Foundations Project](#): while Ethiopia wasn’t one of the two countries targeted under i2i, World Bank staff saw an entry point for disability inclusion during the project design. The i2i consortium held a one-on-one learning sharing session with the World Bank’s task team, around the specific entry points in the project. The i2i team shared more about the different components of the i2i project and brainstormed with the task team about how this would transfer to the Ethiopian context. The project now includes components directly aiming to include persons with disabilities into the digital economy; ranging from partner companies, giving matching grants and loans; but also investing in accommodations and support for persons with disabilities to be entrepreneurs and in assistive technology.⁶

These examples highlight the importance of understanding the government’s policymaking cycle, identifying and seizing entry points for influencing. The role of the World Bank or a similar institution with direct relationships with governments is important, as this enables entry points. As many of those projects are still running, we don’t yet have endline evidence about impact.

⁵ It is important to recognise that civil society and other multilateral stakeholders also worked to influence the Five-Year Development Plan to intentionally mainstream disability inclusion. The World Bank was one of many stakeholders that contributed to disability inclusion mainstreaming.

⁶ Case studies or examples collected from KII with Deepti Raja, World Bank.

5. A three-year project is about “planting seeds of inclusion”, but is not enough time to capture long-term policy and systems change.

Policy and systems change does not happen overnight. Both i2i’s endline evaluation and data collected from key informant interviews for this learning paper, found the project period was not long enough to capture long-term impact. The policy-level advocacy and influencing conducted by OPDs, multilateral organisations and other partners was documented under the project. However, policy and systems change take time and the awareness-raising and advocacy outcomes haven’t yet translated to long term impact.

Findings and recommendations for mainstreaming disability inclusion across the private sector

While policies create an enabling environment for the employment of persons with disabilities, a disability inclusive, supportive private sector is imperative for creating job opportunities for women and men with disabilities. i2i tested multiple interventions to increase workplace inclusivity.

Examples of relevant activities included:

1. Creating and strengthening national BDNs.
2. A combination of in-person training and creating an e-learning module targeting the needs of the employers and conducting accessibility audits and safeguarding training for employers on disability and gender inclusion.
3. Working with targeted companies and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutes to develop a partnership to create job placement and apprentice opportunities for women and men with disabilities.

These activities ultimately aimed to achieve the key programme deliverable of creating 1,000 job placement and apprenticeship opportunities for women and men with disabilities within the private sector in Bangladesh and Kenya.

Learnings

- 1. In both Bangladesh and Kenya, partnering with existing groups of employers, like sector associations or unions, allowed the consortium to reach a large group of employers at once and increase opportunity for scale.⁷**

In both Bangladesh and Kenya, the consortium aimed to reach dozens of corporations and their leadership, with the goal of raising awareness on disability inclusion and getting 100 senior business leaders to “endorse a commitment to disability inclusive employment”.⁸ The consortium found that reaching out individually to businesses, looking for entry points, forming relationships and raising awareness with corporations was time consuming. The consortium found partnering with sector associations or unions created entry points to reach large groups of companies at the same time, increasing efficiency in outreach and ultimately value for money within the project.

⁷ Information sourced from the BBDN Learning Paper.

⁸ Information sourced from the i2i log frame.

2. The consortium model also helped increase reach of the private sector, as different partners brought in different existing relationships with corporations.

The endline evaluation found bringing in partners operational in both countries with existing relationships in country can increase a project's reach by leveraging the network of the entire consortium. This also highlights the importance of bringing on board the right local partners with previous experience working with, or advocating to, employers.

3. Empathetic HR staff were important entry points into organisations and acted as disability inclusion champions throughout the project.

Identifying and partnering with HR staff or teams who were already inclusion champions, whether in relation to disability inclusion or other identities, were some of the best ways to create inclusive talent pipelines into organisations.⁹ This was especially evident in Kenya.

4. Comprehensive sensitisation (not just a one-time training), which works even better if the trainer themselves has a disability, shifts paradigms towards inclusion.

