



A1 HIDDEN ISSUES – INFORMATION FOR FACILITATORS

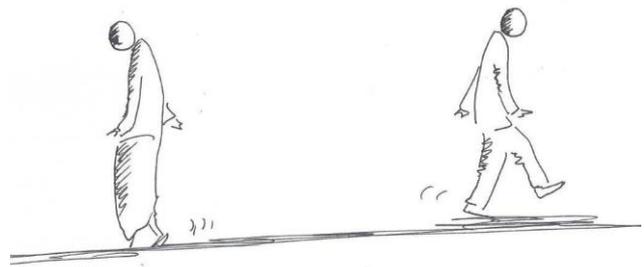
Tools in this section of *Reveal* provide background information on hidden issues for facilitators. Tools in other sections are designed to be used with communities.

Revealing stigma towards people with disabilities

Questions to consider:

Are you aware of people with disabilities in your community? How are people with disabilities treated in your community? Are they treated with dignity and respect? Or are they avoided and looked down upon? Are they treated with fear and stigma? Are they welcome in the church?

It is estimated that 15 per cent of people globally are living with disability – which is about 1 billion people. People with disabilities are often the most marginalised and poorest in our communities. Sadly, they may face stigma (when people have negative attitudes towards them), and discrimination (when people treat them differently because they have a disability).



Often the issue of disability is not talked about. Sometimes, people with disabilities are even hidden away and kept out of sight because of embarrassment and misunderstanding. Disability can be a ‘hidden issue’ that needs to be revealed.

Awareness-raising

Children & youth

Climate & environment

Conflict & peace-building

Corruption & governance

Disaster risk management

Discrimination & inclusion

Food & livelihoods

Gender & sexual violence

Health & HIV

Influencing decision-makers

Migration & trafficking

Water, sanitation & hygiene

A1 HIDDEN ISSUES – REVEALING STIGMA TOWARDS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

What does the Bible say?

The Bible says that all humankind is created in God's image (Genesis 1) and loved unconditionally by God (John 3:16). This includes people with disabilities. Throughout the Bible, we see God's special concern for people who are disadvantaged and excluded.

For Christians, Jesus is to be our example. Jesus always made time to talk with, support and fully accept people with disabilities. In Matthew 20:29–34, Jesus was leaving Jericho when he met two blind men. Instead of healing them immediately, Jesus asked them: 'What do you want me to do for you?'. In the culture of the time, these men would have been outcasts because of their disability, but Jesus wanted to give them dignity by talking and engaging with them personally. Similarly, with the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (Luke 8:40–48), suffering shame and stigma, Jesus' concern went further than her physical needs. Jesus called her a 'daughter of Israel' – a relationship of love and honour. And while Jesus often healed people physically, his main concern was always healing on the inside – in our hearts to bring us into a right relationship with God.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about the church as a body. While we are all different, we are all valuable. There is no one without worth and value in God's kingdom. We have all been created for a purpose with something valuable to offer. The church is called to be an inclusive community, offering love, value and respect to all people. We are called to be without prejudice and to give everyone the opportunity to play a role in the community that fulfils their potential.

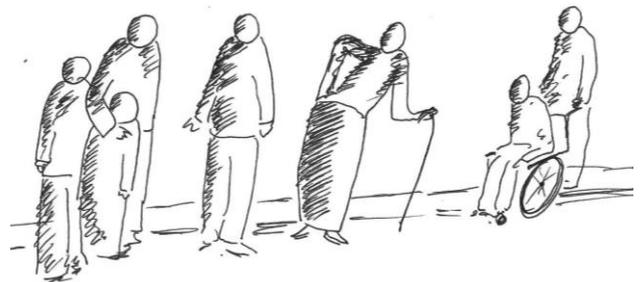
For Bible studies on this issue, please see **Section B** of *Reveal*.

Understanding disability

There are many different kinds of disability, ranging from minor issues that others may not notice, to life-threatening conditions. There are also many different *causes* of disability. Medical help can improve certain disabilities – if it is available.

Disabilities include:

- physical disability – either from birth or from a later accident or illness. Examples include cleft palate, polio syndrome or spinal injury from a road accident.
- deafness or blindness – either from birth or disease.
- emotional disability – as a result of stressful experiences, neglect or abuse.
- learning difficulties – resulting from brain damage.



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How do disabilities affect people?

Many disabled people live in poverty and are not given opportunities for education and work. They are also sometimes denied health care (eg immunisations) and good nutrition. They can suffer stigma and rejection in their communities.

Carers also have to make many sacrifices, giving time and resources to those they are caring for.

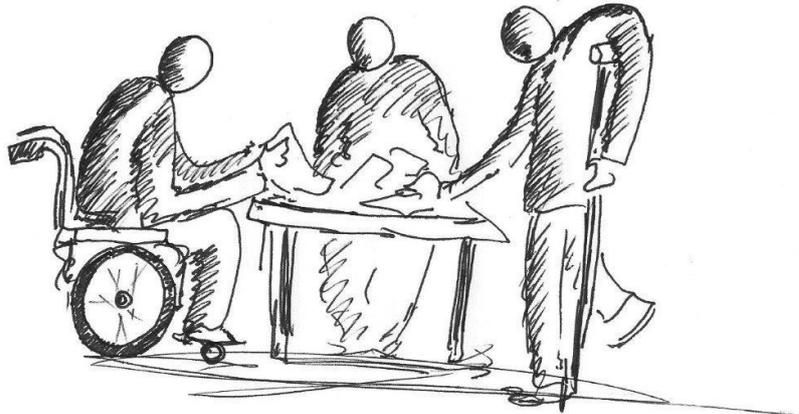
However, if we focus on people's 'abilities' rather than their 'disabilities', negative attitudes can change. Often, when people living with disabilities are given the support they need, they are able to find their rightful place in the community.

For example:

- Providing appropriate aids to help people move about will allow greater independence and perhaps access to work.
- Training in activities for daily living can decrease the dependency of children with disabilities and free up their parents' time for other activities.
- Training in sign language enables deaf people to integrate with other people and become more confident and valued members of their community.

Using *Reveal*

There are activities in **Section A2** of *Reveal* which help to explore issues of vulnerability and disability, and Bible studies on this issue in **Section B**.



Finding out more

- Tearfund (2011) *Footsteps 86 – Stigma*
http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps_81-90/footsteps_86/
- Tearfund (2001) *Footsteps 49 – People with disabilities*
<http://tilz.tearfund.org/~media/files/tilz/publications/footsteps/footsteps%2041-50/49/fs49.pdf>
- CBM – a charity 'devoted to improving the lives of people with disabilities in the poorest places in the world' – <http://www.cbm.org.au/>

Related tools:

- A2 – Understanding vulnerability and disability [A2: *Discrimination & inclusion-1*]
- B – Attitudes towards disease and difference (Bible study) [B: *Discrimination & inclusion-1*]
- B – Disabilities – knowing our true value (Bible study) [B: *Discrimination & inclusion-4*]