The project found that to effectively shift paradigms within a workplace it was important to provide comprehensive training to employers. To provide coaching and follow-up support to companies, was also effective in shifting workplace paradigms. It was found that if the trainer themselves had a disability, this factored into the paradigm shift experienced by business participants. Often, trainers supported businesses directly on topics like accessibility and reasonable accommodation, as well as helping build talent pipelines into the business.

i2i aimed to create a set of e-learning modules on disability inclusive employment as part of its sustainability strategy. The modules were created in Bangla and English, and worked with both local disability rights activists and senior business leaders to narrate sections of the modules. But the project contractor faced many delays, including multiple government lockdowns due to COVID-19 that delayed filming for months, and by the time of their production, the quality of the modules unfortunately did not meet the quality expected by the i2i project team.

5. Talent mismatches in the labour market make it harder for persons with disabilities to get jobs, which in turn affected the private sector's capacity to gain exposure and experience in employing persons with disabilities.

Future projects should consider strategies that focus on specific market-aligned sectors and invest more in "technical" or "hard" skills training, to build talent pipelines. While the project initially planned for some level of partnership with TVET institutions, this was partially disrupted by COVID-19 and partially underestimated as a critical aspect of the project. Quite practically, if organisations receive training and coaching on disability inclusive employment but cannot identify any jobseekers with disabilities that match their hiring needs, the likelihood of their continued investment in disability inclusive employment may fade. For future project replication, it is important to increase the project's investment in accessible and inclusive hard skill building, which will in turn support the private sector to increase inclusion in their workforce and most importantly get more persons with disabilities into waged work.

⁹ Information sourced from mid-term evaluation.

Findings and recommendations for improving access to work for jobseekers with disabilities

The third area of the i2i project aimed to support persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities, to increase opportunities to engage in decent waged employment, including through the digital economy. This included supporting initiatives that increased access to training and piloting an Access to Work scheme that aimed to cover the additional costs that persons with disabilities may face when seeking to access and be retained in work. One of the key innovations under i2i was the digital employment pathways or DEPs, which aimed to enhance employability through digital literacy and soft skills training using inclusive online platforms.

The digital employment pathway:



While the project had ambitious aims to reach 6,000 community members, the project underwent significant budget cuts and the final goal was to create 600 job opportunities (including apprenticeships, internships and job placements) for people with disabilities, including for women with disabilities, designed by the targeted private sector employers.

Learnings

One of the main project innovations was the digital employment pathway. While the pathway was successfully built, implementation findings had mixed results, that should be learned from for future replication.

- 1. The DEPs should be built into existing digital job search engines and ecosystems wherever possible, for local ownership, relevance and sustainability.**

In both Bangladesh and Kenya, rather than creating a new digital employment pathway from scratch, i2i partnered with existing market actors to make current job search platforms accessible and integrate disability-related features throughout. This mainstreaming approach enhanced sustainability of the project. It should be noted that in Bangladesh, the DEP was integrated into a mainstream job site called BD Jobs, whereas in Kenya the DEP was integrated into a disability specific job site managed by NCPWD. The endline evaluation questioned the approach in Kenya, as the system is ultimately separate from the mainstream job search engines operating in country.

In Kenya, one good practice from the programme was around use of internet bandwidth. Recognising that jobseekers with disabilities may have lower incomes and less access to the internet, NCPWD partnered with Safaricom to ensure persons with disabilities accessing the career portal have free internet bandwidth when using this website.

2. Working in partnership with the persons with disabilities to develop inclusive digital skill building modules.

One success of i2i was the participatory approach taken to building online soft skill modules for jobseekers, as part of the DEP. The i2i project worked in partnership with persons with disabilities to develop these modules, including employing multiple persons with disabilities as peer coaches or trainers for several modules. This increased representation and ownership of the modules by the disability community, and improved the user experience by digitising a peer-to-peer learning approach.

Case study: Asiya leverages the soft skills modules in Kenya ¹⁰

Asiya is 29 years old and lives in Mombasa with her mum, dad and four siblings. She is a keen sportswoman and has a degree in early age teaching. Despite her education, at times she has struggled to find work, and feels people judge her for her disability.

“People judge me before they know me, mostly because of the disability. It has affected me trying to get a job. I was offered an interview for the first job I applied for after graduating. But when I got there, they asked me ‘can you really work with small children?’, ‘how will you control small children on crutches?’. As I responded to their questions, I realised they weren’t interviewing me for my teaching, they were interviewing me for my disability.”

Despite this experience, Asiya has been able to find fulfilling work as an early childhood teacher. Excitingly however, in 2019 she qualified in rowing for the Tokyo 2022 Paralympics. She decided to take a career break from teaching to focus on her training, something she has not regretted.

“I get to travel out of the country and meet people from different cultures because of my sports. To me, my disability has brought many advantages compared to the disadvantages.” Before the COVID pandemic, Asiya was living away from home, training for the Paralympics. When the pandemic hit, her training stopped and she had to move back home to Mombasa and look for a teaching job. As the schools began to close, she realised she wouldn’t be able to return to her profession.

Asiya heard about i2i’s soft skills training through APDK (Association for the Physically Disabled in Kenya). She wanted to expand her job search outside of teaching, and thought the training would be helpful. The four-day workshop covered CV writing, cover letters and interviews.

“I found it very informative. The CV writing was especially useful. I now understand more about the interview process and feel more equipped for interviews. I have more confidence, it is now at 101 percent!” Asiya also benefited from speaking to other people with disabilities who were looking for employment. She credits i2i with creating a network so she didn’t feel so isolated.

¹⁰ Case study adapted from work of the i2i communications team.

After the training, i2i introduced Asiya to the NCPWD Career Portal, which links employers with jobseekers. “After a week, I was contacted by an employer. It was very effective and fast. It was so useful.”

With the support of i2i, Asiya is now working full-time at a courthouse in an administrative role, which involves data entry, record keeping and filing. After months of no work, Asiya is happy to be out of her parents’ house and working.

3. When considering creation of an accessible and inclusive digital employment pathway, it is important to consider the cultural context, and more specifically, the culture around accessing work, in the countries of implementation.

The DEP was created on the premise that accessing jobs will happen through an open labour market, and access to employment can be obtained through digital interactions. To an extent in both countries, accessing work was still most common through personal relationships and in-person meetings. Therefore, the idea of a disability inclusive digital employment pathway, while important, didn’t fully meet the reality of how jobseekers typically accessed work. It was noted that in cities in Kenya, it was more common to apply for jobs online, whereas in Bangladesh it was less common, and accessing jobs was more dependent on personal relationships and introductions.

Further, while the global market is slowly moving in this direction, not all types of jobs are typically advertised online. Typically, office jobs or “white collar” jobs that require hard skills and higher levels of education were more likely to be posted on sites like BD Jobs or Fuzu. The project staff found jobseekers with disabilities who had the skills needed to access the types of jobs advertised online did not need the project’s support to access work. Conversely, jobseekers with disabilities who needed support in accessing work, often did not have the skills needed to be hired for office-based jobs. Therefore, the digital employment pathway often did not support them to access “blue collar” work, and the project didn’t adequately support jobseekers to increase their qualifications, in relation to hard skill building. Therefore, the implementing organisations sometimes ended up supporting manual and in-person job matching.

As the economy changes in both countries, it will be interesting to monitor if economies shift towards less personalised, increasingly digital pathways to employment. If yes, the DEP built in Bangladesh and Kenya should be used as a model to ensure they are accessible and disability inclusive.

4. Persons with disabilities faced barriers to entering and using the career portal due to lack of digital skills and access to hardware/internet connectivity, lack of exposure to the formal job market and the design of the career portal itself.

In both countries of implementation, the i2i project found persons with disabilities had less access than previously anticipated to digital hardware and the corresponding skills needed to access the internet. This was a barrier both for accessing the DEP, but also during the pivot to digital skill building training when COVID-19 started. In some project areas, i2i set up small centres where persons with disabilities could access computers and the internet, with teachers to support uptake of digital skills.

In Bangladesh specifically, i2i partners reported that the registration process for the career portal was lengthy and sometimes confusing and staff ended up supporting jobseekers to register in the site. This barrier to entry and use of the career portal should be examined for project sustainability.

- 5. The Access to Work scheme was well-appreciated by jobseekers with disabilities, but needs to be managed by a government or organisation with strong logistics capacity to process and disperse funds at the time that persons with disabilities need the social protection funds.**

Feedback from both project staff and project beneficiaries shared that the social protection dispersed to jobseekers and employees with disabilities was appreciated and the flexibility of being able to use cash to meet personalised needs was highlighted by jobseekers. However, the Access to Work scheme logistics were not designed prior to the i2i project. Both schemes were modelled after schemes in the UK and piloted by community-based organisations, rather than by governments.

Access to Work operations in Bangladesh, where the implementing partner had an existing partnership with a financial service provider and previous experience conducting cash transfer programming, were more efficient and successful than operations in Kenya, where the partner had neither of those things. This specific form of social protection is designed to be time sensitive, aligning the timing of the cash dispersed to the potential need of beneficiary households. For example, if jobseekers started a new job but didn't previously have income, they may not have had the liquidity to commute to and from work without the first pay check. Therefore, a key learning from the project was the importance of having the right partner manage this type of scheme, with previous experience managing cash transfer programmes, strong logistics capacity and a relationship with a financial service provider.

Findings and recommendations for future replication of the model

i2i uniquely brought together a wide range of stakeholders, from grassroots civil society organisations of persons with disabilities to multilateral organisations like ILO and the World Bank, working in partnership with governments and the private sector. While this unique consortium make-up is part of the reason the i2i model is effective and sustainable – it brings together a wide range of stakeholders with varying levels of resources and power to promote change at different levels – success of this model also requires strong leadership and project management support.

Learnings

- 1. The consortium needs strong and well-resourced leadership, project management, clearly defined roles and ongoing stakeholder coordination.**

The i2i final evaluation highlighted several learnings about how the consortium is set up and governed. A consortium lead who takes initiative and ensures there is a common vision, clearly defined project roles amongst partners and that all critical roles are filled, is an important aspect of ensuring the consortium's success. Ensuring strong and agile leadership and project management is especially critical due to the wide range of stakeholders in this type of consortium that often aren't used to working together, and whose organisations operate in vastly different models.

2. The physical location of consortium management should be closer to project operations.

i2i was set up with consortium leadership and the project management team primarily in the UK, very far away from the project's implementation. Originally, i2i leadership planned for the consortium head to split their time between the two countries of implementation. However, due to COVID-19, this was not possible. Further, while the Head of Consortium was supposed to be based in country, the rest of the consortium core team was still planned to be UK-based. For replication of this model, the core implementation team should aim to be based in the same country. Further, for a consortium with so many actors, it is recommended the consortium take a "one team" approach (considering strategies like sharing a consortium office across organisations). This approach should be reinforced by project management.

3. The Head of Consortium should not also act as a Project Manager.

Leonard Cheshire led the consortium. They budgeted for a Head of Consortium role that was responsible for consortium governance and overseeing all partner activities. However, the Head of Consortium was also responsible for overseeing the project activities implemented by Leonard Cheshire. This detracted from the consortium governance and coordination tasks. The consortium course-corrected and hired a project manager role, which was then subsequently removed due to budget cuts from the funder.

4. Selecting the right country and policy context is important for replication.

i2i's model was created for a specific set of existing conditions in the country of operation.

These included:

- a. An enabling policy context – the i2i project was implemented in two countries that both have strong rights-based national legislation on the right to work and that have signed and ratified the UNCRPD. This policy environment was important to set up OPDs for successful advocacy.
- b. A thriving civil society presence of organisations of persons with disabilities – the i2i project importantly built-in meaningful participation of persons with disabilities at every level, through collaboration with OPDs. One of the greatest successes of the project was through organisations of persons with disabilities. This would not have been possible without so many strong organisations under the project's umbrella.
- c. A strong presence of corporations or employers – the i2i project focused specifically on getting people into waged work. Countries like Bangladesh and Kenya both have growing opportunities for waged work and projects like i2i can contribute to disability inclusive growth.

5. A diverse set of stakeholders is important to affect change across the three levels targeted by i2i: policies, corporations and for jobseekers.

The i2i consortium brought a wide variety of actors together, ranging from civil society actors to multinational corporations, to multilateral institutions and the government. The wide range of diverse stakeholders were a unique reason why the i2i project was effective. When asked about the consortium stakeholder make-up, the World Bank shared: "This is exactly the kind of consortium that we want to pull together, it brought diverse actors who play very different roles."

The consortium structure also facilitated relationships between stakeholders that didn't previously work together. For example, the consortium structure opened up access for OPDs to policymakers. The World Bank in Bangladesh convened a roundtable where OPDs met with World Bank colleagues working in education, social protection, sustainability and inclusion. World Bank Bangladesh colleagues also joined consortium meetings and in both Kenya and Bangladesh formed relationships with the disability community. The World Bank offices hired OPD representatives to consult on disability inclusion on various projects outside of i2i, of their own accord.

In addition to coordination between different stakeholders, OPDs reported a strong benefit from the consortium model. OPDs reported that they benefited from the consortium model, which brought strong coordination. They began to work together to harmonise agendas and speak with one voice.

6. Having the right stakeholders at the table during design is important for creating a realistic timeline for activity completion.

For example, during the design and inception phase of the project, there were no stakeholders present who had enough experience in technology and product design. This role was recruited only after the project was funded. The project implementation timeline underestimated the amount of time needed to develop the digital tools, as well as the beneficiary targets under the project expected to be reached with digital tools.¹¹

Findings and recommendations for gender mainstreaming and intersectionality

The i2i project did not aim to reach the “most vulnerable” persons with disabilities, but still aimed to take an intersectional, inclusive approach. While i2i by design aimed to mainstream gender across the project, and there was a strong gender assessment conducted by Plan International, the gender assessment was too late in the project and lacked a strong approach to ensuring local ownership and application of these findings and recommendations.

Learnings

1. Conduct cross-cutting assessments during the inception phase to ensure practical recommendations can be integrated from the start of implementation.

Key informant interviews with i2i consortium employees found the gender assessment was scheduled and rolled out too late in the project. The gender assessment should be completed in the assessment phase, so it can inform implementation directly.

2. Gender and disability disaggregated data is important when analysed to track project reach to beneficiaries.

While i2i conducted a strong initial assessment and set of recommendations and training on gender mainstreaming, the project did not disaggregate beneficiary data by gender from the outset.¹²

¹¹ Information collected from key informant interviews with project management team members, conducted for the purposes of this learning paper.

¹² Information sourced from the i2i mid-term evaluation.

Therefore, the project did not know until midway through implementation that it was reaching more men with disabilities than women with disabilities. This data could have informed project managers that i2i was underreaching women with disabilities and allowed a strengthening of their approach.

3. Both a top-down and bottom-up approach are needed for successful gender mainstreaming.

The project had a strong approach to gender mainstreaming, led by Plan International. However, the project team was located in Europe, outside of the project area. The project management team shared that if they were to redesign the project, they would have considered bringing onboard either a local gender partner or an OPD led by women. In addition, many of the recommendations made with the team were not particularly practical or operational.

Findings and recommendations for COVID-19 adaptations

i2i was designed prior to COVID-19, with the pandemic starting in year 1 of project implementation. The project's final evaluation report found that: "In light of the recurrence and severity of the budget cuts and COVID-19 lockdowns, the i2i consortium adapted as well as could be expected." This included the creation of the i2i Disability and COVID-19 Influencer Pack, which aimed to equip OPDs with the data needed to conduct influencing activities with governments to ensure their COVID response was disability inclusive.

Learnings

The i2i project had to pivot across all three levels: policy, employment and skill building. However, COVID-19 also affected the management of the project.

- **Policy level pivots:** Originally under the i2i project, the World Bank planned to implement in country policy activities. However, after COVID-19 started, it pivoted away from implementing in country activities and decided to invest in a global technical piece on research and advocacy.
- **Employer level pivots:** prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, i2i planned to sensitise employers on disability inclusion. Both employer sensitisation and job placements were shifted to being online. The BBDN Learning Paper stated that a key learning was that: "Online job fairs could be considered as a landmark example and milestone in the creation of employment for persons with disabilities, specifically in the context of COVID-19."
- **Skill training pivots:** in Bangladesh, i2i planned to partner with TVET institutions to build hard skills for persons with disabilities. However, when the pandemic started, skill training institutions shut down. Led by project partner CSID, the i2i project started to deliver skills training through video and phone communication.¹³
- **Project management:** the i2i project was planned for implementation across several geographic areas. To promote coordination, cohesion and governance of stakeholders, project travel was planned. This was not possible once the pandemic started, as curfews were implemented and borders were closed as a precaution for public safety. i2i tried to

¹³ Information sources from case studies from the i2i project in Bangladesh.

- pivot by convening remote meetings, but this did not achieve the same coordination and cohesion effect. For a multi-stakeholder project like i2i, finding ways to promote social cohesion is important for effective project implementation.

Conclusion

The i2i project was ambitious in its aim to accelerate inclusion and employment of persons with disabilities. The project faced multiple barriers, ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to FCDO budget cuts. Despite these barriers, the i2i project tested several different innovations that should be learned from, refined and scaled. A multi-stakeholder project like i2i should be replicated in other countries or contexts to create a more inclusive economy for persons with disabilities.